

Enhancing the Evaluability of Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2): "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture"

Theme 4 - Demand for and Use of Evidence from Evaluation: Understanding the political economy of evidence and developing a joint evaluation agenda for SDG2

The session was chaired by Mr. Ian C. Davies, Credentialed Evaluator. Position papers were presented by Ms Rossetti Nabbumba Nayenga, Mr Osvaldo Feinstein, and Ms Thania de la Garza Navarrete.

Highlights from the discussion

• Main lessons learned from the MDG era

- The MDGs served the donor community, not so the SDGs.
- The MDGs were a causal proposition not so the SDGs.
- We need to address the value proposition of evaluation in the context of the SDGs.

• Progress and developments made re-evaluability of SDGs

- Everyone is responsible for the SDGs so no one is.
- Most actions to deliver the SDGs are at local and sub-national levels.
- The SDGs are a political process led by nation states. They will be decided and the RBAs are "subservient".
- Evaluability of SDGs is connected to evaluation capacity at sub-national and local levels. Adaptation and contextualization of SDGs are key.
- A key challenge for countries is prioritizing among the SDGs. SDGs must be assessed in context, e.g. "equal access to land" is a non-starter in some African countries.

•

• Gaps in methodology and information/needs and challenges

- Who is making the demand for evaluation is a key factor in affecting change as evaluation is not used by those who can actually cause change, e.g. the ministry of agriculture in Uganda.
- Need to identify the primary users of evaluation knowledge and bring them on board from the outset of an evaluation exercise. Furthermore, there is the need to identify also other stakeholders and those who have the "need and the right to know".
- Upstream involvement of potential users, to develop their ownership and to get their insights, along with a downward engagement with potential users, translating evaluation findings into usable materials through suitable means of

communication (oral and written briefs, involving journalists and/or professional editors; targeting briefs to intended audiences).

- Communication of results to promote usability. Participants agreed on the need to shift from reporting on results to communicating values.
- We need to consider tools for systemic change, intervening in socio-ecological systems. Evaluation should help harness and navigate the complexities.
- Evaluation should look at failures. These are a basis for learning.
- Evaluation is about learning and adapting (and supporting to do so); it is not about assessing mechanistically against indicators.
- Evaluation should challenge assumptions.
- Transparency is an example of something that when functioning well leads to systemic changes.
- Definitional questions are important especially when attempting to articulate between systems, e.g. national system and UN system. There is a significant difference with important implications in defining food security either as “access to food” and as “right to food”.
- The language used in evaluations is different than the one used by policymakers. Furthermore, evaluation reports cover extensively methodological issues which are interesting for evaluators and other technical persons alone.
- There is the need to expand and diversify the way evaluations are conducted so to become more knowledge-focused, allowing evaluators to engage meaningfully in issues that are often politically-driven.
- It is easy to get lost in a mess of indicators and targets. There is a danger of “relaxed” milestones.
- Context matters and identifying contextual characteristics is a necessary and key aspect of understanding and evaluating.
- The question goes beyond what works to what works, under what conditions, for who.
- Adherence to certainty and evidence causes us to retreat into trivia. We don’t contribute to big picture questions and issues.

•

• *Principles/potential next steps for Rome based agencies*

- Rather than “doing evaluations” is it not more effective to instill and develop evaluative thinking in politicians?
- There needs to be a discussion of how we are part of the political economy, e.g. we should be aware of political processes.
- From external financing partners and evaluations countries need support in knowledge, e.g. what are policies and interventions that are positive for small holder farmers, and in developing capacity for evaluation “where change can be affected” such as ministries of agriculture.

- Evaluation should support learning and adaptive management, e.g. real time evaluation, quick feedback. Evaluation should generate cumulative knowledge across evaluations so as to contribute to theory.
- We should strive to make a small contribution to change, e.g. to accountability to citizens.
- Concerning the issue of budgeting raised during one of the presentations, there was the proposal to move from results-based budgeting to value-based investments, so to frame a way in which values of interventions are properly communicated.
- The highest value resides in evaluation processes where Careful attention and efforts should be placed in order to generate value and knowledge during such processes. Evaluation communities of practice and associations should continuously review and rethink processes, developing new approaches, conceptual frameworks, new ways to address validity as credibility.
- Lead the development of key indicators
- Undertake Evaluation Syntheses, drawing from evaluations carried out both by RBAs as well as by countries for SDG2
- Support in-country evaluation capacity development.
- Support the introduction of SDG2 indicators in baseline studies.
- We have to look at our profession as evaluators and question whether we wish to continue being “Producers of scientific-looking good news”.
- the Technical Seminar provided a starting point to initiate a conversation, a dialogue, and a process. SDG2 provide an opportunity to be even more serious about evaluation. The consultative process sparked by the Rome-based agencies should continue beyond the Technical Seminar in an organized manner.