Demand for and use of evidence from evaluation — understanding the political economy of evidence and developing a joint evaluation agenda for SDG2

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I was asked to prepare a short paper (1 or 2 pages) covering the following issues: a.Types or qualities of evidence that are likely to address and/or fuel demand for evaluation; b.Preferences for certain types of evaluations and c. Good practices to facilitate the availability and use of evaluations to benefit the public and for public accountability. Given that recent discussions on these matters emphasize points that were already considered in the 90's, such as the importance of demand for evaluation, of learning rather than accountability and of building evaluation capacity, it seems worthwhile to start by focusing briefly on the political economy of evidence and on some lessons learned as well as on new facts that should be taken into account.

Evaluation generates information, some of which is "evidence", and "information is power", so there is a political dimension to evaluation which ought to be consider to enhance the probability that evaluation will be taken into account, and that therefore its benefits will at least compensate its costs. A political economy analysis involves three major steps: identifying the stakeholders and their preferences, identifying the rules of the game and the dynamics of interaction between stakeholders and identifying how institutional constraints, such as information problems, lack of credible commitment, principal-agent relationships and agenda-setting dynamics shape policy agendas and the collective action capacity of the groups[1] In a study on demand and supply of evaluation in 5 African countries the following table was useful in identifying and considering the role of different stakeholders[2]:

Principals	Government Agents	Evaluation Agents
Executive	Central government,	Universities
Legislature	Line ministries	Think Tanks
Civil Society	Subnational governments	Evaluation associations and networks
Development Partners		Consultants

A frequent implicit assumption is that there is a strong interest and demand for results; but given the interests at stake, the demand by some principals is for "positive results". There is an asymmetry of incentives: strong to present (and demand) positive results, weak to present (and be willing to consider) negative results. This affects both accountability and learning, as learning from failure is important. "Accountability for learning" is a formula that tries to integrate accountability and learning. Concerning demand for evaluation, it has been found useful to distinguish between actual, potential and latent demand; the latter (demand for information generated by evaluations but which the demander is not aware that evaluation can provide) is particular important, and requires to develop an awareness of what evaluations

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[1] See Box 11.1 "Political Economy Analysis: A Practical Checklist" in Corduneaunu-Huci, C et.al. (2013) *Understanding Policy Change. How to apply political economy concepts in practice"*
[2] See Feinstein,O. & Porter,S. (2014) "Reframing Evaluation Capacity in Africa" *EES Evaluation Connections* ("subnational governments" were not included in that text).

can offer. With respect to evaluation capacity building, whereas in the 90's there was only one regional program focusing on ECD (and funded by IFAD,i.e., PREVAL), in the XXIth century there are several ECD programmes and ECD diagnoses have been conducted in many countries. The environment for country-led evaluations is much more enabling than it was 15 years ago, and it can be enhanced by providing opportunities for learning by doing (for example, supporting sector working groups that are country-led).

Turning now to the specific points mentioned in the first paragraph, the type of evidence for which there is an actual demand is evidence on "what works" demanded by politicians/decision makers; increasingly this is taking the form of evidence from RCTs, demanded by "sophisticated" decision makers/principals, who are not aware of the limitations of this type of evidence for scaling-up [3]). There is much less actual demand for evidence from synthesis studies, for which there may be a latent demand by policy/decision makers. Finally, it is highly likely that there will be a strong demand from policy makers and civil society of evidence corresponding to indicators of SDGs, including SDG2; it should be noted that the development of core key indicators for SDG2 is a pending task and challenge, given that the "indicators" presented in https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?page=view&nr=164&type=230&menu=2059 actually are sub-goals rather than indicators. In fact, the development of suitable indicators for SDG2 could be an important contribution of the RBA.

Concerning preferences for types of evaluations, there is an increasing demand for impact evaluations using randomization, which have been "marketed" as "scientific" evaluations, without a clear understanding of their limitations, neglecting other types of evaluations, such as process evaluations, that could be useful for decision making as well as synthesis of evaluations, which may provide more generalizable knowledge than that emerging from single evaluations. This knowledge can accelerate the achievement of SDG2 through better designed policies, programs and projects.

With respect to the use of evaluations, it is very limited[4] and it is clearly one of the important challenges. Some good practices that encourage use are the upstream involvement of potential users, to develop their ownership and to get their insights. And 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 in their elaboration; targeting the briefs to intended audiences).

Finally, prizes could be introduced as incentives to promote evaluability (prizes to teams that develop the best evaluable programs/projects geared to SDG2) and to encourage evaluation use (prizes to teams that produced and disseminated the most used evaluations of SDG2 interventions).

[3] Feinstein, Osvaldo (2015a) "Getting to scale: how to bring development solutions to millions of poor people", book review, *Development in Practice*
[4] See Feinstein, O. and García Moreno,M. (2015b) "Monitoring and Evaluation", chapter 7 of *Building Effective Governments* with data from 24 Latin American and Caribbean countries.