



United Nations  
**CEPA**  
Committee of Experts on  
Public Administration

CEPA Strategy Guidance Note

## Monitoring and evaluation systems

**DRAFT FOR COMMENT**

October 2019

The [United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration \(CEPA\)](#) has developed a set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development. The essential purpose of these voluntary principles is to provide practical, expert guidance to interested countries in a broad range of governance challenges associated with implementation of the 2030 Agenda. CEPA has identified 62 commonly used strategies that can assist with operationalization of the principles. This draft guidance note addresses monitoring and evaluation systems, which are associated with the principle of sound policymaking and can contribute to strengthening the effectiveness of institutions.

## Understanding the strategy

### What is the strategy?

Monitoring can be defined as a continuing function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide policymakers with indications of the extent of progress. Evaluation is the systematic assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program, or policy, including its design, implementation, and results. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfillment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability.<sup>1</sup>

Monitoring helps determine when a program is on track and when changes may be needed. It identifies potential gaps in the process and outlines areas for improvement. Monitoring allows results, processes and experiences to be documented and used as a basis to steer decision-making and learning process.

Beyond monitoring, evaluation is needed to analyze and probe the results achieved, using the data acquired through monitoring. While monitoring provides little understanding of the reasons for good or bad performance, evaluation can provide such understanding. Evaluation enables assessment of how, and how well policies or programs are implemented; and what works, why, under what circumstance. It thus builds understanding that enables regular evidence-informed adjustments to policies and programs.<sup>2</sup>

In the SDG era, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) can play a transformational role. M&E can be used to generate evidence on what works and to assess progress in SDG implementation, thus contributing to strategies to implement the SDGs. The importance of M&E was highlighted in the context of the SDGs. “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” states that review of the SDGs will be “rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations”; and it also calls for the “strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programs”.<sup>3</sup>

### What is the underlying theory of change?

M&E is an important part of sound policymaking and contributes to the governance principle of effectiveness for sustainable development.

The best way to understand M&E’s potential contribution to sound policymaking is to view it at different stages of the policy cycle. The early stages of the policy cycle – analyzing and developing government policy and planning and budgeting priorities and strategies – all benefit from evidence of what has or has not worked in the past. At the next stage in the policy cycle – the implementation and management of activities. M&E helps policymakers to monitor their activities, including government service delivery, so that they learn quickly what is working and is not. At the final stage, M&E reveals the extent to which the government has achieved its objectives and thus provides the evidence needed to ensure government

accountability.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, information on project performance should be fed back into policy adjustments, closing the policy loop.

M&E is most valuable as an integral component of a project and closely woven into the whole cycle. It provides information that can be fed back into the project immediately to improve subsequent performance.<sup>5</sup>

## **How can the strategy be of benefit and under what circumstance?**

M&E helps make informed decisions regarding program management and service delivery. It enhances the chance that the policy's objective is achieved by evaluating the extent to which the program is having or has had the desired impact and by identifying what components of a policy or program work or do not work. A quality M&E provides feedback that can be used to improve programming, policy and strategy, and the conclusions of M&E inform adjustments in policies or strategies. M&E systems can also aid in promoting greater transparency and accountability within organizations and governments. Further, the ability to demonstrate positive results through M&E can help garner greater political and popular support. This is important for policymakers to justify the relevance and effectiveness of public programs in a context of limited resources.

## **Public sector situation and trends**

### **Global and regional assessments of the extent to which the strategy has been or is being implemented by countries, where known**

Many countries around the world have been implementing M&E strategies to improve their policies and programs. This includes not only developed countries but also developing countries. There are however no systematic global or regional assessments of the extent to which M&E strategy for SDGs has been or is being implemented by countries.

### **Are there continuing or emerging trends to be aware of at the global level or within different economics/geographic groups?**

Governments are facing calls for reform from stakeholders to demonstrate accountability and transparency, devise fair and equitable public policies, and deliver tangible services in a timely and efficient manner. The move toward various reforms, such as decentralization, deregulation, commercialization, or privatization, in many countries has also increased the need for M&E at regional

and local levels of government. Further, there are many internal pressures on governments to downsize and reform themselves. Some governments are experiencing budgetary constraints that force them to make difficult choices and tradeoffs in deciding on the best use of limited resources. In addition, countries' competition for the limited resources available for international development assistance has heightened the demand for efficient systems to assess the performance and impact of international development programs. Furthermore, as civil society and local organizations gain greater voice, there is an increasing demand to assess the participatory dimensions of development and to include program participants more meaningfully in M&E processes. All these factors are creating a greater demand for more effective systems to monitor and evaluate policy interventions.<sup>6</sup>

Against this background, the general trend is that particularly developing country governments are increasing their commitment to building systems that can assess the performance of national development plans, as evidenced by a steady growth in the number of developing countries that are implementing national M&E policies.<sup>7</sup>

In particular, there are three key trends of importance. First, M&E increasingly forms part of an overall strategy for knowledge management. Secondly, the role of evaluation in the policy cycle shifts from a more classic ex-post approach to evaluation as integrated throughout the policy cycle.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, new technology developed over the past few years has given rise to new approaches to M&E.

In particular, ICTs are offering new methods for gathering, analyzing and disseminating data and are changing the way M&E is conducted. Along with advances in mobile phone technology, an explosion of mapping tools, social media platforms and data visualization options offers greater possibility to combine data sets and support more informed decisions about policy and program implementation.

While experimentation with ICTs is happening at various stages of the M&E cycle, there is little hard evidence of effectiveness of ICT application for M&E, and there has been greater exploration of ICTs for monitoring than for evaluation.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, there is need to be aware of differing levels of access and inclusion because marginalized members of a group may be left out if ICT-enabled M&E is not designed with inclusion in mind. In fact, ICTs create their own set of new challenges. Some of these new challenges include: potential for technology-driven M&E processes, when M&E plans are adapted to ICT tools; overreliance on digital tools, data and numerical indicators, which may lead to a loss of quality control measures; over-collection of data with little capacity to analyze it, and the loss of contextual understanding obtained from project visits and face-to-face interviews when these are replaced with rapid and often remote electronic data collection.<sup>10</sup>

## Methods of implementation

### What are the basic building blocks of the strategy?

Generally speaking, an effective M&E requires the following building blocks, which together help ensure that M&E is relevant to projects and programmes:<sup>11</sup>

- *Clear and participatory formulation of outcomes and goals:* Indicators, baselines, and targets will all flow from this initial step of establishing outcomes. Engaging key stakeholders in a participatory manner to choose outcomes to monitor and evaluate helps to build consensus and gain a commitment to reaching the desired outcomes.
- *Selection of outcome indicators to monitor:* Another building block of M&E is key performance indicators to monitor progress with respect to inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts. As with agreeing on outcomes, the interests of multiple stakeholders should also be taken into account when selecting indicators.
- *Gathering of baseline data and information on current conditions:* Gathering baseline data is establishing where we are at present relative to the outcome one is trying to achieve. One cannot project performance into the future without first establishing a baseline. Baseline data helps to inform decision-makers about current circumstances before embarking on projecting targets for a given program, policy, or project.
- *Setting specific targets:* In essence, targets are the quantifiable levels of the indicators that a country, society, or organization wants to achieve by a given time. An important consideration in setting targets is the expected funding and resource levels—existing capacity, budgets, personnel, funding resources, facilities, etc.—throughout the target period.
- *Regular collection of data to assess whether the targets are being met.* Statistical capacity to collect data is an essential component of building effective M&E systems.
- *Providing evaluation information and reporting of the results:* Evaluation information can contribute to the discussions among government officials and important stakeholders about the causes of the conditions and how to create an appropriate response. The findings and conclusions resulting from the data collection, analysis, and interpretation of evaluation information should be presented in a way that can assist policymakers to make appropriate decisions.

In the context of the SDGs, it is to note that SDG-specific building blocks of M&E are already defined – starting with the Goals and targets. The indicators are based on targets.

## **Are there international standards and methods, or common approaches followed by different economic/geographic groups?**

Feedback systems, logical framework, participatory M&E, impact evaluation and performance-based M&E present dominant and established approaches to M&E. There are other approaches, such as theory-based evaluation, formal surveys, rapid appraisal methods, public expenditure tracking surveys, cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis and impact evaluation.

Feedback systems present an established M&E approach. It is a subset of PM&E, which generate customer-oriented data about intended beneficiaries' perceptions of how well an intervention is working during its life cycle. Feedback systems is the systematic approach to collecting the views of key stakeholders about the quality and impact of work undertaken by an implementing organizations. Feedback data can monitor either the process of intervention and/or the results achieved. If collected and analyzed in a systematic way, it can provide valuable performance data to policymakers.<sup>12</sup>

The logical framework (LogFrame) became a standard approach to M&E, which is required by many donors for grant applications. It has played an important role in project planning and management over the last two decades. It entails an analytical process which logically sets out the objectives of the project to check whether these objectives have been achieved.

It has what has been called vertical and horizontal logic, required in a matrix form. The vertical logic down the matrix is concerned with ends and means - with objectives, goals and purposes, then outputs, then the activities intended to achieve the outputs. The horizontal logic across the matrix is from narrative summary to objectively verifiable indicators and means of verification. A final vertical column is used to identify assumptions about the external environment that enable or hinder the realization of activities, outputs and purpose. What LogFrame seeks to do is provide a structure which will allow evaluators to specify the components of their activities and identify the logical linkages between a set of means and a set of ends.

As far as participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) is concerned, it can be defined as a process through which stakeholders at various levels engage in monitoring or evaluating a particular project, program or policy, share control over the content, the process and the results of the M&E activity and engage in taking or identifying corrective actions. This approach contributes to demand-led planning and decision-making and improved accountability, when effective communication and feedback loops are in place with programs and agencies. It expands the notion of accountability to answer not only whether organizations are fulfilling the terms of the funding they receive, but also whether they are fulfilling the needs and goals of the communities they serve.<sup>13</sup>

PM&E has emerged because of the recognition of the limitations of conventional M&E. Conventional M&E mainly serves the needs of project implementers and donors; it often ignores the interests of other groups

involved in development efforts. The M&E activities are normally carried out by outside experts, with the result that a gap exists between the experts' perception of the project and its results and that of the people who are directly involved.

Impact evaluation assesses the changes that result from a project, program or policy - both the intended and the unintended ones. While the outcome monitoring examines whether targets have been achieved, impact evaluation aims to seek to answer the question: what actually happened and what would have happened in the absence of project, program or policy. Impact evaluations are part of a broader agenda of evidence-based policy making. In a context in which policy makers and civil society are demanding results and accountability from public programs, impact evaluation can provide robust and credible evidence on performance and on whether a particular program achieved its desired outcomes.<sup>14</sup>

Performance-based M&E combines the traditional approach of monitoring implementation with the assessment of results. This linking of both implementation progress with progress in achieving the desired objectives or goals (results) of government policies and programs makes performance-based M&E useful as a tool for public management. When a government switches its focus from measuring whether a program is on track to whether the program is achieving its desired objectives or results, its overall performance improves. Performance-based M&E strategies emphasize that governments should achieve the results they promise to their citizens. It also then follows that if governments are to achieve these promised results, they should be able to provide to their citizens evidence of having done so. A performance-based M&E system is an important tool that allows governments to acquire this evidence.<sup>15</sup>

## **Do current approaches work well or are other methods/instruments needed?**

Critical assessment of the strengths and limitations of these existing approaches to M&E has identified some limitations of these approaches for addressing the complex environment in which development policies operate.

For example, the disadvantages of PM&E include the need for skilled facilitators to ensure people understand the process and are equally involved. It demands more coordination and is often more challenging to facilitate. The processes can also be dominated by strong voices in the community. Careful identification of stakeholders involved is thus critical as the quality of PM&E process depends on who's involved, and how they are involved.

In case of the Logframe, its main advantage is improvement of project design, fostering project performance and facilitating project management. It has however some shortcomings. For example, if managed rigidly, it can stifle creativity and innovation. If not updated during implementation, it can also be a static tool that does not reflect changing conditions.<sup>16</sup>

As far as impact evaluation is concerned, the evaluator often has such limited information that it is difficult to analyze whether the program was successfully implemented and whether its participants really benefitted from it. Partly, the reason is that many programs do not collect baseline data unless the evaluation was built in from the beginning.<sup>17</sup>

As regards performance-based M&E, there are challenges and difficulties faced, particularly by developing countries that can range from a lack of skill capacity to poor governance structures to systems that are far from transparent.

In addition, conventional M&E is usually done towards the end of a program or project, allowing little opportunity for improvement during early and mid-term implementation.

Furthermore, there is need for new approaches in the SDG era. The cross-sectoral nature of the SDGs constitutes a major challenge to M&E. M&E is often pursued in a fragmented way, with performance being still monitored separately within sectoral divisions and different disciplines. Yet, if various SDGs and targets affect one another, the mechanisms to monitor and evaluate policy interventions to achieve these targets will also need to look across sectors. While M&E tends to target specific policy interventions (e.g., single policy or program in a particular sector), it is important to assess progress towards interrelated SDG goals and targets. The challenges facing the design of M&E systems for the SDGs (e.g., the need to measure cross-sectoral impacts and create insight across sectors and the need for indicators to collectively provide an accurate picture of the overall progress) mirror the fundamental challenges of designing integrated SDG implementation strategies.

In view of this challenge, the new approaches need to be able to leverage M&E as a dynamic tool to encourage continuous cross-sectoral collaboration and determine the extent to which policies were designed to allow potential synergies to emerge during the SDG implementation phase. It is important to think beyond individual policies and programs, as the value of evaluating single interventions is likely to be limited. Here, tracking inter-policy outcomes and impacts may add value and help guide sustainable development efforts.<sup>18</sup>

## Case studies

**Below cases present innovative M&E systems for the SDGs.**

***Colombia's national M&E system - SINERGIA:*** SINERGIA is Colombia's national M&E system for the SDGs. The system tracks policy performance government-wide and evaluates the implementation of key programs across multiple sectors. The SINERGIA unit is located in the National Department of Planning. It works in conjunction with the Office of the President to oversee, develop and implement government-supported evaluations and monitor the National Development Plan. SINERGIA works well, particularly as ministries are an integral part of the M&E process from the early design phase. They are invited to be part of the on-going process and to learn how evaluations are carried out.<sup>19</sup>



**Costa Rica’s society-wide pact to monitor and evaluate the SDGs:** By identifying the programs of the National Development Plan that are related to the SDGs, Costa Rica established the link between policy priorities and the country’s National Evaluation Policy (NEP). NEP refers to the SDGs as an important driver to push policy evaluation and cross-references the National Pact for the Advancement of the SDGs, which commits to the implementation of a M&E strategy. The pact is the national strategy for the monitoring of the SDGs in Costa Rica, which was signed by the Government together with civil society, businesses and citizens in 2016. It is the result of an inclusive and participatory process with national stakeholders, and Costa Rica is the first country in the world to sign a national pact with its people to deliver on the SDGs.<sup>20</sup>

**India’s SDG Index:** India’s National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) decided to assess the progress on SDG implementation through a single index. The innovative index spans across 13 out of 17 SDGs and tracks the progress of all the States on a set of 62 National Indicators, measuring their progress on the outcomes of the interventions and schemes of the Government of India. The Index has been designed to provide an aggregate assessment of the performance of all Indian States, and to help policymakers evaluate their performance. It supports policymakers to benchmark their progress against the national targets and performance of their peers and devise better strategies to achieve the SDGs.<sup>21</sup>

**Switzerland’s MONET monitoring system:** MONET is Switzerland’s mechanism for tracking progress towards its sustainable development strategy and SDG implementation. The MONET system is based on a conceptual framework comprising a frame of reference, an indicator typology, and predefined criteria and processes. The MONET typology models the processes that are relevant for sustainable development. The typology integrates processes such as the efficient use of resources and societal and political measures that aim to correct undesired change. Overall, this conceptual framework ensures that the indicator system measures sustainable development in a holistic manner, integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interaction between them. The conceptual framework of the MONET system has been adopted by other countries.<sup>22</sup>

## Peer-to-peer learning and research

**The African Development Bank Group** conducts research on various evaluation issues in African countries. <https://www.afdb.org/en/search/content/evaluation>

**Betterevaluation** is an international collaboration to improve evaluation practice and theory by sharing and generating information about evaluation methods and approaches. <https://www.betterevaluation.org/>

**Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results** is an initiative of the World Bank and has programs that strengthen evaluation capacities at local and regional levels, particularly with policymakers. <https://www.theclearinitiative.org/who-we-are>

**The DAC Network on Development Evaluation** focuses on developing and improving partnerships to strengthen the relevance, coherence and impact of capacity development efforts for better evaluation. <https://www.oecd.org/development/evaluation/>

**OECD's Directorate for Public Governance** offers international comparative analysis and benchmarking as related to M&E. In support of robust M&E systems, OECD focuses on 3 main pillars: (1) building an institutional framework by putting the right legal, policy and organizational measures in place to support the performance of public policies, (2) promoting the use of evidence and policy M&E, by investing policy making processes and supporting stakeholder engagement, and (3) promoting the quality of policy M&E, e.g., through developing guidelines, investing in capacity building, as ex post review and control mechanisms. <http://www.oecd.org/gov/>

**EvalPartners** is a global partnership that aims to strengthen national evaluation capacities. It has been working to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society organizations to engage in a strategic and meaningful manner in national evaluation processes, to contribute to improved country-led evaluation systems and policies and for evaluations that are equity-focused and gender responsive. It started a global, multi-stakeholder consultative process to brainstorm about the priorities and key areas of a Global Evaluation Agenda for 2016-2020 ("EvalAgenda2020") that aligns with the SDGs. <https://evalpartners.org/>

**EVALS DGs** is a network of policymakers, institutions and practitioners who advocate for evaluation of the SDGs and support integration of evaluation initiatives into national, regional and global SDG feedback and review systems. EVALS DGs aims to form a strong evaluation platform to [inform, support, measure and assess development efforts around the SDGs](#). EVALS DGs members work to support the evaluation community to be prepared for evaluating initiatives towards better outcomes for the SDGs. The network operates as part of EvalPartners. <https://evalsdgs.org/>

**The European Evaluation Society** aims to stimulate, guide and promote the theory, practice and utilization of evaluation in Europe and beyond. Specifically, the Society seeks to advance evaluation knowledge and to encourage adoption of good practices by fostering evaluation excellence, independence and partnerships. <https://www.europeanevaluation.org/>

**The International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation** represents national and regional voluntary organizations for professional evaluation. It strengthens international evaluation through the exchange of evaluation methods, theories and practice. <https://www.ioce.net/>

**UNDP** explores options for aligning the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda with national M&E frameworks, prioritizing SDG indicators for national monitoring, strengthening national statistical capacities, and leveraging partnerships and innovations. <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/evaluation-office.shtml>

**The UN evaluation group** is a voluntary professional network whose members comprise the evaluation units of 45 UN agencies. It promotes professional evaluation knowledge to strengthen the UN, and to enhance programs, policies and governance worldwide in pursuit of the UN’s goals. Its mission is to promote and support the independence, credibility and usefulness of the evaluation units in the UN system. <http://www.uneval.org/>

**The UN Global Pulse** explores ways of effectively integrating big data into the M&E of development programs. <https://www.unglobalpulse.org/>

Many international and regional development banks have M&E systems in place. This includes: **Inter-American Development Bank**, which is a source of evaluation-related expertise. Its Office of Evaluation and Oversight (OVE) is an independent body of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), responsible for externally evaluating IDB’s projects and performance. <https://www.iadb.org/en/ove/home>. **The World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group** is an independent unit within the World Bank; it reports directly to the Bank’s Board of Executive Directors. Its goals of evaluation are to learn from experience, to provide an objective basis for assessing the result of the Bank’s work, and to provide accountability in the achievement of its objectives. It also aims to improve the Bank’s work by identifying and disseminating the lessons learned from experience and by framing recommendations drawn from evaluation findings. <http://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/>

## Acknowledgements

The members of the group are...

To contact the group or nominate a member...

---

<sup>1</sup> OECD, 2002, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management*.

<sup>2</sup> OECD, 2019, *Governance as an SDG Accelerator Country Experiences and Tools: Country Experiences and Tools*, OECD, Paris.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, 2015, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, A/RES/70/1.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank, 2012, *Building Better Policies: The Nuts and Bolts of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>5</sup> Vernooy, R., S. Qin, J. Xu, 2006, *The power of participatory monitoring and evaluation, discussion paper*.

<sup>6</sup> UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS and IPEN, 2006, New Trends in Development Evaluation, *Evaluation working paper 5*.

<sup>7</sup> Raftree L., M. Bamberger, 2014, Emerging opportunities: Monitoring and evaluation in a Tech-enabled world, *itad Discussion paper*.

<sup>8</sup> Akre, B., 2017, Towards a systematic monitoring & evaluation framework: Evaluating individual interventions in an intertwined policy intervention area, *Discussion paper*.

<sup>9</sup> Raftree L., M. Bamberger, 2014, Emerging opportunities: Monitoring and evaluation in a Tech-enabled world, *Discussion paper*.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Kusek, J.Z., R.C. Rist, 2004, *Ten steps to a result-based monitoring and evaluation*, World Bank, Washington DC.

<sup>12</sup> Barnett, C., R. Posford, 2010, Three approaches to monitoring: Feedback systems, participatory monitoring and evaluation and logical frameworks, *IDS Bulletin*, 41(6), 36-44.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank, 2010, *Participatory monitoring and evaluation*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>14</sup> Martinez, G. et al. 2011, *Impact evaluation in practice*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>15</sup> Kusak, J., R. Rist, 2001, Building a performance-based monitoring and evaluation system. The challenges facing developing countries, *Evaluation Journal of Australasia*, 1(2), 14-23.

<sup>16</sup> C. Barnett, R. Posford, 2010, Three approaches to monitoring: Feedback systems, participatory monitoring and evaluation and logical frameworks, *IDS Bulletin*, 41(6), 36-44.

<sup>17</sup> G. Martinez, et al. 2011, *Impact evaluation in practice*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations, 2018, *Working Together: Integration, institutions and the sustainable development goals*, World Public Sector Report, New York.

<sup>19</sup> Cassidy, C., J. Tsui, 2017, Global evidence policy units: SINERGIA, Colombia, *ODI briefing paper*.

<sup>20</sup> Government of Costa Rica, 2017, *A Shared Vision of Sustainability*, Report presented at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, New York.

<sup>21</sup> OECD, 2019, *Governance as an SDG Accelerator Country Experiences and Tools: Country Experiences and Tools*, OECD, Paris.

<sup>22</sup> Government of Switzerland, 2016, *Switzerland's initial steps towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, Report presented at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, New York, 2016.