



United Nations contributions to national evaluation capacity development and the evolution of national evaluation systems

As part of the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations system has a mandate to contribute to international efforts for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), through strengthening National Evaluation Capacity.

United Nations support for national evaluation capacity development (NECD) is further specified in the 2014 United Nations General Assembly Resolution,¹ which called on entities of the United Nations Development System to build capacity for the evaluation of development activities at country level, and is reflected in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards for evaluation².

In 2021, the UNEG working group on NECD undertook a review of the progress on the implementation of the Resolution and identified areas for improvement. The review built on the development of a shared definition and theory of change for NECD, and included six case studies of national evaluation systems, a survey of United Nations agencies and interviews with internal and external stakeholders.

The review found that UNEG Members have been providing direct support to NECD through a wide range of activities targeting governments and non-governmental actors. All countries covered in the case studies have received support for the development of evaluation policies and legislation, in varying degrees, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) historically the most engaged. United Nations agencies have been working with evaluation champions including parliamentarians, Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation and academia, raising awareness and advocating for evaluation. Support has also been provided to develop the tools necessary to translate policies and laws into practice, such as guidelines, standards and competency frameworks. The most common contribution has been to individual capacity development, through training, establishing communities of practice, and learning-by-doing through joint and country-led evaluations.

¹ United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/69/237 "Building capacity for the evaluation of development activities at the country level"

² UNEG Norms and Standards for Evaluation (2017)





United Nations agencies are increasingly relying on local experts to conduct their evaluations, and most have been involving governments and non-governmental actors (for example as members of reference groups or steering committees), though with differing levels of participation. There are also some examples of joint and country-led evaluations, all of which is indirectly contributing to NECD.

Even where national evaluation policies are in place, implementation is still a challenge. Translating these laws and policies into practice requires the progressive development of several elements of an evaluation system. The process of building a national evaluation system is long-term and requires consistent support. A key message of the study is that it is important to start to conduct evaluations to demonstrate their potential, even before all the elements of a system are in place. Useful evaluations can generate interest and political support for further development of the evaluation system.

Currently, evaluations are still mostly commissioned by development partners, with a limited number of evaluations produced by governments. This results in limited ownership and use of results, but also limited opportunities for government officials to be actively involved in evaluation processes. United Nations evaluations can be used to demonstrate to and with government how an evaluation system can be developed. United Nations agencies can also fund government evaluations of national programmes or policies – something that few agencies are currently doing.

United Nations operations can be fragmented, and there are many barriers and few incentives to collaboration. This can weaken, rather than strengthen, national capacity. There is scope to strengthen collaboration and synergy, within the United Nations and beyond, in particular with the Global Evaluation Initiative and EvalPartners. The review highlights the need for NECD to be identified as a separate programmatic area, a specific function to help governments build critical capacity. As such it should appear in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) as an area where agencies could come together under governance.

The NECD working group developed three core recommendations based on the emerging findings, which were endorsed at the UNEG Annual General Meeting in 2022:

- 1. All United Nations agencies should conduct their evaluations so as to foster national evaluation capacity development.**
- 2. In line with General Assembly Resolution 69/237, United Nations agencies and their evaluation functions should continue to support capacity development of national evaluation ecosystems, including support to the enabling environment, institutional and individual capacities.**
- 3. All United Nations agencies should coordinate and collaborate on NECD at corporate, regional and country levels, and allocate adequate time and resources.**