Country: Egypt

VOPE name: Egyptian Research and Evaluation Network (EREN)

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Title: "Evaluation in Revolution: Towards the Era of Positive Change"

I. Background driving forces of the VOPE & its historical development

Despite high levels of economic growth over the past few years, development of the political system, and relative improvements in many sectors such as health, education, and water and sanitation, the living conditions for the average Egyptian remain poor. Admittedly Egypt's liberalization policies have yielded mixed results. Extreme poverty has increased from 5.4% to 6.4% between 2005 and 2008, and the households who live below the national poverty line are estimated to be 18.9% of the total population. Various measurements of disparities and inequality have risen in the last 3 years. Although spending on grants, subsidies and social benefits account for around 26% of the government expenditure, benefits do not reach the poor proportionally. The large failure to share this income with the people has convinced the latter that the latest policies and reforms have failed. According to the U.N. Human Development Index, Egypt ranks 101 of 169 countries. Although the 2010 HDI value reaches 0.659, its inequality adjusted value only reaches 0.449\(^1\). Furthermore, social and political pressures, added to inherited cultural customs and distorted perception of religion, all sustained the exclusion and marginalization of women, with special emphasis on the public sphere.

With the series of crises that have been shaking Egypt during the previous decade:-- financial and economic, plus increase of poverty and disparities, shortage of food and energy as well as political unrests -- emerged the urgent need for stronger systems that address transparency, efficiency and accountability. In addition, both the Government machinery and the civil society lack the minimal quality standards for planning, monitoring and evaluation, and hence they are barely effective and incapable of providing the required standard of services to citizens. Equitable systems and rights-based policies and budgets could hardly be achieved without having a solid monitoring and evaluation (M&E) function/mechanism that can oversee the country’s development initiatives. Accordingly, Egypt is in dire need for developing the evaluation function and building a link between research & evaluation (R&E) and policy-making issues in order to strengthen what is called “Evidence-based policies”. Evidence-based policy has been defined as “the integration of experience, judgment and expertise with the best available external evidence from systematic research” (Davies, 1991). Equally important, there is a need to promote the dialogue between policy & decision makers and research & evaluation practitioners in order to gain the fruits of development and to make a difference in the quality of lives of people.

II. Rationale and project description

\(^1\) The IHDI accounts for inequalities in HDI dimensions by “discounting” each dimension’s average value according to its level of inequality. The IHDI is the actual level of human development (accounting for this inequality), while the HDI can be viewed as an index of “potential” human development (or the maximum level of HDI) that could be achieved if there was no inequality.
With reference to the historical development background of in the case of Egypt presented above, the following were the key challenges to the process of evaluation in Egypt. These challenges constitute the driving forces of the Research & Evaluation Network in Egypt. They could be summarized as follows:

- Most of the development programs in Egypt are becoming more and more questionable in terms of effectiveness, relevance, impact and sustainability.
- Lack of accessibility to evidence-based knowledge because of the weak institutional and human resource capacities especially, in the governmental institutions in Egypt.
- Mechanisms of transparency & accountability of the research & evaluation information are not activated adequately.
- Weak coordination and partnerships amongst the different stakeholders result in limited exchange of experiences and dissemination of R&E findings.
- Number of professional researchers & evaluators are limited, and the capacities of the mid-level ones are not strong enough to provide quality evaluation processes.

The network primarily started informally amongst a group of 13 development practitioners, freelance consultants, Government officials and people concerned with lack of effectiveness of development initiatives in Egypt. All were, and are still, working in the development field in different international and national organizations, and witnessed the weakness of results, the lack of guidelines and standards, the limited accountability with special emphasis on professional ethics, the limited capacities and the frail accountability particularly in the area of research and evaluation.

In December 2008 a group of national experts, University professors, development practitioners as well as Government partners, in collaboration with UNICEF/ ECO held a symposium called "Research and Evaluation in Egypt: Towards Evidence-Based Policies" to discuss the challenges facing the evaluation of development interventions in Egypt. That definitely has an impact on the effectiveness and the impact of the development results as well as on the policy-making process. The symposium ended up with the formation of a constitution of an informal evaluation network that seeks to enhance collaboration amongst researchers and practitioners in development, to promote cross-disciplinary debate and capacity development opportunities on research and evaluation, to enhance the generation and the dissemination of knowledge, and to enhance the quality of research and evaluation in Egypt. The network is currently being registered, under the Egyptian law, as a formal evaluation association that is founded by 13 members and governed by seven members serving as the board of directors, to be rotated on bi-annual basis. The total numbers of members, to date, are 151.

III. Strategy and implementation

**Advocacy for Evidence-based Policies: bridging the gap between policy makers and researchers/ evaluators**

Since its start EREN was keen to contribute to creating the enabling environment to professionalize the function of evaluation and to utilize it for improving programming as well as for providing evidence for equitable decision-making. At the 2008 Symposium, a key
EREN member prepared a policy paper that explores the situation of evaluation in Egypt and analyzed the challenges of evaluating the development interventions in the Egyptian context. This paper was presented in the presence of participants who were representing national and international decision and policy makers. There it was frequently emphasized the urgent need to advocate for paradigmatic shift in the thought and practice of evaluation in Egypt and the importance to link it to policy-making and to programmatic excellence.

EREN was keen to primarily partner with the Centre for Project Evaluation and Macro Economic Analysis (PEMA) under the Ministry of International Cooperation (MoIC), to have the network formally established. Due to the instability in the period after the Egyptian Revolution, partnership with the Ministry was weakened. However, MoIC is expected to auspice the upcoming national conference that EREN plans to conduct by the end of 2012 on "Country-Led M&E to Enhance Efficiency and Accountability". This ministry is an important national partner, since it is responsible for planning as well as for monitoring and evaluating aid effectiveness in Egypt. In addition, an expected partner in this conference is the Ministry of State Administrative Development that is mandated to monitor and improve the performance of the Public Sector in Egypt. In addition, it includes the "Transparency and Integrity Committee" whose mission is to enhance transparency and integrity efforts.

Finally, in order to contribute to the generation and dissemination of evaluation materials in Egypt, where a good part of the national partners are only Arabic speakers, EREN constituted an "Arabization and Publication" initiative. The latter is responsible for Arabizing/translating evaluation policies, standards and materials from English to Arabic language. This would definitely help to fulfill the demand to market for the use of evaluation.

**M&E Capacity development: to enhance ownership, harmonization & sustainability**

Capacity development, in the evaluation field specifically, is seen as part of the broader effort to improve public policy-making to achieve development goals. Consensus on the DAC Network is that partner evaluation capacity plays a key role in enabling ownership of development evaluation and ensuring mutual accountability for development results, and is a decisive factor in improving alignment with partner evaluation systems. To enhance capacities of national partners in the area of evaluation, EREN instigated multiple initiatives with diverse development players including government officials, researchers and evaluators, and media people.

EREN’s strategy to enhance capacities of national partners involves targeting diverse audiences: senior evaluators, mid-level professionals, Government partners, media people, young people as well as other civil society partners like NGOs. The purpose of capacity building is perceived as investing on results achieved through capacity building. Senior evaluators were targeted in more than one session in 2010, while inviting well known national and international consultants to speak about "Governance and evaluation", "Impact Evaluation", "Evaluating Budgets" as well as "Advocacy and Evaluation". Most of EREN initiatives target mid-level professionals by conducting research and evaluation seminars,
institutionalizing diploma on R&E, and conducing open seminars for discussion around different evaluation issues.

Media people were significantly targeted by ERNE, where a "Media Watch Group" was constituted and a number of three workshops were conducted for media people from more than 16 media institution/channels. It started in 2010, in collaboration with PLAN International and the Faculty of Communication in Cairo University, to conduct a seminar on "Enhancing Role of Media People in Utilizing Research and Disseminating Knowledge", where 43 media people and researchers participated and documented their training needs to build channels of communication between media and research. In 2011 and 2012, two media seminars were conducted on "Development Aspects in Media Coverage" and on "Extending Partnership between Media People and Researchers". A new partnership was initiated between the Press Syndicate and EREN and that is aimed to flourish in 2012-2013 to strengthen the media watch group that can monitor the media performance and coverage of the development issues.

Finally, an emerging initiative has developed to enhance capacities of junior researchers and evaluators in planning, designing and conducting research and evaluation and to encourage students to play a more pro-active role in monitoring and evaluating their communities. (Details on capacity building events are mentioned in section VII on 'Progress and Results'.)

Towards Developing Equity-Focused and Gender-Sensitive Evaluation

Although one of the 'raisons d'être' of EREN is its passion and belief in issues of equity-based development, community-based M&E as well as empowerment and transformation, its achievement in this area limited. In 2010 a session was conducted on "Gender and Evaluation" that targeted senior and mid-level researchers and evaluators. Gender is integrated in one of the Diploma Curriculum "Modern Trends in Development" that presents concepts like gender; Results-Based Management and Human Rights-Based Approach as modern trends in development. Last but not least, a promising collaboration with UN Women is emerging, where the latter expressed interest in adding one separate course on "Gender-based Evaluation" in addition to its support in Arabizing manual on "Gender Sensitization of Evaluation".

VI. Key challenges/bottlenecks that hampered EREN's capacity to contribute to the above strategy

There is a long way to go in order to substantially achieve a tangible progress in "Country-led M&E", due to the complex challenges the national institutions have in their structures, and the hard and disjointed management of the Government machinery would not make the change easy and fast.

The culture of generating, utilizing and exchanging information is weak. A culture of protectionism amongst people working in, or concerned with, research and evaluation could easily lead to risk of stagnation of the sector of research and evaluation in Egypt.
There is also a lack of volunteer work and collective responsibility. Research and evaluation consultants’ time is valuable, where they are committed with different tasks and assignments, added to the fact that their time is worth resources.

Belated official registration of EREN, especially with the multiple turnovers of the Minister and key officials in the Ministry mandated to approve the network as an official evaluation association, has been another bottleneck.

VII. Progress and results

First: Developing Capacities of National Partners

1. Two-week Seminar on “Designing Evaluation/Research”:
In collaboration with the Health and Environment Education Association and the National Planning Institute, EREN conducted these seminars for 57 government officials, mid-level professionals and junior university professors involved in planning and implementing evaluation. The purpose was to provide participants with basic understanding of the discipline and profession of evaluation and to develop the knowledge and capacities in designing an evaluation research with a sound methodology.

2. One-year Professional Diploma on Research and Evaluation:
EREN, in collaboration with UNICEF/ECO and the Dutch and in collaboration with two Egyptian universities (Assuit and Helwan Universities), adopted an initiative to institutionalize a professional diploma in research and evaluation. This diploma targets development officers specialised in monitoring and evaluation, government officials working in relevant fields, mid-level researchers, and individual emerging evaluators. The diploma is following the credit-hour system amounting to a total of 24 credit hours along a period of one year.

3. Enhancing the Role of Evaluation in Improving Governance Practices:
In an attempt to demonstrate the intrinsic link between evaluation and governance and to use evaluation as one of the tools to strengthen governance practices in Egypt, EREN conducted a seminar for 66 researchers, evaluators and senior professionals on “Enhancing the Role of Evaluation in Improving Governance Practices”. Although EANRE conducted the above mentioned workshop only one time, it is aiming to continue a series of “Evaluation and Governance” workshops, especially after the Egyptian revolution, where the culture of transparency, integrity and accountability are widely welcomed by Egyptians at the different levels.

4. Initiating Child-Youth Led Research and Evaluation:
In collaboration with NCCM, EREN piloted an initiative to enhance capacities of 38 junior researchers and evaluators divided into two age categories (14-17) and (18-24). The purpose was to disseminate and strengthen the culture of evaluation in schools and Universities, while enhancing the capacities to plan, design and conduct R&E. Six pieces of research plans were developed and implemented by students in their schools and
Universities to come out with final reports that were presented in a public event organized by NCCM.

Second: **Knowledge Dissemination to Proliferate Culture and Practice of Evaluation**

1. **Role of Media in Dissemination of Research Results and in Knowledge Management**

   EREN started the process of developing the capacities of media people, journalists, and communication specialists in Egypt. Training workshops are meant to be a medium conducive to building relations between researchers and evaluators and between media people, and to get the latter committed to get engaged to development issues. Two workshops were held with Journalists’ Syndicate and with Faculty of Communication in Cairo University.

2. **Translation and Publishing Project to Avail and Disseminate Evaluation Resources in Arabic**

   Evaluation materials hardly exist in the Arabic language, and therefore most, if not all national partners do not have their chance to build their knowledge or to enhance their skills in evaluation. EREN has established an initiative to translate key materials and key national research in the country from English to Arabic to avail resources in national language, to help accentuate the culture of evaluation, and to activate dialogue amongst partners on evaluation issues. To date, three key evaluation books were translated, added to UNEG quality standards for ToRs and reports, and short articles/papers on utilization-focused evaluation, national capacity building, etc.

3. **Professional Development Seminars:**

   Professional development seminars are conducted to exchange information on recent issues in research and evaluation and are mainly targeting mid and senior level professionals. Three seminars were conducted on "Outcome Mapping", "Country-led M&E" and on "Community-based Monitoring".

4. **Website for EREN (Under Construction)**

   EREN is developing a website that is expected to be launched soon.

Third: **Bridging Theory and Practice: Towards Evidence-based Policies**

National Conference on “Country-Led M&E to Enhance Transparency and Efficiency”

EREN is partnering with UNICEF, IDRC and other international and national partners to conduct a national conference on “Country-Led M&E to Enhance Transparency and Efficiency”. The conference is meant to be the first of its kind to engage policy makers, key officials, and the public towards the significant need to establish M&E systems in the
Government, to improve information management systems and to encourage R&E to support the evidence based decision making

VIII. Key enabling factors for EREN to Achieve Expected Results

1. Despite the complex instability Egypt is passing through, the revolution has led to a general atmosphere of openness and quest for transparency, integrity and accountability. There is bigger demand for collective responsibility and public action.

2. Due to the decline in aid effectiveness and the reduction of international aid at the same time, disparities are prevailing, creating an imbalance in the supply-demand flow, and hence organizations have started to explore and reread the situation aiming to adjust strategies to improve results.

UNICEF’s belief to the significance of the evaluation function and its support to establish and strengthen national evaluation boosted lots of initiatives and constantly provided required technical and financial assistance to make the network happen.

IX. Innovations and lessons learned

**Innovation:** For the first time in the Arab World, a professional diploma on Research and Evaluation is drafted in Arabic language (9 curricula for professors and for teachers) to cover the basic level of evaluation and development. These include project management, research methodology and research ethics, evaluation of development programmes, public policy analysis, statistical analysis and statistical computer packages, modern trends in development, knowledge management, and intellectual capital development, social planning, skills development added to applied research (project).

**Lessons Learnt:**

- It is good to start from bottom-up and to gain constituency; however having the support of the political and administrative leadership is vital and significant to establish the network faster.
- Adopt the policy/ advocacy strategy as one of the main strategies an evaluation network should be concerned about.
- Expand the membership to include different key players and influential members from the beginning, as this would boost the energy, enhance confidence in the network and help to work on policy level.
- Seek to implement joint programmes and initiatives, as this would help in investing on efforts and on resources.
- Choose the agents of change and make them your façade of promoting the network and defending it whenever needed.
- Build a good linkage between knowledge management and between research and evaluation.
- Last but not least, work intensively to attract the private sector and the media as both can easily support the whole initiative whether in generating resources and collective
responsibility (PS) or in utilizing evidence and evaluation results in evaluation and especially in media channels.

X. Next steps
- Completion of Arabization of one book on evaluation: "Most Significant Change" and of "From Policies to Results". September 2012.
- 10 day series of seminars on good field work for a quality research and evaluation. August through October 2012
- Mini-IPDET to be conducted with IDRC and regional partners in Egypt. January 2013. This includes the Translation of the “Road To results” Book as part of the Arabization process of EREN.
- Launching EREN website after being fed with research and M&E information. November 2012.
- Two professional development seminars on "Gender-based Evaluation" and on "Impact Evaluation" December 2012.