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*American Journal of Evaluation* 2005 26: 124

DOI: 10.1177/1098214004273186

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*Papers in this section focus on evaluation from a historical perspective. They may analyze important turning points within the profession, provide commentary on historically significant evaluation works, or describe and analyze what promises to be a contemporary watershed event with important implications for the future of evaluation.*

*If you have any questions or suggestions about topics you would like to see addressed in this section or would like to chat about an idea you are considering for submission, feel free to e-mail John Gargani at [jgargani@berkeley.edu](mailto:jgargani@berkeley.edu).*

## The Inauguration of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation

Donna M. Mertens

*Gallaudet University*

**Abstract:** Building an international evaluation community has the potential to strengthen the presence, practice, policies, and theories of evaluation and its contribution to improving the effectiveness of programs, policies, and services by making evaluation more rigorous, visible, and responsive to stakeholders. Following 7 years of work by evaluation leaders from many different countries, a major step toward realizing this vision occurred when the inaugural assembly of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) was held in Lima Peru in March 2003. This article provides a rationale for the establishment of IOCE in terms of expected benefits, as well as a summary for the historical record of the challenges and opportunities that emerged in the process of planning such a complex undertaking, and the accomplishments of the IOCE to date. Finally, the road ahead for the IOCE is discussed.

**Keywords:** *international cooperation; international partnership; evaluation organizations; capacity building*

Evaluators from around the world function in different circumstances, constrained or supported by a variety of political, social, and economic forces. Yet they also have much to learn from each other. The recognition of potential benefits that evaluators could reap from a formalized, sustainable entity that allows for communication across countries was one of the primary motivations for establishing an organization by which evaluators around the world could learn from and support each other. The goal of sharing information and thus supporting the development of better evaluation theory and practice worldwide led to the development of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE).

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Donna M. Mertens, Gallaudet University, 4600 Marie St., Beltsville, MD 20705; phone: (301) 937-8282; e-mail: [Donna.Mertens@Gallaudet.edu](mailto:Donna.Mertens@Gallaudet.edu).

American Journal of Evaluation, Vol. 26 No. 1, March 2005 124-130

DOI: 10.1177/1098214004273186

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Although evaluators conduct evaluations for many types of programs that cross national and international borders, such as poverty reduction, literacy, and job training, a health-related evaluation provides an example of the potential benefits of such an organization. Evaluators who work in programs designed to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS are confronted with the challenge of providing insights into how to determine if the programs are effective. How do they know that interventions to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS are designed in a way that members of the intended population will open themselves to the needed information, prophylactic measures, medications, and behavior changes? How do they measure the impact of such interventions in a way that they feel confident they have accurate information?

Hopson, Lucas, and Peterson (2000) addressed these issues through an ethnographic study conducted in a community in the United States in which drug use, prostitution, and poverty were widespread. Chilisa (2004) explored the meaning of HIV/AIDS in Botswana and how interventions could be designed to be relevant to the cultural context of the people of Botswana. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) sponsored training for indigenous evaluators on evaluation strategies to address their priority to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS for women in Africa (Mertens, 2004). These could be viewed as independent events, or they could be published papers, presentations, or professional development opportunities that are accessible to evaluators around the world as part of a formalized system whereby evaluators can benefit from sharing their work at a global level.

The inaugural assembly of the IOCE in Lima, Peru, March 28 to 30, 2003, provided for the establishment of a mechanism to achieve this goal and represents a historical moment of note for evaluators around the world.

## Background

The earliest events that led to the establishment of the IOCE were presented in the *American Journal of Evaluation* in 2000 (Mertens & Russon, 2000). They are briefly summarized here. Before 1995, only five regional and/or national evaluation organizations existed in the world. In 1995, the American Evaluation Association (AEA) and the Canadian Evaluation Society (CES) held a jointly sponsored international meeting in Vancouver, Canada. Planners for this meeting made special efforts to bring evaluators together from 50 countries.

Subsequent discussions on EvalTalk, the AEA-sponsored listserv, were initiated by the cochairs of AEA's Topical Interest Group: International and Cross-Cultural in Evaluation and led to a panel presentation at AEA's 1998 annual meeting. The presidents of AEA, the CES, the Associazione Italiana de Valutazione, the Australasian Evaluation Society, the Kenyan Evaluation Association, and the United Kingdom Evaluation Society debated the meaning and merits of the creation of a worldwide evaluation community. The proceedings of that panel were published in a document entitled *Creating a Worldwide Evaluation Community* (Russon & Love, 1999). The position of the AEA was articulated by Mertens (1999) and reflected a vision in which evaluators in the northern and southern hemispheres would work together to create a worldwide community of evaluators dedicated to strengthening the presence, practice, and theory of evaluation.

Two additional meetings preceded the inaugural meeting of the IOCE. At the first meeting in 1999 in Barbados, representatives from 15 regional/national organizations, as well as a number of observers from international organizations, produced a draft proposal that outlined the purpose of such an organization, thoughts on its organizational framework, and some core activities that such a cooperative framework might promote or engage in (Saunders et al., 2000).

The Barbados meeting was not without its challenges, as many individuals who have engaged in cooperative international efforts can attest. Questions arose, at times accompanied

by heated discussions, regarding the proposed structure of the organization; issues around financial support, especially with richer and poorer countries and a desire to be inclusive; and mechanisms for involvement for countries in which evaluation associations were nonexistent or emerging. Concerns about domination by AEA were explicitly raised. Rather than allowing concerns of Western imperialism and neocolonialism to become roadblocks to progress, the principles of inclusiveness and meaningful representation guided the discussions with a goal of providing a mutually supportive structure, not one that was dominated by Westerners. The group wrote the constitution in such a way as to adhere to these principles; however, the potential domination of IOCE by larger, more well-established associations is an ever-present concern.

A year later, the 15 organizations that attended the Barbados meeting had endorsed the concepts outlined in the draft proposal via electronic communications with the organizing group. In March 2002, a second meeting took place in the Dominican Republic for the purpose of planning the inaugural assembly of the IOCE (IOCE, 2002). The assembly coordinating group made decisions regarding criteria for participation, format, agenda, location, language translations, and secretariat. The criteria for participation were listed in a briefing bulletin that the coordinating group distributed to all known evaluation organizations around the world (Saunders et al., 2000). The intent was to be inclusive, but also to ensure that the individuals attending the assembly had a legitimate mandate from their membership. During this process, issues arose as to who was a legitimate representative of a region. In such cases, the coordinating group asked the individuals to provide some kind of evidence that they were the designated representatives in the form of written principles or a constitution or minutes from a meeting or training session. When appropriate, the coordinating group asked individuals from the same country to confer among themselves and decide for themselves the most appropriate representatives. In this way, the participation could be open to newly emerging organizations as well as more established ones.

Most important, the coordinating committee, with leadership from Arnold Love, developed a draft constitution and shared this draft with the leadership of more than 30 regional/national evaluation associations. Each organization was asked to review the draft constitution, to suggest revisions, and to indicate under what circumstances their organization could endorse the constitution. AEA's board endorsed the constitution at its winter meeting in 2003, with unanimous support of the concept of the IOCE as being in keeping with AEA's mission to improve evaluation practices and method, to increase evaluation use, to promote evaluation as a profession, and to support the contribution of evaluation to the generation of theory and knowledge about effective human action (AEA, 2004). AEA's endorsement did not imply the promise of expenditure of additional funds. The AEA board indicated that requests for additional funds from AEA to support IOCE would need to come to them for approval.

### **The IOCE Inaugural Assembly**

Representatives of 24 national/regional evaluation associations attended the IOCE inaugural assembly (Russon & Love, 2003). They came from Latin America, Africa, Australasia, North America, Asia, Europe, and the former Soviet Union. Richard Krueger (AEA president, 2002) and Donna M. Mertens (AEA board liaison to IOCE) represented AEA at the inaugural assembly in Lima, Peru. AEA provided funds to support the translation of the assembly into three languages: English, Spanish, and French.

The agenda for the assembly included sharing information with the participants on the history of events leading up to the assembly, refinement of the IOCE mission statement, discussion of expected outcomes for IOCE, identification of priority activities for IOCE, presentations on

the process of developing evaluation organizations from a variety of countries' experiences, and discussion of the proposed constitution and selection of a Board of Trustees (Russon & Love, 2003).

### **IOCE Mission and Goals**

The mission of the IOCE (2004) is "to help legitimate and strengthen evaluation societies, associations or networks so that they can better contribute to good governance, effective decision making, and strengthen the role of civil society" (p. 2).

In partnership with national and regional evaluation bodies, the IOCE adopted the following goals:

- Build evaluation capacity and strengthen evaluation skills;
- Encourage the development of new evaluation societies, associations, and networks;
- Undertake educational activities that will increase public awareness of evaluation;
- Develop standards and ethical codes in support of evaluation good practice;
- Increase understanding of evaluation in different cultural and institutional settings;
- Secure resources for and facilitate cooperative international and inter-regional evaluation activity; and
- Provide a forum for the exchange of useful and high quality methods, theories and effective practice in evaluation. (IOCE, 2004, p. 2).

### **Board of Trustees**

The assembly participants in Lima recommended that an interim board be selected to serve for a period of 18 months to 2 years to allow the IOCE to start doing business while continuing to evolve effective structures and processes. Participants met in small groups based on geographic representation and selected members of the interim Board of Trustees from their region based on the principles of broad geographic coverage, continuity in terms of involvement with the IOCE development process, and a willingness to work on the priority issues that the assembly had identified.

Following the assembly, the Board of Trustees met and selected the executive and assigned responsibilities for working groups. The members of the executive for the interim period are president, Elliot Stern (Europe); vice presidents, Zenda Ofir (Africa) and Marco Segone (Latin America); treasurer, Nancy Porteous (North America); and secretary, Penny Hawkins (Australasia). Other board members include Jean Lois Dethier (Europe), Girmay Haile (Africa), Donna Mertens (2003) and Ross Conner (2004; North America), Barbara Rosenstein (Near East), Nino Saakashvili (Newly Independent States and Russia), and Carlos Salazar (Latin America; IOCE, 2003).

The assembly participants expressed concerns about the lack of representation from Asia and a need for increased diversity on the IOCE board. The board set identification of evaluation organizations and their leadership in Asia and inclusiveness of diverse racial/ethnic groups as priority actions. Subsequently, President Stern communicated with leaders in evaluation from Asia who agreed to have Arunaselam Rasappan represent that region on the board pending completion of the regional selection process. The IOCE held its first board meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in October 2003. They established procedural priorities in terms of setting up systems and infrastructures for fund-raising, Web site development, communication materials, legal incorporation, and planning for the next general assembly. They also identified two substantive priorities.

### **IOCE Priorities: Capacity Building and International Exchanges**

On the basis of recommendations from the assembly participants, the IOCE (2004) board adopted two substantive priorities as its initial program of work: capacity building for evaluation associations or networks and advancing evaluation through international debate and exchange through priority themes of international interest.

Support for the development of new evaluation organizations in parts of the world where they currently did not exist or for new organizations that were not firmly established was a theme that emerged in early discussions around the role of an international organization in evaluation. Several IOCE participants at the inaugural assembly shared their experiences in developing such associations or networks. The details of their presentations can be found in Russon and Love (2003). The IOCE board established a committee to prepare resources for new and developing evaluation societies based on the collected experiences of evaluation organizations in different cultural, economic, political, and geographic contexts. Additional information about this priority can be found at the IOCE Web site: [www.ioce.net](http://www.ioce.net).

The IOCE (2004) board's first priority theme for debate and exchange is evaluation in different cultural contexts—nationally and internationally—including issues of social justice and human rights. The IOCE intends to implement programs that would promote international research networks on this theme, develop targeted skills, and provide resources and tools useful for evaluators. An international conversation on this theme will be facilitated on substantive issues designed to move the field of evaluation toward a deeper understanding of the meaning of cultural and competence and its implications for the relationship between evaluation and the goal of social justice. Marco Segone (Latin America), Donna Mertens (North America), and Zenda Ofir (Africa) have agreed to investigate mechanisms for this conversation to occur, including holding sessions at AEA and other professional associations' annual meetings. In addition, the IOCE plans to make available Web-based resources and solicit sessions on this theme for its next general assembly.

### **Much Has Been Accomplished; Much Remains to Be Done**

The inaugural assembly of the IOCE was a landmark event in the history of evaluation worldwide. The occurrence of the assembly itself was preceded by 7 years of work by a small planning group that had rotating membership, with a few individuals who stayed the course throughout the entire period of development. At the end of the first board meeting, a formidable agenda for activity was formulated.

Several outstanding issues remain as challenges for the IOCE. The constitution needs to be formally ratified; it is expected that this will occur at the next general assembly.

The IOCE board and membership must face the challenges inherent in operationalizing its guiding principles of cultural diversity, inclusiveness, and bringing together different evaluation traditions in ways that respect this diversity, given the inequities that exist in the economic resources of the various countries or the sponsoring evaluation organizations. The issue of representation in terms of who is a member of the board and the IOCE raises questions concerning membership fees; access to electronic-based communication and resources; and support structures for active participation in terms of diverse languages, funds to support travel, and the need for leadership training. These issues must continue to be serious concerns for the IOCE if it is to avoid becoming, and being perceived as, a tool of neocolonialism. The goals of being inclusive and respectful mean struggling with these issues so that the views of all evaluation communities can be part of this important conversation.

The IOCE is positioned to serve a unique role in the worldwide evaluation community. However, many issues remain as to how it will play this role in a way that complements rather than duplicates other international evaluation organizations and initiatives. For example, AEA's Topical Interest Group, International and Cross-Cultural Evaluation, is a rich resource for international evaluators; however, it is situated inside the AEA and thus does not have the independence from Western connections that is expected of IOCE. The World Bank initiated the International Development Evaluation Association (2004) as an organization with individuals as members who work in international development. The IOCE is made up of organizations, not individuals, and it focuses on strengthening national and regional evaluation organizations, as well as on issues of relevance to an audience broader than those engaged in international development. With the rich array of resources available to evaluators around the world, the IOCE board and membership will need to be ever vigilant to ensure that they are indeed fostering cooperation among evaluators, rather than duplicating services that are already available elsewhere.

The IOCE provides a laboratory for an experiment in international cooperation through which all evaluators around the world can potentially benefit. Given the magnitude of this experiment, it is no wonder that many challenges have surfaced.

### Notes

1. The W. K. Kellogg Foundation provided funds through two separate grants to the American Evaluation Association (AEA). The first was initially secured by AEA's Topical Interest Group: International and Cross-Cultural Evaluation; Arnold Love secured the second grant as the chair of AEA's International Committee. The grants supported two planning meetings that preceded the IOCE inaugural meeting (Mertens & Russon, 2000). Invitations for the first meeting were sent to the presidents or designated contact people of all known evaluation organizations in 1999. The presidents of the organizations were invited to come, or they could choose to send a representative from their organization. Representatives of the 15 organizations at the Barbados meeting agreed that a smaller group was needed to do the planning for the inaugural assembly of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE); they also agreed on the individuals who would constitute that coordinating group on the basis of one person from each continent who could then invite an additional person that they thought would complement their perspective.

2. The assembly was made possible by funding from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the U.K. Department for International Development, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the American Evaluation Association, the Global Greengrants Fund, the Programme for Strengthening the Regional Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Poverty-Alleviation Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREVAL), and Benoit Gauthier (IOCE Web master from the Canadian Evaluation Society). These funds were used to support premeeting communications, Web site development, travel for participants, meeting expenses, and language translation services. Other national and regional organizations supported the travel of their representatives. Ada Ocampo of PREVAL provided leadership on the logistical arrangements for the assembly. Arnold Love and Craig Russon served as facilitators for the assembly, and two official observers from the Agency Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie and UNICEF also attended. Russon and Love (2003) provided a detailed description of events at the IOCE inaugural meeting in an occasional paper published by the Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University.

3. Subsequently, Arnold Love provided leadership for the revisions of the constitution that was approved by the majority of the national and regional organizations that attended the assembly. Thus, the IOCE was able to be incorporated as a nonprofit organization in Canada and begin receiving funds in its own name to support its activities. Previous funds were managed through various national and regional evaluation associations.

4. The participants felt that continuity was important in that at least some members of the coordinating group should be on the board in order to capitalize on the collective memory of what had already been done. However, not all members of the interim board were members of the earlier group.

5. Ross Conner replaced Donna Mertens on the IOCE interim Board of Trustees in January 2004.

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