

# IDEAS: From global needs to global development evaluation organisation

> Denis Jobin,<sup>1</sup> Vice President, and Ray Rist, President, International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) explain the development of an evaluation organisation that places developing countries and transitional economies at the centre.



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**THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT** Evaluation Association (IDEAS) is a global organisation dedicated to building knowledge, strengthening capacity, and providing networking opportunities for development evaluation professionals, especially in developing countries. This paper will describe the organisation's brief history, its key achievements, and where it aims to go from here.

Many international evaluators have recognised that the development dimension of evaluation needs to be strengthened significantly if evaluation is to play a key role in development agendas: strengthening development effectiveness, and moving towards more evidence-based development policies and interventions. It is also acknowledged that practitioners from developing/transitional economies should be at the heart of these efforts in order to ensure that development evaluation is an effective learning and accountability tool. Evaluation capacity building (ECB), evaluation knowledge development (EKD) and greater recognition of development evaluators' profession were central to the inauguration of IDEAS in September 2002 and IDEAS now aims to fill these gaps in the international evaluation architecture.

## The launch

On May 7–8, 2001, a meeting was held in London,

England, to explore the feasibility of setting up an International Development Evaluation Association. The UNDP's Office of Evaluation and the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department (OED) co-sponsored the meeting. Twenty-six participants were selected, based on their impeccable professional reputation, their wide-ranging experience in development, and their interest in evaluation capacity building. The meeting resulted in several areas of agreement that preceded the inception of IDEAS, including the following:

- All participants agreed that the creation of IDEAS would fill an important institutional gap for development evaluators that was not met by existing evaluation associations.
- Most participants viewed IDEAS as a critical asset for strengthening the development dimension of existing evaluation associations as well as an ally for the creation of new evaluation associations at country level, especially in developing countries.
- Participants welcomed the views of leaders of existing evaluation associations. They recognised that the lessons of experience could inform the creation of IDEAS and that IDEAS will have a supportive role to play in evaluation capacity development – in concert with the efforts of the development community and of national and regional evaluation associations.
- The consensus opinion was that the governance of IDEAS should give a dominant weight to representatives from developing countries and transitional economies. It was also agreed that IDEAS would be an open, democratic, and inclusive organisation, with a minimum of gatekeeping on membership, affiliation, or participation.
- With respect to membership, there was little support for a restrictive model open only to full-time professional evaluators operating in the South.
- It was also agreed that IDEAS should operate according to the subsidiarity principle. It would work to nurture, support and provide assistance to nascent national and regional associations concerned with developing countries and transitional economies whenever possible.

IDEAS was then launched on September 8th 2002 in Beijing and was formally established at the beginning of 2003 when it was registered with the Charities Commission of England and Wales as a charitable organisation.

## The mission

The mission of IDEAS is to improve and extend the practice of development evaluation by refining methods, strengthening capacity, and expanding ownership, particularly in developing and transitional countries.<sup>2</sup> The IDEAS programme strategy does this by enabling, facilitating and convening, while observing

the principle of subsidiarity, to improve the practice of development evaluation and promote it as a key tool for results-based management, transparency and accountability in policy making, and social and organisational learning.

IDEAS focuses on three major themes:

- **Enhancing conceptual thinking in development evaluation.** IDEAS has elaborated a systematic process for articulating the challenges confronting development evaluation as it seeks to respond to paradigm shifts in development as well as to address crises in development assistance.
- **Governance and accountability for development.** Development evaluation has all too often been seen only in the context of aid programmes. IDEAS works to promote development evaluation as a key management tool to foster transparency and accountability in policy making through supporting of the creation and enhancement of national evaluation systems.
- Strengthening development evaluation practice with a focus on strategic areas, e.g. the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with an emphasis on poverty and environment. IDEAS is working on synthesising perspectives from around the world, examining methods and tools for the evaluation of poverty reduction and quality of life programmes and projects, and encouraging the formation of a network of researchers and practitioners in this field.

### Organisational structure and funding

IDEAS is governed by a 10-member Board, including a President, a Vice President, a Secretary, and Treasurer who together form the Executive Committee. All members of the Board are members of IDEAS elected by the membership for a term of three years, with due regard for balanced developed/developing countries representation. The IDEAS Constitution provides for annual routine rotation in order to avoid a simultaneous expiry of tenure of all board members. This ensures continuity in policy making. IDEAS also consults, on an ad hoc basis, a small group of international evaluation experts to serve as an advisory committee to the Board.

Financial contributions to IDEAS derive from two principal sources: the membership base, including annual, life and institutional memberships; and grants from development partners for specific projects.

### Key achievements to date

Since IDEAS was launched in 2002, several notable accomplishments have been realised:

- Membership has reached close to 800 members representing more than 95 countries. IDEAS has close to 100 lifetime members and 20 organisational members.

- A website was launched in 2002.
- An electronic newsletter has been published, informing members on activities.
- A number of global, regional, and national meetings have been held, bringing together development evaluators to discuss topics and themes of interest.
- IDEAS has published a number of papers on topics in development evaluation and these papers have been made available on the IDEAS website.

To provide an opportunity to share and develop networks, in 2006 IDEAS launched a discussion group dedicated to development evaluation discussions and open to IDEAS members only. This group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/IDEAS-Int>) has close to 300 members who accepted an invitation to subscribe (rather than being automatically subscribed, so ensuring the strong interest of participants).

The first Biennial Conference of IDEAS was held in New Delhi in April 2005. It was attended by civil society leaders, parliamentarians, evaluation practitioners, managers of development initiatives, and users of evaluation from developing and developed countries around the world. The conference highlighted the implications of the changing context of development for the evaluation community, and identified new processes shaping development evaluation. Papers presented at the conference included human rights and sustainability. Indeed, beyond economic growth, the paradigm of development is shifting to focus on whether interventions result in equity and equality for citizens and communities. In the new evaluation landscape, development encompasses human development and well-being through expanded capabilities, greater freedoms, wider choices, security, and the protection of human rights.

Following the New Delhi conference, IDEAS focused on rethinking, reforming and reshaping development evaluation. Building on its experience, IDEAS is attempting to make evaluation more central to development and the eradication of human poverty,

as well as promoting the notion that rights and equality, justice and freedom, peace and security are all legitimate dimensions of evaluation. It has focused on finding ways to make the outputs of evaluation more meaningful to the people whose lives are affected by projects, programmes, and broad policy interventions. This has involved thinking through standard methods and approaches, and encouraging new ones that make the practice of evaluation more rigorous and more participatory.

This move to make evaluation more central to development has also meant grappling with the issues of ownership and good governance. In this context, IDEAS organised a series of workshops on country-led evaluation (CLE). In CLE the 'country leads the

evaluation by determining which evaluations will be done, and is responsible for steering and managing them'.<sup>3</sup> In order to understand these issues better, IDEAS conducted two regional workshops on CLE – one in the Central and Eastern European region (Prague, Czech Republic, June 2006), and one in the Africa region (Niamey, Niger, January 2007). IDEAS also launched a dedicated discussion group on CLE in 2007 ([http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Country\\_Led\\_Evaluation](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Country_Led_Evaluation)) which not only raised the profile of CLE and IDEAS, but also provided a tangible service to IDEAS members. To date, this discussion group is still active with more than 160 members interested in CLE. These workshops brought together representatives from government, academia, the private sector, and the NGO community, who all had something to share about country-led evaluations. The specific aims of the regional conferences were to:

- obtain views on how participants define CLE and its design and purpose;
- provide a forum for sharing regional experiences to foster networking and knowledge sharing;
- identify factors that enable or hinder CLE;
- identify lessons learned from country and regional experiences;
- encourage discussions of how to develop the capacities required for CLE.

In addition to this, IDEAS consistently makes efforts to support evaluation-related events and conferences. To name a few: IDEAS has contributed to the OECD DAC (partnership conference in 2003, as well as to define the standards for Global Partnership Programmes (GPP) in 2006). IDEAS has also organised panel sessions on this same topic for a World Bank meeting in Washington in 2003. In 2004, IDEAS co-hosted with Parliamentary Center (Cambodia) a workshop on Public-Private Partnerships in South Africa. It was also represented at a regional seminar in Southern Africa (Nelson Mandela Foundation). IDEAS was also represented at several conferences:

- 2005 AEA-CES joint conference;
- 2006 UKES: IDEAS was represented and participated on a panel;
- 2006 IPEN: IDEAS was represented and presented a paper;
- 2006 DAC-OECD meetings: contributed to the standards related to GPP;
- 2006 CLE workshop – Prague, Czech Republic;
- 2007 AfrEA: IDEAS was represented and organised a CLE workshop;
- 2007 IDEAS Managing for Development Results, Third Round Table ([www.mfdr.org/RT3/Glance/Day3/DenisJobin.ppt](http://www.mfdr.org/RT3/Glance/Day3/DenisJobin.ppt));
- 2007 IDEAS jointly organised with the Malaysian Evaluation Society (MES) a workshop on Impact Evaluation and Development Effectiveness.

As noted, all these conferences generated papers, presentations and reports that are available on the IDEAS website [www.ideas-int.org](http://www.ideas-int.org)

### Future directions

The future of IDEAS is bright. The growing understanding and awareness of the need for strong monitoring and evaluation systems to support good governance, good project and programme management, and coherent development policies all suggest that IDEAS is an organisation whose time has come. The challenges are many and they are not to be dismissed. Building a global virtual organisation, linking persons in countries with different languages, cultures, and experiences of evaluation, sharing knowledge across intellectual and national boundaries, and establishing consensus on topics to be addressed are just a few of the issues confronting IDEAS and its leadership. But it is clear that there is much good will, much interest, and much effort being expended to expand and strengthen IDEAS. The immediate support from so many sectors for the upcoming IDEAS 2009 Global Assembly (potentially in South Africa) on the theme of evaluation capacity building is but one example. IDEAS has come a long way in the past six years. There is much to celebrate about this success in the evaluation community.

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### Notes

1. Denis Jobin is also the Manager of the Evaluation Unit at the National Crime Prevention Center (NCPC), Department of Public Safety, Canada. [www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc](http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/ncpc)
2. In its constitution, the mission of IDEAS is defined as 'The advancement of education for the public benefit in the theories, methods and practice of evaluation in order to improve and expand the capacity for understanding and standards of evaluation predominantly in developing countries.' p.1, Clause 3, *Memorandum Of Association and Articles of Agreement*, London, January 2003.
3. 'Country-led Evaluations', a discussion note prepared by WB/OED, UNDP/EO and IOB, March 2003. Cited in Adrien, M-H. and Jobin, D. (2007) 'Country-Led Evaluation: Lessons Learned from Regions' in *Bridging the Gap: The Role of Monitoring & Evaluation in Evidence-based Policy making*, ed. Segone, M., UNICEF. Available at: [www.unicef.org/keecis/evidence\\_based\\_policy\\_making.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/keecis/evidence_based_policy_making.pdf)