

Community of Evaluators-Nepal (CoE-Nepal)

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An Effort in the Process of Promoting Quality Evaluation: A Case of CoE-Nepal

Evaluation in Nepal – National Context

Evaluation of development plans and policies in Nepal was limited to the review of the performance of immediate past periodic plan so as to incorporate lessons into the following plan till the 7th Five Year Plan (1986-1990). The 8th Plan (1992-1997) reviewed the past development efforts, achievements and constraints more comprehensively and formulated the plan with a provision for developing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system, developed guidelines for conducting evaluation and conducted the mid-term evaluation of the plan (NPC, 1992 and CMED/NPC, 1993). The 9th Plan (1997-2002) has a specific chapter on M&E with its vision, objective, policies, strategies and programme. It has also created structural set up of M&E within the selected government ministries. It laid emphasis on screening of the projects for which special task-force of experts was created. A system of reviewing progress in each two months at the ministerial level and quarterly at the Central Monitoring and Evaluation Division was in place (NPC, 1997). However, it was limited mainly to monitoring of fiscal and physical targets.

The 10th Plan (2002-2007) introduced logical framework for overall economic development in 20 sector specific developments (NPC, 2002). It institutionalised a poverty monitoring system at national as well as district levels (TYIP, 2007). A study on the impact of agriculture competitiveness was carried out and public expenditure tracking surveys were also carried out together with introducing citizen report cards. The Three Year Interim Plan (TYIP) institutionalised M&E in each sector with more emphasis on social/ethnic and gender sensitive indicators. The TYIP introduced result-based M&E system and developed tools and provided training to some staff. It had the provision for developing public policy on M&E of the projects/programmes, but the M&E policy is yet to be made. The current Three Year Plan (TYP) has M&E objective of making M&E system a result-oriented, reliable and regular as well as utilizing the results in the formulation and implementation. However, non-utilization of feedback from M&E system at central and in some districts on formulation and implementation of development plans and projects is still a continuing challenge at public sector programme and a high level commitment at policy level is yet to be realised (TYP, 2011).

Evaluation of local government funded projects was subject of evaluation according to Local Self Governance Action (1999), but due to political instability, the process has not been effectively done. Government of Nepal (GoN) is an active participant of Paris Declaration (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008). The findings of Joint Evaluation of the implementation of the Paris declaration phase II has shown the strong orientation towards development results in Nepal. However, its contribution to the use of country system, harmonization and mutual accountability is less plausible. Having said this, the consideration for implementation of the Paris Declaration has plausibly contributed to develop the level of assertiveness and confidence in major development actors in Nepal (OECD, 2010).

Though M&E thereafter is mainstreamed in each Plan, the emphasis is on the monitoring of target indicators and review of progress, whereas the importance of evaluation is yet to be realised by the government to a large extent. Evaluation in Nepal is largely limited to the donor supported projects including the UN agencies, irrespective of whether it is executed by the government or by non-government organisation (NGO) as it is a mandatory part of the project, in most of the cases. The proportion of the donor support to the development of Nepal is substantially high and the support is found in almost every sector ranging from agriculture development to environment protection, gender empowerment to social inclusion, and peace and development to democratisation. Likewise, the number of the projects is high in Nepal, generally of small size, which are implemented through NGOs and INGOs. The Social Welfare Council (SWC) is a responsible organization for M&E of all projects/programs implemented by all non-governmental organizations across the country. The focus is, however, limited to the projects related to international organizations. For example, out of 25 evaluations it has conducted, all were INGO implemented projects except one which was implemented by a national NGO (SWC, 2012).

As evaluation is an integral part of the projects, and generally it is conducted through an independent body/individual, the market of evaluation for independent evaluators is substantially high. There are consultancy firms and some known individuals who have been providing evaluation services in Nepal. However, these firms have expertise in research rather than evaluation and are conducting evaluation the way research is carried out, in many cases. At the same time, other stakeholders of evaluation including those working in M&E Divisions in public sector do work there because of the position as per the governments' regular assignments, not necessarily that they have training in nor in-depth knowledge of and ethics attached to evaluation (Ojha *et al*, 2009). As a result, their capacity to select the project for evaluation, develop terms of reference and make sound comments on evaluation carried out by independent evaluators is limited. As in other countries in South Asia, often the attitudes, experience and credibility of the evaluators that are relevant to the projects are overlooked;

and perception among evaluands is that “anybody could conduct evaluation” (Solomon, 2010). The Nepal case is not an exception to the above situation. Consequently, evaluations are of questionable quality and use of findings in decision making process is inadequately incorporated, reflecting the low contribution of evaluation to enhancing/ensuring development effectiveness in Nepal. Therefore evaluative culture with appropriate human resource in evaluation is yet to be developed to a desired level.

Need for an Intervention in Evaluation

In a changing socio-economic and environmental context characterized by limited resources and the increasing needs and expectations of the people, evaluation is now an essential tool for effective development management.

The present context of evaluation in Nepal is that it has increasingly gained a prominent role especially at project level. This is evidenced by the increasing number of evaluations commissioned and wide variety of approaches and techniques being used by evaluation practitioners and experts. There are, however, some challenges to enhance evaluative culture in Nepal at policy and practice level. Despite some works being started at national level, NPC has yet to develop evaluation policy, effectively co-ordinate among the ministries and ensure quality evaluation within its purview. SWC is also not in position to develop its comprehensive evaluation strategies for NGOs and INGOs. Similarly, among the private firms involved in evaluation, there was a very limited exchange and interaction to discuss and learn from each other. Even a very few organisations which focused on evaluation could not serve as an active platform on evaluation and capture the attention of a wide range of evaluation stakeholders. In addition, there is no mechanism for sharing and disseminating best practices, developing quality and ethical protocols, enhancing capacity of stakeholders, networking among evaluation societies, and researching evaluation.

Quality evaluation is an emerging concept in development management in Nepal but there was no such innovative, policy advocacy and capacity building initiative from non-government sector in order to support increasing demand of quality evaluation and field building process of evaluation in Nepal.

Establishment of CoE-Nepal

Against the above context of need for enhancing evaluation capacity of public sector M&E staff, increasing the level of competency among evaluators and a need for creating a platform for exchange and interaction among evaluators, the Community of Evaluators-Nepal (CoE-N) was officially established in 2011 with a sole purpose of promoting evaluation field building in Nepal. The CoE-N is a non-profit, non-governmental, and non-partisan organization. The team

comprises a pool of evaluators, development practitioners, and academicians with national and international work experience of over a decade. The CoE-N has a nine-member Governing Board.

The setting up of the CoE-N was largely inspired by the activities of the Community of Evaluators South Asia (COE-SA) particularly the Evaluation Conclave held in New Delhi in October 2010, and also a national seminar on “The Status of Evaluation in Nepal” held in Kathmandu in August 2010. A workshop on “Evaluation Status and Methodology in Nepal” organized in 2009 by Nepali CoE-SA members at the IUCN Nepal premises and their participation in the World Bank organized regional impact evaluation workshop, as well as discussion with some WB officials on the need for an independent evaluation body, were other motivating factors. The restrictive culture adopted by already existing evaluation societies, which were promoted by some projects, in their membership also served as an encouraging element to establish a broad-based evaluation organisation open to a large number of interested evaluators. Three of its current members were also founding members of CoE-SA who initiated discussion with interested experts involved in evaluation in Nepal. A series of discussions among the independent evaluators in Nepal and encouragement of CoE-SA for establishing national chapters in the countries of its members were also the inspiring factors for the creation of the CoE-N. CoE Nepal and its members have been working very closely with government agencies and non-government sectors in Nepal on different issues related to evaluation so it is clear that CoE Nepal can act as an influential organization both at policy and practice level in evaluation in Nepal

Strategy and Implementation

Enabling Environment for Evaluation

The donor community, which has influential role in the development of Nepal, is supporting project level M&E system directly to manage the evaluation system or indirectly by mandating evaluation in development projects funded by them. There were also some specific projects implemented to strengthen M&E system in Nepal. The first project was “Strengthening of monitoring and evaluation system in Nepal” initiated in 1993 which developed guidelines for establishing M&E system, conducting monitoring, conducting review meeting, developing indicators, preparing logical framework, project management including monitoring of project. Another project “Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation System in Nepal” (SMES Project) was implemented (2006 - 2009), and the government M&E system was strengthened to some extent through M&E human resources development; creating the M&E tools; and improving policy makers’ and planning officers’ understanding and support for M&E (IDCJI, 2012). It has also provided training for some public sector staff involved in planning, M&E and management

information system but only to a limited extent. It has also developed guidelines for hiring external evaluation. There is another project “project for strengthening the monitoring and evaluation system in Nepal phase II” (SMES2) being implemented for 3.5 years (November 2011 to May 2015). This project intends to enhance the national capacity for implementing result-based M&E system and coordination among the ministries in carrying out M&E system. In addition, large projects supported by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other donors have also programmes to provide M&E training for the staff involved in the projects. Despite some efforts made, a bulk of M&E staff (almost two thirds) is yet to get even the basic training on M&E as informed by the head of the Central M&E Division (CMED) in the National Planning Commission (NPC). Government of Nepal has also undertaken a joint evaluation of the implementation of Paris Declaration Phase II.

Some international organisations such as Japanese Evaluation Society, Independent Evaluation Group in ADB and a US-based agency are showing interest to conduct short-term M&E training to public sector staff through the CMED in NPC as recently informed by its head in a meeting with one of the authors in connection with establishing linkage between the CMED and CoE-N. In Nepal, much depends on the personal initiative of staff, especially the head of the organisation. This time, the person heading the CMED, which is a focal point for strengthening and coordinating monitoring work and evaluation activities in development ministries and departments, is highly interested to strengthen evaluation system in Nepal. He is particularly interested in developing the capacity of public sector M&E staff on selecting development projects for evaluation, preparing terms of reference (ToR), managing and supporting evaluation. In an interaction with another author, SWC officials mentioned about their plan to make more systematic M&E process and had already started preparing a sector-wise roster of local experts.

Some other development partners have also conducted their portfolio evaluation. UNDP has recently carried out “Assessment of Development Results” which assessed the contribution of UNDP’s intervention in Nepal’s development (UNDP, 2012). In many projects, social audit and public hearings are performed to maintain transparency in project implementation. Similarly, a system of quotation and tender bidding is there to procure the goods and services. However, quite often, the quotations and tenders are subject of controversy and a lot happens under the screen though they are not all supported by evidence. What could be assumed is that more would happen if no system prevailed than what is happening using the loophole of the system.

From these initiatives in evaluation from both government and non-government sectors, it is clear that the enabling environment in Nepal has been increasing which can be properly utilized by CoE Nepal.

Developing/Strengthening a Sustainable Strategy to Enhance Individual Capacities

The public M&E system has provided training to some of the M&E staff through specific projects but does not have partnership or its own institutions to provide evaluation training to keep them abreast with updated information on M&E. Though some training courses are run by Staff College as part of particular training course in some cases, it has been limited to an introductory course and useful for those who have not undergone M&E training earlier. The CMED head has shown interest, in our informal discussion, to forge partnerships with other organisations devoted to training. It is likely that CMED/NPC, in future, may forge a partnership for training public sector M&E staff with South Asia Institute of Advanced Studies (SIAS) which would conduct Training Evaluation for South Asia (TESA) in collaboration with CoE-Nepal. The latter is working on it.

Strengthening Equity-Focused and Gender-Sensitive Evaluation

Though Nepal has progressed poorly in economic front, it is doing well in non-economic indicators. Nepal is recognised as one of the “Top 10 Movers” when measured from the non-income human development index (UNDP, 2010). It is especially development in social inclusion and gender equality that brings Nepal in this position. Social and gender equity have been subjects much discoursed in Nepal for the last five years not only in politics but also in development. Thanks to external development partners and People’s Movement both of which fought strongly for equality. There are over 30,000 NGOs affiliated with SWC and 60% of which are involved in community/rural development wherein social empowerment is a part of the programme in most of the cases (SWC, 2012). In addition, there are more organisations registered with district administration offices but not affiliated with SWC. There are also a huge number of informal groups spread throughout the country and these are headed more by women than by men. Similarly, representation of vulnerable groups including ethnic minorities is ensured by using positive deviance approach in almost in all areas of development. The two national Plans formed thereafter have particularly paid attention to ensure social inclusion and gender equality including broad-based and higher economic growth; social development; targeted programs for excluded groups; and good governance to achieve the poverty alleviations. For promoting the good governance policy, GoN has implemented policies to strengthen the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system (IDCJI, 2012) particularly in developing human resources and developing evaluation tools which have focus on whether the results of Plans have benefitted broader sector of the populace, especially those excluded from the earlier development, including ethnic minorities and women.

Supporting Development Effectiveness and Results

Nepal has committed to make its development process effective and result-oriented in terms of poverty alleviation and attaining economic prosperity by involving different segments of society in the national development process. Government of Nepal has expressed its commitments to Paris Declaration (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and has been working with development partners to achieve those objectives. Nepal has just passed the painful civil war and the peace process has not been ended yet but the development initiatives have been rapidly swollen up and there is a need for the proper management of development action in Nepal. This has also been reflected in the recent Development Plan of the government (TYP, 2011).

CoE-N in Relation to Enabling Environment, Member Capacity, and Social and Gender Inclusion

The CoE-N has also considered issues related to enabling environment, developing individual capacity of member and social and gender inclusion to its organisational development. It has three broad themes such as knowledge development, capacity building and promotion of evaluation theory and practices. Under the promotion of evaluation, it has identified four major activities to create enabling environment. These include networking with likeminded organizations; advocacy for mainstreaming evaluation in the development cycle; policy dialogue for the effective use of evaluation; and collaborative research and outreach with national and international evaluation organizations. In a very short span of its life, it has developed linkages with likeminded organisations such as CoE-South Asia, EvalPartners, SLEvA, IOCE, South Asia Institute for Advanced Studies for information exchange, organising workshops and conclaves and conduct training on evaluation.

CoE-N intends to build the capacity of its members through training on TESA module and organising other professional development trainings of evaluators on evaluation standards, ethics, norms and code of conduct; participation in national and international conferences, conclaves, webinars, seminars, and workshops on topics related to evaluation; and working together in collaborative research on evaluation theory, practices, models, methods and approaches.

CoE-N also intends to develop knowledge on innovative approaches such as appreciative inquiry, contribution analysis, impact assessment and equity-focused evaluation through emerging evaluation research including in the areas but not limiting to climate change, disaster risk management, security system reforms, and peace and development. Focus on equity can also be viewed by looking at its founding members and board of directors. It has both male and female members as its founders and board members coming from different ethnic groups. CoE-N has therefore been conscious to become equity-focused and gender-sensitive.

Challenges

A continuous advocacy to create demand for quality evaluation is one of the challenges CoE-N is facing as small number of organizations is involved in evaluation in Nepal.¹ On one hand, the number of organisations devoted to promoting evaluation is small. On another front, as Nepal is characterised by demand-constraint country, a strong and continuous advocacy would be required. Therefore, carrying out a strong and continuous advocacy required for long time by small number of organisations established recently is a substantial challenge. Another important challenge CoE-N is encountering is the capacity of its constituents to develop human resources of stakeholders of evaluation. Though CoE-N is forging partnerships with SLEvA and SIAS for building the capacity of evaluation stakeholders through TESA module, it may be able to provide training only to a small proportion of the untrained M&E personnel, as their number is abundant. It may take a long time to provide the training to these individuals. The third biggest challenge is raising funds for implementing its research, capacity building and activities related to promotion of evaluation in Nepal. As a very young organisation, CoE Nepal is yet to develop networks with funding agencies. The funding agencies have tendency of supporting already established organisations rather than new ones like CoE Nepal. Therefore, getting business in the beginning is a real challenge.

Progress and Results

CoE-N is a recently established organisation. It has just completed its forming and storming stages. Norming stage is ongoing. Under the forming and storming stages, it has obtained legal status and a governing body is formed. It has developed its vision, mission, goal, objective and tentative programmes (See website: www.coe-nepal.org.np.) Linkages with some likeminded organisations listed above (see the section on strengthening equity-focused and gender-sensitive evaluation systems and evaluations) have been established. Dialogue is underway to establish relations with national M&E Division for training and other related activities. Before its formal establishment, it conducted two seminars with M&E staff working for public and civil society sectors. It is now in the process of developing its norms covering ethical issues. It has now simultaneously started performing. It is now actively involved in organising the Evaluation Conclave 2013 in February in Kathmandu Nepal in collaboration with CoE South Asia. CoE members are involved in raising evaluation need in development management in various workshops and seminars. CoE is also in the process of establishing links with individual evaluators as well as organizations interested in the evaluation field building processes. It is also working on piloting the TESA module in Nepal in collaboration with SLEvA and SIAS.

¹ One evaluation organization (Nepal Evaluation Society) is found to be somewhat active. The activities of SOME and other organizations are little known.

Key Enabling Factors

Strong commitment of members and their continuous efforts as well as encouragement from CoE (South Asia) have perhaps been the important enabling factors that enabled CoE-Nepal to achieve the progress towards the expected results. Besides, experts and knowledge persons working in the development planning and management in Nepal and outside were also a great source of inspiration to take the initiative further to enhance evaluation culture in Nepal.

Innovations and Lessons Learned

Team work and continuous efforts are necessary to run a volunteer organization. Members need to commit not only volunteering the time but also that they need to donate funds. This approach of putting time and money of the members is alright for some time but it lessens the interest of members in the long-run. So external technical and financial support for carrying out activities related to the promotion evaluation is important, at least in the beginning of organisations which are of non-profit nature.

Next Steps

Segone has categorised country contexts into four groups from the perspective of evaluation capacity (Segone, 2009)². Nepal falls between vicious circle and evidence demand constrained countries from the M&E perspective. The quality and quantity of evidence is slightly improving from the vicious circle stage where evidence is technically weak and policy makers have little capacity to use the evidence. Next steps therefore would have to be developed accordingly to fit this context.

Strengthen the Enabling Environment

CoE-N will network with likeminded organizations to launch advocacy for mainstreaming evaluation in the development cycle of the state and non-state actors. It has already initiated dialogue with the NPC and has proposed to prepare an evaluation policy. This process will be strengthened in future. The policy makers will be invited in the Evaluation Conclave as a key note speaker and panellist which would stimulate them to form evaluation policy and use of evaluation in policy decision. CoE-N will also forge networking with the SWC and UN bodies to advocate for evidence-based quality evaluation and use of it in the development cycle. This will create a platform of evaluators for rigorous discussion.

Strengthen Individual Capacities

CoE-N is in the process of collaboration with SLEvA and SIAS for piloting and conducting TESA training to individuals including those involved in M&E working at both state and non-state

² Vicious circle countries: evidence is technically weak and policy makers have little capacity to make use of it; Evidence supply-constraint countries: though evidence technically weak, it is increasingly demanded by policy makers; Evidence demand-constraint countries: the quantity and quality of evidence is increasing but it is not demanded for decision-making; and Virtuous circle countries: evidence is technically robust and is being used increasingly for decision-making.

sectors. Some individuals would take whole TESA course, especially those who have not received evaluation training before. Others would be offered with specific modules as per the interest of individuals. A Training-of-Trainers (ToT) approach will be adopted where a certain number of individuals will be trained as core team members to become facilitators for other interested individuals to take the course. The course will cover both managerial and technical aspects. The managerial aspect will cover developing ToR, supervising evaluation, commenting on evaluation reports, providing logistics and other support to evaluators, working as reference group members, calling tender for evaluation, evaluating tenders and tracking the progress of project/programme and evaluation. The technical aspect will deal with how to conduct evaluation including methodology development, maintaining independence, team building, preparing and disseminating report.

Promoting Evaluation Theory and Practice

One of the objectives of CoE-Nepal is to promote appropriate evaluation theory and practice in order to enhance quality evaluation and their adequate utilization by demand side to ensure better development effectiveness. CoE-Nepal is trying to forge collaboration with national and international organizations to work in this issue.

Advocating for Equity-Focused and Gender-Sensitive Evaluation Systems

CoE-N will identify national and international advocacy partners and get advocacy tools from partners that have developed them. Together with national partners, it will launch advocacy tools by inviting policy-makers including the NPC members and related Division heads. Secondly, it will participate institutionally and also will encourage its members to participate individually in the advocacy programmes initiated by other organisations for equity focused and gender sensitive evaluation system. Probable partners in this respect could be UN Women, UNICEF, NES and others.

Strengthen Institutional Capacity of CoE-N

While developing capacity of other stakeholders, there will be capacity developed of CoE-N simultaneously. There will be training for CoE-N members, on both TESA course as well as professional development training on evaluation standards, ethics, norms and codes of conduct. There will also be seminar/workshop/conference/conclave on evaluation theory, practices, model, methods; and individuals will be encouraged to participate. Specifically, its members will participate in TESA ToT and will be involved in facilitating the TESA module. It will place evaluation materials into its website and would strengthen knowledge management system. This approach will contribute to develop the technical capacity of CoE-N.

CoE Nepal will carry out the following activities in its immediate future which will strengthen its capacity in the field of knowledge building, capacity development and evaluation promotion:

- Conducting evaluators' inventory
- Situation analysis of evaluation in Nepal
- Carrying out collaborative research on evaluation
- Advocacy and lobbying for utilization of evaluation results
- Organising national level seminars/workshops
- Participating in regional and international conferences/conclaves/meetings
- Piloting TESA in collaboration with SLEvA and SIAS
- Conducting TESA module in collaboration with SLEvA and SIAS
- Organising Evaluation Conclave collaboratively with CoE-SA in Kathmandu in February 2013

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