

Senegalese Evaluation Association (SenEval)

SenEval - A Decade of Advocacy and Action for Evaluation in Senegal

Authors: Maguette Diop, Soukeynatou Somé Faye, Ian Hopwood, Oussemi Kinda, Mònica Lomeña-Gelis, Guennolet Boumas Ngabina, Ndeye Fatou Diop Samb, and Moctar Sow

History/Background

The recently created Senegalese Evaluation Association (*SénEval*) has grown out of the Senegal Evaluation Network, which was established as a result of a seminar held on October 9th 2003 sponsored by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and the UN Institute for Development Planning (IDEP). The seminar participants, who included representatives from nine UN country and regional offices, laid the groundwork for the creation of the network as vehicle for the implementation of the recommendations that they had formulated. Amongst those recommendations was the need for a network to promote the culture of evaluation in Senegal and more broadly in the West Africa region. The General Directorate of Planning (specifically the Department of National Planning of the Government of Senegal) played an important role in the coordination of SenEval during the period 2003-2006.

Since then, SenEval has worked mainly on the exchange of information and periodic working sessions for members, including other key actors when possible. The number of persons on SenEval's mailing list has grown steadily to the current number of more than 350, with a "hard core" of at least 15 members. The members are from diverse origins, including ministries and other governmental structures, universities and other training and research institutions, think tanks and consulting companies, UN agencies, donors and NGOs, as well as individual practitioners.

Since its creation, the main driving forces and result areas for SenEval have been the following:

- Development of evaluation capacities, starting with its own members;
- Advocacy for the promotion of a culture of evaluation at the national level;
- Development of the institutionalization of evaluation by the State.

This is well expressed in the original charter of SenEval as follows: "The general mission of the Senegalese Evaluation Network is to promote the culture of evaluation. To achieve that objective, the network wishes to undertake several activities linked to the various dimensions of reinforcement of capacities: sensitize the main categories of actors, stimulate their critical reflection, work for the institutionalization of evaluation, support the training of the key actors identified (including its own members) and bring methodological support and the exchange of practice in the field of monitoring and evaluation."

Strategy and implementation based on the conceptual framework for national evaluation capacities

Promote an enabling environment for evaluation: an external environment favorable to evaluation

The principal activities of SenEval that have contributed to the promotion of an enabling environment for evaluation are: a) the diagnostic study of evaluation capacities; b) the Senegalese Evaluation Days (*Journées Sénégalaises d'Evaluation*, JSE) of 2008; and c) the advocacy for the institutionalization of evaluation. These are presented below:

The diagnostic study

A diagnostic study of evaluation capacities entitled "Evaluation as a Democratic Requirement" was conducted in 2006 with the support of the International Organization for the Francophonie and technical back up from Professor Frederic Varone.

The study presents the stated practice of evaluation in Senegal. Through a documentation review, survey and semi-directive interviews, the study shows a “mature” evaluation practice, with more than 90 evaluation cases reported. It also tried to assess the quality of evaluation practice in Senegal through the meta-evaluation of two evaluations using the AfrEA Evaluation Standards. Overall, certain deficiencies were detected in the management of evaluations, and there was a much stronger focus on the control and financial accountability aspects than on the promotion of learning. The diagnostic study further attempted to define a clear institutional framework to promote an evaluation culture on the basis of an analysis of the existing institutional environment, semi-directive interviews with key stakeholders and the elaboration of scenarios for the development of an evaluation capacity development plan. Amongst the main recommendations of the study are the need to: a) organize a high level national workshop on the evaluation of public policies; b) improve the availability of in-country training; c) create or strengthen the planning and M&E functions in line ministries; d) identify an appropriate administrative structure to house the evaluation function; e) promote an evaluation culture, through initiatives such as SenEval; f) elaborate a national evaluation policy/strategy with three objectives: the institutionalization of the evaluation function, the improvement in the quality and scope of evaluation practice, and the promotion of an evaluation culture.

The Senegalese Evaluation Days (JSE)

SenEval members actively supported the organization of the Senegalese Evaluation Days (JSE) held in October 2008 on the theme of “Culture and practice of evaluation in Senegal: What’s at stake for public policy?”. The decision to hold the JSE was a direct consequence of the above mentioned diagnostic study. This initiative was organized by a broad-based team, convened by the Delegation for the Reform of the State and Technical Assistance (DREAT), with technical support from Laurent Denis of F3E. The three day event –opened by the Secretary General of the Presidency - attracted more than 200 participants who benefited from the training and guidance provided by national and international experts from the UN system, Canada, France and Switzerland. The first day targeted a smaller high level group specially focused on the evaluation of public policies. Overall, the JSE brought together an impressive group of participants that included Secretary Generals and Permanent Secretaries and Directors of Ministries, parliamentarians and local elected officials, representatives of the National Audit Office, the Government Inspectors, and NGOs and development partners, who collectively reaffirmed the imperative need to reinforce oversight and transparency in the public policy arena, and to strengthen their own capacities in evaluation. It also allowed a wide dissemination of the diagnostic study of evaluative capacities, which had contributed to strengthening the conclusions of the JSE. This model has perhaps encouraged the holding of similar events like those in Benin and Niger.

Advocacy for the institutionalization of evaluation

Since its creation, SenEval has advocated for the institutionalization of evaluation targeting principally the Presidency of the Republic, the Delegation for the Reform of State and Technical Assistance (DREAT), the General Directorate of Planning of the Ministry of Economy and Finances, and the Government Inspection Office (*Inspection Générale d’Etat*). The technical challenges attached to institutionalization and the high stakes have been frequent themes of SenEval meetings.

This long running advocacy coupled with specific advice from certain influential members of SenEval have contributed to the government’s recent decision to establish in the President’s Office a Commission for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Public Policies and Programmes. SenEval aims to get involved in the process of institutionalization initiated by this decision.

Develop and reinforce a durable strategy to improve the individual capacities to conduct credible and useful evaluations

The activities to develop individual capacities to conduct credible and useful evaluations have been aimed principally at SenEval members, including other actors when possible, and can be categorized as follows: a) workshops and seminars; b) information sharing by email and SenEval's virtual platform; c) mentoring and informal support; d) partnership with universities and centers of excellence; e) participation at evaluation conferences and professional networks.

Organization of workshop and seminars

In recent years several important training workshops have been organized, conducted principally by international experts who have generously donated their time:

- Training workshop (six sessions) for 60 participants on the principles and methods of evaluation, taught by J Bradley Cousins (University of Ottawa) and Boubacar Aw (CESAG), organized with CESAG in April 2011;
- Half day workshop in July 2011 organized with IFPRI and the Centre for Research on Political Economy (CREPOL) on the topic "Evaluation Impact- Progress and Challenges". Animated by Dr. Annie Duflo and Loic Watine (Innovations for Poverty Action-IPA);
- Half day workshop in October 2011 on the evaluation of public policies, organized with the International Development Research Centre (CRDI). Animated by Fred Carden, IDRC's Director of Evaluation and Colleen Duggan.
- Two training workshops for about 50 participants in January 2012 with Marie Gervais (University of Laval) on "The rights and responsibilities of the manager faced with evaluation" and "Successfully undertaking a quality evaluation in a context of turbulence".
- Feedback session in April by those who participated in the 2012 AfrEA Conference.
- Training workshop for 45 participants with Jim Rugh, Oumoul Khayri Ba Tall and Mónica Lomeña Gelis on "RealWorld Evaluation" in May 2012, organized with CESAG, and a lunchtime seminar by Jim on Impact Evaluation, organized with IFPRI.

Sharing Information by email and SenEval's virtual platform

The most regular – and well appreciated - service for members is information sharing through a fortnightly e-newsletter to the more than 350 persons on the list, of whom 27% are women. The information includes consultancy and employment opportunities, training courses, webinars, new publications, and the activities of other evaluation networks and associations. Amongst other things this has allowed access to training (sometimes with financial aid) and the wide dissemination of employment and consulting opportunities. Most of the content is focused on Senegal and francophone West Africa, but selected information on webinars and publications in English is also shared and used.

In addition, a virtual platform - established in 2011 with the University of Ottawa - serves as a document repository and channel for information sharing. About 200 members have access, which is normally given by the SenEval knowledge management focal points upon request. Training materials used at SenEval events since 2011 are available, as well as documents on evaluation practice and also electronic links to other web-based resources. The platform is underexploited, mostly used as a "drop box" for information to be downloaded, in order to avoid sending large documents through the fortnightly mailings. The on line discussion function, the calendar, and the skills roster will hopefully be used more productively in the coming months.

Mentoring and informal support

Experienced SenEval members have assisted other members in registration procedures for training opportunities, or in the preparation of presentation proposals for conferences, including

AfrEA and the European Evaluation Society. So far, very few members have taken full advantage of these opportunities.

Partnerships with universities and centres of excellence

SenEval collaborates with several universities and centres of excellence. This is facilitated by the presence of members in Cheikh Anta Diop University (UCAD) of Dakar, Gaston Berger University (UGB) of St Louis, the African Centre for Higher Management Studies (CESAG), the National School of Administration (ENA), the National School of Applied Economics (ENEA), the Polytechnic University of the Sahel, and the new National School of Statistics. For the moment, evaluation is taught at post graduate level as part of existing programmes in the fields of project management, planning, sustainable development, education, etc. At least two institutes – CESAG and UGB– aim to establish a post graduate diploma or master's degree in evaluation. The advice of SenEval will be sought in this regard.

Among examples of this type of collaboration, there are the visits of Prof Bradley Cousins (University of Ottawa) in 2011, and of Prof Marie Gervais (University of Laval) who comes to Senegal for six months in early 2013 to support evaluation capacity development, primarily through CESAG/CLEAR and SenEval. Amongst others, she will help reinforce SenEval's networking with professors and researchers in evaluation and related fields.

Since 2009, SenEval members have helped create the conditions that resulted in the selection of CESAG as the CLEAR centre for Francophone Africa. The partnership between SenEval and the CESAG/CLEAR should further develop in the coming months, through the co-organization of specific activities.

Participation at the international evaluation conferences and professional networks

The various initiatives to reinforce evaluation capacities in Africa since 1990 include fourteen international conferences (of which six were AfrEA conferences) and many other M&E seminars. Senegalese participation has been uneven, partly due to the language barrier, given that many of the conferences are in English. In most cases, the participants have come from government agencies, research institutions, or the UN.

In this context, SenEval's efforts to promote participation at the 2012 AfrEA conference are noteworthy. Eight members attended, of which four made panel presentations, one conducted a training workshop, and another coordinated the conference workshops. For perhaps the first time, a feedback session, with presentations, was organized back in Dakar, attended by nearly 50 members.

SenEval members were resource persons at other evaluation events in Benin, Morocco and Niger in the course of 2012. This illustrates the very positive tendency of dialogue and exchange between actors and the evaluation networks that the new CESAG/CLEAR initiative will reinforce.

Several SenEval members have participated in the IPDET development evaluation training at Carleton University, and more recently the PIFED (francophone) training at ENAP, Quebec. Some members have attended the course on participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation organized annually in Burkina Faso by the Centre of Development and Innovation of the Wageningen University.

Reinforcement of evaluations and systems of evaluations focused on equity and gender

SenEval aims to address themes which interest members, without priorities fixed in advance, and in the spirit of a holistic approach. Consequently we have not given an explicit priority to evaluation focused on equity and gender. However, several members are interested in equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation, and relevant trainings and webinars have been announced through the mailings.

Constraints

The three major challenges and limiting factors that have impeded the capacity to implement SenEval's strategy are as follows:

- Maintaining the level of motivation and commitment of members has been difficult because of SenEval's weak organizational capacity. SenEval has relied on the unpaid voluntary work by members, which has therefore to a large extent limited activities to those that could be undertaken with partners who are ready to provide logistic or material support. This prevents us from meeting all member expectations, nor does it allow members to express their full potential and sense of initiative.
- This limited organizational capacity is linked to the lack of funds to ensure the sustained financing of a coherent action plan. SenEval's activities are therefore organized for the most part in a reactive manner, when an opportunity and resources present themselves. A strategic plan is needed, at least partially funded, in order to mobilize the full potential of members, and to meet the expectations of government and other potential partners.
- This informal character as a network has not facilitated the institutional recognition of SenEval by the government, nor the mobilization of support for capacity development. The system of consensual decision taking and lack of clear definition of certain responsibilities have impeded certain advocacy initiatives, and made it difficult to ensure the formal representation of SenEval in certain coordination and decision making fora.

Progress and results

- The growing public recognition of the importance of evaluation and the increasingly strong government commitment, to the point of deciding to establish a Commission for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Public Policies and Programs;
- The growing accessibility of SenEval members to training opportunities, with a positive impact on the capacities in the fabric of evaluative practitioners;
- The reinforcement of SenEval's capacities to organize training events, thanks to the experience acquired by members in the conception and the conduct of the workshops undertaken with international experts;
- The reinforcement of the capacities of members thanks to the sharing of information on scholarships, training courses, documentation, etc.;
- The increasing participation of members in meetings and through their contribution to international debates on evaluation issues;
- The expansion of membership (more than 350 signed up for the mailing list);
- The first steps towards the establishment of operational thematic groups;
- The transition of SenEval from an informal network to a formal Senegal Evaluation Association that was initiated at the well-attended Constituent General Assembly on 13 October 2012, when officers and a committee were elected and the statutes approved.

Essential/key enabling factors:

The three key factors that have enabled SenEval to reach the results and progress mentioned above are:

The quality of the members: In particular, one can point to the diversity, continuity, motivation and profile of the members, and the dynamism of the active core group. The diverse membership (coming from government, training and research institutions, think tanks, consulting groups, NGOs, the UN system, donors, etc.) contributes to the richness of exchanges, and enhances SenEval's advocacy capacity. The stability of the active core group has contributed significantly to the continuity and credibility of SenEval's work, despite the lack of funding and the informal character mentioned above. The genuine interest of members is a success factor,

well-illustrated by the fact that there are at least 30 to 40 participants for every presentation and workshop.

The International networks: The enthusiasm and motivation of the active core group has been sustained by the recognition and encouragement resulting from their involvement in international networks, notably AfrEA, the French Evaluation Society (SFE) and the Francophone Evaluation Network (RFE), and to a lesser extent the African Community of Practice for Managing Developing Results (AfCop MfDR). In that same context, the willingness of eminent international evaluation experts (Cousins, Gervais, Rugh, Ba Tall) to support the capacity strengthening work has greatly reinforced SenEval's visibility and credibility.

The positive dynamic regarding evaluation: The growing interest in evaluation has facilitated the action of SenEval, and at the same time is partly a result of that action. Over the past four years the government has taken decisions to reinforce evaluation, results-based management and the national statistical system. This has improved the positioning of monitoring and evaluation, representing a real - though timid - progress in the promotion of an evaluative culture.

There is still a lack of a coherent national evaluation policy that can provide an organizing framework to ensure the harmonization of initiatives taken, and the identification of remaining gaps.

The interest in the reinforcement of evaluation capacities displayed by partners such as UNDP, UNICEF, IOCE and the support coalition for the CLEAR Initiative has also been a source of encouragement for SenEval, opening up a promising perspective of increased support after the transition from network to Association is completed.

Innovations and lessons learned

The development of SenEval is a long term process requiring commitment and patience. We do not yet have brilliant ideas to share, but the following ideas are offered:

SenEval's experience reconfirms the critical importance of government action to institutionalize evaluation. The institutionalization should include the adoption of appropriate evaluation standards, and practical arrangement for capacity development to improve evaluation practice. It is essential to identify actions and strategies to promote the "demand" for evaluation.

Another critical factor is the need to formalize the network – at the right time – and to create an Evaluation Association in order to obtain the means to accompany the government in the institutionalization of evaluation. This process which is already under way, notably reflected by the intention to create a Commission for the Evaluation and Monitoring of Public Policies and Programmes.

Next Steps

In the coming months, SenEval expects to focus on: a) reinforcing individual capacities; b) promoting an enabling environment for evaluation, including evaluation focused on equity and gender; and c) reinforcing its own institutional capacity. Below is a set of actions that will be further refined and prioritized and then integrated into an action plan for the period until end 2013.

The immediate challenges are the completion of the process to establish the Evaluation Association, the re-launching of the thematic groups, the development of a strategic plan and a "manifesto", the creation of a website, and the updating of the membership database. The database should facilitate an inventory of members' sectors of activity, for purposes of better management and targeting of training. In this exercise, members will be invited to share their expectations regarding the new association, and to indicate what they can contribute to specific activities or to the general management of the Association.

It is also planned to establish a database of professors and trainers in evaluation, and of independent evaluators, as far as possible in close collaboration with CLEAR-CESAG.

A strategic plan for capacity development could eventually include the following:

- Technical and material support, in synergy with other VOPEs and international partners;
- Formal partnerships with other VOPEs and international organizations both in Africa and internationally;
- Support for scientific works, through the expected collaboration with EvalPartners and EvalMentors, for example through the production of an annual evaluation publication, and the strengthening of members' capacities to publish in specialized academic journals;
- The second edition of Senegalese Evaluation Days;
- Training workshops on evaluation methodologies with international and national experts;
- Collaboration with institutes of training and research with a view to reinforcing basic training and research related to evaluation;
- Participation in webinars and programmes of on-line training (e-learning);
- Support for the formulation of a code of conduct for evaluators, and for the harmonization of methods and tools.

SenEval is very interested in peer-to-peer partnerships and mentoring opportunities in order to reinforce networking and to improve professional evaluation practice through the development of training and research programmes, as well as professional conferences and the publication of articles in specialized journals. Contacts in that sense have already been made with African VOPEs (Benin, Niger, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Burkina Faso, and Mali), the Quebec Society for Programme Evaluation (SQEP), the French Evaluation Society (SFE) and other partners (Islamic Development Bank, African Development Bank, Swiss Cooperation, UNICEF, CESAG/CLEAR). SenEval has eagerly joined the EvalPartners Initiative and also EvalMentors, and has endorsed the initiative to revive the francophone evaluation network (RFE).

Much of the above has been achieved thanks to SenEval participation during 2012 in various events, including the conferences of AfrEA, the European Evaluation Society, the American Evaluation Association, and the conferences organized in Benin, Morocco and Niger. SenEval attaches a high priority to the future collaboration with CESAG/CLEAR, which is charged with the strengthening of monitoring, evaluation, and performance management in francophone Africa. This partnership could include participation in studies such as the survey of demand for evaluation services, the identification of experts to reinforce the data base, and participation in training and the sharing of good practices.

Finally, it is planned to organize a Francophone Evaluation Forum in Dakar that will help revitalize the Francophone Evaluation Network and reinforce capacities, especially of the francophone VOPEs. This event could reinforce the leadership role of SenEval and further reinforce the collaboration with CESAG/CLEAR.