



Beyond Monitoring: Evaluation for a resilient recovery towards the SDGs

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The 2030 Agenda Midpoint

Progress is possible but not inevitable

Cascading and interlinked crises have reversed years of progress ... and put the 2030 Agenda 'in grave danger'



At current trajectories, in 2030, 7% of the world's population—nearly 600 million people—will still struggle in extreme poverty.



COVID-19 pandemic caused the first rise in between-country income inequality in a generation.



1 in 10 people worldwide today suffer from hunger and 24 million learners may never return to school.



Global unemployment is projected to stand at 207 million in 2022, surpassing its 2019 level by some 21 million.



These crises have reinforced gender inequalities, with significant negative effects on women economic empowerment.

What should countries do?

Countries should prepare for difficult times ahead:

- ✓ Political decisions made now should prioritise actions that are successful at all levels in facilitating sustainable recovery and building sustainable recovery and building resilience against future systemic shocks.

Future policy decisions should be guided by social equity, gender equality, environmental sustainability and underpinned by good governance to ensure that no one is left behind:

- ✓ Taking such considerations requires the use of evaluation techniques and tools for gathering and interpreting evidence to ensure the right information is communicated to decision makers.

Use evaluation information for short and long-term policy decisions:

- ✓ Evaluations are critical for decision making under crisis conditions and strengthening countries' resilience building efforts for a sustainable future.
- ✓ In the short-term, evaluations can support a rapid and effective multi-sectoral response and recovery at various levels.
- ✓ Evaluations can provide information about people, activities and regions most affected and under which conditions they are more affected than others.
- ✓ Evaluations help to understand the impact that each measure taken to help the affected may have on other people, regions, activities and achievement of countries' long-term goals.
- ✓ In the long-term evaluations help to build resilience against other crises as they bring to the fore countries' development challenges, bottlenecks and capacity gaps that hinder progress towards the SDGs.

What should countries do? ...

Enhance public trust through the communication of evidence from evaluations:

- ✓ Use of evaluations to determine resource allocations enhances transparency and accountability in resource allocations.
- ✓ Evaluations help explain government choices and priorities in a polycrisis world – this enhances trust in governments by citizens and support various government programmes

Build a strong and sustained evaluation culture for the post-COVID-19 world:

- ✓ Strong effective and contextually relevant country- led evaluations are critical not only to track progress towards the SDGs but also to support planning needed to make achievement of the SDGs possible.
- ✓ The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of a robust M&E systems across public sector institutions for adaptive planning.

Institutionalize evaluation in policy processes to strengthen countries resilience against systemic shocks:

- ✓ When the pandemic hit, countries that were best able to make evidence –based policy decisions were those with robust M&E systems such as integrated data systems and strong linkages of evidence generators and consumers of evidence.

Strengthen IT infrastructure, technical capacities and data governance for the systematic conduct of evaluations:

- ✓ Impact of COVID highlighted the importance of investment in IT infrastructure, and skills of collecting (such as in nowcasting of high frequency indicators) for real-time evaluations.

What should countries do? ...

Look back from past evaluations :

- ✓ Many countries have gone through similar crisis in the past and have lessons learned from efforts to address these crises events.
- ✓ Governments and international organisations should look back at this past knowledge to tap this existing knowledge for policy insights.

Why is evaluation a crucial ingredient for SDG success?

- Previous reviews of past VNRs by EvalSDGs (2017) identified evaluation as a missed opportunity in the SDGs. Addressing the impacts of COVID-19 and positioning countries in the right direction for the achievement of the SDGs requires use and conduct of evaluation of the SDGs.
- Without conducting an evaluation of the SDGs, countries will not have enough data to understand the various impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and know which problems need to be addressed first for a successful sustainable and resilient recovery.
- The cost of inaction (or of delaying action) towards evaluating the SDGs will result in a loss of the development gains achieved and increase countries' vulnerability to future shocks.
- The review and follow-up processes for the SDGs emphasise monitoring progress towards targets. Evaluation can make use of such monitoring data but is primarily concerned with how well implementation, outputs and development outcomes were achieved, as well as with determining long-term development impact.
- Evidence from evaluations and disaggregated data is a necessity for reporting on the progress towards the SDGs – reporting that must provide evidence that *No One is Left Behind* in development.
- Evaluation allows countries to understand the extent to which they are progressing towards the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs
- Evaluations generate valuable lessons that can guide impactful policy and programme improvements. If decision-makers invest in – and pay attention to – evaluation findings, they can make evidence-based decisions towards the achievement of 2030 and 2063 Agendas and progress towards a more efficient, effective and equitable development.
- Evaluations generate valuable lessons on the policies, strategies and programmes that are intimately tied to accomplishing the 17 SDGs and their targets, whether such initiatives relate directly to one or many SDGs

Why is evaluation a crucial ingredient for SDG success? . . .

- Evaluation addresses the complexity of the SDGs and their achievement. SDGs are deeply interrelated in complex ways — i.e. in unpredictable and largely uncontrollable ways. E.g.; , one cannot neatly separate the aim of reducing income inequality (SDG 10) from the aim of ensuring healthy lives and well-being (SDG 3). Similarly, Goal 2 (end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture) couples natural processes with social and economic processes. It moves in the same direction as Goals 1, 3 and 4, but also involves trade-offs with Goals 6, 7 and 13. This complexity means the link between any given policy or programme and the achievement of an SDG cannot be neatly captured in a linear, straightforward cause-effect relationship.
- Development challenges addressed by the SDGs such as health, poverty, education, hunger etc are ‘wicked problems’ which cannot be addressed by single point solutions. Thus, evaluation practices are increasingly drawing on ‘systems thinking’ in order to attend carefully to complex circumstances and to judge the value of interventions. New tools are allowing evaluators to better describe and analyse the boundaries, interrelationships and perspectives involved in complex situations. Such tools include causal loop diagrams, system dynamics and outcome mapping. Similarly, techniques such as soft systems methodology and critical system heuristics are providing ways to bring together perspectives and reach a way of framing value judgments.
- Evaluative thinking is indispensable for informed choices. To remain relevant, the follow-up and review processes associated with Agenda 2030 require evaluative reasoning. Policymakers, parliamentarians and knowledgeable citizens will be asking the classic evaluative questions, “Are we doing things right?” and “Are these the right things to do?”. Answering these questions requires evaluation that analyses arguments, interrogates evidence and assesses claims. This ‘critical thinking’ is indispensable for making informed and reasoned decisions.
- Evaluation builds solid evidence for claims. Policymakers and parliamentarians, as well as everyday citizens, make claims about programmes and policies. In the context of the SDGs, claims such as: “We have successfully reduced gender inequality in employment opportunities”; “This rural vaccination programme has drastically reduced infection rates”; or “Far more of our citizens living in Y now have access to clean water” may be heard. Evaluation builds the case for such claims. It often involves combining evidence from descriptive questions (how many? how much? how often?) with evidence from explanatory questions (e.g. are observed outcomes attributable to this policy?) and normative questions (is the policy or programme implemented

Finland case study of SDG evaluation

Evaluation of Finland's Sustainable Development Policy (PATH2030)

- Finland was the first country in the world to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the national implementation the Agenda 2030.
- The evaluation aimed to:
 - ✓ produce an independent and comprehensive evaluation on sustainable development policy , especially regarding Finland's national policy, the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Finland's foreign policy.
 - ✓ produce concrete recommendations on the future directions of Finland's sustainable development policy (taking into account different timespans and levels of ambition) as well as ways to evaluate it.
- Planning of the evaluation entailed the following:
 - ✓ **Initial discussions** on the evaluation between ministries and other parties started already in **2017**
 - ✓ **Planning** started in **2018** under the leadership of the Prime Minister's Office
 - ✓ Funded by the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities)
 - ✓ Evaluation **conducted** August 2018 -February 2019
 - ✓ **Results published** in March **2019**

Evaluations questions

- The evaluation team used multiple approaches:
 - ✓ **Theory-based assessment** was used to understand both the preconditions and mechanisms of implementation.
 - ✓ Attention was paid to the theories of change (ToC) of the impact pathways.
 - ✓ The evaluation analysed how *institutional* level societal structures limit or promote development, how the *interest* of stakeholders gives voice and how different interest groups engage with decision making. It also identified the *ideologies* guiding the action, how *ideas* have been accepted in politics and what type of *information* supports and guides the SD policy.
- The following focus areas and policy principles made up the **evaluation criteria used**: *Carbon neutral and resource smart Finland; a non-discrimination, equal and competent Finland; long-term action and transformation; policy coherence and global partnership; commitment and participation.*

Table 1 Analytical framework of the PATH2030 evaluation

| Category | Questions |
|---|--|
| Institutions (rules, path-dependencies or stickiness) | How do structures restrict/promote sustainable development policy? What are the issues that are hard/possible to change? |
| Interests (potential material advantages) | Actors' interests: Why does an actor lobby for a certain issue? Is it somehow beneficial? Are different opinions heard? Who may participate? |
| Ideas (policy discourses, underlying ideologies or beliefs) | What ideologies guide the action of different actors? What new ideas are emerged? |
| Information (data and knowledge, and their construction and use) | What kind of information is used in politics? Who has produced it? |

Source: Berg et al. (2019)

Evaluation process

- The evaluation team employed a participatory process, giving different stakeholders in the SD policy landscape the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation and learn from each other's experience.
- Stakeholders across administrative departments also actively contributed toward formulation of recommendations based on evaluation findings.

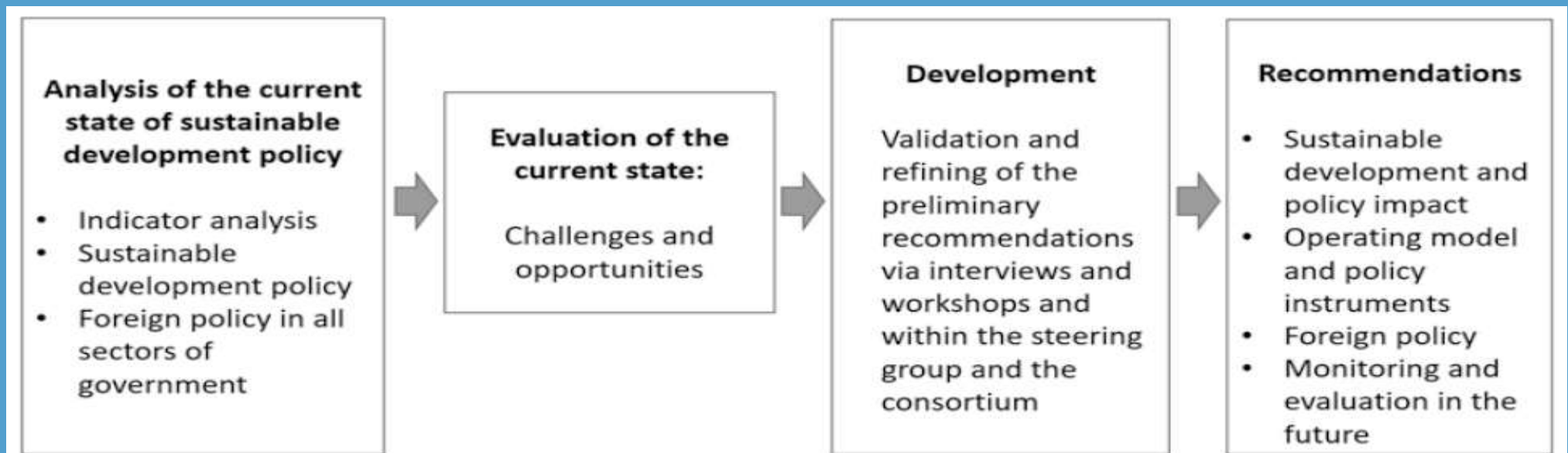


Fig. 2 The process of the PATH2030 evaluation. (Source: Berg et al., 2019)

Development oriented evaluation

- A multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral approach which encompassed:
 - ✓ Comprehensive participation of key actors and stakeholders
 - ✓ Short, but intensive process
 - ✓ Learning and sharing, innovative workshops, interviews and fora
 - ✓ Survey
 - ✓ Cross-administrative steering group
 - ✓ Support group (stakeholders and partners, such as universities, research centers, sustainable development committees, Finnish Evaluation Society, etc.)

Key Information Sources

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Indicators | SDG Index and Dashboards –indicators National SD indicators (10 indicator baskets), Helsus Policy Dialogue materials (expert evaluation and workshops) |
| Key policy documents | Government SD programs and strategies Planning documents for development co-operation projects |
| Survey (N=238) | Closed survey to key SD actors and practitioners Open survey to all interested |
| Interviews (around 80 interviewees) | Key professionals in SD Representatives of all ministries Scientific advisory panel for SD Key process stakeholders |
| Workshops (3) | Two open stakeholder workshops (around 80 and 40 participants) International evaluation workshop |

Key messages from the Finnish evaluation

- Sustainable development has become a broadly accepted aim in society. SD policy has succeeded in being inclusive.
- Not a single country has yet introduced a credible plan for how the goals of the 2030 Agenda will be reached. Sustainable development should become the basis of future Government programmes.
- The Finnish Government should produce a credible national roadmap for how Finland plans to reach the goals of the 2030 Agenda. This requires extensive national targets.
- The coherency of politics should be strengthened, and phenomenon-based budgeting is a good start. All governmental goals should be guided by sustainable development, and Agenda 2030 integrated into the strategies, actions and future briefings.

Key findings of Finnish evaluation

- Finland's biggest challenges in sustainable development policy are related to climate change, consumption, the state of the environment, and growing societal inequality

Figure 1: Assessment of sustainable development in Finland via national indicators



Nigeria case study of SDG evaluation

Nigeria's experience of evaluation of SDGs 3 & 4

- In December 2019, the Government of Nigeria (GoN), through the Office of the Senior Special Assistant to the President on the Sustainable Development Goals (OSSAP-SDGs) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), commissioned two independent evaluations of SDG3 and SDG4 in assessing the effectiveness and impact of: i) the SDG3-1, Healthy Lives in Nigeria within the National Strategic Health Development Plan (NSHDP I and II) (2016–2019) and ii) SDG4-1 within the Education for Change Strategic Plan 2016-2019 and the Universal Basic Education Act of 2004.
- The two independent evaluations objectives were:
 - ✓ Assessing the Health and Education Sector's primary Strategic Plan's contribution towards achieving health and education-related SDG targets, directed to reducing maternal deaths and under-five mortality rates and the first target of SDG 4, namely "by 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes".
 - ✓ Learning from Nationwide Policies and Strategies effects and analysing comparative evidence of enabler factors of success of selected performing States and failure of low performing States toward SDGs targets, to serve as evidence-based policy advocacy instrument to increase public investment and reshape strategies in assisting the GoN for better prioritization and implementation of the forthcoming National Development Plan 2021-2025, NSHDP III (2023-2027) and Education Strategic Plan (2023-2027).

Evaluation approach and methodology

- The evaluation used 15 evaluation questions focused mainly on the assessment of two National Strategic Plans based on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria of Relevance, Coherence, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Impact and Sustainability reinforced with SDGs Principles of Leave No One Behind, Equity, Universality and Gender Equality.
- The impact of COVID-19, the school closures and the effects of the inaccessibility of health facilities by women and children were taken into account throughout the evaluation.
- The evaluation methodology relied mainly on nationwide policies and strategies analysis and secondary data analysis, quantitative primary data collection in case study states using a quasi-experimental design related to Health Facilities Assessments and Learning Outcomes Assessments to measure students' literacy and numeracy level, complemented with primary qualitative information obtained from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).
- The “Multi-Variate Statistical Regression Analysis of Determinants of SDG3-1 (U5MR & MMR) was performed using Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) Raw Data Set. Regarding SDG4-1.
- Causal Analysis was generated from datasets of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) and official EMIS reports from the Federal Ministry of Education (FMOE), and peer-reviewed journal articles.
- In the health sector, most of the information was collected by different organizations in Nigeria in the last ten years, including international development partners like USAID, WHO, UNICEF, WB and the Federal Ministry of Health, and the National Bureau of Statistics.

Evaluation approach and methodology . . .

- The geographical delineation of the evaluation targeted six States in both the health and education sector, grouping and comparing them on the "low", high", and "transitioning" continuum, based on their performance on different indicators.
- Maternal deaths and under-five mortality rate – and their potential associations with socio-economic variables - formed the basis of selecting Kebbi, Gombe, Nasarawa, Ebonyi, Ogun and Bayelsa states for health-related data collection purposes.
- In the education sector, the six States were chosen relevant to their primary education completion rates according to the 2016-2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS).
- Additional criteria considered and deemed necessary and essential were the availability of learning outcome data in the six States. Therefore, Kwara, Kaduna, Katsina, Enugu, Kano, and Zamfara states served as references for data collection on pupils learning outcomes in education.

Findings of the Nigerian evaluation

- Moderate improvement has been achieved under SDG3 and SDG4, ensuring quality and inclusive education and reducing maternal death and under-five mortality rate.
- There were system-wide deficiencies in the education and health sectors, temporarily showing unreachable decent healthcare for most of the population and the increasing number of "out-of-school" children.
- Achieving gender equality, LNOB suffers because of the practice of deeply rooted cultural norms and practices and out of pockets costs.
- The evaluations highlighted the critical and indispensable nature of missing data, inaccessible data, and unavailable data which makes it hard for implementation and monitoring of the SDGs on the one hand.

Some key takeaways

- Strengthening countries' performance on the SDGs increases their resilience to future shocks. This can be better achieved through the entrenchment of evaluation systems in organisational practice for the systematic conduct of SDG evaluations.
- Strengthening the resilience of complex development systems is often illustrated under the 7 principles in Figure 2. Each of these principles can be directly achieved in part through the entrenchment of evaluation systems in the truest sense for (i) enhancing the diversity of perspectives (ii) recognizing the connectivity between different social groups that can increase information sharing, trust and reciprocity (iii) responding to monitoring information by supporting the identification and understanding of the slow variables and feedbacks that can affect the existing ecosystem services (iv) engaging meaningfully with complexity by supporting an understanding of the interaction and dynamics of the social-ecological systems (v) supporting learning and experimentation (vi) promoting broad participation through active engagement of all relevant stakeholders, and (vii) assessing and supporting effective collaboration across institutions.
- This allows the systems to overcome and recover more quickly after a disturbance and ensure that social-ecological systems remain able to provide the ecosystem services needed to sustain and support the well-being of people.

Figure 2: Strengthening the resilience of complex development systems



Thank you
