Module 6 – Conclusion

Technical and Political Challenges to Evaluation

There are technical and political challenges to results-based evaluation.

On the technical side, designing and building an evaluation system that can produce timely, reliable and objective information on the performance and results of projects, programmes, and policies necessitates competence and real institutional capacity. This institutional capacity includes, at a minimum, the technical ability to construct evaluation questions, indicators and measures; the means and ability to collect, aggregate, analyze, and report evaluation data; and competent development managers with knowledge and skills on what to do with evaluation information. Time and resources are needed to build this technical capacity but it is easier to manage than political challenges.

Evaluations are political in nature. Evaluations, when used, become part of the political decision-making surrounding the project, programme or policy being evaluated. Since evaluations take positions on how well an intervention is doing or on what works and what doesn’t, it becomes unavoidably political. Bringing evaluation information into the public arena can alter resource allocation decisions, trigger changes in institutional arrangements, and affect public perception on government effectiveness.

To deal with politics of evaluation, it is important to understand the dynamics of political process and consider political dimensions into the evaluation. Evaluators can anticipate resistance of development managers, government officials and even funders and manage resistance by sharing evaluation processes, criteria and methods publicly.

Where Politics and Evaluation Meet

Evaluation is a rational enterprise that takes place in a political context. Political considerations intrude in three major ways, and the evaluator who fails to recognize their presence is in for a series of shocks and frustrations:

First, the policies and programs with which evaluation deals are the creatures of political decisions. They were proposed, defined, debated, enacted, and funded through political processes, and in implementation they remain subject to pressures – both supportive and hostile – that arise out of the play of politics.

Second, because evaluation is undertaken in order to feed into decisionmaking, its reports enter the political arena. There evaluative evidence of program outcomes has to compete for attention with other factors that carry weight in the political process.

Third, and perhaps least recognized, evaluation itself has a political stance. By its very nature, it makes implicit political statements about such issues as the problematic nature of some programs and the unchallenged-ability of others, the legitimacy of program goals and program
strategies, the utility of strategies of incremental reform, and even the appropriate role of social scientist in policy and program formation.

Knowing that political constraints and resistance exist is not a reason for abandoning evaluation research; rather, it is a precondition for usable evaluation research. Only when the evaluator has insight into the interests and motivations of other actors in the system, into the roles that he himself is consciously or inadvertently playing, the obstacles and opportunities that impinge upon the evaluative effort, and the limitations and possibilities for putting results of evaluation work – only with sensitivity to the politics of evaluation research – can the evaluator be as creative and strategically useful as he should be.


Module Conclusion

In summary, this module described the “Evaluation” in the context of M & E, its types and uses. The module also delved on how to design the evaluation system from defining evaluation questions, designing the evaluation methodology including data collection and analysis, standards of a quality evaluation. Guidelines in writing and presenting evaluations as well as strategies to promote utilization of findings are also provided.

To check your overall understanding of the module, work on the final exercise.