Linking Evaluation to Policymaking in the Arab States Region
Parliamentarians Meeting: 26 - 27 October 2015 - Cairo, Egypt
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Introduction

The Linking Evaluation to Policymaking report presents the conclusions of a two-day meeting held in Cairo in October 2015 with parliamentarians and evaluation associations from the region. The participants came together for an exchange on how to move forward on the institutionalization of evaluation, particularly equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation, in the different countries.

The meeting Linking Evaluation to Policymaking built on the previous initiatives led by UN Women on parliamentarians and evaluation. It brought together 10 parliamentarians and one parliamentarian representative from seven countries across the Arab States region. They were joined by representatives of evaluation associations from Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, as well as the regional Middle East and North Africa Evaluators Network and EvalGender+.

The two-day event also promoted intraregional and interregional South-South exchange on challenges and opportunities in the region, with a presentation by and discussion with Eng. Mostafa Ghaly, Assistant to the Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform in Egypt on the Ministry’s experience developing monitoring tools and systems, as well the Head of Evaluation and Research, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Office of the Presidency, Republic of South Africa on the South African experience of developing and institutionalizing a national evaluation policy and system. For the first time, an exchange with the media was also launched to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and ways in which media and parliamentarians can work together to advocate for and promote a culture of evaluation. The final two sessions of the meeting focused on country-level discussions and presentations of next steps, followed by a collective discussion on recommendations and next steps. (Details of the sessions are available the meeting agenda in Annex 1).

Background

There has been increasing recognition by the national and international community of the importance of evaluation for evidence-based public policymaking. Quality evaluations are essential for effective parliamentary oversight and are a critical means of informing parliamentarians about effective initiatives and development programmes. To assess the inclusion, implications and outcomes of policies and programmes for women and men and boys and girls, evaluations need to consider issues of gender, equity and human rights.

Evaluation everywhere, and at every level, will play a key role in implementing the new development agenda ...

Evaluation is not easy. Nor is it popular. But it is essential. The current constrained budgetary climate makes it more important than ever.

Source: Ban Ki-moon
UN Secretary-General
Global and regional initiatives are being used to strengthen the role of parliamentarians in evaluation, by providing a space for dialogue and peer-to-peer learning and supporting the institutionalization of evaluation at the national level. These initiatives include the Parliamentarians’ Forum on Development Evaluation in South Asia established in 2013, the African Parliamentarians’ Network on Development Evaluation created in 2014, the Global Parliamentarians’ Forum for Development Evaluation launched in 2015 and regional meetings of parliamentarians in Latin America, Asia and the Arab States.

**UN Women Engagement**

UN Women has been supporting parliamentarians across the Arab States region to advocate and legislate for women’s rights, gender equality and inclusive growth. Assessing whether policies and programmes effectively realize these goals is a critical part of this work. To integrate evaluation into the broader work, UN Women has been providing a space for parliamentarians for dialogue and knowledge exchange among themselves and with evaluation associations.

This work began when a group of women parliamentarians from six countries in the Arab States region came together at the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Evaluators Network’s workshop Mainstreaming Evaluation Theory and Practice in the Middle East and North Africa in Amman, Jordan in April 2014. Participants shared experiences on evaluation from within the region and beyond, identified challenges and opportunities, and initiated a dialogue between parliamentarians and the evaluation community. They discussed the need for evaluation to be nationally owned and led, participatory and gender responsive. This core group of parliamentarians agreed to adopt a two-tiered approach of advancing the development evaluation agenda at the national level in their countries and sharing experiences at the regional level. To continue discussions at the regional level, the Linking Evaluation to Decision-Making: Arab States Regional Parliamentarians’ Initiative google group was created by UN Women to provide a forum for parliamentarians to exchange information.

This engagement continued with the fourth General Assembly of the MENA Evaluators Network in Cairo (Egypt) in February 2015. A parliamentarian from Jordan and member of the interim steering committee of the Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation, participated in the panel discussion on Bridging the gap between the evaluation community and policymakers. The goal of the session was to share ideas on how different stakeholders in MENA countries could be mobilized to support evaluation practices in national programmes and public policies.
Parliamentarians from the Arab States region have also been participating in the global movement to institutionalize evaluation at the national level. Two parliamentarians from Jordan and Morocco participated in a one-day global meeting Towards a Global Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation in October 2014 in Dublin, Ireland. Participants discussed the experiences of existing parliamentarians’ forums, emerging parliamentarian initiatives for evaluation, parliamentarians’ role in International Year of Evaluation 2015 global event, and the establishment of a Global Parliamentarians’ Forum for Development Evaluation.

Why Evaluation Matters

The presentation on equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation defined evaluation and how it was different from other related activities including monitoring, supervision and audit. Evaluation enables stakeholders to answer what works and why. Evaluation that integrates equity and gender equality assesses the extent to which men and women and boys and girls are engaged in and benefit from development processes and what, if any, unintended negative outcomes may have resulted. Equity-focused and gender equality evaluation also seeks to engage citizens in the evaluation process to ensure their voices inform it. Thus, equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation can be an important process for achieving gender equality, accountability to citizens, as well as promoting national ownership of development plans and programmes and informed decision-making.

Meeting participants discussed the importance of using evidence from evaluations to highlight the gap between citizens and policymakers and to increase the credibility and transparency of government reports. They also recognized the need to be proactive in developing evaluation plans that are strategic and based on national priorities. They related how evaluation in the region is often translated into a word with a connotation of criticism rather than improvement. The presentation and discussion emphasized that evaluation is about learning and accountability.

Gender responsive evaluation
...the systematic and impartial assessment that provides credible and reliable evidence-based information about the extent to which an intervention has resulted in progress (or the lack thereof) towards intended and/or unintended results regarding gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Source: UN Women Evaluation Policy
2015: The Sustainable Development Goals and the International Year of Evaluation

As mentioned in the introduction, 2015 is an important year in which the international community is launching a new development agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to achieve sustainable development and gender equality. Recognizing the importance of embedding evaluation in the SDGs, 2015 was declared as the International Year of Evaluation (EvalYear) at the Third International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities in São Paulo, Brazil in 2013. Evaluation will be critical for assessing whether the international community is achieving the goals of sustainable development and gender equality.

In 2014, General Assembly resolution A/RES/69/237 acknowledged 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation, and “invited the United Nations development system to support efforts to further strengthen capacity for evaluation.”

EvalYear has included a series of initiatives at the international, national and local levels to position evaluation in the policy arena. These initiatives have brought together diverse stakeholders, including civil society, governments, international partners, academia and individuals to promote evaluation “as a catalytic intervention for better human development”. It is within this context that global and regional initiatives have been working to strengthen the role of parliamentarians in evaluation. Based on regional initiatives and the International Year of Evaluation, the Global Parliamentarians’ Forum for Development Evaluation was launched in November 2015.

We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.

Source: Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets announced in September 2015 of this year reshape the new ‘mammal agenda with the aim to eliminate poverty, realize human rights and reduce inequalities including those based on sex, age, geographic, income, and within and between countries worldwide. Considered integrated and indivisible, the SDGs seek to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what they did not achieve. The experience of the MDGs demonstrated a need for a clearer focus on inclusiveness and gender equality and women’s empowerment, the need for planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to be nationally owned with targets that are aligned to national priorities, and the importance of building national evaluation capacity.

Consequently, “the Goals and targets are the result of over two years of intensive public consultation and engagement with civil society and other stakeholders around the world, which paid particular attention to the voices the poorest and most vulnerable”.

Follow-up and Review processes will be “rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality. Accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated by income, sea, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contents. They will require enhanced capacity, building support for developing countries, including the strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programs.”

Three Countries in the Arab States region, Algeria, Bahrain and Egypt are members of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators to develop an Indicator framework for the goals and targets for consideration by the Statistical Commission at its forty-seventh session in March 2016.

**17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

1. No poverty  
2. No hunger  
3. Good health  
4. Quality Education  
5. Gender Equality  
6. Clean water and sanitation  
7. Renewable Energy  
8. Good Jobs and Economic Growth  
9. Innovation and infrastructure  
10. Reduced inequalities  
11. Sustainable Cities Communities  
12. Responsible Consumption  
13. Protect the Planet  
14. Life Under Water  
15. Life on Land  
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions  
17. Partnerships for the Goals
National Evaluation Capacities - An Overview

Countries in the Arab States region have a range of experiences with respect to national evaluation policies, systems and the conduct of evaluations.

Legal Frameworks

In general, the legislative framework, that is, the laws and policies to support evaluation practice has yet to be developed in countries in the Arab States region. Morocco is the only country in the region to have an article in its Constitution supporting the evaluation of public policies. Nonetheless, other countries in the region have articles and policies promoting good governance and accountability that could be leveraged as entry points for institutionalizing evaluation. Examples include Tunisia, where several articles in the 2014 Constitution provide constitutional authorities with building blocks to set up a legal framework for evaluation activities. This includes article 15 stating that, “The public administration is at the service of the citizen and the public interest; it shall be organized and shall operate in accordance with the principles of ...equality ... and the rules of transparency, integrity, efficiency and accountability”, and article 139 which tasks local authorities with adopting mechanisms of participatory democracy and open governance in preparation for development programmes and monitoring their implementation. These articles, in addition to others enshrining the right to access information, as well the goals of achieving social equity and sustainable development serve as key entry points for advocating monitoring and evaluation to ensure that these goals are achieved.

National Evaluation Policies and Systems

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monitoring and inspection unit’s name to monitoring and evaluation and the Ministry of Education has established a monitoring and evaluation unit. Other promising practices include: the practice of Joint Donor-Partner Evaluation for sectoral level evaluations rather than programme/project level in Lebanon; and the development of an integrated national planning, monitoring and evaluation infrastructure with a results-based management system by the Ministries of Planning and Finance and the establishment of a new independent monitoring and evaluation unit in the Ministry of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform responsible for monitoring national projects in Egypt. Parliamentarians from Morocco also cited other potential entry points in parliament, including a permanent annual session of parliament to monitor and evaluate government policies, a monitoring committee established in 2014 to conduct studies and provide training in monitoring and evaluation to members of parliament, the nine permanent parliamentary committees who have the right to question project leaders and public figures on performance, and the annual report on “achieving equality and anti-racism.”

Other challenges reported as common to a number of countries included the absence of monitoring and evaluation committees in parliament, the general focus on programme/project level evaluation versus more strategic evaluation, the limited reliability of some data, and the need for increased transparency. The misunderstanding of what monitoring and evaluation is, often interpreted as audit or inspection rather than an assessment of results, was also seen as a key challenge. Representatives of evaluation associations as well as some parliamentarians also mentioned how evaluation reports are often placed in drawers and not used.

Stakeholders in Evaluation

Role of parliamentarians

Discussion centred on how parliamentarians, in their oversight and legislative roles, have a crucial role to play in promoting laws, systems and practices in favour of evaluation and ensuring that evaluation is responsive to gender equality and inclusive social and economic development. Potential roles include:

1. Increasing awareness on the importance of using evidence-based evaluation in national policymaking among colleagues and other key decision makers
2. Advocating and developing laws supporting evaluation practices
3. Accessing and using findings and recommendations of evaluations in Parliamentary debates and policy discussions
Role of Evaluation Associations

Both the regional Middle East and North Africa Evaluation Network (EvalMENA) and national evaluation associations have been advocating for the institutionalization of evaluation at the national level and working to strengthen capacity to supply quality evaluations. EvalMENA has been changing perceptions on who is a professional evaluator and supporting evaluators from the Arab States region to take ownership of large evaluation projects. EvalMENA, in collaboration with national evaluation associations, has also been including workshops for evaluators on a range of evaluation topics at its annual meetings and translating key evaluation references into Arabic. Egyptian evaluation professionals have been promoting a monitoring and evaluation culture through education and technical assistance, notably the establishment of an evaluation academic diploma at Assiut and Helwan Universities by the Egyptian Network for Research and Evaluation and the provision of technical assistance to the Ministry of Planning on introducing the results-based management (RBM) system by the Egyptian Association for Evaluators. The Palestinian Evaluation Association has built a web-based project of evaluations to provide aid observers and donors with information on results of projects implemented in the country. The Moroccan Evaluation Association has been actively working to raise parliamentarians’ awareness on evaluation.

Role of the Media

Recognizing the important role the media can play in communicating development and evaluation concepts, promoting evaluation and disseminating evaluation findings, the two-day meeting engaged representatives of the media in a round-table discussion with parliamentarians and evaluation associations. Discussions centred on the role of the media and how the media and parliamentarians can work together to advocate for and use evaluations as part of achieving gender equality and the SDGs. Several parliamentarians noted that most development reports are put in drawers, and the general public has no idea about development-related topics. They emphasized the potential role of different media (journalism, TV or radio) to raise the awareness of the public and disseminate information on new ideas or topics.

Opinions varied on what type of media tool is most effective in delivering messages on development goals. Some print media journalists believed newspapers are most effective in explaining any new idea to the public, while others felt that TV and radio are more powerful forums to reach remote areas. Suggestions given by reporters attending the discussion on mechanisms to deliver the message easily to the public included explanatory journalism, explanatory video on the Internet, short spots, working with the local press and local media who are closer to people in local communities, and awareness-raising in educational institutions. Recommendations for working together included:
Regional Level

Promote exchange and build alliances
1. Create a regional committee for monitoring and evaluation to meet quarterly to discuss progress and new ideas in this area
2. Establish a virtual mechanism for communication and exchange of expertise among parliamentarians, United Nations and other evaluation stakeholders
3. Promote study tours and visits to countries in the Arab States region which are successfully implementing evaluation such as Morocco and visit their parliaments and committees
4. Build regional alliances and networks which include, parliamentarians, evaluation societies and Ministries

Develop a common language
1. Parliamentarians should invite the Information Minister to attend sessions related to the media plan
2. Development and evaluation concepts should be clearly defined for the public

Institutionalization of Evaluation – Moving forward – Key Actions

To move forward, participants called for increased exchange of experiences and the expansion of alliances to include other key actors, including evaluation associations and Ministries. Many ideas for future potential actions were common across countries. Parliamentarians wanted to have case studies of how strategic evaluations had been commissioned and successfully used at the national level. A potential next step being explored is the development of a case study in the region that can be used for future reference.

A list of potential key actions at the regional and national levels based on the discussions is included below.

Institutionalization of Evaluation – Moving forward – Key Actions

Regional Level

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Increase demand
1. Develop evaluation products and present findings in manner which is user-friendly for decision makers
2. Commission new case studies or learn from existing examples of where evaluations have been used

Strengthen capacity
1. Develop certification through EvalMENA for evaluators with skills in equity and gender-responsive evaluation, policy evaluation and presenting evaluation findings to decision makers and make a roster of certified evaluators available on the Internet
2. Establish an evaluation unit in the parliament or the national level
3. Foster cooperation between national and international expertise
4. Train media staff on monitoring and evaluation concepts and practices
National Level

Increase demand
1. Conduct workshops for more parliamentarians in the Arab States region
2. Plan and implement country-relevant media campaigns to educate and increase public awareness on evaluation
3. Mobilize financial support for advocacy campaigns

Build alliances
4. Hold meetings between parliamentarians and evaluation networks and associations
5. Conduct workshops for mutual cooperation among parliamentarians, media and evaluators to build evaluation awareness and skills

Strengthen capacity
6. Conduct evaluation activities in every country to apply learning

Institutionalize evaluation at national level
7. Advocate for legislation to support evaluation at the national level and parliament’s role in evaluating public policies
8. Establish a permanent specialized monitoring and evaluation committee inside parliament with a separate budget
9. Mobilize support to establish and sustain an evaluation unit in parliament with trained staff to manage and conduct evaluation
Annex A – Agenda

Linking Evaluation to Policymaking in the Arab States Region
parliamentarians Meeting 26 - 27 Oct 2015 • Cairo, Egypt

Agenda

Monday - 26 October 2015

09.30- 10.00  Registration
10.00- 10.30  Welcome
   Eng. Mustafa Ghaly, Assistant to Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt
   European Union representative
   UN Women representative
10.30- 10.45  Coffee break
10.45 -11.15  Objectives of the meeting and two-day program at a glance
11.15-12.00  What is equity-focused and gender responsive evaluation? Why should women and men parliamentarians engage in evaluation? (Presentation and discussion)
12.00 - 13.00 Lunch break
13.00 - 14.15  Status of M&E in the region (presentation and discussion)
14.15 - 14.30  Coffee break
14.30 - 15.30  Status of M&E in the region (Continued)
15.30 - 15.40  Break
15:40 - 16:30 The why and how of National Evaluation Policies and Systems - The South African Experience (Presentation and discussion)
16.30 - 17.00  Summary and wrap up

Tuesday • 27 October 2015

09.30 - 09.45 Welcome and key points from the previous day
09.45 - 11.15 Using Evaluation to Assess Progress - The Case of the SOGs and the role of media (Presentation and discussion)
11.00 - 11.30 Tea/coffee break
11.30 - 12.00 Next steps at national level (Working group session)
12.00 - 13.00 Lunch
13.00 - 14.00 Presentation and discussion of next steps (Plenary)
14.00 - 14.15 Coffee break
14.15 - 15.00 Discussion on next steps at regional level
15.00 - 16.00 Validation of lessons learned and good practices working with parliamentarians
16.00 - 17.00 Summary, follow up and wrap up
Annex B – List of Participants

- Dr. Ahmad Holly, MP Palestine
- Mr. Alex Saelaert, Coordinator Local Cooperation Fund (LCF), Embassy of Finland
- Mr. Emad Abu Gheit, Media and Communication Expert, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States
- Ms. Hind Al-Fayez, MP Jordan
- Ms. Jinane Doumit Nader, Tender Manager, MenaPro, Lebanon
- Mr. Khaled Ghobashy – Editor in Chief – Middle East News Agency
- Ms. Lobna Sabry, Senior Representative, Reuters
- Dr. Mohammad Khasawneh, Jordan Evaluation Association
- Ms. Maryse Guimond, Programme Manager, Spring Forward for Women Programme, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States
- Mr. Mahmoud Abdelkhalek, Administrative Associate, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States
- Ms. Mesibah Nadjet, MP Algeria
- Ms. Mona Selim, Regional Evaluation Specialist, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States
- Dr. Najaat Al-Astal, MP Palestine
- Ms. Neveen Ahmed, Political Participation Consultant, UN Women Regional Office for Arab States
- Ms. Olfa Soukri, MP Tunisia
- Dr. Oum Elbanine Lahlou, MP Morocco
- Dr. Roula Hroub, MP Jordan
- Ms. Rachida Tahri, MP Morocco
- Dr. Sahar Qawasmi, MP Palestine
- Ms. Sarah Sirgany – freelance Journalist, CNN and BBC
- Dr. Ziad Moussa, IOCE, MENA Evaluators Network
- Dr. Maha El-Said, EvalGender+
- Ms. Dalia Bayoumi, M+E Specialist, UNICEF Egypt Country Office
- Mr. Tamer El-Fouly, Egyptian Evaluation Association
- Engineer Mostafa Ghaly, Assistant to Minister of Planning, Monitoring and Administrative Reform, Egypt”

References
1- Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia
2- A representative from the Palestinian Evaluation Association joined via skype to present on the state of evaluation in Palestine.
3- http://www.mymande.org/evalyear/parliamentarians_forum
4- Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia
5- Parliamentarians’ participation was sponsored as part of the European Commission and UN Women joint regional programme for 6- the Southern Mediterranean region the Spring Forward for Women, programme implemented with funding by the European Union.
7- Two parliamentarians from the Arab States region are members of the interim steering committee of the Global Parliamentarians’
8- Forum for Development Evaluation.
10- Representatives from Reuters, Middle East News Agency and Arab Media participated in the round-table discussion.