



# Evaluation of EvalPartners

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## The Global Movement to Strengthen National Evaluation Capacities

### Executive Summary

Prepared for: EvalPartners

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose of the Evaluation

EvalPartners, the Global Movement to Strengthen National Evaluation Capacities, began in 2012. This is the first external evaluation of EvalPartners, and it is intended as a reflective stocktaking at a critical juncture in the initiative's history. This evaluation provides a broad snapshot of what EvalPartners is, does, and signifies amongst the key constituents with whom it engages. This feedback is further intended to help inform and shape decisions about what EvalPartners could be and achieve in the future, beyond 2015, the International Year of Evaluation.

### Methodology

This evaluation has used a developmental approach, taking place over the period from June 2014 to January 2015. It has been overseen by a six-member Evaluation Steering Committee (ESC), and conducted by a two-person external evaluation team. The evaluation covers a three-year period, from the inception of EvalPartners in 2012 to the present.

Data collection methods employed in this evaluation include: document review, online survey of professional evaluators, key informant interviews with key stakeholders, email survey of representatives of national VOPEs, email survey of round one P2P grantees, EPMG self-assessment questionnaire, task force member questionnaire, participant observation at the EPMG meeting in Dublin in October, and at EvalPartners related sessions at the adjacent EES conference in October 2014.

### Findings

This evaluation responds to five questions, organized under three key issues:

- I. EvalPartners' role in the international evaluation landscape;
- II. EvalPartners' efforts and effects on capacity building at multiple levels; and
- III. Governance structure, decision-making, and implementation processes.

The findings are presented in relation to each of these three issues.

#### *I. EvalPartners' Role in the International Evaluation Landscape*

EvalPartners was jointly founded by the IOCE and UNICEF in 2012. It emerged from, and into, a global context characterized by rapidly increasing numbers of VOPEs. Because it was founded by a number of institutional and individual champions with long histories of engaged action and strong networks, it came into being as a brand that was immediately and effectively linked to the legitimacy and activity of its founders and associates. These two factors help to explain

how it has achieved so much in such a short amount of time: it resonated with a clear need and built on existing momentum.

Three main trends within international evaluation, as explored in the practitioner survey, include:

- Increased awareness and/or appreciation of evaluation in one or more areas
- New or improved public policies regarding the use of evaluation for publicly-funded programs
- Changes or improvements in professional evaluation standards

For each of these trends, evaluators across the world responding to the survey noted a wide range of changes occurring. Governments, donors, and the lobbying efforts of VOPEs were all seen as major forces behind these changes, and the changes were seen as largely, but not uniformly, positive.

These findings confirm the relevance of EvalPartners and its overall theory-of-change and strategy (please see the box on the right for a brief explanation of these). They also suggest that EvalPartners' partners may wish to explore ways of advancing worldwide conversations on professional standards.

As part of the analysis of EvalPartners' role in the international landscape, the evaluation team explored what EvalPartners means to different stakeholders. These findings are organized under EvalPartners' key constituents – evaluation practitioners, regional and national VOPEs of varying sizes, and non-VOPE CSOs and summarized below.

#### Evaluation practitioners in general

Based on survey results, 58% of evaluation practitioners have heard of EvalPartners. Their understandings of EvalPartners largely fits with what EvalPartners is and does, with the most common description of EvalPartners being a 'network of networks'. It is also well known for its e-learning materials, and through its online presence through listserv communications and emails.

#### VOPEs

Regional and larger national VOPEs have direct representation on IOCE's Board, and hence, on the EvalPartners' Management Group. Amongst this group, there is wide appreciation for

#### **EvalPartners' Theory-of-Change**

National evaluation capacity can be understood in terms of two variables: demand (evaluation use) and supply (quality of evaluation).

EvalPartners aims to support its partners to achieve high capacity in both supply and demand, focused at the national level.

It focuses on supporting three levels of capacity-building: 1) the enabling environment (nationally and internationally), 2) institutional, and 3) individual, plus 4) cross-cutting support on equity-focused, gender responsive

EvalPartners' role, especially for its promotion of EvalYear and its P2P programme. Some key informants from North-based VOPEs suggested that members sometimes find EvalPartners' strong focus on development issues less relevant to them.

Smaller national VOPEs do not have a direct role in EvalPartners' governance. Many of them would like to see this, or at least would like to understand EvalPartners' organizational and governance structure, which is not clear from the outside. They see EvalPartners as highly relevant to them, and the majority is aware of the P2P grant programme, as well as EvalPartners' email communications.

Non-VOPE Civil Society Organizations: The relationship between EvalPartners and non-VOPE civil society organizations has been fairly weak so far. Key informants are split in their opinions as to whether EvalPartners should directly engage with a wide range of interested stakeholders, or focus directly on VOPEs as its 'core constituency'. This is something that will need to be clarified going forward.

## **II. EvalPartners' Efforts and Effects on Capacity building at Multiple Levels**

EvalPartners' capacity building efforts focus on three levels: enabling environment, institutional, and individual. In addition, EvalPartners focuses explicitly on the goal of supporting equity-focused, gender responsive evaluation. Key findings of EvalPartners' achievements in each of these areas are summarized as follows:

### **1. Enabling Environment:**

EvalPartners' decision to declare 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation (EvalYear) has already proven to be a powerful platform for bringing a broad range of stakeholders together and to catalyze a range of advocacy and communicative actions on the part of VOPEs and other evaluation-interested institutions. It inspired UNEG to spearhead the passing of a UN Resolution committing member nations to building their national evaluation capacities.<sup>1</sup>

The Parliamentarians' Initiative was not part of EvalPartners' initial plan, but has also managed to mobilize a large number of actors and engage parliamentarians on evaluation issues in South Asia, Africa and beyond, demonstrating how an idea can be brought to action and replicated to form a movement.

The Innovation Challenge and Peer-to-Peer grants have also encouraged and allowed VOPEs to work on issues related to the enabling environment, which is a topic of high interest to many VOPEs. P2P grants have also helped many VOPEs to increase their own

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<sup>1</sup> This resolution was passed on December 19, 2014. The resolution is posted on the UN's website at: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=a/res/69/237](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=a/res/69/237)

profiles and legitimacy within their countries, and to engage with national policymakers, in direct support of the enabling environment for evaluation.

**2. Institutional Capacity Development:**

The VOPE institutional capacity toolkit and the Peer-to-Peer grants have been EvalPartners' main initiatives directed at increasing institutional capacity of VOPEs. While it is still early to judge the usefulness of the toolkit, initial feedback has been very positive. Over two rounds, Peer-to-Peer grants have leveraged a wide variety of benefits to VOPEs, including the capacity to manage grant funds, to develop formal policies in some cases, to learn from each other, and most commonly, to develop relationships with each other that increase individual and institutional capacity through knowledge exchange, and the potential for future joint action. Most of these activities have led to sustainable changes, although VOPEs remain challenged by limited resources and the insecurity of depending heavily on volunteer efforts.

**3. Individual Capacity-Building:**

Some Peer-to-Peer grants received by VOPEs have been specifically used for building the capacity of members, or other evaluation stakeholders. In addition, significant e-learning resources have been created and made available on the My M&E website, most significantly through a partnership between Claremont University and EvalPartners, which has allowed evaluators to sign up for free e-learning seminars. Claremont welcomed 1300 students over the course of this initiative, and around 20,000 people in 172 countries had participated in courses offered on the My M&E website by September 2014. As a result, many evaluators know EvalPartners because of its e-learning resources.

**4. Equity-Focused, Gender-Responsive Evaluation**

Activities under this domain include an Innovation Challenge to VOPEs funding four winners to undertake projects to promote equity-focused, gender-responsive evaluation, and creating a webinar series on the subject, hosted on the My M&E website. Numerous key informants noted that EvalPartners' emphasis on equity-focused, gender-responsive evaluation, to the exclusion of other goals and social goods that evaluation could aid, seems out of step with its otherwise open-ended, partner-driven approach. Many people suggest broadening EvalPartners' potential aims to addressing any issue that appears of social importance, such as, for example, climate change.

**III. Governance Structure, Decision-Making and Implementation Processes**

The evaluation evidence demonstrates that there is an established governance structure in place consisting of both strategic level bodies (the IAG, EPMG, and ExCom) and implementation bodies at the operational management level - the task forces. Coupled with this established EvalPartners Evaluation – Executive Summary

strategic and operational governance structure, are a stated set of principles (strategic partnership, innovation, inclusion, and a focus on human rights, gender equality, and social equity) and core values that guide EvalPartners in implementing its activities globally. While EvalPartners has an established governance structure in place, evidence suggests that improvements are needed that can be traced to gaps in the governance structure and the administrative and communications processes underlying it. Establishing shared norms and procedures will help fill these gaps while improving the decision-making, communication, and volunteer capacity of the partnership.

One of the hallmarks of EvalPartners' success as a partnership is in having garnered the sector-wide support of key and influential partners and the appearance of a network firmly established in itself and the broader evaluation community. Two factors underpin this success – EvalPartners' networked structure (role as catalyzer and convener) and its shared impassioned leadership with champions dedicated to its cause. While EvalPartners' credibility has been clearly established as evidenced by interviewee perceptions and the breadth of products developed to support VOPEs and individual capacity building, seven areas for future consideration around effective governance and decision-making were identified. These considerations recognize the strengths of EvalPartners networked model and focus on areas of improvement that will enhance the network in its communication, management, administrative, and stakeholder relation capacities. These considerations are:

1. Articulate partner roles and expectations
2. Review and formalize management processes and procedures
3. Clarify administrative procedures and lines of communication
4. Formalize organization of the task forces and allocate some activities to structures other than task forces
5. Clarify the role of the international advisory group (IAG)
6. Articulate the network's value proposition (added value) and strategic directions
7. Address the need for sustained funding

EvalPartners has achieved a great deal in a short amount of time. Its successes appear to share four characteristics: 1) resonance and relevance to the broader evaluation community; 2) a focus on building and leveraging relationships between and across evaluation actors; 3) flexibility and openness, and 4) boldness of imagination.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, this evaluation has identified recommendations in relation to nine key issues, as listed below.

#### **Key Issues:**

1. Relevance

#### **Recommendations:**

1. EvalPartners remains highly relevant, and therefore should

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- continue beyond 2015.
2. Representation
    - 2a. Clarify the role of partners beyond VOPEs in relation to IOCE and EvalPartners.
    - 2b. Clarify definition of and expectations around partnership.
  3. Communication
    - 3a. Create a user-friendly single-window website dedicated to EvalPartners.
    - 3b. Hire a dedicated Executive Director, with oversight for communications coordination.
  4. Engagement
    4. Create thematic platforms for organizations (including, but not exclusive to VOPEs) to participate in as they choose.
  5. Effectiveness (of Capacity-Building Actions)
    - 5a. Recognize and foster the characteristics that lead to success.
    - 5b. Continue the commitment to including capacity-building for VOPEs within processes as much as possible.
    - 5c. Revisit and revise the EvalPartners' logic model so that it is a better match to open-ended capacity-building for evaluation.
  6. Structures for implementation
    - 6a. Formalize structure and membership processes for task forces.
    - 6b. Document processes of decision-making, communication and engagement for task forces.
  7. Feedback & Learning
    7. Continue to monitor specific EvalPartners' initiatives, including the use of resources such as toolkits. Make results publicly available when possible.
  8. Formalization & clarification
    - 8a. Review and formalize management processes and procedures.
    - 8b. Clarify administrative procedures and lines of communication.
    - 8c. Clarify the relationship between IOCE, the UN and EvalPartners. The existing relationship has largely worked well, but there are some associated uncertainties.
  9. Funding
    9. Develop a funding strategy for the post-2015 period, tied to decisions about EvalPartners' longer term institutional home and reflecting consideration for EvalPartners global (North-South, North-North, and South-South) role.

