CHANGING THE WORLD OF EVALUATION

Executive Summary: Stocktaking Exercise of EvalPartners Accomplishments 2015-2017

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Executive Summary

Background and purpose of this EvalPartners stocktaking exercise

EvalPartners (EP) is a global voluntary movement of evaluators formed in 2012, with the aim of establishing evaluation around the world as an essential management and social change instrument and an objective of advocating for and contributing to change to the (Eval)world. EP commissioned a first comprehensive formative evaluation of its activities in 2014 and is planning another evaluation in 2019.

EP commissioned this stocktaking of its activities between 2015-2017 with the following purposes:

- To assist EvalPartners in its future planning, with better information about benefits and outcomes arising from its activities.
- To aid EvalPartners in its reporting of results to the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- To provide ideas about possible considerations that might be explored in the proposed 2019 evaluation.

While this stocktaking exercise also considered EP’s management practices and programming strategy, its priority was to identify, to the extent possible, results (including outcomes, accomplishments and influence) following from what EP has done. The stocktaking considered EP’s three main levels of operating:

- The global level.
- EvalPartners five networks.
- Peer-to-peer and Innovation Challenge projects funded by EP.

Data-gathering approaches, in addition to document review, interviews, email queries and some other methods, featured seven case studies across all three levels in order to get a better idea of emerging or actual outcomes arising from EP. As a stocktaking exercise rather than a full evaluation, with limited resources and barely 3 months in total to undertake, there are significant limitations to the ability of this exercise to explore all possible considerations in depth.

Key findings

Following are what we view as the three key findings of this stocktaking exercise:

- EP activities at all levels (global, networks, and projects) have contributed to an impressive array of outcomes, accomplishments and influence.
- EP partnership model has been identified as part of its DNA and represents its core strength. At the same time, we have highlighted the need for EP to do more to strengthen its partnerships, particularly with the UN, where the failure of the UN to nominate a co-chair since the beginning of 2017 needs to be addressed, otherwise the future of EP may well be fragile.
- EP organisation and functioning, considering its short lifespan and its voluntary nature, in general has been noteworthy, although we identify some areas that might benefit from some additional attention. We note that the EP governance structure has been evolving, which we view as a positive sign of responsiveness and flexibility.

The body of the report presents these, and other, findings in more detail.
Recommendations

To the EvalPartners Management Group (EPMG)

• EP volunteers and partners should take time to celebrate EP’s many accomplishments since it was founded some five years ago, recognising what a group of dedicated volunteers can bring about. EP should give some reflection to how this energy and engagement can be sustained.

• As a matter of priority, the EPMG and its Executive Committee should be proactive in (re)engaging with current and potential new partners, with priority to the UN. We consider the need for such action the most important finding arising from this stocktaking exercise.

• EP, while acknowledging its success in raising funds to support its current activities, should begin to explore future funding options so that its focus does not need to shift from implementation of activities when the current cycle of funding terminates.

• Consider ways of maximising the value of projects, for example:
  - Engage with projects at a mid-point, to provide encouragement and support to project volunteers and to get a better understanding of expected progress.
  - Consider webinars showcasing accomplishments of projects, as well as to increase awareness among EPMG members about what projects are doing.
  - Explore ways of extracting, and sharing, key findings, themes, and learnings from projects. These should inform future requests for proposals for projects so that learnings about what has worked well, or not, can be taken into consideration in future projects.
  - Identify ways of enhancing the way project information is currently stored, tracked, and could be made more accessible, to facilitate easier access to information about projects.

• Given their encouraging start, keep an eye on the networks, sharing experiences and accomplishments as well as learnings that might be of value to others, and as need be how any necessary support could be provided, including increased links across networks.

• Explore reasons for an apparent lack of consensus or uncertainty among EPMG members on many of the items of the self-assessment questionnaire regarding management practices, and as need be take steps to build a better and shared understanding.

• Examine EP’s strategic vision, including the need for refinements, as well as ideas about moving beyond Agenda 2020.

For the planned 2019 evaluation

It is beyond the scope of this stocktaking exercise to do more than to provide some initial ideas that the forthcoming EP evaluation might explore in more depth.

• Examine how effective EP has been in engaging and expanding its partnership arrangements, such as recommended in this stocktaking report.

• Take an in-depth look at the networks, in particular to identify outcomes and accomplishments arising from their activities and outputs, but potentially also considering the extent of coordination and cross fertilisation among the networks and with other partners, as well as consistency with EvalAgenda 2020 and EPMG’s strategic priorities.

• Undertake a more in-depth study of outcomes arising from a broader range of projects than was possible in this stocktaking exercise, as well as identifying how EP engages and supports the projects it funds and how learnings from projects are shared and disseminated.

• Examine how well the EPMG revised governance structure has been implemented.

• Review progress towards the EvalAgenda 2020, as well as implications for future strategic directions.