

Role of CSOs and VOPEs in strengthening national evaluation capacity development¹

Along the lines of the Paris Declaration followed by the Accra Consensus and the Busan Outcome document, CSOs can and should play a central role in advocating for transparency in the allocation and expenditure of public budgets; accountability for the implementation of public policies; strengthening the demand and use of evaluation to inform evidence-based policy-making; and, strengthening capacities of qualified evaluators to produce valid, credible and useful evaluations based on national and international evaluation standards. This can strengthen the quality of democracy whereby informed citizens are able to influence decision-making.

In the field of evaluation, Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) are the key CSOs. Their leadership and participation in supporting the national evaluation systems has now come to be well recognized and accepted. The number of VOPEs has increased from about 15 in the mid-1990s to over 125. This growth is not confined to numbers but also in the scope of activities and areas of influence of VOPEs. The International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), the association that identifies, links and supports VOPEs all over the world, was established in 2003 with the mandate to contribute to building evaluation leadership and capacity, especially in developing countries; to foster the cross-fertilization of evaluation theory and practice around the world; address international challenges in evaluation; and, to assist the evaluation profession to take a more global approach to contributing to the identification and solution of world problems.

The VOPEs include formally constituted associations or societies, as well as informal networks and communities of practice. Their memberships are open not only to those who conduct evaluations but also to those who commission and utilize evaluations and those engaged in building the evaluation field.

The focus of VOPEs has evolved to a more active engagement with governments, policy dialogues, and even coordination of international and regional-level work. Specific ways in which VOPEs support an enabling environment for evaluation include the following:

- Advocate for the use of evaluation evidence in policy development and implementation.
- Advocate for development and implementation of national evaluation policies that are equity-focused and gender-responsive.
- Work in partnership with governments and parliamentarians towards the establishment of national evaluation policies.
- Work with governments to set standards as benchmarks which can be used to convince other stakeholders of the importance of the evaluation principles and measures to safeguard them.
- Foster indigenous demand and supply of evaluation.
- Be available to advise commissioners of evaluations on the relevance of Terms of Reference for evaluations, including choices of appropriate design and methodology to answer key questions.
- Promote the capacity of evaluators to perform quality, credible and useful evaluations.
- Conduct independent research, monitoring and evaluation to validate national statistics provided by the authorities.
- Developed tripartite partnerships with the UN system, government and civil society.
- Mobilize resources otherwise not available for the purpose of evaluation from within the national budgets.
- Create evaluation awareness among journalists by engaging media in the process of advocacy for evaluation.

¹ This section is adapted from UNICEF, EvalPartners, IOCE in partnership with CLEAR, IEG World Bank, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, OECD Development Assistance Committee Network on Development Evaluation, UNEG and UNWomen. (2013). *Evaluation and Civil Society: Stakeholders' Perspectives on National Evaluation Capacity Development*. Available at http://www.mymande.org/Evaluation_and_Civil_Society

Several VOPEs have recognized the need not only to improve the supply of quality, credible, useful evaluations, but also to address the demand side – including advocating for governmental policies and systems that call for appropriate forms of evaluation that contribute to accountability, learning and public transparency. However there are many VOPEs that are facing challenges in establishing themselves firmly and achieving adequate capacities to make significant contributions to, and influence on, the way national evaluation systems are developing. With regards to using evaluations to influence public policies VOPEs express² limited capacity to advocate for equity and gender-sensitive evaluations and increased government budgets for monitoring and evaluation. They require increased skills to create and maintain networks, engage with parliamentarians and the media. They also need greater avenues to learn from other VOPE country experiences through improved knowledge management practices. Above all, VOPEs require capacity to develop effective policy advocacy strategies including finding ways to mobilize resources for advocacy. *The toolkit addresses a number of these areas by building advocacy tools and guidance, which fit the needs of the VOPEs.*

EvalPartners: In this context, 34 organizations launched EvalPartners (International Evaluation Partnership Initiative to Promote Civil Society Evaluation Capacities). EvalPartners is the first international collaborative initiative to contribute to the enhancement of the capacities of CSOs – notably VOPEs – to influence policy-makers, public opinion and other key stakeholders so that public policies are evidence-based, equitable and effective. It is the first global initiative with the aim of promoting coordinated efforts among development funders, UN, governments and civil society, in order to strengthen civil society evaluation capacity to play a more effective role in policy-making. EvalPartners seeks to help VOPEs to become:

- **Stronger:** their institutional and organizational capacities are enhanced;
- **More influential:** they are better able to play strategic roles in strengthening the enabling environment for evaluation within their countries, and so help to improve national evaluation systems and promote the use of evaluation evidence in developing policies geared towards effective, equitable and gender-equality responsive development results; and
- **More strategic:** they are better able to develop sustainable strategies to enhance the evaluation skills, knowledge and capacities of their members, and of evaluators more widely, to manage and conduct valid, credible and useful evaluations.

² As emerging from the VOPE's International Mapping Exercise [to learn more see, UNICEF, EvalPartners, IOCE in partnership with Cooperacion Espanola, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, UNEG, UNWomen. (2013). *Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs): Learning from Africa, Americas, Asia, Australasia, Europe and Middle East*, available at http://www.mymande.org/voluntary_organizations_for_professional_evaluation) and the deliberations from 'EvalPartners International Forum on Civil Society's Evaluation Capacities' at Chiang Mai, Thailand on 3-6 December 2012 [for more information see <http://www.mymande.org/evalpartners/forum>].