

## 29. ALBANIA

# CHALLENGES OF A NEW EVALUATION NATIONAL SOCIETY

**FATION LULI**

Albanian Society of Programme Evaluation

**MARIE GERVAIS**

Quebec Society of Programme Evaluation

### BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL EVALUATION EFFORT IN ALBANIA

The post-Communist era has led to the establishment of democracy in Albania and created an environment favourable to the development of a culture of healthy governance, managing for results and accountability. In addition, the stability of democracy observed over the past years has paved the way for significant changes, calling for greater effectiveness of the government and for more transparency regarding expenditures and outcomes. From this perspective, a major effort was made to renew the Albanian public administration. The context was thus favourable for the development of the evaluation.

However, it must be recognized that evaluation functions remain underdeveloped in Albania, and the degree that evaluation has been institutionalized within the structures of the country is weak to non-existent. It is an environment where everything has to be built. There is neither supply nor demand for evaluation, which is evident by the lack of technical and financial resources. Programme evaluation is generally justified by audit activities, monitoring or procedures to improve the quality (e.g. seeking certification from the International Organization for Standardization [ISO]), thus creating confusion about the true nature of evaluation.

From this perspective, and considering possible strategies to develop an evaluation culture and build evaluation capacity in Albania, the establishment of a national society was chosen as the priority strategy to put forward.

**TABLE 1: ASPE PATHS OF ACTION TO STRENGTHEN INDIVIDUAL, INSTITUTIONAL AND NATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITIES**

<p><b>ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN INDIVIDUAL CAPACITIES</b></p> <p><b>University education</b>                  Develop a course in the universities of Shkoder and Elbasan                  Develop training sessions with the Training Institute of Public Administration of Albania (ITAP)                  Explore the medium-term prospect for development of a diploma in evaluation</p> <p><b>Employment training</b>                  Develop a training module in evaluation for government ministries, municipalities, communes and civil society                  Provide training to Albanian trainers.</p> <p><b>Professionalization</b>                  Train a skills- and profile-evaluator                  Draft standards of practice, ethical principles and certification requirements                  Translate evaluation documents into Albanian                  Develop an Albanian section of the Better Evaluation website.</p>
<p><b>ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN ASPE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES</b></p> <p><b>Create thematic committees</b>                  Training                  Promotion                  Charter of evaluation</p> <p><b>Communicate with members</b>                  Animation of the website                  Development of a distribution</p> <p><b>Generate knowledge of the member profiles</b></p> <p><b>Build relations with the partners</b></p> <p><b>Identify opportunities to support capacity building</b></p>
<p><b>ACTIONS TO DEVELOP AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR EVALUATION</b></p> <p>Develop advocacy to institutionalize evaluation of public policies                  Create information seminars for the parliamentary deputies for the development of a legal framework in evaluation                  Develop a national evaluation policy</p>

**USE OF EVALUATION**

**The first steps of the Albanian Society of Programme Evaluation**

The processes leading to formalizing the Albanian Society of Programme Evaluation (ASPE) began in April 2011. A first informal network was formed in July 2011; ASPE was legally established and officially recognized by the Albanian government in October 2011. The reasons for establishing the society were to raise awareness, create supply of and demand for evaluation, and build a community of evaluation stakeholders. The Quebec–Canada learning case

was chosen after a brief analysis of different models of national evaluation societies by the ASPE Board of Directors.

### **Mission and strategic plan**

The ASPE mission includes contributing to the development of programme evaluation in Albania and promoting the use of evaluation in public and private organizations. In accord with this mission, ASPE developed its strategic plan 2012–2015 in four components: promoting evaluation, professional international cooperation, professional development and teaching, and funding.

### **Strengthening individual, institutional and national evaluation capacities**

Exchanges conducted with Albanian stakeholders made it possible to identify trends concerning the future paths of action for ASPE to take in three areas: strengthening individual capacities, strengthening ASPE institutional capacities and developing an enabling environment for evaluation (see Table 1).

### **Much can be done with little**

It is possible to create a national evaluation society without external funding, based primarily on the work of volunteers and partnerships. However, this has its limits and can jeopardize the short-term survival of such a society. The issue of funding is at the heart of the development capacity of voluntary organizations of professional evaluators.

### **Recognize the importance of the human factor**

Maintaining the active engagement of volunteers over time as well as their ability to work in a team are essential ingredients to ensuring the progress of a project to create a national association in evaluation.

### **Timely networking**

Experience has shown that it is more productive to focus efforts on networking projects and issues that allow the quick development of collaborations than on going for early but general support without specific targets, which quickly generates a decrease in interest.

### **Innovation**

To have quickly sought the mentorship of a more experienced national society such as the Societe Quebecoise d'Evaluation de Programmes (SQEP, Quebec Society of Programme Evaluation) gave ASPE founding members confidence in the path taken. This synergy enabled them to test some decisions and strategies before their implementation in addition to benefiting from the experiences of others.

## **NEXT STEPS**

ASPE still faces many challenges that must be strategically addressed in order to prevent burnout or unproductive dispersion of resources. ASPE should now deliver on its strategic plan and the EVALbania initiative. Thus, rapid ASPE growth must translate into stable and

continuous actions on the ground, which will confirm its legitimacy and strengthen its credibility as an Albanian actor working towards a healthy democracy and good governance.

Although it has demonstrated that it can create and maintain in its early stages of existence a national evaluation society without direct political support and with very limited resources, ASPE must now assure the interest, support and funding to achieve its ambitions. Further, it must stimulate interest in evaluation and promote the commitment of the public sector in partnerships, at different levels of government, in academia and internationally. ASPE will quickly seek the necessary funds to start the first outreach and capacity-building activities.

ASPE is aware of the challenges of leading an emerging community of evaluators. How to interest and engage evaluators, ensure their professional development and support their professional identity, in addition to enhancing quality of the practice in such a context? Efforts to develop the services offered to its members, more meetings with key stakeholders involved in the development of evaluation in Albania and to support the professionalization of evaluation will also take place. On this point, ASPE intends to devote some time to reflecting on skills, standards of practice and ethical principles in Albania.

Finally, ASPE is aware of the great scale of efforts to be deployed in Albanian society without an established evaluation culture. This makes ASPE's role as promoter of evaluation to institutions and individuals is even more important, as it carries significant potential for influence.

## CONCLUSIONS

ASPE has progressed rapidly in less than two years. It has formalized, obtained legal status and determined its statutes. Equipped with a strategic plan, ASPE has signed a collaboration agreement with SQEP, developed the structuring initiative EVALbania with support of EvalPartners and SQEP, and began international outreach.

A movement in favour of developing a culture of evaluation is clearly growing in Albania, and national structures, including the main stakeholders and civil society, are interested in actively contributing to it. The desire to develop a national evaluation society and then advance the evaluation process within different institutions and national structures is challenging, particularly when the country lacks an evaluation culture or national evaluation capacities. How does an organization operate in an environment where everything in evaluation must be built and promoted? That's why the following goals are important:

- Develop a vision of evaluation and development strategies that correspond to the specific characteristics of the country;
- Proceed with realistic and achievable steps that allow small successes that continue to encourage and stimulate;
- Get in touch and communicate with the various stakeholders interested in evaluation; and
- Adjust regularly, given the responsiveness of the environment and resources actually available.