

THE ROYAL THAI GOVERNMENT *and*  
THE INDEPENDENT EVALUATION OFFICE  
OF UNDP *present*

# NEC Conference 2015

**Blending Evaluation Principles with Development  
Practices to Change People's Lives**

EVALUATING SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
A GLOBAL EVALUATION AGENDA 2016-2020

*Organized jointly with*

UNDP REGIONAL BUREAU FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC and  
INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION ASSOCIATION  
(IDEAS)

*as partners with*

THE UNITED NATIONS EVALUATION GROUP (UNEG)



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

NEC CONFERENCE 2015 in  
Bangkok, Thailand

4TH INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL  
EVALUATION CAPACITIES

OCTOBER 2015  
[www.nec2015.net](http://www.nec2015.net)



Venue Bangkok, Thailand  
Date: October 2015

Bangkok  
Photo: Miguel Lleixa Mora

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## Introducing the 2015 NEC Conference

The Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of UNDP in partnership with the Royal Thai Government (RTG) are organizing the 4th International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) to take place in Bangkok, 26-30 October, 2015. The conference will be jointly organized and conducted in parallel with the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) Global Assembly 2015.

The theme of the conference this year is **Blending Evaluation Principles with Development Practices to Change People's Lives**. The conference will focus on how Governments can develop the necessary national evaluation capacities to evaluate sustainable human development, and participants will deliberate on inputs to a post-2015 global evaluation agenda to support the implementation of the upcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

There will be two days of joint pre-conference workshops and three days of the main conference with joint plenaries and keynote addresses, but separate parallel sessions.

## Evaluation and the post-2015 development agenda

*The Global Evaluation Context* – 2015, called *EvalYear*, was endorsed by UNEG and acknowledged as the International Year of Evaluation, in the context of the UN General Assembly resolution on National Evaluation Capacities. This is the first, stand-alone United Nations General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/69/237) on national evaluation capacity development to advocate for stronger evaluation functions at the UN and for enhanced national evaluation capacities.

Evaluation capacities will be imperative to prepare for the implementation of the new *sustainable development agenda 2016-2030* that will succeed the Millennium Development Goals. The SDGs will not only be for developing countries but for all countries in the world. This will require focusing on whether or not development can be made sustainable in all countries, and will call upon the evaluation community, policy makers and development stakeholders to define a global evaluation agenda that can help evaluate sustainable development. UNDP will need to go even beyond and plan to support efforts and assess sustainable human development and its wider implications in changing people's lives, particularly of vulnerable populations.

The SDGs in discussion do not yet have a fully articulated theory of change – 17 goals and 169 targets risk being un-implementable. However, there is an argument that “Practicality” should not blunt ambition in the final stages of the SDG negotiations. Non-binding agreements have led to greater change in behaviour than stronger enforcement but lower-ambition agreements.

“Knowledge and monitoring can drive progress, not just measure it.”<sup>1</sup> The same can be said for evaluation, as one feeds the other and can ultimately strengthen the effectiveness of development.

The evaluation community should be prepared to support an SDG platform for measurement and for improving national evaluation capacities to contribute to accountability and learning. In addition, investment in qualitative assessment and careful design of national and international platforms and networks for dialogue, information sharing and debate with attention given to evidence provided by diverse domestic actors, may become central to strengthening the SDGs.

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<sup>1</sup> May Miller-Dawkins, Global goals and international agreements, ODI.org; November 2014

Given the limited availability of credible data for evaluation and national evaluation capacity, the capacity to evaluate sustainable development and sustainable human development has particularly relevant implications for the South-South agenda. The initial findings from the post-2015 data test studies is a relevant example in this context. This includes the conclusion that reaching coordination on official and unofficial data to support the monitoring, and therefore the evaluation, of the post-2015 agenda will not be easy.<sup>2</sup>

In trying to connect the SDGs agenda with a Global Evaluation Agenda, a networked global multi-stakeholder consultative process was launched in 2014. The aim was to brainstorm about the priorities and key areas of a global evaluation agenda for 2016 – 2020. During the EvalYear, the consultation will proceed face-to-face at different global and regional events. At the end of each event, the “evaluation torch” will pass over to the next one, to symbolize that the consultation will be enriched by each additional event. The torch will be brought to the NEC Conference in Bangkok, and inputs of the previous consultations will feed into networked action planning by key stakeholders involved in the conference to contribute to development results.

## **The role of evaluation in supporting development**

Evaluating the performance of public policies and programmes is considered fundamental to foster accountability, good governance, and improve development effectiveness. Governments and development stakeholders, including the UN, use evaluation for mutual benefit – to better public goods for citizens. Prior to the UN GA resolution adopted in December 2014, recent UN General Assembly resolutions and UNDP Executive Board decisions have also encouraged the UN development system, and UNDP in particular, to support national evaluation capacities.

***The Role of the UN in Evaluation*** is to ensure evaluation draws on and contributes to the improvement of development effectiveness. Through the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), the UN promotes Norms and Standards for Evaluation. In addition, UN entities and partners use evaluation in support of accountability and programme learning; to inform UN system-wide initiatives and emerging demands; to benefit from and to contribute to an enhanced global evaluation profession. The UN has a direct role in capacity development; it is pivotal to the effectiveness of the UN. It plays a particularly important role in enhancing national capacities to monitor and evaluate progress in poverty eradication and other internationally agreed development goals.

The 2007 Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) of operational activities of the UN development system specifically recommended the development of a system-wide policy, concrete strategies and measures, and related oversight mechanisms on capacity development.

Based on the 2007 TCPR, the UN GA requested the “UN system to pursue and intensify its efforts to strengthen evaluation capacities in programme countries, most importantly, taking into account national conditions and ensuring respect for national ownership, strategies and sovereignty.”<sup>3</sup>

***UNDP’s Value Added in Evaluation*** is precisely its strategic positioning as the resident coordinator agency, and as a change agent that supports government efforts to achieve development ideals and strengthen national capacities to promote greater accountability, learning and development effectiveness.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.post2015datatest.com/event/presenting-initial-findings-post-2015-data-test/>

<sup>3</sup> GA resolution 62/208 of 2007

At UNDP, evaluation is critical in helping countries achieve these and, simultaneously, eradication of poverty and significant reduction of inequalities and exclusion.

In 2006, UNDP approved its first evaluation policy. The policy is aligned with UNEG's Norms and Standards for Evaluation, and responds to resolution 59/250 of 2004, in which the General Assembly required the systematic evaluation of the UN System operational activities by assessing their impact on poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development of programme countries.

In 2010, a revised Evaluation Policy was approved. It further highlighted intensified efforts on evaluation capacity development and makes several policy statements, including that "UNDP programme units promote and coordinate South-South and trilateral cooperation in support of capacity building for evaluation at the country level by strengthening communities of practice in evaluation and maintaining regional rosters of evaluation experts and institutes in each region. At the request of programme host governments, UNDP also provides support to national evaluation capacity development.

***The Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP*** has national evaluation capacity development as one of its core functions to support development. In collaboration with UNEG, IEO provides a "forum for discussion of evaluation issues confronting countries and enables participants to draw on recent and innovative experiences of other countries and facilitates the preparation of the ground for formulation of longer-term initiatives to strengthen national capacities for public policy evaluation through South-South and trilateral cooperation."<sup>4</sup>

The Independent Evaluation Office has worked on building evaluation capacity since 1987. It is part of IEO's mandate to "promote national ownership and leadership of, and capacity development in evaluation through country-led and joint evaluations, while ensuring the independence, quality and utility of evaluation". IEO also engages in partnerships with various professional networks and organizations to enhance quality and credibility of evaluation.

***UNDP's International Conferences on National Evaluation Capacity (NEC Conferences)*** have been one of IEO's key means of promoting national evaluation capacity development since the first conference in 2009. However, IEO has been carrying out a range of activities to support national evaluation capacity development since 2006, based on the UNDP definition of capacity development as an endogenous process "through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time". The process can be described as: country-owned, operated in a dynamic change process with back-and-forth movements of reflection and learning, gradual, opportunistic, and adaptive to varying circumstances.

Using this frame of reference, the IEO strategy approaches evaluation capacity development starting with the purpose and meaning of evaluation from a country perspective, as opposed to a donor-recipient perspective. In this regard, the purpose of evaluation goes beyond a focus on public sector efficiency and accountability, to donors and the people of the country. The purpose of evaluation encompasses other significant national goals for learning, developing innovation and social capital, and developing the knowledge assets and intellectual capital for growth, development and contribution to global advancement. IEO's strategy, in supporting the various national goals and objectives to enhance evaluation capacity, highlights the NEC Conferences - the focus of this concept note.

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<sup>4</sup> UNDP Evaluation policy

## The NEC Conference series objectives

The NEC Conference series is part of an IEO strategy to support the development of national evaluation capacity, but distinguishes itself in that it focuses on supporting the governments with which UNDP works across the globe.

In partnership with a host government, the NEC Conferences are held by the IEO in a new region every two years. The conferences are also a part of a broader architecture, in which UNEG plays a significant role by bringing together UN agencies and development partners to collaborate with each other and enhance the understanding and appreciation of evaluation as a powerful tool of public accountability and learning.

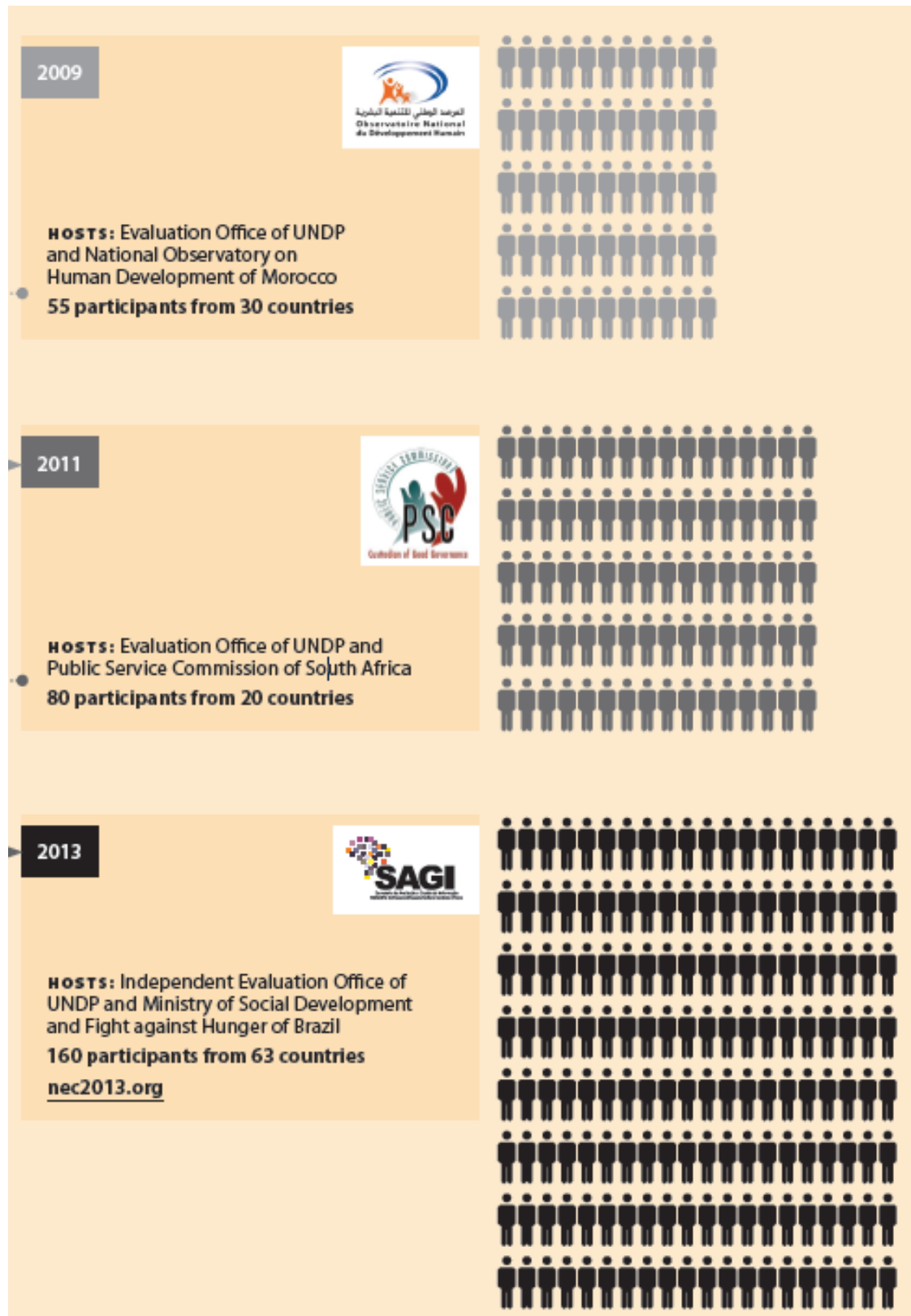
The conferences have the following general objectives:

- (1) Provide a forum for discussion of lessons and challenges at the national level pertaining to the evaluation function;
- (2) Enable participants to draw on the experiences of other countries; and
- (3) Facilitate longer-term initiatives through South-South and triangular cooperation to strengthen national capacities for public policy evaluation.

Strengthening national capacities for public policy evaluation is the primary aim of the conference. Government entities, with the responsibility of conducting evaluation, as well as being the users of the evaluation with policy and planning functions, are the primary audience. In addition, evaluation practitioners and members of evaluation networks and associations also make valuable contributions and engage in sessions and workshops as appropriate. Over the years, the NEC conferences have brought together government representatives from over 65 countries.



## The Evolution of the NEC Conferences



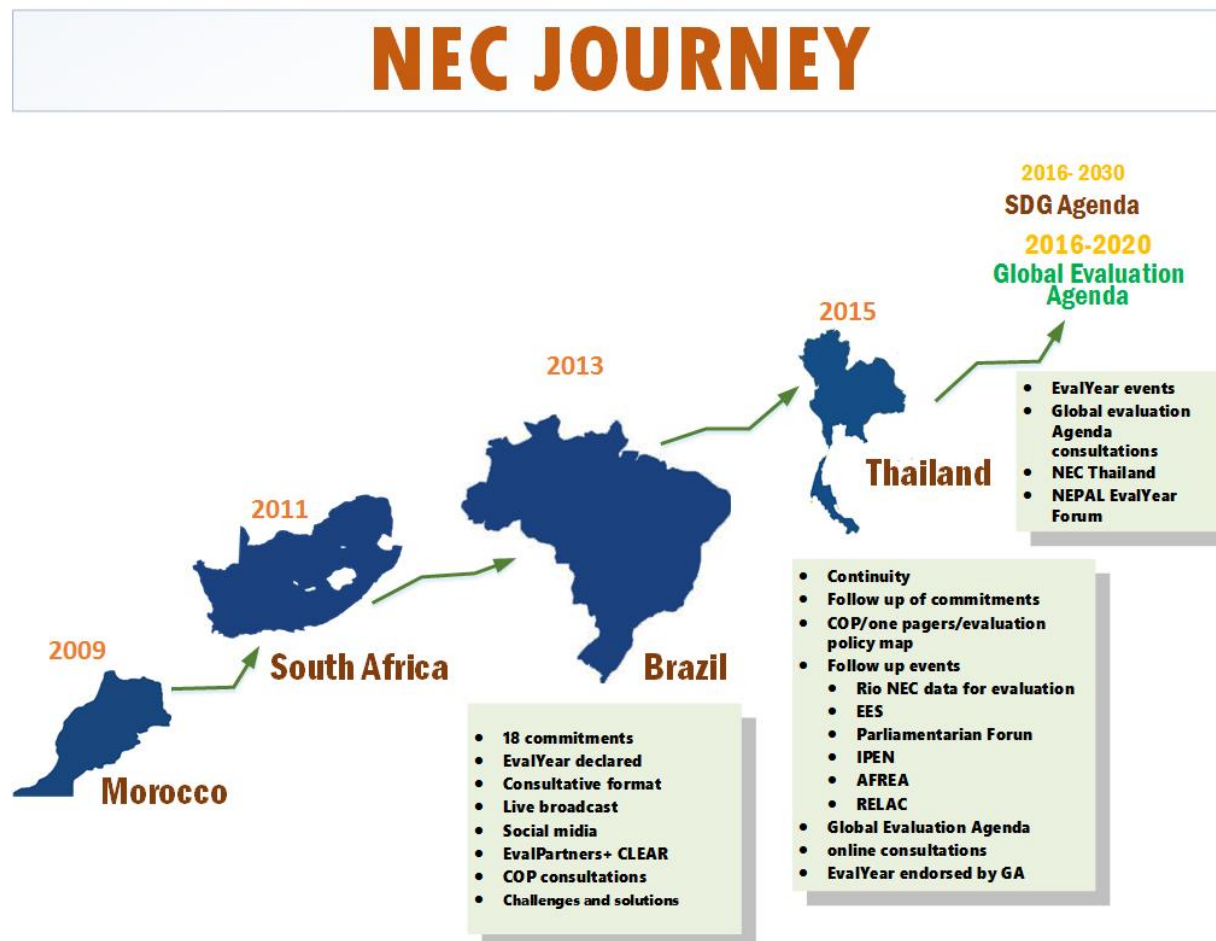
## NEC commitments

The 2013 Conference discussed solutions to challenges related to independence, credibility and use of evaluations. The Conference reached a breakthrough arriving at the [18 NEC commitments<sup>5</sup>](#) to further national evaluation capacities, suggesting benchmarks and encouraging accountability by setting goals for the NEC journey.

During the 2013 Conference, the year 2015 was declared the International Year of Evaluation, helping to sustain the momentum generated and promote the pursuit of NEC commitments. (See the published [Proceedings from the 2013 Conference<sup>6</sup>](#)).

**The 18 NEC commitments** centred around four main strategies to build national evaluation capacities:

- (1) Promote evaluation use through in-country and global advocacy;
- (2) Define and strengthen evaluation processes and methods;
- (3) Engage existing and new stakeholders in exchange and collaboration; and
- (4) Explore options for different institutional structures for managing evaluations.



<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nec2013.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/nec/NEC-proceedings-2013.pdf>



The model of the NEC conference has evolved over the years drawing from lessons and emerging demands. Each time around, support is focused on a specific region and uses different formats of exchange to promote commitment, cooperation and action beyond senior government, with sharing of responsibility with other key players in the evaluation community. Since 2013, much effort has also been invested into promoting continued engagement with past participants and institutions to deepen dialogues and foment continuity, partnership, learning, and cooperation.

## NEC Conference 2015, Thailand concept

*The 4th NEC Conference (2015)* to be held in Bangkok, in partnership with the Royal Thai Government, will be a collaboration between IEO and the UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, and jointly organized with the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) Global Assembly 2015.

The year 2015, as declared and endorsed by the UN General Assembly, is the International Year of Evaluation, but is also the deadline by which countries were expected to have achieved the Millennium Development Goals. A new set of goals are being discussed and shall be called the Sustainable Development Goals with an agenda expected to go from 2016 - 2030. The evaluation community can make a significant contribution to countries, Governments and societies, by coming together to discuss priorities for a Global Evaluation Agenda that can help develop national evaluation capacities to evaluate sustainable development, or even to go beyond and also focus on evaluating sustainable human development,<sup>7</sup> by *blending evaluation principles and human development practices to help change people's lives*.

Thus, **“Blending Evaluation Principles with Human Development Practices to Change People’s Lives”** is the theme of the conference. Discussions will deliberate on future priorities for a Global Evaluation Agenda for 2016 - 2020 to help evaluate the new Sustainable Development Goals and the agenda 2016 - 2030.

Considering the importance of 2015 and the years to come for development, the 2015 NEC conference will bring together:

- (1) the evaluation principles from UNEG, and the IEO of UNDP and its evaluation policy;
- (2) the programme implementation capacity of UNDP global and regional bureaus and country offices;
- (3) the expertise of the evaluation community, in particular, IDEAS; and
- (4) the evaluation and development practice of Governments and various partners and donors.

These different stakeholders will share knowledge and lessons and discuss the priorities for a global evaluation agenda to support sustainable and human development goals. NEC 2015 will go beyond the usual conference exchange and also connect countries and resource persons to engage in South-South cooperation for the implementation of commitments linked to national evaluation capacity development.

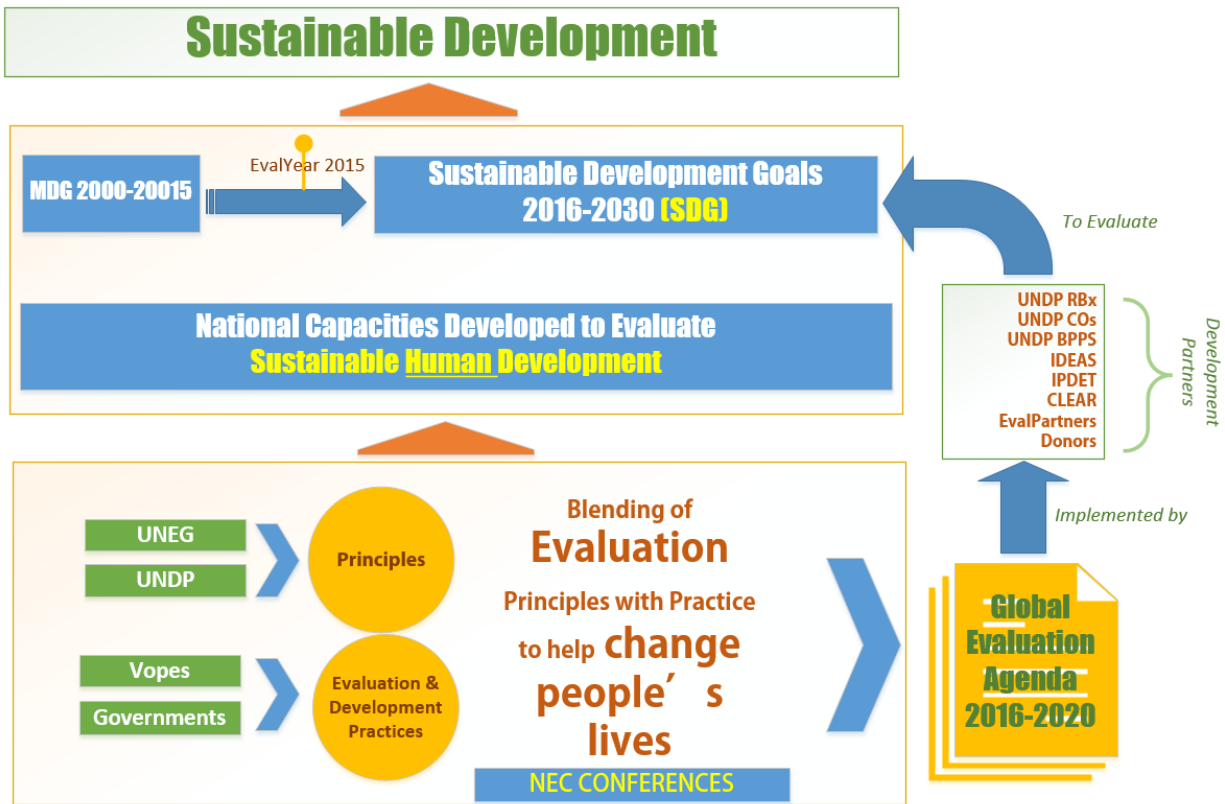
As mentioned, throughout the EvalYear, there will be over 27 evaluation events around the globe that will pass the EvalYear Torch from event to event symbolizing a global effort to promote evaluation. Each of these events will discuss priorities for a Global Evaluation Agenda. In Bangkok, the evaluation torch

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<sup>7</sup> Sustainable Human Development, carries the nature of going beyond the original concept of human development, sustainable development or environmental or economic sustainability. Sustainable human development would focus on the development of human capabilities (capacities and abilities) and the development of conditions (enabling environments, legal frameworks, liberties).

will be passed from the Brazilian Government, the host of the last NEC Conference, to the Royal Thai Government. During the conference, participants will take stock of the 18 NEC commitments agreed upon in NEC 2013 and advance the consultation around the Global Evaluation Agenda and deliberate on priorities. Together with the evaluation torch, the Royal Thai Government will hand the priorities for a Global Evaluation Agenda discussed in Bangkok, to the Government of Nepal, where the Global Evaluation Agenda will be finalized and officially launched at the EvalYear EvalPartners Global Evaluation Week organized at the Parliament of Nepal in November 2015.

The scheme below tries to visually communicate the concept of the NEC Conference, described above:



In the last decade of effort to achieve the MDGs, there has been a move towards promoting legal frameworks for evaluation and additional investments in monitoring systems, all of which helps to connect people to policy makers, based on credible evidence. The new SDGs will require additional efforts to strengthen national evaluation capacities to evaluate the new global development agenda.

The conference, while tackling the progress made, will allow representatives of government to share their experiences with peers, and provide the opportunity to engage with experts in evaluation. Engagement will strengthen evaluation and public policy linkages and encourage national evaluation function towards contributing to the new global development agenda with a global evaluation agenda.

The participants will also discuss key issues, in different format sessions, among them:

- (1) Report on 18 NEC commitments from the last conference clustered in the four themes below:
  - Building and strengthening credible national data systems for results based monitoring, and evaluation of public policies and programmes to promote evaluation use through in-country and global advocacy;

- Developments in national policy legal frameworks and their operationalization;
  - The role of parliamentarians in development national evaluation capacities; and
  - Addressing gender equity in evaluations of public policies and programmes.
- (2) Emerging key priorities for the Global Evaluation Agenda identified in online consultations so far:
- Strengthening an enabling environment for evaluation;
  - Strengthening institutional capacities of VOPEs and civil societies;
  - Strengthening individual evaluator capacity development; and
  - Inter-linkages between enabling environment, institutional capacities and individual capacities.

## NEC Conference 2015 format

In the spirit of a global partnership for the International Year of Evaluation and a Global Evaluation Agenda, this year the IDEAS Global Assembly 2015 will run parallel with the NEC Conference 2015 in the same venue with the aligned theme: “*Evaluating Sustainable Development*”.

The parallel events in the same venue will allow for participants from both events to engage in joint pre-conference workshops and joint daily plenary sessions, keynote addresses and discussions to ensure participants benefit from the different audiences and perspectives.

The NEC Conference programme will be designed to both draw from the rich experience of national evaluation and policy entities, as well as other evaluation practitioners and experts from IDEAS and the UN. The conference will be designed to also provide options for all participants and space for engagement. It will be a forum to:

- Present and exchange lessons, experiences and perspectives in conducting and using evaluations and developing national evaluation capacities;
- Discuss the status of evaluation capacities in various countries;
- Elect priorities for a Global Evaluation Agenda to help sustainable and human development; and
- Promote cooperation among countries to strengthen national evaluation systems and practices.

## Participants

The Fourth NEC Conference, similar to its precursors, is an event that is not only international in character, but will include participants from a range of institutions: from government, parliaments, development organisations, multi-lateral and bi-lateral organisations, and voluntary evaluation organisations. In 2013, the conference had 160 participants from 63 countries. It is expected that in 2015 we will attract over 200 participants from over 75 countries. Participation in the conference will be by invitation only, but NEC and IDEAS participants will be able to take part in joint sessions without additional cost.

Considering that the primary focus of the conference is strengthening the evaluation systems and practices in UNDP programme countries, the participation will be largely from governments in developing countries. The participants will include representatives of national institutions responsible for conducting and commissioning evaluations, and policy makers who are users of evaluations. Measures will be taken

to ensure there is adequate representation at the conference in terms of gender and diversity of countries and regions.

UNEG colleagues, UNDP senior management and selected capacity development, evaluation and governance experts will also be invited to attend and support the participation of Government officials and follow up of commitments after the conference.

A minimum of two and maximum of four participants from each country will be invited to attend the conference to ensure the sustainability of results and to engage a critical mass of actors to trigger changes at a country level. Furthermore, to enhance ownership and South-South cooperation in knowledge sharing and capacity exchange, the participating countries will be encouraged to finance the participation of their representatives and/or representatives from other countries, if possible. IEO also strongly suggests that each participating country appoint/sponsor a female staff member to participate in the meetings or an independent evaluator from their country to participate in the conferences and workshops.

### *Financial Support*

For participants seeking financial support, depending on availability of funds, IEO may finance the participation of one governmental official per country, for up to 80 countries. For those participants supported by IEO, travel costs (economy class) and a partial daily subsistence allowance for the days of the NEC conference will be financed. However, more optimal cost-sharing arrangements will be proposed on a case-by-case basis to ensure ownership and sustainability of the partnership.

To apply for financial support, candidates must present an abstract proposal about the theme of the conference, based on the experience of his/her country and its status in terms of national evaluation capacity development. Additionally, the candidate must have two of the four criteria listed below:

- (1) As an individual, have the potential to inform/influence change linked to national evaluation capacity in Government;
- (2) Critical mass of interest in evaluation in the country;
- (3) Government willing to co-finance participation costs, or the costs of another participant from the same or other country; or
- (4) Track record of conducting, using or commissioning evaluations.

All participants are required to pay a registration fee of USD 450 that must be covered by the participant's organization as a form of commitment, regardless of the participant receiving financial support from IEO.

Participants will also be encouraged to sign up for pre-conference workshops delivered jointly with IDEAS, for an additional charge. More information on pre-conference workshops, will be available on the conference website.

## **Conference partners**

While other agencies will be approached for collaboration, the primary partners of the conference are the Royal Thai Government, UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific and IDEAS.

Supporting partners include United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), EvalPartners, The Government of Finland, NORAD, The Government of Switzerland, UNEDAP, USAID, Thailand Evaluation Network (TEN), and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3IE).



## Contacts

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