

# 14. Building Evaluation Capacities for Evaluation of the SDGs: The Role of Young and Emerging Evaluators

**ANTONINA RISHKO-PORCESCU**

EvalYouth, Conference Task Force Secretary, EvalYouth ECA  
(Eastern Europe, Central Asia & South Caucasus),  
Ukrainian Evaluation Association, Board member 2014-2018

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a significant step towards positive changes all over the world, as they cover all spheres of human lives and refers to people in all countries. One of the main challenges is their competent and well-timed evaluation and, what is also important, the all-embracing evaluation, which is conducted by well-prepared specialists. Therefore, evaluation capacity-building is essential for efficient evaluation of the SDGs. Moreover, developing an evaluation capacity now means creating a base for evaluating the SDGs in 2030, and an important role in this process is played by young and emerging evaluators.

Evaluating the SDGs is strongly linked with the development of national evaluation systems, as the Goals illustrate the progress in all spheres of national development and create the demand for evaluation at the national level. In addition to the potential contribution of young and emerging evaluators to the final evaluation of the SDGs in 2030, they can bring added value to the current process of SDG localization through their active involvement in national and regional debates, contribution to the work of voluntary organizations for professional evaluation, innovations regarding ideas and methods for SDG evaluation, etc.

During the International Year of Evaluation in 2015, the discussions around evaluation capacities and capabilities intensified, setting the conditions for the launch of the Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020, which makes clear that the development of evaluation capacity should fully correspond to the needs of young and emerging evaluators. EvalAgenda 2020 underlines a systematic approach to national evaluation capacity development, which integrates four main dimensions<sup>244</sup> and in each of them young and emerging evaluators play key roles.

<sup>244</sup> For more information see: EvalPartners, 'Global Evaluation Agenda 2016 - 2020', Developed by a global multistakeholder consultative process, EvalAgenda 2020, <http://evalpartners.org/sites/default/files/documents/EvalAgenda2020.pdf>.

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF YOUNG AND EMERGING EVALUATORS TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EVALAGENDA 2020

The first important dimension of building national evaluation capacity is creating an *enabling environment* for evaluation. This process involves a large number of stakeholders and combines multiple components. In order to realize a consistent enabling environment, the process should involve all social groups and spread into all social spheres. In 2017, people under age 30 represent half of the world's population and those aged 15-24 number around 1.2 billion (United Nations 2017).<sup>245</sup> Although the age of starting a professional career can be later, these numbers allow understanding of the scale of voice of young professionals, providing that it will be properly heard.

Therefore, the proper involvement of young and emerging evaluators is a precondition for successful development of an enabling environment for evaluation; they can be both supporters with an active appreciation of evaluation within institutions (governmental institutions, academia, non-governmental organizations, private sector, etc.), and/or evaluation advocates for implementation of new evaluation systems.

There are external and internal influencers for developing an enabling environment. External facilitators are mainly international organizations, which provide some sort of aid and demand a strict process of monitoring and evaluation for project implementation. It could be marked as an obligation to conduct the evaluation. In many regions, especially Eastern Europe and Central Asia, international organizations involve external evaluators in their work because of their higher level of competence and greater experience of required procedures. However, external evaluators cannot fully understand the context of a particular region or country and even more importantly, their activity is temporary and often does not lead to well-grounded implementation of evaluation systems at the local level. Empowering young professionals, and young and emerging evaluators in particular, can bring new forces into the development of national evaluation capacity and create a broad pool of internal influencers who day-by-day are building the base for an enabling environment for evaluation.

National evaluation capacity highly depends on the existence of relevant number of *institutions*, which support and use the evaluation. Countries with a high national evaluation capacity are characterized by proactive civil society and growing public demand for broader transparency and public accountability. In this process, young and emerging evaluators can play a leading role as participants of grass-root initiatives, creators of platforms for discussions and engagement of broad audience. They can be also involved in governmental agencies, bringing innovative approaches to data usage and building evidence-based policy.

Supporting professional organizations in evaluation can become a necessary impetus and strong advocacy tool for the development of evaluation. High engagement of young and emerging evaluators can bring many benefits for improvement of such organizations.

---

245 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division: World population 2017, <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/index.shtml>.

They often bring a fresh perspective on evaluation activities and procedures, use technical tools more freely, can bring innovative solutions according to recent trends and also assure the future sustainability of the organization. More often they are educated in foreign environments and thus are connected to international professional networks and centres of expertise.

Academic institutions are an important basis for national evaluation capacity development, because they have the capability to conduct professional evaluation research, teach professional courses in evaluation and assure continuous training in this area. The number of young and emerging evaluators and their theoretical and initial practical backgrounds depend on the quality of educational programmes and engagement of professionals. However, young and emerging evaluators also play an active role in this area, as the educational process is a two-sided interaction, and without strong demand from young professionals for the quality and diversity of educational opportunities, the supply remains underdeveloped.

The development of *individual capabilities* for evaluation starts with young and emerging evaluators. Traditional education within university walls is not enough for providing up-to-date learning and skills improvement. The wide range of training courses, which are conducted face-to-face, online or in blended ways, as well as conferences, topic-specific webinars, debates, forums, blogs and other opportunities for increasing individual capabilities for evaluation, create good platforms for sharing knowledge and spreading the values and principles of evaluation. Young and emerging evaluators should be at the centre of learning activities, as the quality and future development of evaluation depend on realization of their potential.

Finally, the strong *interlinkages* between all dimensions facilitate the development of national evaluation capacity and create a platform for strong partnerships. Initiatives such as EvalYouth, which brings together young and emerging evaluators with the aim of increasing their professional capacity and empowering them, contribute to the development of evaluation capacities. In addition to interactions with senior evaluators, peer-to-peer interaction and experience sharing provide a platform for gaining confidence in the world of evaluation. This also is a great step towards a common understanding of the evaluation discipline on the global and local levels.

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM EVALYOUTH ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT OF EVALUATION CAPACITY

EvalYouth is a multi-stakeholder partnership under the EvalPartners umbrella which aims to increase national, regional and international capacity to produce high-quality evaluations and advocate for the inclusion of youth and young people in the evaluation process.<sup>246</sup> EvalYouth is a network of young and emerging evaluators which unites evaluators under age 35, new evaluators with less than five years of experience, recent university graduates interested in evaluation and development professionals wishing to become professional evaluators.

---

246 EvalPartners, 'EvalYouth Concept note', 2016, see <http://evalpartners.org/sites/default/files/documents/evalyouth/EvalYouth%20Concept%20Note%20-%20July%202016.pdf>.

EvalYouth is working towards three complementary directions: (1) empowering young and emerging evaluators in voluntary organizations of professional evaluators; (2) development of a mentoring programme; and (3) organization of webinars and conferences. These three priorities are confirmed at the international level to be the most critical areas in which young and emerging evaluators should be supported in order to become more involved in the field of evaluation. Moreover, these directions have implications at the regional and national levels, as to reach goals internationally we should have high support regionally and nationally.

One of the positive lessons learned from EvalYouth activity is ensuring the high *diversity* of its members and events' participants. Although the leadership of the initiative itself and its three task forces is not large, it is regionally diverse. It consists of one representative each from the United States, Canada, Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa; two representatives from the Middle East and North Africa region; and five representatives from Latin America and the Caribbean. Diversity is also one of the key characteristics of participants in its main activities. Of 852 applicants for the pilot phase of the mentoring programme, 56 percent were from Africa, 12 percent from Asia, 9 percent from Latin America and Caribbean, 9 percent from the Middle East and North Africa, 8 percent from Europe and Eurasia, 2 percent from Canada, 2 percent from the United States and 1 percent from Australia and the Pacific. In total, representatives from 114 countries expressed their interest in participation. Since the initiative is voluntary, open to all participants and oriented towards young and emerging evaluators, the number of participants is dynamic and it is difficult to illustrate exact coverage. However, the information from registration forms for online events and from the mentoring programme shows the spread of the initiative to all regions with high interest in Latin America and Africa.

The idea of diversity is also supported by *multilingual events*: the EvalYouth webinars and virtual conferences are conducted in English with simultaneous translation into French, Spanish, Russian and Arabic. This helps to attract diverse participants and create the base for discussion in each region.

Diversity is also a key characteristic of activities of EvalYouth, which helps with relatively small amounts of funding to engage a large audience. The initiative organizes annual virtual conferences (2016, 2017); a webinar series on empowering young and emerging evaluators within professional organizations; online capacity-building seminars; the mentoring programme; a video promotion campaign; and panels for young and emerging evaluators at regional and international evaluation conferences.

Another lesson learned from EvalYouth is the need for a *participatory approach that is relevant to the needs of young and emerging evaluators*. It seems obvious, but often initiatives are useful from the point of view of the organizers but do not involve broad engagement of recipients. EvalYouth is an initiative led by young and emerging evaluators; in preparing the activities of each task force, its leadership uses broad tools of needs assessment and participant engagement. During 2016-2017, two exploratory online surveys were conducted with nearly 330 young and emerging evaluators from around 100 countries. The results emphasize the importance of young professionals in the life of volunteer organizations for

professional evaluation because of their innovative ideas (mostly connected to information technology), energy, fresh perspective and contribution to future sustainability (AEA 365, 14.02.2017).<sup>247</sup> The results of another survey affirmed the necessity of capacity-building activities and the high relevance of the mentoring programme, which meets the needs of young and emerging evaluators for professional development.<sup>248</sup> Other tools often used within EvalYouth are tricider polls (a web-based voting application) about topics for conferences and webinars, short questionnaires, chats during events and pre- and post-event surveys, etc.

In addition, because EvalYouth is a network of young and emerging evaluators, *self-evaluation* and self-documentation are central, helping on the one hand to analyse more profoundly the achievements and limitation of the organized event, while on the other hand, young and emerging evaluators are gaining essential skills for their career development.

It is very important to understand the audience for EvalYouth and communicate with it on suitable channels and in a relevant manner. EvalYouth relies heavily on *social media* for engaging young and emerging evaluators from all around the world. Currently, the EvalYouth Facebook page has more than 16,400 followers, which is an indication of the high level of interest among the audience. Another important characteristic of communication within EvalYouth is the *broad usage of visualization*. The initiative presents its survey findings via infographics and posters, puts information from event registration forms into a visual map with participants' characteristics, creates engaging flyers for online conferences and webinars, etc. Such attention for visualization helps to attract a larger audience and call attention to important messages.<sup>249</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The promotion and implementation of the SDGs are very important for the creation of a better life for all people and need effective support from all stakeholders. The obligation of evaluating the SDGs requires support for the development of national evaluation capacities by creating demand and discussion with the participation of a broad audience. Evaluation plays a central role in assuring real accountability, documenting progress and reporting on

---

247 Luna, Rodrigo, Fazeela Hoosen, Alejandra Lucero, Corey Smith, and Amal Shanty, 'EvalYouth Week: YEEs and VOPEs: Addressing the Active Involvement and Institutionalization in VOPE's Governance', AEA 365, 14.02.2017, <http://aea365.org/blog/evalyouth-week-yees-and-vopes-addressing-the-active-involvement-and-institutionalization-in-vopes-governance-by-rodrigo-luna-fazeela-hoosen-alejandra-lucero-corey-smith-and-amal-shanty/>.

248 Guidoccio, Antonella, Mohamed Rage, and Qudratullah Jahi, 'EvalYouth Week: Building Evaluator and Evaluation Capacity by Mentoring Young and Emerging Evaluators', AEA 365, 15.02.2017, <http://aea365.org/blog/evalyouth-week-building-evaluator-and-evaluation-capacity-by-mentoring-young-and-emerging-evaluators-by-antonella-guidoccio-mohamed-rage-and-qudratullah-jahid/>.

249 Rishko-Porcescu, Antonina, Khalil Bitar and Bianca Montrosse-Moorhead, 'Making Stories Stick: The Power of Visualisation When Communicating with Young Evaluation Professionals', AEA 365, 30.10.2017, <http://aea365.org/blog/making-stories-stick-the-power-of-visualisation-when-communicating-with-young-evaluation-professionals-by-antonina-rishko-porcescu-khalil-bitar-and-bianca-montrosse-moorhead/>.

implementation challenges, which should be taken into particular consideration. However, often there are many limitations to evaluation capacities, especially in regions where it is donor-driven or oriented to one sector.

Young and emerging evaluators play a significant role in increasing of national evaluation capacities. Through empowering young and emerging evaluators, society receives active supporters and passionate evaluation advocates. The network of young and emerging evaluators, EvalYouth, is working at the global, regional and national levels to increase opportunities for young and emerging evaluators in terms of capacity-building activities and supporting the enhancement of an enabling environment for evaluation. Therefore, bringing discussion around evaluation of the SGDs into capacity-building activities for young and emerging evaluators has the potential for significant benefits: promotion and advocacy of global trends locally; creation of sustainability for evaluation in the future; bringing innovative and fresh perspectives to current processes of SDG localization; and the development of evaluation systems.