

COLOMBIA: SINERGIA— COLOMBIA'S SYSTEM OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

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OVERVIEW

Since the early 1990s Colombia has achieved significant advances in designing and implementing an institutional framework oriented towards performance-based management. The Constitution itself requires this system as a strategic instrument for Colombia's public administration. However, the design and implementation of the system has necessitated a series of structural reforms to construct a normative framework that facilitates both the design and the operation of the performance-based management instruments, such as monitoring and evaluation.

In this respect, the most significant reform is related to the Law of the National Development Plan (Law 152 of 1994). It establishes the key elements to be taken into account in monitoring and evaluating public policy and requires this process to be based on the plan's strategic guidelines and priorities. The National Planning Department was appointed to lead this process as the entity in charge of constructing and consolidating the system of monitoring and evaluation (SINERGIA).

With this in mind, the National Planning Department started to develop a system to provide better information for use in decision-making related to formulation and implementation of public policies and to improve efficiency in allocation of public resources. Also, the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES) in 1994 established evaluation guidelines for government agencies, aiming to strengthen public investment management capacity.

In addition, the system has focused on producing information to assess achievement of the goals in the National Development Plan. For this purpose, in 2002 the National Planning Department introduced the application SIGOB, an information system for oversight of relevant indicators. It is the main source of information for management follow-up by the Office of the President. SIGOB was the first generation of SINERGIA and provided the conceptual and institutional framework and the basic tools for monitoring and evaluation. This first phase has been devoted to methodological soundness and conceptual maturity, to

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foster a culture of performance-based management and establish a process for learning how to implement it. This has led to advances in terms of understanding the institutional context needed for a more efficient monitoring and evaluation system relevant to public administration needs.

In 2004 CONPES redefined the institutional framework in the National Planning Department to implement performance-based management. CONPES determined that SINERGIA must have three principal components: one for monitoring the goals of the National Development Plan, one for evaluating public policy and one for disseminating results and ensuring accountability.

This new organization represents the start of SINERGIA's second generation. During this phase the system has encountered various challenges related to improving it and to the use of the information it produces, such as the linkage between the goals of the National Development Plan and the allocation of resources to fulfil them.

At the beginning of the new century, evaluation of public policy was not completely understood as a tool for implementing performance-based management. This led to the need to (i) redefine the incentives for evaluation as a tool to understand the results of State interventions; and (ii) use evaluation as an input for decision-making among policymakers. These challenges were addressed by strengthening the operational scheme for implementation of SINERGIA. With this in mind, the focus of systems operations was shifted from a sector analysis based on agencies to a sector analysis oriented to understanding programme dynamics.

All of this work was led by the Office of Evaluation of Public Policy in the National Planning Department, assisted by key stakeholders in other units, such as the Ministry of Finance and the Office of the President. Also helping were those responsible for formulating the national investment budget in the National Planning Department.

SINERGIA is now moving towards a new phase, oriented to creating a strategic view of the sectors and identifying the delivery chain associated with each of the goals in the National Development Plan. Public policy monitoring will provide timely information while allowing the evaluation agenda to address the most relevant issues. As a result, formulation of public policy will respond to the public policy cycle.

COLOMBIA'S EVALUATION EFFORT

The experience acquired in designing and executing evaluation projects over the past 15 years has led to the recognition of SINERGIA as one of the most advanced systems of the Latin America region. Since 2001 Colombia has been undertaking greater numbers of evaluations, and today SINERGIA is not the only entity evaluating public policies. Academia, think tanks and other civil society organizations are also performing such studies. As a result, today more than 200 evaluations of public policy are available, and nearly 30 more are expected to start soon. The idea is to increase the flows of information to inform policymakers' decision-making processes, allocate resources more efficiently and ensure that public policies are consistent with the needs of the population. However, to understand the evolution of the evaluation process in Colombia, it is important to recognize that evaluation projects arise from the public policy cycle and that the design is based on the logical framework of the programme.

EVALUATIONS IN THE PUBLIC POLICY CYCLE

The public policy cycle (figure 1) refers to the process by which public policies are formulated, implemented, monitored and evaluated. However, the key factor of this process is its cyclical nature. This is what justifies the need for monitoring and evaluation as a learning tool that permits the retro-alimentation of the process.

The design of evaluation projects in SINERGIA responds primarily to a need for information in order to close the cycle. The purpose of evaluations is to provide pertinent inputs for formulation of government programmes. The evaluation is understood as a rigorous study of the causalities derived from the programme's intervention. The information produced is more detailed than that emerging from

FIGURE 1. PUBLIC POLICY CYCLE



FIGURE 2. LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

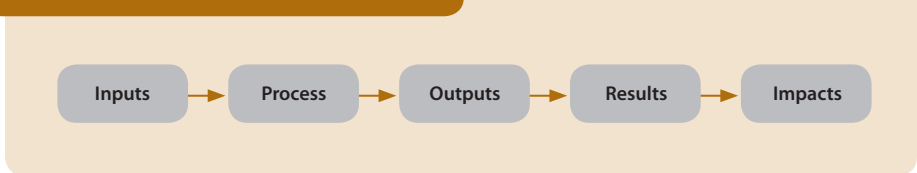
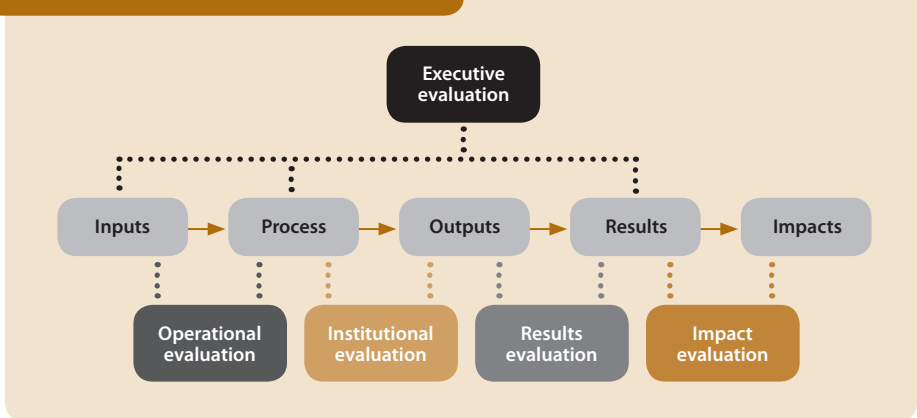


FIGURE 3. TYPES OF EVALUATIONS



monitoring indicators, which enables the evaluation to provide recommendations oriented to improving the programme and designing more efficient government interventions. Therefore, the type of evaluation to be performed depends on the stage of the programme and the type of questions the policymaker wants to assess (figure 2).

Figure 2 presents a simplified version of the logical framework in which it is possible to identify the value chain behind the programme. SINERGIA can identify a type of evaluation for each stage of the logical framework. This ensures that the analysis of causality is appropriate for what the policymaker wants to know. Figure 3 shows the type of evaluation associated with each stage of the logical framework.

SINERGIA'S EVALUATION AGENDA

Given that SINERGIA has identified a type of evaluation for each stage of the logical framework, it is clear that each type has a different scope and target population. Notwithstanding that various types of evaluation use similar analytical techniques, the differentiation remains relevant because it affects the formulation of recommendations. The evaluation types are:

- **Executive evaluation:** Begins by studying the programme design and analyses links between the design and the implementation process. The main source of information is administrative records and programme documentation.
- **Operational evaluation:** Performs a deep analysis of the programme's macro and micro processes. The objective is to use project findings as inputs to ensure that outputs are produced in the most efficient way.
- **Institutional evaluation:** Studies the institutional framework behind the programme and analyses the structure of incentives and of the programme.
- **Results evaluation:** Analyses programme improvements in terms of the welfare of the beneficiaries and studies how delivery of outputs affects the population.
- **Impact evaluations:** The most rigorous type of evaluation, it constructs experiments to determine the effect of programme intervention on an individual relative to the individual's condition in the absence of the intervention.

The country's portfolio of evaluations has been diversifying since 2002. The first evaluations led by SINERGIA were impact evaluations of the social support network.

LINKS BETWEEN EVALUATION AND OTHER MONITORING EFFORTS

Though there are differences between monitoring and evaluation, it is important to understand how they complement each other. For example, the information that results from monitoring is a useful input for developing the evaluation agenda. This is because the indicators used to oversee management of the goals in the National Development Plan permit the analyst to identify the stage within the delivery chain that is not working. The scope of the evaluation can then be shifted to clarify what is happening at that stage.

In the last decade Colombia has improved significantly the supply of information systems available for monitoring. Today three information systems can be used to follow up on programmes and projects to ensure consistency with the work plan and the goals: (i) SIGOB, the monitoring system of the government's goals; (ii) SUIFP, the unified public investment system; and (iii) SISCONPES, the monitoring system of political guidance.

THE USE OF EVALUATIONS

Evaluations are designed and executed to provide feedback on public policy. They should focus on understanding the causalities behind outputs, results and impacts, to improve the efficiency of public policy implementation. For this reason, the stakeholders who use evaluation results are policymakers, programme directors, the Ministry of Finance and the National Planning Department (the agency in charge of long-term strategic planning and formulation of the public investment budget).

However, the stakeholders' interaction is led by the Office of Evaluation of Public Policy of the National Planning Department, which is the technical secretary of SINERGIA. It has three evaluation committees, one covering social protection, one covering competitiveness and business development, and one covering modernization of the State. The committees are meant to ensure that the evaluation agenda and the analysis of its results are consistent with the country's macroeconomic reality, allocation of public resources and the strategic information needs of each sector. This approach makes it possible to assure that evaluations are relevant and timely and that the type of evaluation selected is the best choice to obtain the information requested by the policymaker.

It is worth mentioning that evaluations are conducted by external consultancy firms, think tanks or universities, to assure independence of the results and recommendations. Designing the terms of reference for these tenders is the responsibility of the Office of Evaluation of Public Policy, supervised by the three committees named above.

Since evaluations are executed by third parties, it is important to establish revision protocols to assure the quality of the information and the trustworthiness of the data used as input. For this purpose SINERGIA has established a correction process led by the relevant committee, assisted by an expert in the application of evaluation methodologies. This ensures that project outputs turn out to be useful and coherent.

The indicators and variables also undergo a rigorous review. The protocol for this review is focused on ensuring that the instruments used to assess a programme are compatible with the data, have no information bias and are representative of what one wants to know.

SINERGIA also has a database of peer reviewers, mainly academics, recognized for their expertise in the study of sector behaviour and of how state intervention can change long-term trends. These reviewers revise the products corresponding to the evaluation project and develop a technical note with their impressions of the study. The content of the note is shared with the corresponding committee and the team executing the project. This exercise is very important because the review serves to verify the quality of the analysis and the information produced by the evaluation.

SINERGIA has a vested interest in developing strong and rigorous performance-based management tools. The Office of Evaluation of the National Planning Department has a vested interest in constructing technical capacity in the public administration so that officials can use these management tools in their daily duties. To help them, SINERGIA has designed a short course that teaches the basic instruments and tools needed to understand the key facts. It also covers the necessity of implementing a performance-based management in Colombia's public administration.

Evaluation results are presented in seminars and other events to disseminate the policy recommendations widely. This informs people about how programme implementation is being adjusted based on the feedback received.