

7

ECUADOR: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS TO STRENGTHEN A NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEM



VIVIANA LASCANO CASTRO

DIRECTOR, PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION, TECHNICAL PLANNING SECRETARIAT,
GOVERNMENT OF ECUADOR

INTRODUCTION

Public policy evaluation has become increasingly important at the international level in recent years as a source of evidence for improving governance and providing better public services.

Nonetheless, the institutionalization of evaluation and of monitoring and evaluation systems requires strategies promoted by high-level political leadership and implemented in a sustained and coordinated manner through the commitment of the parties involved.

While several measures have been implemented in Ecuador to strengthen evaluation, it has not yet been possible to consolidate them and ensure their sustainability over time.

This paper begins by reviewing the current legal and institutional context. It then examines several studies in Ecuador that identify areas for improvement in evaluation. It ends by outlining the measures being implemented to strengthen the national monitoring and evaluation subsystem for public policy evaluation.

LEGAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The 2008 Constitution of Ecuador⁷⁹ strengthened the State's role in ensuring adequate planning. The Constitution states that public administration should be governed by principles that include evaluation (defined as the duty of the State to direct, plan and regulate the process of development);⁸⁰ that the Executive has the authority to evaluate national public policies and the plans created to implement them; and that this evaluation should contribute to guaranteeing constitutional rights.

79 Constitutional Assembly (2008). Constitución de la República del Ecuador.

80 Under Article 13 of the Organic Administrative Code (Código Orgánico Administrativo) (2017), the principle of evaluation means public administrations must create and promote permanent channels for evaluating satisfaction with public services.

The Constitution also strengthens the national decentralized participatory planning system, which organizes planning for development.⁸¹ The system's main objectives are related to guaranteeing constitutional rights, coordinating planning and public policy and guiding results-based management for the public sector.

Additionally, the Constitution states that people and organizations must be involved in the planning of national and local development and the evaluation of public policy.

The Organic Code of Planning and Public Finance⁸² states that the monitoring and evaluation of planning and public finance entails compiling, systematizing and analysing information on developments in these areas so that corrective measures can be adopted and new public initiatives undertaken.

In 2014, the Regulation for the Code of Planning and Public Finance⁸³ created the national monitoring and evaluation subsystem⁸⁴ as part of the national decentralized participatory planning system. The subsystem is defined as the set of standards, tools, instruments, processes and activities implemented to monitor and evaluate goals, policies, programmes and projects.

At the institutional level, the National Planning Council is the highest body of the national decentralized system of participatory planning. The Council determines the principles and policies that guide the system, approves the national development plan and the annual evaluation plan, and is responsible for corrective measures based on the results of the monitoring and evaluation of the national development plan.

Planifica Ecuador, the current technical secretariat for planning, is the governing body of the national monitoring and evaluation subsystem.⁸⁵ It leads the subsystem and issues guidelines, directives and methodologies for the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of national and sectoral public policy, as well as producing, monitoring and evaluating the national development plan. It also has powers over producing the annual evaluation plan, feedback on public policy process and decision-making, and monitoring and evaluation of the national decentralized system of participatory planning instruments, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and public interventions.

81 Defined in Article 18 of the Organic Code of Planning and Public Finance as the set of processes, entities and instruments for the planning of development and land use at all levels of government.

82 National Assembly of Ecuador (2010). Código Orgánico de Planificación y Finanzas Públicas.

83 Presidency of the Republic of Ecuador (2014). Reglamento del Código Orgánico de Planificación y Finanzas Públicas. Executive Decree 489 in Official Registry Supplement 383.

84 Defined by Article 53 of the Regulation as the set of rules, tools, instruments, processes and activities implemented to monitor and evaluate goals, policies, programmes and projects.

85 Executive Decree No. 732 of 13 May 2019 abolished the National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES) and replaced it with a new body called Planifica Ecuador. Planifica Ecuador has all the competences, powers, responsibilities, functions and delegations set out in the Constitution, the Organic Code of Planning and Public Finance and its regulations and any other regulations in force that previously belonged to SENPLADES, except for processes related to State institutions and public companies.

To comply with regulations, the Department of Public Policy Evaluation was created in 2014 as part of the former National Planning and Development Secretariat (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación y Desarrollo (SENPLADES), which raised awareness of the importance of evaluation as an instrument for consolidating results-based management in the public sector.

ANALYSIS

As several studies in the area have shown, Ecuador has a weak culture of evaluation, which has persisted over the years.

According to SENPLADES in a report published in 2008, while 52 percent of the ministries analysed had monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for planning, no accountability policy for monitoring and evaluation processes was defined. There was also a lack of participation in evaluation processes at the subnational level, alongside insufficient training and high turnover of staff.⁸⁶

SENPLADES also conducted a meta-evaluation of the country's impact evaluations identified at that point and concluded they were not part of a planning process. Experimental impact assessments predominated due to the robustness of the results, despite being a costly and slow means of providing adequate information.⁸⁷

A 2014 report by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)⁸⁸ found that the monitoring and evaluation system in Ecuador was being institutionalized and that the information it provided was not used in budget decision-making or in the formulation or improvement of programmes and policies. However, Guerrero and Velasco⁸⁹ found that the regulatory and institutional framework for evaluation was patchy and that the management of the entities involved was disjointed and sporadic. The authors identified challenges for the professionalization of monitoring and evaluation, the quality of administrative records, the communication and publication of evaluations, regulations to improve coordination and quality standards for evaluations, and creating a culture of evaluation.

86 SENPLADES–National Secretariat of Planning and Development (2008). *Notas para discusión. Definiciones conceptuales del subsistema de seguimiento y evaluación*. Quito, SENPLADES, p. 11. Available online: <https://www.planificacion.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/08/Notas-para-Discusi%C3%B3n.-Definiciones-conceptuales-del-Subsistema-de-Seguimiento-y-Evaluaci%C3%B3n.pdf> [Accessed 1 December 2019].

87 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

88 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2014). *Panorama de la Gestión Pública en América Latina y el Caribe*. Available online: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/37223/1/S1420739_es.pdf [Accessed 4 December 2019].

89 Guerrero, E. & Velasco, E. (2015). *Acercamiento a los procesos de monitoreo y evaluación de la República del Ecuador: Proceso político y énfasis en el control gerencial*. Available online: https://dds.cepal.org/redesoc/archivos_recursos/4440/Panorama_completo.pdf [Accessed 5 December 2019].

The situation remained unchanged in 2017. A report by ECLAC published in 2018⁹⁰ found that the results of the monitoring and evaluation system were still not being used in decision-making for policy, budgets and the improvement of programmes, and were not being published on the Internet. Similarly, Carrera, Cando and Terán⁹¹ conclude that the greatest challenges facing Ecuador when it comes to evaluation include regulations to generate mechanisms for implementation; coordination and the use of evaluations; increasing knowledge of evaluation in civil society; professional training for evaluators; and creating a space for synergies and cooperation among the different actors involved in evaluating public policy.

Finally, Villarreal, Castells and Castro⁹² (2018) noted that while there are monitoring and evaluation departments within public institutions, their role is to evaluate the performance of partners, processes or budgets. They also found confusion between monitoring and evaluation, reflecting the lack of technical skills in evaluation; that only a few institutions conduct evaluations and publish results; and that “there is no general awareness of the need for and importance of evaluation.”⁹³

It is clear that despite legal and institutional progress, there are still weaknesses when it comes to strengthening the culture of public policy evaluation in Ecuador.

GENERATING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Since 2008, SENPLADES has promoted evaluation in Ecuador by implementing technical capacity-building measures. These have been supported by international cooperation and have involved workshops, seminars, courses and conducting evaluations. However, their continuity has depended on political will.

As such, efforts since 2018 have focused on promoting the sustainability of the national monitoring and evaluation subsystem in order to generate prompt and quality information for decision-making and thus improve public management.

90 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2018). Panorama de la Gestión Pública en América Latina y el Caribe. Available online: https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/42396/S1701222_es.pdf [Accessed 4 December 2019].

91 Carrera, P., Cando, F. & Terán, S. (2019). Análisis de la institucionalización de la evaluación de políticas, programas y proyectos de desarrollo en Ecuador (2014–2017). *Revista Contribuciones a las Ciencias Sociales*, November 2019. Available online: <https://www.eumed.net/rev/cccss/2019/11/institucionalizacion-politicas-ecuador.html> [Accessed 5 December 2019].

92 Villarreal, A., Castells, P. & Castro, A. (2018). Evaluación de programas y políticas públicas en Ecuador: oportunidades y desafíos. Available online: <https://grupofaro.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/ValorAgregado10-Art-2.-Evaluaci%C3%B3n-de-programas-y-pol%C3%ADticas.pdf> [Accessed 1 December 2019].

93 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Based on the experiences of countries such as Costa Rica, Colombia, Mexico and South Africa, four strategy areas were proposed: regulation; technical capacity-building; a culture of evaluation; and an evaluation bank.

The first step was to identify all the parties involved and define their roles in the subsystem, as shown below:

Actors and roles of the national monitoring and evaluation subsystem

Actor	Proposed assigned role
Planifica Ecuador	Given the powers assigned by the current regulations, Planifica Ecuador should exercise greater leadership and play a more strategic role than at present.
Sectoral cabinets⁹⁴	Participation in producing the annual evaluation plan, conducting evaluations and coordinating measures related to the use of evaluation.
Public sector	Involvement in producing the annual evaluation plan, leadership in implementing it and developing and implementing action plans, as well as circulating evaluation results.
Civil society	Involvement in producing the annual evaluation plan through presenting proposals for public interventions to be evaluated. Involvement in some or all of the phases of the evaluation processes carried out by public bodies.

The strategies and activities to be implemented as part of each area were then determined based on the results chain:

1. **Regulation:** A technical evaluation standard was drawn up covering the technical and operational aspects of the annual evaluation plan, the evaluation process for public interventions and the evaluation bank to provide greater clarity on certain aspects of the legal regulations in force. A draft of the document was circulated at workshops with representatives of the actors identified above and the actors responsible for internal processes of the public policy cycle. This helped to strengthen the content of the document and start a process of positioning and raising awareness of evaluation.

The importance of developing legal and methodological instruments to define the “what”, “who” and “how” of conducting evaluations and to establish mechanisms, timing and technical capacity for linking evaluation results to public resource allocations and other phases of the public policy cycle was also deemed

94 Bodies that coordinate the activities of sectoral ministries.

to be important. Ongoing training and communication are planned after issuing the instruments.

2. **Technical capacity:** This involves training, technical support and monitoring of evaluations in the public sector to encourage their use and improve the quality of evaluations.
3. **Culture of evaluation:** This aspect involves specialized communication campaigns for target groups and events related to evaluation or policy issues that have been evaluated. It also involves creating a knowledge platform to provide the public with information and documentation on evaluation.
4. **Evaluation bank:** This involves generating guidelines for the standardized collection and storage of information through public policy design, as well as circulating and publishing evaluations. It also includes consolidating information from evaluation processes that are under way, in order to identify compliance with quality standards and public interventions that are in need of evaluation.

Strategic partnerships with the actors involved need to be generated to comply with these actions and ensure the sustainability of the results. An evaluation platform was created as a coordination space, based on the experience of the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica and support from German cooperation through the FOCELAC⁹⁵ project for capacity-building in evaluation in Latin America. The platform aims to build consensus and achieve concrete agreements, promote collaborative work and structure coordinated measures to promote evaluation in the country and the active involvement of civil society.

The first meeting in September 2019 was attended by representatives of the Executive, local governments, organized civil society and academia. To generate interest from participants, a representative of the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy took part in the event, sharing the benefits, challenges and difficulties of this type of space. Future meetings will develop a joint workplan with objectives, targets and indicators, followed by its monitoring and evaluation. However, it will also be necessary to identify the expectations and interests of the participants.

The challenges are the limited financial, human and information technology resources available for implementing evaluations, ensuring quality information generated by public institutions, the integration and coordination of monitoring and evaluation processes, civil society involvement in evaluation processes and demand for evaluations, and political willpower to implement effective measures for strengthening evaluation in the country.

95 See part 3, chapter 2, "National Evaluation Systems in Latin America: Challenges and Lessons Learned for Other Regions" by Nataly Salas for a discussion of FOCELAC.

Addressing these challenges will require a motivated and committed work team, as well as individuals who wish to get involved beyond the spaces that are created and who share the objective of consolidating the evaluation of public policy in the country.

CONCLUSIONS

Ensuring adequate development of evaluation in Ecuador requires positioning and strengthening the leadership of Planifica Ecuador as the governing body and coordinator of all evaluation activities.

Institutionalizing evaluation is the task and responsibility of all actors involved, such as the public sector (including legislative and social control functions), civil society organizations, academia, evaluator networks and international cooperation agencies. This means it is necessary to establish synergies and strategic partnerships.

A regulatory framework that specifically defines the role of each actor and their interactions in the national monitoring and evaluation subsystem, together with incentives to strengthen the use, quality, publication and dissemination of evaluations, must be developed.

Resources are needed for the implementation of evaluations in the country's public institutions to help deliver more robust results.

It is essential to develop and strengthen the technical capacity of civil servants for monitoring and evaluation to obtain the best possible results and reduce the impact of staff turnover. Greater emphasis should be given to local government.

The role of organized civil society and academia must be strengthened to ensure the sustainability of measures does not depend on political willpower alone.

High-quality mechanisms for generating, safeguarding, maintaining and transferring information must be coordinated among the bodies responsible for information.

International links between evaluation governing bodies must be strengthened for exchanging experiences and practices that can be adopted or adapted to the country.

Mechanisms should be identified to reduce the time required to obtain evaluation results, thus providing timely information for decision-making.

Critical thinking must be promoted in educational institutions so that evaluation is identified as a tool for feedback, learning and transparency.