



Ideas from IDEAS for the Bangkok Principles

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The Global Assembly 2015 of the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) was organized in parallel with the Fourth National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Conference. This was a source of excitement to both IDEAS and UNDP, charged with organizing the NEC conference. Not only did we ensure three plenary keynote addresses that would be an important input into both conferences, but we also aimed for a series of joint sessions that would explore issues of importance to both groups of participants. These joint IDEAS/NEC sessions were highly appreciated according to the satisfaction ratings provided by participants in evaluation surveys. Most importantly, both conferences were, each with a unique perspective, focused on the major challenge for evaluation in the next decade: the paradigm shift towards sustainable development, incorporating social, economic and environmental perspectives in long-term development.

One of the reasons to have these two conferences run together was to make use of the synergy between our respective groups of participants and our goals for the conferences. While both conferences had many subgoals and their own traditions to incorporate (both being the fourth of the series), in general we felt that IDEAS should focus on the challenge of evaluating sustainable development, and NEC on the consequences of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), approved just a month before in New York by the General Assembly of the United Nations, for governments to take up in their evaluation policies. IDEAS would focus on what the professional evaluation community would need to do and need to incorporate into its toolbox to be ready for a world focused on social, economic and environmental sustainability, and NEC would focus on priority setting, policymaking, institutional needs and the role of evaluation in thinking through what the SDGs would mean for the country.

Given that this book focuses on the proceedings of the NEC conference, it would be good to introduce IDEAS. It is the only global evaluation association for individual members. It is also the only association focusing on development evaluation. It exists since 2002, when IDEAS was born in Beijing. Currently we have around 900 members, from many countries all

over the world. Our aim is to work on professional norms and standards, on capacity empowerment, and exchange of knowledge and experience. We are a truly global network, a community of practice on evaluation of development. Our biennial global assemblies provide us with a platform to meet and discuss current developments. In the current series, this is the fourth such assembly. All three previous assemblies have led to authoritative publications, often cited, edited by my predecessor, Dr. Ray Rist. The last conference was focused on inequality: a subject that has returned to the limelight in the SDGs. We hope that the book *Poverty, Inequality, and Evaluation: Changing Perspectives*, edited by Ray C. Rist, Frederic P. Martin and Ana Maria Fernandez will become much used in discussions about these issues in evaluation in the coming years.

The 2015 Global Assembly invited evaluation professionals to discuss two major challenges. The first one is that the concept of development is changing dramatically. The SDGs have a universal meaning and are aspirational for all countries. They recognize that all countries should unite behind these common goals. We cannot split the world into three worlds anymore: the SDGs do not recognize a first world, a second world and a third world. So what has remained? What are we to call our countries? To turn the world into an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable one, we need to recognize that in the new paradigm, all countries in the world are developing countries. So this was the first major challenge for IDEAS participants.

The second major challenge is on evidence. The current focus on evidence that evaluations may bring to support or change policies and programmes is often on what works, 'here and now'. Taking the needs of future generations into account, we also need to find evidence on what works 'there and then'. We have many excellent and rigorous scientific tools and methods available to do this. We have sciences that look into the distant past, like astronomy, archaeology and geophysics. We have scientific theories and tools that look into the future, like risk assessments, rigorous forward-looking scenarios and systems analysis. As evaluators we need to start incorporating these tools and methods. This was the second challenge we aimed to tackle in the 2015 Global Assembly: we need to have evidence both on the 'here and now', and on the 'then and there'.

Our aim was to translate our discussions into insights that could be incorporated in the Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020. IDEAS was one of the promoters of this agenda and of the International Year of Evaluation. Coordinated by EvalPartners and in partnership with the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE), UNEG and UN Women, IDEAS supported a global consultation to shape the Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020, addressing four questions on how to ensure that professional evaluators have the capacity and the mandate to produce good-quality, context-relevant, equity-focused, and gender-responsive evaluations. This consultation was posted on the EvalPartners website and circulated globally, leading to discussions in many conferences, including the 2015 IDEAS Global Assembly. IDEAS Vice President Susan Tamondong actively facilitated a global discussion on the third question regarding the skills and competencies of professional evaluators and what they would need to play their role in evaluation; she also participated in the writing of the final draft Global Evaluation Agenda.

IDEAS operates through thematic interest groups and they played an active role in developing the programme of the 2015 Global Assembly. Parallel streams of presentations of evaluation experiences and challenges were discussed in sessions on education, health, gender and equity, impact, monitoring and evaluation systems and capacity, climate change, and, initiated at the assembly, a new thematic group on resettlement issues, focusing on evaluation of forced resettlement due to development, natural disasters or climate change. Several special sessions took place, among them one dedicated to the challenges facing the evaluation community in evaluating sustainable development.

The experiences discussed and ideas generated during the many sessions will be further explored in a substantive publication on the best of the 2015 Global Assembly, while the presentations and papers that present intermediary work will be published on the website of IDEAS. For the NEC conference and this publication of proceedings, it is sufficient to note that while governments are getting ready to think through national priorities in the light of the SDGs and the important role of evaluation, professional evaluators are thinking through how past experiences and new developments will enable the evaluation profession to respond to the challenges governments, policymakers, civil society and the private sector involved in sustainable development will pose them.

Special mention should be made of the sessions organized on capacity development. Young and emerging evaluators discussed their experiences in the profession so far, and the difficulties and challenges they encountered. In a special session chaired by board member Awuor Ponge, IDEAS announced its intention to run a mentoring programme for young and emerging evaluators. The lack of career opportunities for young evaluators was highlighted in several experiences and emerged in other sessions. It seems that currently there are opportunities for young evaluators to work as evaluation analysts, to provide data and logistical support to evaluations, and there is a definite demand for experienced and skilled evaluators, but the career path from one to the other is unclear. While IDEAS as a professional association cannot solve these issues, it can certainly ask attention for them and lobby for the interests of young and emerging evaluators. Another special joint session took place on the potential role of various forms of credentialing to ensure recognition of the profession and provide assurance on quality and ethics of evaluation professionals.

In the preparation of the Bangkok Principles, IDEAS provided strong support in the draft principles for the need of country-driven priority setting and country-led evaluation systems. There is a strong global perspective in the SDGs, focusing on global issues such as ensuring that our planet will be able to sustain humanity with food, clean air, clean water and other ecosystem services, as well as peace and security and global partnership. These challenges need to be translated to specific country circumstances – I have maintained and will continue to do so, that countries like Switzerland and Bolivia will be less focused on the threat of rising sea levels, while the Small Island Developing States tend to be less concerned about the sustainability of mega-cities. On the substantive side, the SDGs need a country-specific translation, which the NEC conference provided an important additional push towards.

Our focus was on including elements of professionalism in the Bangkok Principles – our aim was to help and support the evaluation profession in its further development. Or, as

the principles state: “As professionals of development and evaluation, we seek to attain and uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct and professionalism.” As specific points of attention, in line with the discussions at the 2015 Global Assembly, emphasis was put on the need for:

- Establishing frameworks of formal competencies and professional evaluation standards;
- Establishing evaluation training programmes within academic and public sector professional training institutions;
- Creating opportunities for local, young and emerging evaluators;
- Supporting national, regional and global evaluation professional organizations.

IDEAS will continue to contribute to further thinking on these issues. While the world is facing a challenge in thinking through how social, economic and environmental sustainability can take shape, the evaluation profession is facing the challenge on how it can provide support to these efforts, by ensuring ethics and professionalism in bringing evidence to bear on progress towards the SDGs.