TRANSFORMATIONAL EVALUATION

FOR THE GLOBAL CRISES OF OUR TIMES

Rob D. van den Berg

Cristina Magro

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EDITORS

IDEAS

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EDITORS

Rob D. van den Berg
Visiting Professor, King's College London
Leidschendam, the Netherlands

Cristina Magro
International Evaluation Academy, Member of the Council
Belo Horizonte, MG, Brazil

Marie-Hélène Adrien
Universalia Management Group, Senior Associate Consultant
Montreal, Canada

IDEAS

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To Be or Not to Be an Evaluator for Transformational Change: Perspectives from the Global South

PABLO RODRÍGUEZ-BILELLA, SILVIA SALINAS MULDER AND SONAL ZAVERI

Abstract. In the current global neoliberal context, evaluation runs the risk of becoming another service that gives answers wanted by those who pay for it. Being a transformative evaluator entails extending the focus of action to contribute to public good, broadening its interest towards medium- and long-term results, and investigating the root causes of those social problems that programmes and policies aim to deal with. This chapter introduces a theoretical framework on transformative evaluation based on theory and practice from the Global South. For that, it discusses a competencies profile for gender- transformative, context-relevant evaluations, a comprehensive approach built in Latin America. Then, selected cases are presented to identify the factors and evaluator competencies that facilitate usable evaluation and evaluations aimed at social betterment. The last section discusses the complexities underlying frequently invisible power issues and relations and the need to fine-tune one's ability to identify and address them in evaluations. The chapter stresses the importance of redefining the role and competencies needed to enhance the transformative potential of evaluators, ensuring gender responsiveness and power awareness under culturally diverse and complex realities, identifying evidence-based strategies and actions to conduct evaluations that have a positive impact on people's lives.

Introduction: Changing Evaluation Paradigms

Evaluators usually do not go into detail on how their work can improve people's lives. They assume that their responsibility does not extend beyond selecting the appropriate methodology or method capable of influencing decision-making. In the global neoliberal context, that behaviour increases the risk of making evaluation another service that answers the questions of those who pay. Although inclusive, participatory evaluations are gaining ground, many evaluations concentrate excessively on efficiency, effectiveness and measurable results on a short-term basis rather than contributing to democratic, transformative and participatory purposes that the evaluation community holds as central.

Being a transformative evaluator entails extending the focus of action of the evaluation to contribute to public good; broadening it towards medium- and long-term results and to unexpected consequences of development interventions and investigating the causes of some social problems that programmes, projects and policies are designed to address. For this, competencies are required that go beyond analysing performance aspects – those that allow the transformations that reduce poverty and inequalities among the most disadvantaged groups in society to be identified, addressed and facilitated. It is also necessary to develop competencies to 'learn to and lead for change' in contexts in which it is imperative to induce cultural changes to transform unequal power relationships and perverse social norms.

Some premises that can help evaluations become learning and transformation processes and help their results redefine strategies for greater transformational impact are that:

- evaluations do not take place in a vacuum. There are political, economic, cultural and even technological forces that can facilitate or inhibit results. Evaluators must be aware of their existence to anticipate possible evaluation scenarios and develop strategies that challenge the status quo and change paradigms.
- evaluation is a political activity, not a process devoid of value and interest. Evaluation processes are part of the 'change we want to see', and evaluators help achieve it.
- challenging power relations begins by breaking the hierarchy in the relationship between the evaluator and the 'evaluated' entity.
- evaluations are inclusive, mutually educational, empowering processes.

- methodological credibility is essential to support the findings. New techniques and tools should be explored while preserving the rigour of the analyses at the same time that conventional understanding of rigour is redefined.
- transformation is context specific.

Approaches such as the Blue Marble Evaluation[1] also bring different perspectives that seek to look beyond the contexts of projects and programmes, beyond national borders and between silos and sectors 'to connect the global with the local, connect the human and ecological, and connect evaluative thinking and methods with those trying to bring about global systems transformation' (Patton 2020, 1).

The Decade of Action towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the worldwide disruptions that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the relevance and importance of evaluation in contributing to transformative purposes such as solving deep structural problems, challenging inequalities, overcoming barriers that inhibit agility instead of moving quickly towards achievement of the SDGs, providing evidence that supports scaling development models and boosting social innovation. Are we evaluators ready to take the challenge? In these times of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, the challenge is even greater, but we definitely cannot continue working under traditional professional paradigms. We need new competencies to understand complex realities, to be people centred, ethically accountable, transformative and resilient. We need to become agents of evaluation with a purpose.

This chapter will help the reader distinguish transformative evaluation from conventional approaches, as well as specify further desirable correlations that make transformative evaluation a robust and relevant approach, addressing subtle differences from other change-oriented approaches. After making that fundamental presentation, we introduce a competencies profile for evaluators who work in diverse contexts, address gender transformation and challenge equity-related power imbalances. This comprehensive approach, developed in Latin America and shared with South Asian and African evaluators, integrates the technical, ethical and political dimensions. The third section presents selected cases from *Leaving a Footprint: Stories of Evaluations That Made a Difference* (Rodríguez-Bilella

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[1] Blue Marble Evaluation focuses on transforming evaluation to evaluate the transformations necessary to reverse damage from climate change and make human life on Earth more sustainable and equitable (Patton 2020).

and Tapella 2018) that provide evidence-based guidance on factors and evaluator competencies that facilitate usable evaluation and contribute to the body of knowledge of evaluations aimed at social betterment. The final section describes the complexities underlying frequently invisible questions of power and power relationships and the need to fine-tune one's ability to identify and address them in evaluations conducive to the occurrence of transformations.

It is hoped that this chapter will raise awareness of the importance of redefining the roles and competencies needed to enhance the transformative potential of evaluators, ensure inclusiveness (exploring mainly gender issues, because of the authors' previous work) and power awareness under culturally diverse and complex realities and identify evidence-based strategies and actions that can be used to conduct evaluations that improve people's lives.

From Conventional to Transformative: Evaluation with a Purpose

Evaluation is described as transformational herein, to contrast it with how evaluation is conventionally conducted. Conventional evaluation is driven primarily by a positivist world view that emphasizes observation and reason – to assess processes and outcomes. The definitions of evaluation describe it as a neutral exercise. Scriven's (1991) definition of judging merit, worth, value or significance is useful to distinguish evaluation from research, but many evaluators interpret this definition as saying that merit and values are universal and similar and that evaluators will be 'objective' in their assessments. Rossi's (2004) definition, which is also popular, describes use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social interventions. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Development Assistance Committee (n.d.) criteria also emphasize the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme or policy and its design, implementation and results.

One may argue that these definitions represent a pragmatic rather than a 'pure' positivist approach, but they are all based on the premise that data should inform what works or does not and in doing so establish a causal relationship. To do so, the most appropriate tools of science and technology for these tasks are applied. What is important for this discussion is the overriding evaluative intention of accountability in conventional evaluations. There

may be less understanding of or attention paid to assumptions underlying programme design, how implementation changes in unpredictable ways and how diverse populations perceive and receive results. To illustrate, a transformative approach to evaluating a cash transfer programme would want a deep understanding of *which change mattered to whom, why and whether that was 'enough'*, acknowledging structural inequities in the lives of poor women. Conventional tools, mostly Western driven, may not assess these living realities. Transformative evaluations question whether 'verifiable' results had real impacts on the power structures that dominate the lives of the marginalized and vulnerable.

The post-positivist approach questioned the conventional framing of evaluation and urged consideration of alternate views to make judgments in evaluation. Evaluators began questioning the lack of acknowledgment for the context, the evaluator's own biases, the lack of emphasis on the voices of those affected by interventions and the complexity of interactions that need to be addressed. Participatory, developmental, systems and goal-free evaluation approaches that are not positivist have gained in popularity because they address the multiple, ever-changing realities of life. Alternative definitions began to emerge, one from the Global South, stating that to evaluate is to assess the overall impact of a *social change* intervention against an explicit set of goals and objectives and to determine what works and what does not (Batliwala and Pittman 2010).

Transformative evaluation is an approach that has been in development for longer than 15 years (Cooper 2013), which can be understood as an expression in the evaluation field of the need for transformation in society. Freire's (1994) call for equality mobilized communities more than four decades ago, and work by participatory and feminist evaluators (Kabeer 2001) has championed the need to include voices that are often marginalized. The demand for transformation is also a product of our complex times, as we grapple with persistent problems of poverty, gender inequities and discrimination, as well as emerging and urgent phenomena that affect societies globally, such as COVID-19. The 2030 Agenda's bold recommendation that 'no one be left behind' spotlights inequities and inevitably demands that interventions be transformative in their approach.

The 2030 Agenda, unlike the Millennium Development Goals, uses a transformative lens, urging a 'people-centered, human rights and gender equity' approach with a particular focus on the poorest and most vulnerable and ensuring that no one is left behind. To do so, it posits that change must be transformative, which means attacking the root causes of discrimination because they generate and reproduce economic, social, political and

environmental problems and inequities (UNRISD 2015). In other words, the demand is to address root causes, not just symptoms of the problem.

Conventional and transformative evaluation represent different world views. A world view is composed of our beliefs, values and assumptions about the world we live in and interact with. In other words, we use our world view to make sense of our experiences in the world we live in. Practically, in evaluation, this means that our world view guides *our decisions* about the definition of any object of study, what questions to ask, how to ask them and how to interpret our findings. World views work in the background, and we become acutely aware of them usually when confronted with an alternative world view. The conventional methodologies are grounded in philosophical assumptions commonly known as 'positivist', whereas the transformative methodologies represent a more systemic and interpretive point of view. Positivist and more conventional evaluators are grounded in Newtonian assumptions that favour predictability, replicability and the observable and seek mostly linear, instructive causal connections. Transformative evaluators, on the other hand, value *what* phenomena are observed; suggest a more nuanced understanding of these observations; view the context in which studies are conducted as unique (often not replicable) and look for narratives, correlations and explanations rather than causal connections. This complex view of the world brings uncertainty and recommends constant adaptation; this is the uncertainty of different realities that we must acknowledge and address.

The assumptions of these two world views are different in terms of what counts as real (ontology), how we know and make sense of our what we know (epistemology) and values and beliefs (axiology), so when we talk of conventional or transformative evaluation, we need to be aware that these are different world views that, in turn, influence how we evaluate.

A transformative lens acknowledges that there are multiple perspectives, each expressing a different reality, where some voices are heard, and some are not. It is this inequality of whose voice matters that underpins our discussion about transformative evaluation. The underlying principle of social justice (Mertens 2007) demands that change processes be assessed in terms of inclusion, equity, sustainability and fairness.

Such thinking should encourage evaluators to question the purpose of evaluation, why we do what we do, who it serves and who it benefits. Evaluators are accustomed to discussions about approaches, methodology and tools but seldom about evaluation's contribution (or not) to equitable, just societal change. Should evaluations confine themselves to assessing outcomes and impact, or should evaluation be an empowering exercise that

addresses the needs of all, particularly those who are being left behind? This is an important shift from conventional evaluation, whose purposes have traditionally been for accountability and learning and to increase an agency's capability (Chelimsky 2006). The emphasis has been on accountability, usually upward, coining terms such as 'value for money' and 'social return on investment'. Even when downward accountability is acknowledged, participation of those that a programme or policy most affects can be tokenistic, with predetermined theories of change based on assumptions that do not address the complexity of power asymmetries and social change processes.

The purpose of transformative evaluation is learning, and accountability is redefined as the democratic sharing of responsibility. We move away from narrowly defined technocratic uses of evaluation to how evaluation benefits the lives of the people most affected. It requires that people (rather than 'beneficiaries') be involved in the evaluation and learning process and not be considered merely as sources from which to gather data. For instance, people that programmes affect actively and purposefully contribute to what data needs to be collected, engage in discussions about why they need certain data and discuss how the data collected and analysed will be used to make decisions. The role of the transformative evaluator is facilitative rather than directive – being in charge of the evaluation process and making judgements as an expert evaluator.

Another characteristic of transformative evaluation is how it understands the nature of change. Transformative thinking is a paradigm shift – understanding that change itself is complex and long term; that we may need to have a more nuanced world view of how change occurs and that the methodology and theoretical framework required in practice is radical, unconventional and innovative. Changes in outcomes are not just incremental or even reform-based, but truly transformative, addressing the root causes of power inequities. The types of questions we ask as evaluators, the purpose of doing so, addressing power (or not), and our actions and tools will depend upon the type of change we evaluate. Incremental change is essentially about improving performance, such as evaluating the expansion of an existing immunization programme (following the same protocols), or 'within the box' change. Reform change is change 'outside the box', where new rules are addressed, usually with policy reform or some sort of restructuring. This could refer to work conditions for female workers in an industry that has previously not addressed workers' rights or the different needs of female workers – superficial changes that improve but do not address root problems. Transformative change refers to a fundamentally new way of addressing the phenomena and could be an innovation or an experiment.

It 'questions the box' itself. An example of such transformative change is ending apartheid. The following example may explain the different types of changes: incremental change would be making available sources of energy more efficient, reform-related change would be advocating for solar energy and excluding fossil-based fuels and transformative change would be changing our lifestyle dramatically so that we live an energy-frugal lifestyle or negotiating energy consumption with Indigenous people whose land provides us the energy resources (table 8.1).

Transformative change redefines accountability as much for the people with whom the project works as for those who are left out. Those who adhere to a transformational stance are likely to seek longer funding cycles and have the patience to work through small transformational changes, such as women speaking up in meetings or, better still, a poor woman who rarely comes to a village meeting speaking up.

To summarize, the transformative evaluator has a fundamentally different understanding of what development, participation, empowerment and

Table 8.1 Types of Change

Change type	Incremental	Reform	Transformation
Core question	How can we do more of the same? Are we doing things right?	What rules should we create? What structures and processes do we need?	How do I make sense of this? What is the purpose? How do we know what is best?
Purpose	Improve performance	Understand and change the system and its parts	Innovate and create previously unimagined possibilities
Power and relationships	Confirm existing rules	Open rules to revision	Open issue to creation of new ways of thinking about power
Action logic	Project implementation	Piloting	Innovating
Archetypal actions	Copying, duplicating, mimicking	Changing policy, adjusting, adapting	Visioning, experimenting, inventing
Tools	Negotiation	Mediation	Envisioning

Source: Adapted from 2017 SDG Transformations Forum.

accountability mean. This in turn determines what we measure, how we do so and who we include in participation. There is a deep belief in ownership and sustainability. A transformative evaluator will always ask what we mean by impact, who we impact and who we leave behind. Specifically, did it make any meaningful difference, was there social justice?

Evaluators as Change Actors: A Competency-Based, Gender Transformative Approach

Evaluations are conventionally expected to be neutral and power blind, but the conscious or unconscious biases of the evaluator implicitly or explicitly frame evaluations. Evaluation in its present form has had a long history in the Global North, centred mostly on white men's contributions. The myths and assumptions that govern conventional development evaluation and are male-biased and rooted in misconceptions about the neutrality of social conditions for development are exacerbated in contexts in which political interests; patriarchal conceptions and values and ethnic, religious and other fundamentalisms influence evaluation decisions. Likewise, there is a widespread conception that gender issues are reduced to programmes and projects for women. Although evolving towards a more gender-fair approach, the idea prevails that major development problems, such as climate change, food security, malnutrition and infrastructure construction have nothing to do with these inequalities. Transformative evaluation introduces gender as a quality criterion of evaluations; boosts the importance of ethics and accountability; emphasizes people-centred evaluation practice; pays particular attention to people who experience any form of inequality, discrimination or vulnerability; and recognizes evaluators as change actors, considering their opportunity to empower actors in the evaluation process; truly assess the transformative nature of policies, programmes or projects and influence evaluation design, process, analysis and use.

Gender analysis and feminist theory have made fundamental contributions to the practice of transformative evaluation in terms of applying the principles of human rights, equality, participation and non-discrimination that allow rigorous analysis to transform the roots of gender inequality. Despite the formal advances, in practice, the evaluation standards do not emphasize the importance of examining and challenging unequal gender power relations or determine the obligation to do so in a context in which there are still false dichotomies between subjectivity and objectivity, qualitative and quantitative, effectiveness and efficiency, spending and

investment, and North and South that limit the measurement of results in terms of social change. Gender blindness in evaluations neglects the fact that reducing gender gaps is not only a matter of justice, but also a key factor to boost development, productivity and poverty reduction and thus a key quality criterion of evaluations.

Motivated by the idea to 'make gender a quality criterion of evaluations', the Network of Latin American and Caribbean Women in Management and Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results Latin America and the Caribbean implemented a virtual course titled 'From Conventions to Innovations: Agents of Change to Promote a Gender Approach in Evaluations' in 2015. This was one of the winning initiatives of the global Innovation Challenge: A Focus on Equity and Gender Responsiveness in Evaluations that the EvalPartners alliance launched. Its innovative approach included a participatory preparatory process with a multidisciplinary group of Colombian stakeholders that, using the Development of a Curriculum methodology (Norton 1997), drafted a first set of evaluation competencies for different actors related to teaching, contracting, implementing and using evaluation. The course, which brought together a powerful, committed group of professionals from government, academia and civil society, as well as evaluation practitioners, ended with an initial collectively developed profile of competencies to promote evaluation with a gender approach, articulating the technical, political and ethical dimensions (Amariles, Salinas and Grandjean 2016).

In November 2015, under the inspiration of the launch of EvalGender+ in Kathmandu, Nepal, and in the context of the promulgation of the SDGs and their challenging mandate to leave no one behind, a collaborative initiative that concluded with a Decalogue of Evaluation with a Gender Perspective emerged from among several Spanish-speaking feminist evaluators (figure 8.1) (Salinas Mulder 2015). The Decalogue constitutes a frame of reference from which to promote the gender approach as a quality criterion for evaluations and makes it easier to follow the discussion on the competencies needed to evaluate with a gender perspective from a transformative, culturally relevant perspective, including competencies necessary to influence construction of an enabling environment that demands and advocates for institutionalization of the gender approach in evaluations of development (Amariles et al. 2015).

From January to August 2017, the Development of a Culturally Relevant Curriculum on Transformative Gender Evaluation project was implemented under the EvalPartners Peer-to-Peer initiative, in which four regional networks of evaluation of the South participated (Latin American Network for

Figure 8.1 Decalogue of Evaluation with a Gender Perspective

This Decalogue seeks to help avoid the evaporation and technocratization of gender issues in evaluation in order to contribute to more gender-transformative practices.

1 Recognizes and values the political dimension of evaluation to contribute to transform gender inequalities and promote social justice.

2 Assumes that public policies, programmes, projects and their evaluation are not gender neutral.

3 Acknowledges evaluation as a quality criterion, noting that a gender perspective should be applied to all kinds of policies, programmes and projects.

4 Implies questioning gender power relations and analysing results and processes.

5 Proposes a holistic approach: one that looks at people, organizations/institutions and their environments.

6 Promotes participatory and collaborative work to build collective knowledge and empowerment.

7 Focuses on accountability, learning, improvement and advocacy with a view to transforming gender inequalities.

8 Generates analysis, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned to promote changes in gender relations.

9 Adopts and adapts gender analysis and other tools and methodologies to local contexts, languages and the cultural characteristics of communities.

10 Analyses how gender inequality intersects with other inequalities.

Source: Adapted from Amariles, Salinas, Espinosa et al. (2015).

Systematization, Monitoring and Evaluation; Network of Latin American and Caribbean Women in Management; Africa Gender and Development Evaluators Network; Community of Evaluators, South Asia). The objective was to share experiences, considering the realities of the regions, and incorporate an approach of cultural relevance into the development of evaluation competencies.
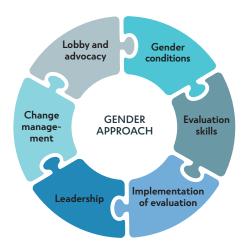
In the first stage of the project, the Latin American team developed a widely participatory process through which two main results were achieved: (1) administration of a survey to determine whether there are any capacity development programmes on gender-transformative evaluation in Latin America and the Caribbean (Spanish and Portuguese speaking) and perceptions of the evaluation community on this topic and (2) participatory refinement of the Integral Profile of Competencies for Evaluators from a

Gender Transformative Approach with Cultural Relevance that starts in Latin America and the Caribbean and is applicable to other regions (Amariles, Salinas Mulder and Rodríguez-Bilella 2018).

The competency-based approach that was developed with diverse participation between 2015 and 2017 through different initiatives discards the previously prevailing assumption that it was sufficient to know to be able to do, highlighting the importance of skills and attitudes to transform knowledge into action and, at the same time, generate the conditions of viability, ethical relevance and coherence of the evaluation process. Thus, the competency profile addresses performance and the real capacity to achieve an objective, solve a problem or achieve a result in a specific context. It combines 'ways of knowing', 'ways of doing' and 'ways of being', developing a new paradigm for evaluation practitioners from a holistic, comprehensive approach.

Figure 8.2 Competencies for Evaluators from a Gender-Transformative Approach with Cultural Relevance

The Integral Profile of Competencies for Evaluators from a Gender-Transformative Approach with Cultural Relevance proposal is organized as a system with seven dimensions designed to articulate a comprehensive approach not only from the themes or contents identified as necessary, but also from an integrated approach that addresses the political, ethical and technical aspects of evaluations (figure 8.2).

- *General conditions* refer to the cross-cutting aspects that build on the positioning of the evaluator, such as their critical knowledge of the context, conceptions of otherness and reflective capacity – in the words of one of the expert reviewers, 'the hidden profile of an evaluator'.
- *Evaluation skills* not only reflect traditional approaches to evaluation competencies (the knowledge and ability to analyse the current regulatory, institutional and policy framework related to evaluation), but also include new 'technical' competencies such as systems perspectives and adaptive approaches that are linked to a transformational approach.

- *Implementation of the evaluation* refers to the realization of the evaluation and includes the whole cycle, from planning to communication of results and recommendations.
- *Gender perspective or approach* is the heart of the profile proposal, a competency that must be integrated into all other competencies for its effective implementation. It includes a wide range of knowledge, skills and attitudes that the evaluators must develop.
- *Leadership* assumes that the environment is frequently not receptive or favourable to including a gender perspective in evaluations. Thus, evaluators committed to including a gender perspective in their practice must also play a leadership and change-actor role by promoting recognition and operationalization of gender as a quality criterion for development evaluations.
- *Change management* is one of the most important contributions and refers particularly to one of the main challenges that evaluation faces today: its use. This dimension goes much further than a necessary follow-up; it identifies the knowledge, attitudes and skills required to motivate and support implementation of changes based on the evaluation findings and recommendations.
- *Lobbying and advocacy:* the key component of the proposal has to do with connecting evaluation with the possibility of advocating for and influencing changes based on the evaluation findings and recommendations. Adoption of a system perspective is a critical component for producing substantive change in various areas and levels, from public policies to gender-blind ways of and criteria for traditional evaluation.

This profile is a work in progress. The re-emergence of conservative and even fundamentalist forces worldwide, COVID-19 and its general and gender-related consequences, expanding inequality gaps and intersected oppressions, increasing multifaceted violence, climate change catastrophes and migrations are among the complex contemporary realities that we evaluators must fully understand and address. New and dynamic evaluator competency profiles must better equip practitioners to play a transformative role.

Leaving a Footprint: Inspiration from Evaluators Who Made a Difference

The commitment to building a new set of competencies for evaluation must meet users' needs, as well as evaluation quality standards based on credible evidence. In bridging the gap between theory and practice, or between resources invested in evaluation and its use, it may be useful to reflect on evaluators' competencies based on stories of evaluations that have made a difference[2]. Analysing evaluation stories can help identify factors that facilitate development of useful evaluations and contribute to the body of knowledge of evaluations aimed at social betterment (Mark, Henry and Julnes 2000), that is, evaluations that improve people's lives.

Evaluation can transform the lives of those whom programmes and policies affect *by providing a space for their voices and their expression*, contributing to their inclusion in decision-makers' mental models. This situation is enhanced in the many cases in which decision makers do not have a close connection to the many realities of programme participants, not knowing their needs or contexts. The story of the qualitative evaluation of the Progresa/Oportunidades (Mexico) programme illustrates how evaluation identified language barriers that prevented very poor natives from benefiting from a money transfer programme. Changes to the programme allowed communication in local languages, which greatly increased the ability of people to understand the programme's requirements (e.g. children's regular school attendance) and therefore to benefit from the money transfer the programme offered.

Programmes and development policies designed to improve people's lives are increasingly being expected to be based on credible evidence. *A key competency for evaluators is their capacity to choose the best way to generate believable, convincing information*, given that what is 'believable' depends on the situation and the specific actors. Evaluation credibility may be achieved in different ways – sometimes by using an approach that helps the process to be perceived as methodologically rigorous, other times focusing on and understanding the perspectives of the most relevant actors in the intervention and other times through active participation of users in the evaluation process.

An example of active participation of users in the evaluation process was the participatory evaluation experience in the cancer prevention and

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[2] This section is based on Rodríguez-Bilella and Tapella (2018) and Perrin et al. (2015).

care programme in Valle de la Estrella in Costa Rica, where regional technical teams were involved and deeply interested in understanding how the evaluated programme worked in their area. In contrast, higher authorities limited their participation to approving the evaluation. In this way, recommendations at regional and local levels were applied soon after the evaluation finished, whereas general recommendations – dependent upon higher authorities – have not yet been applied.

In every evaluation that makes a difference, *the technical ability, rigour and competence of the evaluator or evaluation team is highly significant.* In the evaluation of the Mexican programme, the key factor was the evaluators' anthropological approach, whereas in the evaluation of the cancer prevention programme in Costa Rica, the interdisciplinary nature of the participatory evaluation was very important. Beyond the technical rigour, *communication of the evaluation results to relevant actors is becoming increasingly important.* Communication draws attention to the type of report used, adapting language to different audiences and generating lessons learned that fall within the ability of the organization's ability to respond.

Evaluators often try to keep a certain distance from evaluated programmes to protect their independence, but this increases the likelihood that the evaluation becomes distant and irrelevant for those who need to act on the results. *Being close to the evaluated programmes and their actors gives evaluators opportunities to make a difference through the evaluation process.* This recognizes that the benefits and impacts of evaluation emerge as much as – or even more than – from how an evaluation is conducted (usefulness of the process) as in relation to its findings (usefulness of its results) (Cousins, Whitmore and Shulha 2013).

Including and involving users and participants in collection and use of evaluation data is a powerful way to gain a better understanding of those data. *A powerful and desired competency is to lead participants to take responsibility for the evaluation and for the change and transformation that follows.* Active participation in the evaluation process helps develop better understanding of evaluation and contributes to commitment and use. As the Costa Rica case shows, *the more participatory the evaluation is, the more necessary it is to ensure the willingness and motivation of the most relevant actors in the intervention* (participants, local technicians, officers) in order to promote the impact of the evaluation and for it to make a difference.

In the early stages of the evaluation, it is common for most of the intervention participants, as well as the actors who implement the programmes

(e.g. field technicians, officers in charge of the implementation), to consider evaluation from a point of view of control and accountability. Generally, the start of an evaluation process does not create excitement or expectations connected to the learning dimension. The situation changes *when the evaluator or evaluation team is able to show through their words and actions that evaluation has the potential to improve programmes*, overcoming narrow views connected with monitoring and control, accountability, rewards and sanctions. The evaluation story in Mexico illustrates how indigenous women were invited to participate in the evaluation with the intention of decreasing anxiety, without explicitly mentioning that they were being involved in an evaluation process, which was made clear soon after the women arrived.

The impact of an evaluation can be increased, as a much-desired competency of an evaluator, by having champions who can influence those who make key decisions and necessary changes. It is common that the people who have real authority to make decisions are external to the programme and have not participated in the evaluation process. Thus, even though the programme staff and the directors who took part in the evaluation are committed to improving the programme, other interested parties need to be convinced that the changes are necessary. Champions in evaluation usually are people who care deeply for the affected families and communities and also have an influence on others who are able to make decisions, playing a fundamental role so that the changes can take place. In the example of the evaluation of the Progresa/Oportunidades programme in Mexico, an actor who believed in the potential of the evaluation effort and facilitated implementation of some of the suggested recommendations played that role.

The idea of speaking truth to power may be naïve and insufficient if the inherent political nature of evaluation is not recognized. This entails extending the focus of action of the evaluation to contributing to the public good, broadening its interest towards medium- and long-term results (including unexpected consequences of development interventions) and investigating the causes of some social problems that programmes and policies are designed to address. Giving evidence to subjects of the political intervention entails 'addressing the truth to the powerless', which may be considered a new and relevant competency for evaluators. This requires considering them as legitimate stakeholders in the evaluation results and empowering them to speak for themselves and act on their own benefit. Developing strategies for that is a challenge, as well as a rich field of development for evaluators.

This section discussed seven principles for credible evaluation: being inclusive, selecting good data, using rigorous techniques, communicating

results, being close to the evaluand, having a champion and focusing on use. Although some of these competencies have been around for a while, their implementation and inclusion in evaluation competency profiles is not always harmonized and consolidated, especially in the Global South.

The Devil Is in the Details: Final Reflections

Conventional evaluation tends to produce unequal power relationships and reinforces established unequal power relationships. Power is a tricky and invisible issue that 'hides' in how we relate, view, think and analyse. In this final section, we briefly address some key power dynamics in evaluation that indicate the need to expand evaluator competencies to be better prepared to identify and disentangle power 'knots'.

- *Reflexivity:* This is not a frequently considered competency. Reflexivity and self-awareness help us recognize that we see and evaluate through the eyes of our own history and environment and that our view of reality is always partial and slanted. We represent power structures and relationships that can be expressed in subtle manners. Even gender expertise does not necessarily challenge machismo and patriarchal relationships; addressing power relationships requires changing (one's) culture.
- *Ethics:* Despite good intentions, ethics frequently focuses on formal compliance, with little attention paid to accountability mechanisms that capture and analyse how ethical topics and even dilemmas are tackled in the field. The lack of contextualization and understanding of local dynamics and power relationships worsens the unreflective compliance of formal ethical procedures. Unequal power relationships are frequently reproduced during evaluation processes, and even human rights can be violated by action or by omission during fieldwork. Beware of 'unethical ethics' and be transparent about the ethical dilemmas faced during the evaluation and decisions made under those circumstances.
- *Indicators:* There is an obsession with the idea of and need for success that several factors reinforced. This threatens reflexivity, accountability and learning and can cause a lack of reflexivity about whether 'success' is linked to transformations and improvements in people's lives. Even worse, complying with the established traditional indicators and targets can imply ignoring the policy's or

programme's underlying purpose and not observing participants' (women's) human rights. Success indicators may be misleading, and 'not everything that glitters is gold'; a new set of indicators must be identified for evaluations to be truly transformative.

- *Participation:* To ensure sufficient participation, sometimes not enough attention is paid to ethical premises and basic values that are perceived as potential inhibitors. Participation may entail different assumptions and approaches that do not automatically address power imbalances. Participation will be transformative if it is empowering, if people are treated not merely as 'key informants' but their presence is recognized, valued and somehow redistributed. Participation should be based on context awareness, intercultural dialogue, affirmative actions and trust-based conversations.

Becoming a transformative evaluator is not a one-time effort but a lifetime commitment that is driven essentially by two forces: the external factors that influence the diverse, complex and dynamic realities where evaluators perform and the reflexivity and self-awareness that guide us along the personal and professional path of permanent learning, growing and reinventing.

Acknowledgements

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The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the enormous challenges humanity is facing. It has been facilitated by other crises as climate change, biodiversity loss, economic exploitation, and increased inequity and inequality. The UN Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change call for transformational change of our societies, our economies and our interaction with the environment. Evaluation is tasked to bring rigorous evidence to support transformation at all levels, from local to global. This book explores how the future of the evaluation profession can take shape in 18 chapters from authors from all over the world, from North and South, East and West, and from Indigenous and Decolonized voices to integrative perspectives for a truly sustainable future. It builds on what was discussed at the IDEAS Global Assembly in October 2019 in Prague and follows through by opening trajectories towards supporting transformation aimed at solving the global crises of our times.

By combining practical experiences with perspectives drawn from new initiatives, this book offers invaluable insights into how evaluation can be transformed to support transformational change on the global stage.

Indran A. Naidoo, Director of the Office of Independent Evaluation of IFAD

Across continents, educational systems, and historical complexities, this book builds up the language we all should speak about our field. A mandatory read for all young evaluators.

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After reading these chapters you will have a sharper look at what is relevant when managing or doing an evaluation, and you will notice that 'business as usual' will no longer be an option.

Janett Salvador, Co-founder of ACEVAL, Former Treasurer of ReLAC

This book offers original, visionary discourse and critical perspectives on the challenges evaluation is facing in the post COVID-19 pandemic era.

Doha Abdelhamid, Member of the Egyptian Academy of Scientific Research and Technology

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