

✓ The role of evaluation capacity development (ECD) in fostering country-led SDG evaluations. Lessons from Costa Rica¹

Nataly Salas-Rodríguez

German Institute for
Development Evaluation

Dirk Hoffmann

German Institute for
Development Evaluation

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Abstract: Evaluation capacity development (ECD) has been gaining momentum internationally over recent years, whereby capacities can be developed at three levels: individual, organisational and contextual. ECD projects have been implemented in Latin America by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) in partnership with Costa Rica’s Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (Mideplan) since 2015. Parallel to a recent evaluation of the cooperation received by Costa Rica from the perspective of a recipient country, DEval carried out a “systematisation of learnings” of its design and implementation. Lessons extracted from this exercise illustrate how evaluation processes undertaken by evaluation actors of the Global South can foster awareness and debate around the effectiveness of international cooperation in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected. The aim of this article is to share the results obtained through this evaluation capacity development format, with a special emphasis on lessons learned regarding country-led evaluations in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

Key words: Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD), CLE, SDG, Evaluation, Systematisation of learnings

PT-BR O papel do desenvolvimento da capacidade de avaliação (DCA) na promoção de avaliações dos ODS lideradas pelo país. Lições da Costa Rica.

Resumo: O desenvolvimento da capacidade de avaliação (DCA) tem ganhado impulso internacional nos últimos anos, onde as capacidades podem ser desenvolvidas em três níveis: individual, organizacional e contextual. Projetos de DCA têm sido implementados na América Latina pelo Instituto Alemão de Avaliação de Desenvolvimento (DEval) em parceria com o Ministério do Planejamento Nacional e Política Econômica da Costa Rica (Mideplan) desde 2015. Paralelamente a uma recente avaliação da cooperação recebida pela Costa Rica do ponto de vista de um país receptor, o DEval realizou uma “sistematização de aprendizados” de seu design e implementação. As lições extraídas deste exercício ilustram como os processos de avaliação empreendidos por atores de avaliação do Sul Global podem promover a conscientização e o debate sobre a eficácia da cooperação internacional em um mundo que está se tornando cada vez mais interconectado. O objetivo deste artigo é compartilhar os resultados obtidos por meio deste formato de desenvolvimento da capacidade de avaliação, com uma ênfase especial nas lições aprendidas no que diz respeito às avaliações lideradas pelo país no contexto da Agenda 2030.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento da Capacidade de Avaliação (DCA), CLE, ODS, Avaliação, Sistematização de aprendizados

ES El papel del desarrollo de capacidades en evaluación (DCE) en promover evaluaciones de los ODS lideradas por el país. Lecciones desde Costa Rica.

Resumen: El desarrollo de la capacidad de evaluación (DCE) ha estado ganando impulso a nivel internacional en los últimos años, donde las capacidades pueden desarrollarse en tres niveles: individual, organizativo y contextual. Desde 2015, se han implementado proyectos de DCE en América Latina por parte del Instituto Alemán de Evaluación del Desarrollo (DEval) en colaboración con el Ministerio de Planificación Nacional y Política Económica de Costa Rica (Mideplan). Paralelamente a una reciente evaluación de la cooperación recibida por Costa Rica desde la perspectiva de un país receptor, DEval llevó a cabo una “sistematización de aprendizajes” de su diseño e implementación. Las lecciones extraídas de este ejercicio ilustran cómo los procesos de evaluación emprendidos por los actores de la evaluación del Sur Global pueden fomentar la conciencia y el debate sobre la eficacia de la cooperación internacional en un mundo cada vez más interconectado. El objetivo de este artículo es compartir los resultados obtenidos a través de este formato de desarrollo de capacidad de evaluación, con un énfasis especial en las lecciones aprendidas en relación con las evaluaciones lideradas por el país en el contexto de la Agenda 2030.

Palabras-clave: Desarrollo de capacidades en evaluación, Evaluación dirigida por los países, Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS), Evaluación, Sistematización de aprendizajes

FR Le rôle du développement des capacités d'évaluation (DCE) dans la promotion des évaluations des ODD dirigées par le pays. Leçons du Costa Rica.

Résumé: Le renforcement des capacités d'évaluation (RCE) gagne du terrain à l'échelle internationale ces dernières années, où les capacités peuvent être développées à trois niveaux : individuel, organisationnel et contextuel. Depuis 2015, des projets de RCE ont été mis en œuvre en Amérique latine par l'Institut allemand d'évaluation du développement (DEval) en partenariat avec le Ministère de la Planification nationale et de la politique économique du Costa Rica (Mideplan). En parallèle à une récente évaluation de la coopération reçue par le Costa Rica du point de vue d'un pays bénéficiaire, DEval a réalisé une “systématisation des apprentissages” de sa conception et de sa mise en œuvre. Les leçons tirées de cet exercice illustrent comment les processus d'évaluation entrepris par les acteurs de l'évaluation du Sud mondial peuvent susciter une prise de conscience et un débat sur l'efficacité de la coopération internationale dans un monde de plus en plus interconnecté. L'objectif de cet article est de partager les résultats obtenus grâce à ce format de renforcement des capacités d'évaluation, en mettant particulièrement l'accent sur les enseignements tirés des évaluations dirigées par les pays dans le contexte de l'Agenda 2030.

Mots-clés: Évaluation dirigée par le pays, ODD (Objectifs de Développement Durable), Évaluation, Systématisation des apprentissages, Renforcement des capacités d'évaluation

Introduction

Evaluation capacity development (ECD) has been gaining momentum internationally over recent years. ECD is a conceptual and methodological approach that seeks to generate and strengthen capacities to perform, manage, request and use evaluations of interventions. Capacities can be developed at three levels: individual, organisational and contextual.

ECD projects had been implemented in Latin America since 2015 by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) run in partnership with Costa Rica's Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (Mideplan). This experience has enabled the implementers to gather lessons on how ECD has been applied, and replicate products that have proved particularly successful over these years.

One way evaluation capacity has been developed is through the project's technical and financial support to governing bodies in evaluation in Latin America, to carry out complex and innovative evaluations. Some examples to highlight include the evaluation of the Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation received by Costa Rica in Biodiversity and Climate Change during the 2010-2018 period (hereafter the evaluation of NRIC in BioCC); the evaluation of the policy coherence between the SDGs and other strategic agendas based on institutional and operational analysis in Colombia; the evaluation of the intersectoral articulation of Ecuador's public policy on chronic child malnutrition. Ecuador; and the evaluation of the National Biodiversity Strategy of Costa Rica.

DEval carried out a "systematisation of learnings" of the design and implementation of the evaluation of the cooperation received by Costa Rica from the perspective of a recipient country so that lessons could be extracted. This was carried out in parallel to the implementation phase of the evaluation and so could act as a useful guide for other countries that wish to evaluate the international cooperation they receive and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda.

The 'systematisation of experiences' methodology, a practice generated in Latin America within the context of popular education and human rights struggles in the 1980s and 1990s, was used to obtain lessons from this evaluation. To paraphrase one of this practice's protagonists, Jara (1998), the systematisation of experiences is a

methodology that is used to extract knowledge from specific situations and replicate it more generally to underpin professional initiatives.

This practice seeks to produce knowledge from experience, and so it follows a series of steps that enable us 'to rediscover what happened and reconstruct it historically so it can be interpreted and lessons can be obtained; value the knowledge of those who are the primary subjects of the experience; identify tensions between the intervention and the process; identify and draft the lessons learned; document experiences and develop useful communication materials and products from them' (Jara, 1998).

The aim of this article is to share results obtained through this evaluation capacity development format, with a special emphasis on lessons learned regarding evaluations in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

The evaluation of Non-reimbursable International Cooperation (NRIC) in Biodiversity and Climate Change received by Costa Rica

Since 2015, the Costa Rican government has included a National Evaluation Agenda (ANE) (Mideplan, 2018a) within its National Development and Public Investment Plan (PNDIP) (Mideplan, 2018b). The ANE features a set of strategic public interventions that are evaluated within the period covered by the PNDIP. Interventions are selected based on them fulfilling a set of basic criteria that ensure, not only that they meet conditions to make it possible to carry out evaluations (evaluability), but also that they are strategically relevant and align with the Sustainable Development Goals (Mideplan, 2018a).

Within the 2019-2022 ANE, Mideplan, as the governing body for evaluation and the country's international cooperation, included the evaluation of 'Non-Reimbursable International Cooperation received by Costa Rica in Biodiversity and Climate Change in the 2010-2018 period'. This evaluation aims to strengthen Costa Rica's commitment to the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation principles (GPEDC, 2011) and generate evidence to sustain decision-

making and guide recommendations to improve how international contributions to the country are used.

It is one of the first evaluations of NRIC within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, led by a recipient country. The evaluation not only pointed out how cooperation could be managed more efficiently within Costa Rican institutions, but also demonstrated that it is possible to highlight critical stances concerning the way development aid functions, and whether or not it responds to the needs of the country. In addition to sharing the lessons obtained from the evaluation process in relation to concrete experiences, Costa Rica also set out to share the lessons related to the conceptual approaches addressed in the themes of biodiversity, climate change and the SDGs more generally (Beauchamp *et al.*, 2020).

Thanks to the growing interest in, and international commitments to, interventions focused on environmental issues (2030 Agenda, Paris Agreement, Aichi Biodiversity Targets/Global Biodiversity Framework), increased funding can be accessed by the sector. According to the characterisation study and behaviour analysis of NRIC in BioCC in Costa Rica during the 2010-2018 period (Petry, 2019), the country received around USD 500 million in the aforementioned period for the topics highlighted above.

As this was the ANE's first thematic evaluation, and the first evaluation of NRIC led by a recipient country within the context of the 2030 Agenda, a broad and ambitious scope was defined with high expectations from directly involved institutions and the presidency of the country. As a result, a comprehensive methodology was designed that led to less opportunities to go into detail regarding individual project results. For this reason, the findings and conclusions of the evaluation should be used as starting points for future evaluation exercises that should go into more detail.

Given the breadth of the topic and the interest displayed by responsible authorities, the evaluation was both summative and formative, and focused on evaluating the effectiveness² of the management system, the results of the NRIC in these topics and their sustainability.

In addition to the broad scope of the evaluation and the significant complexity implied in consequence, its implementation phase coincided with quarantine and isolation measures imposed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both these factors forced the evaluation

team to develop a methodology that could respond to the challenges that this represented, not only in terms of the remote collection of information, but also difficulties in understanding the cultural context of public institutions when communicating virtually and the limited opportunities to develop rapport through a screen.

With these contextual conditions in mind, the evaluation team used a mixed methodological approach, with qualitative and quantitative information-gathering techniques. In addition, they approached the evaluation in an exploratory way, providing greater flexibility in terms of the different ways it could develop, dependent on the level of information available to the evaluation team.

The techniques used to gather information were interviews, documentary analysis, focus groups, contrasts of theories of change, surveys and project analysis. They were all carried out virtually, including the work sessions between the evaluation team and the evaluation management team.

The institution in charge of the evaluation was Mideplan (governing body in evaluation and international cooperation in Costa Rica), supported financially and technically by DEval through the Focelac project, and carried out between April and December 2020 by the company Red2Red, with a Spanish-Costa Rican team. To prepare and monitor its implementation, several teams were formed that integrated stakeholders involved in the subject under evaluation, namely:

- Management team: comprised of leaders from the Evaluation and Monitoring Area and the International Cooperation Area at Mideplan.
- Technical team: formed by two people from Mideplan's International Cooperation Area, two from Mideplan's Evaluation Unit, and two people from the Focelac project.
- Wider technical team: with staff from the Ministry of Environment and Energy (Minae), the main recipient of cooperation in BioCC.

One factor in particular was highlighted in this evaluation's preparation process: the lack of a solid database as primary input for the evaluation in the evaluability analysis. While the international cooperation area of Mideplan has a digital system to collect this data³, the available data was far from complete. Therefore, the first priority was to carry out a portfolio study of the cooperation received by Costa Rica (Petry, 2019) in order to provide necessary information

² Effectiveness as defined by the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation

³ International Cooperation Management System (SIGECI).

for the evaluation. This study was carried out between March and September 2019, and is foundational to the evaluation.

Link to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the United Nations in 2015 (UN, 2015) marked a paradigm shift. For the first time in history, development goals have been defined for all countries of the world. In addition, signatory countries must report on their progress in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in what are known as Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). This global reporting commitment leads to functional monitoring systems as the basis for assessing how well countries are progressing in meeting the SDGs, while evaluation is often relegated to a secondary role.

Costa Rica's commitment to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is reflected in the fact that it was the first country in the world to sign a national pact for the SDGs (Mideplan, 2016) and one of the first to present a VNR (Mideplan, 2017). In addition, the government included the SDGs in the 2019-2022 National Development Plan (Mideplan, 2018b), and the Mideplan Evaluation and Monitoring Area has included the need for interventions to demonstrate a link with one or more of the SDGs as one of the selection criteria in the National Evaluation Agenda.

However, despite these efforts, no country-level evaluations have been carried out, to date, to account for progress in meeting the agenda. Therefore, by way of fulfilling the National Pact for the Sustainable Development Goals and advancing the evaluation in the context of the 2030 Agenda, emphasis was placed on carrying out an evaluation of NRIC in BioCC. It addresses issues directly linked to the environmental sustainability component of the Agenda and several SDGs, particularly targets 13 (Climate Action), 14 (Life below Water), 15 (Life on Land) and 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).

The portfolio analysis of NRIC in BioCC for the 2010-2018 period (Petry, 2019) shows that the projects that were related to these topics (i.e. biodiversity, climate change mitigation or adaptation) during this period and that received international cooperation in Costa Rica, referred to seven SDGs in general terms⁴. However, less than 30% of

the total projects examined referred to the SDGs explicitly (Red2Red, 2020). It is important to note that during the first half of the study period, the 2030 Agenda had not yet been signed and therefore before this date, projects could not contemplate the SDGs. However, it is also worth noting that only one of the pre-2015 projects made reference to the Millennium Development Goals. In addition to identifying how the NRIC has contributed to achieving the SDGs mentioned, the evaluation also assessed to what extent 2030 Agenda principles such as gender and participatory approaches (leave no one behind, equity) were upheld.

Reflection on one's own practice: learning from the process

As we have pursued the ECD strategy in the Focelac project and examined the literature on this approach, we have found that it is possible to learn from experience. We can echo the guide 'Evaluation to connect national priorities with the SDGs. A guide for evaluation commissioners and managers' (IIED, Unicef, EvalSDGs, & Finland, 2020), which highlights the importance of sharing the lessons generated while carrying out evaluations that address components of the 2030 Agenda so that other countries or actors can design and implement similar evaluations.

The guide mentioned is written to support those responsible for commissioning, managing and implementing evaluations as they create plans and approaches to evaluate the SDGs and stress that while a successful evaluation must be designed according to the national context, it must also be guided by the 2030 Agenda principles. To this end, the guide explains the main steps to be taken in defining the scope, design and implementation of an evaluation of the SDGs, in order for an evaluation to be successful. It also includes examples of countries that have developed or embarked upon evaluations of the SDGs or with 2030 Agenda components.

One of the case studies in the guide mentioned is the evaluation of the NRIC in BioCC in Costa Rica. When the guide was drawn up, the evaluation mentioned was not yet complete but its link with the Agenda and several of the SDGs was already clear. The Focelac project commissioned the systematisation of learnings in order to identify the main lessons learned in this innovative evaluation process.

⁴ The following figures show how many projects prioritise the following SDGs: SDG 13 Climate Action (35%); SDG 15 Life on Land (19%); SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production (18%); and SDG 6 Clean Water and Sanitation (10%). The following SDGs are also mentioned: SDG 7 Affordable and Clean Energy (4%); SDG 14 Life below Water (4%); and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals (4%). The SDGs most mentioned as secondary to other factors: SDG 13 Climate Action (20%); SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals (15%); SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production (13%); and SDG 15 Life on Land (10%) (Petry, 2019).

⁵ *The systematisation of the experience was carried out by two consultants, Alexander Vargas and Luis Samandú.*

This evaluation not only includes components of the 2030 Agenda but is also an evaluation led by a recipient country of international cooperation⁵, a so-called country-led evaluation.

The systematisation focused on ‘*institutional and contextual conditions that favour or impede the preparation and implementation of the evaluation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs linked to biodiversity and climate change*’. It can also be used together with the IIED guide for SDG evaluations mentioned above as it emphasises the conditions required for countries to carry out thematic evaluations that address components of the Agenda, rather than only referring to the methodological steps required to design and implement an evaluation of the SDGs.

An important starting point for the systematisation process is the fact that the evaluation benefited from contextual conditions that were favourable for its implementation, as mentioned in previous sections, both in terms of political support and institutional and technical conditions that supported the implementation of evaluations within Mideplan, and the technical and financial support of a cooperation project.

Systematisation methodology

It is important to emphasize that the systematisation of experiences methodology seeks to reconstruct and interpret the interaction that took place between the various stakeholders during the different moments of the experience in order to recognise their underlying logic, and then generate a dialogue between the stakeholders so they can identify and select those factors that could be taken as lessons from the process (Vargas & Samandú, 2021).

The process of evaluating the NRIC in BioCC in CR was divided into two stages: the evaluation preparation and the implementation. Each of these stages involved a series of activities and relevant stakeholders. Therefore, the lessons generated in each stage are independent from the other.

The methodological approach included the four steps that characterise the systematisation of experiences:

- Define the systematisation aim, objective and focus.
- Reconstruct the experience historically, according to the defined systematisation focus.

- Identify the underlying logic that makes sense of the reconstructed experience by using a critical analysis.
- Identify the lessons generated through the experience, compile them in such a way that they can be integrated into practice and share them with other interested actors.

To collect the information required in each step, and taking into account the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, several online workshop series were conducted, first with a few people at a time, grouped by organisation (bilateral sessions) and then through plenary sessions that brought together representatives from all stakeholder groups involved in the stage that was being systematised. By doing this, the experiences of all the stakeholders were gathered and contrasted to identify areas of consensus, partial agreement and disagreement on the different topics.

The analysis followed the steps described below. The preparatory phase of the evaluation is explained in greater detail.⁶

1. Individual perception of the lived experience.
2. Collective reconstruction and analysis of the experience.
3. Identification of good practices, successes, mistakes, gaps that influenced the progress of the process.
4. Transformation of assessments into proposals, knowledge expressed in action.
5. Collective evaluation of the relevance and applicability of the most important findings.

⁶ *The systematisation of the preparation phase of the evaluation concerns an experience already completed, while the systematisation of the implementation phase was carried out simultaneously, this posed some challenges for the consulting team and for the systematisation exercise itself.*

Identified learnings

The learnings reflect three types of knowledge drawn from experience:

- Lessons already validated by the experience.
- Proposals for solving difficulties encountered or situations to avoid.
- Proposals for doing things differently.

It is also necessary to emphasize that the lessons identified within the framework of the consultancy cannot be understood outside the particular context of this evaluation and the people involved in the process. Serious consideration, therefore, must be given when deciding if these proposals could be used in opportunities with similar characteristics. Furthermore, the learnings from the

evaluation process were experienced in a heterogeneous manner by the stakeholders involved, so it is not possible to generalise them.

The systematisation themes highlighted below have been selected due to their impact on how evaluation is carried out, based on the analysis and conditions prioritised by the different stakeholders:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Contextual conditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies, plans and other policy instruments • Information management |
| Institutional conditions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination and institutional complementarity • Evaluation design and methodology |

The main lessons taken from the evaluation process (preparation and implementation) through the systematisation are detailed below.

1. Policies, plans and other policy instruments

- A National Development Plan that aligns with the SDGs provides a favourable framework to prepare the evaluation.
- The inclusion of the evaluation in Costa Rica's National Evaluation Agenda confirms the commitment of the political-institutional system to this evaluation and holds it among the national evaluation priorities.
- When undertaking unprecedented evaluations such as those concerning the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, it is good to be ambitious, but at the same time it is necessary to balance the scope with the possibilities available and determine the feasibility of evaluating the issue with respect to: existing information, resources (financial, human and time) and composition of the evaluation team.
- Having the political support of the President of the Republic, key ministries and leaders to carry out the evaluation provides an important impetus to the process of preparing and implementing the evaluation.

2. Information management

- When planning an evaluation involving public institutions that are relevant to a specific topic, it is necessary to know and take into account how information is managed in the different institutions, in order to understand the degree of difficulty involved in accessing it with any given search tool.
- It is necessary to ensure, at the evaluation preparatory stage, that the evaluation matrix formulated is consistent with information available.

3. Coordination and institutional complementarity

Here, the learnings are organised around different coordination components.

Management

- It is important to have one department that guides the process methodologically and organises how the different institutions work together.
- It is important to be able to access validated tools to design and conduct processes of this nature, as a whole and for each of the steps that constitute it.
- It is essential to involve the management team during the preparation stage of the evaluation, so that they are familiar with the topics to be evaluated and thus can provide a higher level of support in the design stage.

Team

- In evaluations that are carried out by institutional stakeholders with different expertise, knowledge, perspectives and work areas, it is essential to achieve high levels of involvement from

- all, recognising and respecting their specific contributions, so that they can work together with respect for their differences.
- It is necessary to ensure the levelling of knowledge between the different members of the management team. Each sector contributes with its competencies. Prior to the evaluation itself, it is advisable to organise contextualisation workshops that prioritise shared viewpoints.
 - A thorough and participatory preparation of the evaluation process is desirable, so that there is clarity from the outset about the roles of the different actors and how each one will participate (decision-making, consultation, input, etc.).
 - It is essential to build trust between actors that come from different institutions, in order to promote collaboration and synergies between a variety of experts.
 - It is also essential to integrate the sectors that will make use of the evaluation from the very beginning of the preparation phase.

Induction

- Induction programmes that facilitate the integration and cohesion of work teams are necessary within an interinstitutional coordination framework. In order for the work teams to integrate effectively in such a coordination, an induction programme is necessary, with training elements on evaluation and the specific topics to be evaluated.

Communication

- It is necessary to define a multidirectional communication strategy that facilitates decision making and the interaction between different stakeholders involved.
- A systematic record of discussions, work and agreements integral to the process is essential. This serves as a collective memory for evaluating the process and extracting learnings.

4. Evaluation design and methodology

Definition of scope

- Prior to defining the scope of such an evaluation, it is advisable to consult with various experts from different disciplines who can help narrow the scope.
- Allocate resources (time, human resources, funding) to collect inputs and pre-determine more accurately the scope and aim of the evaluation.
- Due to the characteristics of a thematic evaluation, it is of utmost importance to ensure that the evaluability study is carried out rigorously. It should deliver an accurate diagnosis of favourable conditions and limitations when evaluating the selected intervention.
- For large thematic evaluations, the management team requires flexibility with respect to methodologies, tools, ways of managing - technical and administrative - among others, in order to be able to innovate and not depend on the way evaluations are 'normally' done.

Separation of the portfolio analysis of NRIC from the evaluation

- It is necessary to assess the advantages and disadvantages of separating the portfolio analysis (collection and study of projects covered by the evaluation) from the evaluation process:
 - Keeping it as part of the evaluation process ensures that the same team generates, and is clear on, what information is relevant when conducting the evaluation.
 - Separating it allows for greater flexibility for administrative contracting deadlines. It also facilitates the contracting process if those contracted are not suitable.

Evaluation capacity development

The Focelac project applies a systemic approach to the development of evaluation capacities, recognising that an evaluation is defined and enabled in any given context by a combination of actors, processes, institutions, procedures, structures, and the links that are generated between them, known as the evaluation system. This perspective holds that all of these factors must be considered when generating capacities in evaluation, but that the system's processes and particularities also have to be understood and respected both as a whole and as individual parts (Klier *et al.*, 2022).

Capacities to manage, develop and use evaluations are required at different levels of these systems. These levels are: individual, institutional and contextual. At the individual level, the aim is that evaluators, public sector staff, civil society representatives, and parliamentarians are aware of the potential of evaluation and have the capacity to carry out, use and conduct evaluations. At the institutional level, the aim is to ensure that public and private institutions, VOPEs, academia, parliaments and civil society can use, train, commission, manage and promote evaluations. Finally, in order for evaluation systems to function, it is essential that there are favourable environments, in other words, that countries meet the political, legislative, regulatory, and technical conditions required for evaluation to act as a key decision-making tool to advance good governance, public service delivery, and ultimately, improvements in the population's living standards.

From the participation-action perspective, promoting and supporting the development of complex evaluations with components of the 2030 Agenda, allows for the different stakeholders to build capacities. However, reflection on the challenges and achievements of the practice enables a more solid learning process at the individual level and this reflection should also guide decision-making at the organisational level with regard to the management and use of the evaluations.

The lessons gleaned from the systematisation process are the result of deep and critical reflection regarding individual, institutional and contextual conditions that are essential for successful thematic evaluations. They can be applied to evaluation processes in similar contexts, for example, other thematic evaluations with 2030 Agenda components in Costa Rica or in other countries in the region.

To sum up

At such a time as this, when political and environmental changes are occurring increasingly abruptly, a growing number of people are recognising the role that evaluation can play in key decision-making processes, so that the course of public policy can be redirected. However, evaluation alone, as a technical tool, must be considered insufficient. To be effective, evaluation requires certain contextual, political and technical conditions; high quality evaluations are dependent on the relevant system's evaluation capacities.

Fostering the development of these capacities at all levels is essential to enable better responses to current challenges. The last decade has taught us the importance of being able to rely on solid evaluation systems that are capable of guiding public policy with evidence and prioritising efficient responses.

This participatory learning process, carried out through the systematisation of experiences methodology (Jara, 1998), is an example of how evaluation processes carried out from the perspective of an international development cooperation recipient country, can foster awareness and generate debate around the effectiveness of international cooperation in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected.

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