Evaluation for Improving People's Lives

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Abstract. *This chapter focuses on the evolutionary process of the acceptance of the use of evidence for policy formulation and decision making. An effective evaluation system and enabling environment are required for achieving such objectives. The complementarity between the demand for evaluation findings and the capacity to meet that demand is of paramount significance. A strong enabling environment for evaluation encourages the generation of impartial, technical, strategic, and citizen-based information to ensure that national planning and budgeting reflect the needs of the people. Evaluation provides a means to enhance participation of civil society groups, as well as an opportunity for stakeholders to interact with members of parliament and improve consultation and representation. The engagement of parliamentarians with evaluation is becoming increasingly important in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Parliamentarians are responsible for passing policies and laws, and for prioritizing and endorsing budget allocations, all of which requires evidence as a basis for national decision making. Parliamentarians are also well positioned to question disparities in society and approve the resources needed to overcome them, again requiring access to sound and comprehensive evidence to aid decision making and better serve those who are left behind. A growing movement of parliamentarians involved in this process can help lead the way.*

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Over the years, development cooperation has operated on the principle of promoting social justice through the transfer of resources to the poor. The global system of social justice provides long-term consideration of how to do this while a country is going through a process of development, even if there are no expectations that this will accelerate economic development. National governments and donor agencies have a long way to go in developing the ability to make transparent and evidence-based policies and decisions so that investments become more effective. This requires greater recognition of the various dimensions of poverty reduction, based on evaluation findings.

Poverty is related to other problems of underdevelopment. It has become a major global issue that affects more than half the world's population. In 2015, the World Bank revised the international poverty line: the new threshold is $1.90 per day. This is a very low margin: the people who live under this threshold are considered to live in extreme poverty. The World Bank's mission is a "world free of poverty." As such, the role of evaluation cannot be underestimated in understanding the causal factors of poverty and identifying appropriate interventions in addressing such issues.

EvalPartners, in collaboration with other stakeholders, developed and launched the Global Evaluation Agenda 2016–2020, according to which national evaluation policies and systems play an important role at the country level. This agenda builds on support from the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution GA/RES/69/237 (UN 2015a) and the more than 90 events that were organized around the globe in celebration of EvalYear 2015.

EvalAgenda 2020 (EvalPartners 2016) highlights the importance of strengthening an enabling environment for evaluation by developing institutional capacities, including voluntary organizations for professional evaluation (VOPEs); individual capacities for evaluation, focusing on evaluators, commissioners, and users of evaluation; and the need for developing links among stakeholders. Such an approach ensures that "no one is left behind" in the evaluation process, and that interventions are designed for sustainable development.

In the above context, evaluation is not a "stand-alone." The complementarity between the demand for evaluation findings and their use, and the capacity and ability to supply the respective services, is of paramount importance.

This chapter focuses on the historical factors and evolutionary process of acceptance of evaluation as a means of providing much-needed evidence for policy formulation and decision making. As such, utilization-focused evaluation, as well as equity and gender-focused evaluation, have come to be accepted progressively. Achievement of such objectives is envisaged through an effective evaluation system supported by an enabling environment, and institutional and individual capacity development so that in time "improving people's lives" with "no one left behind" will become a reality.

MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many

dimensions—poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. They are also basic human rights—the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security.[1] In September 2000, the leaders of 189 countries gathered at UN headquarters and signed the historic Millennium Declaration, committing to achieve a set of eight measurable goals that ranged from the reduction of extreme poverty and hunger by half, to promoting gender equality and reducing child mortality by the target year of 2015. Despite the progress made in reducing poverty, the number of people living in extreme poverty globally remains unacceptably high, and given global growth forecasts, poverty reduction may not be fast enough to reach the target of ending extreme poverty by 2030. According to the World Bank, in 2013 10.7 percent of the world's population lived on less than $1.90 a day, compared to 12.4 percent in 2012, and 35 percent in 1990. This means that in 2013, 767 million people lived on less than $1.90 a day, compared to 881 million in 2012, and 1.85 billion in 1990.[2] While the trend is certainly positive, as the Bank notes, "The effort to end extreme poverty is far from over, and there are many challenges remaining."

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (Rio+20) stimulated a process for developing a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals were formulated in a highly participatory process; and they were subsequently approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2015. This is the new global plan for improving people's lives: it is comprised of 17 goals and 169 targets aimed at resolving major socioeconomic issues. It will cover the next 15 years. The SDGs have replaced the MDGs, which expired in 2015. While the MDGs focused primarily on poverty and health, the SDGs also cover the environment, human rights, and gender equality, among other new goals.

In this context, many organizations will integrate the SDGs into the development programs that will be carried out with the goal of improving peoples' lives around the globe from 2016 onward. Measuring and evaluating these programs will help donors, implementing agencies, beneficiaries, and other stakeholders to identify trends, measure changes, and capture knowledge in order to improve the performance of programs and increase transparency. A fundamental principle underpinning this process is giving a voice to the people themselves. This highlights the need for participatory evaluation processes, methods, and tools as part of the capacity building of evaluators, institutions, and other stakeholders.

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[1] United Nations, http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml.

[2] World Bank, "Poverty," http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/overview.

THE NEED FOR PARTNERSHIPS IN PROMOTING EVALUATION

The emergence of global partnerships, reflected by the Fourth International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) and the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) Global Assembly in 2015, which were conducted in parallel, can be considered a great achievement and a contributory factor in achieving the Global Evaluation Agenda. The NEC Conference addressed the issue of integrating evaluation principles with human development practices. The IDEAS conference focused on evaluating sustainable development by enhancing evaluation capacities, both institutional and individual. These two initiatives complemented each other in reaching toward the final goal of improving people's lives.

In the context of the SDGs, it is necessary to assess how such goals are being realized in the developed world as well, since the SDGs are being adopted by *all* countries, both developed and developing. With this paradigm shift toward supporting the SDGs, it is prudent to examine how evaluation will be able to provide evidence of such support in achieving the SDGs.

As emphasized by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the follow-up declarations of Accra, Busan, and—more recently—Nairobi (in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation),[3] the need for international cooperation to support development in partner countries in line with priorities that reflect those of the people is now well established: this includes the role of evaluation, and is a major breakthrough. It represents a paradigm shift from donor-driven evaluations to country-owned joint evaluations.

Conceptual Framework

The current situation can be reflected upon in the context of two fundamental questions for better understanding:

- How can the SDGs empower evaluators to provide evidence that the lives of people are being improved in a more sustainable way?
- How can the paradigm shift toward sustainability ensure that people can achieve a balance between their economic, social, and environmental needs, both for the present and for the future?

A conceptual outlook on these two questions can be shown in diagrammatic form, depicting the demand and supply aspects within a utilization-focused evaluation framework, as captured in figure 3.1.

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[3]   See   http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/thehighlevelforaonaideffect ivenessahistory.htm for Paris, Accra, and Busan; and http://effectivecooperation.org/ events/2016-high-level-meeting/ for Nairobi.

FIGURE 3.1 **Demand and supply aspects of a utilization-focused evaluation framework**
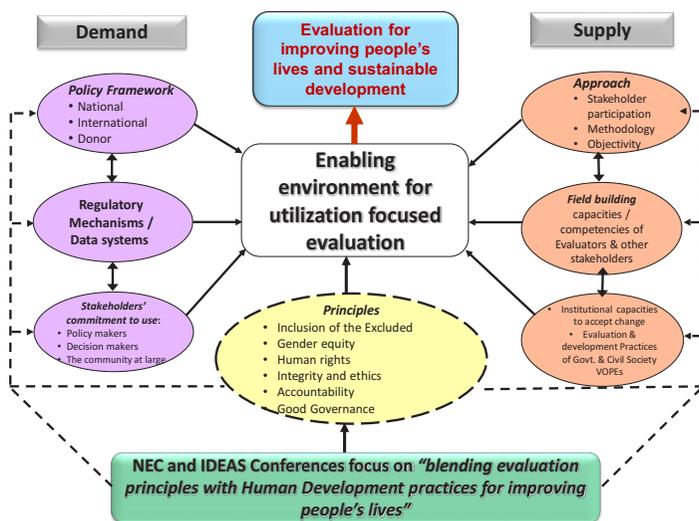
SOURCE: M.R. Samaranayake.

Demand for Evidence-Based Evaluation

The demand for evaluation and the use of its findings are very much dependent on the perceptions and understanding of various stakeholders regarding the added value evaluation can bring to the policy formulation and decision-making processes. The commitment of policy makers to transparency and the use of evaluation findings in policy formulation is considered a significant factor underlying the development agenda. In this context, there is an increasing focus on the role of parliamentarians in these processes.

Demand for evaluation is created through an enabling environment comprised of policy frameworks at the national, international, global, and donor levels. In this context, cooperation and partnership for promoting evaluation of both public and private sector programs, including the commitment of policy makers to promote and use evaluation findings in policy formulation, become critical factors. Thus:

- ■ **Regulatory mechanisms** such as results-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems need to be in place, to ensure that the milestones are being achieved as planned, with evidence being used for decision making.
- ■ **Stakeholders' commitment** to using evaluation findings is another crucial factor in making evaluations matter. This involves policy makers, decision makers, implementers, and the overall community. There is an emerging trend of civil society organizations moving

from service delivery to advocacy, in order to secure more sustainable, widespread change. More important in the context of the SDGs is the involvement of the people themselves, since the final goal is improvement of their lives. A crucial element to be considered is the willingness and commitment of the commissioners of evaluations (i.e., government and donor agencies) for independent evaluation findings, both positive and negative.

- ■ **Community participation** in the evaluation process becomes an important underpinning factor, allowing the voices of the people to be heard.
- ■ **Political will** for the use of evaluation findings and for providing space for the involvement of the people should prevail. The involvement of parliamentarians as policy makers is crucially significant in order for political will to use evaluation findings and influence policy.

A PARLIAMENTARIAN MOVEMENT FOR EVALUATION

Developing and strengthening evaluation policies in countries is important for good governance and effective development. Moreover, it is implicit in UN General Assembly Resolution GA/RES/69/237 (UN 2015a) and the SDGs and their guiding framework, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN 2015b). The SDGs focus on country-led evaluation in line with identified priorities for the SDG targets that are most relevant to national and local contexts. This has emphasized the need for countries to strengthen their data collection, analysis, and review processes. The importance of evaluation is highlighted in the 2030 Agenda, which states that review of the SDGs will be "rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations," and calls for "strengthening of national data systems and evaluation programs." One of the key principles of the SDGs, "no one left behind," points to the importance of achieving equity-focused sustainable development. In many countries, one of the challenges is that disadvantaged communities sometimes do not receive the benefits of development. This is why equitable development needs to be emphasized through equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation.

According to the Parliamentarians' Forum for Development Evaluation mapping study, as of 2015, only 20 countries had established national evaluation policies (PFDE 2015). This shows how far there is to go. The Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation (GPFE) plans to advance this important work on national evaluation policies and systems (box 3.1).

Among Asian countries, only two, the Philippines and Malaysia, have endorsed national evaluation policies. In addition, Malaysia has a strong integrated results-based management system that is used in all governmental ministries. Although the Philippines has endorsed a national evaluation policy (NEDA and DBM 2015), it is yet to be operationalized. Afghanistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka have draft policies that were developed through stakeholder consultations and have been submitted to their governments for endorsement. Out of these four draft policies, the Afghanistan policy includes a section on equity and gender (section 3.3). In Nepal and Sri Lanka, the draft

BOX 3.1 **Key facts on the Global Parliamentarian Forum for Evaluation**

A movement by parliamentarians toward the use of evaluation has grown rapidly in the past few years. Particularly during 2014–15, regional parliamentarian forums were created in the Africa, East Asia, Latin America, and Middle East and North Africa regions. The first-ever parliamentarians' panel on evaluation was held at the Community of Evaluators of South Asia's Evaluation Conclave 2013 in Nepal. This was a historic milestone, as it was the first time parliamentarians raised their voices to advocate for national evaluation policies and to commit to put evaluation at the core of the country-level agenda. The Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation (PFDE) was established in South Asia in early 2013. Thereafter, parliamentarians were featured in many international evaluation events promoting national evaluation capacities. One of the key milestones in this regard is a study mapping the status of national evaluation policies, which was conducted by PFDE with support from EvalPartners, the global movement to strengthen national evaluation capacities (PFDE 2015). This helped promote national evaluation policies, including through regional consultations.

The African Parliamentarians Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE) was initiated at the African Evaluation Association conference held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in March 2014, a year after the initiation of PFDE. APNODE is hosted and supported by the African Development Bank, and is the most formal group among all the parliamentarian forums currently active. In 2015, regional parliamentarians' forums were initiated in other regions.

More importantly, the first-ever national parliamentarians' forum for evaluation was initiated in Nepal by a group of parliamentarians representing all political parties. In Kenya, a caucus for evaluation was initiated to advocate for evaluation in the Kenyan Parliament. In this context, the Global Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation (GPFE) was launched on November 25, 2015, at the Parliament of Nepal, on the occasion of celebrating the International Year of Evaluation (EvalYear).

SOURCE: GPFE website, https://globalparliamentarianforum.wordpress.com/; used with permission.

policies are being reviewed by stakeholders for inclusion of equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation. Nepal is the only country in the region that has evaluation included in its Constitution, and in which the national evaluation policy will be formalized through an act of Parliament. The Evaluation Community of India has formed a task force to work on its national evaluation policy. Bangladesh and Pakistan are planning to work on their national evaluation policies as well.

In Nepal, all stakeholders, including parliamentarians, the government (through the National Planning Commission), VOPEs, development partners, academia, and the media are supporting the national evaluation policy and its formulation process. Nepal was the first country to initiate a National Parliamentarians Forum for Development Evaluation. In this forum, most Nepalese political parties are represented, and it actively supports the case for evaluation in the country. Another example of working with stakeholders is in Sri Lanka, where the National Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation, the government, VOPE, and development partners all work together in stakeholder consultation meetings. Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam have established in-country VOPEs. In Cambodia, the VOPE, the government (through the Ministry of Planning), and parliamentarians are working together. Pol Ham, who is a member of the National Assembly and of the Steering Committee of the GPFE, is also the chair of the Parliament's standing committee on planning. He therefore will be able to officially support evaluation activities through the parliamentary system.

The VOPE in Mongolia is very new, and VOPEs in Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam are also in their emerging stages. None of these countries have national evaluation policies and systems in place, nor have they even begun the process. Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam have been part of EvalPartners' Peer-to-Peer projects; and Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Vietnam are part of one project in the fourth round of the Peer-to-Peer program. This participation will give these countries a chance to further advance evaluation culture within their countries and to strengthen VOPEs.

Cambodia, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are the three countries in the region that are involved in the EvalGender+ network-supported projects on evaluating SDGs through an equity and gender lens. Cambodia has developed guidelines on equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation, and the final draft of these is available. In Nepal, under this project, a workshop was conducted on "Evaluating SDGs in Equity and Gender Lens" for all stakeholders; the country has also developed a national evaluation agenda and conducted various other activities, including development of an online repository that documents tools and methods, national networking meetings, etc. The Sri Lankan project has conducted a national stakeholder consultation to develop a national evaluation plan, held two meetings for parliamentarians, initiated the Sri Lanka Parliamentarians Forum, and conducted a training of trainers program for potential evaluators from the public sector. Interestingly, a young parliamentarian from Sri Lanka has submitted two motions, one on national evaluation policy, and one on the allocation of resources for evaluation from the national budget, to the Parliament.

SUPPLY FOR EVIDENCE-BASED EVALUATION

In order to meet the demand for evidence-based evaluation, there is a dire need for evaluation capacities to be developed and made available. Methodologies that ensure the active involvement of the people require an approach

that allows space for them to voice their views. Evaluators need to integrate participatory evaluation methods with systems analysis. Economic, social, and environmental sustainability requires that these systems interact with each other. To manage such integration, evaluators need to provide evidence of what people need, together with evidence of how far a particular solution would work both for the present and the future. The methodology should be comprehensive enough to allow for free expression of views by all stakeholders concerned: this is the challenge for evaluators.

Evaluation field building refers to the process of improving an organization's ability to use evaluation to learn from its work and improve results. Organizational evaluation approaches and practices need to be strengthened and the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of individual evaluators improved. The competencies of evaluators include coaching and training on the principles and techniques of evaluation, experience in conducting evaluations, on-the-job training, the appropriate use of tools and techniques, and the exchange of experiences among peers in different projects and different countries for the purpose of learning from each other. In this context, Fred Carden, Evaluation Director of the International Development Research Centre in Canada, emphasizes building evaluation capacity, as well as the need for improving the evaluation quality (Carden 2010). Concerns about evaluation capacity in international development are raised at many different levels: the small number of trained evaluators in many developing countries; the nature and location of training; the cultural, linguistic, and political differences that have to be considered in the evaluation process; and the capacity of evaluators to meet the needs of both donors and the specific countries.

Institutional capacity building to accept change also requires attention. Change that strengthens the organization's standing, influence, formal presence, or ability to achieve its goals, and the ability to address the demands from the state, civil society, the private sector, and the community when necessary are essential capacities to be developed in order to meet the demand for evidence-based evaluations. There is a demand for more training: funds are being established by some donors to support evaluation capacity building, and more organizations are trying to understand how they can play a useful role in addressing these gaps.

Evaluators can reflect on the principles, and suggest strategies to ensure integration with the human development practices that are included in the Global Evaluation Agenda 2016–2020, and that contribute to developing national capacities to evaluate sustainable development. It is pertinent to consider how inclusion of the excluded, gender equity, and human rights could be included in the evaluation process. Evaluator integrity and ethics are important aspects of moral character and involve a commitment to intellectual honesty and personal responsibility. Evaluation for accountability and governance are significant aspects on which the capacity building of evaluators needs to be focused.

These are some of the key challenges that evaluators will face:

■ How policy change can be addressed to prevail positively for evidence-based decision making

- Bridging the gaps between the commissioners, practitioners, and users of evaluation
- How evaluators can provide evidence that improves the lives of people in a more sustainable way
- How the shift toward sustainability can ensure that civil society and people can achieve a balance between their economic, social, and environmental needs for both the present and the future, and can use data to hold the state accountable
- How to engage with people concerning their future needs, and how they see a sustainable balance emerging from their economic, social, and environmental needs
- How to bring the time dimension into their evaluations in blending evaluation principles and practices to support the SDGs
- How to provide evidence for the continuity of changes that need to be taken into account in improving people's lives, as required by the SDGs.

THE GLOBAL EVALUATION AGENDA 2016–2020

The Global Evaluation Agenda 2016–2020, also called EvalAgenda 2020, was formally launched at the Parliament of Nepal on November 25, 2015 (EvalPartners 2016). This agenda explains the demand as well as the supply implications for evidence-based evaluation. It is clear that evaluation as a tool for effective governance is becoming increasingly respected and implemented: evaluation has become so embedded in the vision of good governance that no policy maker or manager will imagine excluding it from the decision-making toolbox, dare to hold an important meeting, or reach an important decision without having first reviewed relevant evaluation information. It is also increasingly true that evaluators, whether internal or external, will use whatever methods and approaches are most appropriate to the situation to generate high-quality, ethical information that is pertinent to the issues at hand.

At the same time, it is envisaged that evaluation will help to amplify the voice of all stakeholders, particularly the marginalized and disadvantaged. Experience shows the difference evaluation can make in illuminating the realities of specific contexts by unpacking the complexity that people, organizations, and communities face as they struggle to address a variety of economic, social, and environmental issues. Experience shows the beneficial impact that principled evaluation can have in democratic settings when evaluators work in a neutral way, with all stakeholders contributing data, analysis, and insights in order to assess results, identify innovations, and synthesize learning toward improved outcomes.

Four essential dimensions of the evaluation system make up the core of EvalAgenda 2020: the enabling environment for evaluation; institutional capacities; individual capacities for evaluation; and links among these first three dimensions.

A **strong enabling environment** reflects the demand for evidence-based evaluations:

- All sectors of society understand and appreciate the value of evaluation
- Evaluation is explicitly required or encouraged in national evaluation policies and other governance and regulatory instruments
- Sufficient resources are allocated for evaluation, at all levels
- Credible, accessible data systems and repositories for evaluation findings are readily available
- Stakeholders are eager to receive and use evaluation information
- Evaluation receives due recognition as a profession and
- The ownership of public sector evaluations rests with national governments based on their distinctive needs and priorities, and with full participation of civil society and the private sector

Strong institutional capacities include the following:

- A sufficient number of relevant institutions, including but not limited to VOPEs, government agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), academia, and institutions generate and share relevant data to develop and support evaluators and evaluation
- These institutions are capable of appreciating and facilitating quality evaluations
- They are skilled at collaborating with other relevant and involved institutions
- They are able to resource quality data generation and evaluations as required, make information readily accessible, and are ready to follow up on evaluation findings and recommendations
- They are able to continually evolve and develop as the evaluation field advances and
- Academic institutions have the capacity to carry out evaluation research and run professional courses in evaluation

Strong individual capacities for evaluation include the following:

- Developing individual capacities for evaluation will be relevant not only to evaluators, but also to the commissioners and users of evaluation
- Commissioners and users of evaluation have a sound understanding of the value of evaluation the processes for conducting high-quality, impartial evaluations and more commitment to using evaluation findings and recommendations
- Sufficient numbers of qualified evaluators, drawn from a diversity of relevant disciplines, are available to conduct high-quality evaluations in all countries and all subject areas
- These evaluators have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to make appropriate use of generally accepted evaluation principles, theories, methods, and approaches

- Evaluators have integrated the values discussed above, and are culturally sensitive and
- Evaluators continually learn, and improve their capabilities

Strong links among these first three dimensions include the following:

- Governments, parliamentarians, VOPEs, the United Nations, foundations, civil society, the private sector, and other interested groups dedicate resources to joint ventures for the conducting of evaluations, innovation in the field of evaluation, and evaluation capacity building
- A common set of terms exists in all languages to disseminate and share evaluation knowledge
- Multiple partners in evaluation regularly attend national and international learning opportunities
- The "no one left behind" principle stated in the SDGs is embedded as a key value that goes across the three fundamental building blocks of an evaluation system: an enabling environment institutional capacities and individual capacities for evaluation

These four dimensions do not operate in isolation, but are connected in diverse ways in different countries, sectors, and situations. The relationships are dynamic, with overlapping influences, partners, and drivers; yet at the same time, all dimensions are working like a vortex, pulling the various dimensions ever closer to better outcomes. Each of the partners (institutions, individuals, and evaluation users) contribute a distinct part to the whole through the mutually supportive and interconnected dimensions of the agenda.

It is a collective hope and intention that by advocating for the many initiatives and activities outlined in the Global Evaluation Agenda, the global evaluation community will be able to make significant contributions to attaining EvalAgenda 2020, and all the SDGs, for the benefit of humankind. Each partner in the global community, including but not limited to parliamentarians, donors, governments, VOPEs, CSOs, the media, and the private sector, will have their role to play, and all of the stakeholders will be willing to work with parliamentarians to promote evaluation.

Parliamentarians can play a significant role in this process by demanding high-quality evaluations to ensure accountability. Parliamentarians can take the lead in promoting national evaluation policies and systems, and all parliamentarians and parliaments are expected to join hands with the evaluation community in this effort. Together, parliamentarians and evaluators can proceed toward achieving EvalAgenda 2020.

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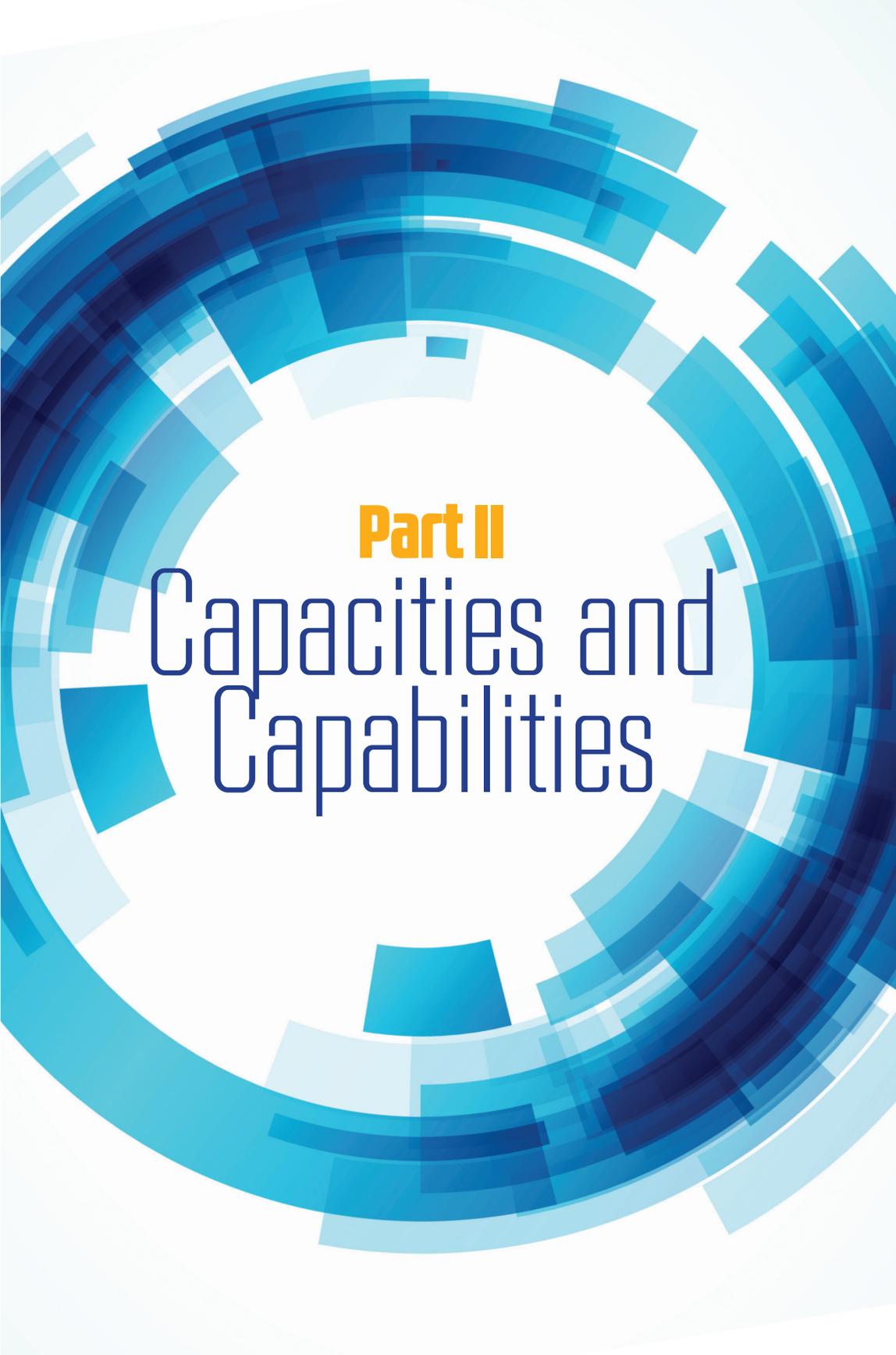
Part II
Capacities and Capabilities