Chapter 18

New Frontiers for Evaluation in a Fast-Changing World

Chris Barnett and Rachel Eager

Abstract. *The world has changed significantly in the past decade: rising inequality, conflict and insecurity, mass migration, terrorism, and climate change all present major global challenges. The responding United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development sets out a holistic approach, cognizant of the interconnectedness between society, economy, and the environment. In addition, many private investors and businesses are increasingly aware of their long-term interdependence on natural systems. These changes provide both an opportunity and a significant evaluative challenge for those who have traditionally operated within the aid/development sphere. This chapter considers new frontiers for the evaluation profession in terms of methodology, engagement with new actors, and how best to provide evaluative evidence within complex and rapidly changing contexts. Responding to global challenges requires more than just methodological improvement and innovation. There is a need for a bolder evaluation agenda, recognizing the evaluators' role in contributing to change: acting not just as providers of evidence, but to proactively engage in an ethical obligation to society, stimulating deliberation and re-examination of evidence by a broader range of citizens—citizens who can be emboldened to use such evidence to improve their situations and hold others to account.*

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The world has changed significantly in the past decade, with rising inequality, conflict and insecurity, mass migration, terrorism, and climate change all presenting major challenges for our collective future. New influential trading powers like China and India challenge the economic status quo, while the choices of voters in the United States and the United Kingdom suggest a re-emergence of protectionist and populist policies in response to increasing globalization and a new multipolar political order. The old East-West, North-South, developed-developing divides look increasingly irrelevant. Meanwhile, over the past few decades, evaluation as a field has developed largely in response to public policy and government intervention, by assessing effectiveness and impact on behalf of governments and their taxpaying constituents. In international aid particularly, this has been underpinned largely by assumptions from an old-world order: it has been focused on public expenditure commissioned by donors for recipient countries, and dominated by large-scale interventions managed mostly by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), agencies of the United Nations (UN), or "managing agents" (Western private companies).

In this chapter, we consider how the field of evaluation might best respond to a changing world, and in doing so set out new frontiers for the coming decades. The first part describes major global trends, with billions of people continuing to live in poverty, and with growing inequality between the richest and the poorest; threats to the environment and our ecosystems; and insecurity, migration, and conflict. In response to these challenges, the international community has set out an ambitious vision for the future: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); the Addis Ababa Development Financing Action Agenda; the World Humanitarian Summit; and the Paris Climate Change Agreement. In parallel, there has been a rising tide of private capital and businesses consciously aiming to become a force for good (Social Impact Investment Taskforce 2014a). This includes various forms of socially and environmentally responsible private and blended capital (e.g., impact investing and venture philanthropy), as well as new modalities and changes in the ways of doing business such as the Blueprint for Business.[1] In the second half of the chapter, we explore the implications of these changes for evaluation in terms of both methodology and new partnerships with new actors. Finally, we argue that these global challenges require something more fundamental than just changing the way in which evaluators respond and adapt to a changing context. Rather, we argue that they imply the need for a bolder evaluation agenda, in which evaluators contribute to the change itself and take up a more value-driven mantra: not only to provide evidence-based assessments, but also to engage in an ethical obligation to society to make evidence available in such a way that it can be deliberated upon and reexamined by a broader cross-section of the population. At a time when many of the most vulnerable feel disenfranchised by global trends, it is perhaps even more

[1] www.blueprintforbusiness.org.

pertinent for evaluators to embrace technology, new ways of working, and new partnerships in order to focus increasingly on the ultimate "client" (the poor and marginalized), by empowering citizens to better use evidence to inform, challenge, and call to account politicians, policy makers, development professionals, and private companies.

GROWING INEQUALITY

There is increasing recognition that inequality is one of the major challenges of our time. In recent years, seminal work by leading economists has highlighted a growing divide between the world's richest and poorest citizens (Atkinson 2015; Bourguignon 2015; Picketty 2013). Indeed, inequality within countries continues to rise (Oxfam 2014), with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reporting that income inequality in developing countries increased by 11 percent between 1990 and 2010 (UNDP 2013). Furthermore, the location of the poorest is changing, and the distribution is no longer concentrated in low-income countries. Research shows that 72 percent of the world's poor (960 million) now live not in poor countries, but in middle-income countries (MICs), a dramatic shift from two decades ago, when the vast majority (over 90 percent) lived in low-income countries (Sumner 2012). Increasingly, the problems of poverty are a challenge for MICs that are less dependent, and may not be at all dependent, on development assistance. As such, poverty reduction in many MICs becomes less about having enough resources and more about having the political will to address issues of redistribution. This has implications for development assistance, which is increasingly being used to target the most stubborn problems in the least developed countries, especially among fragile and conflict-affected states (Picciotto 2015a). Not only is this a challenge to the traditional North-South model of development assistance: it also affects evaluators and the role of evaluation. While evaluators need to retain some focus on development assistance, increasingly there is a new role emerging: to support national-level (and country-led) policy objectives, and to consider policy coherence internationally. This requires not simply evaluating aid-driven (or micro level) interventions in isolation, but also assessing the effects of other policies—of trade, investment, environmental protection, foreign policy, immigration, and so on—to either mutually support (or to undermine) poverty, inequality, and sustainability objectives (Picciotto 2005).[2] Or, as van den Berg and Cando-Noordhuizen (2017) have put it, "Evaluators need to point out to policy makers and decision makers that what they promote with one hand, is more than sufficiently undone with a very active and much bigger other hand."

[2] See, e.g., the blog discussion by Heider (2017).

PUSHING PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

At the same time, our understanding of the environment is changing. New thinking and new science suggest that there are planetary boundaries, i.e., that there are thresholds within which there exists a safe operating space for humanity. For instance, Rockström et al. (2009) suggest a framework of nine planetary boundaries (including stratospheric ozone depletion, ocean acidification, and biogeochemical flows) within which humanity can continue to develop and thrive for generations to come. Work on climate change also suggests that growing global resource demands will continue to exacerbate the likelihood of increased flooding, heat waves, earthquakes, and other natural disasters, the consequences of which are linked in many countries to food security concerns and increased levels of conflict (UN 2015c; World Economic Forum 2016). Economic, social, and environmental developments are increasingly viewed as interlinked, and pose challenges for policy makers, the private sector, and evaluators. The latter can no longer operate purely within defined sectoral boundaries, and even social systems are too limiting: there is an increasing need to consider the relationship between social and natural systems, as well as longer-term time frames—that is, no longer 3–5 years, but 20, 50, or 100 years (Rowe 2012).

CONFLICT, SECURITY, AND SAFETY

Alongside a growing gap between the richest and poorest, and a greater vulnerability to risks and disaster-related losses especially for the poorest, deterioration in indicators of peace in the Middle East and North Africa have been so severe they have masked increases in other areas. The global peace index has highlighted deterioration in the impact of terrorism and political instability indicators as key contributors (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2014). The severity of the situation in the Middle East has wider implications. Global levels of displacement are now higher than ever before, with 65.3 million people living in exile at the end of 2015—a population of forcibly displaced people that is greater than the entire population of the United Kingdom (UNHCR 2015). Large-scale global migration is now rated as one of the most likely and impactful global risks (World Economic Forum 2016). The intertwined dynamics of terrorism, conflict, and political instability within a small number of countries has consequences at a global level, with the economic impact of violence estimated at 13.3 percent of world GDP (Institute for Economics and Peace 2014). Evaluation, particularly when undertaken in fragile contexts, increasingly has to respond to dynamic situations, where the politics of diplomacy, military intervention, and peace-building activities often intersect with more traditional forms of humanitarian and development assistance (Broegaard, Bull and Kovsted 2014).

THE POST-2015 ERA: RESPONDING TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES

The above-mentioned challenges of poverty, inequality, insecurity, and the environment are increasingly being recognized, with the re-emergence of "sustainable development" as a unifying concept—that is, the process of meeting human development goals while sustaining the very natural systems that are needed to provide the resources and ecosystem services for humanity (both society and the economy) to thrive. For the coming decades, the international community has set out an ambitious vision: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in September 2015), which includes the SDGs; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on development financing (in July 2015); the World Humanitarian Summit (in May 2016); and the Paris Climate Change Agreement (in December 2015). The SDGs in particular represent a major shift toward global responsibility, unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), where the focus was on developing countries. These agreements also offer a more holistic vision that acknowledges the interconnectedness between objectives (societal, economic, and environmental), and advocates partnerships that go beyond governments, and that include the private sector.

The Agenda for Sustainable Development presents a vision for eradicating poverty and tackling inequality, and addressing the need for economic, social, and environmental sustainability with a breadth of focus that recognizes the interconnected nature of the issues faced. While the MDGs focused on identifying and filling gaps, the SDGs ask a more holistic question about how we can stimulate sustainable progress across a much broader range of complex and interrelated goals (Weisen and Prokop 2015).

Evidence and learning are also integrated into the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which is monitored via a results framework composed of the 17 ambitious SDGs, and 169 quantitative and qualitative target indicators. These goals are aspirational and universal, setting a framework within which countries define their own targets based on national priorities and contexts. In contrast to the tracking of the MDGs, where disparities in performance were masked by aggregate-level reporting, the 2030 Agenda calls for the monitoring of targets at all levels, and an increased focus on data disaggregation by a range of characteristics including income, race, age, gender, disability, and ethnicity (Weisen and Prokop 2015). Systematic follow-up and review processes are also prominent within the agenda, positioning evidence, data, and evaluative thinking as critical to the achievement of the strategy. Review processes are expected to operate at the national, regional, and global levels, in order to "promote accountability to our citizens, support effective international cooperation…and foster exchanges of best practices and mutual learning" (UN 2015a, clauses 72–73). Follow-up and review processes will be informed by the tracking of progress toward goals, and rigorous country-led evaluation, and are expected to make "a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximise and track progress…in order to ensure that no one is left behind" (UN 2015a, clauses 72 and 74g).

The Agenda poses many challenges for evaluation. First, it requires country-led evaluation which requires strengthening national evaluation programs through enhanced capacity-building support for developing countries. Although as highlighted by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), little guidance is given on how countries may set their own national agendas, and evaluation will need to address issues such as whether or not progress made is equitable, relevant, and sustainable (Ofir et al. 2016; Schwandt 2016). Second, lessons from the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of the MDGs suggest that the MDG approach oversimplified the development narrative, essentially creating sector-based silos. In response to this, the interrelated nature of the SDGs demonstrates the need for a more holistic development—and therefore evaluation—approach. Third, moving away from the public sector, donor-centric MDG approach, there is a clear recognition of the need for diversification in funding mechanisms. The new agenda emphasizes the role of multiple change agents, and recognizes the need for contextual flexibility and the disaggregation of data (Ofir 2015).

MOBILIZING RESOURCES FOR THE POST-2015 AGENDA

Financing this ambitious global agenda requires a significant increase in resources allocated, and a mobilization of resources far beyond that of development assistance. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has estimated the total investment needs in developing countries to amount to $3.9 trillion annually. Current investment reportedly stands at $1.4 trillion, highlighting a substantial investment gap of $2.5 trillion per year (UNCTAD 2014, 145). In many MICs, the public revenues generated are sufficient to meet costs: however, insufficient funds are being allocated to basic services. The current political climate in both Europe and the United States increasingly challenges the commitment to deliver 0.7 percent of gross national income as official development aid (Nakhooda et al. 2016). In this resource-constrained context, the importance of private sector investment is heightened, changing the dynamics of development finance significantly. The role of the private sector is clearly acknowledged within the 2030 Agenda, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda encourages philanthropic donors to continue their engagement through impact investments, with calls for increased transparency and accountability across the sector (UN 2015a, 2015c).

Meanwhile, there is a potential convergence between this globally agreed agenda and the individual interests of some in the private sector. Over the past decade, the private sector has been evolving considerably, with the emergence of businesses with a more deliberate social or environmental conscience. The long era of corporate social responsibility (CSR) continues, but this has sometimes been plagued by accusations of tokenism, or "greenwashing." Indeed, claims of CSR are rarely evaluated (Picciotto 2015b), therefore little is known about the effectiveness of these approaches in creating social and environmental change (Flynn, Young, and Barnett 2015). But whereas CSR has sometimes been viewed as an add-on to the core business, there is now a growing movement that is advocating using business as a force for good—for example, initiatives such as Blueprint for Better Business, the World Forum on Natural Capital, and B-Corp. Building on the pioneering work of businesses such as The Body Shop as well as fair trade and other certifications, these movements aim to encourage businesses to define and operate with a purpose that serves society and the environment. B-Corp, for instance, now has more than 2,000 businesses that are certified to its standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency.

The investment field provides a good example of the multiplicity of challenges faced by more traditional forms of evaluation. In recent decades, new variants of purpose-driven, or mission-based, capital have emerged, aiming for both social and environmental returns along with their financial benefits. The boundaries between traditional public sector–driven international aid and private sector investment are becoming more and more blurred with the emergence and proliferation of a huge range of social and environmental investment funds, financial intermediation schemes, and insurance products aimed at achieving profit with purpose (Picciotto 2015a; Social Impact Investment Taskforce 2014a). Private sector resources are now being directed toward socially responsible purposes, with new investment modalities seeking to achieve both financial and social or environmental returns.

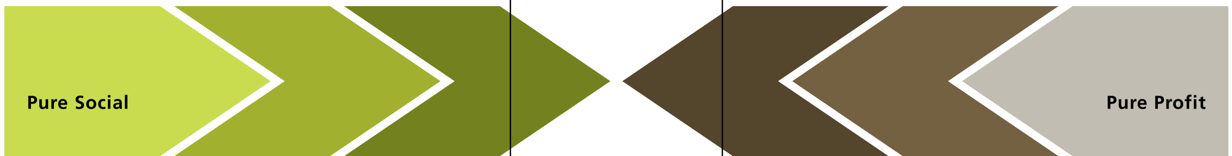
There is a broad range of approaches to socially or environmentally responsible capital, existing across a spectrum that ranges from philanthropic giving to traditional, profit-driven investment (Avantage Ventures 2011). As shown in figure 18.1, investment modalities can be broadly categorized into five groups: socially responsible investments; environmental, social, and governance investments; impact investing; program-related investing; and venture philanthropy. Toward the profit-oriented end of the spectrum, socially responsible investing focuses mainly on "do no harm" principles that involve avoiding investments in companies with ethically, socially, or environmentally questionable business practices. However, a new breed of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investments are oriented more toward "doing good" by incorporating ESG factors consciously into their investment decisions, and aiming to improve the sustainability and ethical impacts of an investment (Avantage Ventures 2011).

At the other (socially oriented) end of the scale, there has been a rise in philanthropy, which has more direct, charitable-giving purposes. Venture philanthropists in particular provide flexible financial support and mentoring to social entrepreneurs and organizations that are aiming to drive innovation and social change, and to achieve operational sustainability. Financial support has traditionally been focused on grant giving, but has broadened recently to include other mechanisms, such as equity-like investments and loans.[3] Program-related investments go further still, and are made where there is a potential for return on investment within a specific period of time, allowing recipients to access capital at lower rates.

The growing industry of purpose-driven investments has already leveraged a substantial amount of private capital for social and environmental "goods." The potential of social impact investing to bring new capital to developing economies, and to advance development using market principles, is well recognized (Picciotto 2015a; Social Impact Investment Taskforce 2014b). Mapping market trends in global impact investing, the Global Impact Investing Network reports an increase in impact investing assets under management

[3] Source: Social Innovator, "Venture Philanthropy," http://www.socialinnovator.info/ways-supporting-social-innovation/third-sector/mission-related-investment/venture-philanthropy.

FIGURE 18.1 **Spectrum of social and financial objectives**



Type	Philanthropic Donations	Venture Philanthropy	Program-Related Investing	**Impact Investing**	ESG Investments	Socially-Responsible Investments	Traditional Investments
Investment Approach	Pure charitable giving with no expectation of financial return	Donations are given as seed capital with the expectation of operational sustainability through mentoring by investors	Return of at least the principal is expected; possibility of market return, as well as of social performance	**Investments in companies whose primary goal is delivering social and environmental good, whilst also delivering competitive market returns**	Limiting investments to companies who track and evaluate their performance agaist key environment, social and governance metrics	"Do no harm" investing in listed stocks that avoid ethically and environmentally questionable companies (e.g. tobacco, coal, casinos)	100% driven by maximisation of short-term financial gain

SOURCE: Avantage Ventures 2011.

from \$25.5 billion in 2013 to \$35.5 billion in 2016, with survey respondents committing an average \$8.5 billion per year between 2013 and 2015 (GIIN 2016).

Progress in the field has been supported by the creation of new networks, approaches and guidance, and standards and metrics (Jackson 2013). However, to date there has been a limited focus on evidencing impact and systematic, independent evaluation, increasing concerns about the validity of current measures and approaches to assessing social and environmental impact (Picciotto 2015a). There is a significant risk that sectoral standards of impact assessment focus more on marketing claims of impact rather demonstrable social change (O'Flynn and Barnett 2016); many key players are therefore calling for increased scrutiny of impact claims (Brest and Born 2013).

In a review of impact measurement initiatives emerging across the impact investing field, Flynn, Young, and Barnett (2015) identified a huge range of tools and approaches documented in the gray literature. The most prominent of these were the Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS) and the Global Impact Investing Rating System (GIIRS). The IRIS provides investors with a standardized menu of indicators ranging from jobs created through to sector specific changes; while the GIIRS sets out a rating system (guided by the IRIS) that can be used to assess companies, funds, and their portfolio companies in four key areas: governance, workers, community, and the environment.

While these approaches have moved the field forward in terms of metric standardization and reporting against output-level indicators, they have contributed little to our understanding of investment outcomes or impact. This can result, for example, in better measurement of the number of people employed by an organization but with limited, or no evidence, of the social value that these jobs create (Brest and Born 2013). Flynn, Young, and Barnett have concluded that while a wide range of tools and approaches exist, the predominant focus on metrics and rating systems concentrates on counting inputs and outputs rather than on establishing any meaningful understanding of social and environmental change through the measurement of intended outcomes (Flynn, Young, and Barnett 2015; Jackson 2013). Moving forward, it is clear that a variety of methods and approaches will be required in order to effectively evaluate the diverse range of impact investments occurring in such a broad spectrum of operating contexts. Many of the design approaches, and both the quantitative and qualitative methods employed in public sector development evaluation, will add value, especially when considering the participation of a wider range of stakeholders within the evaluation process (Jackson 2013).

THE NEW FRONTIERS: TAKING UP THE EVALUATION CHALLENGE

To this point, this chapter has considered recent global trends such as growing inequality, environmental threats, mass migration, and insecurity and conflict, and the international response to them. Over the past decade, however, evaluation, specifically in international development, has become a rather introverted field, with most effort focused on the inadequacies of methodology and the need for rigor in impact evaluation (Picciotto 2012). Certain methodologies have come to dominate the debate (spearheaded by work such as that of Duflo and Kremer 2003; Savedoff, Levine, and Birdsall 2006; and White 2009), particularly because they offer an apparent certainty to (mostly Western) donors under pressure to demonstrate accountability to their national parliaments. This pressure to prove "demonstrable impact" has trickled down through the system, from the policies and procedures of donor agencies, through staff priorities and capacities, and onward through funding mechanisms to multilateral agencies, NGOs, researchers, consultancies, and so on. Much of the focus has been on selecting the *best* method, and in many cases this rests on an assumption that particular designs and methods are superior (a "hierarchy of evidence").[4] The term "rigorous impact evaluation" for instance, has become synonymous with experimental and quasi-experimental methods, while definitions of "impact" are often limited to counterfactual notions of causal inference (Stern et al. 2012). Even those who take a broader view of evaluating impact are still primarily concerned with selecting the best method; although admittedly rather than focusing on the intrinsic superiority of one method over another, their focus has been on the *appropriateness* of methods in line with the evaluation purpose, the evaluation questions, the context, and the characteristics of the intervention (Stern et al. 2012).

Yet far less attention has been paid to the changing demands for evaluation—that is, who is now asking the impact questions, and what questions really need answering? Indeed, it is clear, as outlined in the preceding sections of this chapter, that evaluators are now operating in an increasingly rapidly changing and volatile environment; and they are facing complex and interrelated issues in which the traditional linear approaches are insufficient to describe the changes. Linear, cause/effect approaches to evaluation are insufficient to understand such complex interactions and the contextual variation that is influencing progress toward the SDGs (Befani, Ramalingam, and Stern 2015; Picciotto 2015b). Going forward, evaluation will need to draw on methods and approaches from further afield, including systems thinking and complexity science in order to support understanding of change in these circumstances (Barder and Ramalingam 2012; Ofir 2016). Monitoring and evaluation systems are required at the global, country, sector, and local levels, with a wide variety of evaluative approaches needed to assess achievements (Picciotto 2015b).

But are these new frontiers only about a methodological revolution—a new science for evaluation? In the next sections, we argue that while there are undoubtedly implications for methodology, much more is needed. Methodological innovation and adaptation is key to meeting the evaluation challenges

[4] Hierarchies are well established in the evidence-based policy tradition (e.g., evidence-based medicine), including the Cochrane Collaboration and Campbell Collaboration approaches to systematic reviews. In the development field, 3ie has taken this tradition on board.

of the SDGs: these methodological challenges will require flexibility, creativity, and innovation. No one approach or method will be sufficient, and there will be no "gold standard" (Picciotto 2015a). In addition, it will require building partnerships within and beyond the evaluation community in order to support both the country-led focus of SDGs through capacity building (Ofir 2016), as well as the new demands from a range of private and public actors. Indeed, the evaluation community should engage more effectively with the private sector, by promoting dialogue and mutual understanding, and increasing the demand for evaluative products. There is some level of urgency here in order to avoid these roles being filled by management consultancies, auditors, and accountancy firms, many of who have pre-existing relationships with investors or private companies, but limited experience in social (i.e., developmental) and environmental impact evaluation.[5]

Finally, we conclude that the evaluation field needs to take on a more value-driven approach. The increase in private sector social investments and the associated lack of public accountability mechanisms necessitates a response from evaluators in order to promote transparency in claims of impact; to support inclusive evaluative processes; to stimulate demand for (and use of) evidence in decision making; and to include deliberation and accountability for, and by, citizens.

METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATION AND ADAPTATION

The methodological challenges facing the evaluation field in this new era are multiple and varied. The reframing of global development goals represents a conceptual shift in our approach to addressing issues of poverty and inequality, as we move from thematically silo-based thinking toward a greater understanding and acceptance of the complexity of the issues being faced. Understanding issues such as resilience, working in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, and meeting the requirements of private sector approaches will increase the complexity of evaluation in various ways, but all of them will challenge the reliance on results-based, linear, and experimental designs (Picciotto 2015a). We propose that four different responses will be required from the evaluation profession in the coming years:

- Methodological pluralism within coherent evaluation design
- Systems thinking and complexity science
- Increasing agility and flexibility
- Capitalizing on the data revolution

Methodological Pluralism within Coherent Evaluation Design

Since the early 21st century, development evaluation has been characterized by a reliance on experimental and quasi-experimental approaches,

[5] As concluded in Clarke, Barnett, and van den Berg (2015).

with proponents declaring counterfactual logic the only valid approach to establishing causality (Picciotto 2012). However, limitations in experimental designs, and their inapplicability in a wide range of social and environmental contexts, have called this thinking into question, leading to increased interest in a broader range of evaluation designs and theoretical approaches to establishing causality (Stern et al. 2012). Today's evaluators have an increasing set of methodologies and tools at hand. However, faced with increasingly complex operating environments, multifaceted programs, and interrelated issues, the challenge in coming years will be to become more experienced in the use of a plurality of methods *within* broader (and sometimes nested) evaluation designs. Indeed, our acceptance of *mixed* designs, combining different approaches to establishing causality; and our innovating in the use of contrasting methodological approaches, will be fundamental to our ability to effectively capture and understand impact.

Systems Thinking and Complexity Science

Evaluators will also need to borrow from other disciplines in order to meet the challenges raised in the post-2015 era. The fields of systems thinking and complexity science are increasingly drawn upon by evaluators who are engaged in the challenging task of *understanding* "what works" in complex, dynamic contexts. The principles of these approaches are well-established in many fields, but relatively new to development evaluation (Befani, Ramalingam, and Stern 2015). There is still a significant amount of work to do to understand the applicability and appropriateness of different methodologies, and to adapt and develop the tools used across this incredibly broad field, whether as a heuristic device, or as more complicated forms of social simulation and agent-based modeling. Examples of the application of systems thinking and complexity science within evaluations are limited. Further real-word testing of these approaches is critical to progress in this area (Befani, Ramalingam, and Stern 2015).

Agility and Flexibility

Traditional public sector oriented evaluations can be a costly and time-consuming activity. Increased agility and flexibility will be essential in order to provide private actors with the information they require for decision making and learning. Within the impact investing market for instance, the current focus on lean systems presents a risk in terms of an overreliance on simplistic numerical summaries.[6] Outcome-level evaluation is expensive and time-consuming, which may be why there are few examples to examine (Brest and Born 2013). Evaluators must work to identify cost-effective tools and approaches that are able to meet this demand while providing robust,

[6] This is a trend that mirrors the development of the microfinance sector more than a decade ago, when what could easily be counted obscured the need to capture nonfinancial (social) returns. See Foose and Folan (2016).

high-quality evaluative evidence. This may be partially achieved through the blending of M&E, the employment of continuous data-capture approaches, and considering real-time monitoring and evaluative approaches (Greeley, Lucas, and Chai 2013).

Big Data and Social Media

Evaluators will also need to capitalize on the flourishing information and communications technology market in order to support increased agility in data collection and analysis. Mobile phone and smart technologies can enable people to communicate more easily, engage in dialogue, and contribute their opinions to evaluations. Technological innovation has also made it possible to generate data on difficult-to-reach populations, such as those in fragile and conflict-affected environments (Bamberger 2016).

To date, there has been very limited use of social media and big data in international development evaluation, which has a greater focus on research, planning, and resourcing. When used appropriately, big data can increase the reliability of findings through the provision of huge data sets; facilitate data collection on sensitive topics and in difficult-to-reach situations; capture a range of stakeholder voices and empower vulnerable groups; support the evaluation of complex contexts and programs; and finally, play an important role in the dissemination of findings (Bamberger 2016).

The digital data revolution has significant potential to provide cost-effective, real-time data, and hence to increase the pace at which information can be generated for decision making and learning. However, there is presently insufficient understanding of and practical experience in using these approaches in development evaluation. Continued engagement from the profession will be required to capitalize on these new opportunities.

GOING BEYOND METHODOLOGY: BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Methodological pluralism alone, while important, will not lead to a significant increase in the relevance and utility of evaluation in meeting current global challenges. Methodology has dominated the last decade of development evaluation, but new demands will inevitably require evaluation to expand beyond the public sector and begin working more closely with the private sector, philanthropic foundations, and INGOs, with a stronger emphasis on dialogue within and between actors. Currently rooted in the public sector, the development evaluation profession is likely to have to expand its communication horizons; learn the language of the private sector and philanthropic organizations; and develop the skills and experience required to interact closely with key stakeholders outside the public sector. It will also be important to communicate the experience, knowledge, and approaches developed over the last decade in a manner that the private sector finds engaging, and that demonstrates a clear value proposition (Jackson 2013). Several such attempts have emerged in recent years—for example, the Social Impact Investment Taskforce, the Wilton Park event on New Frontiers, and ImpCon, among others.

Promoting dialogue between evaluators and the private sector is key to building understanding and demand for evaluative products. As discussed earlier, there is presently a rather nascent demand for evaluative evidence, and a lack of clarity about the value evaluators might bring beyond more mainstream advisory services from management consultants and accountancy firms. Evaluators need to not only be open to and able to meet investor and business requirements: they must “do more than evaluate or critique… they also have to become ‘field builders’ to demonstrate their approach and its value.”[7] A variety of new platforms and events are required to promote discourse on differences in language, expectations, challenges, and values.

Within the evaluation sector, partnerships between developing, middle-income, and developed countries will also need to support the building of evaluative capacity across the globe. The move toward country-led evaluation strategies precipitated by the SDG evaluation agenda will require a substantial increase in national technical capacity, commissioning, and evaluation.

THE NEED FOR VALUES-DRIVEN EVALUATION

The applied nature of evaluative inquiry means that findings should have a direct relevance to decisions, whether program decisions, policy changes, strategic changes in direction, or funding allocations. As stated by Patton (2014), “evaluation is something that informs action.” That is, it is a distinctive form of social science inquiry. The conclusions of an evaluation are expected to judge effectiveness, and to place a value on the subject of inquiry; hence they are of keen interest to stakeholders (Barnett and Camfield 2016). As such, the ethical responsibility of the evaluators extends beyond a focus on more traditional research endeavors, in which a “protection of respondents” (i.e., human subjects) predominates—in other words, a “do no harm” principle. Evaluation now has a perhaps heightened requirement, to also contribute to society (a “do good” principle) through deliberations on policy and resource priorities, as well as the associated focus on transparency, accountability, and participation. This requires evaluators to consider more carefully how evidence and knowledge are created and made available and accessible, in a way that facilitates debate among more than just commissioners and immediate stakeholders (Barnett 2015).

In an emerging profession, where commissioners often have a significant, and sometimes unhealthy, stake in evaluation findings, maintaining independence is a continued challenge, especially where commissioners can exert significant control over the scope, methods, approaches, and outcomes of evaluation (Scott 2016). Furthermore, the growth of private sector and blended modalities in the international development field has given rise to heightened concerns over levels of accountability and transparency. Unlike public sector funds, which are generally subject to rigorous evaluation and public scrutiny, many investors are primarily accountable to shareholders rather than the general public (O’Flynn and Barnett 2016).

[7] As concluded in Clarke, Barnett, and van den Berg (2015).

The lack of widespread use of rigorous tools for the assessment of impact, combined with the real risk that the evaluative function is being overtaken by management consultants, financial advisors, auditors and so on, presents a fundamental challenge in establishing the validity of private sector impact claims.

Furthermore, there is a distinct lack of clarity concerning how and to what extent citizens' voices can and should be heard in the process of private sector evaluation (O'Flynn and Barnett 2016). Within the field of impact investing, for example, a shift toward capturing impact at the household or individual level could significantly contribute to the empowerment of those individuals affected, either positively or negatively, by social impact initiatives (Jackson 2013; Clarke, Barnett, and van den Berg 2015). However, a values-driven evaluation profession can, and it is argued should, take a more deliberate stance in addressing the trade-off between methodological rigor and ethical principles such as inclusion (Barnett and Camfield 2016).

CONCLUSION

In short, we argue that in this changing landscape—one of increased interconnectedness, uncertainty, and new actors—the evaluation field will need to both adapt methodologically and form new alliances and partnerships that transcend traditional development assistance. But even beyond this, we argue that evaluation has an ethical and value-based proposition: after all, evaluation is about "value" and "valuing" performance and impact. Evaluation can be about more than simply presenting evidence: it can be used to engage a range of very different interests, support inclusion, raise the voice of the marginalized, and "speak truth to power." With the necessity of mobilizing private sector resources to reach the SDGs also comes an evaluator's responsibility to perform a new role in supporting transparency and accountability. For example, in the absence of traditional public accountability mechanisms, development evaluation can play a supportive role, alongside metrics and certification, to help hold the burgeoning private sector to account (Jackson 2013). Other professions (accountants, management consultancies, auditors, certification bodies, etc.) are already addressing these emerging needs, but with less focus on the effectiveness, transformational change, participation, transparency, and accountability that a truly values-based evaluation profession could offer. Therefore, not only do evaluators themselves need to adapt to a changing world: they also have a role to play in helping citizens to adapt to globalization through the better use of evidence. This includes advocating for, and being part of, processes that hold public and private sectors to account for their performance and impact—not just in the short term, but also in longer-term consequences, both positive and negative.

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