

Thinkings for Overcoming Deficiencies in Evaluation Capacity in China

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In recent years, driven by the strong domestic need of improving the performance of government, the public demands for political transparency, and the pressure of strengthening the institutional and personnel capacity building, China has seen a marked upsurge in demand for design and implementation of result-based evaluation and put great efforts to establish a complete result-based system among the government sectors to notice the input-output efficiency, comprehend outcome, and long-term effects based on management for development results since 1978.

As an important emerging country in the world, China has already been on its way of spreading monitoring and evaluation culture with the cooperation of the WB and ADB. A lot of experts from universities and institutes are studying on setting up appropriate evaluation theories, methods, techniques, as well as indicator systems to promote the practice of development management. However during the way of building their own results-based development management system, China like other developing countries is facing great challenges like lacking internal political demand, necessary budget arrangement for system construction, incomplete law system, opacity of auditing and budgeting process, short-term policy planning, difficulties in inter-ministerial cooperation, and insufficient evaluation capacity.

1. Challenges from Different Sides

(1) Challenges from institutional capacity. China has less developed financial, budgetary, and accounting systems, which bring vague knowledge of the allocation of resources. Because different government departments have different benefits and goals, as well as their weak capacity of development evaluation, it is hard to plan the resource allocation as a whole. The capacity for a results-based system includes the ability to measure inputs, activities, and outputs.

(2) Challenges from technique and capacities. Sound technical skills in data collection and analysis, as well as the matched managerial skills in strategic goal setting and organizational development are necessary for M&E system's sustainability. Prevalently short of basic data base, statistics system, and e-financial budgeting system, as well as well-trained human resources of data collecting, monitoring and analyzing are the strong baffles of improving evaluation capacity. In order to better management, information and data should be valid and available while most developing countries prefer not to collect, analyze, disclose and share data base. However, some projects only have temporary offices and employees, and when the projects are shut down it is hard to call these people and information back. Sometimes, many officials like to make false data to blandish their superiors.

2. Recommendations and Suggestions

In view of these situations and challenges, some measures or approaches could be taken to enhancing capacity in the future.

(1) Winning more support from senior officials. To achieve real benefits, the M&E system constructing needs the political and financial support from seniors. To provide performance information and results to senior management and program managers is fundamental for them to gauge the success of their efforts and adjust policies and programs when needed.

(2) Introducing more technical assistance. As important knowledge tanks, the WB and ADB have very abundant information, experience, and experts of evaluation which could be shared with the developing countries. Furthermore, some OECD countries have best practice in strengthening accountability for results at projects, stimulating improved managerial performance and introducing the disciplines of relevant benchmarking at all management levels.

(3) Enhancing the professionals' capacity. Well trained staff and managers are also very essential to build an evaluation system. Now many government officials have little knowledge of evaluation ideas and methods, few independent evaluation institutions or training organizations. Therefore, it is very necessary for universities, institute and government sectors to work together on researching, training, and popularizing evaluation concepts and approaches.

(4) Improving citizens' involvement. The public citizens should be well educated to supervise how and where the public fund is spent on and more involved in measuring the government performance. Local governments, especially neighbor communities may hold some workshops to get real reflections of public programs from the normal people who are usually important stakeholders.

(5) Emphasizing the media's participation. Media plays very important role in popularizing the ideas and methods of M&E, enhancing the supervision of public services, improving the mass's capacity and disseminating the governments information performance. Therefore the media, which is the bridge connecting public and governments, should be trained first to increase the communications of providers and recipients of public products.

(6) Strengthening institutional capacities. Establishing or reforming related auditing and budgeting systems to be more results oriented are necessary to better use of resources allocation and decision making. To set up formal institutions inside the local governments is essential to sustain the M&E systems. As a distinguished model, Guangdong province has widely applied the M&E and set up a formal Division of Performance Evaluation which is the first institutionalized M&E practice in China.

(7) Founding a regional capacity center. For the great domestic and regional demand of well trained professionals of evaluation, the capacity building is most urgent for the political improvement and social development. Based on the past experience, some meaningful programs should be paid more attention and get strategic growth by the support of China's government and

IFR. For instance, SHIPDET should still take the responsibility of constructing capacity for the whole region in long term. In the near future, based on strengthening and perfecting the existing mechanisms and training model of SHIPDET, China is actively integrating domestic and foreign resources to turn SHIPDET into the “Regional Evaluation Capacity-Building Center”. Meanwhile, the broader network of SHIPDET will be more beneficial for the region to exchange experience and share knowledge which would improve the evaluation ability of evaluators, cultivate evaluation environment as well as create the related facilitation. The further development of SHIPDET can sustainably promote the capacity building and reinforce the MfDR for the developing countries in the whole region.