EvalSDG
A Concept Paper

EvalSDG is a network of interested and skilled policy makers, institutions and practitioners who advocate for the evaluability of the performance indicators of the new SDGs and support processes to integrate evaluation into national and global review systems.

EvalSDG members work to support the evaluation community to be prepared for evaluating initiatives towards better outcomes for the SDGs and ultimately, the "World We Want".

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Introduction

From 2000-2015, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused global efforts and spurred progress towards achievement of human development goals around the world. Much has been achieved, but a key criticism of the MDGs was that there was insufficient attention paid to generating evidence on achievements and learning from challenges.

In September 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [1] are expected to be adopted by world leaders.
The SDGs are aspirational. Progress towards "The world we want" - the headline of the SDG extensive consultative process - will only come through efforts at every level to turn aspirations into realities[2]. It will require learning, innovation and application of effective interventions, at pace and at scale. It will also require effective and accountable leadership and the ability to measure and demonstrate achievement and success.

2015 is also the" Year of Evaluation".
Evaluation supports learning, transparency, accountability and improvement. Evaluation evidence informs, orients and strengthens efforts and interventions under the SDGs. Evaluation of what is working, for whom, and under what conditions will accelerate progress towards "The World we want".

 In the challenging years ahead, evaluation processes can support and empower citizens, institutions and nations to navigate complex problems and take effective actions. For these reasons, and at this unique moment in time, EvalPartners is proposing to set up a strong evaluation partnership to inform, support, measure and assess development efforts around the SDGs: the EvalSDG Network.

Introducing EvalSDG
This Concept Paper explains the rationale for EvalSDG, introduces the proposed initial steps and encourages evaluation leaders to become engaged in the dialogue and actions as we contribute to "The World we want". This paper is a "living document" that will be further developed as the process evolves.

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[1] Open Working Group, 2014. Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>
[2] UN General Assembly, 2012. Sixty-sixth session, Agenda item 19:Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 July 2012 - The Future We Want'. p. 12.

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Why EvalSDG?

IOCE, EvalPartners and the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG)

The International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE)[3] in partnership with the United Nations formed the Evalpartners network in March 2012[4]. Evalpartners aims to enhance the capacities of Civil Society Organizations (CSO), particularly Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs), to influence policy makers, public opinion and other key stakeholders so that public policies are based on evidence, and incorporate considerations of equity and effectiveness. Evalpartners has been working to strengthen the enabling environment for CSOs to engage in a strategic and meaningful manner in national evaluation processes, to contribute to improved country-led evaluation systems and policies and for evaluations that are equity-focused and gender responsive. It is working towards a Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020 that aligns with the SDGs. UNEG is taking an active role in assessing the evaluability of the SDGs and will be a key agency in conducting evaluations related to the SDGs.

Adding value through Evaluation and SDG Implementation and Review

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The Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020

The EvalSDG initiative is aligned with the emerging Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020. This will ensure evaluation is mainstreamed in the SDGs themselves as well as in national development goals. The emerging agenda is as follows:

1. Strengthen the enabling environment for evaluation
2. Strengthen institutional capacities of Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) and Civil society
3. Strengthen individual evaluator capacity development
4. Inter-linkages between enabling environment, institutional and individual capacities

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Attention is being given to the monitoring of the SDGs through a series of goals, targets and indicators. The SDGs targets and their indicators will help countries develop implementation strategies and allocate resources towards achieving the goals. However the focus of the SDG process is on review and reporting as a report card approach. Evaluation has the capacity to step beyond compliance into engagement in performance assessment, learning, strengthening of accountability mechanisms, as well as feeding into policy and decision-making processes. Strengthening of global and national evaluation capacity will add substantial value to the SDG implementation process and assist in achieving long term outcomes.

In response to the need to improve effective monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs in a way that maximizes participation and influence on national systems as well as realizing the potential of evaluation to strongly contribute to the global agenda of the SDGs, Evalpartners has established EvalSDG.

EvalSDG is a network of interested and skilled policy makers, institutions and practitioners who advocate for the evaluability of the performance indicators of the new SDGs, support processes to integrate evaluation processes into national and global review systems and who will work to support the evaluation community to be prepared for evaluating the initiatives towards better outcomes for the SDGs. In this way, EvalSDG can add value to both the evaluation sector and to the SDG implementation and review processes.

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[3] See www.ioce.net
[4] See http://www.mymande.org/evalpartners

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Why now?

Adoption of the SDGs is imminent
The post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs are scheduled to be adopted at a United Nations (UN) Summit in New York from 25th-27th September 2015. Work is currently being undertaken on developing the performance indicators that will apply to each of the 17 proposed.[5] So it is timely to consider the evaluability and evaluation systems of the indicators in relation to the achievement of the SDGs. EvalSDG can provide a platform for advocacy for inclusion of evaluation in consideration of the SDG review mechanisms.

The time to learn the lessons from the MDGs starts now....
The UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) has recently published a report on the importance of evaluation to the effective and efficient achievement of SDGs.[6] The report highlights the contribution of evaluations to accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision making. It also emphasized the importance of ownership of initiatives by stakeholders that can be generated by evaluations, and especially by making the results of evaluations easily available to stakeholders.[7] When thinking about the role of evaluation in the achievement of the SDGs, it is important to consider lessons learned from the experience of implementing the preceding MDGs.

Defining the indicators
The SDG indicators have been the subject of much debate. The indicators associated with MDGs have been criticized for being insufficient to track the progress of the goals and the focus on national averages- masking local disparities in accomplishment.[8] There has been increasing acknowledgement of the importance of clearly defined targets monitoring using the best available science.[9] Evaluation brings a blend of disciplines that can assist in assessing complex situations.

Increasing stakeholder engagement
Stakeholders need to be more engaged in monitoring and evaluation. Good evaluation practice, based effective stakeholder engagement is needed to assist in providing a useful framework and practices for governments and international agencies to engage stakeholders in generating valid quantitative and qualitative data as evidence for performance monitoring and learning.

New opportunities for evidence gathering
The lack of good data is challenging.[10] There are new opportunities arising due to technological advancements for new sources of data that could facilitate more easy tracking of the SDG indicators.[11] Some examples are remote sensing and satellite data.[12] Another opportunity is to make use of private-sector firms' data.[13] EvalSDG can capitalize on such opportunities to encourage the evaluation community to be prepared to integrate new methodologies, practices and sources of data into evaluations relating to the SDGs.

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[5] Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2014. 'Indicators and a monitoring framework for Sustainable Development Goals: Launching a data revolution for the SDGs (Working Draft)'.
[6] United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), 2015. Evidence Changes Lives Realizing Evaluation's Potential to Inform the Global Sustainable Development Goals.
[7] UNEG, 2015.
[8] Sharma, Y. 2014. 'The best way to track the SDGs'. http://www.scidev.net/global/mdgs/feature/track-sdgs-data-development-goals.html
[9] e.g. Hazelton, A. 2015. 'UN warned of pitfalls of vague SDG targets'. <http://www.scidev.net/global/mdgs/news/un-pitfalls-vague-sdg-targets.html>;
Piotorxski, 2014. 'Scientists 'need to step up' to development goal talks.'
<http://www.scidev.net/global/mdgs/news/scientists-need-to-step-up-to-development-goal-talks.html>
[10] Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), 2014. 'Indicators and a monitoring framework for Sustainable Development Goals Launching a data revolution for the SDGs'
[11] The United Nations Secretary-General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (IEAG), 2014. 'A World That Counts: Mobilizing the data revolution for sustainable development'.
[12] Zomer, A. & Hsu, A. 2015. 'Four hurdles to getting data and science into the SDGs: Rigorous integration will ensure the goals inspire rather than deter commitment, say Angel Hsu and Alisa Zomer.' <http://www.scidev.net/global/data/opinion/four-hurdles-datascience-sdgs.html>
[13] Sharma, Y. 2014

What we want to achieve

EvalSDG will seek to promote evaluation activities around the SDGs and to orient and support the evaluation community to work on the SDG agenda in the following ways:

1. engage with the enabling environment for evaluation relevant to the SDGs
2. provide a platform for dialogue, advocacy and knowledge generation in relation to evaluation and the SDGs
3. assist in strengthening the institutional capacities of VOPEs and evaluators to conduct evaluations in support of national SDG implementation and review processes
4. foster inter-linkages and interaction between initiatives to strengthen evaluation and implement and review the SDGs.

How we will achieve it

The proposed actions of the EvalSDG initiatives in line with the above strategies and as a contribution to the emerging Global Evaluation Agenda are as follows:

1.   Promote evaluation in relation to the SDGs

Proposed actions:
- Work with partners as the development of the SDGs proceeds to assist in promoting effective evaluation practices as an important way to improve evidence-based and participatory processes to achieve the SDGs.
- Participate in the enabling environment for the SDGs, particularly in relation to potential review processes for the SDGs
- Encourage National Government involvement in the development of national evaluation systems and policies in support of SDG implementation and review

2.   Act as a platform for dialogue on the role and practice of evaluation and the SDGs

Proposed actions:
- Provide a forum for discussion on evaluation practice in relation to the SDGs
- Advocate for a focus on evaluability of indicators, and feasibility of monitoring and data collection and other evaluation practices to enhance the SDG design-implementation-review cycle
- Work with partners on data generation and evaluation methods relevant to the SDGs
- Strengthen the knowledge base on what works and assist in disseminating good practices and lessons from evaluations
- Prepare advocacy materials on evaluation and craft advocacy statements to be used in public fora, the media, etc relating to the SDGs.

3.   Assist in strengthening of VOPEs and evaluator capacities to evaluate SDGs

EvalSDG will consider and support initiatives to strengthen the capacity of members of the evaluation sector, policy makers, government officials, evaluators, civil society representatives and advocates, and other interested actors. It will promote efforts to embed good evaluation practice in the review of SDGs.

Proposed actions:
- Identify opportunities to strengthen the capacity of evaluation sector to evaluate SDGs through training, mentoring and support to VOPEs and civil society organisations

- Advocate for VOPEs to work with National Governments to consider evaluations of progress in relation to the SDGs in their national evaluation agendas
- Include evaluation and evaluability of the SDGs in discussions at key events associated with the 2015 International Year of Evaluation
- Encourage innovation by supporting the evaluation sector to embrace new techniques and sources of data to evaluate progress against the SDGs
- Document and share information on good practices relating to the evaluation of SDGs across the VOPE networks and through professional development opportunities

4.   **Foster inter-linkages related to the evaluation sector and the SDGs process**

EvalSDG will contribute to coordination and integration between relevant stakeholders around the evaluation of the SDGs.

Proposed actions:
- Identify and map stakeholders interested in SDGs and their evaluation
- Support increased coordination between stakeholders by providing networking opportunities e.g. online forums, EvalYear events, information portals
- Identify, disseminate and communicate good practices and lessons learned on how to evaluate SDGs and the results of systematic reviews of relevant evaluations
- Enhance linkages with other evaluation networks, particularly EvalYouth, EvalCulture and EvalGender

Next steps

The shaping and launch of EvalSDG will be participatory in nature, and will leverage existing processes within the International Year of Evaluation, by taking advantage of the existing events organized by several stakeholders within the framework of the year of evaluation.

It will connect with other networks, organizations and individuals that are interested in contributing to the process. EvalSDG will be managed through a core group of institutions, led jointly by EvalPartners and the UN Evaluation Group. A wider reference group will be open to all interested organizations and individuals who align with the purpose of EvalSDG and wish to be engaged with the process.

EvalSDG will be formally launched at the 2015 Global Evaluation Week in November 2015.

In the meantime, an open discussion forum has been established on www.ioce.net/forum. We would welcome your feedback on the Concept Paper and a signal of willingness to engage in the EvalSDG activities.

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