



Review of monitoring and evaluation capacities in the agriculture sector

STUDY BRIEFING NOTE

There has been little research on the role of Ministries of Agriculture in the institutionalization of countries' evaluation practices. In fact, efforts to support countries institutionalize evaluation and develop national capacities have often focused on central ministries and institutions. Evaluation is a necessary tool to respond to an increased and legitimate demand for accountability and improvement of policies and practices through continuous learning, including in Ministries of Agriculture.

This study aimed at clarifying monitoring and evaluation (M&E) activities, capacities and dynamics taking place in Ministries of Agriculture. Enhanced knowledge on this subject could allow to better orient initiatives to support evaluation functions – or by extension monitoring or results-based management (RBM) - in sectoral public institutions, until now rarely targeted by such capacity development endeavours. This study also aimed at contributing to the debate on the relevance and importance of M&E practice in Ministries of Agriculture and stimulating further initiatives on the topic.

Process and methodology

The study consisted of a six-month data collection process which started in September 2019. It relied on information collected through phone interviews and a review of available literature, although the latter proved to be quite scarce. Key informants consulted were predominantly from M&E units in Ministries of Agriculture and related institutions, identified through voluntary organizations for professional evaluation, the EvalForward Community, and FAO Country Representatives. While the initial scope was on the evaluation activities, the study has expanded its focus to M&E and related RBM activities.

Key findings

Based on a synthesis of information collected in relation to elements influencing the evaluation function in developing countries, the study found that:

- **Ministries of Agriculture are generally overlooked with regard to M&E capacities.** Their level of activity in these areas tends to be less developed, with few exceptions. This

is due to the fact that evaluation has most often been entrusted institutionally to central ministries, such as the Ministry of Planning or under the responsibility of the Prime Minister.

- The extent to which **M&E units in Ministries of Agriculture contribute to agriculture sector results reporting is unclear and inconclusive** in many countries.
- Units in charge of M&E tend to mostly **focus on monitoring**, in some cases limited to financial and activity monitoring, and suffer from **limited access to resources**, tools and capacities.
- **Budget cuts in the agriculture sector** have led to reduced investments in human resources training and skills development in many countries. This may explain why M&E units are often understaffed and lack training opportunities.
- **Donors still largely drive evaluation efforts** in sectoral projects and programmes. It is rare to find instances where nationally-owned initiatives are subject to evaluation in the agriculture sector.

- Positive examples show **the central role of influential leaders championing evaluation** in influencing an effective evaluation function at national and sectoral level. High-level champions are instrumental in supporting the institutionalization process and introducing a culture of evaluation and RBM within the administration. Frequent leadership changes can jeopardize achievements and undermine the results of past investments.
- **Ministries of Agriculture are unevenly involved in measuring progress against Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**; there is still a disconnect between project level, national indicators and SDG targets/indicators in many countries.
- In comparison to previous studies on the topic, the **main challenges identified as hampering M&E capacities in the agriculture sector, particularly concerning staff capacities, institutionalization/operationalization of M&E systems, data and budget remain largely unchanged over the past decades.**

Opportunities emerged from countries to strengthen M&E in Ministries of Agriculture

Based on the findings across countries, some opportunities can be identified to support stronger M&E systems in Ministries of Agriculture:

- M&E components of agriculture programmes funded by donors can contribute to strengthen M&E activities and understanding in Ministries of Agriculture. However, in most cases and especially in big countries, **long-term engagement and commitment is required to institutionalize M&E**

components and to contribute to **creating an evaluation culture, beyond project or programme-based interventions.**

- SDG reporting represents a challenge but also an immediate opportunity to support the Ministry of Agriculture in M&E. Concrete actions that would benefit Ministries of Agriculture are **support in aligning sector plans, national surveys and policy evaluation to SDG indicators.**
- There are emerging opportunities to support impact evaluation or **the use of geospatial and IT tools in the agriculture sector.**
- **South-South Cooperation** could be an effective avenue to support the development of capacities.
- The involvement of **research institutes and civil society organizations** proved to be a good and cost-effective way to strengthen capacities in M&E activities in the agriculture sector.

Countries included in the study

Argentina, Armenia, Benin, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Gabon, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mali, Palestine, Peru, Senegal, South Africa, the United Republic of Tanzania, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Uganda and Uzbekistan.

Limitations

Although the methods and scope of the study have identified relevant dynamics and challenges in M&E in the agriculture sector, findings cannot be considered statistically representative, as the limited number of interviews has not allowed extensive triangulation that would lead to systematic conclusions.

Office of Evaluation

E-mail: evaluation@fao.org

Web address: www.fao.org/evaluation

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Viale delle Terme di Caracalla

00153 Rome, Italy



Eval Forward

Evaluation for Food Security, Agriculture & Rural Development

www.evalforward.org



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