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# THE FUTURE OF DEVELOPMENT EVALUATION

# EL FUTURO DE LA EVALUACIÓN DEL DESARROLLO

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## **Abstract**

Over the past sixty years evaluators working on development have coalesced into a distinctive branch of the evaluation discipline. But opinion about the future of their occupation remains fragmented given the critical uncertainties of the operating environment, the tectonic shifts that have shaken the development scene since the 2008 financial crisis as well as the diverse conceptions of the role that evaluation can and should play in realigning policy priorities towards the emerging post 2015 sustainable development goals. In these vastly changed circumstances, the effectiveness of development evaluation hinges on forging an accurate appreciation of the challenges faced by evaluators in contributing to the development enterprise and, under the aegis of the International Year of Evaluation, on bringing together the scattered energies and resources of the burgeoning network of national, regional and global evaluation associations.

*Key Words:* Development Evaluation; Evaluation Trends; Metrics.

## **Resumen**

Los evaluadores que trabajan en el área del desarrollo durante los últimos sesenta años han ido convergiendo hacia una rama diferenciada de la evaluación como disciplina. Pero la opinión acerca del futuro de esta línea de trabajo está fragmentada debido a las incertidumbres críticas del medio en que debe operar y los cambios muy importantes que han sacudido el escenario del desarrollo desde la crisis financiera del 2008, así como las diferentes concepciones sobre el rol que la evaluación puede y debe desempeñar para realinear las prioridades de políticas hacia las metas emergentes del desarrollo sostenible después del 2015. En estas circunstancias tan diferentes, la efectividad de la evaluación del desarrollo depende de una apreciación adecuada de los retos que enfrentan los evaluadores para contribuir a la empresa del desarrollo y, bajo la égida del Año Internacional de la Evaluación, que se unan las energías dispersas y los recursos de la pujante red de asociaciones nacionales, regionales y globales

*Palabras Clave:* Evaluación Del Desarrollo; Tendencias Evaluativas; Métrica.

## 1. Development trends.

Development evaluation is about to enter a new age. Will it adapt to the new global economic order? Will it respond to the post 2015 development priorities? Will it rise to the challenge of an unprecedented social crisis that is sparing no region and no country? In order to throw light on these questions, this article surveys development trends, sketches the evolving paradigms of the discipline and examines how three major drivers of change (internationalization, technology and looming social unrest) are reshaping development evaluation. Next, it revisits its models, metrics, methods and management and concludes with a call for collective action to reinvent development evaluation and fulfill its promise.

### **Development trends**

Tectonic changes in the global economy and the aid architecture have transformed the development landscape. Past development efforts have dramatically improved the lot of humanity. Remarkable gains in social indicators have accompanied the rapid rise in average incomes. Average life expectancy at birth rose from 48 years in 1955 to 65 years in 1995-2000 and may reach 73 years by 2025<sup>2</sup>. The share of people denied access to clean water has been halved since 1990. The world is close to achieving parity in primary school education between girls and boys. The Millennium Development Goal of halving the share of people living in absolute poverty from 1990 to 2015 was reached five years ahead of schedule.

On the other hand, the challenge of global poverty remains and development achievements have been unequally distributed<sup>3</sup>. Out of 5 billion people in developing countries there remain 2.5 billion people living on less than US\$2 a day and 1.3 billion living in abject poverty (less than US\$1.25 a day). Almost a billion people are still malnourished. Without a resumption of robust growth combined with a substantial reduction in income disparities it will not be possible to make poverty history.

In the west innovation fueled productivity growth for more than a century. But in the last fifty years the industrial democracies have experienced dismal and often jobless growth. Following the 2008 financial meltdown they have endured high

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.who.int/whr/1998/media\\_centre/5ofacts/en/](http://www.who.int/whr/1998/media_centre/5ofacts/en/)

<sup>3</sup> World Bank, *Global Monitoring Report*, Washington DC, 2010

unemployment, stagnant wages and social dissatisfaction<sup>4</sup>. By contrast, we are now midway through a century of high and accelerating growth in the developing world<sup>5</sup>. In particular the emerging market economies have adopted the technology, know-how and policies that gave a head start to the western industrial democracies. This has induced a “great convergence”<sup>6</sup>.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the share of the global economy held by developing economies is projected to rise from 40% at the turn of the century to 57% by the year 2030 in terms of purchasing power parity<sup>7</sup>. But many countries, caught in a poverty trap, have been left behind. They are typically small, disadvantaged and landlocked. Forty eight of them are classified as least developed<sup>8</sup> and figure prominently in the league tables of fragile and conflict prone states. Finding solutions to their predicament remains an ethical imperative and a core challenge for development cooperation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Looking ahead, economic and political imbalances endanger international stability. International relations are deteriorating. Human security is increasingly threatened by complex emergencies: the number of great natural disasters rose from two in 1950 to six in 2005<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, ethnic strife continues to endanger international stability. The number of armed conflicts has been stuck at 32 for the last 4-5 years<sup>10</sup>. Finally chronic runaway “problems without passports” such as infectious diseases, water pollution, land degradation and criminal networks (combined with the weakness of multilateral institutions to deal with them) have contributed to the growing complexities, risks and uncertainties of the operating environment. Strengthening the weakest links in the global system has moved to the centre stage of development priorities.

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<sup>4</sup>Mariana Mazzucato, 2014, *The Entrepreneurial State: Debunking Public vs. Private Sector Myths*, Anthem Press, London and New York

<sup>5</sup>Pedro Olinto and Jaime Saavedra, *An Overview of Global Inequality Trends*, World Bank, Inequality in Focus, Volume 1, Number 1, Washington DC, April 2012

<sup>6</sup><http://www.economist.com/node/21528979>

<sup>7</sup><http://www.oecd.org/dev/pgd/economydevelopingcountriessettoaccountfor nearly60ofworldgdpby2030 accordingtonewestimates.htm>

<sup>8</sup>A country is classified as Least Developed if its per capita income is less than \$2.5 a day; if its human resources are limited and if its economy and society are vulnerable to shocks. 48 countries currently meet these criteria. Only three least developed countries have graduated to developing country status since the late sixties.

<sup>9</sup><http://www.oecd.org/finance/insurance/38155568.pdf>

<sup>10</sup><http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/kampanjer/refleks/inns spill/engasjement/prio.html?id=492941>

These complex and closely interconnected insecurities will not be overcome by existing development policies. They are not environmentally sustainable. Three and a half planets would be needed to accommodate all countries at current UK standards of living<sup>11</sup>. The energy and natural resources intensive development practices that have fueled past development efforts need urgent reform. They have induced temperature rises unknown in human history.

The global eco-system is deteriorating given the complex feedback loops associated with the drying of wetlands, the thawing of permafrost regions and the unabated destruction of rainforests. Land-based species are facing extinction; biodiversity hotspots are under threat and the acidification of oceans is damaging fish stocks. No wonder that sustainability has been selected as the overarching goal of the post 2015 development agenda<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. The new development architecture.

The north-south model of international relations that lumped together emerging middle income economies with low income and vulnerable least developed countries has become anachronistic<sup>13</sup>. New donors have appeared on the development scene. The BRICS' development bank symbolizes the viability and dynamism of emerging market countries; confirms [China's global leadership](#) and puts pressure on the IMF and the World Bank to adapt to an emerging economic order<sup>14</sup>.

It is not easy to gauge the precise level of the new donors' contributions since only a few foundations<sup>15</sup> and a handful of non DAC government donors<sup>16</sup> report their bilateral

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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.wwf.org.uk/about\\_wwf/press\\_centre/?unewsid=6783](http://www.wwf.org.uk/about_wwf/press_centre/?unewsid=6783)

<sup>12</sup> <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

<sup>13</sup> China's gross domestic product (GDP) already exceeds Japan's while Brazil's will overtake France and the United Kingdom by the middle of this decade.

<sup>14</sup> <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/3-reasons-the-brics-new-development-bank-matters/>

<sup>15</sup> Beyond the International Financial Institutions, the Regional Development Banks and the United Nations agencies, the GAVI Alliance, the Global Fund, the Global Environment Facility and the Montreal Protocol submit regular reports to the DAC. See DCD/DAC (2010)32, p.27. According to <http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=DCD/DAC/STAT%282011%2921&docLanguage=En>, pp.5-7 the Gates Foundation has now agreed to send reports to the DAC which hopes to secure reporting from other foundations and international NGOs.

aid using DAC standards<sup>17</sup>. But the aid they are already providing is substantial and growing, e.g. private aid was estimated at \$33.5 billion in 2005 compared to \$107 billion of official development assistance<sup>18</sup>. China has become a large new aid player<sup>19</sup> and Brazil, Russia and India have emerged as significant aid donors on a par with (or even ahead of) such long-time western donors as Finland, Ireland or Portugal.

While the resulting sprawl has contributed to aid incoherence and administrative burdens it has offered new partnership options to developing countries and it has begun to relax the tight hold that high income countries have long exerted on the development cooperation system. In this new context, development evaluation will have to free itself from the top down logic of the aid relationship and become an integral part of governance processes in the public, private and voluntary sectors at local, country, regional and global levels.

The lack of broad based consensus about the ends and means of achieving peace and prosperity coincides with a crisis in development theory<sup>20</sup>. This is opening up a window of opportunity for evaluation. The effectiveness of development strategies differs sharply among countries so that evaluation has a potential comparative advantage as a tailor made practice. It uniquely connects knowledge to policy on a case by case basis. Given rising public demand for more transparency and accountability the global demand for evaluation is growing rapidly.

More than ever development evaluators have an opportunity to make a difference. The era of single economic narratives is over. Developed countries are facing a host of economic and social problems evoking those of the developing world. New conceptions of development are being explored since the industrial democracies are no longer the beacon of sustained economic progress and social harmony and the voices of the south

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<sup>16</sup> Nineteen non-DAC donors report their aid to OECD DAC (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Turkey, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE)

<sup>17</sup> Nineteen non-DAC donors report their aid to OECD DAC (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Iceland, Israel, Liechtenstein, Turkey, Chinese Taipei, Thailand, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, UAE)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2007/08/aid-kharas>

<sup>19</sup> <http://dalberg.com/blog/?p=1778>

<sup>20</sup> E.A. Brett, 2009, *Reconstructing Development Theory: International Equality, Institutional Reform and Social Emancipation*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York

have begun to be heard<sup>21</sup>. Development evaluation and the evaluation mainstream are getting closer.

Shifting international wealth patterns mean that the challenge of poverty reduction is now largely concentrated within countries that have the resources to address it directly and on their own. Most middle income countries enjoy the financial scope to tackle extreme poverty within their borders so that development cooperation will no longer be principally about North-South transfers of resources via aid. As a result the rationale for development aid is undergoing fundamental change

In 1990, about 90 percent of the world's poor people (by both \$1.25 and \$2 income per capita per day international poverty lines) lived in low-income countries. By 2008, most of the world's poor lived in middle-income countries: this is where 74% (or 79%) of poor people lived depending on whether measured poverty is measured in terms of \$1.25 or \$2 income per capita per day poverty lines<sup>22</sup>.

Of course, most low income countries are enduring higher poverty rates than middle income countries and several of them will continue to depend on official development aid for decades to come. But non-aid links have become major mechanisms of resource transfer so that development evaluation must now contend with a complex web of cross border relationships. In this context, development interventions with scaling up or policy reform potential are at a premium:

- Developing countries' exports (about US\$5.8 trillion) are about 45 times the level of 2010 official aid flows.<sup>23</sup>
- Remittances from migrants (US\$283 billion) are 2.2 times as large as aid flows.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> [http://europeanevaluation.org/sites/default/files/ees\\_newsletter/ees-newsletter-2014-06-july-05-web.pdf](http://europeanevaluation.org/sites/default/files/ees_newsletter/ees-newsletter-2014-06-july-05-web.pdf) (page 9)

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.cgdev.org/files/1426481\\_file\\_Sumner\\_where\\_in\\_the\\_world\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.cgdev.org/files/1426481_file_Sumner_where_in_the_world_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> [http://www.oecd.org/document/49/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_34447\\_46582641\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/49/0,3746,en_2649_34447_46582641_1_1_1_1,00.html) shows DAC donor aid at US\$129 billion. The trade number is the 2008 level according to WTO. It dipped by eight percent in 2009 but more than fully recovered in 2010. See <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/01/index.htm> and [http://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/coher\\_e/mdg\\_e/development\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/coher_e/mdg_e/development_e.htm)

- Foreign direct investment (US\$548 billion) is 4.2 times as large as official aid flows.<sup>25</sup>
- Royalty and license fees paid by developing countries to developed countries (US\$27 billion) are more than one-fifth of official aid flows.<sup>26</sup>
- The huge damage to developing countries caused by climate change as a result of OECD countries' unsustainable environmental practices is getting worse, given the rapid growth in emerging market countries.<sup>27</sup>

The increasingly interconnected global system is refocusing the scope of development policy research and broadening the concerns of development evaluators. Individually as well collectively the powerful transmission belts of globalization are dwarfing the money impact of aid and creating new and powerful connections between industrialized and developing countries, as well as among developing countries

### 3. Evaluation trends.

The new international order is inducing development evaluation to conquer new frontiers and to become embedded within countries in order to remain relevant. Its value and legitimacy will ultimately depend on the extent to which it influences decision making in ways that expand the freedoms that the peoples of the world enjoy<sup>28</sup>. Of course, it will at any one time continue to be shaped by the dominant paradigm that animates public policy.

Evert Vedung's model of evaluation diffusion portrays the history of evaluation as a succession of *waves* driven by the prevailing winds of popular sentiment and political

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<sup>24</sup> Remittance flows to developing countries stood at US\$283 billion in 2008 according to the World Bank (Migration and Development Brief 8, November 11, 2008) which projected them to dip slightly in 2009 and more than fully recover in 2010.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, *World Investment Report, 2010, Investing in a Low-Carbon Economy*, United Nations, New York and Geneva, 2010

<sup>26</sup> This World Bank estimate is for 2007 (*2009 World Bank Indicators*). It compares to official development assistance of US\$104 billion for that year according to DAC statistics.

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Impacts, vulnerabilities and adaptation in developing countries*, UNFCCC Secretariat, Bonn (Germany), 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Amartya Sen (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, Random House, New York



ideology<sup>29</sup>. Each wave eventually subsides but only after it has reshaped the evaluation shore line and left behind layers of intellectual sediment that enrich the discipline.

Thus Don Campbell's "*experimenting society*" was emblematic of the first wave in the early 1960's. It was rationalist, science based, positivist and meritocratic.

The second wave was followed by a *dialogue-oriented*, constructivist, participatory and pluralistic wave that surged in the late 1960's. The political winds shifted sharply to the right in the mid-eighties. Suddenly big government was perceived as the problem rather than the solution and a *neo-liberal* wave swelled and engulfed the evaluation discipline. We are now surfing a fourth wave which is *evidence based*; takes neo-liberalism for granted and restores experimentalism as the privileged approach of the evaluation enterprise.

The current wave legitimizes value free evaluation by clothing it in technocratic apparel. It gives pride of place to the achievement of pre-determined goals set by vested power<sup>30</sup>. It thrives on tracking progress through self serving indicators. But countervailing currents are already brewing. A new evaluation wave has begun to swell. It will be propelled by three major forces – internationalization; the new information and communications technologies and the popular clamor for social change in all corners of the world.

## 4. Internationalization.

Right under the surface of the doctrinal waves described by Evert Vedung a strong tide began to surge in the early 1990's: internationalization. It was detected by Eleanor Chelimsky in 1995<sup>31</sup>. The UK Evaluation Society was set up in 1992. France and the European Evaluation Society followed in 1994. Next, came Malaysia and Peru and in 1997 Italy came on board as well as Germany/Austria.

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<sup>29</sup> Evert Vedung, *Four Waves of Evaluation Diffusion*, Evaluation, July 2010, 16:263-277

<sup>30</sup> House, E.R., *Blowback, Consequences of Evaluation for Evaluation*, American Journal of Evaluation, December 2008 vol. 29 no. 4 416-426. Sage Publications

<sup>31</sup> E. Chelimsky and W. Shadish, *Evaluation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Sage Publications, London and Thousand Oaks, California, 1997

By the turn of the century 20 evaluation associations were operating and by the end of 2012, EvalPartners under the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) had identified 114 evaluation groupings globally, of which almost 40% are informal networks. This bewildering diversity of evaluation networks, associations and conferences has facilitated the spread of ideas. Evaluation has crossed borders and gone global. The logical culmination of this trend will be reached in 2015, the *international year of evaluation* recently announced by the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE)<sup>32</sup>.

## 5. The new technologies.

We live in a 'plugged in' world. For better or for worse we have become inextricably intertwined socially, financially and culturally. In pursuit of the post 2015 development vision, evaluators will use the new *information technologies* in order to combine their assets and improve evaluation practice.

We are right in the middle of a quiet, gradual and irreversible global transformation of society and this is bound to affect the evaluation discipline. Following the main frame era and the PC era associated with past evaluation waves a *new generation* evaluation movement has arisen. The new movement combines the social energies triggered by Web 2.0 and the analytical potential of 'big data' associated with Web 3.0.

The term Web 2.0 evokes [information sharing](#) and [user-centered designs](#) as well as [collaboration](#) through social networking. It evokes the systematic use of social software at all stages of the evaluation process and the growing use of applications to carry out evaluations. It relies on the stakeholders themselves to create and publish evaluation content. It wires evaluators, program managers and ultimate beneficiaries closer together through social networks.

Under Web 2.0 shared measurement systems nurture social capital, forge deeper understandings and increase transparency and accountability. The new technologies

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<sup>32</sup>IOCE through [EvalPartners](#), the global movement to strengthen national evaluation capacities, made this announcement at the [Third International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities](#) organized in São Paulo, Brazil, 29 Sep - 2 Oct 2013.  
[http://mymande.org/evalyear/Declaring\\_2015\\_as\\_the\\_International\\_Year\\_of\\_Evaluation](http://mymande.org/evalyear/Declaring_2015_as_the_International_Year_of_Evaluation)

also offer new ways of presenting evaluation results. Instead of long winded and bulky reports, clients will be presented with virtual presentations of brief texts summarizing comparative perspectives, vivid images, and video content including hyperlinks that allow drilling into technical content and the back up evidence. Just as for Wikipedia, the evaluation will be governed by voluntary contributions and informal networking<sup>33</sup>.

The term Web 3.0 is still contested but all definitions point to the potential of advanced *search engines* that whirl and sift through the torrents of big data currently flowing through the worldwide web. The explosion of social media and the increasingly robust digital infrastructure of the developing world are generating huge amounts of data.

Millions of sensors are embedded in mobile phones, ATM machines, personal computers, pads, tablets, transport vehicles and industrial machines. Individuals churn out a phenomenal and burgeoning volume of data as they move about, engage in commercial transactions or connect with others.

Given these developments, Web 3.0 makes use of digital data exhaust secured from service providers; local radio calls and information hot lines; ‘digital smoke signals’ secured from social network sites; triangulation of program beneficiaries’ location with socio-economic regional characteristic and program performance data; social networking tools; and performance data collected at the source through mobile phones.

## 6. Social change.

Development evaluators will also tap their unique comparative advantage relative to the applied social sciences— a value driven mandate and a commitment to the public interest. The foundations of evaluation are consistent with liberal democratic ideals. Belief in democracy is associated with faith in progress and confidence in the future. Most prosperous and stable countries are representative democracies<sup>34</sup>. Even the most authoritarian governments claim to be democratic.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.fsg.org/tabid/191/ArticleId/964/Default.aspx?srpush=true>

<sup>34</sup> The ten highest ranking countries in the Legatum Index (<http://www.prosperity.com>) that ranks countries according to their wealth, growth and quality of life are democracies. In such countries the rule of law enforces contracts and property rights and popular representation gives legitimacy to government.

Yet fresh doubts about the effectiveness of liberal democracies are spreading. The notion that they are most successful at triggering economic growth and sustaining prosperity is no longer widely held. The advent of market socialism in China and its remarkable success in generating rapid economic growth and poverty reduction combined with the economic insecurity still haunting western economies have generated unease about the notion that liberal democracy and development go hand in hand.

The global progress towards liberal democracy appears to have stalled. For the eighth consecutive year Freedom House's annual report has reported setbacks. Whereas in 2013 forty countries experienced greater freedoms fifty four countries registered declines<sup>35</sup>. Modern authoritarianism seeks to dominate all branches of government as well as the civil society and the press. Its appeal lies in promises of rapid economic development.

It is now well established that inequality within the industrial democracies is extraordinarily high and getting worse<sup>36</sup>. The hollowing of the middle class and the persistence of high unemployment are undermining faith in the liberal democratic model. Extremist political parties are getting more adherents.

Reducing inequality and bolstering long term economic growth are two sides of the same coin. IMF economists have found that in rich as well as poor countries inequality is strongly correlated with shorter spells of economic expansion and thus less growth over time<sup>37</sup>. Similarly the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has stressed that high levels of pay inequality reduce growth prospects<sup>38</sup>. Finally the Brookings Institution has concluded that globally, economic disparities pose even greater challenges as they can contribute to cycles of poverty, disease, social unrest and political turmoil<sup>39</sup>.

Mass protests and popular battles over public space are leading indicators of social change. Evaluation will not have legitimacy unless it serves the liberal democratic

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2014#.U76nmZRdUuc>

<sup>36</sup> Pedro Olinto and Jaime Saavedra, *An Overview of Global Inequality Trends*, World Bank, Inequality in Focus, Volume 1, Number 1, Washington DC, April 2012

<http://www.imf.org/external/np/pp/eng/2014/012314.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/forum/oecdyearbook/inclusive-growth-making-it-happen.htm>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.brookings.edu/research/topics/inequality>

ideals under which all citizens are equal before the law and all voices are heard in the governance of society. But in order to be relevant evaluation will have to adopt diverse strategies to help resolve a host of collective action dilemmas in a variety of governance environments.

## 7. The limits of current evaluation models.

The dominant evaluation models currently on offer have merit in particular circumstances. But they are not fit for challenging the status quo, promoting radically different policy solutions or probing the political dynamics that lie behind existing policies and programs. They fall into three basic categories.

The first group emphasizes *compliance*. It examines whether public resources have been applied within existing rules and regulations. Like auditing it is goal based. It assumes that adherence to pre-determined norms is desirable. But what if these goals do not address issues of inequality, social inclusion and environmental sustainability?

The second group is oriented towards social learning. When *knowledge creation* is the main goal evaluation is akin to social science research. The focus of this group of models is on whether a policy or a program works. It puts attribution at the centre of the evaluation stage. But it is often value free. It raises the question of what knowledge is being sought and why.

The third group is dedicated to *improved decision making*. It emphasizes instrumental utilization of evaluation findings. Active listening, fulsome engagement with evaluation stakeholders and close attention to evaluation dissemination and follow up characterize this group of models. But here again one needs to ascertain whose decisions are being examined and what impact such decisions have on various groups. Lack of independence is the greatest threat to the ethical validity of this approach. If evaluators judge their own success by the actual use of their findings and recommendations are they likely to be objective and independent?

Looking at the state of evaluation today it is hard to avoid the conclusion that client controlled evaluations have contributed to the timidity of evaluation agendas. Goal achievement evaluation models still dominate evaluation practice. Delivering on

intended goals matters of course but whose goals? Whose values are used to ascertain the merit and worth of results achieved?

Finally do we have the right evaluation guidelines? The enormously influential American Evaluation Association Guiding Principles urge evaluators to meet legitimate clients' needs whenever it is feasible and appropriate to do so. They give pride of place to the utilization of evaluation results by program managers and policy makers<sup>40</sup>. The unintended consequence has been a neglect of the social dimensions of policies and programs.

## 8. What about democratic evaluation?

Giving voice to the citizenry has been the main aim of a neglected evaluation model: democratic evaluation<sup>41</sup>. It originated in the second dialogical wave of evaluation diffusion. Barry MacDonald, its pioneer, made clear that “sponsorship of the evaluation study does not in itself confer a special claim upon this service”. He recognized the need for the evaluator to engage “in periodic negotiation of his relationship with program sponsors and participants”. But he chose to reduce evaluation to an information service to the community<sup>42</sup>.

Unfortunately a neutral brokering role is ill adapted to utterly dysfunctional governance contexts. The model works best in authorizing environments where communicative rationality prevails and rational discourse buttressed by ethics can influence decision making. It is not accidental that democratic evaluation emerged in the United Kingdom at a time and in a sector (education) when it was sensible to “take seriously, rather than for granted, the public rhetoric of the liberal democratic state”.

To strengthen the MacDonald approach and help promote the interests of the weakest and the least fortunate Ernest House and Kenneth Howe revised the traditional democratic evaluation model:

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<sup>40</sup> The guiding principle related to the public interest is not phrased as strongly: “Evaluators articulate and take into account the diversity of interests and values that may be related to the general and public welfare”.

<sup>41</sup> Deliberative democratic evaluation is similar: it is inclusive; dialogical, deliberative, participatory and sensitive to power imbalances (House, 1999).

<sup>42</sup> MacDonald, B. (1976). *Evaluation and the control of education*. In D. Tawney (Ed.), *Curriculum evaluation today: Trends and implications* (pp. 125–134). London: Macmillan

“I favor an approach called deliberative democratic evaluation that includes all relevant stakeholders, promotes dialogue with and among stakeholders and involves stakeholders in extended deliberation processes. Its three key components are inclusion, dialogue and deliberation. Inclusion means working with underrepresented and powerless groups as key stakeholders of the evaluation, not just the sponsors and powerful stakeholders; extensive dialogue increases the chances of evaluators understanding stakeholders understanding each other; and extended deliberations is careful reasoned discussion of issues, values and findings of all concerned.<sup>43</sup>”

House acknowledged that the model is an ideal that cannot ever be fully realized in a world of unexamined interests and values, power asymmetries and exclusion of weak segments of society. For him the democratic “evaluator is not a passive bystander, an innocent facilitator, or a philosopher kind who makes decisions for others, but rather a conscientious professional who adheres to carefully considered principles”<sup>44</sup>.

This implies a more activist stance as required in authorizing environments that are partially democratic. But for both for MacDonald and for House/Howe the instrument of choice is expert facilitation. This falls short in authorizing environments that do not tolerate dissent and/or for assignments that are closely controlled by evaluation sponsors.

Refraining from values in the evaluation process does not rise up to the wicked challenges imposed by dysfunctional governance contexts.

In particular, evaluation in developing countries must frequently contend with authorizing environments in which governments have been captured by personal or private networks or in which a central ruling elite exercises full control over public affairs. In such patrimonial situations the country’s political economy drives the policy processes within which evaluation services are delivered so that opportunities to elicit effective demand for evaluation calls for tailor-made approaches that focus on civil

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<sup>43</sup> House, E.R., (2005) *The Many Forms of Democratic Evaluation*, The Evaluation Exchange, Volume XI, Number 3, Fall, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Family Research Project

<sup>44</sup> House E.R. and Howe K. R. (1999) *Values in evaluation and social research*, London and Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications

society organizations, local think tanks and universities and reframe technocratic issues as political in order to promote evaluation for democracy<sup>45</sup>.

## 9. Democratic evaluation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Undoubtedly all current evaluation approaches have useful features and fulfill valuable services. They will all continue to have adherents and to fulfill useful social functions. Utilization focused evaluation helps decision making but it is subservient to the values of its sponsors and lacks independence. Knowledge acquisition and accountability models are independent but mostly value free. David Fetterman’s empowerment evaluation as well as participatory evaluation approaches used in knowledge acquisition and accountability models help to level the policy playing field but they ultimately lack independence<sup>46</sup>.

**Table 1:** Independence and transformative value among evaluation models

	Low independence	High independence
High transformative value	Participatory evaluation; empowerment evaluation models	Social justice models; democratic evaluation models
Low transformative value	Utilization focused evaluation models; developmental evaluation	Accountability models; knowledge acquisition models

As Table 1 above suggests, only the democratic evaluation and social justice oriented approaches championed by Donna Mertens<sup>47</sup> combine social values and independence.

<sup>45</sup> Feinstein O. and Porter S. (2014), *Reframing Evaluation Capacity Development in Africa*; Evaluation Connections, European Evaluation Society, July ([http://europeanevaluation.org/sites/default/files/ees\\_newsletter/ees-newsletter-2014-06-july-05-web.pdf](http://europeanevaluation.org/sites/default/files/ees_newsletter/ees-newsletter-2014-06-july-05-web.pdf))

<sup>46</sup> David Fetterman, *Empowerment evaluation*, Evaluation Practice,15, 1-15, 1994

<sup>47</sup> Mertens, D.M. and Wilson, A.T., (2012), *Program evaluation theory and practice: a comprehensive guide*,. New York, Guilford



Barry MacDonald’s original model and House/Howe deliberative democratic evaluation models are highly relevant to social change in many contexts. But not in all: serving the public interest and speaking truth to power in situations where democracy is absent, social inequities are rampant and governance has been captured by vested interests calls for a contemporary variant.

In adverse authorizing environments an alternative evaluation model (*independent democratic evaluation*) would emphasize professional independence, analytical rigor and engagement with citizens and the civil society. It would aim at reforming evaluation governance in society by breaking the chains of fee dependence and asserting its autonomy in shaping evaluation agendas and selecting evaluation methods. It would not shy away from advocating measures or recommending actions at the service of democratic ideals of freedom and equality. It would be armed with knowledge about recent policy research findings about inequality and draw on the contemporary ideas of social justice and ethical principles inspired by contemporary moral philosophers.

**Table 2:** Democratic evaluation models

	Traditional democratic evaluation	Deliberative democratic evaluation	Independent democratic evaluation
Authorizing environment	Liberal democracy; “town meeting” democracy;	Illiberal democracy; developmental state	Neo-patrimonial; captured by vested interests
Evaluator role	Neutral brokering; facilitation, etc.	Activist; inclusive; empowers disadvantaged groups	Owns evaluation product
Fee dependence	Yes	Yes – mostly	No
Recommendatory	No	No	Yes

Advocacy	No	Yes – to level the procedural playing field	Yes – as value commitment
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Thus keeping in mind that “he who pays the piper calls the tune”, independent democratic evaluators would reject work assignments under which evaluators report to decision makers in charge of the very policies or programs being evaluated. Instead they would insist on reporting to a supreme authority (board of directors, parliaments, etc.) or to an entity that stands at arm’s length from the policy or program being reviewed (e.g. a non-governmental organization in the case of a government sponsored program).

Ultimately as evaluation capacity development initiatives bear fruit independent democratic evaluators would be entrusted with attesting to the quality of self evaluation processes. This would create synergistic relationship between what MacDonald calls autocratic and bureaucratic evaluation in ways similar to the interaction between accounting and independent auditing. Evaluation professionalization and credentialing would further contribute to achieving this state of affairs<sup>48</sup>.

## 10. New metrics.

The Millennium Development Goals displaced economic growth as the dominant objective of development in 2002. Suddenly national income was no longer considered a satisfactory indicator of economic and social progress since it failed to (i) capture highly valuable services provided within the household; (ii) account for environmental losses; and (iii) reflect the inequities and social disruptions associated with unbridled economic growth.

The goals, principles and practices that have long guided the choice of metrics in development evaluation could no longer be assumed to provide a sound basis for the future. It is the advent of quality growth (rather than economic growth per se) that constitutes the overarching economic, political and ethical imperative of public policy. How to achieve it is no longer considered straightforward in the wake of the

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<sup>48</sup> Picciotto, R. (2011), *The Logic of Evaluation Professionalism*, Evaluation, 1-16. Sage Publications

unprecedented financial crisis that has turned decades of economic orthodoxy on its head.

Development theory focused on standard policy prescriptions is in crisis. Sobering facts about the notion that individual economic agents act in isolation and that collective behavior can be assimilated to that of individuals or even countries has been discredited<sup>49</sup>. Distributional considerations are now acknowledged as critical for maximizing well-being in a society<sup>50</sup>.

Recent social research findings, including behavioral economics, have demonstrated that in a wide variety of cultural settings the standard utility maximization principle does not actually govern actual human behavior. Fairness motivates economic agents. Rigorous experiments conclude that most people do not act so as to maximize their own utility at the expense of others. Surveys of life satisfaction have also generated relevant and robust results about the relationship between income and reported happiness within societies.

Building on Amartya Sen's conception of development as the freedom to realize human capabilities<sup>51</sup> the three dimensional (3D) model proposed by Allister McGregor and Andy Summer offers a timely analytical tool that captures the material, relational and perceptual characteristics of human aspirations and social progress <sup>52</sup>.

**Table 3:** Human well-being and evaluation

<i><b>Evaluation characteristics</b></i>	<i><b>Material well-being</b></i>	<i><b>Relational well-being</b></i>	<i><b>Perceptual well-being</b></i>
Major discipline	Economics	Sociology	Psychology
Dominant evaluation approach	Cost benefit analysis	Participatory evaluation	Empowerment evaluation
Investment focus	Physical	Social capital	Cultural capital

<sup>49</sup> Alan Kirman, *The Economic Crisis is a Crisis for Economic Theory*, CESifo, Economic Studies, Vol. 56, 4/2010

<sup>50</sup> Stephan Klasen, *The Efficiency of Equity*, Review of Political Economy, Issue 2, Volume 20, 2008

<sup>51</sup> Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999

<sup>52</sup> Allister McGregor and Andy Summer, *Beyond Business as Usual: What Might 3-D Wellbeing Contribute to MDG Momentum?* IDS Bulletin, Volume 41, Number 1, January 2010.

	capital		
Main unit of account	Countries	Communities	Individuals
Main types of indicators	Socio-economic	Resilience	Quality of life

While there is a positive relationship between income levels and reported well-being the increments decline sharply as incomes rise beyond a threshold. This confirms that inequality reduces aggregate well-being and suggests that progressive taxation is in the public interest. Average income growth in a society does not seem to have a material impact on reported well-being. Relative incomes matter more than absolute incomes. Consequently greater equality generates higher well-being both because of positional effects and as a result of what appears to be a general distaste for social inequality.

The paradigm shift currently evident in developed countries (e.g. the on-going search for more inclusive and reliable indicators of human happiness to replace the Gross National Product as the dominant marker of policy success) is consistent with the new definition of development as the process that allows individuals the freedom to fulfill their potentials instead of merely escaping income poverty.

## 11. New priorities, methods and processes.

The post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals are likely to include the eradication of poverty, the empowerment of women, quality education and lifelong learning, healthy lives, food security, universal access to water and sanitation, sustainable energy, effective natural resources management, good governance, peaceful societies, the reduction of inequality and the implementation of a global enabling environment for fair and inclusive development<sup>53</sup>. These are the *priorities* that development evaluators should privilege.

<sup>53</sup> [http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam\\_undf/HLP%20P2015%20Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/HLP%20P2015%20Report.pdf)

The evaluation *methods* kit needs refurbishment. Given the complexities of the sustainability development paradigm the quality bar for development evaluation has been raised. It will be no longer enough to “wing it” by simply rating projects and programs and engaging in “rich description” of development interventions and their effects. Just as innovation in society involves adaptation of methods tested in other contexts development evaluators will have to make effective use of all the methods and instruments available within the evaluation mainstream, and eventually from other disciplines, and demonstrate that they have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to use them judiciously.

According to Hegel when the excesses of a dominant thesis as well as its antithesis come to light the ground is ripe to for a constructive synthesis. This process is well underway in development evaluation. The potential as well as the limitations of experimental methods are at long last being recognized. As they are tested in the real world of evaluation practice, the simplistic doctrines of the evidence based movement will yield ground to mixed methods that recognize the value of quantitative methods while embracing qualitatively oriented methods reliant on pluralistic, interactive and flexible practices<sup>54</sup>.

Looking ahead development evaluation will embrace and refine the mixed methods tool kit to address the complexity of the operating context. Whereas complexity implies non-linearity (i.e. sensitivity to initial conditions and amplified responses to shocks) the results chain which dominates development evaluation implicitly assumes fixed causal linkages between inputs, outputs and outcomes. Theory based evaluation approaches that face up to the intricacies of the development process and make clear distinctions between theories of action and theories of change will increasingly have to inform evaluation approaches.

In an increasingly interconnected international system, global policy dynamics are increasingly impacting on country and local development efforts. Their consequences need to be identified and addressed more explicitly than they have been<sup>55</sup>. Development evaluation should be increasingly informed by the logic of complex adaptive systems.

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<sup>54</sup> Robert Picciotto (2012), *Experimentalism and Development Evaluation: Will the bubble burst?* Evaluation, vol. 18 no. 2213-229, Sage Publishers

<sup>55</sup> Picciotto, Robert (2005), *The evaluation of policy coherence for development*, Evaluation, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Vol II (3): 311-330

Unpredictable system effects materialize where diverse actors motivated by conflicting interests interact with one another in response to changing conditions. Only a mix of innovative evaluation methods that can grapple with the complexity of an operating environment characterized by emergence is appropriate.

In an increasingly turbulent operating context the social learning cycle will rotate faster and the geometry of development interventions will become variable and adaptable. Consequently, the monitoring and evaluation functions will become closely inter-connected in theory as well as practice. This will call for subject matter expertise as well as evaluation knowledge and political savvy:

- Performance indicators in order to be relevant will increasingly be grounded in the program theory being tested by the development intervention.
- The concept of a monitoring component attached to development interventions will become redundant since monitoring will finally be conceived as an integral part of program management.
- Development evaluators will be called upon to advise managers about the selection and measurement of performance indicators that can be tracked and interpreted in real time to help adapt programs and projects to changing conditions

In the current austerity climate as well as in patrimonial governance environments decision makers whether in the public, private or voluntary sector will increasingly crave reassurance that the programs they fund “work”. They will expect pre-determined intervention metrics to be used and the measured results to be attributable to the intervention. The more uncertain the environment the more certainty they will expect out of the evaluations they fund. They will look to evaluations to generate useful insights in pursuit of the goals they have selected. They will disdain inconclusive, academic documents.

Consequently the pressure on development evaluators to comply with commissioners’ preconceptions, suppress bad news and offer simplistic findings will rise further. Development evaluators will have to resist decision makers’ attempt to capture evaluation processes. They will have to live up to the ethical strictures of their craft and protect the integrity and independence of their evaluations. They will be

required to educate their clients about the generic uncertainties of the development enterprise, the need to manage rather than avoid risk and the rewards associated with learning from failure as well as success.

Development evaluation will require more self evaluation. Independent evaluators should embrace this trend but they should also stand apart from it since self evaluation is not always objective or focused on accountability to citizens and consumers. There is no substitute for a strong and principled independent evaluation function operating at arm's length from line managers and policy makers in order to amplify the voices of citizens.

Contestability of self-evaluation findings by independent evaluation and oversight of self-evaluation standards by independent evaluation constitute basic features of sound evaluation governance. Hence an important role for independent development evaluators will be to attest to the quality of self evaluation within government, the private sector and the civil society – just as auditors do for financial accounts.

Finally whereas development evaluation has typically operated within a sovereign government or organization, the implications of the new and fragmented development architecture will have to be drawn as tailor made evaluation governance systems are set up. But the diversity of authorizing environments and the need to capture the many facets of the comprehensive post 2015 definition of development preclude a single evaluation governance model.

Evaluation management models that were effective in past settings may no longer be appropriate. In this context the lessons drawn from democratic evaluation experience<sup>56</sup> are likely to be relevant and credible development evaluation will mean empowering all sectors of developing societies to be involved in the process. This will call for a major commitment to evaluation capacity building in developing countries, especially in emerging market countries where most poor people live<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> <http://europeanevaluation.org/news/ees-connections-special-edition>

<sup>57</sup> Andy Sumner (2013), “Where do the poor live?” *World Development*, Vol. 40(5), pp. 865-877.

## 12. Rising to the challenge.

Evaluation is still a fragile, embattled and fledgling discipline. Evaluators in general and development evaluators in particular still lack the status, visibility, prestige and autonomy of a profession. Other disciplines have invaded the burgeoning development evaluation market, e.g. in the United Kingdom, KPMG has earned the contract to carry out all independent evaluations of the UK Aid program.

The evaluation discipline remains fractured by sterile methodological disputes. It has yet to agree to universal guiding principles, ethical guidelines and competencies for evaluators. It does not control access to its ranks and as a result the quality of evaluation work is highly variable. Consequently evaluators are not remunerated at the level enjoyed by auditors, lawyers or doctors.

The vast expansion of the development evaluation market will call for coordinated efforts by evaluation associations to secure new recruits. Evaluation is still an infant industry. The largest association (the American Evaluation Association) has 7,700 members. Next, ReLAC in Latin America boasts 3,800 members followed by the Canadian Evaluation Society with about 2,000 members and Australasia with about 1,000 members. In Europe the German association is the largest with over 700 members. The European Evaluation Association is growing but it has yet to reach the 500 members mark.

Excluding these five associations, the average membership of evaluation associations is less than 150. Most evaluation societies live from hand to mouth and struggle for survival. Globally all evaluation associations and networks surveyed by EvalPartners include 32,000 members and this includes double counting of members who belong to more than one association. This is less than a fifth of the membership of a single association of internal auditors (the Institute of Internal Auditors which has 175,000 members). It compares to 1.2 million accountants and auditors employed in the United States alone.

Looking to the future, evaluation associations will have to work together to professionalize the discipline and defend its interests. For evaluation to ascend to the top of the knowledge occupation ladder and help make the world a better place evaluation societies will have to promote and protect the evaluation brand, promote



decisive actions aimed at credentialing evaluators and help generate a larger supply of competent evaluators and reinvent development evaluation.

The development cooperation enterprise has changed. The bulk of the poverty eradication challenge is one that middle income countries will have to address directly, and knowledge generated by development evaluation may help them in the design of effective interventions. In parallel development aid will focus on the complex problems of low income countries. Private philanthropies will remain influential in setting policy directions for global development coalitions and initiatives. Civil society organizations will continue to hold the key to local development challenges in countries that lack national institutional capacities.

Capturing new evaluation markets and adopting new models, metrics, methods and management systems implies strong leadership, collective action and cross border cooperation. The core mandate of development evaluation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to become embedded in governments, organizations and communities throughout the world. In order to meet the rising demand for high quality evaluation services and do justice to the emerging social and environmental sustainability agenda development evaluation will have to stick to its values, reach out to diverse constituencies and adopt tailor made evaluation capacity building strategies.

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