

Opening Keynote Address by

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Distinguished delegates and colleagues;

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address you this morning. Let me start by thanking the Government of Brazil for graciously co-hosting, with the UNDP Evaluation Office, this 3rd International Conference on National Evaluation Capacities, and the Municipality and State of Sao Paulo for the warm welcome. I want to extend a special thank you to Mr. Indran Naidoo, Director of the UNDP Evaluation Office, for his leadership and drive to make this event a success.

I also want to thank all of you here today (170 delegates, representing 62 countries). Your presence shows your commitment to building and sustaining effective national evaluation capacities that foster accountability and good governance; transparency and accountability are key to effective democracies and evaluation is part of this equation while at the same time help improve the effectiveness of public policy, programmes and service delivery.

Complexity of development interventions and achieving results

Our world is more complex, interconnected and unpredictable than it has ever been. And so are the challenges that we face. As countries strive for prosperity and improvements in the quality of life of their citizens, and as citizens demand grow, they must make far more sophisticated decisions, in much less time than ever before.

The pressure on national governments, non-state actors, development agencies and donors to achieve and demonstrate sustainable results is huge, and will only increase as the post-2015 development agenda emerges.

No doubt the MDGs were an important milestone in this direction setting concrete targets and outcomes for the improvements of millions around the world. But since 2000, the world has changed a great deal. Aspirations and expectations are high, so we must learn from experience, successes as much as failures, understand better what works, why and in what context.

This is what evaluations can help us with; understand better so we can devise innovative and appropriate solutions to complex development problems. Evaluations help us to bridge the gap between experience and knowledge.

The theme of this conference, *Solutions to challenges linked to independence, credibility and use of evaluations*, is therefore very timely.

The challenge for the governments in results-based evaluations is not only dealing with the complexity of contexts and multiple layers of programme responses, but also the diversity of cultures and actors, as well as their high expectations to measure results. Of course, we know that lasting change does not happen overnight.

We know development interventions take time to mature and achieve sustainable results. And so Governments and development practitioners have to balance the short-term need to show progress with the long-term goal of sustainable human development. Evaluation can provide critical information to ensure that development interventions take longer-term and interconnected challenges into account despite the short term nature of the planned actions and projects.

We also need to resist the temptation of going only for the quick wins and low hanging fruits and to address the measurability challenge. To measure impact does not mean that everything is quantifiable.

Many of the things that make an intervention sustainable through time cannot be easily capture by a simple number: capacity development, institutional building just to name a few, are difficult to account for but are essential to deal with, so we need to fight the temptation to go only for what is quantifiable but maybe less important to concentrate on the issues that are the ones that make a difference. But we need to find the way to measure it even if not arithmetically.

This is why national evaluation capacities are not only increasingly critical to countries' overall ability to capture and demonstrate results to a variety of constituencies but also to promote learning and enable decision-makers to make informed decisions and plan strategically.

We, in UNDP, are convinced that the success of development interventions depends in part on the ability to carry out credible evaluations and use them to make evidenced-based decisions.

And that is why evaluation must be considered from the planning stage of the program cycle and be an integral part of all its phases, in doing so we also increase the evaluability of the programs since the information necessary to carry out a good evaluation is many times missing, so by integrating evaluation from the beginning the quality of the program itself but also the monitoring and available information for evaluation can improve substantially.

Need for structured responses to national evaluation challenges and priorities

The previous two National Evaluation Capacity Conferences in Morocco and South Africa emphasized the need to build better institutional capacities to manage development programmes. The

focus was on improving organizational systems and processes, and on developing incentives for better performance and results.

These conferences stressed the need to develop individual skills and competencies within an enabling environment that allows for more inclusive, collaborative and responsive plans, programmes and service delivery systems. Looking at the preparations for this conference, I see that similar issues have emerged. Most of the participating countries have highlighted improving programme quality, oversight and accountability as their highest priorities.

National systems that facilitate independent and credible evaluations play an important role in achieving these priorities by generating evidence and objective information on how improvements can be made. This is why institutionalising evaluation systems and practices is so important.

As development practices are evolving to respond to a rapidly changing and increasingly complex context, so must evaluation evolve, as a profession and as a process.

Evaluation must be more flexible and nimble; more inclusive and collaborative; and more responsive, without compromising the rigor and independence needed for its credibility.

Let me mention some promising new approaches: a) citizen engagement – broad-based involvement of national stakeholders, including beneficiaries, enhances not only the ownership of, and mutual accountability for results, but also the credibility and transparency of the evaluation exercise; b) harmonizing evaluations with programme cycle – facilitates their use to make necessary improvements or adjustments as the programme is being implemented; c) Faster feedback loops between monitoring and evaluation - allow frequent exchange of information and data to support decision-making on a real-time basis; d) open data and easily accessible performance data systems - promote

transparency and e) we need to train and exchange how best to carry out these approaches so evaluations and evaluators evolve in this direction. No doubt these conferences have a lot to contribute on facing this challenges.

UNDP also walks the talk

I will now turn to the evaluation practice in UNDP. I am happy to say that UNDP walks the talk and has invested considerable efforts over the past three years to strengthen results-based management, programme performance, learning from evaluation, and results reporting. We are seeing a stronger culture of results taking root in the organization.

We have just approved our new Strategic Plan where we made a special effort in its design and formulation to take into account the evaluative evidence provided by our independent Evaluation office. But we know that this has at the same time to permeate

the rest of the organization so the impulse will not come only from the top, but will be build bottom up.

That is why we recently launched the country office support initiative (COSI) which builds on existing efforts to improve programme and project management, and aims to:

- strengthen country office capacities for evidence-based programme cycle management.**
- support business model review of UNDP monitoring and evaluation capacity at the regional and country levels to strengthen its reach, and**
- ensure a smooth transition from our current strategic plan to the next one, with a focus on the evidence-base, results monitoring and reporting.**

Let me say very clearly that at the organisational level, we are committed to ensuring that evaluation is considered from the outset - within the design of our programmes; and we take measures to ensure that the lessons learned from evaluations

inform the work of the organization as a whole at the global, regional and country level.

The use of evaluation for learning is a key responsibility of senior management at Headquarters and in country offices.

We have also engage in different forms, although it was not part of our original mandate, in a range of activities, specially through our country offices, to support national capacity for results-based management, including monitoring and evaluation, and are encouraged to use national results frameworks and performance indicators for monitoring and evaluating UNDP contribution.

For instance, in line with UNDP's Evaluation Policy, UNDP programme units promote and coordinate South-South and trilateral cooperation in support of strengthening national capacities for evaluation at the country level. South-South cooperation is a powerful tool to tackle common development challenges.

Similarly, South-South solutions can play a strong role in promoting and strengthening national evaluation capacities, and addressing the urgent concerns confronting development evaluation today.

National Evaluation Conferences, as this one, provide forums for discussion of evaluation issues confronting countries and enable participants to draw on recent and innovative experiences of other countries. Through these conferences, UNDP seeks to facilitate the formulation of longer-term initiatives to strengthen national capacities for public policy evaluation and enhance the understanding of evaluation as a powerful tool to improve people's lives through better policy making, public accountability and learning.

To promote greater use of evaluative evidence, UNDP has established a searchable database of performance ratings and

findings from all project evaluations available since 2008 in the online Evaluation Resource Centre.

This database will provide a crucial tool for analysis of “on the ground” project performance that can be used to guide and improve programmatic choices. We have already used it to inform the cumulative review of the strategic plan 2008-2012. The database will also allow staff to quickly identify relevant lessons for real time learning related to project and programme quality, and performance and effectiveness.

The Independence of the UNDP Evaluation Office is something that I am particularly proud of. The Evaluation Office reports directly to the Executive Board of the Member States and not to the UNDP Administrator. Its institutional independence is clarified in terms of budget, staff recruitment, work programme, and the appointment, renewal and dismissal of the director of the Evaluation Office.

The Evaluation Policy specifies that to avoid conflict of interest, the evaluators cannot be directly involved in UNDP policy-setting

or decision-making, and the head of the evaluation office cannot be hired after its term in the organization.

We consider these measures very important for ensuring the independence and credibility of evaluations.

During the course of the conference, you will have the opportunity to deliberate on some critical issues and to share experiences in promoting evaluation practice and culture. There is a lot to learn from one another's successes, failures, innovative policies and practices in strengthening national evaluation capacities, and promoting evaluations as a development tool.

Convening and collaborative action potential of participating in the 2015 International Year of Evaluation

As we move towards the designation of 2015 as the International Year for Evaluation, I call upon all partners to further redouble their efforts to strengthen national evaluation capacities, and

harness the wealth of knowledge and expertise in development thinking in the Global South.

UNDP will provide resources and tools to help facilitate knowledge exchange and South-South cooperation over the next several days, and in the months and years beyond.

This is the opportunity to position evaluation more strategically in the policy arena and raise awareness of the importance of monitoring and evaluation for the achievement of development goals and other priorities at the international and national levels.

Summing up the value and contribution of Evaluation

In this more complex development environment, it is incumbent upon us to keep evaluation relevant by recognizing and responding to the challenges of use, credibility and independence in evaluation. Let me close by reaffirming that UNDP is fully committed to supporting your efforts to strengthen national evaluation capacities.

I wish you a productive conference and look forward to the outcome of your deliberations.

Thank you.