

Fostering a vibrant evaluation ecosystem in Bhutan¹

The Evaluation Association of Bhutan (EAB) is a Civil Society Organization instituted to provide a platform for promoting evaluation culture, developing evaluation capacity, and generating demand for evaluation in the country. The association remains committed to carrying out its mandate of establishing a vibrant ecosystem of evaluation in Bhutan. However, for EAB to be able to offer relevant evaluation services to fulfill its mandates, it needed to first establish a clear understanding of the prevailing environment for evaluation in the country.

This policy brief is based on EAB's situation analysis of the evaluation ecosystem in Bhutan, conducted from August to November 2020. The situation analysis focused on understanding the demand for and the supply of evaluation services, and how different stakeholders view and understand the Association.

The situation analysis identified gaps in evaluation practice and policy, and recommended ways to address these gaps in order to build a vibrant evaluation ecosystem in the country. The situation analysis is therefore expected to serve as a basis for developing a way forward for the Association, to the fulfilment of its mandate.

The following sections present the methodology used for the situation analysis, followed with potential findings, and the recommendations for way forward.

Methodology

It is imperative to have a robust design of the study to appropriately address our needs. For assessing the current environment for evaluation, a quantitative method was deemed appropriate, and a survey was used. This survey consisted of six sections, with a total of 21 questions. Section I was on demographic and respondent details; Section II on Evaluation Demand; Section III on Evaluation Supply; Section IV on Capacity Development for Evaluation; Section V on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Officer/Staff, and Section VI on Awareness of EAB. To adhere to the risk elimination protocols of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was administered electronically.

Those invited to participate in the on-line survey were representative of all relevant stakeholders, inclusive of both demand and supply sides of evaluation. This included private consultants, NGOs, INGO, corporate employees, development partners, members of public, parliamentarians, government officers and executives. Of the 336 stakeholders invited through email, 147 completed the survey. The response rate was 44%.

¹ The Policy Brief is developed by Phuntsho Choden (PhD), the Chair of Evaluation Association of Bhutan based on the situation analysis of the evaluation ecosystem in Bhutan. Author would like to acknowledge the critical peer review and the value addition by Dr Fiona Cram, Director of Katoa Ltd, New Zealand. Published on EAB website August 2021.

Findings

The findings of the study indicate several gaps both in policy and practice and called for serious initiatives to create an enabling environment to develop a vibrant ecosystem of evaluation in the country. The following are the key findings:

On the policy front, the National Evaluation Policy (NEP) is the main policy directive for the creation of a potentially enabling environment that will strengthen the country's developing evaluation culture. However, the draft NEP is yet to be endorsed. In the absence of a legal framework, organizations have developed their own evaluation guidelines and plans. There remains a need for a standard M&E guideline that provides direction and facilitates a strong and consistent national evaluation system.

In practice, evaluation is yet to become a regular activity in developmental programs, except in donor supported projects. The demand for evaluation is therefore generally low. Since the evaluation culture in the country is in its nascent stage, the supply side institutions of evaluation are limited and weak in their capacity. There is no institution that provides regular training on evaluation, and the handful of institutions that provide training are need based and dependent on availability of funding.

In terms of professionalization, there are few governments and corporate bodies with some sort of M&E capacity, however, the majority do not have any foundation on which to initiate or build the capacity. Similarly, the lack of designated M&E officials hinders the professionalization of evaluation. Evaluation culture is yet to enter mainstream governance and is not a priority, hence, there is no budget allocation for M&E activities. For instance, organizations that have evaluation guidelines and plans in place do not provide a budget for it.

The awareness of EAB is low among organizations in the country, only 16% of the respondents reported being fully aware of the existence of EAB and only 13% are affiliated with the Association.

There is an immediate need for EAB to take leadership in creating an inclusive and impactful evaluation system in Bhutan. For this, EAB needs to collaborate with parliamentarians and key government organizations so that a sound evaluation culture and system is established.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are suggested to rectify the gaps in policy and practice to foster a vibrant evaluation ecosystem.

Recommendations for way forward

A legal framework

The NEP is critical for building an evaluation culture in the country. Policymakers must continue the dialogue around the national policy and move forward for the endorsement. This legal framework is instrumental in the promotion of evaluation culture as it will help guide the formulation and implementation of evaluation policies and strategies as well as other initiatives related to review, capacity building amongst others. EAB must play a key role in keeping the dialogue on NEP alive, for which it must collaborate with key stakeholders including the Gross National Happiness Commission Secretariat (GNHCS) policy

makers, parliamentarians, and other stakeholders in the government. To facilitate this dialogue, EAB must focus on developing strategy for various collaborations.

Professionalizing evaluation

Formulation of standards and creation of levels of evaluation expertise are necessary to enable the local evaluation experts to build their expertise. For this to happen: (i) a legal framework becomes essential for the formulation of new guidelines and standards for evaluators in the country, (ii) there is a requirement for designing and standardizing evaluation training content towards capacity building, developing guidelines and standards for evaluation reviews. An appropriate professionalization will enable and promote evaluation standards that are specifically relevant to Bhutan and foster cohesion and efficiency in the long run. The gap in lack of evaluation professionals can be addressed by collaborating with institutions and universities in the country to standardize and institutionalize evaluation methods and activities. The professionalization of evaluation will strengthen capacity and competence of evaluators, Currently, M&E functions are undertaken by people who are mostly trained on the job.

The role of EAB is crucial in the review and creating standards including code of ethics and training in the country. Therefore, EAB must initiate the formulation of guidelines for training and ethics in evidence generation while it continues to engage in dialogue with relevant stakeholders to bring about a holistic growth towards the value of evaluation.

Capacity Building

The need for capacity building is relatively high in all areas of evaluation. There is an urgent need to recognize that these trainings need to be provided in a standardized and systematic manner. Currently, all capacity building activities are conducted in an ad-hoc manner, organized by different organizations and agencies, and following different guidelines because of the lack of standards. Although this may seem like a progressive way for upskilling within organizations, the ad-hoc nature to these training have limited contribution to professional development.

Towards this, EAB should continue to expound culturally responsive evaluation training and development of methodologies that best serve practices in the country, while also continuously developing tools that explore the full value of evaluation in development. It is evident that the future in evaluation training lies in standardized capacity building with inclusion of more innovative modules that target the local capacities by capturing local practices.

Advocacy and Awareness

Given the strong lack of awareness on evaluation culture among the key stakeholders, advocacy and awareness campaigns play a critical role to address the gap. As the concept of evaluation is new to the people, there is a need for continuous advocacy activities to ensure individuals and organizations can fully comprehend the value and use of evaluation. Currently evaluation activities are misunderstood as an external and additional reporting activity for donor-funded development works and not necessarily for the internal growth and transformation. Therefore, continuous advocacy and awareness programs are required to develop and strengthen evaluation culture in the country.

Advocacy materials that target different types of individuals and organizations must be developed that will enable demand generation and value the use of evaluation. These advocacy materials should clearly convey the value of evaluation for policy makers, organizations, and communities in influencing policies and in the allocation of budget by demonstrating results and impact of different initiatives. Further, EAB advocacy plans should involve continuous networking and presentation in seminars, conferences, and meetings to enable awareness on the value and usage of evaluation as well as promote the role of EAB in the country.

EAB has a significant role as an integrative agent fostering a vibrant ecosystem of evaluation in Bhutan. The figure 1 demonstrates the role that EAB must play in integrating demand and supply sides agents through contribution to creating enabling environment for evaluation, professional and capacity developments, creating awareness and advocating for value of evaluation.

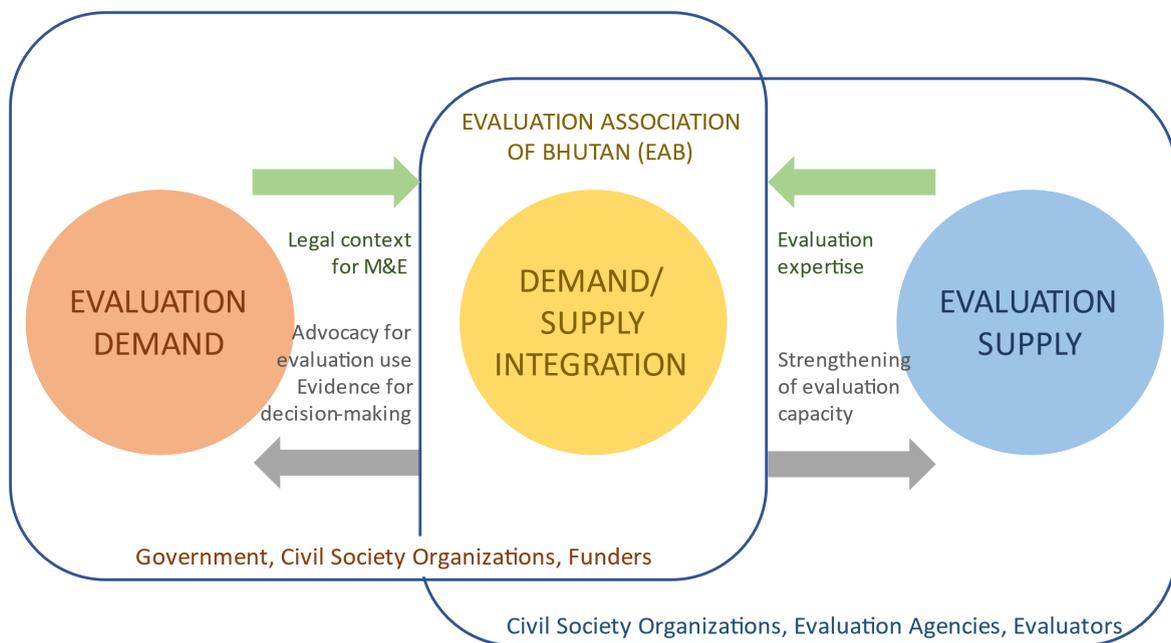


FIGURE 1: INTEGRATIVE ROLE OF EAB