Background

The establishment of the Kyrgyz M&E Network in 2007 was preconditioned by several historic events that took place in Kyrgyzstan (official country name: “Kyrgyz Republic”) over the past twenty years. The first major shift occurred when the country gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As an independent nation, Kyrgyzstan had to start the process of strategic planning at various levels of public administration. Both the first country development plan (National Poverty Reduction Strategy - NPRS - 2002-2005) and the second strategic policy document (Country Development Strategy, CDS, 2006-2008) contained monitoring and evaluation sections. More importantly, both of these strategic policy documents were developed with the participation of civil society organizations.

In 2005, after the completion of the first country development plan, the government reported that poverty in the country had declined from 67% to 45% (or even to 37%, according to some sources). However, the question was which specific results in the field of poverty reduction could really be attributed to this particular program? This led directly to the issue of monitoring and evaluation of program performance, which was also raised in the context of the involvement of civil society organizations in the formulation of the Country Development Strategy (2006-2008). In the process of such public discussions, a number of civil society organizations realized and agreed that a coordinated approach to monitoring and evaluation was necessary.

In 2006 a study of M&E services in the country was conducted, which recommended: a) building the capacity of civil society organizations for monitoring and evaluating country development programs and policies; and b) establishing a professional evaluation organization that would be able to lobby evaluation issues and contribute to reform efforts in an organized manner. The findings of the study were presented at the M&E conference that was organized by the Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan and attended by representatives of civil society, the government as well as international donors. That conference helped to identify the main issues and needs in terms of cooperation between the state and the civil society, in particular improving government transparency and developing an evaluative culture to ensure good governance in the public administration.

In the fall of 2007 a general meeting of organizations and individuals working in the evaluation sector was held in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. Participants of the meeting decided to establish the National Network of Monitoring and Evaluation, formulated and approved the founding documents of the Network and identified main areas of work. A mailing list was created for convenient communication among Network members. The main objective of the Network was identified as building cooperation and communication procedures between the civil society and the public authorities (the government).

On the basis of this objective, the Network organized events that engaged both civil society and government representatives. However, the high degree of instability in the country over the past seven years has resulted in a continuous turnover of civil servants and in constantly changing structures of government bodies, which has made it difficult to institutionalize cooperation and partnership efforts in the field of evaluation.

As a result of this period, one can say that the main reason for the creation of the Kyrgyz M&E Network has been the need to establish a sustainable system of interaction between professional organizations, government agencies, and other interest groups with the aim of improving the effectiveness of public administration through introduction and use of M&E at all levels.

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1 In 2005, a first coup d’état took place, resulting in a subsequent change of government and president; 2008 saw a radical reform of the government, a major structural overhaul and changes of many civil servants; 2010 finally saw a second revolution, resulting in a shift from presidential to parliamentary form of governance, followed by major ethnic unrests. Since 2010 Head of Government has changed three times already.
Activities
The Network's activities helped all its participants to contribute to the creation of a sustainable country- and sector-level M&E system, and become part of international and regional M&E communities. Apart from this, the Network served as a platform for information sharing and knowledge dissemination and offered opportunities for participation in various studies, programs and projects.

Initially the Network was founded by 26 organizations. At present, eleven organizational members act as active key players and are involved in policy making in various sectors and fields. The mailing list includes 64 organizations and individual experts. Initially, the structure of the Network was envisaged without a central Board of Directors. However, since 2009 this issue has been raised several times, and at present the issue of creating a Board of Directors with engagement of government representatives is being considered.

Strategy and Implementation
The mission statement formulated during establishment of the Network in 2007 was “to build the institution of professional evaluation and expertise in the Kyrgyz Republic.”

The Network's long-term goals include the following:

- Strengthen and promote professional evaluation and expertise as important mechanisms of raising effectiveness of social projects and programs;
- Contribute to the creation of conditions for evaluation of programs and projects in Kyrgyzstan; and
- Raise the quality of the implementation of socio-economic projects and programs in Kyrgyzstan.

Supporting the establishment of a country-level M&E system
Since 2007 there have been annual country-level events aimed at discussing ways to implement the Network's goals and objectives. Activities were conducted where key ministries and agencies of Kyrgyzstan\(^2\) participated together with representatives of civil society and of the National M&E Network. Recommendations from these events were usually included in the policy formulation of the respective agencies, with Network members participating in the formulation.

At the initiative of Network members and with the support of the UNICEF country office in Kyrgyzstan, Kyrgyz government representatives were able to take part in annual IPEN conferences that transformed them into supporters of results-based management as well as advocates of evaluation in their respective agencies.

In order to raise the capacity and improve information sharing among M&E specialists, the Network regularly organizes peer-to-peer meetings on the discussion of evaluation instruments and methods. Occasionally these meetings included international experts who were available for pro bono consultations to the Network. Some of the most interesting discussions during these meetings included those with Ian Grant, an expert of the European Commission who spoke of the importance of developing the institutional capacity of government agencies to commission and utilize evaluation in decision making processes; and Dr. McConnick, an expert evaluating the UNDP Poverty Program in Kyrgyzstan, who advised the Network to regularly monitor or evaluate certain economically or socially important issues and present them to interested parties in order to improve awareness of the Network’s potential and the quality of services that its members can offer.

Network members participated in development and publication of two methodological guidelines on evaluation issues supported by UNICEF Kyrgyzstan and Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan. The guidelines were presented to partner organizations and the Government

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and were well received, in particular because they address the general scarcity of M&E-related materials and publications in the Russian language.

In 2011 Network members initiated the production of two papers analyzing the legal and institutional environment for evaluation in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the possibility for civil society's participation in policy evaluation. These analytical briefs, were submitted to the national Parliament and Government for consideration.

In 2011 after the April 2010 violent events in the country and the subsequent complete overhaul of the government, Network members took part in formulation of the ‘government evaluation methodology’. The methodology was approved by a government resolution. At present, the efforts of the Network focus on how to implement this methodology in such a way that evaluation results would be used in decision making. Negotiations are underway on ways of building institutional connections among government and civil society bodies in the formulation and evaluation of government programs.

Training and Capacity Building
Apart from activities aimed at building a country-level evaluation system, the Network tries to raise the capacities of Network members. In March 2011, 24 Network members participated in a two-month webinar on "Results-Based Management and Evaluation" conducted by British evaluation expert Freer Spreckley. In 2010, the Kyrgyz M&E Network organized and conducted online training events as part of the annual IPEN conference that brought together around 80 participants from civil society, think tanks, international donor agencies, and government agencies.

Other events included workshops in 2011 for NGOs that took part in monitoring humanitarian aid in the city of Osh and the surrounding region that had suffered from inter-ethnic violence in June 2010. The training was conducted for 27 members of NGOs based in the southern regions of Osh and Djalal-Abad with support from Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan. Four Network members took part in training events as well.

Five members of the Network took part in Donna Merten's workshop "Transformative Mixed Methods Evaluation" that was organized in Kazakhstan by UN Women and IPEN in 2011. Each of these five participants from the Kyrgyz M&E Network later made presentations for other Network members, experts on organizational diagnostics and gender issues, and held a number of meetings on popularization of transformative mixed methods.

Information Sharing
Apart from this, Network members regularly receive information about in-country and out-of-country capacity building events and opportunities.

Gender Evaluation
Activities in the field of gender evaluation included the 2009 study on the state of gender evaluation in the country. The study helped to identify burning issues and recommended the creation of an evaluation system in the country that would make it possible to conduct comprehensive gender evaluations. At present, gender evaluation activities predominantly focus on raising qualification and capacity of NGOs, conducting of information events and promoting transformative mixed method evaluation.

Besides, Network members individually conduct various activities for the promotion of evaluation in government agencies, and at present the discussion focuses on how to coordinate and institutionalize these efforts.

Institutional Capacity
There is a central Council of Network members who are in charge of various Network activities and are active participants of strategic and operational discussions and projects. In

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terms of institutional capacity, this Council is currently considering creating a Board of Directors with the participation of government and parliament representatives.

**Challenges**

**Limited institutionalization:** The goals that the Network set for itself require a relatively high degree of organization. However, in practice the leading network members of the Network are NGOs and research centers who can contribute only a very limited amount of time to volunteer work. Besides, the continuous turnover in government and state institutions results in a slide-back where achievements of earlier stages that have been successfully discussed and agreed with the previous government are easily lost. In the light of this, it has become ever more important to structure the work of the Network so that it can contribute to institutionalization and continue transforming the outputs of previous stages into decisions and results at the next stages (such as regulations requiring constructive response and feedback).

**Lack of a clear strategy that would unite all Network members:** Even though the mailing list includes quite a number of people, they all have diverse goals, limited capacity and readiness to be included in decision-making processes, policy formulation and consulting. For this reason their participation is very limited and many are inactive.

**Lack of a Public Relations strategy of the Network:** Another major issue is the limited public awareness of the Network’s activities and goals in various sectors of society. Existing network products and resources are available only to a limited circle of people included in the mailing list and through personal connections. This results in underuse of the Network’s capacity by government agencies and in the lack of a systemic approach to cooperation and partnership.

**Progress and Results**

Progress and results to date include the following:

- The Network represents collective interests of various institutions and individuals in the field of M&E.
- The Network presents a platform for information sharing and the professional strengthening of network members.
- The Network represents Kyrgyzstan in the international arena in the field of M&E.
- Network members actively take part in forming the country-level M&E system and in the evaluation of government performance.
- Network members have managed to establish constructive contact with ever-changing government bodies (Government, President's Office) and maintain communication with key ministries.
- The regional coverage of Network members has improved and now includes representatives from various provinces of Kyrgyzstan.
- Network members use the skills and knowledge that they receive through Network training events to implement their own contracts, projects and programs in the field of M&E.
- In addition to Kyrgyzstan-based evaluators, the Network's mailing list includes evaluators from neighboring Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

**Key Enabling Factors:**

- A group of active Network members who actively participate in most Network initiatives on a volunteer basis;
- Relatively open and cooperative government bodies with interest in M&E issues;
- Fruitful informal partnerships with international M&E experts; and
- Sufficiently high unsatisfied demand for M&E activities;
- Active and dynamic civil society in the country;
• Supportive donor agencies (such as Soros Foundation, UNICEF).

**Agenda for the next development phase:**
- Build a clear communication and partnership strategy with government, wider civil society and interest groups, taking the diverse interests of Network members into account;
- Active integration into international M&E initiatives;
- Develop a PR and awareness building strategy about Network activities;
- Formulate and implement M&E standards;
- Improve fund-raising activities considering the 'soft' nature of the Network's activities.

**Innovations and Lessons Learned**
Network members have accumulated and are willing to share experience in the following areas:
- Forms and methods of interaction with government agencies;
- Practical M&E of conflict and post-conflict situations (building in particular on the experience of the 2010 interethnic clashes in the south of Kyrgyzstan);
- Participatory monitoring of municipal land use (local self-government bodies and local nongovernmental organizations, such as in the case of inventory of municipal land in Osh city);
- Evaluating public satisfaction with infrastructure provision (monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of local budget allocation and usage, such as in the case of the "clean water" line item);
- Gender-sensitive performance analysis of government bodies (evaluating the operationalization of M&E systems, audits, the formulation of plans and development strategies at various levels of public administration).

**Next steps**
- Continue partnership initiatives with the Government, Parliament and local self-government bodies on the introduction of M&E in management processes; support introduction of results-based management and M&E.
- Continue offering capacity building activities for Network members.
- Expand and strengthen membership in the Network.
- Develop methods to improve the M&E skills for network members, government officials and interested persons.
- Promote equality evaluations and transformative Mixed Methods Evaluation in donor-funded project evaluations.
- Continue participating in international M&E initiatives.

The National M&E network is an integrative self-organized volunteer platform of organizations and individual experts who are interested in promoting M&E issues and who use M&E principles and instruments in their activities. The Network plans to improve its institutional capacity and make it part of the Network's development strategy.