

Country: Kyrgyz Republic (Kyrgyzstan)

VOPE name: The National Monitoring and Evaluation Network of the Kyrgyz Republic

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Background

Establishment of the Kyrgyz M&E Network in 2007 was preconditioned by several historic events that took place in the 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 Kyrgyz Republic 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 participation of civil society organizations.

In 2005, after completion of the first NPRS, government reported that poverty in the country declined from 67% to 45% (or even to 37% according to some sources). However, the question was "What specific results could really be attributed to this particular program?" Attempts to answer this question and involvement of civil society organizations in the formulation of the Country Development Strategy (2006-2008) have raised the issue of monitoring and evaluation of program performance. In the process of such public discussions a number of civil society organizations realized and agreed that these efforts had to be concerted.

In 2006 a study of M&E services in the country was conducted, which recommended a) building capacity of civil society organizations if they planned to monitor and evaluate 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. Findings of the study were presented at the M&E conference that was organized by the Soros Foundation - Kyrgyzstan and attended by civil society, government, and international donor representatives. That conference helped to identify main issues and needs in terms of cooperation between the state and the civil society; improving government transparency; and developing evaluative culture to ensure good governance and public administration.

In the fall of 2007 a general meeting of organizations and individuals working in the evaluation sector was held in Bishkek, Kyrgyz Republic's capital. Participants of the meeting decided to establish the National Network of Monitoring and Evaluation, formulated and approved founding documents, and identified main areas of work. A mailing list was created for convenient communication among Network members. Building cooperation and communication procedures between the civil society and the public authorities (the government) was identified as the Network's main objective. It guided Network events that engaged both civil society and government representatives.

However, high degree of instability in the country¹ over the past seven years has resulted in continuous turnover of civil servants and changing structure of government bodies. As a result cooperation and partnership efforts in the field of evaluation have not been institutionalized.

As a result of this period one can say that the main reason for creation of the Kyrgyz M&E Network was 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.

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. Besides the Network served as a platform for information sharing, 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. The Board of Directors was not provisioned from the start. However, since 2009 this issue was raised several times and at present the issue of creating the 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;
- Contribute to creation of conditions for evaluation of programs and projects in the Kyrgyz Republic; and
- Raise quality of socio-economic projects and programs implementation in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Supporting establishment of country-level M&E system

Since 2007 there were annual country-level events aimed at discussion of ways to implement the Network's goals and objectives. Activities were conducted with participation of key ministries and

¹ Year 2005 – first coup d'état first with subsequent change of Government and the President; 2008 – radical reform of the Government with overhaul of government structure and civil servants; 2010 – shift from presidential to parliamentary governance.

agencies of Kyrgyzstan², representatives of civil society, and representatives of the National M&E Network. Recommendations from these events were usually included in policy formulation of respective agencies, while Network members participated in such policy formulation.

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

In order to raise capacity and improve information sharing among M&E specialists, the Network regularly organizes peer-to-peer meetings on discussion of evaluation instruments and methods. Occasionally participants of such meetings included international experts who were available for *pro bono* consultations to the Network. The most interesting discussions were held with Ian Grant, the European Commission expert who spoke of the importance of developing institutional capacity of government agencies to commission and utilize evaluation in decision making processes; and Dr. McConnick, an expert evaluating UNDP Poverty Program in Kyrgyz Republic 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 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 and were well received due to very limited number of M&E-related materials and publications available in Russian language.

In 2011 Network members initiated and Soros Foundation - Kyrgyzstan supported development 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 country³ and complete Government overhaul, Network members took part in formulation of the 'government evaluation methodology'. The methodology was approved by the Government Resolution⁴ and at present efforts focus on how to implement it 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 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 capacity of Network members. In March 2011, 24 Network members participated in a two-month

² Ministry of Economic Development, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Chamber of Accounts, National Statistics Committee.

³ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8608440.stm>

⁴ Government Resolution no.105 of 17 February, 2012 "Evaluating effectiveness of government bodies in the executive branch and local self-government agencies in the Kyrgyz Republic". <http://www.gov.kg/?p=7889> (description of general methodology in Russian language).

"Results- Based Management and Evaluation" webinar 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 Osh city and Osh region that suffered from inter-ethnic violence in June 2010. The training was conducted for 27 members of Osh and Djalal-Abad-based NGOs (southern regions of the country) with support from Soros Foundation - Kyrgyzstan. Three Network members took part in training events as well.

Five members of the Network took part in Donna Mertens' workshop "Transformative Mixed Methods Evaluation" that was organized in Kazakhstan by UN Women and IPEN in 2011. These five participants from the Kyrgyz M&E Network later made presentations for other Network members and experts in 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 creation of an evaluation system in the country that would make it possible to conduct comprehensive gender evaluations. At present moment gender evaluation activities predominantly focus on raising qualification and capacity of NGOs; conduction of information events; and promoting transformative mixed method evaluation.

Besides, Network members individually conduct various activities for 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 works. In terms of institutional capacity this Council is currently considering creation of a Board of Directors with engagement of government and parliament representatives.

Challenges

Limited institutionalization: The goals that the Network set for itself require high degree of organization. However, leading network members are effective NGOs and research centers and can contribute only very limited amount of time to volunteer work. Besides, continuous turnover in

Government and institutions results in a slide back from the achievements of earlier stages that have been successfully discussed and agreed with the previous government. That is why it is important to find forms of work that would contribute to institutionalization, and that would transform outputs of previous stages into decisions and results at the next stages (e.g. 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 the decision-making processes, policy formulation and consulting. For this reason their participation is very limited and many are inactive.

Lack of Public Relations strategy of the Network: Limited awareness of Network activities and goals in various sectors of the society is another major issue. Existing network products and resources are available only to a limited circle of people included in the mailing list and through personal connections. This issue leads to the underuse of the Network's capacity by government agencies and lack of 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 professional growth 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 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.
- 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 private contracts (projects and programs).
- In addition to Kyrgyzstan-based evaluators, the Network's mailing list includes evaluators from neighboring Tajikistan.

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 partnership with international M&E experts;
- 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 clear communication and partnership strategy with government, wider civil society, and interest groups, considering diverse interests of Network members;
- Active integration into international M&E initiatives;
- Develop PR and awareness building strategy about Network activities;
- Formulate and implement M&E standards;
- Improve fund-raising activities considering 'soft' nature of 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 (the case of interethnic clashes in the south of Kyrgyzstan);
- Participatory monitoring of municipal land use (local self-government bodies + local nongovernmental organizations; the case of inventory of municipal land in Osh city);
- Evaluating public satisfaction with clean water supply (monitoring and evaluating effectiveness and efficiency of local budget ("clean water" line item));
- Gender sensitive performance analysis of government bodies (evaluating operationalization of M&E system, audit, 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 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;
- Promote 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.