

UNEG  
AGM 2025



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United Nations Evaluation Group

# Lessons Learnt From Joint And Support To Country- Led Evaluations

## **UNEG AGM 2025**

This document was prepared by the National Evaluation Cooperation Development Working Group and presented at the UNEG AGM 2024 for discussion.

It is being presented at the UNEG AGM with a request for approval to be published as a UNEG Reference Document.

## Acknowledgements

This report has been prepared for the United Nations Evaluation Group Working Group on National Evaluation Capacity Development, by Steven Masvaure from the University of Witwatersrand's Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa. The report was funded by UNEG and contracted by the World Health Organisation.

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# 1 BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Introduction

The United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) National Evaluation Capacity Development (NECD) Working Group (WG) was tasked to prepare a paper on lessons learnt from joint evaluations and support to country-led evaluations. The request emanated from the recommendations of the report<sup>1</sup> previously commissioned by the WG. The recommendation states that “*when feasible, United Nations agencies should foster joint and country-led evaluations. United Nations entities should also support country-led government evaluations that address agency priorities, which may then count towards United Nations agency evaluation coverage requirements*” (UNEG, 2022). This paper examines lessons from joint evaluations (JEs) and support to country-led evaluations (CLEs) conducted by United Nations (UN) and other bilateral/multilateral agencies in collaboration with government departments. Further, it defines and proposes a conceptual framework for CLEs. The paper is guided by the following objectives:

- Share lessons for UNEG members to consider when conducting JEs or supporting CLEs.
- Provide governments with good practice examples, and information where and how to solicit support when taking part in JEs or CLEs specifically with an eye on the implementation of Resolution A/RES/77/283 on Strengthening Voluntary National Reviews through Country-led Evaluation.
- Promote JEs/CLEs and the implementation of Resolution A/RES/77/283 on Strengthening Voluntary National Reviews through Country-led Evaluation.

Lessons learnt are generally understood to be knowledge or understanding gained by experience (positive or negative). The lessons must be significant in that they should have value or assumed impact on how UN agencies operationalise and implement the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions A/RES/77/283 on Strengthening Voluntary National Reviews through Country-led Evaluation, A/RES/69/237 on Capacity building for the evaluation of development activities at the country level and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17 target 17.9 on enhancing international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation. The lessons learnt should be valid, factually and technically correct and should be applicable in that they identify specific actions to be taken, replicated, avoided, or adjusted (Magoula and Benevento 2013).

This paper examines the lessons emerging from JEs and support to CLEs of selected UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies that were conducted in collaboration with government departments. The paper begins by defining and conceptualising JEs and CLEs. This is critical since there are varying definitions, understanding and conceptualisation of the two terms. The latter sections of the paper present the lessons emerging from JEs and support to CLEs.

## 1.2 Methodology

The paper adopted a qualitative approach that enabled the decoding of real field experiences gained from implementing JEs and CLEs. The study purposively sampled JEs and CLEs from Benin,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unevaluation.org/document/download/3825>

Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Kenya, Malawi, Mexico, Namibia, Tanzania, and Uganda. Factors such as the geographic location, who initiated the evaluation demand, design, sign-off, who led the commissioning and management, funding of the JE or CLE and characterisation of the evaluations (whether JE or CLE) were considered in the selection of the cases. The objective was to select evaluations that were conducted by government departments in collaboration with UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies. However, it is important to note UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies have no common definition of CLE hence an entity might characterise a JE as a CLE and vice versa.

Once the JEs and CLEs were identified, individuals who led the JEs or CLEs from the entities involved were identified for in-depth interviews. Sixteen in-depth interviews were conducted with selected JE and CLE evaluation managers (10 females and 6 males). The evaluation managers were from government departments, UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies. Most of these evaluation managers have years of experience in managing and commissioning several JEs and CLEs. These interviews were complemented by in-depth interviews with government officials<sup>2</sup> (4 females and 2 males) who are leading national evaluation systems in some of these countries. Furthermore, the study was complemented by in-depth interviews with selected UN agencies' evaluation function heads or delegated representatives (7 males and 3 females).

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected critically. The intention was to look for trends, parallels, patterns, and connections in the data and extract key lessons about the process of implementing JEs and CLEs and how they are conceptualised. Data was initially coded leading to identifying similarities, differences, and emerging themes within and between the various JEs and CLEs. The subsequent step was to review the themes and finalise them leading to the development of this paper.

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the government officials were also leading the identified JEs or CLEs.

## 2 CONCEPTUALISING JOINT AND COUNTRY-LED EVALUATIONS

### 2.1 Joint evaluations

The concept of JEs has been in existence for several years. In 2006, the OECD defined joint evaluations as efforts undertaken by a group of donors, working together in a systematic and targeted manner, to obtain evidence of the achievements and failures of development cooperation activities and/or to assess the quality of mostly multilateral institutions. The original focus was on facilitating collaboration between donors who share the same interests with no or minimal government involvement. Recently JEs have evolved and there is now a specific typology of joint evaluations that involve UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies and government departments. The focus of this paper is on *joint evaluations conducted by UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies in collaboration with government departments*. The catalyst for this evolution can be traced back to the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and 2008 Accra Agenda for Action which advocated for country-led and owned development. The principles of these two are presented in the table 1 below.

**Table 1 Core Principles of Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action**

Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005)	Accra Agenda for Action (2008)
<b>Ownership</b> Developing countries set their strategies for poverty reduction, improve their institutions and tackle corruption.	<b>Ownership</b> Countries have more say over their development processes through wider participation in development policy formulation, stronger leadership on aid coordination and more use of country systems for aid delivery.
<b>Alignment</b> Donor countries align with these objectives and use local systems.	<b>Capacity development</b> To build the ability of countries to manage their future.
<b>Harmonisation</b> Donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication.	<b>Delivering results</b> Aid is focused on real and measurable impact on development.
<b>Results</b> Developing countries and donors shift focus to development results and results get measured.	<b>Inclusive partnerships</b> All partners - including donors in the OECD Development Assistance Committee and developing countries, as well as other donors, foundations, and civil society - participate fully
<b>Mutual accountability</b> Donors and partners are accountable for development results.	

Source: OECD (n.d.)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm>

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action advocated for country ownership of the development priorities. Country ownership assumes that countries' interest and participation in development initiatives through ownership will lead to better development outcomes. Furthermore, it is emphasized that development partners should support the country's development priorities, hence, if different organisations are working together with the government to address a specific country priority, then evaluation should occur jointly.

The call for country ownership did not end with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action. It is reiterated in the UNGA Resolution A/RES/69/237 which called for the United Nations development system *“to support, upon request (country-led demand), efforts to further strengthen the capacity of Member States for evaluation, in accordance with their national policies and priorities.”* The recent UNGA Resolution A/RES/77/283, also calls for *“United Nations agencies, within existing mandates and resources, to provide support at the request of Member States on their efforts to undertake evaluations of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and facilitate exchange of experiences and knowledge products from those evaluations.”* Furthermore, SDG 17 target 17.9 encourages UN agencies to support developing countries in strengthening their national evaluation capacities and support CLEs. It can be argued that what is common across these two resolutions and SDG 17 is that the member states/countries need to lead in developing national evaluation systems/capacities and conducting CLEs.

The imperatives of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, Accra Agenda for Action, UNGA Resolutions A/RES/77/283, A/RES/69/237 and SDG 17 target 17.9 have seen the organic transformation or repurposing of JEs into CLEs. However, this transformation is still emerging and there is no agreed definition of what a country-led evaluation is or how is it implemented.

## 2.2 Country-led evaluations

The term CLE emerged in the development space in 2003 in an OECD CLE discussion paper. Despite CLE emerging two decades ago, there has been limited traction in realising its objectives. The development space still suffers from the same problems that gave rise to CLE twenty years ago. CLEs emerged because developing countries were and many of them are still not commissioning evaluations for their programmes, policies and strategies - most development programmes and policy evaluations are still commissioned and led by development partners (Goldman et al. 2018).

Recent evolution in the national evaluation capacities development space has seen efforts being put towards CLEs. The efforts are intended for the countries to take leadership and ownership of country evaluations thereby meeting their SDGs obligations. The demand for country-led evaluations has largely been from development partners with limited uptake from government departments (Fraser and Morkel 2020; Goldman et al. 2018, UNEG 2022). There is also an assumption that the countries have evaluation capacities and systems, resources, and willingness to own and lead evaluations. Literature on national evaluation capacities development shows that there are limited financial resources for evaluations and evaluation capacities are still limited in some countries (Borlini et al. 2020; Masvaure and Motlanthe 2022).

### 2.2.1 Towards Defining CLE

To address the financial gaps and limited national evaluation capacities, UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies are currently using JEs as an avenue to strengthen national evaluation capacities and support CLEs. This has led to an organic shift from JEs and/or tailoring them to CLEs. However, these intentions have not been complemented by the development of common definition or conceptualisation of CLE and how it differs from the OECD typologies of joint

evaluations. Such limited articulation can lead to organisations characterising JEs as CLEs and vice versa.

Respondents for this paper were asked to define or articulate the meaning of CLE. In the process of defining CLEs, they highlighted some key factors that shape how CLEs are defined and conceptualised. These factors were also highlighted by several respondents who contributed to this paper. These factors are:

- CLE is based on the premise that the country leads and coordinates the development initiatives within the country with the support of the development partners. This is supported by the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, Accra Agenda for Action, UN Resolutions A/RES/77/283, A/RES/69/237 and The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. It is pertinent for the country to lead the evaluation of these development initiatives to enable it to “use the evidence for SDG decision making and reporting on progress towards the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.” In this case, CLE is an evaluation that is led, and owned by the government but is inclusive of other interested stakeholders who are contributing towards the development initiatives/priorities being evaluated. CLE does not mean the government commissioning, managing, and conducting the evaluation alone – in such situations, it is just a “normal evaluation.”
- The demand for CLE can be partially or fully initiated outside the government, however, the leadership and ownership of the evaluation should be firmly in the country’s control. The demand should also be aligned with the country’s development priorities to fulfil the ownership principle.
- Co-managed evaluations are characterised as JEs that form part of the CLEs continuum. In CLEs, it is important to note that UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies ‘support’ countries – not lead or co-lead the evaluation. In addition, development partners have no mandate to evaluate government programmes.
- JEs between government departments and the UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies means joint decision-making or co-managing the evaluation. Other forms of collaboration that do not include joint decision-making or co-management of the evaluation are not regarded as JEs. Meaningful collaboration or involvement in a JEs by the government is defined by joint decision-making or co-management.

The following CLE conceptual framework is informed by several conversations with both government and UN agencies with several years of experience leading and implementing joint evaluations. The conceptual framework is made up of six elements which are:

- Country leadership
- Country ownership
- Inclusivity
- Cost sharing
- Alignment with national priorities and planning process
- Contribution to strengthening national evaluation capacities

The above elements are achieved in a continuum i.e., the elements are achieved in progression in whatever sequence the context dictates (see conceptual diagram below). Notwithstanding the non-defined sequence of progression, the minimum criteria for an evaluation to be regarded as country-led are that it must have three core elements which are (1) Country leadership; (2) Country ownership; (3) Inclusivity. If it misses any of the core components it is not a CLE. A fully matured CLE should be made up of all six elements. The key informants for this paper highlighted that UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies will struggle to meet the country’s leadership and ownership



elements unless they are willing to cede some of their power. Certain governments may also struggle to realise the cost-sharing element given the low regard for evaluation and limited funding. The six elements are described below.

### **Country leadership**

Country leadership stems from the premise that governments are the overall development coordinators, and it is their programmes that are being assessed through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) hence it is natural for the governments to lead country-led evaluations. It means the country leads the evaluation process (commissioning, managing and use). Through its leadership, the government must facilitate the co-creation and co-production of the evaluation with relevant stakeholders. UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies can urge and advocate for government-led evaluations, however their role is to *'support'* the government during the implementation of CLE. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that country leadership does not mean that the government leads the evaluation process alone but should open spaces for decision-making with involved stakeholders. The sign-off for the evaluation outputs and ownerships should remain with the country in a CLE.

### **Country ownership**

Countries (government and in some instances civil society organisations) are the primary agents who decide on what is to be evaluated, the design of the evaluation and the evaluation priorities. The main reason for making the country the primary agent is to improve the utilisation of the evaluation by the government, allow the country to align the evaluation with national priorities and enable the government to report on progress towards SDGs through VNRs. The spirit of the term “country-led demand” is about the alignment of the evaluation to the country-defined development priorities. Hence UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies can urge and advocate for government-led evaluations that are aligned with country development priorities, e.g., supporting evaluation of key national programmes and policies. Such evaluations will not result in losing country ownership because it is an evaluation that is aligned with national priorities (in some cases the evaluation is part of the national evaluation plan). This aligns with Resolutions A/RES/77/283, A/RES/69/237 and The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. Moreover, such evaluation is about enabling the delivery of development effectiveness.

### **Inclusivity**

This element is critical especially when evaluating development programmes or policies. UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies support the government through implementing programmes that are aligned with government priorities hence there is a collective effort that should be replicated at the evaluation level. This is also emphasized in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which states “*VNRs should be regular and inclusive...*” CLE should be inclusive of the relevant stakeholders and should also try to balance the evaluation needs of the stakeholders involved. There is no specific number of stakeholders to be involved, however, CLE should be open to UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies and other stakeholders who are contributing towards or have an interest in the development priority being evaluated. It is the responsibility of the government to facilitate and open the platforms for inclusion.

### **Cost sharing**

Financial contribution by the government is a catalyst for country-led evaluation. Cost sharing means that there is a need for at least some sort of contribution (in kind or financial) for the evaluation by the country or the government. Cost sharing by the government gives it power to lead and increases decision-making confidence. It also helps in developing a culture of allocating financial resources for evaluation. This can be done by contributing to specific evaluation activities,

e.g., the data collection process. If there is no financial contribution by the government, it weakens its ownership and leadership role in the evaluation. This was also echoed in the WFP (2022) lessons learnt paper on joint evaluations. It is pertinent to note that given the limited resources, CLE can be fully funded by the non-state sector, however, the funding should not curtail the leadership and ownership role of the country. It's worth mentioning that a few countries including Benin, Costa Rica, South Africa, and Uganda have costed evaluation plans.

**Alignment with national development priorities and planning process**

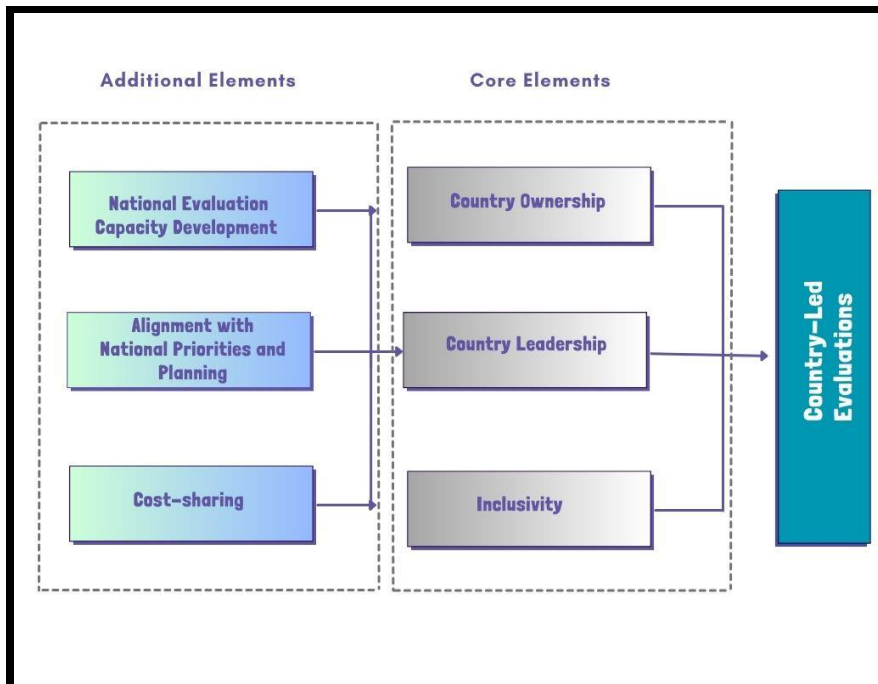
This element supports country ownership. Country-led evaluations should be aligned with national priorities, this strengthens the ownership element in the sense that the evaluation becomes relevant to the country. National priorities should also be aligned with other international obligations such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development or other regional obligations. The alignment to these priorities strengthens the state’s capacity to report on its development initiatives. In addition, the country-led evaluation should be timely and aligned with the country's planning and decision-making process to increase its utility. Evidence from Benin, Costa Rica, Mexico, South Africa, and Uganda has shown that having a national evaluation system and an institutional arrangement that manages and coordinates evaluations at the national level is critical for the alignment of evaluations with national priorities.

**Contribution to strengthening national evaluation capacities**

This element is focused on strengthening the national evaluation capacities. Country-led evaluations should be opportunities to develop the capacities of individuals, and institutions and create an enabling environment for national evaluation systems. This will facilitate countries to be able to commission, manage and conduct evaluations in future without the support of development partners.

Given these elements, **CLEs are defined as evaluations that are country-led (country leadership in commissioning, managing and use), country-owned, inclusive and respond to the development needs and priorities of the countries.**

Figure 1 Country-led Evaluation Conceptual Framework



### 3 LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE JOINT AND SUPPORT OF COUNTRY-LED EVALUATIONS

The lessons learnt are distilled from interviews with both government and UN and other bilateral/multilateral agencies' country offices and regional staff who have overseen several JEs and supported CLEs. While some of the lessons are context specific, others can be applied universally. These lessons are not one-size-fits-all and they should be applied according to the context. To promote anonymity, no specific examples of JEs and CLEs are provided. However, the lessons are contextualized/situated to enable the appreciation of the relevance of the lessons to implementation of JEs and CLEs. The lessons are drawn from various contexts that range from countries with functional more pronounced national evaluation systems to those with emerging national evaluation systems.

It is also pertinent to note that the development of the conceptual framework and the documentation of the lessons was done concurrently. The implication is that some of the sampled evaluations that were characterised as CLEs did not meet the minimum requirements for CLEs according to the new conceptual framework and the definition. Hence the lessons below are largely from JEs of which some of the evaluations are in a CLE continuum. Despite this limitation, it is important to note that the lessons presented below are derived from evaluations that were conducted in collaboration with government departments. The lessons learnt are clustered into three categories, i.e., general lessons that apply to both JEs and CLEs, lessons that apply to JEs and lessons that apply to CLEs.

#### General lessons that cover both JEs and CLEs

##### 3.1 JEs and support to CLEs start way before the actual evaluation.

JEs and CLEs should be planned well in advance to enable better planning, synchronisation with monitoring, and building relationships and rapport with the collaborating institution/s. The approach should not be ad hoc or impromptu. In contexts where JEs are emanating from the joint implementation of a programme or policy, there is a need to prepare for the evaluation at the planning phase of the policy, programme, or project. The planning should lead to the development of the evaluation plan. It is ideal for JEs to be preceded by joint implementation or other forms of collaboration (policy design, technical assistance, etc.); it strengthens the need for and naturally leads to joint evaluation.

For CLEs, in contexts where there is a functional national evaluation system, they become part of the national evaluation plan, thereby facilitating early planning. However, if there is no existing national evaluation system, early planning for CLEs will include putting systems in place that define how the evaluation will be conducted, the stakeholders to be involved and funding of the evaluation.

It is important to note that hurriedly planned joint evaluations affect country ownership and leadership and will lead to half-hearted involvement and participation that is not meaningful to the government. This will in turn affect the utilisation of the evidence generated. JEs and CLEs need collaborative planning and there is also the need to think about the contribution of the evaluations to the broad country priorities and how it can be synchronised to the major decision-making processes and events. When planning for JEs and supporting CLEs, collaboration should not be treated as a tick-box exercise but as a sincere process that seeks meaningful cooperation in the different stages of the evaluation process.

### 3.2 Agree on governance structure and framework before embarking on a joint or country-led evaluation.

Most of the challenges in joint and country-led evaluations emanate largely from disagreements on how things should be done. When two or more organisations are collaborating especially on an evaluation, the possibility of disagreements is very high. It was highlighted that disagreements are prevalent in contexts that lack defined national evaluation systems. The implication for CLE is that before it is implemented there is a need to develop a governance framework and systems to facilitate the evaluation. For JEs, disagreements are more pronounced in situations where either both the organisations and/or one of the collaborating institutions have no frameworks that govern JEs.

Before implementing JEs and CLEs there is a need to develop and agree on a governance structure and framework that informs their implementation and decision-making – *“agree on how things are done.”* The evaluation co-managers should define the rules, procedures, roles, and the division of responsibilities for the duration of the evaluation. All the stakeholders who are part of the evaluation should agree on the governance structure and framework and sign off on it. It is important not to impose governance structures and frameworks on other stakeholders – *“learn the art of persuasion through discussion.”*

The governance framework should define the principles of the evaluation, assign responsibilities to the involved stakeholders, and explain how responsibilities will be fulfilled. Furthermore, the framework should address how quality assurance will be carried out, timelines for giving feedback and agree on mechanisms for resolving sticky issues. JEs and CLEs without a governance structure and framework are likely to face several delays especially when issues emerge and there is no agreed mechanism on how to address them – *“do not fly blind.”*

As part of planning, there is a need to create another governance structure that is higher than the evaluation co-managers. This structure should be made of senior officials (with the power to move or resolve issues) from the stakeholder entities, and it should be used to resolve controversial topics and disagreements the evaluation co-managers cannot resolve. It will also become handy for mediation and hard decision-making. For evaluations of high national importance and priority, this structure should include political leadership. In addition to political leadership, some of the UN Agencies use Regional Evaluation Professionals to provide support and resolve technical evaluation issues.

### 3.3 Cultivating good working relationships is important for the evaluation success.

It is inherent to recognise the history of international development and the connotations of ‘donor–recipient’ relationships. The power imbalances whether implicit or explicit are real and can stifle meaningful collaboration in JEs and support to CLEs. Normally the organisation that pays for the evaluation has the power to shape and influence the decisions made on the evaluation. All stakeholders should be aware of their power, subtle expression of power shuts off robust discussions and may affect future engagement. Although at times this power is not exercised other stakeholders are conscious of it and will take a cue from the funder on what should happen. This is more pronounced in contexts where there is a limited culture of evaluation in government and experience in collaborating and conducting evaluations. This can be resolved through cultivating good working relationships with the key people who are expected to be involved in the joint evaluation, specifically through developing good working relationships based on openness, frankness, and respect. These relationships are critical for frank and robust discussions between parties involved and will become handy when difficult decisions are to be made. Good working

relationships even out power imbalances through making communication possible thereby creating an environment for the smooth implementation of the evaluation.

When conducting CLE, the national/local government should be in the driving seat and have control over the evaluation. Putting the government in the driving seat should be complemented by cultivating both formal and informal relationships that are aimed at supporting the government's leadership and control of the evaluations.

Working relationships for JEs take a different approach in the sense that there is limited expectation for long-term collaboration relationship between the individuals involved in the evaluation co-management, e.g., a JE for a specific time limited project, programme, or policy. However, even in this case the cultivation of good working relationship remains pertinent as it facilitates meaningful engagement.

### **3.4 Be deliberate on what National Evaluation System Capacities you want to develop.**

JEs and CLEs are platforms for strengthening national evaluation capacities. They strengthen individual knowledge and skills in managing, commissioning, and conducting evaluations. They also provide practical experience for managing and commissioning evaluations. At the institutional level, joint evaluations can lead to the development or testing of institutional frameworks, procedures and policies that govern evaluations, especially for country-led evaluations. This was also reflected in the UNEG 2022 report. Although capacity development in the form of practical experience happens organically, there is a need to plan how capacity development will pan out.

When conducting JEs, there is a need to plan collaboratively with the stakeholders on what capacities are to be developed. Do not assume either that there is no capacity or that capacity exists. It is imperative to apply a mix of capacity development activities that are centred around the evaluation. Some of the capacity strengthening can include online self-paced evaluation courses that cover key aspects of the evaluation such as the development of terms of reference, evaluation approaches, design, data collection approaches and evaluation quality assurance. Include workshops and learning and reflection sessions with everyone involved – these are critical for building relationships that are key to the success of the evaluation. During implementation, it is important to convene learning and reflection sessions to discuss issues. The reflection session contributes to learning (complemented mentoring and coaching) and building relationships and trust for current and future evaluations.

CLEs need to adopt a different approach to capacity development, firstly in contexts where there are no recognised national evaluation systems, support to CLEs should include supporting the development of these systems (national/institutional evaluation systems) whilst at the same time developing individual evaluation capacities that are aligned with the national evaluation systems.

It is pertinent to remember that “*capacity development is not a one-way street*” but happens both ways. All the stakeholders must be encouraged to learn during the evaluation process. It is also important not to punish failure - failure should be treated as a learning process/capacity development. The evaluation also presents an opportunity to advocate for a culture of evaluation within government departments.

#### **Lessons emanating from JEs**

### **3.5 Organisational cultures, procedures, and ways of doing things differ.**

One of the key factors that cause challenges in JEs is the clash of organisational cultures, procedures, processes, and ways of doing things. How decisions are made, financial control

mechanisms, and quality control mechanisms differ and can cause disagreements among the stakeholders collaborating. The clash of organisational cultures is more pronounced in situations where there is no prior agreed framework to govern the collaboration or evaluation co-management. Furthermore, clashes are likely to happen where one of the collaborating organisations solely defines the evaluation process without getting a buy in from other collaborating organisations.

Organisational cultures, procedures, and ways of doing things should be addressed in the evaluation governance framework where stakeholders agree on the specificities of the evaluation. Furthermore, flexibility and open-mindedness are key to manoeuvring organisational culture clashes. Also, there is a need to be flexible and make provisions for divergence from organisational processes especially in JEs. Insisting on organisational processes even in situations where it is not rational can be viewed as unreasonable, exerting superiority and might cause disharmony.

### **3.6 Strike a careful balance between accountability and learning.**

The evaluation design should balance organisational accountability requirements and the learning needs of the stakeholders involved. Accountability-oriented evaluations are driven by the need to account to the funders/donors of the development partners hence the design, evaluation questions, implementation and use of evaluations are focused on meeting the accountability needs of the funders. This means that these evaluations have limited utility to the other stakeholders. Accountability-oriented evaluations may be perceived as finger-pointing (fault finding) exercises that will lead to reluctance or reduce active involvement and utilisation of the evaluation especially by government stakeholders. In addition, accountability-oriented evaluations may be used as a political tool by government opponents in case of adverse evaluation findings. This reduces the appetite of those in power to commission them.

On the other hand, learning-oriented evaluations adopt a different approach, and they are mainly for the improvement of the current or future policy/strategy, programme or project. In addition, learning-oriented evaluations may assume different approaches and principles depending on what is to be learned. They may be done internally thereby foregoing the independence principle<sup>4</sup>, focus on problematic programmes and can be used to develop internal evaluators' knowledge, and skills, and provide evaluation experience thereby contributing to national evaluation capacity development.

Those implementing JEs are encouraged to come up with evaluation designs that cater for both accountability and learning needs to increase interest and buy-in from the stakeholders involved.

### **3.7 Evaluation goes beyond the submission of the final report.**

Often the focus of evaluations is limited to the point when a final report has been delivered. Lessons coming from JEs show that there is a need to plan for post-evaluation report processes such as the development of management response (likely from more than one institution) facilitating the development of action plans, implementation of recommendations and dissemination of the evaluation evidence. Also, have a plan on what happens when recommendations are rejected (by any of the parties involved) or when the action plan is not implemented. These processes might go on for months or years after the final report has been delivered hence the governance framework should also cover this period. Such forward-looking planning aligns with the current good practice

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<sup>4</sup> Most UN agencies evaluation policies emphasises the independence of the evaluation.



of conducting evaluations. If issues cannot be resolved, they should be referred to the higher-level structure that has the power to address the issues.

### **3.8 Written feedback on deliverables is good, however, convene platforms to discuss feedback.**

Meaningful collaboration in evaluation requires all stakeholders to be heard especially in reviewing and giving feedback on evaluation key deliverables such as the terms of reference, inception report and evaluation report. The evaluation managers must facilitate the review and how feedback is provided. Convening sessions aimed at capacitating involved parties on how to review the specific deliverables will help in developing confidence among the parties involved and can also be part of the evaluation capacity development plan for the evaluation.

As part of the review process, the parties involved are encouraged to review separately and convene to discuss the reviews and agree on the feedback to be given to the authors of the deliverables. These platforms should be planned for throughout the evaluation process. Such a process promotes openness and, a feeling of being valued and drives involved persons to review the deliverables before the review session. If you are the funder of the evaluation, it is encouraged not to share your reviews too soon with your collaborators. There is a likelihood that if other collaborators see your reviews before they perform theirs, they will tailor their reviews accordingly. It might also cause fellow collaborators to put less effort since the person/organisation that matters has already commented. Feedback should be shared simultaneously and discussed to resolve key differences.

### **3.9 Validate the findings to get buy-in for recommendations and formulate action plans.**

Critical to joint or country-led evaluations is to validate the findings of the evaluations. The validation should be inclusive and incorporate stakeholders with an interest in the findings of the evaluation and not only limited to those working on the evaluation. For JEs and CLEs that are of national significance and contribute to VNRs, validating the findings with other partners that are contributing to the priority area is important. The validation should serve three purposes, firstly, it is a platform to scrutinise the findings and agree on the validity of the findings. By doing this, other alternative interpretations of the findings are discussed, and it creates a shared understanding of the evaluation. Secondly, validation acts as a platform for getting buy-in and teasing out recommendations to key decision-makers. This curtails the outright rejection of the report and its recommendations. Finally, validation is also a platform for formulating draft action plans with the stakeholders of interest.

### **3.10 Be patient, joint evaluations take time.**

All interviews highlighted that JEs timelines are longer than usually experienced in single-entity evaluations. The longer timelines are caused by several factors that include different organisational processes, e.g., it takes more time to agree on selected evaluation consultants. Secondly, reviews of deliverables can also take considerable time, e.g., it can take a development partner a week to review and approve a deliverable whilst in government it can take more than a month to get approved. The delays have implications for all stakeholders and engaged evaluation consultants who might not be available beyond the initially agreed time. Longer timelines can also result in the evaluation missing key planning events that depend on the evidence from the evaluation.

To mitigate against longer timelines, at the planning stage, there is a need to understand the context and how things are done by collaborating organisations. This should lead to factoring in these elements in the evaluation timeline.

## Lessons emanating from CLEs

### 3.11 Align the evaluation with major government priorities and decision-making events.

Country ownership and leadership are fostered when the evaluation is aligned with country priorities, planning, and decision-making events. *“Focus is on the bigger policy issues than on minors micro level issues.”* This is achieved through prioritizing evaluations of national significance. Aligning the evaluation with major government decision-making plans, e.g., review of national policies and programmes, planning, and reporting on specific achievements such as the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development (VNRs), increases interest in country ownership and buy-in. It also reduces unnecessary delays in the evaluation. This also aligns the evaluation with the UNGA resolution A/RES/77/283. In prioritisation, there is also a need to strike a balance between national and international interests. There is also a likelihood of cost sharing and a high level of facilitation of the evaluation by the government.

### 3.12 Financial contribution empowers governments and improves decision-making confidence.

Departing from the previously discussed issue of power imbalances between developing countries and development partners, cost sharing of an evaluation is a great power equaliser. Where possible, the government should contribute to the evaluation either in kind or financially. This is known to increase *“interest, empower the government and bestow the government with decision-making confidence”*. In addition, cost sharing is a catalyst for the country to lead evaluation. Cost sharing can be done in different ways, from financing a specific component of the evaluation to bearing the costs of data collection or providing human resources for data collection. Cost sharing can lead to the institutionalisation of evaluation funding within the national budgets through the national evaluation plans.



## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation 1: Countries should develop costed national evaluation plans to facilitate CLEs support.**

For meaningful support to CLEs, countries should develop national evaluation plans that are costed. The plans should be aligned with national priorities and also respond to international obligations such as SDGs. National evaluation plans will systematise the evaluation which is critical in contributing towards national priorities. Furthermore, the national evaluation plans should feed into VNRs.

**Recommendation 2: Government and development partners should use JEs and CLEs as platforms for testing and developing national evaluation systems.**

Governments and development partners should use the JEs and CLEs as platforms to test or strengthen national evaluation systems' institutional frameworks, tools, procedures and policies that govern evaluations. This can be achieved through using government evaluation tools, frameworks, procedures and policies when conducting JEs and CLEs. In cases these are not available it is an opportunity to develop them.

**Recommendation 3: Development partners should provide support to CLE but not lead or co-lead.**

Evaluations that are country-led are more likely to yield better utilisation outcomes and they also enable the countries to strengthen their national evaluation systems, hence development partners should support CLEs and give the country room to lead and own these evaluations.

**Recommendation 4: Government and development partners implementing JEs and CLEs should understand that successful evaluations require both technical and other soft skills.**

For successful JEs and CLEs, there is a need to complement technical skills with soft skills that enable the smooth implementation of these types of evaluations. There is a need to develop soft skills such as cultivating positive professional relationships, leadership, teamwork, emotional intelligence, flexibility, and communication.

**Recommendation 5: Organisations implementing JEs and CLEs should systematically document the experiences and emerging lessons.**

Numerous JEs and CLEs have been conducted, however there is limited information on lessons emerging from their implementation. Organisations implementing JEs and CLEs should systematically document the experiences and emerging lessons from the JEs and CLEs to contribute towards collective learning. Sharing/disseminating the experiences is also a process of celebrating the successes.

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## Acronyms

CLE Country-led Evaluation

JE Joint Evaluation

NECD National Evaluation Capacities Development

UN United Nations

UNEG United Nations Evaluation Group

UNGA United Nations General Assembly

VNR Voluntary National Review

WG Working Group