

Chapter 13

Foceval and Focelac

Ten Years of Cooperation for Capacity Development in Participatory Evaluation in the Region

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Abstract

Over the course of a decade, the cooperation between the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica (Mideplan), through the Foceval and Focelac projects funded by the BMZ, sought to strengthen evaluation capacities in Latin America and the Caribbean, promoting informed decision-making. This chapter reviews the actions undertaken in the field of participatory evaluation in the region. The first section addresses the purpose of the projects, showing the relevance of participation and its inclusion in the cooperation strategy. The second part details the journey, highlighting key experiences and principal milestones, framed within a systemic approach that contributed to developing individual and institutional capacities and fostering an enabling environment in this area. The third section reflects on the lessons learned and challenges faced in accompanying entities and in training activities, it also explores the opportunities offered by participatory approaches in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Finally, the fourth section sets out the next steps, highlighting the importance of South-South-North synergies for fostering inclusive evaluations and contributing to effective public management and the achievement of the SDGs.

Keywords

Evaluation, Participation, Participatory Evaluation, International Cooperation, Inclusive Evaluation, Capacity Development, Public Policy.

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Introduction

Over ten years, the cooperation between the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)⁷⁴ and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica (Mideplan) was sustained through two projects —Foceval and Focelac— funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), with the shared objective of strengthening evaluation capacities in Latin America and the Caribbean and contributing to evidence-based decision-making.

This chapter offers a general overview of the actions carried out over ten years of cooperation in the field of participatory evaluation in the Latin American region. The first section describes the purpose of these projects and how the interest in participatory evaluation emerged. It accounts for how participation became a key management mechanism within the cooperation projects, linking different sectors and entities, and how it was established as a line of action in the cooperation strategy.

The second part of the chapter summarises the progress made, highlighting the experiences developed

and the main milestones that have contributed to the strengthening of capacities in participatory evaluation in the region, within the framework of the systemic cooperation approach promoted by DEval. This approach, among other aspects, promoted actions aimed for impact on three levels: individual capacities, institutional capacities, and the creation of an enabling environment.

The third section addresses the most significant lessons learned and challenges arising from the accompaniment of entities and organisations, as well as from training activities and the various actions generated. It also shares reflections on the opportunities offered by participatory approaches in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the challenges facing the region in its complex political and social contexts.

Finally, the fourth section outlines the next steps in the cooperation and explores the potential of creating and exchanging South-South-North synergies for capacity development in more inclusive evaluations — fundamental to contributing to good public governance and the achievement of the SDGs—.

⁷⁴ An institution dedicated to the independent and scientific evaluation of development cooperation projects and programmes funded by the German government. Founded in 2012 and headquartered in Bonn, its mission is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of development aid through rigorous evaluations and the promotion of good practices in international cooperation. For more information, visit: <https://www.deval.org/>.

Participation in Evaluation Processes: A Sustained Interest

In July 2014, DEval and Mideplan launched the second phase⁷⁵ of the Foceval project (Promotion of Evaluation Capacities). After two years of implementation, a third phase of equal duration was approved. In 2019, upon the conclusion of Foceval, a new project was implemented, Focelac (Strengthening Evaluation Capacities in Latin America), which was developed in two phases over four years. Between 2023 and 2024, a new stage called Focelac+ was carried out, focused on promoting a culture of evaluation and learning in Latin America with a global outlook.

The table below summarises the different phases of the projects over time and their main objectives.

Name	Period	Objective
Foceval (Phase 2)	July 2014–2016	To promote the training, institutionalisation and regionalisation of evaluation for political decision-making. Particularly in Costa Rica and other LAC countries.
Foceval (Phase 3)	2016–2018	
Focelac (Phase 1)	2019–2020	To develop evaluation capacities to promote the use of evaluation and decision-making centred on the context of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs in LAC.
Focelac (Phase 2)	2021–2022	
Focelac+	2023–2024	To promote a culture of evaluation and learning in Latin America with a global outlook that strengthens good governance as a prerequisite for fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

Table 1. Projects implemented by DEval and Mideplan to contribute to evaluation capacity development.
Source: Author’s own elaboration.

From the outset of the second phase of the Foceval project, participation was positioned as a central axis in two ways: first, as an internal management mechanism for cooperation with its partners and counterparts; and second, as a constant interest in the evaluative reflection of the actors actively involved in the project. The organisational management of Foceval was characterised by the participation of diverse actors in Costa Rica in the operational processes of decision-

⁷⁵ The first phase of the intervention (2011–June 2014) was managed by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

making related to the project's implementation. Specifically, these decisions were taken jointly between the strategic partners (DEval and Mideplan) and various entities in a space known as the Coordination Group. This group, made up of representatives from the public sector, academia, and civil society in Costa Rica, was where the proposal emerged to incorporate the themes of evaluation and participation as a line of action in this new phase of the project.

Later, this form of organisation, sustained by the participation of diverse sectors, was consolidated with the creation of a national multistakeholder evaluation platform in Costa Rica —comprising the public sector, academia, evaluation networks, international cooperation bodies, and civil society organisations— and a regional multistakeholder evaluation platform, made up of a diversity of actors interested in evaluation. Through these platforms, cooperation among the various actors was fostered to strengthen the practice of evaluation in public institutions; capacities in innovative evaluation topics were strengthened; links were established between evaluation and civil society participation; and mutual support was promoted through specialised networks and the exchange of Costa Rica's experiences and achievements in evaluation with other countries in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region.

This interest in participation is not coincidental, if we briefly consider the prominence that citizen participation has had in the Latin American region and specifically in the Costa Rica's governance history. In the Latin American context, the link between participation

and evaluation stems from a rich tradition in the field of social research, characterised by at least three currents of knowledge: popular education, participatory action research, and systematisation of experiences, all of which reflect the participatory dimension from a liberating and transformative perspective on reality (Tapella *et al.*, 2022, p. 48). In all three currents cited, knowledge is constructed collectively and there is a shared commitment to inclusion and empowerment for social change.

In the specific case of Costa Rica, since the abolition of the army in 1948, resources have been concentrated on human development and the creation of robust democratic institutions. The Political Constitution of 1949, as well as subsequent reforms, have promoted a political system based on the active participation of citizens, guaranteeing rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and the right to political participation. Within this democratic tradition, the active involvement of citizens in political processes and decision-making has been commonplace, through national and municipal mechanisms such as referendums, popular consultations, public hearings, community development councils, participatory budgeting, forums, roundtable discussions, and others.

The coordination group for the second phase of the Foceval project was a diverse group that reflected this tradition, comprising not only public entities or those related to evaluative and academic work, but also organisations and entities that safeguard people's rights. Among these, the roles of the Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría de los Habitantes, DHR)

and the Citizen's Oversight Network (Red de Control Ciudadano) were particularly notable.

The Office of the Ombudsperson of Costa Rica is an independent public institution, created in 1992 under Law No. 7,319, whose main objective is the defence and protection of the rights and guarantees of the country's inhabitants. Its mission is to ensure that people can exercise their rights fully and to supervise the proper functioning of public institutions. This entity promotes transparency and accountability in public administration, in addition to fostering respect for human rights. Hence its involvement as an actor within the Foceval project's coordination group.

For its part, the Citizens' Oversight Network was a space that emerged from the coming together of a group of social organisations interested in public policies in 2004, with the aim of monitoring the proposals of the Costa Rican government. This network served as a platform that promoted social mobilisation for political advocacy, the oversight of public policies, and the exercise of active participation, thereby strengthening democracy.

Both entities were fundamental in incorporating into Foceval's activity plan aspects such as an interest in reflection, practice, and theoretical production on the active participation of diverse actors in evaluation processes.

For Foceval's main partners (DEval and Mideplan), the subject also represented both an interest and a challenge. On the one hand, for Mideplan this

association between participation and evaluation was not new, since it is one of the objectives established in the National Planning System, which seeks to foster greater citizen participation in addressing economic and social processes and to promote transparency and accountability, ensuring that policies and projects reflect the priorities and aspirations of Costa Rican society. This applies to both the planning as well as the monitoring and evaluation of interventions; however, in the latter area it was still an emerging theme. For DEval, reflecting on the active participation of diverse actors in evaluations —beyond merely consultative levels— represented a valuable opportunity for learning and deepening both the theoretical and practical dimensions of evaluation methodologies.

Following this initial call to incorporate actions on the subject, this line of action was not only maintained but consolidated. In the subsequent years of implementation of the Focelac and Focelac+ projects, participation in evaluation was a fundamental pillar of the cooperation framed within the actions undertaken to address the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda from an evaluative standpoint. Specifically, the focus has been on actions centred on thinking about the importance of context, leaving no one behind, and opening participation to all actors — principles that inspire the Agenda.

Thus, through the interest arising from dialogue among the diverse actors involved in the cooperation, and linked to the global call to fulfil the 2030 Agenda to promote more inclusive evaluation processes, many of the actions undertaken over the last decade have

been oriented. Some of the strategies implemented, as we shall see below, have been the research into and strengthening of participatory approaches that seek not only to evaluate in a more inclusive, fair, and rigorous manner, but also to generate processes of learning and continuous improvement that promote equitable and sustainable development.

The Path Travelled: Accompanied Experiences and Cooperation Milestones

The Foceval and Focelac projects, in their different phases, have been characterised by applying, to varying degrees⁷⁶ and depending on the country, a systemic approach model for promoting capacity building in evaluation (Klier *et al.*, 2022). One part of this approach consists of fostering the development of evaluation capacities at three levels: individual capacities, institutional capacities, and generating actions to create or promote an enabling environment. This approach takes into account the interrelations and complexity of evaluation systems in the different countries.

At the level of impact to develop individual capacities,

⁷⁶ The Foceval project (July 2014–2018) implemented the systemic approach fully in Costa Rica and partially in other countries.

training programmes, workshops, and courses were offered for diverse actors from public and non-public entities. In the development of institutional capacities, close work was carried out with public institutions and other entities on the development and exchange of experiences; technical advisory support and accompaniment were provided to promote the development of national evaluation systems. Actions were also undertaken to promote an enabling environment for the evaluation ecosystem, such as political awareness raising, the fostering of institutionalisation through support for the creation of regulations, policies, guidelines, and standards. Actions were promoted for the creation of multistakeholder platforms and alliances between entities from diverse sectors, at national and regional levels, and for the generation of knowledge in evaluation through publications, manuals, guides, and other means.

This approach has been applied in several countries in the region, adapted to the specific contexts and needs of each. This has made it possible to contribute to progress in the institutionalisation of evaluation and in the promotion of an evaluation culture, according to the evaluation report carried out in 2023, which focused on evaluating DEval's Evaluation Capacity Development work (Korswagen & Williams, 2023).

Recognising the importance of this comprehensive approach, which considers the interrelation of the three levels of impact, various activities have been developed in the thematic axis of evaluation and participation. In broad terms, the Foceval and Focelac

projects have carried out the following actions in this area:

1. Delivering courses, training sessions, and workshops on evaluation and participation for diverse audiences (public officials, staff of civil society organisations and NGOs, members of evaluation networks, evaluation professionals, evaluation managers, academia, and others).
2. Accompanying and advising public entities and organisations in the implementation of participatory evaluations using a learning-by-doing approach, in which groups of stakeholders are involved from the planning stage of the evaluation. In these experiences, public entities or intervention implementers evaluate jointly with the target population and local actors. This promotes the development of evaluation capacities through direct experience, enabling participants to acquire knowledge and skills while evaluating, and also produces situated (contextualised) learning and knowledge.

3. Cocreating a regional community of practice and learning to develop reflections, methodologies, and tools that contribute to professionalising the field of participatory evaluation.
4. Supporting theoretical production and research on the participatory approach, based on the experiences and training delivered, as well as on cooperation with academic actors in the region who have specialised in the subject.
5. Fostering exchange among actors in the ecosystem and participation in congresses and events, both local and global, to share experiences and reflections, and thereby contribute to building a community committed to the subject.

Table 2 summarises the principal milestones resulting from the actions mentioned above, through the Foceval and Focelac projects, in the area of participation and evaluation.

Year	Milestone	Entities involved
2015	Meeting of social organisations on participatory evaluation and workshop on the subject for civil society organisations, San José, Costa Rica.	Mideplan / Office of the Ombudsperson
2016-2017	Participatory Evaluation of Cancer Prevention and Care Services in Valle de la Estrella, Limón, Costa Rica.	Mideplan / Costa Rican Social Security Fund / Office of the Ombudsperson
2018	Participatory design of projects by the Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA) in various LAC countries (Guatemala, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia) in Antigua, Guatemala.	Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA) / UN Women / Mideplan
2018	Participatory evaluations of the Working Groups initiative by the organisation TECHO, in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico.	TECHO
2018	Participatory evaluation of interventions under the Servicio País programme, run by the Foundation for Overcoming Poverty, Chile.	Servicio País Programme
2019	The EvalParticipativa initiative is launched: the Community of Practice and Learning in Participatory Evaluation for Latin America and the Caribbean.	Research Programme on Employment, Environment and Society (PETAS-UNSJ) / DEval, through the Focelac project
2019	First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation Experiences for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean in Quito, Ecuador.	EvalParticipativa
2021	Publication of the “Sowing and Harvesting” handbook, a publication aimed at the region, which presents a series of proposals and reflections on the inclusion of civil society in the field of evaluation.	EvalParticipativa
2019-2021	Participatory evaluation of public policy supporting transport for older adults, students and people with disabilities, Jalisco, Mexico.	Evalúa Jalisco / Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation / Government of Jalisco.
2019-2021	Evaluation with participation of Programme for the Promotion of the Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities.	Mideplan / National Council of Persons with Disabilities (Conapdis) Costa Rica.
2023-2024	Participatory evaluation of gerontological care in Socialisation and Meeting Spaces (ESE), Ecuador.	National Planning Secretariat (SNP), Ecuador / Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), Ecuador

Table 2. *Milestones of the Foceval and Focelac projects in the area of evaluation and participation*

Source: Author's own elaboration

The first steps along this path were taken in 2015, when a series of activities was launched to explore the link between social participation and evaluation. To this end, a working group was formed comprising representatives of Foceval, the Office of the Ombudsperson, and Mideplan, in Costa Rica. Three activities were carried out: a meeting with civil society organisations interested in citizen-led evaluation exercises, an intensive workshop on participatory evaluation for this sector, and an open call to those organisations—once trained—to submit participatory evaluation proposals, with the selected proposal receiving support from the Foceval project.

The selected intervention was the proposal put forward by the Health Boards⁷⁷ of the Huetar Caribe region to carry out a participatory evaluation of the Cancer Prevention and Care services in Valle de la Estrella, Limón, Costa Rica. This initiative⁷⁸ began in 2016 and concluded in 2017, and was notable for being a pioneering effort in the country and for integrating the target population of the intervention into the evaluation team. This team was made up of representatives of the Health Boards, medical staff of the intervention being evaluated, a local facilitator and an expert facilitator, all of whom were contracted by

⁷⁷ The Juntas de Salud are citizen participation bodies established to supervise and collaborate in the management of health services; they are made up of community representatives and their main objective is to improve the quality and efficiency of the health services provided by the Costa Rican Social Security Fund.

⁷⁸ For more information, visit: <https://evalparticipativa.net/en/resources/meaningful-lessons/the-valle-de-la-estrella-case-study-a-participatory-evaluation-from-the-beginning-to-the-end/>

the Foceval project, which had the support of Mideplan and the Office of the Ombudsperson.

This evaluation not only enabled all the participating entities and actors to develop capacities, it also prompted and promoted discussion on the importance of incorporating active participation into public sector evaluation processes led by the governing body, Mideplan, by highlighting the potential for learning, uptake, and transformation that the approach offers. In retrospect, it can be said that this first experience also served as the catalyst for two fundamental achievements for the entity:

- The creation of a National Evaluation Policy, in which participation was included as one of its principles and thematic axes, whose planning process began in 2018 with the broad participation of diverse national actors.
- The development of a Guide to Evaluation with Participation, a methodological instrument that currently forms part of the manuals guiding the entity's evaluation work. This instrument was key to guiding the second participatory experience undertaken by Mideplan in 2019; both milestones achieved with the support of the cooperation.

In 2018, three processes were supported that were fundamental to gaining experience in applying the participatory approach with social organisations and putting methodologies and lessons into practice. The first two focused on supporting the TECHO organisation and the Servicio País programme of Chile in the design and implementation of participatory evaluation

processes within their respective organisations. To this end, an intensive training was held in Chile, attended by representatives of TECHO from different countries to learn more about the approach and plan their evaluations, as well as staff from the Servicio País programme.

These processes were facilitated by an expert consultant and by a member of the Foceval project's technical team. In addition, to accompany these experiences, young and emerging evaluators (EJE) were contracted; they in turn received training and supported the cases developed at the local level.

In the case of TECHO, five participatory evaluations were carried out in five countries in the region, with virtual and in-person support from the facilitators and the EJE. One of these experiences resulted in the participatory evaluation of the Working Table of the Santa Teresa settlement in Chile, presented in this book in Chapter 3.

In the case of the Servicio País programme, the training and support resulted in the improvement of its own participatory evaluation intervention model, an experience presented in Chapter 4, which describes the participatory evaluation in the municipality of Putaendo in Chile.

The third process, carried out in 2018, was the partnership established with the Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA).⁷⁹ As part of the synergies achieved

⁷⁹ The international media development division of Deutsche Welle (DW), Germany's international broadcaster. DWA specialises in the education and training of media professionals. Its mission is to promote free and independent journalism and to support the development of sustainable and democratic media.

with the DWA, a training workshop was held with its counterparts from different countries in the region. This workshop took place in Antigua, Guatemala, and resulted in the participatory design of the evaluation of various projects implemented in LAC. This space was also facilitated in collaboration with other bodies, including Mideplan and UN Women, within the framework of the Foceval project. State actors representing the Secretariat for Planning and Programming of the Presidency (Segeplan) of Guatemala also participated in this training session. A further training space on the approach for the DWA was also held in Bonn, Germany.

In 2019, building on the collaborative experiences and fruitful exchanges that had taken place in previous years, the cooperation agreement was formalised between the Focelac project and the Research Programme on Employment, Environment and Society (PETAS) of the National University of San Juan (Argentina) to create the EvalParticipativa initiative—a community of practice and learning around participatory evaluation—. EvalParticipativa promotes a space for interaction, both virtual and in person, where interested people, organisations, and entities can reflect on their evaluative practice, improve it, support one another, and jointly develop methodologies and tools that contribute to professionalising the field of participatory evaluation.

From this initiative, multiple actions have been implemented to achieve the proposed objectives. Two interlinked milestones stand out:

- In 2019, the First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation Experiences for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Quito, Ecuador, with the aim of sharing emblematic cases, identifying common success factors and methodological challenges, and building shared learning around facilitation processes.
- In 2021, drawing on the reflections and contributions from the Quito gathering, as well as from prior experiences—both of the project and of PETAS—and the body of knowledge on the subject, the *Sowing & Harvesting handbook*⁸⁰ (Tapella et al., 2022) was produced: a publication aimed at the region which presents a series of proposals and reflections on the inclusion of civil society in the field of evaluation.

EvalParticipativa and the cooperation project have also created important synergies to foster the inclusion of the participatory evaluation subject within academic training structures. Support has been provided for regional training programmes that integrate participatory evaluation as a central thematic axis in their content, or even as their main theme. Incorporating this subject into academic training in evaluation enriches learning by providing practical and theoretical tools for conducting more inclusive evaluations, and contributes to the training of professionals increasingly capable of supporting them.

In parallel, as part of the drive from public entities to address the subject, Evalúa Jalisco and Mideplan, with

⁸⁰ The handbook is available in English at: <https://evalparticipativa.net/en/resources/participatory-evaluation-guides-and-manuals/sowing-and-harvest/>

the support of Focelac, initiated coordinated actions for the design and implementation of two participatory evaluations. Both experiences have been presented by their protagonists in the corresponding chapters of this book (7 and 9). For this binational process, the project provided technical support and contracted an expert in the subject, responsible for facilitating and implementing the capacity development component in both countries.

Finally, in 2023 and 2024, the Focelac+ project provided support to the National Planning Secretariat of Ecuador in the implementation of its first participatory evaluation. The lessons learned and challenges from previous experiences proved fundamental to this accompaniment. Assistance was provided in the design and implementation stages of the participatory evaluation of the Socialisation and Meeting Spaces (ESE) service, an experience detailed in Chapter 10.

Lessons Learned and Challenges along the Way

The cooperation project's accompaniment of all these initiatives has yielded a series of meaningful lessons and challenges. Over the last decade, the public institutions responsible for evaluation with which collaboration has taken place have made significant progress in establishing mechanisms for the active

participation of diverse actors in evaluation processes. These advances reflect a joint effort to diversify and enrich perspectives, recognising the importance of involving a broader range of participants in order to obtain more inclusive evaluations.

Despite the above, an important lesson learned — evident in the journey undertaken and also captured in the *Sowing & Harvesting handbook* (2022)— is that the active and conscious participation of the parties involved⁸¹ depends both on the real opportunity to participate (which includes the political will to share informed decision-making and the conditions to guarantee participation) and on the capacity to do so (reflected in the attitudes, skills, conditions, and contexts of the actors).

With regard to the real opportunity, one of the greatest challenges lies in the conviction and political will to share or cede control and, therefore, decision-making. This principle is fundamental to achieving active and empowered participation by the diverse groups of actors. For this reason, it has been crucial for the cooperation to promote good participatory evaluation experiences —such as the accompaniments presented in this book— that demonstrate how power can be transferred from within institutions, highlighting the possibilities and benefits of other voices also participating in decisions about what is being evaluated, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and representative public management.

⁸¹ People who implement the intervention, the target population, organised civil society, entities allied to the intervention, donors, and other actors.

This political will is tied to a genuine conviction in these participatory approaches, both at the political and technical levels. In this regard, another key lesson learned has been the importance of supporting awareness-raising and training mechanisms at the level of senior officials, middle managers, and technical staff, in order to promote —beyond mere discourse— that decision-making power over what is evaluated, how it is evaluated, and how evaluations are used should be shared with other parties involved, who can directly influence such actions.

This also implies the need to provide training, through participatory evaluation capacity-building activities, on other epistemic approaches that value intersubjectivity, methodological adaptability, and cultural relevance —approaches that encourage the recognition and appreciation of other forms of knowledge beyond formal knowledge, such as local, experiential, situated, and contextual knowledge—. This will make it possible to move beyond viewing the participatory approach as merely a technical matter and to recognise its potential as a political tool for social transformation.

In this regard, the efforts mentioned above over the last decade have been highly relevant —particularly, the cooperation with multiple stakeholders (including public entities, academia, evaluation networks, and social organisations) to create spaces for reflection, promote political advocacy, and incorporate the approach into the region's training offerings—. These efforts have also included the delivery of training and the creation of manuals, tools, teaching guides, and other knowledge products.

The practical experiences described also demonstrate that carrying out a participatory evaluation implies, from the outset, analysing and assessing the levels of participation possible at the different stages of the evaluation process, according to the context and the particular characteristics of those involved. One of the greatest challenges when looking back, in relation to desired participation and possible participation (Tapella et al., 2022:71), concerns the institutional constraints with regarding public resources, which hinder the investment of time and funds in processes that sustain active participation beyond consultive levels. Such resources also guarantee certain optimal conditions for enabling population groups to participate in a sustained manner.

In this regard, another barrier is the recurring absence of political and legal frameworks that include adequate regulations for the effective involvement of actors in the activities inherent to a participatory evaluation. For example: permits and travel allowances to transport people, funding to remunerate the work of other populations in evaluation teams, and resources in general to guarantee inclusive conditions for vulnerable groups or those with disabilities, among others.

As already noted, it is necessary not only to ensure that actors have the opportunity to participate, but also the skill set to do so. And this involves creating spaces for meaningful learning through capacity development. If we wish to foster the empowerment of stakeholders so that they can be agents of their own development, it is necessary to plan and design sufficient training spaces

along the evaluation pathway. On some occasions, entities respond to political and institutional deadlines that are often not well suited to processes of this type, which is therefore a relevant factor to bear in mind.

Another key lesson learned from the practical experiences is the fundamental role played by evaluation professionals in facilitating participatory evaluations, to promote and balance the real opportunity for participation by the diverse groups of actors and the capacities needed to carry it out. Whether this function is taken on by external individuals or by the managers of the entities, their approach must be:

- to promote learning and capacity development so that quality evaluations are carried out;
- to ensure the active participation of all the groups involved, especially those historically excluded; and
- to encourage the inclusion of ethical, gender, and human rights considerations throughout the process.

In summary, a participatory evaluation requires a person or team to accompany and guide the process with a technical perspective that is sensitive to gender and to the cultural context in which it takes place.

When thinking about evaluation practice in our region, it is difficult to overlook political volatility, which can disrupt both initiatives and the continuity of evaluation processes, and interfere with the awareness-raising processes needed to broaden the participation and accountability of civil society. In these complex contexts of instability, the use of and feasibility of

establishing mechanisms for active participation in evaluations is a significant challenge.

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, participatory approaches offer very valuable opportunities for responding to the concerns raised. However, the experiences lived also prompt reflection on the importance of considering the political contexts in which they are embedded, as well as the socioeconomic circumstances and, especially, the current democratic crises in the Latin American region. All of the above adds complexity to the implementation of participatory approaches that succeed in transforming the living conditions of people.

The Path Ahead: Building South-South-North Bridges

The fruitful cooperation between DEval and Mideplan in the region and on this subject has highlighted the importance of broadening the perspective of evaluation approaches that recognise the central role of the participation of diverse groups of actors — especially local actors and the target population of interventions. Support for entities and organisations, together with training and knowledge exchange over the last decade, has demonstrated that the active participation of these groups in evaluation significantly enriches the process by contributing their local knowledge and lived experiences.

For 2025, a new cooperation project is being planned with a global focus that integrates the knowledge and experiences generated in Latin America, through South-South-North learning and the inclusion of perspectives from Africa and other regions. This project will seek to strengthen national evaluation systems and promote good governance, through the exchange of experiences and lessons between different countries and continents, as well as the generation of new shared knowledge, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

One of the planned lines of action will be the reinforcement of inclusive and local approaches in evaluation. The valuable experience accumulated throughout a decade of work in participatory evaluation, briefly recounted in this chapter, will be a crucial resource for deepening these approaches and facilitating the creation of new spaces for exchange and cooperation.

In this way, the new project will act as a bridge for mutual learning and the facilitation of South-South-North exchange, promoting dialogue and shared understanding about the importance of inclusive and local approaches in evaluation. The aim is to integrate approaches and methods that include the active participation of local actors and the target population, the recognition of local and cultural practices and knowledge as valid forms of knowledge in evaluation processes, as well as in the generation and dissemination of evidence —such as storytelling and indigenous evaluation approaches—. Likewise, gender, feminist, and human rights approaches will be

incorporated, with a view to highlighting the structural inequalities and systematic discrimination faced by certain population groups.

As we near the final stretch to achieve the 2030 Agenda, these approaches are reaffirmed as fundamental for ensuring that evaluation practice responds to the real needs of the population and contributes to building more comprehensive and context-specific responses, promoting more sustainable and equitable development. In this scenario, the path ahead for the cooperation between DEval and Mideplan, together with their diverse partners, is both highly challenging and motivating: the commitment is to the experience acquired, mutual learning, and the creation of global synergies.

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