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¿Do All Paths Lead to Rome? Comparative Analysis in the Institutionalization of Evaluation

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Index

Abstract	3
Acknowledgements	4
Systems of Monitoring and Evaluation: what are they and how are they studied?	5
Analysis of Federal Monitoring and Evaluation Systems	6
Canada: a decentralized system	6
Spain: An Agency Without a System	8
Mexico: A System Built Incrementally from a Sectorial Evaluation Agency	10
Brazil: A system based on the government's plan.....	12
Argentina: fragmentation and disarticulation of the evaluation.....	15
Some issues and practices for the design of a national monitoring and evaluation system	18
Bibliography.....	24
About the Authors.....	27
Notes	28

Index of tables and charts

Table 1-- Catalan Institute of Public Policy Evaluation (Iválua).....	9
Table 2 - MIDE Jalisco and EVALÚA Jalisco	11
Table 3 - SPLAG	15
Table 4 -Head of Cabinet and General Secretary (CABA).....	17

Abstract

In recent years, evaluation has gained importance within public administrations of different countries. Even still, in many cases, it is implemented in a fragmented manner, in response to specific and isolated requests. On the other hand, to speak of a “system” with regards to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) implies that the practice derives from stable institutional arrangements that distribute the functions between those involved in the process, as well as other definitions with an orientation towards quality assessment information in a regular and sustained manner.

This document analyzes different institutional arrangements of a set of countries with federal governments with respect to M&E. Those analyzed include Canada, Spain, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina. The case studies of the following sub-national governments are included as well: Catalonia, Jalisco, Pernambuco and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires. Said studies demonstrate that if a single pattern of institutionalization of M&E functions does not exist, it is important to consider transversal aspects that affect its development.

The formation of a system does not end with the creation of an agency or body responsible for M&E. For this organism to have the necessary capacities to carry out its functions, it requires an institutional insertion that guarantees a certain degree of political independence, while also enabling it to promote evaluations as a management tool. Likewise, it is necessary to establish rules defining responsibilities, rules that establish the obligation to evaluate and define quality standards in addition to defining a financing mechanism that guarantees the autonomy, perdurability of the system, and the commitments of evaluated programs or organisms.

With respect to the evaluative practice, it is important to consider, not only the definition of an evaluative plan, but also quality control of information produced, and the promotion of evaluation, the use of which improves accountability, transparency of government actions, and decision making. This last facet requires the instauration of mechanisms promoting the use of information in management but also the generation of M&E information that could easily translate into decisions, improving programs and policies.

The analyzed case studies demonstrate that M&E systems have started to expand to a level of sub-national states. These governments should act as an active partner in the design and implementation of the national M&E systems and promoters of their own systems. Because of this, the development of capacities and the institutionalization of areas in the government with these specific attributions from said matters are key.

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Systems of Monitoring and Evaluation: what are they and how are they studied?

Traditionally, public administrations have developed financial and budgetary management systems, human resources and auditing without taking into consideration the results (Kusek y Rist 2004). Nevertheless, in recent decades, the functions of monitoring and evaluation programs and policies have appeared within public administrations. Even still, one frequently observes that said functions develop in a fragmented manner, without an integral framework organizing them into a coherent system, which would give them strategic sense. Argentina is no exception in this respect.

The existence of a system implies that the evaluations are not requested or executed in a sporadic and isolated manner, varying with the interests and motivations of the involved actors, requirements of international organisms, or the availability of resources. The ideal system would link the most stable institutional arrangements, guaranteeing regular provision of evaluative information (Leeuw y Furubo 2008). This system would, furthermore, be characterized by a set of actors cooperating in their functions and interactions, while institutional determinations and organizational capacities would assure its development and sustainability over time. Finally, though no less important, the functionality of a system implies the existence of a shared epistemological perspective and an agreement with respect to what evaluative activity implies and how it should be executed (Leeuw y Furubo 2008).

It's important to develop an M&E system for the following three reasons: it allows visibility and coherence to the evaluative function; it protects, at least formally, against the pressures of the political system and bureaucracy that could undo it; and it connects the decision making processes with vertical and horizontal accountability, as well as transparency (Laázaro 2012).

That being said, a single model system does not exist. Instead, there is a multitude of alternatives depending on the institutional legacies that characterize the diverse public administrations and their particular social and political contexts.

With the objective of understanding distinct institutional arrangements possible in the context of federal nations, monitoring and evaluation systems developed in Canada, Spain, Mexico, Brazil and Argentina have been analyzed, focusing on questions linked to the organizational framework, the sustainability of the system (regulation, financing, human resources), and the evaluative practice and the utilization of evaluation results. Furthermore, when possible, case studies from sub-national governments were included: Catalonia (Spain), Jalisco (Mexico), Pernambuco (Brazil) and the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires (Argentina).

Analysis of Federal Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Canada: a decentralized system

Organizational Framework

In Canada, the functions of monitoring and evaluation are driven, regulated and controlled by a central area of the government, the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (SCT¹), but executed by the departments/agencies of the federal government in a decentralized manner.

With respect to monitoring, the SCT centrally defines the logical framework that allows the federal government departments and programs to identify performance measurement indicators. The function of evaluation is coordinated by the Center for Excellence of Evaluation (CEE²), which, created in 2001, is a division of the SCT. This Center defines the government's Evaluation Policy and offers support relating to the use of evaluative findings. The CEE interacts directly with the Evaluation Units that function in all of the federal departments/agencies both large and medium. Said units are charged with defining the department's Evaluation Policies, in agreement with the framework established by the federal government, and the development of an annual and mid-term Evaluation Plan. Also, they must advise the responsible programs and elaborate an annual report. Additionally, a Department Evaluation Committee should be formed in every department, charged with supervising the executions of evaluations, review and approval of Evaluation Plans, evaluation reports, and the use of said reports.

Sustainability

The Financial Administration Law is the norm that establishes the obligation of evaluation. Even still, the specific directives in the matter of monitoring and evaluation are formalized in a body of diverse administrative policies created by the SCT, lacking range of law and conformance to any coherent plan that works to develop the evaluative function (Lahey y Nielsen 2013). Said policies define the degree of coverage the system offers, the responsibilities and functions of the actors in charge of the evaluation in every department, the principal questions approached in the evaluations, and the standards of quality, neutrality, and the utilization of such³.

Departmental evaluation financing is provided by funds from the Treasury Council to implement the Evaluation Policy (OAG 2009). The level of investments delegated to every Evaluation Unit is defined by authorities of every department/agency in accordance with its size and coverage goals established by the Evaluation Policy (Lahey y Nielson 2013)⁴.

¹ The Treasury Council is composed of six ministries of the government cabinet. They are charged with audits, financial management, administration and personnel, and the approval of regulations. The Secretary of the Treasury Council is its administrative body.

² The CEE is a division within the Spending Management Sector of the Treasury Council.

³ The principals are: The Evaluation Policy (from 1977 and then updated in 1991, 2001 and 2009), the Evaluation Function and Evaluation Standards Directives.

⁴ As a benchmark, in 2005 expenditure on evaluation as a percentage of total expenditure in each department was 0.10% for the economic sector and 0.18% for the social sector (Lahey and Nielsen 2013).

In terms of human resources, the CEE developed a training policy oriented toward the personnel of the Evaluation Units, implemented a network to link the responsible agents of said units, and defined requisite competencies for the aforementioned (Lahey 2010).

Evaluative Practice

The programs and policies selected for evaluations are contained in the Plan that elaborates every Departmental Evaluation Unit, and later approves its respective Evaluation Committee. It is developed with respect to the guidelines derived from the Evaluation Policy. Said selection should include the obligation to evaluate 100% of expenditures made directly by the government on programs within the course of 5 years⁵. With respect to the execution of the evaluations, Department Evaluation Units should perform this task using their own evaluators or, as done in most cases, by contracting outside evaluators (Lahey 2010).

The decentralized execution of the evaluations is regulated and supervised by the CEE, which develops guides and tools that regulate the implementation in the departments and agencies, supervises the standards and quality of evaluative practices, and analyzes the infrastructure and capacities with respect to evaluation. Furthermore, General Auditing takes the form of periodical reports about the implementation of M&E systems, which permit not only an independent perspective concerning strengths and weaknesses, but also stresses the importance and the role of M&E in public management (Lahey 2010).

Use of Evaluation

Canada's system of M&E is firmly grounded in accountability (Lahey and Nielson 2013). The results of the evaluations are utilized to submit reports to the Treasury Council and the Cabinet, perform the Annual Report of Plans and Priorities and the Departmental Performance Report that is directed towards Parliament. Furthermore, a large proportion of the evaluations are utilized to implement improvements in individual programs and, in the end, focus more so on the implementation processes than the effectiveness of said programs (TBS 2012).

The results of the evaluations also are utilized to support budget decisions, especially those linked to subsidized programs and contributions. This use of evaluations is facilitated by two factors: 1) by the fact that SCT is an actor with powers to inform the financing decisions of certain programs and the management of all government spending; and 2) by the existence of a specific administrative policy that establishes the obligation to perform evaluations that decide renewal of financing for all subsidized programs and contributions (Lahey 2010).

⁵ Previously stated obligation extended exclusively to the subsidy programs and contributions, which represent around 40% of expenditures in programs.

Spain: An Agency Without a System

Organizational Framework⁶

In Spain, an evaluative organization has been created as part of the central government: the State Agency for the Evaluation of Public Policy and Quality of Services (AEVAL), created in 2007 and attached to the State Secretariat of the Public Function of the Ministry of Finances. As a "state agency" it has distinct public legal personality, its own assets and treasury, and management and functional autonomy. Even still, the system of M&E has not become institutionalized as such so that the evaluative practice presents difficulties in terms of its reach and sustainability. That being said, specific units for evaluation do not exist in the interior of the ministries and other organisms of the central government. Those that exist are small, with short trajectories and dispersed.

Sustainability

AEVAL's origin and functions are both derived from the Law 28/2006 (which forms State Agencies) and one series of the Real Decrees that define specific issues (e.g. Statute approval).

The greater part of AEVAL's activities are financed with treasury funds. Even still, the agency also utilizes its own resources, generated principally from the quality certifications of the services provided by public organizations according to the models of excellence and, to a smaller extent, from technical assistance services. In some cases, co-financing was earned on the part of the evaluated body or program, and used to solve the information gathering.

Evaluative practice

AEVAL has a two core functions. On one hand, it is charged with functions linked to the evaluation of programs and policies: its direct execution or technical assistance and supervision of those executed by other units within the government. On the other hand, it is charged with a series of functions associated with promoting the quality of public services provided by different organisms and programs of the central government, for which it performs different actions such as formation, technical assistance, certification and awards.

With respect to the evaluative function, AEVAL subscribes a Management Contract with the General State Administration every four years, the term by which its activities and finances are measured. On this basis, a National Action Plan is created annually,

⁶ When this document was being published, AEVAL was replaced by the Institute for the Evaluation of Public Policies located in the Secretary of Public Service, Minister of Finance and Public Service (Real Decreto 769/2017). Its functions include the evaluation of public policies, especially in the educative, health and social areas at the national level. This change supposes less formal autonomy than the previous organizational framework.

detailing the evaluation that will be performed. These analyses are preselected by AEVAL, but must garner the endorsement of the Council of Ministers⁷.

The evaluations performed vary in type and look to diverge from an exclusively experimental impact approach. They are designed by the Department of Evaluation, although the fieldwork and/or expert advice is contracted externally. Even still, the exercise of evaluation is not centered solely on AEVAL. Rather, “a plurality of organizations that practice evaluation exist, albeit with differing focuses, methods, and tools.” (Ruiz Martínez 2012: 21). A survey of the evaluations performed between 2007 and 2011 conclude that out of 71 evaluations conducted, less than half were executed by AEVAL (Labeaga Azcona y Muñoz Martínez 2013). Also, every ministry has its own monitoring system, which further fragments this task.

Regarding the relationship with the Autonomous Communities, in 2011, the possibility of collaborating with them was incorporated, which motivated different evaluations (Labeaga Azcona y Muñoz Martínez 2013). Furthermore, an Evaluative Work Group has been created as part of the Inter-Administrative Quality Network, in which Community Representatives participate.

Evaluation Use

Many times, the evaluations performed by AEVAL have incentivized program reforms; this body has no specific mechanism to follow up on the implementation of recommendations suggested in evaluations. In this manner, the focus is placed on accountability. Once the evaluations are completed, they are widely diffused, delivered to different areas of the State, and published on the web page of the agency.

Table 1- Catalan Institute of Public Policy Evaluation (Iválua)

Catalonia: Ivàlua

The Catalan Institute of Public Policy Evaluation (Iválua) began operations in 2008. One of its distinctions is that it takes the form of a consortium between the government, academia, and civil society. This design has the advantage of granting more autonomy in comparison to the government, but it is inconvenient in that it lacks the formal mandate to evaluate public policies (Blasco 2013: 2).

Actually, representatives from the Catalanian government, the Barcelona Deputy, the Pompeu Fabra University, the Interuniversity Council, and the Economic-Social Work Council form Ivalua. Its courses of action include the execution of evaluative studies, the promotion of demand, the generation of capacities, and the follow up of obtained results.

Its members (principally the Ministry of the Economy) and the earnings that generate its activities finance the Institute. Currently, its technical staff is composed of 8 members who execute the evaluations.

Iválua has developed a relationship strategy with the agencies that might solicit evaluations,

⁷Due to political changes, AEVAL was not awarded the approval of a work plan in recent years, and because of such, prioritized the evaluations that were solicited.

oriented towards establishing linkages with them--the “partners for the generation of knowledge.” Because of this, it was decided that the evaluations would be on demand and that the responsible technicians and politicians of the evaluated programs will participate in a work group in conjunction with evaluators. At the start, even co-financing of evaluations was promoted (Blasco 2013: 2).

The case study has illuminated the fact that if one looks to strengthen the culture of evaluation, solely increasing the number of evaluations will not suffice. Rather, one must also develop other strategic courses: better the conditions of evaluability, incorporate scientific knowledge in the design process for policies and programs, improve follow up and monitoring systems, introduce pilot projects with experimental designs, and plan evaluations in an agenda (Blasco; 2013: 10).

Mexico: A System Built Incrementally from a Sectorial Evaluation Agency

Organizational Framework

Mexico's system of monitoring and evaluation has the peculiarity of having been progressively expanded. In 2000, Congress approved a law requiring annual evaluations of federal programs offering subsidies. In 2004, the Law of Social Development created the National Council of Social Policy Evaluation (CONEVAL) as the institution charged with coordinating the evaluation of federal government's social programs. Finally, in 2007, the Performance Evaluation System (SED) was created in response to the mandate put in place by the Federal Budget and Fiscal Responsibility Law (2006) to institute a system of evaluation that would permit the institutionalization of relations between strategic planning and the budgeting process.

The SED depends on the Secretary of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) and CONEVAL. The organization's objectives are to monitor the implementation of programs included in the national budget and evaluate the results. Furthermore, the dependencies and entities of the Federal Public Administration must designate an administrative unit that is separated from program operations, so as to coordinate contracting, operation and supervision of evaluations. These units articulate their actions to CONEVAL and SHCP.

Sustainability

The implementation of SED went into effect in 2007 with the Fiscal Reform Law (that defines the system and demands that states and municipalities adopt result-based management), the SED Implementation Agreement (that solicits the definition of an annual evaluation program and establishes the public diffusion of generated information), and the launch of General Guidelines for the Evaluation of Federal Programs.

The evaluations concentrated by CONEVAL and the SHCP are financed with resources assigned to both institutions. The complementary evaluations are financed by each of the entities through internal evaluation units. Finally, there are evaluations mandated by CONEVAL and SHCP, but financed by each public federal entity.

Evaluative Practice

Following the General Evaluation Guidelines, the dependencies and entities of the Public Federal Administration need to elaborate their strategic objectives based on the National Development Plan and link the federal programs they are charged with. Furthermore, they need to elaborate a Results Indicator Matrix (MIR) for every federally budgeted program based on the methodology established by the governing bodies (SHCP and CONEVAL), and report the advances and results of such programs in terms and deadlines set by SHCP and CONEVAL. These two bodies review and validate the indicators and generate recommendations to improve the quality of the indicators.

With respect to the evaluations performed in the framework of the SED, the assessments are planned and defined through the Annual Evaluation Program that is elaborated in conjunction with representatives of the governing bodies together with the ministries and agencies of the evaluated programs. In actuality, practically all of the ministries and governmental institutions participate in the evaluative process. Evaluation is eminently external, with outsourcing of the process to academic and investigative institutions, professionals, or specialized national bodies, and nationally or internationally specialized organizations. There is an obligation to make contracting procedures public as well as the totals paid.

Use of Evaluation

The evaluation reports need to be delivered to the Chamber of Deputies and the Superior Audit of the Federation. Through the Budget Transparency portal, indicators of each program can be consulted. Results of evaluations contracted by the organization are published on the CONEVAL web page. The reports and complementary evaluations need to be forwarded to CONEVAL and published in the web pages of the corresponding dependencies. At the same time, the M&E system communicates the budgeting process through the SHCP. From the 2009 budget, the budget assignments focused on effective evaluations and performance indicators of each program. Also, recommendations made after an evaluation, which are effectively deemed "areas for improvement" by the officials in charge of the evaluated program become commitments that must be published and monitored periodically until its conclusion.

Table 2 – MIDE Jalisco and EVALÚA Jalisco

Jalisco: MIDE Jalisco y EVALÚA Jalisco
The M&E system of Jalisco is structured around the General Department of Monitoring and Evaluation, which depends on the Secretariat of Planning, Administration and Finance. It is composed of two strategies: Monitoring Development Indicators ("MIDE Jalisco") and "Evaluate Jalisco". The MIDE follows the objectives established in the State Development Plan (PED) 2013-

2033. The sub-national government units and the members of a Citizen Council defined the indicators through which the monitoring is done. The monthly progress⁸ of its goals is performed by a dynamic computer platform for public consultation on the Internet.

Evalúa Jalisco concentrates on the monitoring and evaluation of programs and policies. An Evaluation Program is prepared and disseminated annually. Between 2013 and 2016, 48 studies have been carried out in different fields: social, economy, environment, entrepreneurship, culture and infrastructure, among others. All of them are outsourced. Likewise, the General Guidelines for Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Programs have been created and disseminated, establishing the technical bases, procedures, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation.

In 2013, the Consejo Evalúa Jalisco was founded. It is a technical advisory body made up of academics, officials dedicated to evaluation agencies in the Federal Public Administration, and agencies dedicated to the evaluation of local policies and programs. This council periodically reviews the advances made in compliance with the M&E strategy and updates guidelines concerning the matter. Similarly to the federal level, the recommendations that are put forth after reviewing the policies that are deemed “areas for improvement,” become periodically monitored until those recommendations are met. This oversight can be observed through a portal on the website.

In order to guarantee its financing, in 2015 a trust consisting of a retention rate of up to 2% of the total amount from the programs with state resources was created. The Evaluation Unit is in charge of the fund. Although it does not have an operational structure, it has a committee that includes the Secretary of Planning, Administration and Finance, the State Comptroller, the General Coordination of Transparency, the Undersecretariat and the Evaluation Unit.

In order to carry out the M&E strategies, an intra-governmental network of officials in charge of the Internal Monitoring Units (there are 34 in total) and Evaluation Units (28 currently in operation), under the Coordination of the Evaluation Unit of Jalisco, has been created.

Brazil: A system based on the government's plan

Organizational Framework

En In Brazil, the federal government's M&E system is based upon the four year Pluriannual Plan (PPA)⁹. The Secretary of Planning and Economic Affairs (SEPLAN) of the Ministry of Planning, Development and Management is responsible for the follow-up of this Plan. SEPLAN coordinates processes, consolidates M&E information and provides methodology, orientations and technical support to other government areas (MP 2016^a).

⁸ More than 40% of the indicators (mainly impact levels and results) come from sources outside government offices, while the rest of the metrics are generated by specialized information offices or offices of the Government of Jalisco.

⁹ Conceived as a structural and integrative element of all governmental action, the PPA contains the directives, objectives and goals of the public administration, as well as details the resources to finance them.

Inside each ministry or secretary there are coordinating offices. They function as a nexus with SEPLAN and are in charge of consolidating information produced by the programs inside each organism and synthesizing it to elaborate reports. Likewise, many ministries or secretaries put into action their own systems of sectoral information. Some Ministries, like Social Development, have set up internal offices to monitor and, to a lesser extent, evaluate their programs. Nevertheless, there is little articulation between these initiatives and the PPA. It is interesting to note, as well, the proliferation of sectoral plans with scarce articulation with the PPA¹⁰.

The creation of this system, towards the end of the XXth century and beginning of the XXIst, initially offered a coherent and ordered process for public action and its following up. Nowadays, nevertheless, its main weakness is the low appropriation by the management and the scarce use of its information in the decision making process. In this context, in 2016 the Committee for Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies (CMAPP) was created. Representatives from the Ministry of Planning, Development and Management (MP), Ministry of Treasury, the Civil House of the Presidency of the Republic and the Comptroller General of the Union (CGU) are members of this Committee¹¹. Other institutions (such as IPEA or the World Bank) can also be invited to participate.

The creation of this Committee represents a turning point in the M&E institutional framework. Until now, its work has focused on identifying the fails in management and distortions in spending in a group of social programs. In the midterm, it aims to organize, standardize, and analyze the information relevant to the execution of budgets and financing of ministries, as well as defining a group of programs that will be monitored and evaluated.

Sustainability

The development of the Pluriannual Plans are outlined in the Federal Constitution (art. 165). In turn, each PPA relies on its corresponding normative backup: the PPA 2016-2019 for example, was instituted by Law N° 13.249 and its implementation is regulated by Decree N° 8.759. In said laws, it is defined the type of evaluation to be completed, the form of presenting it, and the schedule. To complement this, a series of resolutions from the Ministry of Planning, Development and Management established the procedures and deadlines for the registry of information about the PPA (MP 2016b).

With respect to human resources, the coordinating offices are composed of personnel from the respective Ministry or Secretary, as well as technicians that depend on the Ministry of Planning. They are trained in planning and budgeting issues.

¹⁰ According to MP-SEPLAN (s/f), there would be almost 70 sectoral plans, which would be more useful for the managers than the PPA follow up information.

¹¹ The CMAPP has the objectives of “perfecting public policies, programs and actions of the Executive Power so that they achieve greater results” and “to better the allocation of resources and the quality of public spending”, as it is stated in regulations.

Evaluative Practice

Currently, the PPA's M&E system is structured in two levels: evaluation of programs and evaluation of the PPA as a whole.

The evaluation of programs is done by its responsible areas, with advice from the coordinating offices. The evaluated programs are those identified as "thematic programs", which currently total 54 (MP 2016b)¹². The data reported by each program refers to objectives, goals (quantitative and qualitative,) completed initiatives, expected results, levels of completion, motives for which they have not been reached (MP 2016a). The informing indicators refer mostly to products (quantity of goods and/or services offered) and their coverage, and to a lesser extent they report results indicators. So far, the PPA 2016-19 has developed 564 indicators and proposed 1,132 goals (MP 2016b).

The evaluation of the PPA implies a global analysis done by SEPLAN. It focuses in financial execution, global performance in main indicators (what proportion of them show an increase, decrease or no variation) and the development of goals (what proportion of them were already reached, show adequate progress, were not initiated or have been suspended) (MP 2016b).

In order to guide this work, SEPLAN periodically updates a Guide and offers complementary orientations through training events (MP; 2016a: 2). The upload of this information is completed through the Integrated System of Planning and Budgeting (SIOP, in Portuguese). On the basis of this information, an Annual Report is developed. It comprises an evaluation of socioeconomic variables (elaborated by the economic area of SEPLAN), a general analysis (completed by SEPLAN) and an evaluation of the different thematic programs (done by the respective programs and consolidated by SEPLAN) (MP 2016).

Use of Evaluation

The principal use of PPA's evaluation is accountability. The Annual Report is submitted to the National Congress together with the proposals for revision of the Plan and the Law of Budgeting. Additionally, there seems to be a contribution in terms of organizational learning, as the PPA M&E system makes managers reflect on their practice at least once a year.

Nevertheless, their use is limited in terms of the decision making process. Some evidence of this situation might be the low level of indicators's measurement (in 2008 over 70% were not measured) as well as the lack of discussion within and outside the government with respect to its results (Nogueira y Cavalcante 2009).

¹² The 54 PPA 2016-19 programs are organized around 4 strategic axes: Social and Public Security, Infrastructure, Natural and Productive Development and Special Themes (MP; 2016b: 6).

Table 3 - SEPLAG

Secretariat for Planning and Management (Pernambuco): SEPLAG

Towards the end of 2007, the state government of Pernambuco implemented a new management model based on the integration of planning, budget formulation and monitoring (Alessandro et al., 2014). In order to manage this model, the Secretariat for Planning and Management (SEPLAG) was created.

A key element of the management model is the formulation of the governance strategy. There is a series of defined objectives, each with its own Strategy Map, which is broken down into more specific elements: results, products, and activities. These elements are in line with the architecture of the Multi-Year Plan (PPA) and the Annual Budgetary Law, thus allowing for programmatic alignment.

The government's Control Panel of Strategic Actions physically and financially monitors the priority goals that the model seeks to monitor and manage. These goals are concrete projects (such as the construction of a hospital in a certain region) that receive budget allocations. Therefore, most of the priority goals refer to internal processes and government outputs, but not societal outcomes or impacts on society (Alessandro et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness is done by measuring a set of indicators associated with the strategic objectives in three cycles throughout the year: annual, fourth-monthly and bimonthly. The annual evaluation of the results of government is documented in the Report of Government Actions, which is sent to the President of the Legislative Assembly and published on the Internet. In that report, the main results and impacts obtained in the year are measured through economic and social indicators. The Social Management Report, which evaluates the results of government actions in the areas of education, health, safety, economic activity, labor market and government investments, is prepared and published on the Internet every four months. Finally, the results achieved in the areas of health, education and safety are evaluated bimonthly through the measurement of impact indicators (Moreira da Cruz et al., 2013).

Argentina: fragmentation and disarticulation of the evaluation

Organizational Framework

In Argentina, there is no specialized body that is responsible for the evaluation function, the deployment of the M&E policy or system¹³. Since 1994, the Office of the Cabinet of Ministers (JGM) has the mission of intervening in the monitoring and evaluation process, articulating sectorial evaluation systems, developing a monitoring system for government programs, and establishing key indicators for priority policies in respect to decision-making. However, the office has not achieved strategic continuity in the development of a system and a culture of evaluation. For its part, the Budget Office of the Ministry of Finance has developed a system of quarterly physical and financial monitoring of budget programs. Although this system has been expanding coverage of the program portfolio, the expansion has had little connection with the actions conducted by the JGM. At the sectorial level, the Integrated System for the Evaluation of Social Programs (SIEMPRO) emerged as an evaluation body within the National Council for Coordination of Social

¹³ The 5 bills submitted (3046-D-2010, 2268-D-2011, 2422-S2015 and 0751-S-2014 and S-882/17) for the creation of a policy evaluation agency were not reviewed by the legislative.

Policies, but over the years it had a residual role focused mainly on some of the Ministry of Social Development's programs.

Sustainability

In contrast to the regional trend of progress and consolidation of both the function and the evaluation institutions, in Argentina a normative architecture that could give political direction to the evaluation function in the state was not formalized. Some laws outline partial aspects of a potential evaluation system: Law 24,156 on Financial Management and Control Systems, Law 24.354 on the National System of Public Investments, and Law 25.152 on the Program for the Evaluation of the Quality of Spending (Aquilino et al., 2015). But while these laws organize aspects of evaluation, they are disjointed and offer no coherence to the system. This occurs because they pursue partial ends, focus on the control of expenditure, and do not systematically address the results achieved by plans and programs.

In addition, there are no formal and homogeneous requirements for planning and designing public policies that are evaluable. This is particularly evident when analyzing the quality of design and development of plans and programs. Aquilino et al. (2015) show that there are no uniform design and operation rules for creating government plans and programs that have the capability to parameterize the essential aspects of policy formulation (objectives, results, indicators, products, sources of information, etc.) and the design of information systems (monitoring and evaluation matrices). In addition, only one in every three policies allocates resources (financial and/or human capital) to the evaluation function.

Evaluation Practice

The Budget Office of the Ministry of Finance has developed an information system for financial implementation and quarterly monitoring of indicators of physical targets related to the provision of goods and/or services of the budget programs. Likewise, in recent years, result indicators linked to the performance of the budget programs are gradually being incorporated¹⁴.

Despite the inadequate institutional framework, the National State shows progress in M&E of plans and programs in some sectorial ministries through the creation and/or strengthening of areas responsible for this task¹⁵. However, in most ministries, the evaluation function remains in charge of each program and is driven primarily by the requirements set forth by external funding (Acuña et al., 2016: 22).

At the provincial level, governments vary in terms of capacities, legal frameworks and evaluation cultures. Some provinces advanced in the adoption of strategic medium

¹⁴ Between 2012 and 2014, 71 indicators of results belonging to 52 budgetary programs of the National Public Administration were developed (Investment Account 2014).

¹⁵ Education through the Secretariat of Educational Evaluation; Health through the Supervision and Monitoring Department and some specific programs; Production with the Evaluation Directorate; Labor, Employment and Social Security with the Direction of Design, Evaluation and Monitoring of Social Protection Policies; Science, Technology and Productive Innovation with the Sub-secretariat of Institutional Evaluation.

and long-term government plans, one of the bases to make the evaluation of public policy results viable¹⁶. Other jurisdictions are making progress in assessing the performance of their political officers to set impact and management objectives.

Use of evaluation

The information produced by the system of monitoring physical targets and results of the budget programs is used as a mechanism of accountability to elaborate on the Investment Account, which must be submitted annually to the Congress. Also, in the past years, the information provided by this system has been used to analyze the consistency of the budget distribution performed and the requirements for additional funding (Acuña et al., 2016)¹⁷.

The results of the evaluations are generally not publicly and systematically communicated. The information that exists is scattered among the websites of the public agencies and does not depend on a common sorting criterion. However, public policies are not yet designed as valuable platforms to show development results or to account for their impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Table 4 –Head of Cabinet and General Secretary (CABA)

City of Buenos Aires: Head of Cabinet and General
<p>The case of the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires contains two fundamental aspects: internal management, which intends to align the government behind shared priorities and reinforce their orientation for results; and the relationship with citizens, which intends to generate trust through accountability. The need to concentrate themselves on ministerial plans, campaign proposals, and axes of management is emphasized.</p> <p>Internal procedures. The City of Buenos Aires relies on a government plan based on four central axes: enjoyment, human scale, social integration, and creativity. The monitoring is made up of two levels: i) projects that compose the Annual Operative Plans (AOP) of each ministry (led by the Secretary of Planning and Coordination of Management, Chief of the Cabinet of Ministers) and ii) government commitments that are goals inside of the AOP and considered strategic (led by the General Secretary , Head of Government.</p> <p>At the projects level, control in implementation is underlined. The system assures the continuous following of projects, construction works and spending through the measure of indicators in the control board in order to guarantee coordination and a transversal approach alongside the involved jurisdictions.</p> <p>At the level of government commitments, the system focuses on the “management of fulfillment,” that consists of three fundamental tasks. First of all, they establish performance trajectories for each one of the commitments and define “compliance chain” in which they identify the distinct actors, governmental and non-governmental, that contribute to the achievement of the commitment.</p>

¹⁶ Such is the case of Chaco, Corrientes, the Autonomous City of Buenos Aires, Tucumán, Salta, San Luis and Santa Fe, for example. Other provinces managed to develop capacities in management for results, in many cases with the support of international organizations, which is also a necessary step for a systematic evaluation exercise. In this, Córdoba and Tucumán are good examples. Some provinces developed quality monitoring and evaluation systems for specific plans or programs, especially in the social sector, as in the case of Santa Fe.

¹⁷ To that end, Circular 1/2015 of the Office of the Budget established the obligation for quarterly financial programming to be accompanied by target information.

Secondly, they carry out a periodical follow-up of the commitments in order to verify if any change in the process of policy implementation is needed. Finally, they are held accountable with monthly follow-up meetings in which each responsible Ministry should explain to the Head of Government how they advance to fulfill each public commitment and look for solutions to problems.

Relationship with citizens. With respect to accountability the system poses two axes: the selection of issues that have relevance for citizens, and the supervision of each area of the government. The system also emphasizes the need of counting on a multitude of tools to enforce accountability. For example, the Head of Government holds events to expose, with concrete data, the results achieved up to that point; as well as the development of a digital platform that allows citizens to know the state of advancement of the government commitments and a description of the actions completed for their achievement.

Some issues and practices for the design of a national monitoring and evaluation system

The case studies discussed above highlight the challenges of building a coherent and integrated M&E system within the public administration. In particular, Argentina's trajectory in terms of M&E of programs and policies shows the weaknesses of its institutional framework. It also demonstrates the fragmentation and disarticulation between the different courses of action taken. These actions arose from specific needs and conjunctures, without a global vision to generate a policy of capacity building, promotion or use of evaluation that could articulate them as parts of a coherent system (Acuña et al., 2016: 23).

Taking into account that there is still a long way to go to achieve a national M&E system, a culture of comprehensive evaluation and strategic use of results by decision makers, we consider it fundamental to begin to delineate some issues about design and practices of M&E that arise from the case studies.

Organizational Framework

The organizational framework of a system is not hindered in the creation of a body. Greater institutional engineering is required, including (among other things) the creation and strengthening of the competencies of those counterparts linked to the M&E system, both within the other central government departments and in the sub-national governments.

The governing body of the M&E system must take into account both the need to guarantee a degree of independence with respect to political factors on some sensitive issues (what programs to evaluate and what results to make known) and the ability to promote the use of assessments as a management tool (Gaarder and Briceño 2010). In this sense, the case studies analyzed show the predominance of a model that seeks to integrate the evaluation with the budget allocation, either through an alliance between the

specialized evaluation body and the agency in charge of the budget (Mexico) or through a body that will have both functions (Brazil, Canada). In this way, the emphasis seems to be on using evaluation as a management tool rather than guaranteeing its independence. However, in most cases, evaluation councils with representation of actors outside the executive branch (such as experts or representatives of academic fields) are involved. They intervene at different stages in order to guarantee some objectivity and quality of the evaluation process.

Another key aspect related to the organizational framework is the distribution of responsibilities and functions between the central body of the system and the sectorial jurisdictions (ministries, departments, etc.). In most cases, the systems have evaluation units in each of the central/federal government ministries/departments. These units may act in different ways: where there is greater centralization (Brazil, Mexico), they usually provide internal information for the monitoring and/or evaluation processes. On the other hand, in the more decentralized models (Canada), these ministerial/departmental units have an influence either on the definition of the policy and priorities of evaluation of their sector, or on the performance (or contracting) of evaluations. In these latter cases, the role of the governing body of the system is still fundamental: it establishes guidelines, regulations, and manuals that help guide the evaluation processes carried out by different jurisdictions. The governing body also evaluates the systems according to a set of criteria such as status of the evaluation function, availability of information systems and their quality and reliability, or use of evaluation results.

In the cases of Spain and Argentina there is a strong fragmentation of the evaluation function. Although in the former an evaluation agency has been created, in both countries the institutional and normative framework give the different government agencies a high degree of discretion as to whether or not to evaluate and how to do it.

Sustainability

In order for the system to be sustainable, at least three aspects must be taken into account: the type of rules that regulate it, the availability of trained personnel to carry out the evaluations or outsource and supervise them, and the sources of financing that allow to carry out quality evaluations.

The most relevant norms are those that 1) create the governing body of evaluation and assign it its attributions and functions, 2) define the design of the system in relation to the agencies involved and their responsibilities and functions, 3) establish the obligation to evaluate certain policies and programs, and 4) form guidelines and quality standards for evaluations. Often, such regulatory frameworks should take into account the willingness and technical capacities of the agencies to evaluate.

For its part, the technical expertise of the personnel in the area in charge of the system is a fundamental instrument. The technical expertise of the personnel not only guarantees the quality of evaluations but also legitimizes their role vis a vis the sectorial areas (ministries, secretariats, central government agencies), insofar as it depends on them to access the information and its specialized knowledge. In this sense, the definition of the professional profile and the competencies required to fulfill the established functions and

the implementation of a specific training policy are fundamental. It is often asked whether state agencies responsible for evaluation systems should form expert evaluators, who can carry out evaluations themselves, or evaluation managers, who can assess the design and results of third-party studies and promote their later use (Lázaro 2012). The analyzed cases show that the systems of greater scope like those of Canada and Mexico have a greater preponderance of evaluation managers, whereas in the cases of smaller scope, like the one of Spain, the profile of the evaluator dominates.

Finally, it is important that the institutionalization of the evaluation system provides a financing mechanism that guarantees its autonomy and durability, as well as the commitment from the agencies or programs that are evaluated. Evaluation systems are usually financed from treasury funds. No cases have been detected where there is a specific tax to cover this function. This implies that, in most cases, the amount of resources allocated to M&E is subject to political decisions, which means there are high risks of discontinuity and/or cuts. However, in some cases different institutional arrangements have been applied for the aforementioned purposes, ranging from co-financing for specific evaluations (Catalonia) or for some specific activity within the same policies (Spain) to the establishment of a trust fund conforming from contributions made by all programs, regardless of whether or not they are evaluated during a given year (Jalisco). In some cases, even the budget of the governing body of the system is complemented by the resources obtained by the services that can be offered, e.g. studies, training, technical assistance or others that are related to their functions (Spain, Catalonia).

Evaluation Practice

The coexistence of centrally defined monitoring and evaluation practices is observed in Mexico and Canada. In these countries, efforts have been made to establish common guidelines for performance indicators and evaluation practices in all areas of the government. The performance indicators, associated with a logical framework or chain of results, are a key informational input for the evaluation, insofar as they allow the ability to identify the theory of change in each program. However, in many cases, the problem observed is that indicators that serve to manage the programs are of abundance while indicators that are useful for evaluation are lacking. In this sense, the fact that the monitoring and evaluation practices are defined centrally by the same agency represents a greater possibility of coordination.

In Brazil, however, although there is a general monitoring system associated with the government plan, each ministry according to their interest and capabilities performs evaluative studies. On the contrary, in Spain a central evaluation body has been established but in the context of a public administration that is scarcely oriented towards results management and performance monitoring.

Regarding the conduct of the evaluations, the most common practice is the outsourcing of institutions through a bidding process. Although the outsourcing of evaluations presents advantages in relation to their credibility and objectivity, it may also make it difficult for the agencies evaluated to take ownership and use of the results. This will also pose challenges to the process of accumulation of knowledge and skills by the

governing body of the system. In order to solve this tension, in some cases mixed evaluations are carried out and it is formally established that the actors involved in the evaluated programs must participate in the evaluation, both during the design and implementation.

Likewise, it is standard practice (with the exception of Argentina) to define an evaluation plan that establishes the programs and policies to be evaluated on an annual or multiannual basis. For this selection to include the most relevant programs and policies (in terms of expenditure level and components of a medium/long term strategy), two types of mechanisms are used: 1) the definition of selection criteria or coverage goals of the system and 2) the requirement of approval of the evaluation plan by a technical committee. The latter ensures that the selection of the programs to be evaluated is not motivated solely by the interests of the political actors, who sometimes may not have incentives for some of the central initiatives to be evaluated.

Finally, an important aspect to consider is the quality of control of the information produced by the evaluations. The case studies analyzed include the establishment of collegial bodies (committees/evaluation councils) involved in the meta-evaluation of the design, implementation and results of the studies carried out. In turn, government oversight bodies conduct audits on the operation of M&E systems (in relation to their structures, available resources, contracting, etc.).

Use of the evaluation

The orientation towards accountability is strongly prevalent through the submission of reports to the Parliament or the Cabinet. On another note, the use of evaluations as an input to make decisions on the allocation of budgetary resources requires a strong communicative relationship with the area of the executive that is in charge of public expenditure management. This can be achieved through an organizational framework that allows such linkage, through the implementation of formal mechanisms for coordination between agencies or placing the evaluation function under the supervision of the agency responsible for budgeting. Likewise, cases that show greater integration, such as Canada, have specific regulations that establish the obligation to evaluate certain types of programs to support the decisions of renewal and budgetary allocation of the same programs.

Finally, the use of a learning-oriented approach and the redesign of programs and policies require taking into account at least three issues: 1) the introduction of the mechanisms to promote the use of information in management (e.g. the list of commitments that are published and information regarding which programs are being monitored as in the case of Mexico), 2) evaluation at a time that is conducive to changing programs and policies (e.g. at a reform stage), and 3) the generation of information that can be easily translated into decisions for policy improvement. Regarding the last point, emphasizing that the evaluations are carried out to answer a wide spectrum of operative and public policy questions and not only to estimate the average effect of an intervention (Bamberger et al., 2010) is key. In this sense, when developing an evaluation system it is important to consider the different objectives and uses for which such studies are required and to develop different methodologies depending on the organizational cultures and the information needs of those who manage the mechanism.

Reflections on the role of sub-national governments

The case studies analyzed show that M&E systems have begun to expand not only at national, but also at sub-national levels. This expansion is especially relevant in the context of federal countries in which each political unit has autonomy in relation to how and what public policies should be implemented in its specific territory.

One of the typical ways of solving the problems of coordination that occurred in these contexts is through the distribution of competences among the different levels of government. In these cases, sub-national governments have exclusive powers over the design, implementation, and evaluation of some policies and programs.

Likewise, the implementation of sectorial programs promoted and financed by federal government ministries (who express public policies that are hierarchically oriented from the central state) (Escolar et al., 2011) is frequently observed. Even in cases where sub-national governments intervene only in the execution of plans and programs designed and financed by the federal government, different implementation modalities may generate variations from the original design. Understanding such variation is important in order to be able to compare the differential effects of the same policy in different contexts.

In this way, sub-national states play a dual role: they must be leaders in the creation and operation of M&E systems for their own plans and programs, but also active partners in the design and implementation of national M&E systems. It is for this reason that the development of their capacities and the institutionalization in areas of the government with specific attributions in these matters is key.

In this regard, the case studies analyzed show that institutional arrangements at sub-national level sometimes differ from the arrangements chosen by the central government on key issues, e.g. the formation of the governing body of the system, obligation to evaluate supported by a normative mandate, the sources of its funding, or how to address the work with the agencies whose initiatives are evaluated. These issues make the particularities of the strategies and decisions of sub-national governments, which must be respected.

However, it is critical to ensure the coherence and comprehensiveness of the M&E system at the federal level. In order to do so, the important role of the body responsible for M&E within the central government must be acknowledged, and also some strategic issues must be addressed. In this regard, it is not only desirable that sub-national governments have some representation within the structure of that body and that they establish cooperation agreements with them for the conduct of evaluations (Spain), but it is also important that they play a role in the decision making process for the Evaluation Plan established by the central government.

Likewise, there are some prerequisites for the exercise of the M&E to function at the sub-national level, around which the central government has a non-delegable role. One of them is the training and technical assistance of the teams responsible for M&E. Another is the definition of quality criteria, not only for evaluations but also to standardize certain management tools that ensure evaluability, e.g. information systems (both those run by national and sub-national governments). Finally, the central government can use financing

as a tool to direct the evaluation exercise towards certain strategic issues relevant to the whole.

In federal countries, such as those discussed here, it would be desirable to generate cross-use of evaluation results so that the central government can make more accurate decisions by drawing on evidence generated locally. This would also allow sub-national governments to frame their M&E decisions in national guidelines, decisions and strategies. Only this way could it be ensured that the exercise of M&E not only provides timely and quality information but also contributes to the generation and maintenance of a genuine federal system.

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