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## Good Practice Countries— What Does “Success” Look Like?

Officials in many developing countries are interested in the experiences of governments with well-functioning M&E systems. Such governments have accumulated valuable lessons about how to set up and successfully manage an M&E system—what to do, how to do it, and the pitfalls to avoid. These governments also showcase the cost-effectiveness of M&E.

As noted in chapter 3, there are dangers in attempting to uncritically replicate another country’s model. In Latin America, for example, many countries look to the case of Chile—which has a very strong and disciplined M&E system—and would like to apply it to their own country. However, Chile possesses a specific and rare combination of characteristics: a highly centralized budget system, a highly capable and extremely powerful finance ministry, sector ministries and agencies that closely follow the rules and procedures set down by the finance ministry, a disciplined civil service, and a highly capable academic community. These are all success factors for the Chilean government’s M&E system. But there is only one Chile.

This is not to say that Chile’s experience, or that of other countries with successful M&E systems, is irrelevant to other countries, even those with relatively weak public administrations. The very process of comparing any individual country with another that possesses a successful M&E system is illuminating; it helps reveal the reasons for that success, and it clarifies how easy or difficult it might be to replicate that success.

The concept of a successful M&E system also requires some examination. The definition applied throughout this volume is as follows:

The successful institutionalization of M&E involves the creation of a sustainable, well-functioning M&E system within a government, where good quality M&E information is used intensively.

Three dimensions of success are stressed here:

1. **Utilization of M&E information.** The information is used in one or more of the four principal ways outlined in chapter 3, that is, to support government policy making, including performance budgeting or national planning; for policy development and analysis and program development; for program and project management; or for accountability purposes. Utilization of M&E information can, of course, range along a spectrum from zero or negligible to substantial (or intensive). Intensive utilization can be viewed as reflecting the mainstreaming of the M&E

function in the government. Most evaluators and evaluation offices in governments and donor organizations have a surprisingly poor understanding of the extent to which their evaluation findings are or are not used by others.

2. **Good quality M&E information.** Governments differ considerably in terms of what they conduct under the heading of “M&E.” Some stress a system of performance indicators—focused on national development goals; ministry goals; and lower levels of ministry outputs, service delivery, and processes. Others focus on carrying out various types of evaluation, such as rapid reviews, rigorous impact evaluations, or other types and methods of evaluation. There are standards against which M&E can be compared to determine if it represents good quality or not.<sup>1</sup> Most evaluation offices have some sort of quality control mechanism in place. Most, however, do not appear to conduct or commission formal evaluations of the quality of their M&E work.
3. **Sustainability.** This relates to the likelihood that the M&E system will survive a change in administration or in government ministers or top officials. Where the utilization of M&E information is firmly embedded—that is, mainstreamed—in core government processes such as the budget cycle, it can be said to be institutionalized and thus is likely to be sustained over time. Conversely, where M&E has only a handful of key supporters or is little used, or if it is largely funded by donors rather than by the government itself, then sustainability would be seen as less likely.

Three case studies of countries with good practice government M&E systems are presented in the next chapters: Chile, Colombia, and Australia. In-depth reviews of their M&E systems are available (Rojas and others 2005; Mackay and others 2007; Mackay 2004). None of the three can be considered to constitute a “perfect” M&E system in terms of the three dimensions of success outlined above. Each has strengths and weaknesses, as is evident in the following discussions.