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Colombia

The government of Colombia decided in 1991 to create an M&E system, which would be based initially on the World Bank’s own approach to evaluation. A constitutional requirement for evaluation was introduced later that year, and the Bank and other donors quickly followed with a range of technical and financial support. The government also introduced a series of laws, decrees, and regulations to buttress the M&E system.

During its early years, the main emphasis of the system was on monitoring information rather than evaluation. The system has waxed and waned, however, and by 2000 Colombia even considered abolishing the system—because of the perception of difficulties with the system’s management, and also because of doubts about its relevance to the government’s public sector reform agenda.

A substantial change of fortune occurred with the election of a reformist president in 2002. The president had been dismayed to note that the large increases in government spending in areas such as schools and health care had not been matched by corresponding increased performance (outputs and outcomes) in these areas. At the same time, he was strongly committed to a new culture of public administration based on social accountability—or social control. The president recommitted the government to a rejuvenated M&E system, and this was followed by a fresh infusion of donor support. These steps quickly strengthened the system.

Main Components of the M&E System

There are two main components of the system—which is known by its Spanish acronym, SINERGIA (Sistema Nacional de Evaluación de Resultados de la Gestión Pública, or National System for Evaluation of Public Sector Performance)—as well as several other components that have been or are currently being piloted. The most visible and most heavily utilized component is the subsystem for monitoring progress against all 320 presidential goals and the country’s development goals (as contained in the national development plan).

This subsystem (Sistema de Programación y Gestión por Objetivos y Resultados [SIGOB], or System of Programming and Management by Objectives and Results) records the goals, their strategies, baseline and target performance, and amounts spent by the government on them. Goal managers are also required to provide detailed explanations when goals are not met. All this information, including the contact details for each goal manager, is publicly available on a government Web

Box 7.1: Colombia's Whole-of-Government M&E System

The main components of the M&E system are as follows:

There are about 500 performance indicators relating to 320 presidential goals, and for each indicator, SIGOB records the objective, the strategies for achieving it, baseline performance, annual targets, actual performance against these targets, and imputed amounts spent by the government. Thus, SIGOB includes a large number of indicators on government performance. The information is disaggregated by region, including for the major cities.

In addition, where a target has not been met, the goal manager is required to prepare an explanation of the reasons for the shortfall. These exception reports are included in the SIGOB database, the core of which is publicly available on a real-time basis. The Web site also encourages accountability by identifying the goal manager and his or her ministry and formal position and e-mail address. It is the responsibility of ministries and agencies to supply the SIGOB data to the system's manager—the Department of Na-

tional Planning (DNP)—which undertakes some data checking. However, there is no formal system of data audits, and some concerns have been raised about ministries gaming (that is, distorting) the data they provide.

About 15 rigorous impact evaluations and institutional and management evaluations are under way, and another 22 are planned. Their cost ranges from \$15,000 to \$2 million; most cost between \$50,000 and \$200,000.

These evaluations are contracted out to academia or consultants, with oversight by the planning department in close collaboration with both the evaluated agency and the donors funding the evaluation. Rapid evaluations are also being piloted, with a view to mainstreaming them in the budget and planning work of the finance and planning ministries. The rapid evaluation methodologies have drawn on Chile's approach and on the rating approach of the United States' PART system (see boxes 6.1 and 3.2). The pilots currently being conducted are expected to cost between \$15,000 and \$25,000 each.

site (<http://www.sigob.gov.co/ini>). The President uses the SIGOB information intensively for political and social control.¹

SINERGIA's second main component is the series of evaluations it is conducting (see box 7.1). At the end of 2006, 15 evaluations were being conducted or had recently been completed, with another 22 planned for the following five years. The total cost of these evaluations is \$11.1 million. Unlike in Chile, no standardized types of evaluation are conducted; Chile has standardized ToRs, evaluation approach, and cost limits for each type of evaluation the MoF commissions. The three main types of evaluation in Colombia are rigorous impact evaluations, "institutional" evaluations, and "management" evaluations—the latter two focus on management and process issues. The most expensive (\$2 million) is a rigorous impact evaluation of a conditional cash transfer program.

These evaluations are collaborative exercises involving the planning department, the sector ministry or agency responsible for the program being evaluated, and donors. Most of the funding for these evaluations is provided through donor loans.

Most of the programs being evaluated are managed by the ministry of social protection, the family welfare institute, or the ministry of education.

A fourth type of evaluation is currently being piloted—rapid evaluations of those government programs that are either high priority or that have some suspected performance problems. The pilots are being conducted by the finance ministry and the planning ministry.² The intention is that rapid evaluations will eventually be mainstreamed in the core budget analysis and decision-making work of the two ministries. (In Colombia, there is a split budget: The finance ministry is responsible for recurrent spending; the planning ministry is responsible for the investment side, including education spending and cash transfers.)

The M&E system has other components, but they are weaker and much less fully institutionalized. One is an effort to partner with civil society—such as establishing consortia of NGOs and the media—in analyzing government performance. Another component is support for two municipalities that are undertaking performance monitoring and performance budgeting.

One final component is the preparation of performance budget reports to the Congress. These have been prepared by the planning ministry as an annex to the conventional budget documents. They present government spending on a programmatic basis and report the available M&E information on the performance of these programs. As noted in box 3.1, such performance reporting is a form of performance budgeting, albeit a weak type. It is particularly weak in Colombia because the Congress plays a weak role in the budget process, it has little technical support to enable congressmen to easily digest performance information and evaluation findings, and Congress' discussion of the annual budget tends to focus on narrower political issues (see annex B).

Accountability—Political and Social Control

A unique feature of Colombia has been President Uribe's strong commitment to the use of M&E information to enhance political control of the executive government and to support social control. The SIGOB database is loaded in his personal computer, and he uses this information in his monthly management control meetings with each minister and the DNP. During these meetings, the progress being made against each presidential goal is reviewed, and ministers are required to provide reasons for any shortfalls in performance. Performance indicators and ac-

tions to meet these targets are also agreed. The president uses this SIGOB information in his weekly town hall meetings in different municipalities around the country and also in an annual television presentation to citizens, in which he and his ministers discuss the government's performance and answer citizen questions on these issues.

This strong presidential commitment to using M&E information to monitor and report on the government's performance appears to be unique in Latin America—and perhaps in the world. It sends powerful signals to individual ministers and civil servants. However, there does not appear to have been a widespread adoption of M&E practices by ministries and subnational governments. Several ministries and agencies in the social sectors, as well as two municipalities, are currently working to strengthen their M&E systems with assistance from the DNP and donors.

Use of Evaluations to Support Government Decision Making

By early 2007 only three evaluations had been completed, so the opportunity to make use of evaluation findings to support government decision making in both the national budget and for national planning has been limited. But one notable example of an influential evaluation does exist (see box 7.2).

Box 7.2: An Influential Evaluation in Colombia

F*amilias en Acción* is a government conditional cash transfer program that provides income support to poor families that commit to ensuring that their children receive preventive health care, enroll in school, and attend classes. The program was created in 1999 in response to an economic crisis.

A rigorous impact evaluation of the program was contracted out to external consultants, under the supervision of the planning department. The evaluation found that the program achieved impressive nutrition, education, and health impacts. These findings persuaded the government of President Uribe, who was elected

in 2002, not only to retain the previous government's program but to double its coverage, from 500,000 to 1 million poor families. In late 2006, the government decided to further increase the program's coverage, to 1.5 million families.

The *Familias en Acción* evaluation has cost \$1.5 million so far. Although this is a large amount, it is relatively small when compared with total government spending on that program (around \$100 million at the time of the evaluation). Because of its major influence on the government, this evaluation can be judged to have been highly cost-effective.

Source: Mackay and others 2007.

Strengths and Weaknesses of Colombia's M&E System

Colombia's system can also be assessed against the three criteria of a successful M&E system: high utilization, good quality M&E, and sustainability. The evidence base for such an assessment for Colombia is not as robust as it is for Chile, but some conclusions can nevertheless be drawn. Utilization by the president of the monitoring component (SIGOB) of the M&E system is notably high, for purposes of social and political control—that is, for accountability.

The quality of the monitoring data is unclear, but there are fears—held by some senior civil servants and by some influential members of civil society—that the data are not wholly reliable and that some of the information provided by sector ministries and agencies might be self-serving. The sustainability of this monitoring component seems highly likely, however, even after a change of administration and a new president. This is because of the usefulness of such data for the DNP and the president's office in their oversight of government performance.

The other main component of Colombia's M&E system is the ambitious program of rigorous impact evaluations, institutional evaluations, and management evaluations. Only a few evaluations have been completed, but one of them—*Familias en Acción*, one of the government's most important programs—has been highly influential and can be judged as having been very cost-effective. This is noteworthy because even a single, high-profile evaluation that influences a government's decisions can also influence more widespread acceptance of M&E by demonstrating its value.

The quality of Colombia's evaluations has not been formally reviewed, although there is some comfort concerning their likely quality and reliability: they have been contracted out to eminent academics, including some internationally renowned evaluators, and have had significant involvement from evaluators from the World Bank and other donors. The sustainability of the evaluation program is not entirely assured, however.

In the short term—that is, for the next five years—the evaluation agenda will be supported by a new World Bank loan; one feature of this agenda is a declining level of donor financial support for these evaluations, in the explicit expectation that the government will take up the slack by using its own budget funds to pay for them.³ This is likely to happen if the government judges the evaluations produced as worth the time and effort; this in turn places the onus on the planning department to ensure that the evaluations are intensively utilized.

Comparison with Chile's M&E System

There are other notable issues, particularly if Colombia's M&E system is compared with that of Chile. One is that Chile's system is managed by the budget directorate, ensuring the close integration of M&E and budget work. But in Colombia the M&E system has been essentially managed as a stand-alone activity that almost coincidentally happens to be located within the planning department. Until now the M&E system has not been integrated with either the planning work or the budget responsibilities of the department; nor has there been collaboration with the finance ministry's budget work.

This scenario might be about to change. The rapid evaluations being piloted involve the M&E and budget directorates in the planning department, as well as the budget area of the finance ministry. If these pilots are judged successful—that is, as being cost-effective for purposes of performance budgeting—then it is likely that M&E will become mainstreamed in the core budget work of both ministries.

Some observers have argued that a major constraint on the use of M&E information to influence budget decision making in Colombia arises from the various rigidities in the national budget. These include a large number of earmarked expenditures that cannot easily be varied. As a result, between 90 and 95 percent of budget spending in Colombia cannot be changed in the short term. Various counterarguments can be made here (see annex B); but perhaps the most telling observation is the

Table 7.1: Strengths and Weaknesses of Colombia's M&E System

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high level of utilization of monitoring subsystem by the president and his office • Performance information used to set performance targets for ministers and their ministries and agencies. Public reporting of the extent to which performance targets are achieved; where they are not achieved, managers have to provide public explanations. • Evaluations conducted externally in a transparent process and considered highly credible by other ministries and the Congress • Evaluations planned and conducted in a collaborative approach involving the planning department and sector ministries and agencies • All M&E information reported publicly and sent to Congress. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-level utilization of M&E information by the budget and planning directorates of the planning ministry, and by the finance ministry • Concerns about the reliability of monitoring data supplied by sector ministries and agencies • Excessive reliance on donor funding of the evaluation agenda

high level of influence of Colombia's *Familias en Acción* evaluation on the government's priorities and on its budget allocations (box 7.2).

One final point when comparing Colombia and Chile is the high level of collaboration between Colombia's M&E directorate in the planning department and the sector ministries and agencies whose programs are being evaluated. The DNP has shared its evaluation expertise and some funding with its sector partners, and none of the sometimes antagonistic relationships that can exist in other countries when the finance ministry plays an active role in the evaluation agenda appear to have arisen. This collaborative approach between the central ministry and the sector entities might change if and when Colombia adopts a more active form of performance budgeting.

However, if performance budgeting is to work well, there will need to be close collaboration among the M&E directorate within the planning department, the budget directorate of that department, and the budget directorate of the finance ministry. One way to foster close collaboration

between these central ministries and with sector entities would be to include all of them in the high-level government committee that has formal responsibility for oversight of SINERGIA. The government plans to move in this direction.

A summary list of the strengths and weaknesses of Colombia's M&E system is presented in table 7.1. The World Bank's diagnosis of Colombia's system is reproduced as annex B to this volume.

Conclusions

The government of Colombia has succeeded in creating a monitoring subsystem of government performance relative to all 320 presidential goals and the country's other development goals. It is notable that the president uses this subsystem intensively in his direct oversight of ministerial and ministry performance and in reporting to civil society.

The government has also embarked on an ambitious evaluation agenda; evaluation findings have already had some significant influence on government decisions and budget allocations.

A weakness in Colombia's system is that M&E information is not yet systematically used for the core budget and planning work of the two ministries responsible for the national budget. There is a good chance that mainstreaming of M&E into budget analysis and decision making will occur, but until it does there will be limits on the extent of utilization of monitoring information and evaluation findings. Such utilization would also considerably increase the probability of sustainability of the central M&E system.

Several ministries and agencies conduct M&E for their own internal purposes, to aid their own planning, analysis, and ongoing program management. These entities are the exception, however. With World Bank support, the government is currently examining options for mandating

M&E more widely within all ministries, agencies, and subnational governments.

It would be fair to conclude that Colombia's M&E system is less well developed and mature than that of Chile. The Chilean system was progressively developed over more than a decade; and although Colombia's system has existed in some form since the early 1990s, it is only since 2002 that it has really blossomed. The Colombian M&E system currently costs around \$2 million per annum, or almost three times the cost of the Chilean system (\$0.75 million per annum).⁴ The source of this cost difference is the particular emphasis on major impact evaluations in the Colombian system. Both countries' systems could be improved, but both—and particularly the Chilean—can be judged to be cost-effective.