

Management response to evaluation (MRE) is a tool to assess the post-evaluation process deployed by commissioners or managers of evaluation to use evaluation findings and recommendations in decision-making process. This tool, therefore, is catalyst to promote the use of evaluation for evidence-based decision-making. MRE is gaining popularity among the development partners that make decisions based on the evidence. However, the level of MRE use varies by countries and by type of organisations within the country. To assess the status of MRE, a survey was conducted in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal as a joint venture of three Voluntary Organisations of Professional Evaluators (VOPEs) namely the Community of Evaluators-Bangladesh, Evaluation Association of Bhutan, and Community of Evaluators-Nepal with technical support of EvalPartners and financial support of the International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) from February 2014 to February 2015.

The study has a twin objective, to: (i) assess the status of MRE use in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, and (ii) develop MRE index which could be used to monitor the status of the demand for and use of evaluation in overall development of countries.

The study was conducted with 108 organisations from the government, UN agencies, donor community and civil society organisations in the afore-mentioned three countries. The main instrument used to conduct the study was a 16-item questionnaire which was designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected for five years from 2009 to 2013, in most of the cases. Orientation to the methodology, review of inception report and draft study report by study reference group, country level workshops to validate the findings, and frequent communications between the study coordinator and country focal persons were the main activities carried out to ensure the quality of the study. Each country team prepared respective country report and this consolidated report is the gist of the three country study reports. In terms of MRE index, a model was proposed in the beginning of the study which was refined through a workshop organised upon the completion of the country studies.

### Major findings

The UN agencies and donors have evaluation policy and standard procedures to respond to the evaluation findings and recommendations, whereas government agencies do have certain guidelines/framework to conduct evaluation in many cases, but not all. As far as management response is concerned, it is a new concept for the government agencies. I/NGOs generally conduct evaluation as per the donor policy and they are not particular in responding to evaluation.

Countries differed sharply in terms of conducting number of evaluations in the last five years ranging from 64 in Bangladesh to 1,366 in Nepal with 292 in Bhutan. As far as review of accepted evaluations is concerned, UN agencies were found reviewing more than 80%, donors more than 60% and I/NGO more than 25% in an average. Regarding review by government, it was none in Bhutan to 94% in Bangladesh and it was around 3% in Nepal. The major reason of high percent of evaluation reviewed in Bangladesh was that it was made almost mandatory arrangement, whereas in Nepal and Bhutan it was not the case. In terms of preparing the action plan for implementation of recommendations, about 43% of the respondents reported that they made the action plan. The reasons of the agencies not preparing the action plan were inadequate technical skills, inadequate understanding of the leadership about the importance of MRE action plan, financial constraints, less relevant recommendations to make decisions and evaluation conducted as donor requirements.

Fund for preparing the MRE action plan was either inadequate or not available at all for two third of the respondents. The fund for implementation of evaluation recommendation was reported to have adequate with donors and not with others including UN agencies. Sharing of evaluation and MRE plan was done mostly with donor, partner agencies and government but it was done minimally with grassroots level beneficiaries. The grassroots beneficiaries were found neglected by all the agencies in terms of sharing the evaluation and MRE plan. This denotes that these organisations do not practice the human rights approach to development wherein the participation of grassroots beneficiaries, especially the vulnerable groups, are kept away from the decision making process by the so called promoters of human right approach.

Use of evaluation findings for decision making is done more by UN agencies followed by donors, then by I/NGOs and least by government agencies. In the use of evaluations, the countries varied sharply by agencies from country to country. What have been common are that there is a need for creating evaluative culture, developing capacity of users on evaluation, and promoting activities for organisational ownership in addition to mandatory provision in evaluation policy. Likewise, participatory approach to evaluation, unbiased and quality evaluation report written in non-technical language, orientation to policy makers on the integration of evaluation finding into forthcoming project and sharing evaluation and MRE plan to different stakeholders are other factors promoting evaluation use.

Regarding the MRE index, a three-dimensions and 11 indicators index is prepared as given below.

#### MRE index

Dimension	Indicator	Score
1. Enabling Environment (Score: 0.333)	i) Presence of evaluation policy	0.00 to 0.167
	ii) Presence of MRE policy	0.00 to 0.167
2. Managerial capacity (Score: 0.333)	i) Focal point for evaluation	0.00 to 0.111
	ii) Fund allocation for MRE	0.00 to 0.111
	iii) Tracking system on the MRE action plan	0.00 to 0.111
3. Technical parameter (Score: 0.333)	i) No. of evaluation reviewed/ No. of evaluation conducted (N)	0.00 to 0.056
	ii) No. of action plan made/N	0.00 to 0.056
	iii) No. of action plan implemented/N	0.00 to 0.056
	iv) No. of evaluation shared with different type of stakeholders/N	0.00 to 0.056
	v) No. of MRE plan shared with different type of stakeholders/N	0.00 to 0.056
	vi) No. of evaluations used for decision-making/N	0.00 to 0.056

Using this index, MRE value of three countries were calculated which were found 0.375 for Nepal, 0.301 for Bhutan and 0.381 for Bangladesh. Agency-wise, donors and UN agencies were found having relatively higher scores than I/NGOs and government, in general. However, in Bangladesh the government had higher score than UN agencies and I/NGOs mainly because of the mandatory provision of the government to review and take action on the evaluations conducted.

The study has identified three good practices which include steps taken by the government to create enabling environment through the development of National M&E guidelines in Nepal and evaluation policy in Bhutan; the mandatory role of UN agencies and donors to review the completed evaluation, prepare management response plan and follow up activities have been a learning tool for government agencies; and emphasis on the review of conducted evaluations by related government agency which has been supportive to prepare MRE plan and follow up actions in Bangladesh.

In conclusion, there has been enabling environment gradually developing in the three countries through the formation of evaluation policy and M&E guidelines which have included MRE as an integral part of evaluation. Capacity of agencies to prepare and implement MRE plan has been a challenge to all stakeholders studied. More crucial is the financial constraints for governments and local NGOs to prepare and implement MRE. Grassroots beneficiaries are neglected stakeholders of almost all agencies under study, in terms of sharing the evaluation and the MRE plan that indicates the violation of their human rights.

In light of the above findings, good practices, and conclusion, the study has made five recommendations as follows:

- VOPEs should facilitate government to prepare evaluation policy with MRE as an integral part. There should be guidelines/frameworks to support the implementation of evaluation policy once it is approved.
- MRE plan and implementation should be tailored with the evaluation funds which should be allocated at the time of project formulation.
- VOPEs should carry out activities for more awareness, education, training, and advocacy as well as lobbying so that planners can use actionable recommendations for project/programme planning.
- Since government agencies are constraint with technical capacity to prepare and implement MRE action plan, VOPEs should actively be engaged in facilitating these agencies in encouraging them towards building their capacity.
- MRE index developed here serves as the base for further work on it. Therefore, action research should further be carried out considering the rigor of the methodology including sample size, parameters, and dimensions with an aim of refining the MRE index for global application.