

Evaluation in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Overview of Recent Developments

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In the past ten years, evaluation, as a professional field, has undergone significant development in several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Four considerations provide clear evidence of such development: (1) establishment of professional evaluation organizations; (2) intensified dissemination of ideas and use of professional evaluation in the three key societal sectors: government, private, and philanthropic; (3) increased number of evaluation-related publications; and (4) growing establishment of short-term and graduate-level training programs in evaluation.

Evaluation Organizations

The first professional evaluation organization that was formed in the region was the Central American Evaluation Association (ACE) in 1989 that has had its headquarters, since then, in Costa Rica. ACE's main objective is to foster the evaluation of programs and projects to improve efficacy and efficiency of the use of societal resources. The main activities developed by ACE include seminars, workshops, and courses to disseminate evaluation knowledge in Central America.

Only eight years later, in 2002 new evaluation professional organizations were established in LAC. Given their specific contexts, Brazil, Colombia and Peru opted

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to create networks of evaluators, less formal and more flexible organizations than associations or societies. United Nations agencies such as UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund), UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), and IFAD (International Fund for Agriculture Development), along with international and indigenous nonprofit organizations (e.g., foundations, institutes, etc.), played a decisive role in the creation of these three evaluation networks. Most membership is comprised of evaluators working in social and educational programs funded either by the government or by foundations.

[PREVAL](#) (Program for Strengthening the Regional Capacity for Evaluation of Rural Poverty Alleviation Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean)—a joint effort between IFAD and, from 1995-2000, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and, from 2000-2007, with the Centro de Estudios para la Promoción del Desarrollo (Center of Studies for Development Promotion)—has played an strategic role in the region since 1995, contributing directly to the creation of the national evaluation networks in Peru and Colombia. In its first two phases (1995-2000 and 2000-2004), PREVAL focused its work on strengthening the evaluation capacity of IFAD projects to reduce rural poverty in the region. In its third phase (2004-2007), PREVAL will broaden its objectives to work more closely with governments, organizations offering technical assistance in monitoring and evaluation, as well as national evaluation and monitoring networks/associations in the region. PREVAL has established an important network of evaluators working with projects aimed at alleviating rural poverty, and has produced an important body of knowledge in this area published in Spanish. It is also important to recognize the key role played by the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation ([IOCE](#))—comprising all national and regional

evaluation organizations around the globe—in fostering the establishment of evaluation organizations in the region. IOCE held an important planning meeting in Barbados with all major international leaders and its inaugural assembly in Lima, Peru in 2003². The creation of both the Peruvian and the Colombian evaluation networks were strongly supported by IOCE.

In September 2003, representatives from the four existing evaluation organizations in the region got together in São Paulo, Brazil, to create the Latin American and Caribbean Evaluation Network ([RELAC](#)). The city of Lima, Peru, will host RELAC's first evaluation conference in October 20-23, 2004. The conference's theme ("Evaluation, Democracy, and Governability: Challenges for Latin America") and main sessions (e.g., democratic evaluation, methods for evaluating human rights programs, evaluation capacity building in social initiatives, monitoring, evaluation and systematizing as a political and social process to strengthen democracy in LAC, etc.) reflect RELAC's strong focus on promoting a social agenda for the region and having evaluation as a major tool. The conference will gather more than 100 evaluators from all over the region including representatives from eight countries that are trying to create their own national evaluation organizations: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

There are at least four electronic discussion lists on evaluation in the LAC region: RELAC, PREVAL, the [Brazilian Evaluation Network](#), and the ILPES/CEPAL.

It is not over-optimistic to assume that very soon we will witness a significant increase in the number of evaluation professional organizations in LAC.

² Russon, C. & Love, A. (2003) The Inaugural Assembly of the International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation: The Realization of a Utopian Dream. Occasional Paper #20. The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University: Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Use of Professional Evaluation in Key Societal Sectors in LAC

There has been significant growth in the use of professional evaluations by the government, the nonprofit sector, and at least in the field of personnel evaluation, in large private businesses. In the government arena, initiatives related to national educational evaluation/assessment systems, innovations in government administration systems, and social development programs supported by international cooperation agencies are major factors influencing such growth.

In education, the establishment of evaluation mechanisms has been extensive from basic (K-12) to higher education in many countries within the region. In Brazil, for instance, the ministry of education has in place at least four major evaluation initiatives, applied countrywide, to assess the quality of education. In higher education there are two initiatives: (1) institutional evaluation (assessment of the general conditions of all higher education institutions in the country), (2) evaluation of undergraduate education (includes a national exam for senior students in each professional area and an accreditation strategy to renew or provide new licenses for universities and colleges). The other two are related to the basic education system: (3) national evaluation system for basic education (bi-annual assessment of the quality of K-12 schools, based on a national random sample), and (4) national exam for high school students (senior high school students have the option to take the exam that will serve as one of the criteria for acceptance in a university—similar to the ACT and SAT tests in the U.S.). Several countries also have official connections with regional as well as worldwide education assessment initiatives such as the Latin American Laboratory for Evaluating the Quality of Education, the International Program for Student Evaluation, and the World Education Indicators Program.

The idea of reducing the size of the state and making it more effective and efficient (state reform) has strongly influenced virtually all countries in the region. Such an idea brings along a strong push for the establishment of control systems on expenditures as well as for implementation of planned activities that usually involve monitoring and, to some extent, evaluation. Several countries have created structures, usually subordinated to the ministry of planning, that are in charge of dealing with monitoring and internal evaluation of governmental efforts. Examples of such structures are the System of Information, Evaluation, and Monitoring of Social Programs (Argentina); Secretary of Strategic Investments (Brazil); Intersectorial Committee for Modernizing Public Administration (Chile); National System for Management and Results Evaluation (Colombia); and the National Evaluation System (Costa Rica).

In the area of social development, virtually all programs supported by international cooperation agencies such as the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, World Health Organization, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID), are required to be evaluated both internally as well as by using external evaluators. These organizations have played a major role in introducing innovations in evaluation as well as advocating for the use of quality professional evaluations within government funded initiatives. Several examples of such evaluations are already publicly available from the agencies' websites (e.g., [USAID](#) and the World Bank-Operations Evaluation Department ([OED](#))). The Latin American Institute for Social and Economic Planning ([ILPES](#)), subordinated to the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean ([CEPAL](#)), has been an important reference in providing evaluation support to country-level government evaluators by offering supporting materials (publications); evaluation training; and networking opportunities for professionals

working in evaluations of governmental social-development programs in the region.

Initially influenced by international foundations investing in the region the fast—growing nonprofit sector in Latin America has increasingly used and advocated for the use of evaluation as a way of assuring quality of the programs they fund, and also to inform their decisions regarding strategic funding.

The [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#) is one of the international foundations that have significantly invested in the development of evaluation in LAC. In 1995 and 1997, the foundation sponsored two groups of LAC evaluators (a total of approximately 40 professionals) in in-depth training programs in evaluation at [The Evaluation Center—Western Michigan University](#). Some of the participants of such training opportunities are assuming leadership roles in evaluation in the creation of evaluation organizations in their home countries.

Several foundations and institutes are commissioning and/or developing evaluations throughout the region. In Brazil, for instance, some of the nonprofit organizations that are very active in evaluation include: [Fundação Carlos Chagas](#), [Fundação Cesgranrio](#), [Instituto Ayrton Senna](#), [Fundação ABRINQ Foundation](#), [Instituto FONTE](#), [Fundação Roberto Marinho](#), and [Fundação IOCHPE](#).

Another interesting movement influencing the growth of evaluations in the third sector is the increasing number of private businesses investing in social initiatives, based on the idea of social responsibility. Such organizations have a different culture (focus on control and efficiency) from the nonprofit organizations investing in the sector, and have made an important push to support the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems in the initiatives sponsored by them. In Brazil, the *Grupo de Institutos, Fundações e Empresas*—GIFE (Group of Institutes,

Foundations, and Enterprises) and the Ethos Institute are examples of two large organizations created to mobilize funds and to support companies and private foundations who invest in social, cultural and environmental projects of public interest, making such organizations partners in building a sustainable and fair society.

The extent of evaluation use in the private sector is not very public. It is evident that several corporations and other private business have made serious efforts to evaluate their products, projects and personnel. Reports on such efforts, however are not easily accessible and the evaluators working in this area have almost no contact with other evaluators working in the public and nonprofit sectors. No doubt more extensive exchange of experiences between these professionals has great potential to be beneficial to all, but some important barriers such as prejudices from both sides (e.g., ‘private sector only look at profits;’ ‘public and nonprofits are always inefficient’) need to be overcome before such approximation has any chance of succeeding.

Body of Original Publications in Evaluation

Though there are virtually no evaluation specific journals in LAC, there are several journals related to education, health, and social sciences with strong evaluation content. Some examples include:

- [*La Revista de Ciencias Sociales*](#) (Journal of Social Sciences—Costa Rica)
- [*Revista Ensaio – Avaliação e Políticas Públicas em Educação*](#) (Evaluation and Public Policy in Education—Brazil)
- [*Estudos em Avaliação Educacional*](#) (Educational Evaluation Studies—Brazil)
- [*Cadernos de Saúde Pública*](#) (Journal of Public Health—Brazil)

- [*Revista Avaliação Psicológica*](#) (Journal of Psychological Evaluation—Brazil)
- [*Revista da Rede de Avaliação Institucional*](#) (Journal of the Institutional Evaluation of Higher Education Network—Brazil)
- [*Cuadernos de Investigación de la Escuela de Gerencia Social*](#) (Journal of Inquiry of the School of Social Management—Venezuela)
- [*Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Educación*](#) (Journal of the Education Science Investigation Institute—Argentina)
- [*Acción y Reflexión Educativa*](#) (Educative Action and Reflection—Panama)
- [*Planejamento e Políticas Públicas*](#) (Planning and Public Policy—Brazil)
- [*Revista de Administração Pública*](#) (Journal of Public Administration—Brazil)

The footnoted social science journals³ have regularly published the intellectual products of LAC evaluators.

It is critical to acknowledge the substantial collection of accessible evaluation publications such as books, manuals, newsletters, technical reports, etc. that are available in most Latin American countries. There are several websites such as the Latin American Institute for Social and Economic Planning (ILPES), and the Programme for Strengthening the Regional Capacity for Evaluation of Rural Poverty Alleviation Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREVAL) that provide an extensive collection of evaluation publications in the field of evaluation throughout the region.

³ A very useful source to find out about Latin American journals in education and related areas is the *Centro de Recursos Documentales Informático*—[*CREDI*](#) (Center for Digital Documental Resources), sponsored by the Organization of Ibero-American States.

There are two excellent annotated bibliographies that provide published reference materials that address several aspects of evaluation in LAC. The first publication, *The Annotated Bibliography of International Programme Evaluation*, edited by Russon & Russon⁴ has a chapter by Antoinette B. Brown and Ada Ocampo, on Latin America and the Caribbean. The reviewed documents (books, manuals, journal articles, etc.) are grouped into three sections: (1) manuals and guides, (2) participation, and (3) case studies and evaluation reports. The second publication, *Annotated Bibliography on Project Evaluation* by Viñas⁵ which includes a broad range of documents in the review, is divided into fourteen categories: (1) definition of basic concepts; (2) design, implementation and evaluation; (3) environment impact; (4) evaluation approaches; (5) evaluation design; (6) gender; (7) indicators; (8) methods and instruments for information collection and analysis; (9) monitor and evaluation systems; (10) organizational development; (11) participation by beneficiaries; (12) producing reports and presenting conclusions; (13) types of evaluation; and (14) use of evaluations.

Capacity Building in Evaluation

There are a few LAC universities and training institutions that offer masters level programs, specifically in evaluation. At the masters' level, there are at least five universities offering such program:

- [Professional Masters in Evaluation of Social Programs and Projects.](#)
Universidad de Costa Rica. San José, Costa Rica.

⁴ Russon C. & K. Russon. Eds. (2000) *The Annotated Bibliography of International Programme Evaluation*. Norwel: Kluwer, Academic Publishers

⁵ Viñas, V.E. (1997). *Annotated Bibliography on Project Evaluation*. San José, Costa Rica : International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), Programme for Strengthening the Regional Capacity for Evaluation of Rural Poverty Alleviation Projects in Latin America and the Caribbean (PREVAL).

- [Masters in Socio-Economic Evaluation of Investment Projects](#). Universidad Panamericana. Mexico City, Mexico.
- [Masters of Science in Project Management and Evaluation](#). University of the West Indies—Cave Hill Campus. Bridgetown, Barbados.
- [Masters in Project Evaluation](#). Universidad del CEMA, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- [Masters in Social Projects Evaluation](#). Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara. Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

At the certification level there are quite a few programs offered in different countries including:

- [Course on Evaluation of Social Programs and Projects](#). Centro de Empreendedorismo Social e Administração em Terceiro Setor—CEATS (Center of Social Entrepreneurship and Administration for the Third Sector—Brazil) and the FONTE Institute.
- [Diploma in Evaluation of Projects](#). Universidad de Concepción. Concepción, Chile.
- [Diploma in Evaluation of Social Projects](#). Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Santiago, Chile.
- [Diploma in Planning and Evaluation of Projects](#). Universidad de Chile. Santiago, Chile.
- [Diploma in Planning and Evaluation of Socioeconomic Projects](#). Centro de Análisis y Evaluación de Política Pública—CAEP—Monterrey, Mexico. (Center of Analysis and Evaluation of Public Policy)

- [International Certificate of Project Planning, Evaluation, and Management—Inter-American Development Bank](#). Centro de Investigaciones Territoriales del Ecuador—CITE. (Territorial Investigation Center of Ecuador).
- [Post Graduate in Formulation and Evaluation of Projects](#). Universidad Americana. Managua, Nicaragua.

There are also several short-term evaluation training courses facilitated by different organizations within the region. Some of the best sources to identify such training opportunities include: (a) Nota Informativa del ILPES sobre Evaluación de Proyectos y Programas ([ILPES Informative Note on Program and Project Evaluation](#)); (b) [PREVAL](#); and [FONTE Institute](#). The following is a sample of the recently offered short-term courses in some LAC countries:

- X International Course on [Planning and Evaluating Public Investment Projects](#). Offered by [CEPAL/ILPES](#). Sept 27 to Oct 22, Santiago, Chile.
- [Internet-based course on Planning and Evaluation of Agricultural and Agri-Industrial Projects](#). Offered by REDCAPA and [Austral University of Chile](#). Sep 1 to Nov 30 2004.
- [International Course on Logic Model, monitoring and Evaluation](#). Offered by ILPES/CEPAL and the Spanish Cooperation Agency (AECI). Jun 21 to Jul 2, 2004. Cartagena de Indias, Colombia.
- [International Course on Use of Socio-Economic Indicators for the Evaluation of Impact of Poverty Reduction Programs](#). Offered by ILPES/CEPAL and the Spanish Cooperation Agency (AECI). May 3—14. Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia.

- [Utilization-Focused Evaluation by Michael Quinn Patton](#). Sponsored by the Brazilian Evaluation Network, UNICEF-Brazil, and FONTE Institute. Salvador, Bahia—Brazil. March 2004.
- [Collaborative Evaluation by Rita O’Sullivan](#). Sponsored by the Brazilian Evaluation Network, UNICEF-Brazil, and FONTE Institute. São Paulo, SP—Brazil. September 2003.

Final Comments

The report makes no claims to be comprehensive and does lack significant information, mainly about the state-of-art of the evaluation field in the Caribbean countries. We hope to fulfill the existing information gaps in the next revisions of and addenda to this paper.

It does, however provide unquestionable evidence of the impressive advances the whole region has made in the evaluation field in the recent past. Evidently, even though not to the same degree in each country, it is reasonable to say that basic conditions have been established to make such advances even more comprehensive and effective in the future.

The current efforts to establish national and regional evaluation organizations, the growing number of quality publications in both Spanish and Portuguese on evaluation, the increasing use of professional evaluation by different organizations in all societal sectors and the broad recognition of evaluation as important for improving society are some of the factors influencing such advances. One major challenge still to be faced in order to have evaluation in a better position as a recognized professional field is the creation of more formal graduate-level training for evaluators in a wider range of countries.

This paper is a work in progress that will be modified and/or improved as we gain new information. If you would like to provide additional information or point out any errors or misunderstanding in the text, please do not hesitate to contact Thomaz Chianca (thomaz.chianca@wmich.edu) or Brandon Youker (brandon.w.youker@wmich.edu).