



Juha Uitto
Senior evaluation adviser
United Nations Development Programme

“One positive development is that evaluation is being recognized as an important tool for understanding and improving policy and programming.”

Juha Uitto recognizes that as one of the largest implementing agencies of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the UNDP has a big role to play in the monitoring and evaluation of climate change. One of his latest projects is a soon-to-be-published report evaluating environment and climate change efforts across global, regional, and national UNDP programs.

This report is the first of its kind in the organization and will be a comprehensive source of information that includes lessons learned, recommendations, and other useful feedback to inform future policies and programs.

According to Uitto, “Climate change is a phenomenon that is taking place, but mitigation and adaptation are very different angles towards addressing it. Mitigation is more of an environmental issue, but adaptation is really a development issue that affects every sector.” Climate change is currently a big part of UNDP’s environment and energy program and, until recently, focused almost exclusively on the mitigation aspects. In recent years, adaptation has become a focus of programming at UNDP (www.undp.org/climatechange/adapt/role.html).

Uitto feels that because the impacts of climatic change, including the increased occurrence of natural disasters, are now being recognized more widely, adaptation will emerge as a major field within the development community’s approach to climate change. He also comments that organizations such as UNDP are especially looking toward adaptation efforts in Africa where the impacts of climate change are likely to be most acute.

According to Uitto, it remains to be seen whether the field of adaptation will create a select group of evaluators to work on the issue or whether it will use existing evaluation methods and experts. In Uitto’s opinion, what is needed is a calibration of evaluation approaches to deal with greater uncertainty and rapid change in climatic conditions. When dealing with vulnerable communities, he says, the issues are largely the same, even if their appearances vary. He emphasizes that whether you’re talking about tropical storms or desertification, coastal or water resources management, the real issue is sustainable development.

Uitto comments that evaluation is also attracting increasing attention and thriving among UN programs and agencies. For instance, in recent years, the UN Evaluation Group (www.unevaluation.org) has become an active forum for strengthening the evaluation function within the UN system.

At the same time, he says, evaluation is changing organizationally from what it looked like in the past. Uitto remarks that the conference provided further evidence of evaluation's growth, and that "there is a need for a new paradigm for conducting evaluation." Uitto sees two ways in which this paradigm shift is happening. In the past, evaluation was very much donor driven or overseen and implemented in a way that donors preferred, but there is now a push to enhance national ownership and accountability to the stakeholders in program countries. Uitto prefers this strategy, saying that the program countries should continue to increase their involvement in conducting evaluations themselves. This way, accountability will occur — as Uitto believes it should — toward both top and bottom.

Uitto sees many benefits from the International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development (www.esdevaluation.org) and recognizes networking as a major success. In particular, "the informal network that developed over the conference's four days is invaluable for learning about what others are doing and improving communication between practitioners, scientists and evaluators." He hopes that these exchanges can clarify questions about approaches, methods, and tools for evaluating climate change, both the mitigation and adaptation aspects, and lead to a common language among these groups. He sees the conference and future similar events as opportunities to continue building awareness and debating how evaluation can improve development practice.

One of the big questions left for Uitto is how to scale up, or extrapolate from, evaluations of individual interventions to inform policy at higher levels. However, Uitto acknowledges that not everyone wants to hear that things have to be done differently and that there are politics at play that can discourage the use of independent evaluation.

Also, there is currently a dichotomy between external evaluation and participatory monitoring, and Uitto stresses the importance of building a bridge between these two approaches and incorporating more participatory development practices. After all, "if we are looking at the environment, we must include the people living in it." Uitto cites GEF's local benefits study as an example of this (www.gefweb.org/gefevaluation.aspx?id=16864&terms=local+benefits+study). For this reason, as well as the need to design effective, successful evaluations, Uitto stresses that it is vital to be truly cognizant of needed changes when designing future evaluations and development interventions.