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“What we should do as a community of experts is set standards to evaluate projects and programs. These should be based on existing successful evaluation methodologies.”

Laurent de Schoutheete believes that a new system or standard should be developed for evaluating climate change using existing tools and methods.

He comments, “Maybe the question isn’t what is new in climate change evaluation, but rather, should anything be new?”

He believes that the large amount of information currently available on climate change and evaluation makes it even more important to look through what exists and modify it to create a flexible standard. He points out that there is already a database of 300 evaluations in existence. He suggests looking at these reports and examining the indicators that have been used as well as the relevant, achievable, realistic, and cost-effective methods.

de Schoutheete also wants to look at who uses this database and how useful it is in order to develop it further and give it real purpose. He believes that this process can offer needed guidance for developing evaluation frameworks and benchmarks to create a practical and useful cycle of evaluation.

Furthermore, de Schoutheete insists that the definition of these frameworks and benchmarks should be wide enough that the various people evaluating climate change, such as evaluators, practitioners, and implementers, can be brought together as one community. This is one direction in which he feels evaluation should be moving: toward becoming a platform for dialogue, a tool to strengthen communication between stakeholders.

He also emphasizes the importance of keeping things simple, pragmatic, and flexible. He talks about the importance of scaling up these assessments and points out that it shouldn’t be “external organizations going in and assessing external donors. It should be local systems working with local knowledge.”

de Schoutheete recommends a gradual course of action with a flexible monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impacts of climate change interventions and policies

at various levels. Within this framework, everything should be planned concretely using a set of well-defined criteria and indicators. He emphasizes that this is not just a matter of evaluation, it is a matter of decision-making as well. “Well-defined indicators orient strategies from their onset. With all of these pieces in place, we can evaluate interventions in a flexible and contextualized way.”

To accomplish all of this, de Schoutheete underlines the necessity of looking at existing tools, networks, and methods to foster the political will required to integrate climate change into policy. He also talks about the importance of making climate change a cross-cutting issue throughout programs and policy interventions. This will require mainstreaming climate change evaluations at the policy, program, and project levels. According to de Schoutheete, even programs that do not focus on climate change should be examined to see where they interact with climate change.

Overall, de Schoutheete feels that the conference served a very important purpose: developing an agenda and creating a community of liked-minded professionals. He enjoyed the discussions about various types of evaluation and recognizes the role they play in getting closer to some evaluation standards.

However, he is quick to caution that although networking is good, it should focus on pragmatic outcomes. He suggests that the repository of climate change evaluation put forward at the conference would be very useful if it also included a list of contacts, creating a truly open network that is accessible at all levels.

He is keen to bring Australia into the community of professionals working on the issue of evaluation and climate change. Its current absence, he maintains, leaves a gap in information about what Australia and New Zealand are doing and their contributions to the field. He holds, “We all, as a community, need to make sure that everyone is included: our climate is global, and sustainable solutions to the current crisis should be built and shared in every corner of this world.”