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“Evaluation reports are underutilized and in different repositories, while climate change is a global issue.”

This comment comes from Sandra Romboli, who together with Ted Strudwicke of the World Bank and in collaboration with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, is working toward establishing a knowledge repository that aggregates evaluations conducted by various evaluating organizations to produce a summary of experience that is easy to navigate and learn from.

Strudwicke notes, “Evaluations already exist electronically but within different organizations’ websites; this would bring everything to one place.” He adds, “It will be useful for learning from evaluations rather than just doing them and having them, because information contributes to accountability and allows us to learn from our mistakes.”

The repository idea comes none too soon, as it addresses a number of comments and concerns that came out of the International Conference on Evaluating Climate Change and Development. Main concerns were that evaluation work is often done in relative isolation, with underdeveloped vertical and horizontal learning potential: vertically, because the network linking the international evaluation community with what happens on the ground is not yet fully developed, and horizontally because evaluations sit in different organizations’ repositories making it difficult to get a clear and broad perspective on how effective climate change projects actually are. A further recurring

comment was that evaluations would be more useful if a lessons-learned component was added, rather than simply storing evaluation documents as they are.

The need for the repository is clear, but why now? In short, establishing the repository is effectively striking while the iron is still hot. According to Strudwicke, the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the host of the conference, “is equipped to digitize information, and the collection of evaluation reports is still relatively small enough to comfortably attempt a pilot project and test the usefulness of the repository.” He adds, “The repository would be like a box of information, and the Bibliotheca is where the box would live.”

The conference itself brought together climate change practitioners representing communities of practice that do not usually overlap, namely evaluators, project implementers, and researchers. This was the perfect opportunity for Romboli and Strudwicke to put the idea for the repository on the table and encourage discussion and feedback around the issue. “These are inputs from people who represent the primary target of this knowledge-sharing tool, and taking on board their views and opinions from the outset will help us tailor the tool for maximum benefit.”

At a roundtable meeting, everyone agreed in principle that the repository is a necessary tool to help collate climate change evaluations to learn from them. However, there are practical considerations that make implementation not as straightforward as it may sound. To begin with, both Romboli and Strudwicke concur that the repository would probably be best placed within the various regional evaluation networks that exist online — among them AfrEA, IDEAS, and IPEN — to maximize exposure and encourage use. The establishment of a community of practice is another idea that surfaced during the conference and is being explored further at the moment.

The repository would ideally be steered by a working group made up of members of the evaluation community. When these practicalities were presented at the roundtable discussion, there was consensus on the need for the tool and its inclusion in the regional online networks, but concerns were voiced over who would make up the working group, who would screen the included evaluations for quality, and in what language the repository would be hosted. This type of feedback is why the conference was an excellent opportunity to put the idea forward, as all these points will be considered when Romboli and Strudwicke along with the Bibliotheca Alexandrina take the repository from concept to reality.

While the climate change community waits for the final product to take form, a sneak preview of the planned repository is available in the GEF Evaluation Office’s database (www.ccevaluation.org/inventory/2-GEF.html), which will serve as a foundation for the repository and contains the evaluations that the GEF Evaluation Office, World Bank, and Bibliotheca Alexandrina team have compiled thus far.