
Capacity Development in Evaluation: The Role of the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET)

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Background: Over the last decades evaluation has truly become a global field of practice. Of particular note has been the significant progress in the institutionalization of evaluation in low- and middle-income countries. Ray Rist, working at the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank, has been an influential champion of evaluation capacity development, among other things through establishing and leading the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET), a flagship global training program in evaluation.

Purpose: The article focuses on the role of IPDET in developing evaluation capacity. It highlights IPDET's contributions to the field, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, and discusses factors contributing to its success and future challenges.

Setting: IPDET was initially hosted by Carleton University from 2001 to 2016, offering a comprehensive training program on evaluation. In 2017, the University of Bern and the University of Saarbrücken took over, introducing a new program

concept. The program has adapted to changes, including moving online during the COVID-19 pandemic and integrating into the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI) network.

Intervention: Not applicable.

Research Design: Not applicable.

Data Collection and Analysis: Not applicable.

Findings: IPDET's success is attributed to its strong brand, external financial support, quality control, and community spirit. The program has trained thousands of participants globally and continues to adapt to evolving needs. Key factors for future success include differentiating itself from competition from other training programs, adapting to technological advances, and maintaining relevance in the evolving field of evaluation. The article emphasizes the importance of IPDET's holistic approach to training and its integration into the GEI network to enhance its impact.

Keywords: *evaluation training; evaluation capacity building*

Over the last decades evaluation has truly become a global field of practice (Furubo et al., 2002; Jacob et al., 2015; Stockmann et al., 2020). Across continents, countries, policy fields, and institutional contexts, the practice of evaluation has risen to prominence.

The rising prominence of evaluation is evidenced by a growth in:

- evaluation functions in government agencies and departments as well as in non-governmental institutions (including the private sector);
- professional associations for evaluators across the globe;
- evaluation-related textbooks, journals, knowledge repositories, communities of practice, conferences, and the like;
- professional and academic training programs, courses and workshops in evaluation;
- initiatives that certify or accredit professionals in relation to particular evaluation competencies.

Of particular note has been the significant progress in the institutionalization of evaluation in low- and middle-income countries (especially in the latter). Though progress across countries has been uneven and there are many countries where the practice of evaluation is still nascent, there has been notable progress in comparison to 25 years ago.¹ Since that time (and before), the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) has led or supported a number of initiatives which have significantly contributed to evaluation capacity development and the institutionalization of evaluation in low- and middle-income countries. IEG's mandate is to independently evaluate the World Bank Group's (WBG's) work. At the same time, as part of its mandate, it supports capacity development in evaluation in WBG client countries (IEG, 2018). Over the last 25 years, IEG has supported evaluation capacities in the following ways:

- Collaborate with WBG institutions to develop evaluation capacities within the WBG system (through providing training, advisory support, and methodological guidance);
- Establish and implement the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET);
- Establish the regional Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR),² which provide technical assistance, advisory work, and training on monitoring and evaluation to clients in countries within their region of operations;
- Conduct research and publish on evaluation capacity development and the institutionalization of evaluation;³
- Provide support to global and regional voluntary organizations for professional evaluation (VOPEs);⁴
- Establish the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI), which since 2021 has managed IEG's evaluation capacity development portfolio.⁵

While each of these lines of action merits its own discussion, in this article I will focus on one of these, the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET). Quite probably, IPDET has been the most well-known and widely attended training program with a global reach in the field of evaluation. Morra Imas and Rist (2023) discuss nine factors contributing to the program's ongoing success. Based on my own experience and recent research by IPDET (2023), I would emphasize the following factors that stand out:

- IPDET's strong brand name and reputation, which have grown over time since its inception; IPDET continues to attract high-level participants from different institutional environments across the globe.
- External financial support from international development partners, which is mainly used to finance scholarships for participants (especially from low-income countries) who

¹ Around the time when Ray Rist joined the Independent Evaluation Group (then called the Operations Evaluation Department) at the World Bank.

² At the time of writing there are six regional centers, in Chile, Brazil, Senegal, South Africa, India, and Pakistan.

³ Early examples include, inter alia, Kusek and Rist (2004) and Morra Imas and Rist (2009). More recent examples can be found here: <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/methods-resources>.

⁴ Among other things, IEG played an instrumental role in the establishment of IDEAS (The International

Development Evaluation Association). Ray Rist was president of IDEAS from 2008 to 2014.

⁵ Apart from the IPDET program and the CLEAR Initiative, the GEI (globalevaluationinitiative.org) in recent years has incorporated other flagship activities such as the Better Evaluation platform (betterevaluation.org), gLOCAL Evaluation Week, and the National Evaluation Capacities Conference (led by the UNDP Independent Evaluation Office).

otherwise would not be able to afford attending the program.

- The dedicated attention to quality control. This relates to aspects such as faculty selection, the focus on real-world cases and examples, and pedagogical support that is provided to the IPDET faculty. For example, during the COVID-19 period when IPDET was forced to suspend the in-person training offers and fully switch to an online program, IPDET hired a professional firm to train and coach IPDET faculty on online pedagogical techniques. A final point to note is that participant end-of-training evaluations are taken very seriously and are used to course-correct future offerings and discontinue workshops if they do not meet participants' expectations.
- The strong IPDET community spirit. IPDET has traditionally invested a lot of time and resources in making the in-person training experience more than just a training. During their stay at the IPDET program participants spend a lot of time together informally in community events and sports and other leisure activities organized by the program. This community spirit is sustained through online platforms and lasting relationships among participants.

The rest of this article discusses three topics: the two main implementation periods of the program, followed by a forward look at how IPDET could adapt to the evolving needs in the field of evaluation. One of the main arguments of this article is that in order to become and remain successful, the IPDET program has (had) to adopt a holistic approach to in-person training and knowledge exchange among international participants across the globe, as well as continuously adjust the content of its trainings to remain relevant to the evolving practice of evaluation.

IPDET: The Carleton University Period (2001–2016)

IPDET was first delivered in 2001. Under the auspices of IEG, the program was run by its founding directors, Ray Rist and Linda Morra Imas, and a small support team, in collaboration with Carleton University, the institution hosting the

program. In the early days, the program consisted of a 2-week course on the foundations of evaluation and an additional 2 weeks of specialized workshops. The program offered a broad range of topics around the institutional, conceptual, and methodological principles of evaluation in the context of international development. The program was adapted on an annual basis. The foundational course was periodically updated but did not significantly change over time, while the workshop program offered more variation. The program was able to attract well-known evaluation scholars and practitioners as faculty, most of which remained connected to the program for longer periods of time. By 2016, the program had trained over 4,000 participants from more than 80 countries (Morra Imas & Rist, 2023). By 2016, the program had developed into a global brand name and counted on strong support from donors (for scholarships) and a vibrant network of institutions and alumni, many of whom continued to be connected to the program (either by returning to IPDET to participate in additional workshops or through online platforms). In 2016, the collaboration with Carleton University abruptly ended and IEG intervened and started up a competitive selection process for a new host institution.

IPDET: The University of Bern Period (2018–present)

In 2017, a consortium of two institutions, the University of Bern in Switzerland and the University of Saarbrücken in Germany, was selected to become the new delivery partner of the IPDET program. The first IPDET program (new style) was delivered in 2018, with the former institution serving as the host institution and the latter leading on the curriculum reform and substantive delivery through its Center for Evaluation (CEval). A new program concept was launched: a core course of 1 week followed by 2 weeks (later reduced to 1 week) of consolidation workshops⁶ and specialized workshops.⁷ The successful building blocks of the first phase of IPDET were retained: an international faculty with wide-ranging professional experience; a strong emphasis on peer learning and community-building among participants; and evidence-based program adaptation (following the evolving demand in the field of evaluation as well as feedback from the participants). During the 2

⁶ Workshops closely aligned to the core course content and further deepening the discussion on selected topics covered in the core course.

⁷ Standalone workshops on specific topics or methods of high interest to participants.

COVID-19 years (2000 and 2021), IPDET successfully moved its training offer online, and in 2022 it restarted its on-site program, this time accompanied by an online learning program, encompassing a select number of workshops. Around that time the governance situation markedly changed. With the establishment of the GEI in 2021, IEG (through the GEI) became more actively involved in the oversight of the program. In addition, generous support from international donors was channeled to the program through the GEI Trust fund. As IPDET became an integral part of the GEI, it began to collaborate more closely with other GEI partners. As a result, trainers from GEI partners (e.g., from the CLEAR centers) joined the IPDET faculty.

A tracer study conducted by the IPDET program in 2023 reaffirmed the importance of the global IPDET brand and found evidence of the utility of the program and the application of the acquired knowledge by participants in their professional environments (IPDET, 2023). The study generated important lessons and recommendations to further improve the program's outreach (especially among target audiences from low-income countries), its substantive offerings (based on trends in the field), and the pedagogical aspects of the program. On outreach, for example, the study highlighted the importance of providing both on-site and online offers to better reach specific audiences that are better served through one and/or the other.⁸ Regarding content, the study stressed the need for adaptability in light of changing demands in the field. The program had already successfully offered content on new topics in the area of innovative technologies and data science techniques, for example. In terms of pedagogy, it was recognized that supporting faculty in digital didactics is a crucial factor for the continuation of online training programs. The Bern IPDET program has trained between 150 and 250 participants annually since 2018.

IPDET: Challenges and Prospects for the Future

The field of evaluation in the context of international development has significantly evolved over the last 25 years. Going forward, IPDET's continued relevance and success depends

on its ability to adapt to change. Leaving aside internal factors such as staffing, financing, and organizational issues, let me briefly highlight some of the key strategic and external factors that IPDET will need to address in the near future.

A changing landscape of evaluation training programs.

The field of evaluation capacity development has been significantly evolving. Whereas 25 years ago IPDET⁹ constituted one of the few comprehensive training offers in evaluation (in the field of international development), over time the number of training programs across the globe has exponentially increased. IPDET has been able to retain its unique position as a global training program with a strong convening power and reputation, but increasing competition from regional and national training programs (both foundational and specialized) has led to more strategic reflection and adaptation of the training offer. In this context it is worthwhile to note that IPDET itself contributed to the growth in training programs, as it constituted the basis for other IPDET-like programs, such as SHIPDET,¹⁰ PIFED, and TAQYEEM.¹¹ In addition, several IPDET alumni (and their employers) have established their own training programs. Over the last 10 years, the advent of online and hybrid learning has come with new challenges. One type of challenge relates to pedagogy and how to develop and implement engaging, relevant, and effective online learning offers. A second challenge is more strategic in nature. As technology is changing the landscape of available training offers, it is important to reflect on how IPDET should position itself in terms of providing online, hybrid, and in situ learning offers to best achieve its objectives.

The evolving practice of evaluation.

The following issues merit careful consideration. First of all, evaluation is increasingly challenged to help decision makers and other stakeholders better understand how policy interventions can help address the great challenges of our time (such as climate change, inequality, and poverty). The use of systems approaches in evaluation is but one of many methodological solutions that can help

⁸ For example, due to financial or time constraints potential participants from target audiences may not be able to attend the on-site program in Switzerland.

⁹ Also including the regional deliveries of IPDET (i.e., often in the form of a 1-week (or limited number of days)

foundational evaluation training delivered by Ray Rist and/or Linda Morra Imas.

¹⁰ Delivered for a number of years in China.

¹¹ Delivered in French and Arabic by the École Nationale d'Administration Publique.

improve evaluators' understanding of these complex issues. More broadly, there are important implications regarding how evaluators should conceptualize interventions in their complex contexts and how evaluations should be commissioned and designed. Second, new advances in technology and data (as well as computational capacity) are changing the practice of evaluation. This includes the availability and use of new data collection techniques (e.g., using QR codes to capture citizens' views); data management techniques (e.g., connecting different types of georeferenced data [e.g., image, text] in relational databases); and data analysis techniques (e.g., using discriminative and generative artificial intelligence approaches to enhance evaluative analysis). It is essential that evaluation stakeholders from different roles (e.g., analysts, team leaders, commissioners) develop the right level of methodological literacy regarding these new techniques.

The evolving institutionalization of evaluation.

As stated in the introduction, there has been progress in the institutionalization of evaluation in (non-)governmental systems, yet progress across and within countries has been uneven. Political pressures, incentives (e.g., short-termism), and belief systems can work against the creation of a culture of evaluation where evidence informs accountability, learning, and decision-making processes—a situation which is often exacerbated by high turnover in senior management and political leadership. Moreover, there can be competition between (often nascent) knowledge and oversight functions in government and the practice of evaluation, or competition between evaluative evidence and other sources of “evidence,” such as expert knowledge (sometimes politicized, often tacit); various manifestations of citizens' knowledge (e.g., as captured on social media platforms or opinion surveys); conventional and online media (including “fake news”); and so on. The purpose of evaluation training programs is not just to impart knowledge and skills about the processes and practices of evaluation, but, importantly, also about the context in which evaluations are produced and (hopefully) used. In other words, training is about not just how to do evaluation but also how to advocate for the role of evaluation and, if necessary, defend the need for (evaluative) evidence-based learning and accountability.

The role of IPDET within the GEI network.

IPDET was established as a stand-alone training program. In recent years, IPDET has become part of a broader network and strategy around evaluation capacity development in the framework of the GEI. Within that broader configuration, IPDET is positioned as the global training program, with increasing ties to other institutions in the network that also offer training on evaluation. IPDET has been tapping into the GEI network to attract new faculty as well as participants. A strategic leap forward would be to explore IPDET's potential to become GEI's global center of expertise on evaluation training (in the context of international development). This would imply not just delivering training, but also becoming a center for training coordination, curriculum development support, faculty sharing, and even accreditation. Working through the GEI network, IPDET could take evaluation training for evaluation stakeholders in the field of international development (especially those hailing from low- and middle-income countries) to the next level.

To conclude, as described in this article, many factors contributed to the success of the IPDET program, perhaps the most important being its ability to adapt to the evolving needs of different evaluation stakeholder audiences. After almost a quarter of a century, IPDET is poised to enter a new phase of training the next generation of evaluation practitioners in the field of international development across the globe. Informed adaptive management of the program will remain crucial. IPDET is one of Ray Rist's¹² greatest legacies. Building on past experience, the program is well positioned to take the next step and ensure that the legacy continues.

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¹² And Linda Morra Imas's.

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