# Towards an evaluability assessment of social plans and programs in Argentina. A study of 16 national initiatives

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**T**he economic growth that took place between 2003 and 2013 was accompanied by the government's active role in social matters and a sustained increase in social spending, which rose from 19% of GDP in 2003 to 32% in 2013. At this stage, there has been an improvement of the main social indicators, accompanied by the expansion of rights to historically excluded sectors. Today, the social plans and programs portfolio implemented by the national government benefits nearly one-fourth of the country's population and represents a significant fiscal effort. (Repetto 2013).

But are national social plans and programs under conditions to be evaluated in a credible and reliable way? Does their design include monitoring and evaluation elements? Is there reliable information available to assess the effective results of public policies? Is the vision of multiple actors taken into account in this evaluation of social effects? And lastly, are the necessary resources in place to ensure we can assess whether the objectives of these interventions have been accomplished or not? Without denying the efforts of public administration bodies in this sector, **it is important that both citizens and administrators can build informed judgments about the results of public policies.**

In order to assess whether it is possible to produce relevant data about the effectiveness of social policies in Argentina, 16 social policy programs were studied in an exploratory manner referring to five different capacities (1) the quality of the planning and design of intervention to achieve the desired effects; (2) the quality of the information system for the monitoring, production and archiving of information; (3) the planned evaluation strategy; (4) the strategy adopted by the actors to assure participation during the different stages of monitoring and evaluation, and (5) the resources allocated to carry out the evaluation. **The study shows that 43.75% of the programs in the sample are under conditions of high evaluability. Of these, more than half are implemented by the Ministry of Education and the remainder by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Federal Planning and Public Investment. 37.75% of the programs studied are under conditions of low evaluability. Of these, 66% receive government funding.**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

CIPPEC
Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth

## Introduction

It is important to monitor and evaluate social plans and programs because these practices produce useful information to improve the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of public policies. Furthermore, in a context in which civil society demands government results and accountability, monitoring and evaluation generate robust and reliable information about the performance and fulfillment of planned governmental objectives.

According to some, evaluation is so important that "there is no other area with a greater social impact than that of improving the ability of a program to perform rigorous evaluations" (Galiani).

In Latin America, there is valuable experience in designing and implementing monitoring and evaluation systems of social plans and programs. For example, the national governments of Mexico and Colombia promote, regulate, and coordinate the systematic evaluation of public policies. In **Mexico**, the objective of the National Council of the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL as it is abbreviated in Spanish)[1] is to regulate and coordinate the evaluation of the National Policy for Social Development. In **Colombia**, the Public Policy Evaluation Office - through the National System of Results Management and Evaluation (SINERGIA as it is abbreviated in Spanish) – measures and evaluates the management, execution, and impact of the main governmental programs and policies[2]. These bodies demonstrate a culture of evaluation led by the government itself.

<span style="color:purple">political iniciative</span>

<span style="color:purple">technical knowledge</span>

In this context, programs like "De Cero a siempre" [3](Colombia) and "70 y más" [4](Mexico) have information systems and evaluation strategies built around the guidelines of the government. This guarantees that the programs fulfill the minimum standards of evaluability.

**In Argentina there is no body analogous to those in Colombia and Mexico. Instead, monitoring and evaluation tasks depend on the political initiative and technical will of a program's management or on the demands of financial institutions.**

Thus, under such a system quality and technical rigor can vary greatly[5]. Therefore, it is worth asking ourselves if all social policies are under conditions to be evaluated in a reliable[6] way.

1 Created within the framework of the Social Development General Law (2004).
2 The tracing and evaluation system SINERGIA (created in 1994 and rooted in the requisite for making evaluations included in the constitution of 1991) is one of the strongest in Latin America (World Bank Independent Evaluations Group, 2007)
3 "From Zero Onward"
4 "70 and More"
5 The recent creation of the Public Policies Evaluation Program from the Central Office of the Cabinet is an important step towards the institutionalization of evaluation in national public administration.
6 Based on the definition by OCDE/DAC.

## What is evaluability? Why is it important to take it into account?

> Given that public policies are generated by the will of governments to attend to the problems of their citizens, if the programs can be evaluated it is easier to determine to what extent they are an appropriate strategy to solve these problems.

**Evaluability** can be defined as the degree to which the individual characteristics of the design of a plan or program affect the ability to provide an effective evaluation (Youtie, Bozeman y Shapira, 1998).

The **analysis of evaluability** is a strategic tool in the evaluation of public policies because, among other reasons[7]:

- It facilitates the identification of improvements in the design of the evaluation, the monitoring and evaluation matrix, and the plan or program itself.
- It allows for the collection of information of high strategic value so that the actors involved in the evaluation can define their course of action.
- It allows for the optimization of the program's budget and, above all, the portion allocated to evaluation, because it avoids large unsuitable or unnecessary investments and provides a justification based on concrete valuations of the expenses that must be incurred for the needs of the plan or program in question.
- It implies a contribution to the transparency and accountability.
- Its correct use legitimizes subsequent evaluation.

In those cases in which an in-depth evaluation is feasible, a complete analysis of evaluability will dictate the appropriate methodologies for each particular scenario[8] and will determine whether the eventual evaluation will facilitate the generation of relevant information, for example in the form of contributions to improve the efficiency of the program. When the analysis of evaluability yields negative results, it will serve to give recommendations about the modifications

7 Over Merino's basis(2007).
8 Some types of program evaluations are: needs evaluation, impact evaluation, and process evaluation.

required to make an evaluation feasible.

**In principle, any plan, program, or project can be evaluated. The choice between different technical scenarios to facilitate and implement a rigorous analysis is a political decision. This analysis will define the achievements and challenges of the initiative or theme in question.**

However, the scope and type of evaluation possible are determined by elements that are related, among other things, to the design of the intervention, the information systems and data collection carried out as part of the monitoring process during implementation, the available human and operative resources, the expectations and expected benefits of the participants and, in general, the attitude of those involved in the development of the public intervention under evaluation. In each case, the specific characteristics of these elements will determine the convenience of executing an evaluation.

From the analysis of five dimensions, this work analyzes to what extent a selection of social plans and programs, carried out on a national level, are under conditions to be evaluated:

1. **The quality of the design and planning of the intervention to achieve the desired effects.**

2. **The quality of the information system used to carry out the monitoring, production and archiving of information.**

3. **The evaluation strategy proposed in the formulation of the intervention.**

4. **The strategy adopted by actors to include participation during the monitoring and evaluation stages.**

5. **The actual resources allocated to the execution of the evaluation.**

An evaluability protocol was designed and used as an analysis tool, which allows for disaggregating and testing systematically the term in different relevant dimensions and indicators. For this, the evaluability protocol of "La Comunidad Foral de Navarra"[9] and the Checklist for Reviewing Scope of Work for Performance Evaluation from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), were considered. With these and other inputs, an analysis tool was adapted for the Argentinean context.

## Social Plans and Programs Analyzed

To carry out the evaluability analysis, 16 social policy programs were investigated in an exploratory manner. On one hand, this sample exhibits rich diversity, which can be seen in the wide range of funding sources, the various execution bodies and ministries involved, and the different levels of budget and coverage. On the other hand, all elements in the sample have in common the fact that they are social programs currently being implemented on a national scale.

Furthermore, all the considered programs have some type of program or information document that is linked to the central concepts of evaluability considered here. That is to say, the 16 programs are in a surveyable[10] condition because they have the necessary information to answer the questions included in the evaluability protocol.

The programs or plans that make up the sample are:

efectiveness

management

| | Plan/Program | Implementing Organization |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Programa de Mejoramiento de Barrios II (PROMEBA II)*1 | Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investment and Services |
| 2 | Programa Federal de Construcción de Viviendas - Techo Digno*2 | Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investment and Services |
| 3 | Plan Agua + Trabajo*3 | Ministry of Federal Planning, Public Investment and Services |
| 4 | Programa Jóvenes con Más y Mejor Trabajo*4 | Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security |
| 5 | Seguro de Capacitación y Empleo*5 | Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security |
| 6 | Plan Nacer*6 | Ministry of Health |
| 7 | Plan Federal "Incluir Salud"*7 | Ministry of Health |
| 8 | Programa Nacional de Salud Sexual y Procreación Responsable*8 | Ministry of Health |
| 9 | Programa Remediar Redes*9 | Ministry of Health |

| | Plan/Program | Implementing Organization |
|---|---|---|
| 10 | Programa de Educación Media y Formación para el Trabajo para Jóvenes Fase II*10 | Ministry of Education |
| 11 | Programa de Apoyo a la Política de Mejoramiento de la Equidad Educativa II (PROMEDU II)*11 | Ministry of Education |
| 12 | Programa de Mejoramiento de la Educación Rural*12 | Ministry of Education |
| 13 | Programa Conectar Igualdad*13 | Ministry of Education |
| 14 | Programa Ingreso Social con Trabajo*14 | Ministry of Social Development |
| 15 | Plan Nacional de Seguridad Alimentaria*15 | Ministry of Social Development |
| 16 | Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Local y Economía Social "Manos a la Obra"*16 | Ministry of Social Development |

*1: Neighborhood Improvement Program
*2: Federal Housing Construction Program – Sturdy Roof
*3: Water & Work Plan
*4: More and Better Jobs for Youth Program
*5: Training and Employment Security
*6: Birth Plan
*7: "Include Health" Federal Plan
*8: National Program for Sexual Health and Responsible Procreation
*9: Network Repair Program
*10: Program for Secondary Education and Training for Jobs for Youth Phase II
*11: Program to Support Policies on Improving Equity in Education
*12: Rural Education Improvement Program
*13: Connect Equality Program
*14: Social Income with Work Program
*15: National Food Safety Plan
*16: Plan for Local Development and Social Economy: Let´s Work!

design quality

access to information

## Results by dimensions

### 1. Quality of the design and planning of intervention

The first dimension analyzed answers questions about the diagnosis of problems which the initiative tries to solve and the objectives or desired results of the intervention.

81% of the programs carried out a diagnosis of the problems, but a smaller percentage (62%) identified the causes of the problems in question. 69% of the programs show problems that are quantifiable or measurable in some way and 65% define the baseline from which the intervention starts in the program documents.

100% of the programs analyzed explicitly define their objectives, responding to the detected needs and problems. Furthermore, 31% of interventions establish deadlines for achieving these objectives.

**Later, we will see that the dimensions of the quality of the design and planning of intervention influence the degree of evaluability that a program can reach in its other dimensions (quality of information, evaluation strategy, actors' strategy, and designated resources).**

'El Programa Conectar Igualdad'* (Ministry of Education) is one of the interventions that performed well in this dimension: it has a good diagnosis of the initial situation and a clear description of the objectives that must be achieved through the implemented activities.

*Connect Equality Program

### 2. Quality of the information system

This dimension gathers information about the indicators used, the sources of information established and the mechanisms of data collection.

**Of all the programs studied, 63% define a matrix of monitoring and evaluation, while 88% define indicators to systematically collect information about the evolution of the intervention and its activities.** The monitoring and evaluation matrices of 56% of the cases analyzed use impact indicators and 69% set the information sources that will be used to collect the different indicators.

Moreover, while 81% of the studied programs and plans define a procedure to review the information, only 44% specify when it should be implemented.

**It's expected that the recommendations arising from the evaluation will aid the improvement of management, although in practice this may be difficult. Therefore, it is necessary to work to ensure that the information expressed in the recommendations is used as an aid for this purpose.**

One of the programs that performed well in this area is 'El Programa de Educación Media y Formación para el Trabajo para Jóvenes Fase II'* (Ministry of Education): it has a matrix of monitoring and evaluation in which the relevant indicators, sources and procedures to obtain information are identified.

*Program for Secondary Education and Training for Jobs for Youth Phase II

## 3. Evaluation strategy

When analyzing the quality of the evaluation strategy of plans and programs, the following indicators are taken into account: type of strategy, purpose and scope of the strategy, the utilization of feedback and resources, the diffusion of findings and systematization of lessons learned.

**In 75% of the analyzed cases the planning of some type of evaluation strategy was observed, be it a mid-term review (56% of cases), final (44% of cases) or both types combined (44% of cases).**

In 75% of the cases the purpose of the evaluation was defined, but only in 38% of these cases were the evaluation questions that should be answered specified. In 75% of the analyzed programs some mechanism was provided for incorporating the recommendations of the evaluation into the management policy.

**One of the factors that strengthen evaluability of a program is that the necessity of evaluation is explicitly established from the design stage of the program: evidence shows that national plans that include periodic monitoring and evaluation from the planning stage have an increased capacity to coordinate themselves with other actors and produce synergy.**

'El Programa Remediar Redes'[1] and 'El Programa Mejoramiento de Barrios II' (PROMEBA II)[2] performed very well in terms of the quality of their evaluation strategies (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Federal Planning and Public Investment, respectively). Both define an evaluation strategy, its purposes and the questions that must be answered. Furthermore, the program documents delineate the dimensions (temporal, institutional, geographical, etc.) that will be taken into account in the evaluation and include plans to incorporate lessons learned from the evaluation.

[1]Network Repair Program

[2]Neighborhood Improvement Program

## 4. The actors' strategy

In this fourth dimension, it was asked if the actors involved in the evaluation were clearly identified and to what degree they were involved.

**Of the 16 programs analyzed, 44% carried out a preliminary analysis of the possibilities of participation of different actors in the evaluation process.**

The 'Programa de Apoyo a la Política de Mejoramiento de la Equidad Educativa II' (PROMEDU II)[1], of the Ministry of Education is one of the programs that performed well in this dimension. It identifies the actors involved in the intervention and plans for their participation in the development of the evaluations.

'Conectar Igualdad'[2] and 'El Programa Ingreso Social con Trabajo'[3] have planned a collaboration with national universities for the evaluation of the programs.

On the other hand, 'El Programa de Educación Media y Formación para el Trabajo para Jóvenes Fase II'[4] is considering developing participative self-evaluations for the educational bodies involved in intervention.

[1]Program to Support Policies on Improving Equity in Education

[2]Connect Equality

[3]Social Income with Work Program

[4]Program for Secondary Education and Training for Jobs for Youth Phase II

## 5. Resources allocated for the implementation of an evaluation strategy

actors

The fifth and final dimension is broken down into indicators of budget, time, and equipment, all of which are essential resources for carrying out an effective evaluation.

resources

N**one of the analyzed programs stood out in this dimension: only 37% of the programs and plans reviewed have a specific budget for carrying out activities of monitoring or evaluation** and, with the exception of the 'Programa Conectar Igualdad', this percentage is comprised of only plans or programs with international funding.

Of the programs in which specific funds are allocated for these activities, not one designates more than 5% of the total budget for evaluation activities.

## Some conclusions: evaluability performance

If we observe the general performance of the programs, 43.75% of the social programs and plans analyzed are under conditions of high evaluability, 18.75% of the sample registered conditions of average evaluability, and 37.75% are under conditions of poor evaluability.

The general average of evaluability of the

sample is 56%, but if each dimension of analysis is measured (graph1), the best dimension is the quality of the planning and design of intervention (80%). On average, the dimensions of information system, evaluation strategy and actors' strategy provide information to answer 57% of the questions in the protocol. The fifth dimension (resources allocated) provides far less information (21%).

### Graph 1.
### Evaluability performance of the sample size



Source: CIPPEC, based on evaluability protocol designed for this study
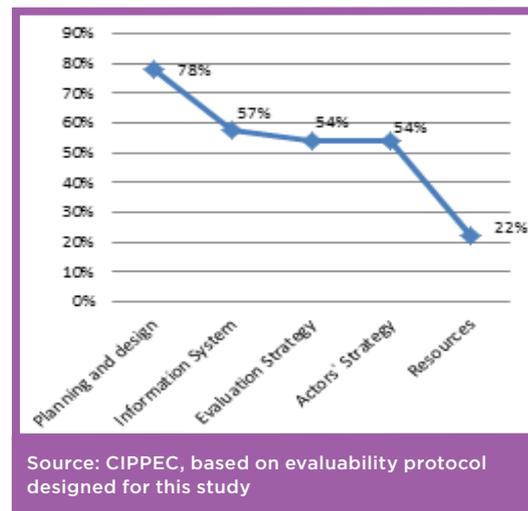
The average budget is another means through which the evaluability of social programs can be analyzed. Research reveals that **there is no clear correlation between average budget level and evaluability conditions.** There are interventions with high, middle, and low budgets, just as much in programs with high evaluability as those with low evaluability (graph 2).

### Graph 2.
### Evaluability matrix. Average budget



Source: CIPPEC, based on evaluability protocol designed for this study.
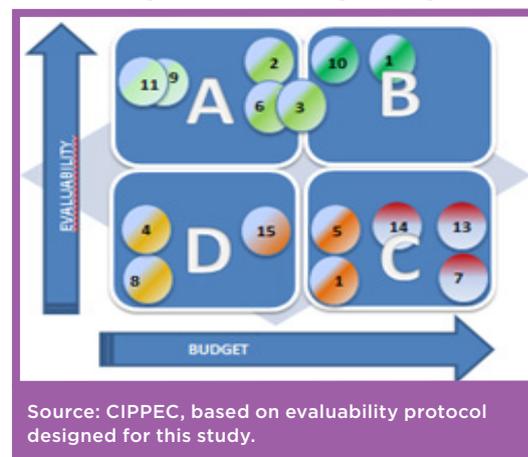
Graph 2 presents the matrix of the evaluability-budget relationship (designed by CIPPEC). This tool assigns a spatial location to each program or plan of the sample as a function of its evaluability level and average budget. Furthermore, it lets us detect the general distribution of the sample in terms of evaluability. The programs with high evaluability and a low budget for evaluation are located in **quadrant A**; those with high evaluability and a high budget in **quadrant B**; and those with a high budget and low evaluability in **quadrant C**. The programs with low levels of evaluability and a low budget are found in **quadrant D**. **In an ideal scenario, all programs should be distributed between quadrants A and B.**

Yet, if we consider the implementing body:

- More than half of the programs that are under conditions of high evaluability are implemented by the Ministry of Education, and the rest by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Federal Planning and Public Investment.
- The programs of medium evaluability are implemented by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Development.
- One third of the programs with low evaluability are implemented by the Ministry of Federal Planning and Public Investment; the rest by the Ministry of Social Development, Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security.

Throughout the research it was possible to identify some trends, but these findings don't allow us to reach a solid conclusion about the possible relation between the evaluability level of a program and the implementing body or ministry in which it was designed.

However, if we observe the performance by **funding source**, 50% of the programs with high evaluability are funded by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). All of the programs with average evaluability are funded by the government and, lastly, 33% of the programs with low evaluability are funded by the BIRF and the other 67% by the government.

Some considerations emerge from the analysis carried out and the contextual information collected:

- **The planning and design of an evaluation process always perform higher than the other dimensions of the analysis.**

- **The allocated resources and the actors' strategy are the dimensions with the lowest performance.**

- **There is not much information about the allocation of resources within the programs.**

- **Programs that assign a budget to monitoring and evaluation show a greater degree of evaluability, while those that don't show low evaluability.**

However, social policies are still not assessed in terms of effectiveness to determine to what extent the investments–whether financial, human or temporal resources–have facilitated or contributed to the resolution of problems such as access to educational, health and housing services, among others. In other words, it is too soon to determine to what extent these efforts will translate into effective improvements.

## Challenges in strengthening the evaluability of public policies in Argentina

The results of an evaluability analysis must not be confused with those of an evaluation because they have different consequences and can be used to improve; (1) the design of an evaluation; (2) the design of a monitoring and evaluation matrix, or (3) the design of a plan or a program.

An evaluability analysis such as that carried out here allows us to identify some improvements that could be implemented at three levels:

### Level 1: design of public policies:
- Promote the analysis of the evaluability of social programs as a means to strengthen the design, data collection and evaluation of the public policy at any point in its life cycle.
- Ensure the systematic inclusion of monitoring and evaluation matrices with indicators that are relevant and consistent across all interventions.
- Guarantee, incrementally, strategies for evaluation and participation of actors in all policy interventions.
- Strengthen the inclusion of specific budgets for monitoring and evaluation in all plans, programs and projects.

### Level 2: availability of public information about governmental plans and programs
- Guarantee the availability and accessibility of information about the planning and design of plans and programs through new technologies.
- Promote the inclusion of innovative methodologies that generate systemic, public and relevant information to strengthen the decision making process.
- Generate mechanisms for ensuring the use of results obtained from evaluations to improve the formulation and implementation of policies.

### Level 3: institutional context
- Develop minimum quality standards for the design, monitoring and evaluation of interventions.
- Strengthen a results-based approach to budgeting. This involves identifying the results to be achieved, the necessary procedures and those responsible for each action.
- Institutionalize a national evaluation system that is able to orient and establish political and technical rules that guarantee that the evaluability of public policies is at an appropriate level.

In short, strengthening the culture of evaluation facilitates the increase of knowledge and information about the governmental plans and programs available, the development of the technical capacities of officials and the strengthening of political will in each stage of management. This will work in conjunction with the establishment of an evaluation procedure as a common practice that should be included in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and post-intervention analysis of programs. **But it also implies counting on access to reliable national statistics that serve not only as a diagnosis, but also as a continuous reference for remaining improvements and challenges.**

## Annex: Description of the methodology used

This document is the result of an investigation that included: (1) the identification of the objectives of carrying out an evaluability analysis on national social plans and programs; (2) the selection of a sample for the analysis; (3) the collection, compilation and analysis of available documentation; (4) the development and implementation of an evaluability protocol; (5) dialogue with administrators and executers of the plans and programs under analysis; (6) the development of recommendations.

The evaluability conditions are addressed, on the one hand, through the application of the protocol and, on the other hand, are subject to the availability of information about the program, generated from strategies such as: requests for information, review of websites, requests for interviews and the realization of focus groups with key actors. For the construction of the protocol, five dimensions were taken into account:

a) Quality of the planning and design of intervention to achieve the desired results.

b) Quality of the information system for the monitoring, production, and archiving of evidence.

c) Evaluation strategy planned in the development of the intervention.

d) Strategy adopted by actors to encourage participation during the stages of monitoring and evaluation.

e) Resources allocated for carrying out an evaluation process.

The evaluability analysis took into account the performance of each social program in each dimension. For each program, the sum total of performance by dimension generated an evaluability level. The research set out to answer the question: Are all policies conditions to be evaluated? Not with a simple yes or no answer, but rather by considering the level of evaluability of a program or plan.

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