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Evolution of the National Evaluation System in India

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Abstract

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is now a mandatory activity in development sector for effective implementation of a program or a policy. India has had a central level evaluation office since 1952, and a countrywide spread of regional and state level evaluation organisations since the sixties. Over the last seven decades, initiatives for establishing national and state-level M & E systems have been taken several times and efforts are still on for building capacities and developing institutions for effective monitoring and evaluation. However, the instability due to changing leadership, changes in government, economic crisis, external pressures, etc. and policy flip-flops, have rendered these efforts ineffective in the long run, reversing previous accomplishments, at times. This paper addresses a gap in the literature on historic evolution of M&E in India by tracing the evolution of National Evaluation System (NES) in India in the past seven decades. The methodology used for this is content analysis of accessible literature (Planning Commission annual reports) to draw a timeline and highlight emerging similarities and the repetitive nature of events and activities. This helps to learn from the past, contributes to context-based literature on history of NES in Asia Pacific region, and offers insights to build resilient systems in future. To institutionalise evaluations, parliamentary mandate via policy action and deeper integration of evaluations into budget cycles and program approval processes is important.

Key Words: National Evaluation System, History of Evaluation, Timeline of Evaluation, Annual Reports, Institutionalisation

Introduction: Learning from the Past

The United Nations (UN) declared 2020-2030 as the 'Decade for Action' towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were launched in 2015, following up on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In support, the 'Decade of Evaluation for Action' campaign

was launched globally calling to improve national evaluation systems for effective achievement of SDGs (Eval4Action, 2020). The field of development evaluation is as old as development-aid, and has expanded since the 1960s (Furubo, 2019). However, evaluation as a profession is yet to mature despite efforts for over 50 years to build evaluation capacities and systems; which

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is potentially attributable to inadequate learning from history. Understanding the history of programme evaluation can provide insights into how and why the field evolved as it did (Madaus & Stufflebeam, 2000).

This paper juxtaposes the changes in the national evaluation system in India with global trends and national events to capture the peculiar journey of India. The Program Evaluation Office (PEO) in erstwhile Planning Commission (PC) was set up in October 1952 as the national evaluation office (PEO, 1978) and in the next two decades focused on building capacities at national and sub-national level. These efforts were regularly repeated, but India's monitoring and evaluation system is considered a work in progress (Mehrotra, 2013). The documentation of changes leading to the present situation, through reports, news articles, research articles, etc., are rare in India. A timeline comparison illustrates India's journey from a global leader in development evaluation to a non-formalised, evolving/ work in progress country in context of national evaluation policy, practices, systems, and capacities (Mehrotra, 2013; Rosenstein, 2015). This study describes the M & E journey of India and highlights the patterns in it, but stops short of identifying causes behind it, which needs its separate analysis and paper.

Documentation of History of Evaluation

An authoritative source for the international history of programme evaluation is a book chapter by Madaus and Stufflebeam (2000, p. 3-8) that divides past 170 years into six ages of evaluation with a west-centric

perspective evident in other sources as well (Hogan, 2007; Vedung, 2010; Toscano, 2013; Furubo, 2019; Mouton, 2010). These histories focus on evaluation as a sector, its research methodologies, evaluation use, and formalisation of evaluation as a profession. Vedung (2010) proposes four waves corresponding to the seven ages, based on the nature of evaluations and public sector governance doctrines in each period. This literature-based global understanding is the foundation for subsequent historic documentation in this study, which focuses on India as opposed to the West.

Brief documentation of history of evaluation in India is available in Mehrotra (2013), Chandrasekar (2015) and Gayithri (2019, p. 175-185). The third academic on the list built on the previous two, comparing flaws in India's M&E system to those in Canada. Apart from these, there is no published documentation of history of evaluation in India that depends on existing historical artifacts. This paper uses annual reports (ARs) of the PC and National Institute for Transforming India (NITI Aayog), which contain details on the central evaluation office attached to these institutes, to trace the evolution of evaluation system at the central level. These documents have been unutilised in prior researches, especially from an M&E systems perspective.

Method of Analysis

Two timelines are prepared by reviewing literature on history of evaluation at global-level (Figure 1) and in India (Figure 2), including important related events. The Indian timeline contains information from available ARs of the PC (and NITI Aayog). No ARs from year 1950 to 1970 were

accessible, information from this period is added from a conference report (PEO, 1978). The Emergency period (1974-77) ARs are also not available, and only summary reports from 1995-1999 were provided, with no information about PEO. From 1970 to 2022, 46 ARs with information about PEO (and Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office or DMEO) were tabulated³ on various parameters including the prominence in the report, content patterns, activities, trainings, evaluation studies conducted, officials, number of evaluation reports published, etc. Other documents by PEO, conference reports, and news articles are used to complete the analysis. The emerging patterns are reported parameter wise.

Documentation of Past

Global History of Evaluation

The six ages by Madaus and Stufflebeam (2000) are shown in Figure 1 along with other important events. Vedung (2010), while describing his four waves, raised concerns about the field retreating into post-positivistic practices under the influence of funding agencies, creating little value. This has ushered in the fifth wave of *decolonising evaluations*; global conversations around it are picking up, where the focus is on context specificity and relevance of evaluation standards, methods, and measurements (JMDE, 2022).

In the 21st century, there is a collaborative effort to engage all stakeholders in the evaluation field to build capacities, strengthen national systems, advocate evaluations for attaining SDGs, etc.

This is being termed as the seventh *Age of Consolidation and Engagement* (2000-current) in this paper. In the timeline in Figure 1, major global events that affected program evaluation as a discipline, major evaluation related events, and formation of evaluation agencies are depicted. It shows that activities globally picked up during the 1970s, institutions were created in the 1980s-1990s, and global engagements increased after 2000.

The UN resolved in 2014 to “build capacity for the evaluation of development activities at the country level” in order to promote M&E usage in fulfilling the SDGs. 2015 was declared the International Year of Evaluation and the Global Evaluation Agenda 2016-2020 was endorsed by governments, parliaments, civil society, and academia (EvalPartners, 2016). This was the first long-term global vision for evaluation developed collaboratively and to strengthen the evaluation systems (EvalPartners, 2016).

Important multilateral agencies established their evaluation offices in the 1970s-80s and consolidated their functions in 1990s-2000s. The United Nations Evaluation Group was formed in January 1984 as ‘Inter-Agency Working Group on Evaluation’ connecting evaluation units of all UN agencies, and renamed UNEG in 2003 (UNEG Secretariat, 2008). The World Bank project evaluations began in 1970 through the Operations Evaluation Unit, renamed Operations Evaluation Department in 1973 after the US General Accounting Officer started to pressure the Bank for evaluations (Willoughby, 2003). In 2006, evaluation units in all the World Bank institutions integrated into the Independent Evaluation Group which reports to the Executive Board (IEG, 2006).

³ Table provided as a separate file, to be provided as a web only resource

The International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation was founded in 2003, as a collective representing international, regional, national, and sub-national voluntary organisations of professional evaluators (VOPEs) (IOCE, 2018). The year 2002 saw the formation of the International Development Evaluation Association, a global association for development evaluators (IDEAS, 2018). EvalPartners was established by UNICEF and IOCE (EvalPartners, 2017),

which created EvalYouth, EvalGender, EvalIndigenous, etc. to focus on specific communities.

The American Evaluation Association and the European Evaluation Society were established in 1986 and 1992 respectively. More VOPEs formed in different regions (AFrEA - 1999, APEA - 2012, etc.) and countries (AES - 2001, ECOI - 2015, etc.) to bring together leading evaluation practitioners and academicians and collaborate on formalising the field.

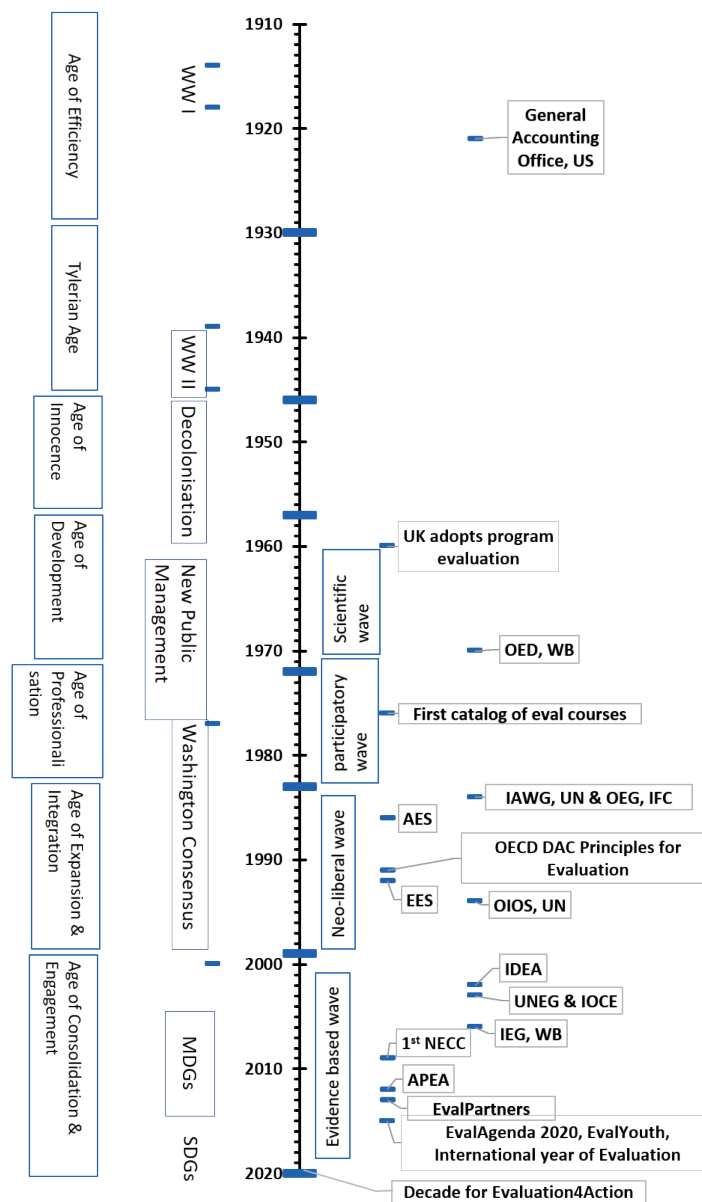


Figure 1: Global Evaluation Timeline

History of Evaluation in India

Following an overview of the history of evaluation on a global scale, the following section of this study examines the evolution of evaluation in India. As a parallel to the global ages and waves, this paper proposes four phases in the history of development evaluation in India that differ in how the Indian evaluation system was viewed by the bureaucracy, drawing on Mehrotra (2013) and Chandrasekhar (2015). The beginning and ending years of each phase correspond to defining PEO events. These and other events form the base of the timeline in Figure 2.

Planned growth phase 1952-1972

The PC was established in March 1950 and the PEO in 1952 (Planning Commission, 1987), during the first five-year plan (FYP) to evaluate development programs and bring out their successes and failures. This was the Age of Innocence in the West, when evaluation and accountability were not prioritised. PEO activities expanded till the fourth FYP; by the late 1960s, over twenty state evaluation organisations (SEOs) were set up under the State Planning Departments (PEO, 1978). The SEOs were established as either evaluation division in the Directorate of Economics and Statistics (or similar directorates), or as a separate evaluation directorate, but generally under the Planning Department of the States (PEO, 1978). These state-level entities under State Planning Departments are designated SEOs in PEO literature.

PEO rendered technical advice and recommended financial assistance to strengthen evaluation machineries in the States (Planning Commission, 1972). The scope of PEO extended to schemes and

programmes in health, agriculture and cooperation, rural industries, fisheries, family welfare, rural development, rural electrification, public distribution system, tribal development, social forestry, and Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) (PEO, 1978). In the 1950s, evaluation was a regular item in the annual conference of community development (PEO, 1978).

PEO had a three-tiered organisational structure, with its headquarters in New Delhi, three Regional Evaluation Offices (REOs) and 20 Project Evaluation Offices. The lowest tiers were considered as field offices to conduct field work and coordinate with the SEOs (Chandrasekar, 2015). Over time, the total number of evaluation offices (in the three tiers and SEOs) swelled to over 40, with a combined workforce of over 700 (PEO, 1978). PEO had relative autonomy as its lower offices and the officers of the SEOs reported to the Director, PEO. Discussions on Evaluation reports were an important part of the annual conference of State Development Commissioners, enabling follow up actions (Mehrotra, 2013).

Contraction phase 1973-1995

Following a period of strong, centralised, and planned growth, India saw the turbulence of Emergency (Agrawal, 2018), which was followed by the first non-Congress central administration in the 1970s. Simultaneously, development aid and lending organisations advocated for the Washington reforms (Naim, 1999). The central planning machinery and the economy deteriorated, culminating in the 1991 economic reforms (Srivastava V. K., 2021).

Once the First Administrative Reforms Commission advocated narrowing the scope of PC in the 1970s, PEO entered a phase of decline and neglect. While its work expanded to include urban areas, its evaluations were limited to operational, financial, and administrative, rather than the design and impact of programs (Mehrotra, 2013). Quick studies were recommended to be timely and useful. PEO was headed by generalists compared to earlier specialist academicians (Mehrotra, 2013). Also, the tabulation of ARs shows that many a times the adviser position was given as an additional charge to other officials, reducing focus on evaluation related activities.

In April 1973, PEO functions merged with PC and it reduced to a division (Chandrasekar, 2015). Field offices dropped to 27 by 1980 following recommendations of the Staff Inspection Unit of the Ministry of Finance (Mehrotra, 2013). PEO received inadequate financing in subsequent FYPs, and fleeting mentions. This hampered the quality and timeliness of its evaluations, which received less importance by the concerned ministry/ department (M/D). This reduced their use, which further reduced the number of studies and funding at PEO (Chandrasekar, 2015). In 1994, the overall sanctioned personnel strength of central and state evaluation offices was about 1,048 (PEO, 1995).

Despite attempts to revitalise the evaluation machinery (Planning Commission, 1973), conferences of heads of SEOs (PEO, 1978; PEO, 1987; Planning Commission, 1988), committees (Planning Commission, 1978), and other initiatives, no significant changes occurred, and PEO received insufficient recognition for its work (Chandrasekar, 2015).

Resurgence phase (1995-2013)

During this period, coalition governments became common and the country opened up to the world post economic liberalisation in 1991. Privatisation, hiring of consultants, outsourcing of activities, etc. became acceptable in line with the NPM paradigm, reflected in PEO as well.

In 1995, a professional economist was appointed as the head of PEO, serving till 2005 (Mehrotra, 2013; DESI, 2021). Evaluation demand resurged in the late 1990s, when PC was involved in design and implementation of social safety net programs to counter the adverse effects of economic reforms (PEO, 2001). Unfortunately, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act 2003 kept the evaluation offices understaffed. The number of field offices reduced to 15 and the total strength was below 120 (Mehrotra, 2013). With the General Financial Rules (GFR) 2005 laying out guidelines for outsourcing of services (Department of Expenditure, 2005), more studies were being outsourced to social science research institutes (Chandrasekar, 2015). From the ninth FYP onwards, PEO involved M/Ds and subject matter experts to ensure actions were taken based on its reports (Planning Commission, 2006).

The 11th FYP 2007-2012, emphasised the development of online MISs for flagship schemes (Mehrotra, 2012). The Second Administrative Reforms Commission and the Sixth Pay Commission emphasised both the importance of performance management systems (Trivedi, 2017) and M&E in the context of e-governance and citizen centric administration, including robust MIS systems and external impact

evaluations (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2009). The Performance Management Division implemented outcome budgeting in 2007-08, followed by Results Framework Documents (RFDs) in 2009, and the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation System (PMES) at the cabinet secretariat (Trivedi, 2017). The Prime Minister's Office established a Delivery Monitoring Unit (PMO, 2014). The Strengthening Evaluation Capacity scheme was introduced in 2006-07 to finance PEO, but it did not address administrative and personnel issues (Chandrasekar, 2015), leaving only 7 regional and 8 project offices functional in 2012 (PEO, 2012).

This period saw the formation of MIS for flagship government programs to monitor the relations between inputs, outputs and outcomes as these accounted for substantial component of public budget expenditure (Mehrotra, 2012). During this phase of resurgence in demand for evaluation activities, M&E functions were mixed up with MIS data while evaluations were employed for verification rather than for learning. At the same time, the PEO's plight remained unresolved, studies were underutilised, and outsourcing to private institutions was implemented without a defined policy, all of which contributed to PEO's stagnation. (Chandrasekar, 2015).

In 2012, the SEOs were either cells/divisions under some Directorate or separate Directorates in the State Planning Departments, mostly retaining their format since they were first established almost 50 years ago and operating in collaboration with the PEO (Institute for Human Development, 2012).

New institutions and frameworks phase (2013-current)

Around 2012, the second United Progressive Alliance government proposed greater accountability measures in response to corruption charges (Ganguly, 2014), poor governance, failure to meet Millennium Development Goals (Pillalamarri, 2014), and other issues. In 2013-14, in addition to the 80 M/Ds, their 800 autonomous organisations/subordinate offices/ attached offices and 16 of the 35 States and Union Territories also prepared RFDs. (Kamensky, 2013).

During the 12th FYP, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) was founded, proposing evaluations by institutions and researchers selected via competitive bidding (Chandrasekar, 2015). While the IEO was announced, alongside the PMES initiative in 2009 and founded in November 2010, its notification was released in July 2011. It was formally launched in August 2013 and commenced operations in February 2014 (NITI Aayog, 2015). Originally intended to be a Director General-led, PC-funded independent governance unit, the IEO became an attached office under PC like the PEO (Planning Commission, 2011). The matters related to IEO were defined under allocation of business rules under PC (Planning Commission, 2013).

With regime shift and dissolution of the PC in 2014, PEO and IEO merged into DMEO in September 2015 (Loksabha, 2017). In 2017, field offices were closed and all personnel were attached to DMEO in New Delhi (Indian Express, 2017). Since the PMO replaced the PMES with the Pragati dashboard for improved execution (The Economic Times, 2015),

opportunities for evaluations based on the RFDs prepared by the ministries were lost. In 2019, a full time DG was appointed at DMEO; it expanded its activities, partnerships, and efforts to strengthen the national evaluation system (DMEO, 2021).

When examining the websites of SEOs in 2019, the authors found that their practices had remained mostly unaltered from the previous years. DMEO launched a study of SEOs in 2021 (DMEO, 2021), however the findings have not yet been made available to the public. This report on the assessment of evaluation infrastructure in states will provide information regarding the status of these offices as of 2022.

Patterns in Evolution of PEO

Selective memory biases do not impact PC and NITI Aayog ARs, which report year-to-year activities, changes, accomplishments, and so on. ARs were tabulated with the help of pertinent information from a particular year to complement the existing literature. This section presents trends in the development of the Indian M&E system based on the table (<https://bit.ly/40VL1e0>). Here, patterns are established by referencing different time periods; the common thread and its implications are then delineated.

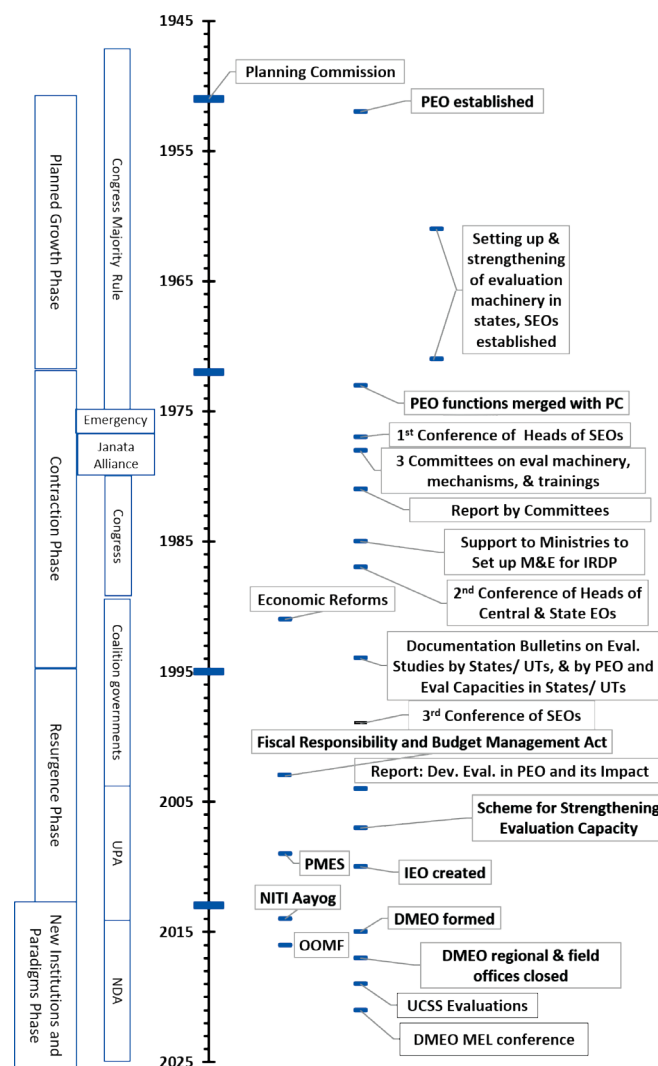


Figure 2: Evaluation timeline in India

Content on PEO in AR

PEO was bundled with other PC efforts in the ARs until 1978, but had its own chapter in AR 79-80, with a detailed background note, when Dr. SM Shah was Chief, PEO. After NITI Aayog was founded, DMEO was assigned to the ARs' activities' chapter, similar to PEO's status before 1978. This can be inferred as to reflect its reduced independence, and placement as an attached office under NITI Aayog (DMEO, 2021). Again, the number of pages devoted to M&E increased, documenting the flurry of activity since 2019 (NITI Aayog, 2021). ARs from 1988 to 1995 mention PEO functions; ARs from 2000 to 2009 feature a 10-page PEO chapter, compared to 4-5 pages earlier. The structure of chapter/ section on PEO (DMEO), its content, and pages devoted to it have changed regularly, which can be correlated to change in the advisers. A question arises whether the change in structure reflects the efforts of full-time advisers to strengthen the system, which may not have continued after their exit.

Strengthening evaluation systems

During the third and fourth FYP period (1961-74), support to schemes for setting up & strengthening of evaluation machinery in States was provided by PEO. A working group on evaluation was set up in 1960 (PEO, 1978), a taskforce on Evaluation to reorganise & strengthen evaluation machinery in States/ UTs & CPEO was set up in 1972-73. The efforts were halted during the Emergency period, after which the Janata alliance government showed interest in reviewing the evaluation machinery and improving it, and three committees were formed

in 1977 for reviewing existing evaluation mechanisms, for strengthening them, and for training for evaluation (Planning Commission, 1980). In 1978, a total of 700 people worked across the evaluation organisations (EOs) but leaders at PC, considered PEO to be unsuccessful and lacking in expertise, especially in the social sciences (PEO, 1978).

The first two committees submitted a combined report in April 1980; the third had submitted in October 1979, but according to ARs till 1983-84, the recommendations were under consideration, while the following ARs do not mention the reports or any action on them. The regime change in 1981 side-lined the recommendations. PEO undertook three types of evaluations during this phase: quick evaluation of ongoing programs for feedback, joint evaluation studies by CPEO and SEOs, and evaluation of externally aided projects (Planning Commission, 1982).

In 1994, a status report on status of evaluation in states was prepared (PEO, 1995). During the Ninth Five-year Plan, it was noted that evaluation needs to be strengthened; a working group on "Strengthening M&E System for Social Sector Development schemes" submitted its report in 2004-05. In 2006, central plan scheme "Strengthening evaluation capacity in government" was introduced with a budget of Rs. 8.55 crores to develop evaluation capacity, databases, and SEOs, and to make evaluation reports meaningful, timely, and informative by using statistical software and upgrading computer hardware (Planning Commission, 2006).

From 2009 to 2015, several initiatives including RFD, PMES, and IEO culminated

in the creation of DMEO. As indicated in AR 2020-21, DMEO has institutionalised and promoted evaluations, developed partnerships, and focused on capacity development beginning in 2019. (NITI Aayog, 2021). Thus, it is evident that India has endeavoured to develop its national evaluation system every few years but without consistency.

Use of computers

From 1965 till 1985-86, PEO administratively contained the computer centre or computer services division of PC, PEO chapters in ARs had a separate section on computer services for the PC. In the 1986-87 AR, computer services division was omitted from PEO chapter, and made a comeback in 1987-88 report as a separate activity under the Adviser, Monitoring and Information. In the next report, it is mentioned that this centre was merged with the National Informatics Centre, when NIC was transferred to PC in 1988 (Planning Commission, 1988). In the times when use of computers was not common in governance, and was limited to statistical data analysis, PEO was using computers regularly for its work and supporting other M/Ds, as noted in multiple ARs. In the early 2000s, PEO conducted computer training for all SEOs (Planning Commission, 2001).

Uploading of evaluation reports to websites

In the mid-2000s, PEO assisted SEOs to set up websites, through the central plan scheme started in 2006. All reports of PEO were digitised and uploaded to the PC website. As the REOs and project evaluation offices worked as field offices

of PEO, they did not have own websites or publications. Following the PEO's example, the SEOs began publishing their reports on the websites of their respective state planning departments. PEO was a forerunner in the use of computers and uploading all evaluation study reports online, and DMEO's M&E studies guidelines mention that studies will be uploaded on its website (DMEO, 2021). As is evident from their websites, though, not all SEOs have recent studies uploaded on or updated websites. Since the authors conducted this research in 2020–2021, certain SEO sites' current states may have changed.

Evaluation conferences

On July 7-8, 1987, the second meeting of the heads of central and state EOs convened to address the role of special research institutes, the nature of cooperation between EOs, the Central Statistical Office, and State Directorates of Economics & Statistics in creating evaluation studies, as well as shortcomings in functioning and corrective actions for CPEO and SEO (PEO, 1987).

PEO hosted large conferences, which included representatives from CPEO, REO, and SEO, in addition to their regular seminars/workshops on specialised evaluation reports centred on their techniques and training sessions regarding data collection. These brought together all SEOs and other stakeholders to deliberate on status of PEO and SEO, strengthening of evaluation machinery, training for evaluation, follow up of findings of studies, coordination between the Centre and states, among other things. The first conference of the heads of SEOs was organised by PEO on 14-15 November

1977 in New Delhi (PEO, 1978). On 7-8 July 1987, the second conference of heads of central and state EOs convened to address the role of special research institutions, the nature of collaboration between EOs, the Central Statistical Office, and the State Directorates of Economics & Statistics in designing evaluation studies, as well as deficiencies in functioning and remedial measures for CPEO and SEO (PEO, 1987). On July 28, 1999, a third conference was organised (PEO, 2000). A workshop was held on 25-26 July 2007 focusing on improving evaluation quality (Planning Commission, 2008). Recently, DMEO held conferences in 2021 and 2022 (DMEO, 2022) involving all SEOs and other stakeholders. Every decade has seen a national evaluation conference, but without follow-ups or updates on action items.

Evaluation training

PEO regularly engaged with SEOs and trained senior officers and junior staff at SEOs, CPEO and REOs; these training sessions were held at different locations across the country, including New Delhi, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad, and Lucknow. A primary duty of PEO was to train Indian Economics Services officials in evaluation methods and tools and there were instances of foreign officers being trained by PEO during 80s (Planning Commission, 1984; Planning Commission, 1988). In response to renewed interest, DMEO is training state level senior officials, staff of SEOs and young professionals (DMEO, 2022).

Evaluation reports output

A graph of year-wise evaluation studies published by PEO is given in Figure

3. From 1954 to 2001, the number of studies is based on a list available on the archived website (Planning Commission, 2019). For 2001 onwards, the number was created from information in the ARs. Evaluation studies averaged five per year during the planned expansion phase. This dropped to an average of three during the contraction period, before rebounding to four or five during the resurgence phase. The trend reversed at the commencement of the current phase, followed by a rise to between six and seven over the last four years. Evaluation study output has remained stable despite delays and issues regarding evaluation usage.

Evaluation advisory committees

In 1978, several states reported that their evaluation committees were dysfunctional or meeting sporadically, as detailed in the first conference report (PEO, 1978). The 1984-85 report specifies a technical advisory committee for each PEO evaluation. The AR 1994-95 mentions that the evaluation advisory committee for PEO evaluation studies was constituted for the 'first time' in March 1994. However, given that SEOs already had advisory committees, it is safe to assume that PEO had an evaluation advisory committee before this, especially in its growth phase. In 2000, the evaluation advisory committee included experts from PC, non-government organisations, and academic institutions. In the 2010-11 AR, a consultancy evaluation cum monitoring committee was mentioned along with a list of meetings and studies presented to it. NITI Aayog's 2015-16 Annual Report mentions evaluation monitoring committees for each DMEO study. In June 2021, DMEO established

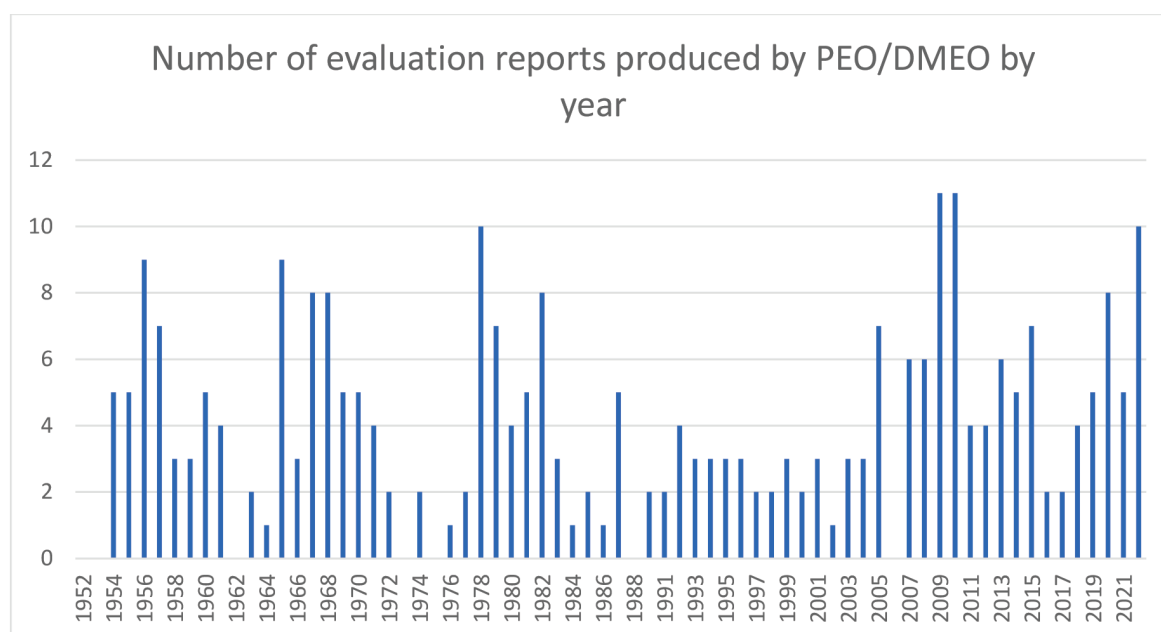


Figure 3: Evaluation Reports published annually by PEO/DMEO

the development evaluation advisory committee (NITI Aayog, 2021). The PEO (or DMEO) had institutional mechanisms to prepare plans for evaluation studies and follow up on their use through the evaluation advisory committees headed by senior secretaries, and it enforced a parallel system on the SEOs as well. Separate technical committees specific for each study involving subject experts and representatives from respective M/Ds were also common. The committees have been regularly reconstituted after becoming defunct, showing some limitations in the way they have been institutionalised every time.

Outsourcing evaluations

The 1982-83 AR lists grants-in-aid provided to institutions for research and evaluation. Although similar lists are absent in earlier reports, they are available in later reports showing that agencies other than EOs are involved in evaluations for PC. Such third-party evaluations over the years are not

listed as PEO publications. During 1983-86, support was planned and provided to M/Ds to set up their M & E systems for programs under Integrated Rural Development Program. This started the shift away from PEO towards M/D level M&E. While this reduced the load on PEO, it also compromised the independence of evaluation findings. Mid-90s saw the start of outsourcing of evaluation studies to consulting firms, as part of the global neo-liberal wave pushing for privatization and contracting out (Vedung, 2010). This further increased with the GFR 2005 laying out guidelines for new areas of governance previously not included in GFR 1963, including externally aided projects, government guarantees, engagement of consultants, outsourcing of services, etc. (Department of Expenditure, 2004).

Conclusions

Comparing the international timeline of evaluation with the Indian timeline, one notes that India was a forerunner in institutionalising evaluation before most

western countries. This is in contrast to many countries institutionalising evaluation in the Age of expansion and integration, with a push from multilateral aid agencies and the NPM paradigm. Not only did India establish a strong central setup, but also decentralised evaluation by taking it to every State and Union Territory and regularly engaged with them in the 1970s, when globally evaluation functions were just being institutionalised even by multilateral agencies. Unfortunately, India lost two decades till the 90s, when the neo-liberal wave of institutionalisation led to resurgence in evaluation demand and its institutionalisation.

As described in the previous section, the country saw repeated attempts at strengthening evaluation systems, organisation of conferences every decade to connect with States, reformation of evaluation advisory committees for better planning and use of evaluations, etc. But despite all these activities, due to changing leadership, reduced funding, embargo on staff hiring, limiting scale of activities, commissioning of studies by individual M/Ds, outsourcing of studies, etc. evaluation systems in India didn't mature and institutionalise.

Institutionalisation has not been achieved in India despite the ongoing emphasis on strengthening evaluation. This is because neither a national evaluation policy with Parliament's mandate nor an independent evaluation agency with authority comparable to that of India's Comptroller and Auditor General have been established. It is hypothesised that despite the best efforts of evaluation champions at PC (or NITI Aayog), attempts to build the evaluation machinery didn't continue at the same pace following

their departure, as seen by the cyclic spates of activity and inactivity (Gayithri, 2019). From the experience of other countries in the region, we know that the sustained work by champions within the Government (parliamentarians and bureaucrats) is important for strengthening evaluation systems. The countries where a Parliamentarians Forum for Evaluation was set up and kept active in the last decade saw formalisation of their evaluation systems (Diwakar, De Mel, & Samarsinghe, 2021). However, this is not the case in India. The lack of legal backing is compounded by the positioning of the PEO (or DMEO) as an attached office of PC (or NITI Aayog) (DMEO, 2021). Evaluation is linked to performance-based management and outcome-based expenditure globally; hence many countries establish evaluation offices under the Ministry of Finance. In India, the MoF mandates evaluations through a government order (Dept of Expenditure, 2016). It had initiated an outcome-based budgeting via RFD, which is now the Output- Outcome Monitoring Framework (OOMF), but the MoF still hasn't anchored the evaluation system. This shift from RFD to OOMF is another example of repeated efforts. RFD was first discontinued (Trivedi, 2017); then two years on OOMF was introduced without any reference to the previous efforts in the preface to the first OOMF document published in 2019 (Dept of Expenditure, 2019).

As seen by the emerging patterns presented in the preceding section, the Indian evaluation system lacks institutional memory and continuity. The PEO to DMEO transition could have been a process of moulting to shed encumbrances of a legacy organisation, formed in a different era. Instead, it disowned its legacy and

disregarded its accomplishments. The crumbling PEO may have had to be dismantled, but lessons learned from its demise may have helped build a more stable organisation in its place. It is customary in India, according to Gayithri (2019), to altogether abandon an existing institution and framework and replace it with new ones. Trivedi (2017) also discusses how the prevailing PMES and RFD system atrophied after a regime and systems shift. Over the last seven decades, we have failed to use past experiences to strengthen the system; regular activities were ignored before being revived. This issue affects the evaluation advisory committees, training sessions, evaluation report output, and conferences listed in the preceding section.

Other Asia Pacific countries, have institutionalised evaluations by adopting a National Evaluation Policy (NEP) (Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Australia) or legalising it through constitution (Nepal) or a parliamentary act (Japan) (Diwakar, De Mel, Samarsinghe, Liyanagamage, Mahmodi, & Kalugampitiya, 2022). According to Trivedi, enshrining a system in law protects its longevity across government changes and permits efforts to continue. The central role and need of NEP in India to standardising evaluations, especially to achieve the SDGs, has been stressed elsewhere (Srivastava, 2018).

DMEQ is currently leading the efforts to strengthen the Indian evaluation system

using a multi-pronged approach that includes networking, capacity building, standardisation, stakeholder involvement, evaluation plans, etc. This paper identifies patterns from the past to point out that the unending project of institutionalisation of evaluation in India has some missing ingredients, such as, a strong national evaluation policy and ownership by other stakeholders, which can help India regain its prominent place at the global level in evaluation. The primary contribution of this research is the detailed documenting and division of the history of M&E in India into distinct phases. This paper prepared the ground work for future research capturing insights from previous and present officials and other stakeholders associated with the M&E system in India, which has not yet been attempted due to dearth of prior research in this field in the country.

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Declaration of conflicting interest statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Table 1: Tabulation of PEO related content from PC ARs

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
1951-1971		Annual Reports not available for this 20-year period.			
1971-72	4 / 44		1 for SEOs		Support to schemes for setting up & strengthening of evaluation machinery in States
1972-73	4 / 65		1 for SEOs		Task force on Evaluation - Reorganise & strengthen evaluation machineries in States/UTs & CPEO
1977-78	4 / 55	1 st Conference of heads of SEOs		Chief, Dr S. M. Shah	3 committees <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review committee to examine existing evaluation mechanism in states 2. Committee for strengthening evaluation machinery combined report of 1&2 in April 1980 3. Committee for training for evaluation report submitted in Oct 1979
1979-80	4 / 32		1 for SEOs		
1980-81	4 / 35		1 for sr. officers in CPEO & SEO; 1 for supervisory staff		Objectives of computer division - <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. computational and data processing for PC 2. Computational and data processing for Govt. depts. And research institutions 3. MIS development 4. Trainings of PC personnel 5. Sixth plan analysis - I/O models 6. data processing of PEO surveys
1981-82	3 / 29	3	2		3 Types of evaluation studies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. quick evaluation studies of ongoing programs for feedback 2. Joint evaluation studies by CPEO and SEOs 3. Evaluation of externally aided projects Strengthening Evaluation Machinery report - examined by committee

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
					of advisors of PC and they recommended that PEO should evaluate beneficiary-oriented programs in rural and urban
1982-83	3 / 42	2	1 for 52 IES		
1983-84	3 / 53	3	1 for PEO staff; 1 for 30 IES by DoP&AR, & 2 Indonesian govt officials by FAO	Adviser evaluation vacant, Member Prof A. M. Khusro	Documentation of Evaluation studies related to irrigation and agriculture - a meta-review? Next year planning - proposed taking up evaluation studies from M/Ds for deciding future program of studies Organisation chart of PC given for first time
1984-85	6 / 70	1	1 for SEO, PEO staff; 1 for 32 IES, 3 from CSO	Adviser G. P. Kapur, Member Dr Raja J. Chelliah	Technical Advisory committee for each evaluation SEM mention gone
1985-86	4 / 67		3 for SEO staff; 1 for 26 IES		Ministries supported to set up M&E for IRDP PEO officials go to international events
1986-87	3 / 71		1 for SEO staff 12 IES deputed by Dept of Econ. Affairs 2 from Stats & survey div, PC	Adviser G. P. Kapur, Member Dr Raja J. Chelliah	PEO officials go to international events
1987-88	3 /100	2 nd Conf July 1987 - PEO, SEO heads	Jr. Cert. in Statistics with Central Statistics Organisation 2 batches of IES, 2 Afghanistan officers as UN fellows	Adviser evaluation under member Dr Raja J. Chelliah	Second Conference of the Heads of the Central and State Evaluation Organisations held in July, 1987; discussed on a) role of Special research institutions b) nature of collaboration between EO, central statistical organisation, State Directorates of Economics & statistics in designing evaluation studies c) deficiencies in functioning and remedial measures for CPEO and SEO

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
					This report attaches list of grant in aid provided to institutions for conducting research and evaluation studies. It is clear that this is a regular phenomenon, as evident from earlier reports. So agencies other than EOs are involved in evaluations for PC and must have generated hundreds of such reports
1988-89	3 / 96		Jr. Cert. in Statistics with CSO 2 batches of IES	Adviser post vacant A. K. Saikia in charge, Raja J. Chelliah Member	Page 92-93 missing from report from PEO chapter The Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi organised a Diploma Course in Investment Planning and Project Evaluation
1989-90	2 / 109			A. K. Saikia in charge, member L. C. Jain	No details of trainings, workshops, adviser post is still vacant
1991-92	3 / 100	2-day meet of REOs for QS, Joint evaluation related 2-day meeting in TN	1	Adviser Dr B. N. Sahay	The main function of the PEO is to undertake evaluation studies which encompass: (i) an assessment of the achievements of Plan Programmes against the stated objectives and targets; (ii) measurement of the impact on beneficiaries; (iii) impact on the socio-economic structure of the community; (iv) the process and adequacy of the delivery mechanism, etc. In addition the PEO has also been providing technical advice and guidance to the State Evaluation Organisations and imparting training to the evaluation personnel. Perspective plan for evaluation studies - areas identified in line with thrust area of Eighth Five Year Plan, Meetings with SEO heads to discuss on trainings and design of studies, Discussion with Institute of Economic Growth and Society for Development Studies for qualitative strengthening of EOs

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
1992-93	2 / 138	3-day meeting on planned studies		Adviser B. N. Sahay, special secretary A. K. Basak	Association with SEO and other research and academic institutions for taking up studies of regional and local importance Two Papers at Performance Evaluation in Asia, Regional Seminar, Kuala Lumpur.
1993-94	3 / 128	2-day meet with REOs for 3 studies		Adviser B. N. Sahay, Member G. V. Ramkrishna, special secretary Yogesh Chandra	Documentation bulletin with material from SEOs
1994-95	3 / 143	3-day meeting on planned study		CL Malik, Dy Adviser PEO, Adviser M. P. Bezbaruah additional charge, Member G. V. Ramkrishna, Special Secretary S. Som additional charge	Documentation Bulletins on "Evaluation Studies conducted by States/ Union Territories Governments (1985-86 to 1991-92), Evaluation Studies conducted by the P130 (1952-1995)" and "Evaluation Capacities in States/ UTs" Evaluation Advisory Committee in respect of PEO evaluation studies constituted for the ' first time ' in March 1994 – Member Secy and CM - Prof Arjun Sengupta
1999-00	6 / 41	2 for planning studies, 2 for finding dissemination 3rd Conference of Central and State EOs 28 July 1999	1 for Sr IES officials; 1 Computer training, 1 for investigators training at NIRD		PEO - 1 Adviser (Evaluation) at head, Jt Adviser, 5 deputy Advisers/ Project directors. 7 REOs headed by Directors/ Dy Advisers with 2 Res Off, 2 Econ Investigators G1, 2 EI G2, - supervision of field work, scrutiny and compilation of field data, guidance to Prj Eval offices under it and liaison with state govt and SEOs Field unit - Project Evaluation offices - 8

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
					Head - Prj Eval officer, Sr RO, assisted by RO, 2 EI G1, 2 EI G2 responsible for reporting the working of development programs in their areas and conducting eval studies and maintaining state liaison Evaluation advisory committee exists, experts from PC, non-govt orgs and academic institutions Reports being put on website
2000-01	10 / 128	1 planning, 1 dissemination	1 for PEO, SEO officers' evaluation techniques skill upgradation training at NIRD, 1 Computer techniques training		PEO organisational setup from HQ, REO to field offices each REO and PEO have 12 employees, HQ has 59. total sanctioned strength 241
2001-02	11 / 151	8 meetings of SMES sub group 1 planning of new study	1 for PEO/ REO/ SEO officers at NIRD	Adviser Dr. S. P. Pal, Joint Adviser V. K. Bhatia; Secretary S. S. Bopapara	Working Group on Strengthening M&E System for Social Sector Development Schemes for Tenth FYP constituted, chairman - Secy PC, 12 major recommendations
2002-03	9 / 147		1 for PEO/ REO/ SEO officers at NIRD		PEO officers going for training in other depts, as participants and as lecturers
2003-04	9 / 149	15 meetings related to studies	1 for Indian Audit and Accounts officers	Adviser Dr. S. P. Pal	Cabinet Secretary advised all Ministries to carry out evaluation of all the ongoing schemes/ programmes/ projects. Dec 2002 Concept of periodic assessment should be adopted and in-built as a standard feature of new schemes Findings & Suggestions of the evaluation studies are being implemented at varying degrees PEO was primarily a field-level organisation with 3-tier structure Reports - Development Evaluation in PEO and its Impact, Development evaluation in India - contemporary

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
					issues and approaches by CAG 7 REOs, 8 PEOs
2004-05	11 / 135	5 for planning studies - orientation meetings Meeting to discuss DE in PEO and its impact report with Dy Chairman PC studies related follow up meetings		Adviser Dr. S. P. Gupta (JS, also adviser RD)	<p>Evaluation as a plan scheme proposed WG on Strengthening M&E System for Social Sector Dev schemes submitted its report</p> <p>EAC as DEAC w.e.f. 24 Nov 2004 provides ToR of DEAC. Check if earlier ToR and current ones are available.</p> <p>Rashtriya Sam-Vikas Yojana related work through PEO - 4+4 districts allotted to Adviser Evaluation</p> <p>Expansion of IT facilities at REOs</p> <p>Updated directory of research institutions, NGOs engaged in conducting evaluations prepared and disseminated to M/Ds.</p> <p>1 para on follow up actions on studies</p> <p>Socio Economic Research Division deals with the scheme of grant- in-aid to Universities/research institutions for undertaking research Studies and organising Seminars & Conferences, which are relevant for the programmes and policies of the Planning Commission. PEO checks the study designs of evaluation studies in this.</p>
2005-06	7 / 122	1 ongoing study related			<p>Proposal for evaluation to be brought under Plan-scheme</p> <p>Concern for an Independent and In-depth Evaluation Highlighted in Union Budget (2005-06)</p> <p>follow up actions section</p> <p>PEO's Evaluators got space in World Bank's Publication entitled "Influential Evaluations", 2004 http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/609091468329361924/Influential-evaluations-evaluations-that-improved-performance-and-impacts-of-development-programs</p>

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
					International Development Evaluation Association biennial conf in Delhi - PEO one of the founding members in Beijing 2002 Dr S. P. Pal Adviser Evaluation
2006-07	9 / 146	meetings of DEAC 2 study related orientation programs		Adviser V. K. Bhatia, multiple charges; Pr. Adviser Development Policy, Socio economic research Dr. Arvind Virmani; Member Prof. Abhijit Sen,	Diagnostic approach for therapeutic Results and Participatory Approach for Improving Service Delivery' appear for second year 7 REO, 8 PEO till now Strengthening evaluation capacity in Government scheme launched
2007-08	18 /161	Technical Workshop on Improving Quality of Evaluation" on 25th and 26th July 2007 at New Delhi, with UNDP 3 orientation of ongoing studies	2 for officers of M/D, state/ UT on evaluation at IIPA Barapani and NIRD, Hyderabad		Change in content pattern from previous few years Concurrent and impact evaluations Lament on lack of ECD linked to launch of new scheme Two subcommittees each under the chairpersonship of Dr. (Smt.) Renuka Viswanathan, the then Secretary, Department of Rural Development and Dr. S. S. Srivastava, Retd. Director General, Central Statistical Organisation (a) to study the evaluation capacity in Government and (b) to review the existing M&E systems in Social Sector Development Ministries respectively. reports submitted in May 2007; recommendations included in 11 th plan document. This report also gives summary of some problems.
2008-09	8 / 173	orientation programs		Adviser Devendra Verma, Sr. Adviser Ms. S. Bhavani	Content pattern similar to 2006-07 Follow up actions missing from 2007-08

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
2009-10	4 / 168		1 SPSS training to PEO and REO staff	DDG Smt. Ratna A. Jena, Sr. Adviser Ms. S. Bhavani	From org chart, it seems PEO was directly under chairman, not under any member and looked after by Sr adviser who had two other charges as well, with a DDG
2010-11	9 / 160			Adviser PEO Smt. Ratna A. Jena,	Consultancy Evaluation Cum Monitoring Committees given prominence in this report. List of meetings and studies presented to them given IEO established 18 Nov. 2010, headed by DG, an independent governance unit funded by PC, governing board. DG member of DEAC - so PEO and IEO both report to DEAC?
2011-12	8 / 213	2 orientation programs	1 modern techniques M&E at Administrative Staff college Hyderabad -	2 advisers K. Rangareddy & Smt. Ratna A. Jena	No mention of IEO in PEO chapter or the entire report DG UIAI shown at par with Sr Advisers
2012-13	7 / 217	orientations		Adviser IEO Madan Mohan, Adviser PEO Ms. Ratna A. Jena, Secretary Ms. Sindhushree Khullar	All matters relating to Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) added under functions of PC defined under allocation of Business Rules, IEO is an attached Office under aegis of PC
2013-14	6 / 210				7 REO, 8 FPEO
2014-15	7 / 217			No organisational charts in NITI Aayog annual reports	In the first year of NITI , the report structure of the entire AR is same as previous PC reports, PEO report content is almost the same as the previous few years. IEO 1 page is added with PEO Necessary action has been initiated on a proposal to merge IEO with a reconstituted PEO. 7+8 field offices Though the Notification formally establishing IEO was issued by the then Planning Commission on July 14, 2011, it actually came into being on

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
					August 07, 2013. However, it started functioning effectively only from 17th February, 2014
2015-16	4 / 104				<p>DMEO is formed by merging PEO and IEO, provides responsibility and functions of DMEO</p> <p>Evaluation Monitoring Committees for each study Provides key findings of submitted reports, no comments on action taken, about structure of DMEO, trainings, etc.</p> <p>The DMEO has been mandated to “actively monitor and evaluate the implementation of programmes and initiatives, including the identification of the needed resources so as to strengthen the probability of success and scope of delivery”.</p> <p>The DMEO undertakes the monitoring of implementation of various government programmes and projects in respect of the Infrastructure Ministries and the Social Sector Ministries on an ongoing basis. The monitoring reviews are held at the highest levels in the Government. Similarly, the DMEO is assigned to monitor the Departmental Action Plans of various line M/Ds based on the recommendations of the Groups of Secretaries on eight themes. Key functions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Monitor the Implementation of Government Programmes 2. Help Ministries in Designing TORs for Evaluation Studies 3. Conduct Evaluation of Government Programmes 4. Promote the Spirit of Co-operative Federalism 5. Monitor the Implementation and progress of SDGs
2016-17	4 / 97				15 RDMEOs with Director level officer as head, Cooperative federalism removed from functions of DMEO list and added to functions of RDMEOs

Year	Pages	Workshops	Training	Officials	Other comments
					Monitoring review of Dept action plans, outcome-based review of sectors/schemes and SDGs
2017-18	8 / 140				157 posts, 102 professional staff and remaining supporting staff Functions diagram reappears - 5 functions Organisational structure overview, 15 RDMEOs closed on 30 th Sep 2017, staff transferred to Delhi - reason keeping in view the changed functional requirements, which means? Monitoring activities - PMAY dashboard, sectoral reviews by PMO, Thematic departmental action plans (transferred to sectoral group of secretaries) SDG related - awareness, VNR preparation, monitoring progress ToR vetting,
2018-19	3 / 16 / 164	internal skill building workshops	involved in training program by NILERD		Focus only on activities OOMF, Sectoral review dashboard, PMAY dashboard, scheme appraisals, Quick assessments, Evaluation studies Who did sectoral reviews in between?
2019-20	5 / 22 / 164			Dr Sekhar Bonu appointed as DG	UCSS evaluation in 10 evaluation study package, 8 ongoing quick evaluations List of research studies by other institutions in annexure Change in content pattern
2020-21	10/19 /202	19 Webinars with external experts and partners and States	Develop-ment of curriculum for officers		Variety of activities, partnerships, MoUs, trainings, toolkits, etc. Activities for institutional strengthening 5 ongoing quick evaluations
2021-22	6/15/ 198	National Conference on MEL 18-19 March	Webinars, more details on website.		Evaluation plan prepared, DEAC reconstituted, revision to EFC/SFC templates, DGQI, sectoral reviews, 10 UCSS studies complete, shared with M/Ds and states. Not published on website.