

Ouverture du groupe de travail EWG (25 septembre 2017)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear fellow SAI colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you today at the *Cour des comptes* for this meeting of our working group dedicated to the “Optimal combination of qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation”.

Today, we are gathering representatives from thirteen different countries and some of you have had a long trip. I am very grateful that you took the time to join us. Your contribution to our working group is essential to our common progress. Since its creation, this group sought to develop best practices sharing in order to facilitate program and evaluation by SAIs. I wish that the new work plan of this group, adopted at the INCOSAI in Abu Dhabi, will enable us to reach this common objective together.

As for France, since the 2008 Constitutional review, the *Cour des Comptes* is responsible, along with other institutions, for the evaluation of public policies. This has led the Court to implement new work processes and methodologies to conduct this different mission. Since 2008, the Court has assessed more than twenty different public policies,

ranging from biofuels supporting policy to policy against harmful use of alcohol. Those evaluations have been conducted either at the request of the Parliament or on our own initiative.

Evaluation is a demanding exercise for which SAIs are particularly suited, thanks to high neutrality and independence guarantees.

As such, the article 15 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, engraved on the pediment of this Great Chamber, underlines the necessity of transparency. The work of our SAIs, whether it consists of performance auditing or public policy evaluation, plays a decisive role in translating this great principle into reality.

We can rely on our traditional skills to enlighten policy makers by offering them, through our evaluations, a critical analysis capacity, be it prospective or retrospective. Evaluation enables the development of a precise and objective vision of the impact of public policies. In a way, it is the extension of our daily audit work; evaluation enables us to enlighten public authorities and to inform citizens on the use of public funds. In the future, I hope that it will become an integral mission of a growing number of our institutions.

Our discussions came to fruition in 2016 with the **adoption of guidelines on the evaluation of public policies** – INTOSAI GOV 9400 – at the occasion of the XXII INCOSAI in December 2016. Those guidelines had previously been submitted for consultation, with the

involvement of international organizations active in this field, including the United Nations General Secretariat.

As recalled in those guidelines, evaluation differs from performance and conformity audit in three respects:

- First, the **aim** of evaluation is, as its name suggest, to assess the value of a specific public policy, by measuring its impact with respect to the collective needs to be filled by this policy ;
- Second, an evaluation is characterized by its **scope**. It must focus on significant challenges, of reasonable size but large enough to bring to light eventual synergies, contradictions and failures of public policies ;
- Finally, the processes implemented to conduct evaluation also contributes to the differentiate evaluation from audits as it gives a significant role to stakeholders and experts.

The adoption of this basic text constitutes a turning point for our working group and a new work plan has been approved at the INCOSAI. We also submitted a survey to all the SAIs conducting or planning to conduct evaluations and interested in working with us. Hence, we are delighted to welcome new SAIs today, as they have signaled their interest in our work.

We are gathered here today to discuss about the relevance of combining qualitative and quantitative methods of evaluation, when possible.

As a number of evaluation practitioners, the French *Cour des comptes* primarily uses a qualitative approach in order to estimate and understand the causal relationships between the actions of a policy and its effects on the targeted audience.

This approach partly relies on statistical observation but it also draws a lot from humanities and social sciences. **Its strengthening through a quantitative approach, when possible, is a prime aim of the Court.**

This approach also requires the access to reliable data bases as well as to sophisticated mathematical tools.

The French *Cour des comptes* progressively gets equipped with tools to conduct growingly elaborate quantitative analyses, whether through statistical and econometric skills acquisition by our auditors, the recruitment of big data experts or partnerships with universities. Evaluation implies the possibility to have enough time to conduct the study, especially in order to be able to analyze one or several counterfactual scenarios (a situation in which, all things being equal, the policy was not implemented).

For each and every evaluation conducted by SAIs, **the optimal combination of qualitative and quantitative methods now has to be considered.**

Hence, we consider that, when it is possible, quantitative techniques must be systematically implemented in order to complement – without replacing – traditional qualitative methods, which most

probably better explain impacts thanks to stakeholders' involvement, but often come short measuring them. The use of quantitative methods must be bolstered by the implementation of internal or outside counter-expertise mechanisms, in order to **guarantee the scientific validity of the work conducted**.

In that perspective, it seems highly advisable to SAIs that they make use of one or several independent reviewers or members of advisory and supervisory committees, who are statistics and econometrics experts so they can approve of the methodological choices and results. As such, INTOSAI GOV 9400 guidelines on the evaluation of public policies could be supplemented by methodological sheets on those subjects.

We suggest thinking about a common conclusion of our meeting. My colleagues will hand out a draft conclusion to you, which you will be able to amend throughout this meeting.

Following this meeting and in accordance with the work plan adopted at the INCOSAI¹, we will organize in 2018 a **seminar dedicated to experience sharing centered on health policies case studies**. In that regard, we need to decide by the end of this meeting whether we want to adopt a thematic approach focusing on policies targeted at specific diseases (cancer, AIDS, obesity, autism, malaria...) or an horizontal approach dealing with cross-cutting policies (access to

¹ Following the work plan relating to knowledge sharing and as indicated at the INCOSAI, the working group will organize between 2017 and 2019 technical exchanges on (I) qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods and (II), experience sharing based on concrete health policy evaluation.

healthcare policy, quality of care, prevention and health promotion, vaccination, mental health...).

Depending on the needs identified through our discussions, a new methods workshop will be organized in 2019. As it is the case today, we will join forces with evaluation professional associations for those seminars, be they regional or global.

Thank you for your attention.