

# Global Evidence Policy Units

## COLOMBIA: SINERGIA

Sistema Nacional De Evaluación De Gestión Y Resultados



“Using a series of performance-based indicators, SINERGIA tracks policy performance government-wide & evaluates the implementation of key programs across multiple sectors.”



# KEY FACTS

- SINERGIA is the Colombian Government's monitoring and evaluation unit.
- It was established in 1994 and is one of the oldest evaluation units in the world.
- SINERGIA aims to assist policymakers to make evidence-informed decisions and to strengthen the culture of monitoring, evaluation and learning in Colombia and more widely in Latin America.
- It sits in the National Department of Planning (Departamento Nacional de Planeación - DNP). The unit works in conjunction with the Office of the President to oversee, develop and implement government-supported evaluations and monitor the National Development Plan (Plan Nacional de Desarrollo).
- SINERGIA undertakes a range of evaluations including outcome evaluations, institutional and results evaluations, and impact evaluations. They are typically conducted by research organisations or consulting firms on behalf of SINERGIA.

## SINERGIA has four departments:



**Monitoring (Seguimiento)**  
monitors the goals and objectives of the National Plan.



**Evaluation (Evaluaciones)**  
examines the development and impact of public policies through evaluations.



**Territorial**  
oversees monitoring for the National Plan with municipal government.



**A new department**  
will monitor Colombia's progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

# KEY FACTS

How the monitoring team works



● Actors who share data    ● System administrators    ● Data users

Source: The Division of Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies (DSEPP) - part of the National Department of Planning (DNP), translated from Spanish.

# HOW WAS THE UNIT SET UP?



Before SINERGIA was set up in 1994, the Colombian Government did not have any formal evidence-based system.

In the early 1990s, following the introduction of a new constitution and neoliberal economic policies, Colombia saw the emergence of a new climate where quality evidence started to be used to inform policies. There was a growing desire to collect data to enhance social accountability.

At the same time, in the Latin American academic sector there was a growing interest in evaluations, and particularly Random Control Trials (RCTs), to assess the impact of programs. In Colombia and Mexico, the first RCTs evaluated key cash transfer programs such as Familias en Acción.

In 1994, Colombia's Congress passed a law to implement a new government-wide system of monitoring and evaluation to help modernise the state, improve the efficiency of public funds and democratise public administration. This led to the founding of SINERGIA in 1994, which initially sought to improve the efficiency and execution of the National Development Plan. The unit began to conduct impact evaluations and with time went on to examine other government policies and programs. The type of evaluations broadened to include methods such as cost-benefit analyses and results evaluation management.



# EVOLUTION OF THE UNIT



## FUNDING

In the early years, SINERGIA received much of its funding from multilaterals such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. Funding for specific programs was received on the condition that an evaluation of the program would take place. This played a critical role in creating a culture of evaluation.

Today, SINERGIA receives funding through the national budget and other sources, such as the Colombian General Royalty System, to do project evaluations. It also receives project funding from international donors such as USAID.

The annual budget is 12,000 million Colombian Pesos. This is 3.21% of the annual budget of the National Department of Planning.



## LEADERSHIP

Key to the success of SINERGIA has been a top-down leadership approach. There has always been a direct mandate and input from the president during each administration. In addition, the Director of National Planning, who oversees SINERGIA, has the same status as other ministers and has been integral in promoting a culture of evaluation.



## THE EVALUATION PROCESS

On average, SINERGIA carries out 10 to 12 evaluations per year.

The cycle of evaluations starts with setting the annual evaluation agenda. Each sector in national government is asked which policies and programs should be subject to an evaluation. Based on key criteria and budget, SINERGIA calculates how many evaluations can take place that year. To ensure transparency, the agenda is made public. The unit is continually looking at ways to improve evaluations and make them more usable.

# EVOLUTION OF THE UNIT

Several factors have helped SINERGIA to work well with government:



The unit does not directly carry out evaluations, but engages external consultants and research organisations. This allows SINERGIA staff to talk to government entities as brokers and in a more neutral capacity.



SINERGIA sits within the National Department of Planning and is therefore part of government and not a separate controlling entity. It promotes its role as helping ministries to find evidence for the problems they are experiencing, rather than auditing.



It funds the evaluations itself and does not ask ministries or departments to set aside their own budget for this.



Ministries are an integral part of the process from the early design phase. They are invited to be part of the on-going process and to learn how evaluations are carried out.



Any recommendations that are made to entities are presented as suggested improvements rather than changes that must be implemented.

# EVOLUTION OF THE UNIT



## STAFFING & RECRUITMENT

SINERGIA has 40 staff who work across the four teams (**monitoring, evaluation, territorial,** and the new **SDG** team). In the evaluation team, there are seven leaders in charge of supervising evaluation contracts. A team of six economists also perform replications, render data anonymous and carry out internal evaluations with administrative data.

Staff turnaround is an issue. For example, staff in the evaluation team frequently leave the team to work as external evaluators. To ensure good knowledge management, processes are documented very carefully for new members. Another issue is that many staff members are hired as consultants and therefore are more likely to leave.

The procurement process for evaluations is open and to increase transparency anyone can see a proposal. SINERGIA puts out a tender to the private sector, NGOs, universities and research organisations. Most applicants are Colombian consulting firms from the private sector. Foreign teams can be hired, but the majority are based in-country.



## KNOWLEDGE SHARING & COMMUNICATIONS

SINERGIA recently launched a new communications strategy. It asks evaluators to look at different ways to deliver results for different audiences, such as using videos, animations or infographics. For example, an animation to give the public key facts on the progress of Colombia's National Plan and its work on the SDGs.

Once an evaluation is finalised, the consultant will present the findings to the relevant minister or vice minister. This will be done as a presentation, but frequently the session starts with a short video or infographic that synthesises the key messages. This ensures that even if the minister has to leave early, he or she has seen a snapshot of the work. Other more detailed meetings and presentations also take place with ministers' advisors. A final report is published around the same time and made public on the SINERGIA website.

# EVOLUTION OF THE UNIT



The website clearly defines all the areas that the unit works on, as well as key definitions and terminology for non-specialist audiences.

Following recommendations from an external evaluation of SINERGIA, the unit is committed to open data. With the help of the World Bank, it now allows open access to all evaluation data. It is hoped that data will be shared internationally, for example, at international conferences.

## BUILDING DEMAND FOR EVIDENCE



SINERGIA aims to build capacity for the use of evidence in multiple ways. Strategies include working with external organisations to build capacity through training, such as the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3IE), the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA). Examples include courses and conferences on evaluation, impact evaluations and systematic reviews. Government entities and local actors are frequently invited to attend to learn more. SINERGIA provides technical support to ministries and government agencies to help them carry out their own evaluations, or to develop their own evaluation teams, but this support depends on the in-house capacity.

# REFERENCES

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