While evaluation has been embraced worldwide as a modern public governance and management tool, it can be reasonably argued that the trend in effective evaluation use and impact lags significantly behind the development of evaluation institutionalisation and the resulting growth in evaluation activities and outputs. This conference, in bringing together international, regional and national level users and producers of evaluations, aims to improve understanding of why this is the case and to provide an impetus to bridging the gap between evaluation supply and demand that otherwise risks becoming wider, given the challenges faced by policymakers in an increasingly complex world.

Throughout the course of the twentieth century, evaluation became an institutionalised practice in most of the developed world. More recently, the collective endorsement by UN Member States of a results-based international development agenda, as enshrined in the Millennium Development Goals and their targets, the subsequent 2005 Paris Declaration on development effectiveness and later meetings on aid effectiveness, have been important drivers towards the institutionalisation of evaluation in the developing world. Finally, in the last decade or so, many middle-income countries have taken decisive steps to develop evaluation systems within their public administrations. As a result, evaluation has now become widely present across the globe and more than ever contributes to better decision-making processes and policies for the benefit of society. Yet, despite the growth of the institutionalisation and reach of evaluation, guaranteeing results effectively fulfil their fundamental purposes of ensuring accountability and supporting learning appears to be constrained by a number of systemic issues.

On the supply side, commissioners and evaluators often need to deliver evaluations under severe time and budget constraints. This brings trade-offs between the quality, scope, and depth of evaluations that can have repercussions on their usefulness. At the same time, promising advances in information technologies and ‘big data’ can offer new ways to gather information more efficiently, in particular about target populations and societal changes, yet making use of the opportunities provided by these technological advances remains a challenge.

On the demand side, there is a widely recognised need for empirical evidence to support decision-making, and expectations of what evaluations can do are often high. However, evaluation results and recommendations are not always used as fully as they could be to inform policy discussions and support organisational learning alongside the many other sources of decision-making and learning information.

2015 is the International Year of Evaluation. The European and French Evaluation Societies, OECD, and UNESCO have joined hands in organising an event to discuss the use of evaluation within the context of the challenges outlined above. The purpose of the event is to bring together decision makers and evaluators, the demand and the supply sides of evaluation, to discuss the use and impact of evaluation itself and how this could be improved. What is the potential for evaluation as a mechanism for providing a stream of evidence to inform strategic decision-making, for example on major shifts in policy and significant resource reallocations? What are the building blocks of successful evaluation systems in which evaluative outputs are credible and user-ready so as to
effectively inform decision-making and organisational learning, and how can evaluations be better used in this context? Decision makers and evaluators may have divergent views on these questions, yet they fundamentally share the same mission, to develop and implement better policies and programmes to the benefit of their constituents and target populations.
Programme

9.00 - Registration

9.30 - Opening addresses
Opening addresses (live or video) by Ms Irina Bokova (Director General, UNESCO) and Mr Angel Gurria (Secretary General, OECD). The opening addresses will be introduced by Ms Susanne Frueh, (Director, Internal Oversight Service, UNESCO).

10.10 - What is evaluation use?
Introductory presentation by Mr Elliot Stern, focusing on theoretical constructs and practical examples of different types of evaluation use. This session will set the scene for the rest of the conference. The presentation will be followed by a short plenary discussion chaired by Ms Lucy Elliott (Director of Internal Audit and Evaluation, OECD).

11.00 - COFFEE BREAK

11.30 - What do decision makers expect from evaluations?
Panel discussion involving users/user intermediaries on the topic of what the ‘demand side’ is looking for in evaluations, including in terms of the resulting information, its format and dissemination, involvement in the evaluation process, etc. The panel session will be followed by a plenary discussion. The session will be moderated by Mr Elliot Stern and the panel will consist of:
- Ambassador Annika Markovic (UNESCO and OECD, Sweden)
- Ambassador Mariam Katagum (UNESCO, Nigeria)
- Ambassador Nick Bridge (Chair of the OECD’s Evaluation Committee, UK)
- Mr Marc Trouillet (Sous-directeur de la gouvernance démocratique at the ministère des affaires étrangères, France, tbc)

13.00 - LUNCH

14.30 – Ensuring the usefulness of evaluations – What is the evaluator’s perspective?
Presentations by the ‘supply side’ in the form of two evaluation experts, Mr Nick York (World Bank) and Mr Jacques Toulemonde (independent evaluator) about what they have been able to do and what they recommend should be done in the future to ensure the usefulness of evaluations. The presentations will be followed by a plenary discussion. The session will be chaired by Ambassador Dionisio Pérez-Jácome (OECD, Mexico).

16.00 - COFFEE BREAK

16.30 – What have we learnt about the gap between the demand and supply sides of evaluation and how might we bridge it?
This session will take stock of the presentations and discussions, and provide pointers for future work to bridge the demand-supply gap. Mr Pierre Savignat (President, SFE), Ms Claudine Voyadzis (President, EES), Ms Suzanne Frueh (UNESCO) and Ms Lucy Elliott (OECD) will share the conclusions they have drawn from the event. The session will be chaired and wrapped up by Mr Elliot Stern.

17.15 – END OF CONFERENCE