

RESEARCH REPORT

M&E CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING APPROACHES
AND MEASUREMENT IN AFRICA



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The practice of national and organisational capacity-strengthening for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is gaining momentum in the Global South. However, little is known about the design, effectiveness, and impact of these M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives. Adequate M&E capacity assists government officials, development managers, civil society organisations, and funding entities to improve project planning, facilitates progress, increases impact, and enhances learning (Segone, 2009). In addition, M&E capacity can identify what works, what does not work, and the reasons for each outcome. This report provides an overview of National Evaluation Capacity Development (NECD) across selected Anglophone African countries and provides recommendations on how to strengthen national evaluation capacities. The report is based on a study undertaken by the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) which examined M&E systems capacity-strengthening approaches in Anglophone African countries and how the effectiveness of these approaches has been measured.

Methods

The study adopted a mixed-method approach which enabled the researchers to use multiple sources of information from multiple approaches to gain new insights into how the capacity strengthening of M&E systems is evolving in the African context. The mixed-methods approach comprised a cross-sectional survey and a qualitative in-depth enquiry. The respondents were drawn from government departments or ministries, non-governmental organisations, not-for-profit organisations (both local and international), public training institutions, parliamentary staff, and Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs). Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately and were integrated during analysis.

Findings

In the African countries selected for the study, M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives are provided both internally and externally and the initiatives range from training and technical assistance to coaching and mentoring. International organisations with an interest in NECD have been the major funders of initiatives in the region and have invested substantial sums of money. This study concludes that although the literature on the measurement of M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives is still nascent, state and non-state institutions providing capacity strengthening fail to adequately measure the efficiency, impact, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability, and worthiness of the approaches. In cases where measurement has been done, knowledge management systems do not capture the measurement information effectively. This is tantamount to missing opportunities for reflection on the worthiness of capacity-strengthening approaches and the loss of potential lessons that could have been learnt during the process of implementation.

Key findings

Firstly, it was found that the capacity needs assessments and capacity-strengthening plans are lacking in all eight countries. The implication is that capacity-strengthening initiatives are haphazard, unsystematic, ad hoc, inadequate, and ineffective. The failure to define country capacity needs has led to the narrow perception that capacity is limited to the micro level, revealing a distinct lack of understanding of the inherent interconnectedness of all levels of capacity.

The second issue identified is that capacity strengthening is frequently divorced from the prevailing contextual factors (culture, socio-economic, political and governance systems), with the approach to strengthening capacity being that of a generic one-size-fits-all solution which fails to acknowledge that M&E capacity determinants such as culture, the value of M&E, and the general environment of M&E practice, are endogenous and context-specific. The implication is that there is a mismatch between the supply and demand aspects of capacity.

Thirdly, study findings show that current M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives do not emphasise the key elements which are crucial for the holistic development of M&E systems. Capacity strengthening at a macro level (country level) should create an enabling environment which facilitates and values the practice of M&E. This can be achieved by assisting countries to develop coherent policies, culture, structures, and strategies and by inducing behaviour change – all of which will add value at both micro and macro levels of capacity. In state institutions the creation of an enabling environment is an immense task which is exacerbated by a lack of human capacity, inadequate resources, an absence of policies and frameworks, and a weaker demand for M&E compared to the non-state sector. This has a direct implication on state programmes' effectiveness and accountability and impedes the development of a culture of evaluation.

Fourthly, the findings of this study show that there is a general shortage of resources (material, human and financial) across all levels (individual, institutional, and state level) for the development of M&E capacities. At the state level, there is a heavy dependence on non-state capacity-strengthening funders and this compromises the sustainability of such approaches. In several countries, funders dictate the capacity-strengthening goals and approaches to be adopted thereby depriving state entities of the opportunity to utilise the resources where they are needed most. Non-state sector institutions receiving funding from international organisations have guaranteed funding for M&E system capacity strengthening and setting up of M&E systems with the objective of improving accountability and performance monitoring. However, these funds do not extend to measurement activities to assess the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of these capacity-strengthening approaches. At individual level, resources are scarce for academic and professional training for individuals who are not attached to institutions.

Fifthly, the study shows that across all the eight countries, the measurement of M&E capaci-

ty-strengthening activities is amorphous and vague. Measurement only exists at the input, process, and output stages of the micro-level spectrum. Absence of monitoring tools for capacity-strengthening activities implies that the efficiency and effectiveness of capacity-strengthening activities are unknown hence implementers are deprived of the opportunity to reflect on what is working, not working, for whom and under what circumstances. Also, the absence of evaluations means that the relationship between capacity-strengthening interventions and M&E capacity outcomes is not defined.

Recommendations

The study makes four recommendations, namely: (1) Know your capacity needs and be systematic – countries and organisations providing funding for capacity strengthening must prioritise country-level M&E capacity needs assessments and formulate country capacity development plans according to the identified needs. The plans should include specific measurement indicators to measure achievement levels. (2) Strengthen capacity at all levels – individual, institutional, and country. (3) Be fully cognisant of the context, applicability, and demand for M&E capacity-strengthening approaches. To ensure maximum impact and sustainability, situations with the most pressing needs and greatest potential for effective outcomes should be prioritised and not simply be provided with a 'tick-the-box' or 'one-size-fit-all' approach to capacity-building; (4) Create the necessary synergies and networks between state and non-state sectors as these synergies dispel the silo mindset frequently adopted for M&E capacity-strengthening and create opportunities for mutual benefit by learning, sharing experiences, and identifying what works best in a particular country. Most importantly, it is emphasised that these recommendations will be ineffective in meeting the overall objective of ensuring measurement of M&E capacity-strengthening approaches if equal attention is not paid to the enabling environment, for example, allocation of resources, not only for capacitation but also for measurement.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLEAR-AA	Centre for Learning and Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
CS	Capacity Strengthening
AFREA	The African Evaluation Association
NES	National Evaluation Systems
VOPEs	Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
AFDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation

1.1 Introduction and Background to the study

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is a centre within the faculty of Commerce, Law and Management at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits University), located in Johannesburg, South Africa. CLEAR-AA is one of six regional centres housed in academic institutions across the globe which support the development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity. The other CLEAR centres are in Senegal, Mexico, India, China and Brazil, and are supported by the CLEAR Global Initiative in Washington, D.C. CLEAR-AA aims to improve the practice of M&E and to assist in strengthening the ability of countries and organisations to plan, report on what is being achieved, and to assess results. CLEAR-AA works with various stakeholders such as policymakers, parliamentarians, academics, M&E networks, practitioners, and civil society organisations.

Strengthening the capacities of countries and organisations to perform M&E functions is gaining momentum in the Global South. However, little is known about the design, effectiveness and impact of these M&E capacity strengthening initiatives. M&E capacity assists government officials, development managers, civil society organisations, and funding entities to improve the planning of their projects, facilitates progress, increases impact, and enhances learning (Segone, 2009). In addition, M&E capacity can identify what works, what does not work, and the reasons for each outcome. In Africa there is a dearth of literature on M&E system capacity development/building, leaving the impacts of such initiatives undocumented and unclear. Given the gaps in the current literature on the topic, this study seeks to inform CLEAR-AA's M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives across Anglophone Africa. An M&E system in this study is defined as a coordinated and harmonised monitoring and evaluation system that provides timely and accurate strategic information to guide planning and decision making at national level (Shepherd, 2011). This study focuses on M&E systems which seek to inform a process of learning and change to promote real developmental impact. This suggests an approach where monitoring enables adaptive management, evaluative processes, and rigorous evaluation.

1.2 Study objectives

The objective of this study is to examine the status of capacity-strengthening initiatives of selected M&E systems in Anglophone Africa in terms of how the systems have been implemented and how their effectiveness has been measured. The study seeks to gain greater insights into the impact of M&E capacity strengthening in Anglophone Africa by investigating the experiences of Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. This selection is based on CLEAR-AA having previously worked with M&E stakeholders in these countries and is in the process of developing stronger partnerships for strengthening country-driven M&E systems. The underlying assumption is that if CLEAR-AA is better able to understand the ecosystem of M&E capacity-strengthening interventions at the country level, it will be a more effective convener of suitable partners, be they VOPEs, INOs, universities or thought leaders, to collaborate and, with the appropriate set of interventions, to strengthen national M&E systems.

This study seeks to answer the following research question: *What approaches to M&E system capacity strengthening have been used in selected Anglophone African countries and how has their effectiveness been measured?* The following sub-research questions will be explored:

1. What is the current status of M&E system capacity strengthening in selected countries in Anglophone Africa?
2. What do both research and practice suggest is 'good' practice in M&E CS at individual/organisational/system level?
3. What are the gaps in M&E capacity strengthening in selected countries in Anglophone Africa?
4. What approaches, mechanisms and measures are being used by various institutions to measure the impact of this capacity strengthening (for example to influence policies, programmes, management systems) as well as the combination and quality of the interventions themselves?

1.3 Defining M&E capacity strengthening

The literature alludes to various stakeholders (both state and non-state entities) which are implementing interventions targeting both the development and the building of M&E capacity of individuals, the state and non-state institutions. This M&E capacity is also referred to as National Evaluation Capacity Development (NECD). The interventions which are being implemented in the African context are, to a lesser extent, aimed at building M&E capacity. A more widespread approach of interventions is targeted at developing M&E capacity. M&E capacity building¹ refers to the building of new M&E systems, according to a prescribed design whilst capacity development refers to building on existing M&E skills and knowledge, driving a dynamic and flexible process of change, borne by local actors (European Parliament, 2017). This study takes cognisance of the academic debate and contention regarding the definitions of the two terms. In this study, the terms M&E capacity building and capacity development are collectively referred to as capacity strengthening (CS) which is defined as the process through which individuals, institutions and countries develop, enhance and organise their M&E systems to effectively monitor the performance and evaluate development interventions at both state and institutional (non-state/state) levels. In this study, M&E capacity is viewed as consisting of three interconnected levels – the individual, institutional and country levels (system level). The individual and institutional capacities are regarded as the ‘micro’ level whilst the country capacity is regarded as the ‘macro’ level. At the individual level, M&E capacity refers to the ability of individuals to perform M&E duties and functions according to their individual skills and abilities (Babu, 2018). At an institutional level, capacity requires an enabling environment with the necessary structures, processes, resources, management, and governance frameworks to support the development of an M&E system (Struyk, Damon and Haddaway, 2011). At the country level, coherent policies and strategies in state and non-state entities create an

enabling environment for the development and use of M&E system products (Nuyens, 2005). It should be noted at the outset that this study does not focus on the strengthening of national evaluation systems (NES) which routinely include evaluations as a regular component in the life cycle of public policies and programmes. This study focuses on performance monitoring and evaluation.

Capacity strengthening of M&E systems applies a strengths-based approach and builds on capabilities i.e. the ability to apply enhanced values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Mackay, 2007). Capacity refers to the ability to effectively, efficiently, and sustainably perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve M&E objectives at individual, institutional, and system levels (UNDP, 2009). As the definition above infers, the term capacity relates somewhat differently at individual and institutional levels depending on the organisational objectives (Tall, 2009). This includes product aspects (e.g. establishing M&E frameworks) and process dimensions (e.g. building the capability to analyse problems, and to plan and develop M&E frameworks) (Görgens and Kusek, 2010). Critical to M&E capacity strengthening is the recognition that capacity involves three interdependent levels – individual, institutional and system level (enabling environment) (Lennie and Tacchi, 2014). At the individual level, there is a need to strengthen knowledge, technical skills, and individual experience. At an institutional level, there is a need to improve internal policies, M&E arrangements, procedures, and resources. An enabling environment which includes the appropriate policies, legislation, power relations and social norms, is a prerequisite for strengthening M&E capacity at individual, institutional and system level (Segone, 2009).

M&E CS is a long-term change process aimed at strengthening capacity in related management systems and the development of national or sectoral performance monitoring and evaluation systems. It also enables the achievement of more effective policies and programmes and helps to achieve optimal public and private sector performance (Shepherd, 2011). Other important aspects of M&E CS involve the design and implementation of teaching and learning strategies to inform individuals, groups, and organisations on what consti-

¹ The definition of M&E capacity building and development is adapted from Preskill and Boyle's (2008) definitions of evaluative capacity development and evaluative capacity building which emphasise evaluation capacity.

tutes effective, useful, and professional M&E practice (Morkel and Ramasobama, 2017). It reflects an intention to improve participants' knowledge and skills and to promote a more positive attitude to evaluation (Preskill and Boyle, 2008). Sustainable M&E practice also requires the development of systems, processes, policies, and plans that embed M&E practices in the procedures used by organisations and governments to accomplish their missions and strategic goals. The ultimate benefit is that information and evidence from an M&E system enables sound and informed decision-making.

1.4 Role of M&E in achieving development outcomes

M&E systems play a significant role in development initiatives as they generate relevant, accurate, and timely information that is used to improve programme design and decision-making thereby enhancing the impact of development interventions (Elkins, 2006). At state level in democracies, citizens are party to a contractual agreement with the state. The citizens pay taxes thereby acknowledging the legitimacy of the state and showing their allegiance while the responsibility of the state is to secure development for its citizens. The continued legitimacy of the state depends on whether it fulfils its expected duties and obligations. In effect, citizens are constantly monitoring and evaluating government performance (through demands for improved service delivery, support for political parties, government, and the media) albeit without formal, established structures to do so (Kimaro and Fourie, 2017a). These informal assessments of government performance have proved successful in prompting a change of course for governments, especially in cases of unpopular actions or policies (Branch and Mampilly, 2015). Formal M&E systems act as a tool for citizens to monitor the state's development interventions and evaluate the outcomes (Franco and Shankland, 2018). In the African context, the demand for M&E systems is growing, emanating from a desire to align institutions with evidence-based decision-making processes hence the need for national M&E systems which have the capacity to perform effectively and efficiently (Eresia-Eke and Boadu, 2019). By strengthening a

country's M&E system, citizens and the state will be capacitated to monitor and evaluate development outcomes.

Despite the significant attention being given to M&E capacity strengthening by organisations and the substantial investments being made to achieve this goal, M&E capacity strengthening is still impaired by the adoption of untried, impractical theories with the result that many programmes fall short of their goals and expectations (Holvoet, Gildemyn and Inberg, 2012). If African governments and civil society are to improve development outcomes and reduce corruption and poverty, there is a need for sound analysis based on adequate information which can be provided by a well-functioning M&E system (Hope, 2017). Developing M&E capacity is essential to improve governance and ensure proper management of public resources (Mackay, 2006).

1.5 Conceptual framework

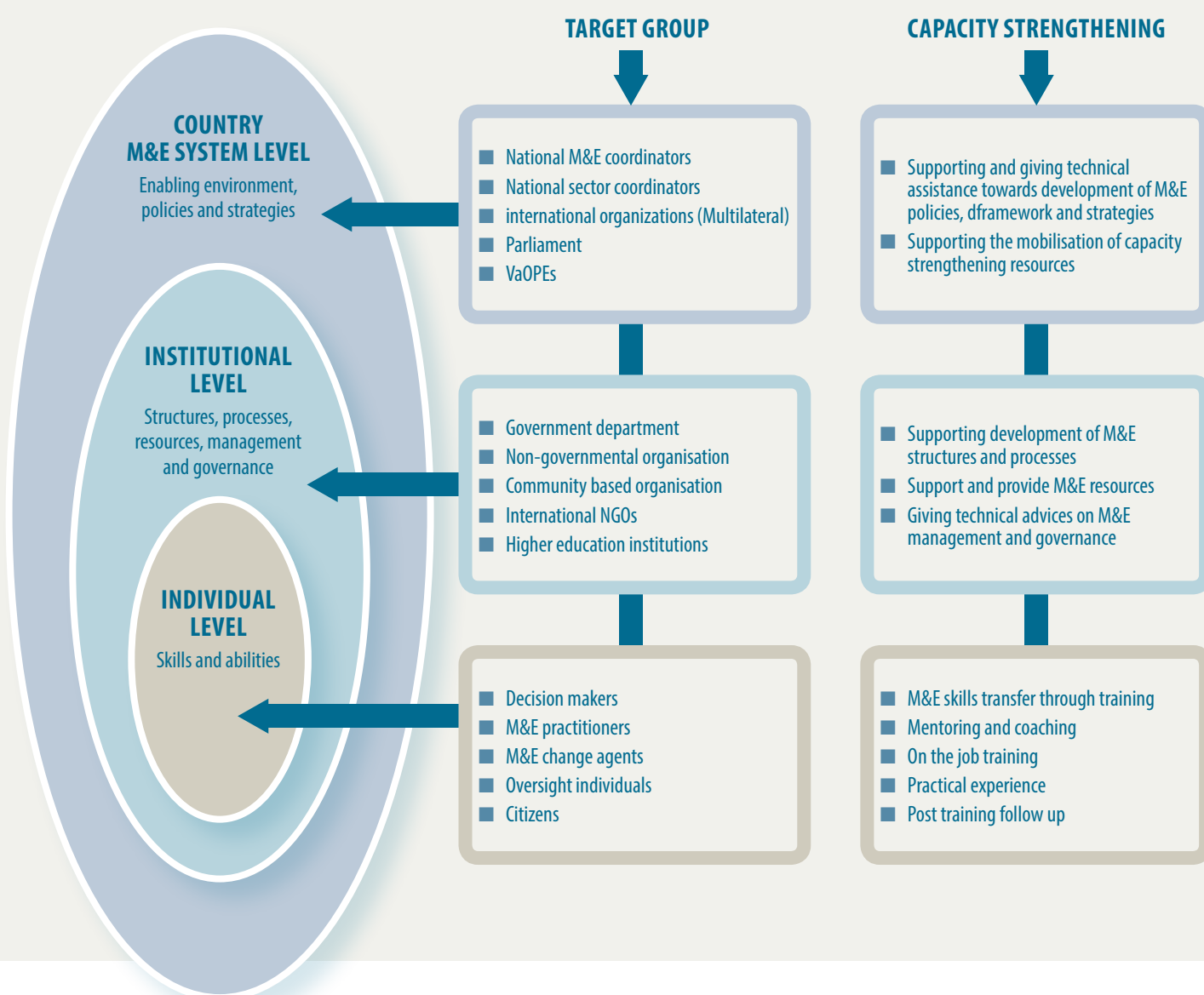
In this conceptualisation, an M&E system is regarded as a country M&E system, which includes both state and non-state institutions. Drawing from the definition of M&E system capacity alluded to earlier, a country M&E system can be described in terms of three levels - the individual, the institutional and the country level (system level). These three levels are interconnected and complement each other to form a country M&E system (see Figure 1 below). A country M&E system consists of different M&E sub-systems which are interlinked and which, at times, may operate independently. The conceptual framework is underpinned by the following principles:

- M&E system capacity is broad and does not consist solely of individual skills and abilities but also involves institutional systems and a country-level enabling environment.
- M&E system capacity-strengthening approaches should go beyond capacitating individuals and must target the three levels (individual, institutional, and country) in a systematic manner, depending on the system needs.

- Country M&E system capacity-strengthening approaches and activities need to respond to the capacity needs of the system.
- Country context has a great influence on the design of capacity-strengthening approaches and there is no one-size-fits-all approach.
- For sustainability, M&E CS approaches should be locally owned and driven.

Figure 1: M&E system capacity-strengthening conceptual framework

This conceptual framework guides the analysis and presentation of the findings of this study.



1.6 M&E capacity strengthening in Africa

There is a dearth of literature on M&E capacity strengthening in the African context. Where such literature exists, it generally deals specifically with strengthening the evaluation capacity of individuals and institutions and there is limited literature available on the topic of strengthening performance monitoring. This is also the case in terms of literature related to evaluations of M&E system strengthening approaches. Despite these limitations, an examination of the literature shows that M&E institutional frameworks and systems for the practice of M&E are not widely developed across most African countries and are characterised by a limited local demand for evaluation (Lahey, 2015). M&E capacity strengthening is still not recognised as a priority intervention area due to the lack of clear guidelines on how to operationalise CS and the limited number of capacity assessments undertaken at national level (Kimaro and Fourie, 2017b), leading to countries not having a clear understanding of their M&E capacity needs. M&E demand is largely externally driven and M&E capacity-strengthening interventions are driven largely by the interests of the funder (external) in ensuring the success and leveraging the impact of their respective programmes in a variety of countries (Stewart et al., 2019). Historically, international CS funders have committed the majority of their resources to discrete, short-term capacity-building activities which are often fragmented and, as such, there is limited evidence to show that their impacts yield long-term benefits.

The lack of systematic recognition of CS, less so amongst the largest donors, is quite surprising considering the plethora of international agreements intended to enhance development effectiveness through the promotion of evaluations, country ownership, and institutional strengthening (Tarsilla, 2014). In the African context, previous evaluations, reviews of evaluation capacity, and performance monitoring have pointed to certain scarce skills in the region and indicate a pressing need for greater utilisation of locally available skills when evaluations are conducted, and also to the strengthening of institutional mechanisms in the evaluation sector, such as communities of practice and mechanisms for peer learning (Mapitsa, Khumalo, Engel and Wooldridge, 2019).

The focus has been on enhancing individual capacities to conduct and manage evaluations, with limited interventions targeting the capacitation of institutions and the creation of enabling environments in which M&E systems can operate effectively.

In the African context, capacity-strengthening activities are largely targeted at strengthening the knowledge and skills of individuals (Di Ciommo, 2017) and M&E skills development falls into two categories: (1) academic training, which is the domain of universities and institutions of higher learning; and (2) professional development training (workshops and conferences). For academic training, while the field is growing there are limited institutions and courses which focus specifically on M&E (Basheka and Byamugisha, 2015). In most cases, M&E is taught in various postgraduate programmes as a specialisation, e.g. in management or public health (Tirivanhu, Robertson, Waller and Chirau, 2018). Furthermore, there are no institutions that offer M&E at an undergraduate level.

In terms of the professional training approach, Kithinji (2015) reports the existence of extensive capacity-strengthening efforts in Africa including training and scholarships, workshops, technical support for projects/programmes, financial support, joint evaluations, coaching and mentoring, dialogue at policy level, and communities of practice. Other interventions in the African context are varied and include training parliamentarians on how to interpret and respond to evaluation reports, the provision of information technology infrastructure for data collection systems, the empowerment of beneficiaries to participate actively in assessing programme outcomes, the training of programme managers to draft quality terms of reference, opportunities for internships, improvement of data analysis skills and assisting in the development of theories of change (Goldman et al., 2018; Porter and Goldman, 2013).

Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) are also active in M&E capacity strengthening. VOPEs act as a platform for strengthening individual knowledge and skills (Rodríguez-Bilella and Lucero, 2016). As such, "VOPEs are established by evaluation practitioners, that is, people who make their living by doing or

commissioning evaluations, who self-organize to discuss and share professional experiences and challenges and to jointly advance the profession and develop professional standards. VOPE events, such as conferences, workshops and seminars, and publications provide a platform for professional exchange" (Kosheleva and Segone, 2013, p. 8). Currently, more than 30 VOPEs are operational in Africa under an umbrella body – the African Evaluation Association (AFREA) – and are seen as important for providing practitioners with a platform for peer learning, sharing good practice and speaking with one voice on M&E issues (Basheka and Byamugisha, 2015).

1.7 Constraints to M&E systems strengthening

Overall, M&E CS is heavily linked to international development partners who commission and conduct evaluations (Ngwabi and Wildschut, 2019). As such, M&E capacity strengthening in the African context has been supply-driven to serve international partners' objective of strengthening organisational accountability capacity. The approach is narrow, it is mainly micro-focused, and is generally short term. The dominance of international development organisations in M&E CS has led to the piecemeal strengthening of 'partner' organisations' local staff using approaches and frameworks imported from western countries and devoid of the context in which they are implemented (Tall,

2009, Tarsilla, 2014). This has resulted in the pace of M&E CS being determined by supply, hence the poor adaptation of M&E systems in Africa (Morkel and Mangwiro, 2019).

Perhaps one of the biggest barriers to capacity strengthening is the manner in which evaluations are commissioned. As evaluations remain largely donor-driven, there is a longstanding and widespread practice of international organisations commissioning evaluations and engaging foreign evaluators thereby overlooking available local evaluators (Basheka and Byamugisha, 2015; Mackay, 2007; Tarsilla, 2014). This deprives local evaluators of opportunities to gain the requisite experience and build individual skills which are essential for strengthening the supply side of the development and sustainability of country M&E systems. Context-specific innovations which contribute to the production of knowledge for adaptation are lost when commissioners of evaluations engage foreign evaluators and neglect to invite the participation of local evaluators in their teams.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Design

A mixed-method design was adopted for this study. Mixed-method design draws on the potential strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell and Clark, 2017), allowing researchers to explore diverse perspectives and uncover relationships that exist in a multifaceted research objective. The mixed-method approach provided a platform for this study to use “multiple sources of information from multiple approaches to gain new insights” (Axinn and Pearce, 2006, p. 1) into how M&E system capacity strengthening is unfolding in the African context. In this study, the mixed-methods approach comprised a cross-sectional survey and a qualitative in-depth enquiry.

2.1.1 Cross-sectional online survey

The cross-sectional survey was targeted at the staff of organisations responsible for M&E system CS in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Given the time and resource constraints, convenience sampling was used to select the participants. This potentially results in a degree of selection bias as respondents were selected using the subjective judgement of the researcher, rather than relying on random selection. This has an implication on the generalisability of the study (see limitations and delimitations section). The respondents were drawn from government departments or ministries, non-governmental organisations, not-for-profit organisations (both local and international), public training institutions, parliamentary staff, and Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs). The research team worked with stakeholders in the targeted countries to create a sampling frame for the survey. Details such as the email addresses and telephone numbers were collected during the creation of the sampling frame.

The sampling frame included information on the contact details of 322 respondents across

the selected eight countries. A Survey Monkey² survey link was sent to the 322 respondents, of which 18 (6%) bounced back due to incorrect email addresses, and 117 (36%), did not open the email. One hundred and forty-two respondents completed the survey (44%) which is regarded as an adequate response rate for a population size of 322. The table below presents the distribution of respondents across the selected eight countries.

Table 1 Survey respondents across selected eight countries and the percentage of the population identified

Country	Number of survey respondents	Per cent of total respondents
Ethiopia	17	12%
Ghana	12	8%
Kenya	19	13%
Region ³	12	8%
Rwanda	3	2%
Tanzania	22	15%
Uganda	26	18%
Zambia	31	22%
Total	142	100%

2.1.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the various M&E system capacity-strengthening approaches and their impacts, and to elicit information on how the effectiveness of these approaches are measured. The interviews were conducted either telephonically or in-person with purposively selected participants from Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Respondents were also drawn from

² An online platform for data collection and analysis.

³ Respondents work across a number of countries.

organisations involved in capacity strengthening such as UNICEF, African Union (AU), African Development Bank (AFDB) and non-governmental organisations. The respondents included government officials, non-governmental organisation staff, public training institutions academics, M&E units in government, and international support/donor agencies. The criteria for selecting the respondents for the in-depth enquiry were:

- Significant experience in M&E capacity strengthening in Africa.
- Currently working in the M&E sector or related field.

The initial target was at least 20 in-depth interviews or to the point at which saturation was reached, which occurred after 15 interviews. These interviews provided a rich and comprehensive understanding of capacity-strengthening activities throughout the selected countries. The distribution of respondents is as follows:

Table 2 In-depth inquiry respondents across selected eight countries

Country	Number of key informant respondents	Category of the respondent
Botswana	1	Government ⁴
Ethiopia	-	-
Ghana	3	Government and VOPE
Kenya	2	Government and VOPE
Rwanda	1	VOPE
Region ⁴	4	UNICEF, AU, INGO, AFDB
Tanzania	2	Government and VOPE/Academic
Uganda	2	Government and CSO
Zambia	-	-
Total	15	

2.2 Data analysis

Data analysis was guided by the study objectives and also by the study design. Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately and were integrated at the analysis stage. Quantitative data were downloaded from Survey Monkey, cleaned, and analysed using STATA, which allowed for data to be managed, analysed, and translated into a graphical display of data. Descriptive statistics (count, frequencies, percent distribution and mean) were used to analyse the closed-ended survey questions whilst manual content analysis was used for the open-ended questions. Qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed and analysed using content analysis. This enabled the

research team to make sense and meaning of the thematic content and, more importantly, to sort data by thematic areas linked to the study objectives.

2.3 Limitations and delimitation

Limited time and resources to conduct the study influenced the choice of convenience sampling as the sampling approach. Convenience sampling limits the findings of the study as they cannot be generalised across the selected eight countries. However, analytic generalisation was applied by determining which findings apply to all countries and which are unique to specific countries.

⁴ These respondents are from government departments which are specifically responsible for coordinating M&E at national level.

⁵ Region includes all respondents who work in more than one country.

3. FINDINGS

The findings presented below addresses the overarching aim of the study, which was to examine the status of M&E systems capacity strengthening in relation to how it has been implemented and how its effectiveness has been measured. The first section presents the description of the study sample and the subsequent sections expand on the various research objectives.

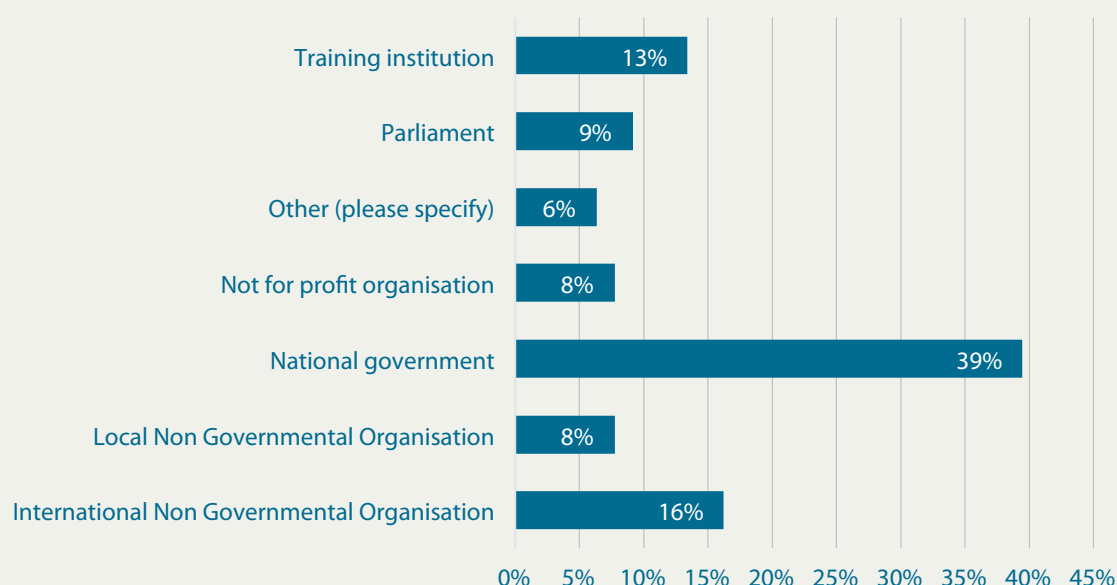
3.1 Study sample profile

As previously mentioned in the methodology section, the semi-structured interview respondents and the survey participants were drawn from eight targeted Anglophone countries – Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia (see Table 2). For the cross-sectional survey, respondents were distributed evenly

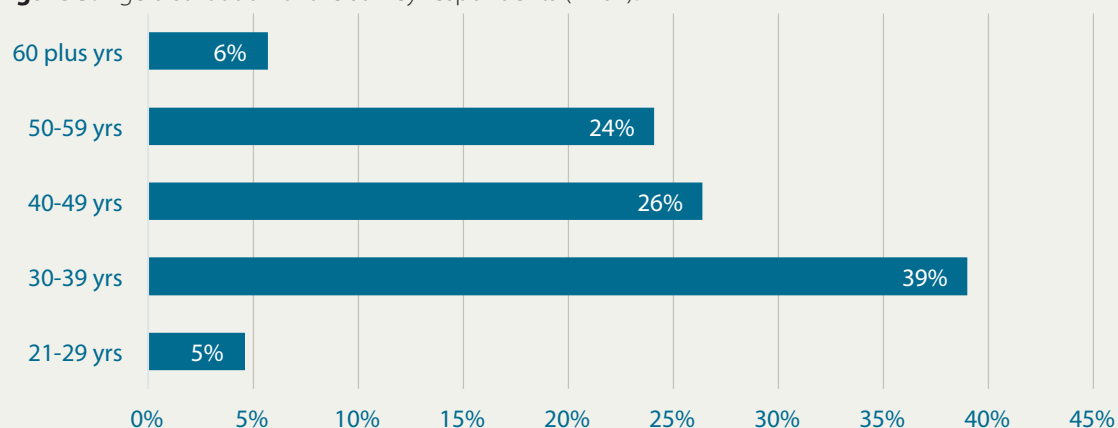
across the countries except for Botswana (0%) and Rwanda (2%). Semi-structured interview participants were also drawn from the selected eight countries and were drawn from entities such as national government M&E departments, international non-governmental/multilateral institutions, and local non-governmental institutions. All participants are employed at a senior level within their organisations and are directly involved in M&E capacity strengthening, either at country or regional level.

Whilst the majority of the participants who responded are from national governments (39%), the remaining participants (61%) were drawn from other M&E stakeholders. Figure 2 provides information on the respondents' employers.

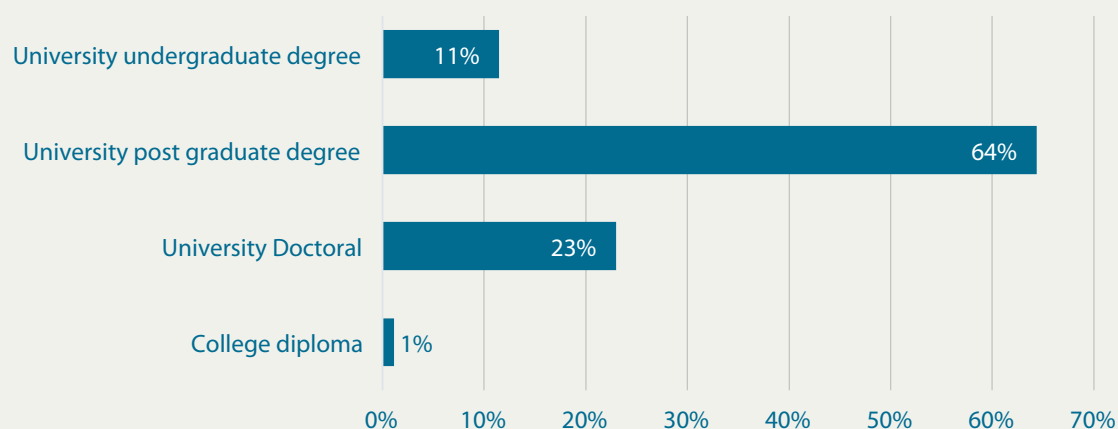
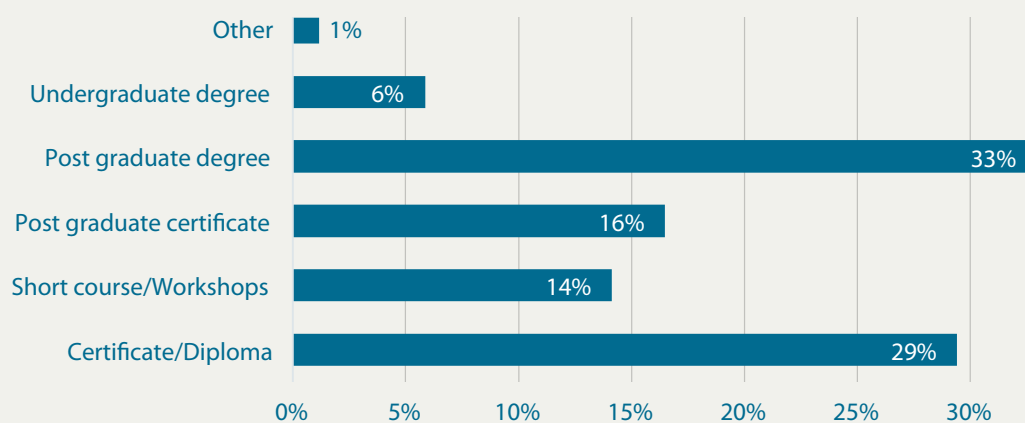
Figure 2: Type of organisations where survey respondents work (n=142).



The gender distribution of the participants shows that males make up 70% whilst females make up 30%. Age distribution shows that only 5% of the participants are aged between 21-29 years.

Figure 3: Age distribution of the survey respondents (n=87).

In terms of education, 88% of survey respondents (87) hold at least a postgraduate degree, with 23% of these holding at least a doctoral degree. However, few of these qualifications are in the field of M&E with 33% possessing a postgraduate degree in M&E, whilst 14% of the participants possess M&E short course certificate/workshop training qualifications.

Figure 4: Highest educational qualification (n=87).**Figure 5:** Highest M&E educational qualification (n=85).

3.2 Capacity strengthening

This study views capacity as multi-dimensional, not limited to individual skills, knowledge and abilities but also incorporating the availability and use of functional M&E systems, processes, resources, management and governance of M&E activities within institutions. At the country level, capacity includes sound M&E policies and strategies that create an enabling M&E environment. In this study, capacity-strengthening approaches are classified at three levels – individual, institution and system levels.

3.3 Overview of organisations implementing capacity strengthening

The findings of this study indicate that there are various organisations currently involved in capacity-strengthening activities in the eight selected countries. The organisations include government departments, higher education training institutions, multilateral organisations, local and international non-governmental organisations, VOPEs, and individuals acting as consultants. Multilateral organisations such as the World Bank, UNICEF, USAID, UNDP and AFDB are involved in capacity-strengthening activities across several African countries but their approaches vary from country to country. Although CLEAR-AA is not a multilateral organisation, it is active in strengthening capacity at the country level by supporting countries to develop M&E policies and frameworks at both country and institutional levels. CLEAR-AA's support also extends to supporting the VOPEs with the aim of strengthening their influence on organisational and national evaluation policies for the benefit of society at large. Certain organisations are reported to be involved in sector-specific projects such as in health and agriculture etc. These projects are not necessarily related to capacity strengthening despite the organisations involved being listed as capacity-strengthening organisations. In the study, interviewees indicated that these organisations focus on strengthening the capacity of their staff largely for accountability purposes and that the state sector benefits little from these efforts.

In this study, specific government units were identified as being responsible for coordinating M&E

in the various countries and were also listed as organisations providing capacity strengthening. Several respondents confirmed that capacity strengthening is provided by such units in the various countries involved in this study. These include Uganda's Prime Minister's office, Botswana's National Strategy Office, Tanzania's Public Service Management and Good Governance Office, and Kenya's Monitoring and Evaluation Department. Two points should be noted with regard to government interventions in M&E capacity strengthening. The first point is that there is significant involvement and influence of multilateral and other organisations in state-led M&E capacity-strengthening activities. Throughout the selected eight countries, multilateral and other organisations provide funding for these activities and set specific goals which are required to be achieved during the period of funding. In Uganda, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) was listed by all 26 respondents from Uganda as providing CS. However, respondents also revealed that the OPM plays a coordinating role and works in partnership with several other organisations who provide material and technical assistance for capacity strengthening. In other countries, the coordination by the central government is not as strong as it is in Uganda. The second point is that state capacity-strengthening activities are focused on strengthening government institutions and have limited reach in organisations outside the state system. Although the state is focused on strengthening capacity within its own institutions, the high turnover of state M&E personnel was highlighted as an obstacle effectively making the government system a training ground for staff who will later move to either local or international non-governmental organisations.

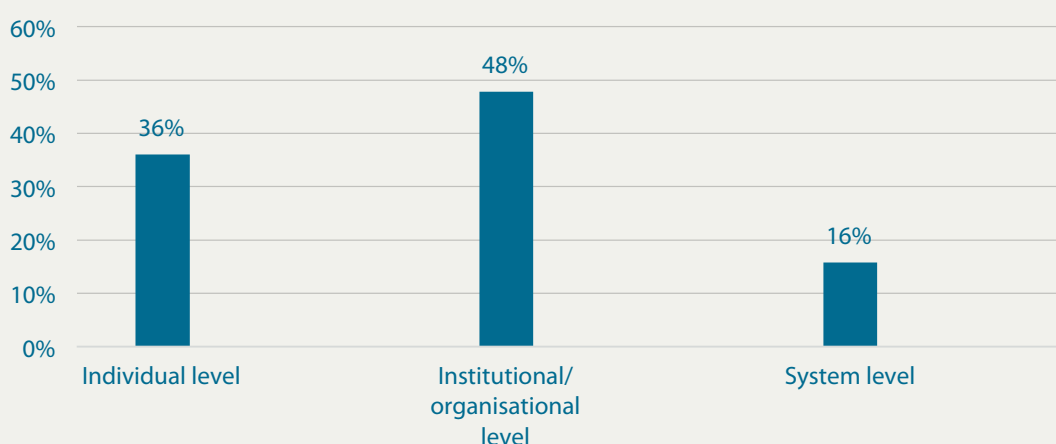
Higher education institutions are also listed as providing M&E capacity strengthening across all the eight countries but the majority offer short courses and M&E modules which are targeted at specific sectors e.g. health, agriculture etc. Evidence shows that there is no direct career path for those who want to study M&E from undergraduate level to postgraduate level. This reflects the poor development of M&E as a discipline and casts a certain doubt on the quality of M&E curricula, with consequent detrimental effects on the skills of the graduates.

VOPEs are listed as organisations that are active in M&E capacity strengthening in seven of the eight countries, with the exclusion of Botswana. It is evident from the respondents that they believe that although the VOPEs in some of the countries are not yet fully developed they have the potential to transform the M&E system and practice by strengthening individual M&E practitioner skills and playing an advisory role in the various state departments.

3.4 M&E capacity strengthening approaches

The survey and the in-depth interviews revealed that various capacity-strengthening approaches are being implemented across the eight African countries. The approaches are being implemented by a variety of stakeholders including central government, training institutions (higher education institutions), multilateral organisations, local and international non-governmental organisations, and consultancies. The targets of the capacity-strengthening approaches are presented below.

Figure 6: Target of capacity strengthening activities (n=75)



Although 48% of respondents indicated that the capacity-strengthening approaches are targeted at the institutional level, it is important to note that when respondents were asked to describe the CS activities, the description reveals that the activities are mainly for the imparting of specific skills to individuals within organisations and these activities should, therefore, be regarded as individual-level approaches.

3.5 Country system-level capacity strengthening

The perception of both the interviewees and the survey participants is that capacity-strengthening activities such as developing M&E policies and frameworks, creating an enabling environment, and developing institutional M&E systems do not constitute capacity strengthening. It is evi-

dent from the responses to the survey and the in-depth interviews that the focus is narrow and concentrates on strengthening individuals' skills and knowledge. Respondents highlighted that country-level M&E capacity strengthening is dominated by multilateral organisations or the organisations they fund and the government itself. There is a distinct focus on strengthening government systems whilst the non-state sector largely operates as a parallel system.

At country M&E system level, very few respondents (survey and semi-structured interviews) were of the opinion that capacity-strengthening activities are taking place. Capacity-strengthening approaches at country system-level focus on developing policies, frameworks and M&E systems specifically for state institutions. These approaches are being implemented in collaboration with

other international organisations but national M&E coordinators dominate. The various capacity-strengthening activities appear to concentrate on the formulation of policies and guidelines to guide the institutionalisation of M&E in the state sector rather than on the implementation of M&E guidelines and policies within the state sector.

3.6 The institutionalisation of M&E (institutional level)

Respondents were asked to describe the capacity-strengthening activities at the institutional/organisational level. Respondents to both the survey and the semi-structured interviews classified capacity-strengthening activities into state sector and non-state sector activities. In the state sector, countries such as Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya are implementing strategies to institutionalise M&E within government departments. This is being done by the creation and capacitation of M&E units within government ministries and departments. Respondents indicated that in Botswana concerted efforts are being made to set up M&E units in government departments whilst in Uganda a few of the ministries have appointed M&E officers but others still lack M&E structures due to resource constraints. The results show that across the eight countries, challenges such as poor funding for the institutionalisation of M&E, the perception that M&E is not relevant or is a fault-finding tool, and the poor appreciation of the value of M&E make institutionalisation difficult.

Respondents indicate that in the non-state sector the situation is somewhat different with various approaches having been implemented to strengthen M&E structures and processes and to capacitate individuals. A respondent summed up this scenario by saying that the non-governmental organisations which receive funding from international organisations are required to follow stringent accountability requirements which a functional organisational M&E system can provide and they therefore have an obligation to build their own capacity. However, despite having this capacity, respondents indicated that non-governmental organisations do not share their performance data and evaluation reports with state stakeholders, hence the existence of parallel M&E systems.

3.7 Approaches to developing individual skills and abilities

As mentioned earlier, several organisations are involved in strengthening individual-level skills and abilities across the eight African countries. However, it is important to note that there seems to be a perception among respondents (both from the survey and the interviews) that M&E capacity is largely concerned with individual skills and abilities. The majority of respondents listed strengthening of individual-level skills and abilities as the main capacity-building activity in their country. These activities were project-based and aimed at improving organisational reporting, mainly for the purposes of accountability. The approaches used at the individual level only target at M&E practitioners. At an individual level, the following approaches were listed as being used to strengthen capacity:

- Short term courses – training individuals (M&E practitioners) on specific skills e.g. impact evaluation, data analysis and report writing;
- In-house M&E training – internships, mentoring and coaching;
- Higher training institutions offering training (sector-specific M&E courses); and
- Stakeholders, such as VOPEs, offering pre-conference training workshops to participants.

During the study respondents were asked their opinion on the rationale for offering this wide range of types of training. Despite the fact that some of the respondents were working for M&E coordination units, they could not say with certainty what guided these approaches. However, respondents from countries such as Uganda indicated that a country capacity needs assessment had been conducted and gaps have been identified. This would allow for capacity-strengthening funding to be directed to the appropriate capacity-strengthening activity. Respondents indicated that organisations funding and implementing capacity-strengthening activities work in silos, without linking and coordinating with other role players. The lack of coordination of individual training activities also means that strengthening individual skills and knowledge is conducted on

an *ad hoc* basis, it is not centrally coordinated, and is conducted using different curricula and therefore fails to meet the capacity needs of an individual.

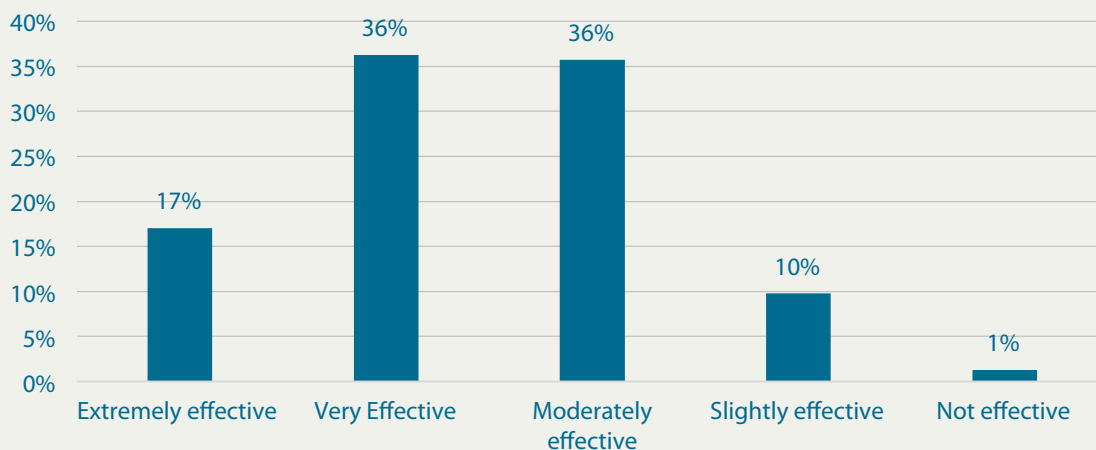
3.8 Capacity-strengthening issues

Despite the interventions which have been implemented in these eight countries, it appears that there is no systematic approach to understanding the M&E system gaps and needs. Respondents indicated that capacity-strengthening interventions are disjointed, unsystematic, and seem to address the individual skills and abilities of the practitioners rather than the consumers of the M&E products. Respondents working at the regional level indicated that there is a need to realise that capacity is multi-dimensional and to achieve full capacity there is a need for various elements of capacity to work together. Across

all the countries except for Uganda, capacity strengthening is not informed by capacity needs assessments but by assumptions of the needs of the country. Respondents alluded to the unsystematic and *ad hoc* nature of capacity strengthening across the eight countries and the lack of capacity-strengthening frameworks or strategies to address the capacity gaps.

Respondents were asked about the effectiveness of capacity-strengthening activities being implemented in their countries. There is a consensus that these approaches are effective, with only 1% indicating that they are not effective. However, effectiveness needs to be measured according to the intended outcomes and its contribution to the broader country M&E system. As will be discussed in detail later in this report, capacity strengthening is not being measured and effectiveness is, therefore, subjective.

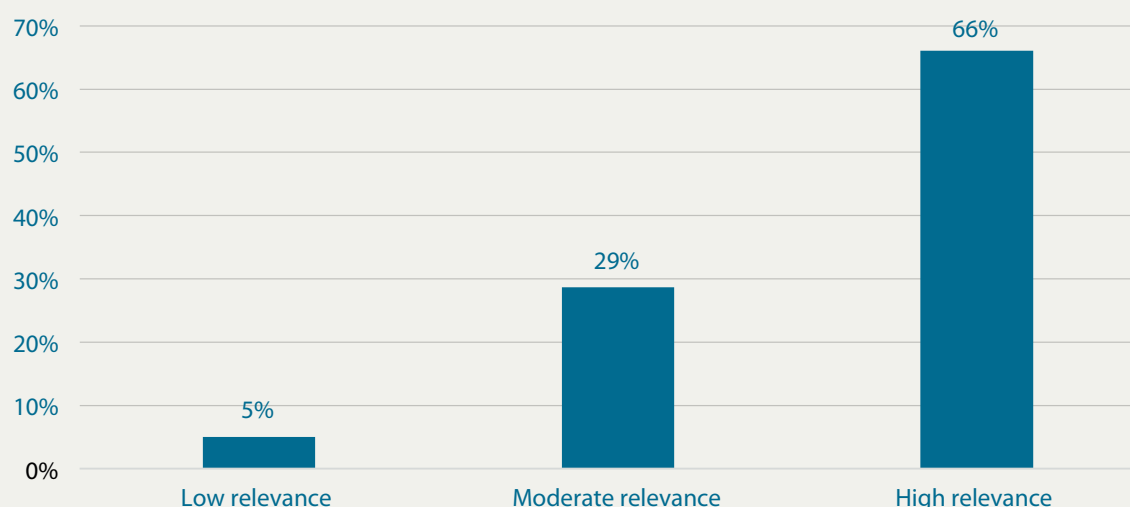
Figure 7: Effectiveness of capacity strengthening activities (n=138).



Survey respondents were also asked about the relevance of the capacity-strengthening activities to their

local context and 66% indicated that they are relevant to their context whilst only 5% indicated low relevance. This finding contradicts the literature on the topic of capacity strengthening which indicates a general lack of contextual relevance of capacity-strengthening approaches across Anglo-phone African countries. It can be inferred that

due to the outcomes of capacity strengthening not being measured and the absence of capacity needs assessments in these countries, the contextual relevance of these activities lacks a reference point.

Figure 8: Relevance of capacity-strengthening activities (n=138).

3.9 Capacity-strengthening enabling factors

Respondents to the semi-structured interview cited several capacity-strengthening enabling factors. Key enablers identified are the initiatives being undertaken by the governments of the selected eight countries to formalise M&E into government systems and the anchoring of these systems in national budgets. This has been achieved by the development of M&E units and policies and by linking them to national development agendas. Respondents highlighted that such developments enable M&E capacity strengthening which is critical for defining roles and responsibilities of the stakeholders outlined in M&E country policies.

The role of development funders/donors was highlighted as enabling capacity strengthening. Respondents across the eight countries highlighted the fact that funding for development programmes is now seldom granted without the imposition of stringent M&E requirements and the availability of funding to capacitate staff of the organisations receiving the funding. This has played a significant role in building the M&E human capital of the various countries and furthering the development of M&E institutional capacity in both state and non-state institutions.

A growing demand for M&E products by both the bureaucratic and political arms of governments

was cited as one of the enabling factors for M&E capacity strengthening. Although respondents indicated that there are challenges in situations where the importance of M&E is undervalued and there is a poor appreciation and awareness of M&E by politicians, demand for M&E products was increasing thereby opening avenues for capacity strengthening within the state. Respondents highlighted that M&E champions within state institutions have played a significant role in creating this demand. Champions at this level of authority have a valuable role to play in the integration of M&E across the public policy cycle at sectoral and national level.

Partnerships between state and non-state entities were also cited as enabling M&E capacity strengthening. Respondents reported that partnerships between stakeholders such as VOPEs, government departments, and donors are common in various countries. These partnerships have resulted in various capacity-strengthening activities which include developing M&E policies and frameworks at national level, M&E institutionalisation, and development of individual skills and abilities. Despite these partnerships, respondents indicated that the non-state and state sectors operate in silos when it comes to the practice of M&E with the former having developed efficient M&E systems whilst the latter is poorly funded and struggles with limited human resource capacity.

3.10 Barriers to effective M&E systems capacity strengthening

3.10.1 Scarce resources

In an effort to understand the factors that impede capacity strengthening across the selected eight countries, survey participants were asked for their opinions on the main barriers responsible for impeding capacity strengthening. The bar-

riers were pre-coded and are presented in Table 3. The table lists the various barriers identified by participants. Poor funding for M&E capacity strengthening was regarded as the main obstacle to capacity strengthening. This perception concurred with that of the interview respondents who stated that the state sector allocates limited funding for M&E capacity strengthening and implementation of M&E policies. State institutions depend too heavily on international donors for M&E capacity strengthening.

Table 3 Barriers to M&E system capacity strengthening (n=127).

Barriers to M&E system capacity strengthening	%
Capacity strengthening activities not adapted to the local environment/country context	33%
Organisations only target their internal M&E staff for capacity strengthening	38%
M&E academic courses not aligned with skills needs	45%
The institutional environment not conducive to practice acquired M&E skills	49%
Limited opportunities for local evaluation practitioners	54%
Government departments have low demand for M&E system products	56%
Poor funding for capacity-strengthening activities	87%

Interviewees indicated that the situation is completely different for non-state sector organisations that are implementing donor-funded programmes. They highlighted how these organisations are guaranteed funding for M&E system capacity strengthening and the setting up of M&E systems with the objective of improving accountability and performance monitoring. At the individual level, there are scarce resources available for the academic and professional training for individuals not attached to institutions.

3.10.2 Lack of a culture of evaluation

Most respondents cited the lack of a culture of evaluation as a barrier to capacity strengthening. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the general perception that M&E is a type of audit stems from civil servants seeing M&E as doing 'police work' or as a tool for checking what went wrong rather than an opportunity to learn how to improve on

their activities and they will therefore often avoid engaging in M&E. Most survey participants (73%) concurred with the perception of interviewees who indicated that M&E is used as a tool for accountability to the programme funders. Only 27% indicated that M&E is used for learning and improving programme implementation. Considering the poor history of evaluation being used as a tool for informed decision-making but rather regarded as a means to determine accountability, these findings suggest that while demand for M&E products may be growing, this demand might be misplaced and might not assist countries to achieve their intended development outcomes.

3.10.3 Limited understanding of the role of M&E by critical stakeholders

Growing the demand for evaluations and M&E products has been highlighted as an enabling

factor for capacity strengthening. However, respondents state that the lack of awareness and appreciation of the role of M&E amongst state bureaucrats, political principals, and funders act as a barrier to M&E capacity strengthening. Respondents indicate that while M&E products are in demand, there is lack of knowledge on how to use the products and that there is poor availability of M&E evidence to enable informed decision making. Commonly, M&E products have little influence on programme learning and implementation as they are received and acted upon after the fact and this was found to be the case for all the eight countries in the study. This has diminished the value of M&E and has indirectly affected the availability of capacity-strengthening resources.

3.10.4 Mistrust in sharing M&E products

The degree to which the development of M&E across the continent has been driven by development partners has created a system of fragmentation regarding what evidence is generated by M&E systems and how it is shared or coordinated. This is particularly pervasive amongst civil society entities. As CSOs, NGOs, and international NGOs are largely donor-driven, the reporting requirements for this funding have proved beneficial as they have helped to build M&E capacity within civil society. Unfortunately, the reporting requirements are such that often the analysis of these systems is only shared with development partners and not with the state drivers that provide the direction, the setting, and the national performance monitoring systems of these same sectors. This poor sharing of information between civil society and government in more inclusive societies, such as Ghana, is largely due to the lack of coordination mechanisms for centralising government and civil society-generated data. In other countries that are less inclusive, such as Uganda, there tends to be mistrust regarding how the data will be used.

In Uganda, there is limited sharing of data between government, NGOs, and INGOs. As noted above, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has overseen a steering committee for selecting all evaluations to be carried out in the country and this includes civil society, academia, and the private sector. To address this lack of sharing, the OPM

is establishing a framework to streamline CSO reporting through the government in order to reap the benefits of CSO performance monitoring and evaluation.

3.10.5 M&E curricula and training barriers

Respondents indicated that there are several barriers related to M&E training. Respondents reported the non-availability of M&E courses at the undergraduate level as being directly responsible for the human capacity shortages across African countries and the poor development and adaptation of M&E as a discipline in the African context. Respondents also stated that while professional courses, workshops and postgraduate academic courses are being offered across Africa, these are frequently beyond the reach of the very individuals and institutions in critical need of training. Organisations and government departments which lack resources have very limited access to these professional courses whilst non-state entities who have the necessary funds can afford to capacitate their institutions by sending individuals for professional development courses. Respondents indicated that due to the disparity in remuneration between state and non-state organisations (INGOs) in Africa, qualified M&E individuals tend to migrate to the non-state sector (INGOs). Respondents indicated that state institutions effectively become a training ground for the non-state sector as the most capable and qualified M&E human capital moves out of the state.

The absence of post-training follow-up of those who have received various types of professional training makes it difficult to ascertain the impact of capacity strengthening at an organisational or systems level. The emphasis appears to be on training rather than on a broader, long-term strategy for national M&E capacity development plans. Such plans could serve to identify the needs of the country for the next generation and it is therefore essential that competency is strengthened to be able to provide the scale of capacity needed to meet the future needs of the countries.

3.10.6 Unknown M&E capacity needs

Unknown capacity needs of countries, institutions, and individuals across the eight countries have been identified as a barrier to capacity strengthening. Respondents highlighted that country capacity needs and gaps are not known and are decided by whoever is funding the capacity strengthening. This has led M&E capacity strengthening approaches' design and activities being dictated and driven by international funders and those implementing capacity strengthening activities. During interviews, respondents emphasised that given the limited resources for capacity strengthening, it is prudent for countries to assess their M&E capacity needs and prioritise the meagre resources towards areas with the greatest need.

3.11 Measuring M&E capacity-strengthening activities

3.11.1 How is M&E system capacity strengthening measured?

Measuring the effectiveness of M&E capacity strengthening is critical as it allows the implementers to understand how the intervention has performed and the extent to which it has addressed the initial needs or objectives of the intervention. There is consensus amongst all the respondents that M&E capacity-strengthening results are not necessarily seen in the short-term but provide benefits in the longer term. This means that the impact and effectiveness of capacity-strengthening approaches are noticed after a much longer period. The fact that the major stakeholders, both funders and implementers of capacity-strengthening activities, are usually from outside the country means that their interventions are targeted at a specific area/level and are of a limited duration. This also means that the resources for measuring the effectiveness of M&E capacity strengthening are also only available for a short period of time, hence it is often difficult to measure the long-term impacts of the capacity-strengthening activities. Respondents emphasised that M&E capacity strengthening should be funded locally or, in cases where resources are limited, the state should take a lead (driven from within) and set long-term measurable goals.

The second issue raised by respondents is that in both state and non-state institutions, M&E capacity-strengthening activities are often viewed as a very small item or process in the whole development intervention/programme cycle and may be regarded as not worth reporting or evaluating at the end of the cycle. The result is that the design for capacity strengthening is *ad hoc* and is not carefully considered, and CS activities do not receive adequate funding and support by state decision-makers. Respondents indicated that the implication is that funding is allocated for capacity strengthening itself e.g. training of individuals, rather than on the assessment of the impact of CS. One respondent summarised the implication of not measuring M&E capacity development by saying that despite significant investment being made in the African context to develop evaluation capacity, both state and non-state institutions still decry the lack of evaluation skills within their organisations and the sector still depends on foreign evaluators. The respondent apportioned the blame for the skills shortage to the lack of evaluation of the design, processes and outcomes of M&E capacity-strengthening activities. The argument is that if the funders and implementers of M&E system capacity development insisted on the measurement of outcomes, this would result in sound and informed solutions for addressing capacity strengthening.

3.11.2 What has been measured and how?

Survey respondents were asked how the various capacity-strengthening activities being implemented in their countries were being measured, and especially their effectiveness was being measured. The responses were elicited by means of an open-ended question. Sixty participants responded to the question and 54 stated that process and output indicators were the only forms of measurement.

The process and output indicators are clustered as follows:

- Pre- and post-training scores;
- Number of individuals trained;
- end-of-module assessments;
- Number of courses held; and
- The number of graduates.

In terms of intermediate outcomes (building capacity or systems) two indicators were identified:

- Number of CSOs with the ability to produce quality data in their programmes; and
- Ability to perform data quality assurance.

Only four respondents listed wider outcome indicators around changes in behaviour or performance which are related to the broader goal of capacity strengthening. The indicators are:

- Level of parliamentary and citizen demand for M&E system products; and
- Utilisation of national statistics for decision-making purposes.

Respondents indicated that those implementing capacity strengthening did not measure how M&E system CS was performing. However, respondents suggested that if a country has a capacity development framework, then it is necessary to set long-term goals that will lead to measurable immediate and wider outcomes.

The interviewees proposed the following indicators to measure CS indicators for immediate outcomes:

- Quality of reporting;
- Quality of evaluations;
- Quality of data produced; and
- Timeliness of reporting and is reporting aligned to the decision-making process.

The interviewees proposed the following indicators to measure CS indicators for wider outcomes:

- Evidence use in decision making by both state and non-state entities;
- Use of performance data for programme learning and adaptation at the institutional level; and
- Uptake of M&E in the decision-making process.

The results show that issues related to the measurement of M&E capacity-strengthening activities are not divorced from the broader issues of capacity strengthening. The fact that the majority of capacity-strengthening activities are focused at the individual level means that performance monitoring indicators are more dominant than the system-level outcomes. Respondents highlighted that various compounding factors make it difficult to measure outcomes. These include problems with disjuncture in the design of capacity-strengthening activities, an unsystematic approach, and the disjuncture between what the training curriculum offers and the M&E sector skills requirements. Given the observations presented, it can be argued that for effective measurement of the outcomes of M&E capacity-strengthening activities, a systematic approach to capacity strengthening is needed, and the design should address known capacity needs at institutional and system level. Such an approach addresses the non-availability of resources for measuring outcomes and refocuses capacity strengthening to national needs.

4. DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to explore the approaches to M&E system capacity strengthening that have been used in selected Anglophone African countries and to determine how their effectiveness has been measured. The following specific research questions were pursued: What is the status of M&E system capacity strengthening in selected countries in Anglophone Africa? What are the gaps in M&E capacity strengthening in selected countries in Anglophone Africa? What approaches, mechanisms and measures are being used by various institutions to measure the impact of this capacity strengthening (for example to influence policies, programmes and management systems) as well as the combination and quality of the interventions themselves? What do both research and practice suggest is 'good' practice in M&E CS at individual/organisational/system level? This discussion section is structured according to these research questions.

4.1 Current status of M&E system capacity strengthening.

Despite the widespread practice of M&E in the countries involved in this study, evidence shows that there are frequently dual parallel M&E systems. One is led by central (national) government and focuses on the development of M&E within government institutions and the other is composed of various non-state organisations running their systems parallel to those of the government. Performance monitoring data and evaluations from these two systems rarely cross the parallel divide to influence policy, planning and decision making within the other.

At the sector level, certain sectors' performance monitoring capacity is more developed, especially those sectors receiving substantial funding from the international community, such as health and agriculture. At an institutional level, the capacity of the M&E systems of certain state institutions/departments are more developed whilst others are still in the development phase. This is largely dependent on the investments of resources by both the state and non-state sectors. In the non-state sector, M&E systems function as measures of

accountability to meet to funders' requirements. It is important to note that in state institutions evaluations and assessment of evaluation capacity are not frequently undertaken whilst in the non-state sector significant numbers of evaluations are carried out and, in cases where evaluation capacity is lacking, the non-state sector draws from outside the country.

VOPEs and academic/training institutions also focus on M&E policy advocacy and the strengthening of individual skills and abilities. What is significant in these eight countries' systems is the lack of coordination and integration between state institutions, the VOPEs, and higher education institutions in pursuit of a consolidated M&E system. This has resulted in these key stakeholders working in silos thereby losing potential opportunities for strengthening M&E capacity. Non-state sectors play a limited role in state sector performance monitoring and evaluations, whilst academic institutions' curricula are not driven by the M&E industry needs and neither are they localised resulting in a mismatch between the skills produced and the M&E industry requirements.

4.2 Demand for M&E products and evidence-informed decision-making

The responses to this study strongly emphasise that the generation of demand for M&E products plays a pivotal role in strengthening capacity for countries. Demand for M&E products has been classified as modest to the extent that even in cases where evaluative evidence is available, it is rarely used for decision making. There is an assumption that generating demand and conscientising decision-makers (both political and administrative) on the importance of M&E will lead to a top-down demand for M&E products which will result in the strengthening of M&E system capacity. If this demand is sustained, it will advance the institutionalisation of M&E. This can be achieved by better allocation of resources, advocating for the formalisation of M&E within institutions, strengthening data collection systems, and increasing the demand for quality M&E

products. However, in countries such as Uganda, with a more developed M&E system, it was highlighted that evaluative evidence complemented by other types of evidence is not always available when decisions are being made. With regard to the demand for M&E products, it is important to understand what informs that demand – is it the demand for accountability, programme improvement or learning? For demand to be strengthened there is a need to understand whether and under what circumstances robust evidence directly contributes to decision making.

4.3 M&E system capacity-strengthening gaps

Evidence has shown that outside entities and foreign donors influence the agenda of M&E system capacity strengthening. The implication is that capacity-strengthening approaches are designed without an inclusive capacity needs assessment, they do not consider the in-country context and, in most cases, they focus on non-state sector organisations and individuals to strengthen accountability and project reporting mechanisms. None of the eight countries selected for this study has conducted a countrywide capacity needs assessment or have formulated an M&E capacity-strengthening framework.

Other stakeholders involved in capacity strengthening are separating evaluation from performance monitoring to focus on evaluation capacity strengthening. Monitoring provides performance information on policies, programmes, or projects at any given time in relation to set targets and outcomes. Evaluation provides evidence of whether targets and outcomes are being achieved and is an essential measurement tool for use during the programme life cycle rather than an activity to be performed at the end of the project. The focus on evaluations is underpinned by the belief that the more frequently evaluations are conducted, the more evidence-based decision making will be enabled. Separating evaluation from performance monitoring means that those responsible for the implementation process lose the opportunity to learn and adapt during project implementation. Evaluation skills are integral in performance monitoring, as these skills enable the development of an evaluative culture within institutions and have a direct influence on learning and adapta-

tion during the implementation of interventions. In resource-constrained countries, strengthening the evaluation skills of staff who are responsible for performance monitoring will also address the skills shortage and foster a culture of using evidence in decision-making at the implementation level. This will change the perception that decision making is restricted to senior managers.

4.4 Enabling factors

There are several opportunities which enable capacity strengthening. There is an increasing willingness to develop M&E systems with government departments and the sharing of technical expertise could significantly assist in developing effective M&E systems with subsequent positive development outcomes. This, coupled with a growing demand for M&E products, could highlight the necessity and demand for evidence to inform concrete policy decisions such as programme redesign, scale-up or discontinuation, and will ultimately lead to positive development outcomes. Also, the availability of a variety of partners such as VOPEs, donors, educational, and multilateral institutions presents a valuable opportunity for countries to make the best use of these partnerships by directing the partnership resources to where the need for strengthening country M&E systems is the greatest. The prevailing ineffective situation of the state and other development partners each using their own M&E systems to implement development interventions which are targeted at the same/or similar development challenges indicates a need to break these M&E silos. This would create opportunities for mutual learning through the sharing of knowledge and experience to collaboratively determine what works best in the particular country.

4.5 Barriers

The majority of the barriers relate to the poor appreciation of the role of M&E by decision-makers. The findings of this study show that there is a shortage of resources across all levels (individual, institutional and system levels) to develop a fully functional M&E system. At the state level, there is a dependence on non-state funders for capacity strengthening. This is not sustainable and, in most cases, the funder dictates the capacity-strengthening goals and approaches thereby depriving

state entities of the opportunity to channel the resources where they are needed most. At the institutional level, despite the push to develop functional M&E systems, state institutions lack the necessary human and material resources to realise this goal. At individual level, individuals are often exposed to a variety of *ad hoc* professional and non-professional training interventions offered by various entities, and these training opportunities are frequently priced beyond the financial reach of individuals who are not sponsored by their employers. To address the resource challenge, there is a need for the state to assume overall responsibility for M&E system capacity strengthening and allocate adequate resources to address M&E system capacity gaps in state institutions.

Another important barrier common across the eight countries is the absence of a culture of evaluation. The poor perception and lack of appreciation of the potential benefits of M&E results in situations where evaluation results are used selectively for justifying prior decisions or, in some cases, results are suppressed or used to advance specific political agendas. In some cases, despite the availability of evidence from M&E, decisions are made without using that evidence – deliberately or inadvertently. What can be learnt from such situations is that the development of a culture of evidence-informed decision making does not only strengthen the capacity of M&E practitioners but is also of value for decision-makers.

There is a need to develop synergies and partnerships amongst all stakeholders who are addressing the same development challenges. These synergies and partnerships must also extend to programme design and the implementation of development programmes. This will prevent duplication of efforts and enable both the state and the non-state sectors to work collaboratively.

As has been the case in other disciplines, the M&E curriculum is flawed due to its non-alignment with local M&E practice needs. Curriculum alignment is crucial in realising learning objectives but in the case of M&E, alignment objectives are often subject to practical problems. Professional training of individuals in M&E is haphazard with individuals randomly attending workshops and short courses without any pre-determined learning trajectories or plans across the curriculum.

4.6 Measuring the effectiveness of M&E system capacity-strengthening approaches

Measuring the effectiveness of M&E capacity strengthening is critical as it allows the implementers to understand how the intervention has performed and to what extent it has addressed the initial needs or objectives of the intervention. The findings of this study show that across all eight countries, the measurement of M&E capacity-strengthening activities is amorphous and vague. Measurement only exists at the input and output stages of the micro-level spectrum. Absence of monitoring tools for capacity-strengthening activities implies that the efficiency and effectiveness of capacity-strengthening activities are unknown hence implementers are deprived of the opportunity to reflect on what is working, not working, for whom and under what circumstances. Also, the absence of evaluations means that the relationship between capacity-strengthening interventions and M&E capacity outcomes is not defined.

4.7 M&E capacity-strengthening 'best' practice

The findings on M&E capacity strengthening in Africa show that it is unsystematic, chaotic and is largely focused on developing individual skills. The absence of well-planned capacity-strengthening activities and evaluation of these activities makes it difficult to identify best practices in M&E capacity strengthening. It is also pertinent to mention that there is consensus amongst respondents from all the countries in the study that to achieve positive outcomes, it is essential that the design and implementation of approaches takes cognisance of the context in which capacity strengthening activities are to be implemented. Therefore, it can be argued that approaches to M&E capacity strengthening from other countries cannot be accepted as good practice without interrogating their sustainability and suitability in the local context. The context in which the M&E system operates determines the value attached to M&E and the extent to which it will influence the decision-making process by both state and non-state entities. Drawing on lessons learnt from this study and from existing literature on evaluation capacity strengthening and general capacity development in the African con-

text, principles of 'good' practices in M&E capacity strengthening are starting to emerge. These principles are presented below.

The unsystematic, short-term, and piecemeal nature of M&E system capacity strengthening shows that it is not informed by situational/needs assessments at all the three levels of M&E systems. As a good practice, M&E system capacity strengthening must be preceded by a situational and needs assessment of the intended beneficiaries, it must be demand-driven, and must respond to specific needs. Without a situational analysis or needs assessment, M&E system capacity strengthening will remain supply-side driven. Good practice, in this case, demands that M&E CS be driven from within and although there is a greater likelihood of success if structuring interventions are based on demand, attention to the incentives behind the demand is essential.

The findings of this study have shown that M&E capacity-strengthening activities which go beyond individual skills and abilities are likely to yield better outcomes. There is a need to reassess the commonly held belief that strengthening individual skills-sets and abilities automatically leads to significant improvements in institutional and system-level outcomes. The design for M&E system capacity-strengthening approaches must go beyond improving individual competencies or the identification of sector skills deficiencies to the linking of M&E capacity-strengthening activities to institutions' performance gaps.

A novel approach to CS is the use of change agents (seconding M&E staff) within institutions to change M&E organisational culture and this approach has sometimes been adopted to strengthen M&E systems. The effectiveness of this technical assistance depends on two issues. Firstly, the change agent must wield enough power to change the organisational culture (Benn, Edwards and Williams, 2014), both M&E practice and the use of M&E products in decision making. The second issue is that, for sustainability, there is a need to consider the role of the change agent beyond that of providing technical assistance.

Capacity-strengthening approaches which focus on individuals should be reinforced by the provision of the requisite tools and enabling envi-

ronment and should utilise context-appropriate approaches which enable the capacitated individuals to practice what they have learnt. Training should not be regarded as an end in itself but should mark the beginning of an individual's M&E capacity-strengthening proficiency. Individuals should be long-term catalysts for institutional strengthening by facilitating improvements in institutional behaviour and culture which will strengthen the M&E system. To achieve this, the curricula for training interventions must be adapted to the local context and must go beyond classroom training and include implementation of what is learnt through post-training follow-up.

Finally, capacity-strengthening interventions are rarely evaluated. Capacity-building plans should include an M&E component to monitor and evaluate not only the outputs but also the outcomes to understand whether the interventions change behaviour and performance at individual and institutional levels. Evaluation of capacity-strengthening activities enables individuals to learn from experience and to adapt the interventions to meet local needs.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations are targeted at both national institutions and organisations funding M&E capacity development in the eight selected countries. The success of the suggested recommendations depends on the creation of effective synergies between state and non-state sectors and the recognition at policy level that such networks and synergies are relevant when seeking a holistic solution to M&E capacity challenges. When implementing these recommendations, it is important to incorporate a sufficient degree of flexibility and scope to enable adaptation to the specific country context.

Recommendation 1 – Know your capacity needs and be systematic

Capacity-strengthening funding initiatives for countries and organisations must prioritise country-level M&E capacity needs assessments in order to determine the existing capacity at the time of the assessment as this affects the overall practice of M&E within the country. The follow-up step is to develop a country-specific capacity development plan which provides details on the necessary capacity improvements or makes recommendations on new types of capacity which may be required. It is also important to develop measurement tools for assessing the impact, effectiveness, and merit of M&E capacity-strengthening approaches. Key to the implementation of the plan is a robust knowledge management system where state and non-state institutions mine knowledge/evidence to enable productive reflection on what is working, not working, for whom, and under what circumstances.

Recommendation 2 – Improve the strengthening of capacity at all levels – individual, institutional and country

Stakeholders who fund or implement capacity-strengthening initiatives must focus on the M&E system as a whole and strengthen all capacity levels – individual, institutional and country. The focus should not be limited to the monitoring of

micro-level technical skills and abilities but should take a broader view and include the strengthening of macro-level capacity and evaluation skills.

Recommendation 3 – Context matters

Countries are not homogenous and M&E capacity depends largely on the contextual factors/nuances prevalent in each organisation and country. Individuals or stakeholders responsible for the design of M&E capacity-strengthening approaches should devise context-specific approaches which are acceptable to the recipients of such interventions and permit them to adapt easily and sustain the capacity they have gained.

Recommendation 4 – Extend capacity strengthening to decision-makers and create an enabling environment

The lack of capacity-strengthening approaches which create an enabling environment and develop the capacities of decision-makers creates obstacles for the development of a culture of evaluation and the use of M&E information and evidence within organisations. To optimise programme effectiveness, those who are funding, designing, and implementing capacity-strengthening initiatives must extend their focus to include these aspects.

Recommendation 5 – Create synergies and networks

The state and other development partners are implementing development interventions which address the same or similar development challenges in various entities but fail to consider that these entities may have significantly different M&E capacities. It is recommended that synergies be developed between state and non-state sectors to eliminate the existing M&E capacity silos and to create opportunities for mutual learning and sharing to determine what strategy works in their particular country. The state should be leading the development of these synergies.

CONCLUSION

This study affirmed the importance of strengthening M&E system capacity in Anglophone Africa, given the key role of effective M&E systems in enabling countries to achieve their development goals. A clear understanding of country context, the conducting of M&E system capacity assessments, and the development of capacity-strengthening plans are all vitally important for the strengthening of country M&E systems. Further research is needed to fully understand the various approaches to country M&E system capacity strengthening, and how the design and training curricula can be adapted to specific country needs and contexts.

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