POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief examines key elements of national evaluation policies among selected African countries with a view to inform policy-makers on good practices for the development of such policies. This brief draws from a comparative study conducted by CLEAR-AA in 2018 of the status of national evaluation policies of South Africa, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Kenya.

In addition, a desktop review of the national evaluation policies was conducted. For comparative purposes of the policies, two analytical frameworks were utilised: Segone, Bamberger and Reddy (2015); and Holvoet and Renard's framework for effective national evaluation systems (2007).

The National Evaluation Policy landscape in Africa: A comparison

The demand for National Evaluation Policies (NEPs) has gained traction in Africa as more countries acknowledge the value of evaluation in enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in public and development management. As these countries implement developmental programmes and projects they require appropriate and effective monitoring and evaluation systems to measure performance, assess impact and draw lessons for future programmes and projects. Similarly, the Sustainable Development Goals call for country-led systems to measure effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, and the impact of development interventions.

National evaluation policies are an important framework to structure, systematise and guide monitoring and evaluations at country level. Mwaijande (2018) cautions that the absence of such policies can potentially leave programmes and policy planning unchecked, and allow for inefficiency and ineffectiveness in policies and development programme implementation and accountability. It is upon this basis that this brief advocates for the formulation and implementation of national evaluation policies across the continent.

> Hojlund (2015:430) defines a national evaluation policy as "a systematic and institutionalised monitoring and evaluation framework in several interdependent organisational entities with the purpose of informing decision-making and securing oversight function".

> Mwaijande (2018) also defines a national evaluation policy as that which guides the evaluation process, activities, resources, and utilisation of evaluation results.

There is a direct link between national evaluation polices and national evaluation systems (NES). These systems are put in place to implement the evaluation policies. Effective evaluation systems are dependent on evaluation policies for framing the purpose, responsibilities, and organisation of the public sector evaluation function in a particular country (Segone, Bamberger and Reddy 2015). NES are systems put in place to implement NEPs; they complement each other.

National evaluation policies provide a normative framework, while national evaluation systems build the mechanisms that operationalise the principles dictated in the policy.

However, the presence or absence of evaluation policies or systems does not necessarily hinder the undertaking of evaluations. This is demonstrated in South Africa, where government departments carried out evaluation before the National Evaluation Policy Framework was passed. The policy was developed before the development of National Evaluation System, and in Uganda the NES was developed prior to the development of the policy. While the system and policy increase the demand for and use of evaluations, governments

WHY IS A NATIONAL EVALUATION POLICY IMPORTANT?

- **Increase demand and use for evaluations:** An NEP places an obligation on ministries and sectors to increase demand and use evaluations findings to improve programme design.

- **Structure the National Evaluation System:** NEPs can define what evaluation is, determine what needs to be evaluated, what methodologies are to be used and how evaluation findings should be used and will be communicated, creating a common approach and guiding principles across the public sector.

- **Allow for budgeting and capacity building:** A NEP integrates evaluation into policy and budgeting cycles. Since there is a need to strengthen the technical capacity of government departments to design, implement, disseminate and use evaluation information, a NEP is the hook for integrating evaluation into a department's programme cycle. NEPs provide a plan, which includes addressing capacity development to support implementation of the plan.

do not necessarily need both to be in place to carry out evaluations. This is a key lesson for countries establishing their evaluation systems Goldman *et al* 2018).

Key Findings

Comparison of the five countries' NEPs by elements

Elements characterising NEPs are different, and are not commonly agreed between scholars. However, elements which feature in five reviewed NEPs can be seen below:

Element	South Africa	Nigeria	Uganda	Kenya	Zimbabwe
Rationale	x	x	x	x	x
Objective/Purpose	x	x	x	x	x
Principles/Standards	x	x	x	x	x
Definitions	x	x	x	x	x
Responsibilities	x	x	x	x	x
Selection of evaluations	x		x		
Methodology/Techniques	x		x		
Ethics		x			
Dissemination	x			x	x
Use	x		x		x
Review of NEP		x		x	x

Table 1: Elements of the NEPs in 5 Countries

Content of the NEPs

As can be seen in the table, all five countries policies contain sections explaining the rationale, objectives and purpose, principles and standards, definitions, and responsibilities. Of the five countries, the scopes of the policies are relatively different; Kenya and Zimbabwe's are entitled *National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy*, Uganda's is entitled *National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation*, Nigeria's NEP is entitled *National Evaluation Policy*, and South Africa's NEP is entitled *National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF)*. While the titles are different, the purpose is similar.

Concept clarification

The degree of depth in these NEP elements varies. Table 1 indicates that South Africa and Uganda's evaluation policies explicitly outline the types of evaluations which should be used in their monitoring and evaluation systems; Zimbabwe, Kenya, and Nigeria are silent on this. South Africa's policy outlines six types of evaluations – specifically diagnosis, synthesis, design, implementation/process, and impact evaluations. The Ugandan policy mentions mid-term, impact, summative evaluations, and ex-ante or baseline evaluations.

Communication and use of evaluation evidence

Dissemination is an element of evaluation practice that should be included in a national evaluation policy. If evaluation is to influence and shape behaviours of policy makers and programme implementers, the findings should be widely shared. Nigeria and Uganda do not indicate in their policies how evaluation findings are to be disseminated, although this is acknowledged as important. The policy-making cycle is complex, and as such it is important that communication around evidence is not seen as something that happens only at the end of the project. The South African NEPF makes it mandatory for all evaluations in the National Evaluation Plans to be presented to Cabinet, which gives weight to implementation for influencing policy and decision-making. However, scholars have conceded that policy-making is inherently political, influenced by a number of imperatives other than scientific evidence. These include budgetary, administrative and contextual limitations. Therefore political will and robust evidence from evaluations is imperative for any policy to work effectively.

Institutional arrangements

Evaluation practice is enhanced by both the national evaluation system and policy. The policies clarify the roles and responsibilities of different government institutions. They are managed by a central oversight and coordination office within the Executive. This can demonstrate political will and buy-in. The ministry or department typically supports evaluation practice and manages the system. There is a debate around the benefits and disadvantages of a highly centralised evaluation system; however, the five national evaluation policies reviewed acknowledge that a wide range of stakeholders with roles and responsibilities in the system is necessary for success.

Continuous enhancement/evaluating NEPs

Monitoring and evaluation is a discipline that is evolving and as such the practice, approaches and tools for this will continuously develop, resulting in a need to review the policy and ensure its continued relevance. The NEP for Kenya indicates that their policy review is a participatory process in which state and non-state actors are involved. The review is done after five years or as necessary. Similarly, the Nigerian policy is reviewed after five years. The Zimbabwean policy takes a different approach from the Kenyan one; it highlights that an "evaluation will be conducted to ensure learning from the implementation of public policy interventions". The policies of South Africa and Uganda have no clear process of how their policies will be reviewed; however the South African government initiated an evaluation of the NES, which provides an independent assessment of the performance and change facilitated by the system.

Linkages with policy and budget cycle

In many African countries, the link between planning, budgets and results remain weak; policy can be a tool to strengthen this. The policies of South Africa, Kenya and Uganda acknowledge the significance of Treasury and Finance for effective implementation of NEPs and improving the feedback mechanisms between budget alignment, planning and learning.

Capacity building

A national evaluation policy can provide guidance and structure to national efforts of evaluation capacity development. Without evaluation technical expertise, implementation of the policy will be difficult. The analysed policies acknowledge that respective countries have varied capacity, both of evaluator technical expertise and of public sector staff managing and commissioning the evaluations. In Uganda, the policy delegates the responsibility for capacity building to the Uganda Evaluation Association and the Ugandan Management Institute. In South Africa, the National School of Government, universities and the South African Monitoring & Evaluation Association offer evaluation capacity building in line with the NEPF. Despite capacity building initiatives in different countries, evaluation capacity remains a challenge, with the bulk of evaluations being undertaken by external consultants.

Key Lessons for countries developing NEP

- **Avoid mimicry**: There is an acknowledgment that countries have to learn from each other to develop a national evaluation policy. However, a country should develop a policy that is relevant to their country context. This includes recognising capacities, government openness to critiques and use of evidence, resources, and structure of government.

- **Political and administrative support is vital**: In developing a national evaluation policy, there is a need for political support, buy-in, ownership and inclusivity to preventing the policy from becoming another layer of compliance and policing of programmes.

- **Promote the value of evaluation**: The best way to promote evaluation and encourage buy-in is to demonstrate the value of evaluation. Therefore, it is important to do evaluation even before a policy is complete and to demonstrate the model while building the elements of the policy.

- **Take a participatory approach**: Partnerships are critical. Key government ministries, civil society organisations, and academic institutions are needed to run a sustainable national evaluation system. These stakeholders are likely to support, benefit or hinder the process of establishing a national evaluation policy; making use of partnerships should be built incrementally and be based on need. Partners, who might not immediately see their role in the system, may better understand their role as the system matures and begins churning out evaluations.
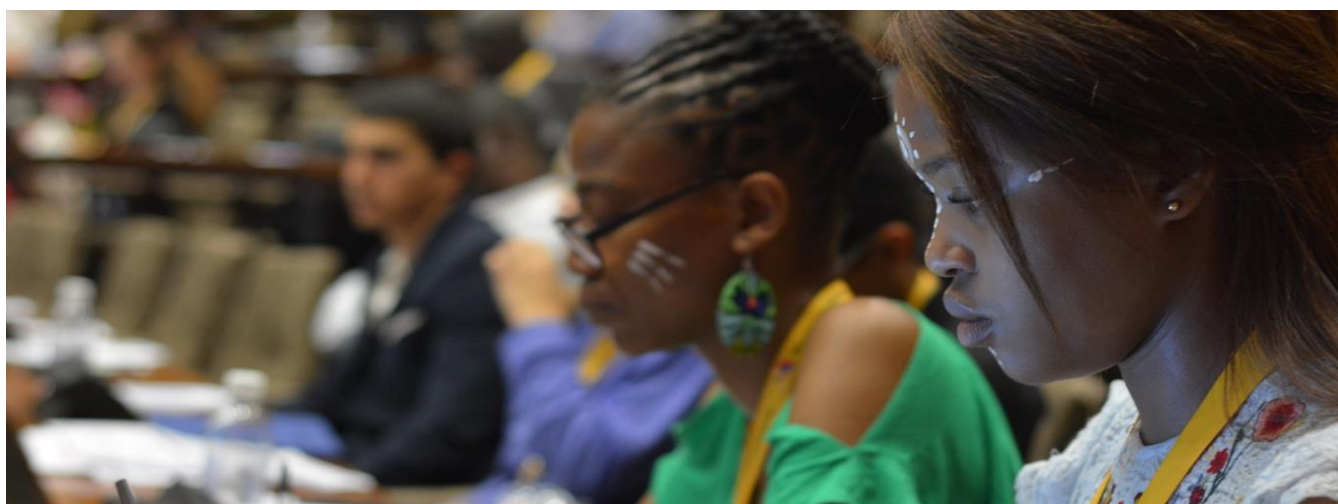
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