



M&E CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING APPROACHES AND THEIR MEASUREMENT IN ANGLOPHONE AFRICA – A POLICY PERSPECTIVE.

Authors:

Steven Masvaure, Takunda Chirau and Angelita Kithatu-Kiwekete

ABOUT CLEAR-AA

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is one of six regional centres housed in academic institutions across the globe with the purpose of building the capacity of countries, people and institutions to plan, measure and report on development programmes – a process referred to as monitoring and evaluation (M&E). CLEAR-AA's work in supporting and improving M&E contributes to better governance and improved development outcomes across Africa.

In the past, CLEAR-AA's approach to supporting and improving M&E in Africa has been to offer discrete interventions, for example pieces of training, peer-to-peer learning and technical assistance. But in 2019, we shifted to using country-based programmes to achieve systematic, systemic results. The positive impact on governance and development can be seen not only in individual countries but also in their sub-regions.

Overview

This policy brief provides an overview of National Evaluation Capacity Development (NECD) across selected English-speaking African countries and provides recommendations on how to strengthen national evaluation capacities. The policy brief is based on the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR AA) report *Approaches to, and measures of M&E Capacity Strengthening in Anglophone Africa* which examined M&E systems capacity strengthening approaches in English-speaking African countries and how the effectiveness of these approaches has been measured.

In these selected African countries, 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 at the forefront of funding these initiatives in the region, and have invested substantial sums of money. This brief 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 measure the efficiency,

impact, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability and worthiness of the approaches adequately. 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.

The policy brief 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 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 synergies and networks as synergies between state and non-state sectors 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.

Background

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is one of six regional centres in the CLEAR Initiative working globally to strengthen capacity for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and the use of evidence to improve programmes and support policymakers and implementers to make better decisions. In 2019, the Centre undertook an exercise to examine the approaches to and measurement of M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya,

Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. To accomplish that, a mixed-method research approach was used. 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). Respondents were drawn from all eight selected countries.

In this brief, M&E capacity strengthening is defined as the process of improving the ability of individuals, institutions and the overall M&E system to meet its M&E objectives and expectations. Capacity strengthening is not restricted to the process of development of individual technical skills and abilities but also includes the development of the capacity of institutional and national M&E systems, thereby fostering a culture that values evidence and programme learning based on evaluative thinking. Furthermore, M&E capacity is conceptualised as consisting of three interconnected levels – individual, institutional, and country levels. At the individual level, capacity relates to individual technical skills and abilities (Babu, 2018), whilst at an institutional level, capacity relates to having an internal M&E system defined by the existence of M&E structures, processes, resources, management and governance frameworks (Struyk, Damon and Haddaway, 2011). At the country level, coherent policies, culture, structures, behaviour and strategies amongst state and non-state entities create an enabling environment for the development and use of M&E system information and evidence (Nuyens, 2005). The individual and institutional capacities are regarded as ‘micro’ level whilst the country capacity is regarded as ‘macro’ level.

M&E capacity contributes towards sustaining and helping government officials, development managers, civil society organisations, and funding entities to improve the planning of their projects, improve progress, increase impact, and enhance learning (Segone, 2008). In addition, M&E capacity can identify what works, what does not work, and the reasons for each outcome. Despite significant investments in strengthening M&E capacity in the African context, evidence shows that monitoring and evaluation (measurement) of the initiatives is non-existent. This is despite the value of the measurement of these initiatives which allows countries to be aware of their capacity needs and enables them to plan how to address the needs. At the funder and implementer level, measurement presents the opportunity to understand the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the initiatives whilst drawing lessons on what works.

Findings

Stakeholders active in M&E capacity strengthening.

The general trend across all the eight countries shows that multilateral organisations (World Bank, United



In 2019, the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) undertook an exercise to examine the approaches to and measurement of M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives in eight countries.

Nations organisations, African Development Bank) focus on funding and/or strengthening capacity at country/system level – due largely to their mandate which dictates that their engagement with countries is at a national level. Multilateral institutions focus on developing country M&E policies and frameworks and, in some cases, they also second M&E personnel to government departments to strengthen M&E capacity and systems. 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.

International non-governmental organisations, such as DFID, 3ie, USAID, GIZ, etc., which are active in the development space, are also involved in strengthening individual and institutional M&E capacity. Their main aim is to strengthen organisational accountability mechanisms but their efforts also spill over to the state sector. With the aid of funding and technical support from external organisations, state institutions are also actively strengthening their capacity through their designated

M&E CAPACITY STRENGTHENING APPROACHES

Individual level approaches

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

Institutional level approaches

- Setting up M&E units in government departments
- Secondment of M&E personnel in government departments by external organisations
- Improving internal institutional functioning by developing M&E systems, processes, resources, management and governance of M&E – more pronounced in the non-state sector.

Country/system level approaches

- Developing national M&E policies and frameworks

M&E units. Higher education institutions, VOPEs and individual consultants are also active in strengthening M&E capacity.

Predominant M&E capacity-strengthening approaches and their target group

Across all eight countries in this study, the predominant approach to strengthening M&E capacity is to focus on the micro level (individual and institutional) with a range of short-term individual technical training initiatives whilst, at the institutional level, the focus is on strengthening internal functioning of institutions, structures, processes, resources and strategies but information on how these institutions interact with other institutions is lacking. These approaches are more evident in the non-state sector. The non-state sector has benefited from external pressure from donors and funders to institutionalise M&E systems. This has played a significant role in strengthening M&E capacity within organisations funded by external organisations. However, this is accountability-driven i.e. developing capacities to demonstrate that programme work has been conducted in compliance with agreed standards or to report on results vis-à-vis plans.

Within the state sector, approaches to strengthen institutional capacity are limited because of poor funding for institutionalisation and insufficient human capacity, coupled with the perception that M&E is not relevant, but is merely a fault-finding tool – all of which result in a poor appreciation of the value and effectiveness of M&E. The state sector also faces the challenge of high turnover of M&E skilled personnel who move to the non-state sector where remuneration is better.

The approaches at micro level are skewed towards the performance monitoring capacity at the expense of the capacities needed to support the ability to plan, conduct, learn from and sustain evaluations within institutions. There are also limited initiatives focusing on the development of national policies, strategies, and enabling environments for the practice of M&E. The approaches also neglect the macro-level capacity i.e. the M&E culture, behaviour, context, and structures at country level.

Key lessons from M&E capacity strengthening in African countries.

Firstly, throughout all eight countries, the capacity needs assessments and capacity-strengthening plans are lacking. 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 and a distinct lack of understanding of the inherent interconnectedness of all levels of capacity.

The second issue 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 be creating an enabling environment which enables and values the practice of M&E. This is achieved through assisting countries in developing coherent policies, culture, structures, strategies and inducing behaviour change, a process which will bring new values 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, resources, 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) to develop M&E capacities. At the state level, there is a heavy dependence on non-state capacity-strengthening funders and this, in turn, affects 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 the individual level, the resources available to individuals not attached to institutions are scarce for academic and professional training.

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

Policy implications and recommendations

The recommendations are targeted at both national institutions and organisations that are funding M&E capacity development in the eight selected countries. The success of the suggested recommendations is based on the creation of effective synergies between state and non-state sectors and recognising, at the policy level, that such networks and synergies are pertinent to addressing the M&E capacity challenges holistically. When implementing these recommendations, there is a need to ensure sufficient 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 need to prioritise country-level M&E capacity needs assessments in order to determine the capacity that exists at the time of the assessment and how it affects the overall practice of M&E within the country. The follow-up step is to develop a country-specific capacity development plan which details 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 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 levels of capacity, including individual, institutional and country levels. The focus should not be limited to the monitoring of micro-level technical skills and abilities but should 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 gained capacity.

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

The lack of capacity-strengthening approaches targeted at creating an enabling environment and developing the capacities of decision-makers creates obstacles for the development of a culture of evaluation and use of M&E information and evidence within organisations. Those who are funding, designing, and implementing capacity strengthening need to extend their focus to these aspects to optimise programme effectiveness

- **Recommendation 5 – Create synergies and networks**

The state and other development partners are implementing development interventions which are targeted at addressing the same or similar development challenges in the various entities but which have significant differences in M&E capacities. It is recommended that synergies be developed between state and non-state sectors to do away with the M&E capacity silos that currently exist 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.

References

- Babu, S. C. (2018) *Monitoring and evaluation for capacity strengthening*. Intl Food Policy Res Inst.
- Nuyens, Y. (2005) 'No development without research: a challenge for research capacity strengthening'. Geneva, Switzerland Global Forum for Health Research.
- Segone, M. (2008) *Evidence-based policy making and the role of monitoring and evaluation within the new aid environment*. UNICEF.
- Struyk, R. J., Damon, M. and Haddaway, S. R. (2011) 'Evaluating capacity building for policy research organizations', *American Journal of Evaluation*. SAGE Publications Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA, 32(1), pp. 50–69.

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the author/s; they do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of CLEAR AA