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Strengthening Anglophone Africa M&E systems: A CLEAR-AA perspective on guiding principles, challenges and emerging lessons

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Background: Evaluation capacity development (ECD) is evolving to adapt to 21st century governance and development contexts across the world. Consequently, the ECD community is seized with processes of developing, implementing and sharing best ECD practices that are able to build strong and resilient individual and institutional M&E capacities.

Objectives: The article seeks to contribute to the on-going discourse and practice regarding evaluation capacity development (ECD) approaches and interventions in Anglophone Africa, Africa, the Global South and global best practice.

Method: The article's methodology is essentially centred on action research pursued during the course of co-planning and designing ECD interventions across English-speaking African countries, empirical data as well as the authors' experiences and insights gained from leading ECD interventions across African countries.

Results: The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa's (CLEAR-AA) principle of partnering and engaging governments and development partners throughout the life cycle of ECD interventions is paramount to cultivating country-owned and led national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that are sustainable and are able to facilitate a shift towards evidence-based decision-making.

Conclusion: The value of this CLEAR-AA mission is that it offers the possibility of improving decision-making, policymaking and implementation and better service delivery and development outcomes in English-speaking Africa. While noting well-known M&E challenges that impact the success of ECD interventions in Africa, the article highlights forward-looking CLEAR-AA strategies that seek to improve the success and impact of its ECD interventions in Anglophone Africa. Such strategies include the identification and use of M&E champions in each country; working to integrate the M&E function within public sector decision-making, development planning, implementation and budgeting processes; and building ECD partnerships with governments, non-governmental institutions and development partners who have intricate knowledge of country M&E systems.

Keywords: national evaluation systems; monitoring; evaluation; ownership; evidence; outcomes and development.

Introduction and context

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is one of the six regional centres housed at academic institutions across the globe. The other CLEAR centres are in Senegal, Mexico, India, China and Brazil and are supported by the CLEAR global Initiative in Washington, DC. From 2011, CLEAR-AA has been working in English speaking African countries to strengthen various elements of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems – for example, developing M&E plans, national M&E policy, evaluation plan, evaluation guidelines and offering different kinds of training. The Centre's guiding proposition (as reflected in its organisational Theory of Change) is that strengthening M&E leads to good governance, transparency and accountability for governments and public institutions by fostering a culture of evidence-based decision-making, which is an important contributor to improved service delivery and improved development outcomes. The paper explores the prevalent evaluation capacity development (ECD) practices worldwide and the African region and then situates CLEAR-AA's own approach to ECD. Through this reflective exercise, as a further contribution

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to this growing body of knowledge, this article fills important gaps in M&E systems capacity strengthening in Africa, it feeds into literature on:

1. The driving factors for the demand for M&E capacity strengthening in a country based on CLEAR-AA's experience and practice.
2. The guiding principles and phases followed when initiating and implementing an ECD country programme, and the predominant approach is at the national level – working with either a government ministry, department or agency.
3. Barriers to negotiating and implementing/strengthening country M&E systems.
4. Emerging lessons from strengthening and implementing country M&E systems in Africa. In each section, we explain and describe what we are observing and learning.

The article draws from the authors' experiences in jointly leading country programmes to strengthen M&E in Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Ghana, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho and Namibia. This experience of leading country M&E programmes has afforded the authors a unique insight into both the structure and purposes of countries' M&E systems and the varied capacity profiles experienced within countries. The article also draws on action research approaches adopted by CLEAR-AA at the University of the Witwatersrand to build national M&E systems across the region. This paper therefore draws on peer learning and knowledge co-creation spaces that CLEAR-AA has facilitated with stakeholders of public sector M&E systems in English-speaking African countries. There are also personal reflections drawn from the authors' experiences and informed opinions and at times, not based on empirical findings. As such, the paper should be treated as a contribution to larger ongoing strategic conversations about M&E capacity development approaches and best practice in Africa.

Conceptualising monitoring and evaluation systems, evaluation capacity development, international best practice and trajectory globally and in Africa

Conceptually, a national M&E system is defined as the collection of M&E frameworks that guide the commissioning and undertaking of M&E and the individual and institutional M&E capacity to undertake and use M&E information to inform development planning, policy-making and decision-making (Chirau et al. 2020:2). It is therefore discernible that an M&E system exists when M&E, and use of evidence therefrom, has become institutionalised in an organisation or institution such as government. The United Nations (2012:7) affirms the above definition by normatively asserting that an M&E system ought to develop an equilibrium between the supply of M&E information (i.e. undertaking programme M&Es) and the demand for M&E information by policymakers and other development decision-makers. Goldman et al. (2018:2) identifies six constitutive elements of a functional public sector national or sectoral M&E system:

1. The existence of an M&E policy that conceptualises M&E and assigns M&E roles to various public sector institutions.
2. Methodology – whereby development indicators are identified, criteria for selecting government interventions (development programmes) to be evaluated is defined, and there is an identification of data collection methodologies to be used for performance M&Es.
3. Defining the M&E roles of the various public sector institutions (government ministries, departments, agencies and offices).
4. Individual and institutional M&E capacity in the public sector, including capacity building plans.
5. Integration of non-government institutions in the government-wide evaluation system: these include Parliament, non-governmental organisations and development partners (donors).
6. Quality of M&E evaluation products (reports) and their utility in decision-making, policymaking and budgeting.

Evaluation capacity development seeks to strengthen each of the six pillars of a public sector M&E system. Typically, ECD interventions seek to ensure the use of evaluation findings in development planning, policymaking, general decision-making and budgeting, using evaluative findings for organisational learning as well as accountability. A vital precondition for developing an evaluation system is demand from the relevant government stakeholder (oversight or sector ministry) because an evaluation system cannot be imposed (Mackay 1999:3).

Mackay (1999:2) defines ECD as a deliberate process of developing or strengthening national and/or sectoral evaluation systems. In essence, ECD is a social compact through which people, organisations and society join forces to strengthen, develop, adapt and maintain evaluation capacities over a period (Tarsilla 2014:1). The strengthening of individual and institutional evaluation capacities is intended to improve the *supply* and *demand* of evaluative evidence that strengthens the planning and implementation of development interventions, thereby ensuring better development outcomes. The ECD fraternity's equal focus on both supply of and demand for M&E evidence is demonstrative of the evolution of ECD thinking globally, where ECD stakeholders have learnt that building individual M&E capacities strengthens M&E systems only when M&E institutions and architecture are also strengthened, such that these institutions and frameworks create demand for M&E activities and evidence (Anderson 2010:36). Stimulating demand for M&E is enabled in a number of ways: developing M&E infrastructure (i.e. M&E policies and other frameworks), forming and strengthening evaluation associations that champion M&E practice and evidence-use and empowering development beneficiaries to participate in the measurement of development outcomes.

Current state of evaluation capacity development interventions in Africa

Most ECD work in Africa has been unsystematic, donor-funded and donor-centric and sought to improve the appraisal and performance of donor-funded programmes. These donor-driven ECD initiatives have had a short-term focus, such as evaluation trainings for a few public servants and technical assistance to selected ministries. Such short-term ECD programmes do not strengthen evaluation systems, but rather the capacities of sampled or selected local staff and ministries (Tarsilla 2014:2). In essence, ECD in Africa is said to pursue donor interests and not necessarily strengthen African evaluation systems – they are not country-led and focused. Recent trends, however, demonstrate a gradual ECD move from small projects to national programmes and policies in order to inform policy decisions (Independent Evaluation Group, Online).

The unsystematic nature of ECD initiatives by various international partners means that ECD in Africa requires greater coordination and partnerships among larger ECD funders. Major ECD funders in Africa include the World Bank, German Development Agency (GIZ), Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the United Nations network. Stakeholders ought to coordinate their ECD interventions to avoid duplication and yet another 'Scramble for Africa', this time in the form of ECD interventions.

North Africa is a region that underwent a major political transformation as a result of the Arab Spring (2010–2012). The political transformations and unrest in the region led to an influx of aid from international donors. The need to measure aid effectiveness was a key condition of aid. The need for government accountability in the post-Arab Spring contexts placed M&E high on the agenda in the region. Consequently, the M&E community in North Africa has focused on three aspects of M&E:

1. Accountability: measuring the impact of development aid and reporting thereon to donors.
2. Inclusiveness: advocating for greater participation of aid beneficiaries in implementing aid programmes and the appraisal thereof.
3. National ownership: advocates for the building of local M&E capacities and locals taking a lead in the appraisal of aid effectiveness (Jaafar & Amer 2017:158).

These three ECD focus areas on North Africa are appropriate, particularly in the context of appraising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A major challenge for the ECD community in North Africa is that the region's political culture of authoritarianism means that the demand for M&E information in governance and development is limited. As a result, ECD interventions in North Africa require an added dimension of building a culture of political accountability as a precondition for creating systemic demand for M&E information.

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa's operations within the broader evaluation capacity development space

For much of its formative years, CLEAR-AA's work was mainly discrete country M&E interventions, for instance, capacity strengthening focusing on individual and organisational capacity to plan, use, do and manage M&E; strengthening legislatures by focusing on how parliaments can make better use of evidence and M&E processes; and technical assistance, focusing on good M&E practices. However, from late 2018, the Centre has changed its modus operandi from delivering discrete interventions towards achieving systemic and systematic results in individual countries and sub-regions through in-depth ECD country programmes that are led and owned by the countries themselves. The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa's principle of ownership is paramount and is operationalised through the adopted approach where an in-country ministry, department, or agency owns and leads the strengthening of the country M&E/evaluation system.

Much of the existing literature around M&E systems is based on European, North American and Latin American systems (Laguna 2012; Lahey 2012; Mackay 2012; Rubio 2012), with little written about African M&E systems, with the exception of Goldman et al. (2018), who wrote a comparison of national evaluation systems (NESs) of Benin and Uganda. Monitoring and evaluation systems in Africa are at different levels of maturity, and the challenges they face vary from country to country. There is a stronger focus on monitoring compared to evaluations in Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda (Porter & Goldman 2013), while CLEAR-AA's M&E situation assessment reports on the state of M&E systems in Tanzania, Namibia, Lesotho, Madagascar and Zambia indicates the same phenomenon. Most countries refer to M&E, which denotes an equal emphasis on both monitoring and evaluation and have established M&E systems. In practice, however, the M&E systems are largely focused on monitoring (CLEAR-AA 2019; Porter & Goldman 2013). Inadequate technical expertise for undertaking evaluations, insufficient budget for evaluations, lack of culture for supplying and demanding evaluative evidence and inadequate follow-ups on M&E recommendations remain major challenges (Maimula 2017:25; Masuku 2015:15; Mthethwa & Jili 2016:109).

Despite the challenges facing African M&E systems:

> [*T*]here are pockets of excellence in evaluation designs and methods that have been conducted on the continent, with South Africa and Uganda being exemplary, in as much as there are other examples where room for improvement is needed. (Blaser Mapitsa, Tirivanhu & Pophiwa 2019:6)

Uganda and South Africa are considered exemplary insofar as their governments' adoption of key M&E frameworks (M&E policies, evaluation guidelines and evaluation plans) which create a favourable environment for the institutionalisation of both monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation capacity development remains a primary solution to the persistent weaknesses and limitations in the demand and supply of both monitoring and evaluation capacity on the continent (Wao et al. 2017:1).

Value of country monitoring and evaluation systems

The increase in development and strengthening of government M&E systems in Africa is a result of the demonstration effect provided by the leading countries of Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Brazil. This is not to say no internal factors are influencing the development of M&E systems in Africa. For example:

> [*A*]s African countries emerged from civil wars and oppressive regimes, they became more stable and citizens' voices and demands became increasingly important. Organised civil society has emerged as an important third sector in different countries, calling for government and private sector accountability and defending human rights. These various developments have collectively driven governmental demand for M&E evidence, leading to the establishment of monitoring systems largely for financial accountability. (Chirau, Blaser-Mapitsa & Amisi 2021)

Cases studies of Chile, Colombia and Australia M&E systems provide insights into what is working, what is not working, for who and under what circumstances. In 2011, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) went on a study tour to Mexico, Colombia, Brazil and the United States of America. The purpose of the study tour was to develop practical lessons that South Africa could apply on how to implement national evaluation systems (DPME 2011). The learning from these systems is useful for countries wanting to develop their M&E systems, but countries should develop their systems according to their circumstances and priorities.

The uniqueness of African M&E systems is that most of them are still in their early phases of development. In Africa, a whole-of-government approach to country M&E system has been adopted, taking lessons from countries like Chile that focus on three dimensions of utilisation of M&E information, sustainability, and good quality M&E information (Mackay 2007). African countries who have developed their M&E systems have also modelled their systems along these three dimensions.

Many African countries have adopted the whole-of-government approach that is centrally driven, as in the case of Chile. The approach has proven to be weak as there are low levels of ownership especially by ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) (Mackay 2007). There is evidence in Africa that the same phenomenon experienced by Chile is experienced by central government oversight institutions, for example, Office of Prime Minister (Uganda), President's Office-Public Service Management and Good Governance (Tanzania) and Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (South Africa) among others. From CLEAR-AA's M&E interventions, the emerging common pattern is that central M&E oversight ministries in the respective countries experience challenges in coordinating the M&E activities of sector ministries and subnational levels of governance. Consequently, Anglophone African countries tend to exhibit somewhat fragmented M&E systems, with the national M&E system being detached from the M&E systems at regional and/or local levels of government. Such fragmentation may be a by-product of the hybrid nature of state bureaucracies, where even in unitary states, there may be an experimentation with devolution of governance and development planning functions from central to subnational levels of government. However, African countries are encouraging participatory, iterative and systems approach to strengthening the country M&E system thereby cultivating a spirit of ownership and utilisation of evaluative evidence in both national and subnational levels of governance.

M&E systems are important in aiding government MDAs to measure the results (outputs, outcomes and impact) achieved by their respective development policies, programmes and projects. In January 2010, the Government of South Africa committed to the 12 outcomes (later augmented to 14 outcomes) as part of the Medium Term Strategic Framework (2014–2019). The 14 outcomes are essentially the development priorities set by the government. Since the adoption of the 14 outcomes, quarterly monitoring reports on the outcomes have been produced and compared to reports on outputs and sub output levels (Goldman et al. 2012). The reports are taken to Cabinet and Parliamentary committees for oversight and performance appraisal.

In reality, although there is an M&E system at the central level, MDAs and local government tend to have their own M&E systems that co-exist within a broader centralised M&E system (Goldman et al. 2012). Both systems provide information on the performance or non-performance of government policies, projects and programs at the national, sector and local government levels. Importantly, in the process of measuring the results at various levels of outputs, outcomes and impacts, the M&E system should be able to identify what works and what does not and why (Mackay 2012). Put into context, the Zambia 7th National Development Plan (2017–2021) is informed by the evaluation findings of the 6th National Development Plan (2011–2015). By doing so, the Government of Zambia identified what worked and what did not work during the implementation of the sixth National Development Plan and tried to improve on those shortcomings during the course of implementing the seventh National Development Plan (Ministry of National Development Planning 2017). This is a lesson that other countries should learn.

Monitoring and evaluation systems help improve government performance and help development programmes to achieve their objectives. In so doing, M&E systems provide vital evidence to ensure accountability to citizens, legislatures and civil society (Mackay 2012). Sound evidence is equally critical in improving programme planning, budgeting, policy-making and decision-making.

There is evidence that points to the value of developing a system (both an M&E system and evaluation system) and an M&E policy, although one (an M&E system or evaluation system) can come before the other (an M&E policy or evaluation policy). Chirau, Waller and Blaser-Mapista (2018) argue that there is a direct link between national evaluation policies and the development of strong NESs. Effective evaluation systems are dependent on evaluation policies for framing the purpose of M&E and a delineation of institutional M&E responsibilities (Segone, Bamberger & Reddy 2015). To demonstrate the importance of both a policy and an evaluation system, Goldman et al. (2018) use Table 1 to demonstrate the effect of maturing NESs on the number of evaluations done in Benin, Uganda and South Africa from 2010 to 2018, following the establishment of NESs in these countries.

Goldman et al. (2018:6) argue that the decline in evaluations conducted is attributable to limited individual and institutional capacity to conduct evaluations in the three countries. This therefore vindicates the rationale for ECD interventions in Africa, because strengthening an evaluation system goes hand in hand with strengthening individual and institutional M&E capacities.

Despite the relative infancy of evaluation in Africa, there is empirical evidence suggesting an increase in the number of evaluations conducted in both government and non-governmental institutions (Blaser Mapitsa & Chirau 2019). It remains unknown whether the number of evaluations conducted indicates a development of an evaluation culture in government and non-governmental organisations.

In ensuring the quality of evaluations, evaluation guidelines have been established in Uganda, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa. The net effect of evaluation guidelines has been structuring and systematising how evaluations are conducted, particularly in the government sector. For learning purposes, repositories are developed, for example, South Africa's DPME has a repository where anyone interested can access evaluation guidelines, templates, policy briefs and evaluation reports, thereby facilitating learning inside and outside government regarding programme or policy performance. This epitomises the progress in establishing the national evaluation system in South Africa (Amisi 2015).

TABLE 1: Number of evaluations influenced by an evaluation system.

Item	Benin	Uganda	South Africa
Total number of national evaluations completed or underway as on 31 December 2016	15 (from 2010)	23 (from 2008)	56 (from 2012)
No. of evaluations started in 2016	1	4	8
Completed evaluation reports	14	14	32

Source: Data from government partners adapted from Goldman, I., Byamugisha, A., Gounou, A., Smith, L.R., Ntakumba, S., Lubanga, T. et al., 2018, 'The emergence of government evaluation systems in Africa: The case of Benin, Uganda and South Africa', *African Evaluation Journal* 6(1), a253. https://doi.org/10.4102/aej.v6i1.253

An adequate supply of trained personnel (including those with both monitoring and technical evaluations skills) is key for the sustainability of M&E and evaluation systems (Lahey 2012). Pieces of trainings are not sufficient and should be supplemented by technical assistance, coaching and mentoring to ensure knowledge and skills acquired through trainings are put to suitable use. This is a holistic approach to developing sustainable M&E systems, ensuring an equilibrium between the supply and demand of M&E information and use thereof across the M&E ecosystem of a country (composed of individual and institutional M&E capacities, demand for M&E information by decision-makers and ultimately, an evaluative culture).

What does an African country monitoring and evaluation systems look like?

In Africa, M&E systems exist in different MDAs and subnational governments, and they work in silos and are seldom coordinated (Masuku 2015:15). This is the case in Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda, South Africa and Ghana. Despite M&E capacity strengthening efforts made by these governments, the M&E infrastructure remains biased towards producing monitoring data as the main performance management input and accountability mechanism. Evaluation remains on the periphery. The accountability and over-emphasis on monitoring have led to a culture of malicious compliance (CLEAR-AA 2012). There is too much attention paid to measuring inputs and activities without attention to outcome and impact of programmes (CLEAR-AA 2012:19). These fragmented African M&E systems are a by-product of the fragmented bureaucracies of the colonial and post-colonial states in Africa. Muiu (2010:1311) asserts that the colonial African state was designed to plunder resources within its defined territory with impunity, not accountable to the African populations over which they presided. Furthermore, the colonial state was an authoritarian, centralised political and administrative entity that was not institutionalised beyond the capital and cities wherein economic activity was concentrated. The post-colonial African state has somewhat inherited the colonial state institutions without any significant improvements. For instance, the colonial and post-colonial legislatures in Africa are not designed to play an optimal oversight role over the performance of executive institutions. This bureaucratic context likewise affects the M&E systems that are hosted by these state institutions, meaning that the environment for African M&E systems is a challenging one. The challenge, therefore, for CLEAR-AA and the broader ECD community is how to build harmonised public sector M&E systems such that oversight M&E institutions are involved in sectoral and subnational M&E systems, which requires a degree of work with these different spheres of governance and not just one of them.

Anglophone African countries have a common practice of having a government institution at central level leading, advocating for, implementing and using evaluations (Goldman et al. 2018). This is the case in South Africa (DPME), Uganda (Office of the Prime Minister), Ghana (Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation) and Tanzania (Presidents Office-Public Service Management and Good Governance). Genesis Analytics (2016) argues that if the evaluation function is not centralised, the evaluation system will be fragmented, without standardised systems. Internationally, Mexico (National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy [CONEVAL]) and Colombia (Department of National Planning) have centrally located units to manage the evaluation system (Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation 2011). At the decentralised level, there are M&E units coordinating the M&E functions for a sector ministry, department, or agency. The M&E units in the sector ministries, departments and agencies at times have their own M&E systems that co-exist with the central government M&E system located in a central M&E institution. This is the case in South Africa and Benin. A clear gap exists for the ECD community to devise strategies of coordinating intergovernmental M&E systems such that the M&E evidence from various spheres of governance finds its way to decision-making, development planning, policymaking and budgeting cycles. Thus, while central oversight ministries are a crucial partner of ECD interventions, it is important that the ECD community also pivots towards instituting programme and project level ECD interventions where the development 'work' actually gets done.

Capacity to supply and demand M&E information remains a challenge. Countries such as Tanzania, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Namibia, Uganda and Kenya have M&E capacity limitations that have been uncovered through M&E diagnostic research studies. Findings from South Africa indicated that individual M&E capacities and the quality of evaluation training are weak (Morkel & Mangwiro 2019). Despite the weakness in M&E capacity, Anglophone African governments have established M&E units across MDAs; however, most are understaffed, which is a major challenge. However, Goldman et al. (2018) argues that M&E peer learning forums are helpful for sharing of the 'how to' and 'what works' as a way of building M&E capacity. Tanzania and Kenya are two examples of M&E systems in nascent stages for reference in Box 1.

Monitoring and evaluation practice is growing in these two countries despite the absence of M&E policies guiding M&E in the public sector. Mwaijande (2018) cautions that the absence of M&E policies can potentially leave programme and policy planning processes up to the whims of bureaucrats, thereby compromising the efficiency and effectiveness of development policies. The absence of evaluation policies or systems does not necessarily hinder evaluation practice. This has been demonstrated in South Africa where evaluations have been conducted by certain government departments, some of which had already formulated their own M&E policy before the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) had been passed (Chirau et al. 2018; Goldman et al. 2018). The National Department of Human Settlements is one of the departments to have instituted its own M&E policy before the inception of the NEPF. This is also the case in Ghana, where evaluation practice is well established in the public sector, despite the absence of a prescribed national M&E policy. However, the absence of a policy framework creates a public sector M&E framework vacuum.

Guiding principles for monitoring and evaluation capacity strengthening in a country: A centre for learning on evaluation and results – Anglophone Africa perspective

As a further contribution to this growing body of knowledge, this section is an overview of what CLEAR-AA considers when selecting a country to work with and implementing M&E capacity strengthening programmes. The guiding principles discussed in this section are general, and they are applicable to working with a ministry, department, or agency in a country and are highlighted below.

BOX 1: Two examples of African country monitoring and evaluation systems.

United Republic of Tanzania: The public sector monitoring and evaluation function is managed by the President's Office – Public Service Management and Good Governance (PO-PSMGG). Currently, national M&E is housed within two government agencies, PO-PSMGG and the Planning Commission, the latter being a unit of the Ministry of Finance and Planning. Other key stakeholders are M&E Units in MDAs, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Parliamentarians and development partners. President's Office – Public Service Management and Good Governance is responsible for the recruitment of M&E specialists and developing capacity for effective M&E units, M&E conscious economists and statisticians to ensure high performance of the system and its sustainability. To date, most Ministries, Department and Agencies have M&E units responsible for M&E functions at the sector level. The monitoring system is well-developed compared to the evaluation system. The appetite to conduct evaluations are high in government, but there are technical capacity skills gaps and budget shortfalls. There are capacity strengthening initiatives which were done in 2019 by CLEAR-AA, commissioned by the Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) at African Development Bank. The United Republic of Tanzania has a history of conducting evaluations; however, majority of these are conducted by international donors: United States Agency for International Development (USAID), World Health Organisation (WHO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and so forth. At the moment, the Republic is in the process of drafting a policy/strategy for evaluations to systematise and institutionalise the undertaking and use of evaluations in the country.
Kenya: The Monitoring and Evaluation Department (MED) in National Treasury and Planning coordinates all government's M&E activities, primarily through the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES). The department also provides technical support to public sector institutions to build technical capacity and inculcate M&E practice. Monitoring and Evaluation Department is currently awaiting approval of their National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy by Cabinet. Ministerial M&E Committees in each line ministry coordinate ministerial M&E activities, collect information and prepare reports. At the devolved level, the County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System and the County Monitoring and Evaluation Committees are the key policy advisory bodies. They validate and approve county M&E documents, including plans, progress reports, indicator handbooks, and standards and guidelines. Members of Parliament are driven to use evidence as part of their oversight mandate vis-à-vis the Executive. Furthermore, the African Parliamentary Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE) has been instrumental in shaping evidence use in Kenya by providing platforms for peer learning and sharing. Seven higher education institutions provide formal M&E qualifications. In the main, M&E courses are offered as part of other professional qualifications. Some institutions offer M&E certificates and diplomas. The Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK), the country's Voluntary Organization for Professional Evaluation (VOPE), is spearheading the professionalisation of M&E, in collaboration with the Monitoring and Evaluation Department and universities.

M&E, monitoring and evaluation; CLEAR-AA, Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa.

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa's first selection criteria when selecting countries to work in is the presence of internal appetite and/or demand for M&E at the administrative and political levels (CLEAR-AA 2019:8). Securing political and administrative buy-in and will is crucial in making sure that M&E becomes a valued practice in governance and development practices. To this effect, raising awareness on the value of M&E among high-ranking political and administrative leaders, commonly referred to as M&E champions, is a crucial activity when seeking to institutionalise and entrench M&E into the governance apparatus. These M&E champions exert significant influence on ministries, departments, agencies and subnational government and are therefore strategically positioned to promote and advocate for institutionalisation of M&E practice in planning, budgeting, policy design, implementation and general decision-making. In characterising the M&E and evaluation systems, Lazaro (2015) argues that the presence of evaluation in political, administrative, and social discourse is essential in that it shows that there is a political and administrative interest in evaluation. The centralisation of oversight and coordination of M&E and evaluation systems in South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania epitomise the acknowledgement of the value of M&E in the public sector.

Countries that already have established national M&E/evaluation systems are key to our work and is an additional criteria CLEAR-AA considers when selecting a country to work with. The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa works in countries like Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia among others to strengthen M&E systems through a package of interventions that leads to system-wide impact. The development of M&E infrastructure, for example, M&E frameworks such as the M&E policy is an indicator of a given government's value attachment to M&E, viewing M&E practice as a vehicle for improving development outcomes. Genesis Analytics (2016) indicates that the M&E and evaluation systems are crucial in bringing about transparency and accountable governance.

Partnerships with local institutions and individuals that are knowledgeable about the country context is a key CLEAR-AA selection criteria when selecting a country to work with. Our approach is unique in that we seek to use a local entity in the country to strengthen the country's M&E system. Drawing from the indigenous institutions and individual(s), and their knowledge systems embedded in the specific African country context, has the potential to strengthen ways of thinking about M&E, use of evidence emerging from M&E and its impact (Chilisa 2015). The local capacity is drawn from individuals, higher education institutions, consulting firms and voluntary organisation for professional evaluations (VOPEs). Mamdani (2016:79) argues that it is critical to position active African participation and African voices in the construction of evaluation theory and practice. This is key to the indigenisation of knowledge and use thereof to inform development processes (i.e. planning, implementation and appraisal). This approach increases the ownership and buy-in, leading to country-led and owned M&E systems. The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa has done work with Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) and African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs (ACEPA) in Accra, Ghana and Zambia Monitoring and Evaluation Association among others. In these respective partnerships with local institutions, CLEAR-AA has affirmed its commitment to local ownership, indigenous knowledge and leadership in strengthening local M&E systems and practice.

Steps to consider for capacity strengthening in a country

Evaluation capacity development institutions follow various steps used when conducting M&E capacity strengthening and/or development. These steps tend to be somewhat similar, albeit there are nuances (e.g. the first common step is to conduct a diagnostic study of the state of individual and institutional M&E capacities and to survey the broader socio-political environment within which M&E takes place). Table 2 outlines CLEAR-AA's three basic steps when initiating and implementing ECD interventions in a country.

Programme inception phase

The Evaluation Systems Programme is one of the six programmatic areas that constitute CLEAR-AA as an institution. The Evaluation Systems Programme acts as a convener of the Centre's country programmes. It initiates communication with a national government institution: this may be a department, ministry or agency that has a mandate of coordinating and providing oversight of government-

TABLE 2: Three basic steps to initiate monitoring and evaluation capacity strengthening in a country.

Phases	Activities
1. Programme inception	• CLEAR-AA's Evaluation Systems programme initiates communication with a relevant institution in the particular country (based on our understanding of demand in the country arising from our engagements with key stakeholders); • A convening is scheduled in-country to which selected stakeholders are invited by the institution that has a mandate to provide M&E oversight; • Presentations are made by various stakeholders, and CLEAR-AA presents its ECD offerings.
2. Programme design (*What and so what?*)	• A situation analysis is undertaken on the incumbent state of M&E (or M&E system) in the country to understand its strengths, as well as define and understand problems and their causes; • A validation workshop of the situation analysis is conducted in-country; • A formal agreement (preferably in the form of a contract/memorandum of understanding) is concluded and CLEAR-AA drafts an initial country programme proposal with a budget and time frames for interventions; • An implementation plan and resources necessary for successful implementation are defined; • CLEAR-AA, in collaboration with selected local partners, explores the most appropriate resourcing models for the interventions.
3. Programme planning (*Now what?*)	• A process to deliver change is identified in-country. The process will include different stakeholders with relevant practical and contextual expertise; • Other CLEAR-AA programmatic areas provide ECD interventions respectively emanating from the empirical results of the situation analysis.

Source: Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA), 2019, *CLEAR-AA's regionalisation strategy*, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

CLEAR-AA, The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa; ECD, evaluation capacity development; M&E, monitoring and evaluation.

wide M&E system, for instance, the Office of the Prime Minister in Uganda. Once the country institution agrees to an inception meeting, it invites other government institutions to attend and participate in the inception meeting. These other stakeholders are selected on the basis of playing a role in the country's M&E system and include line ministries, departments, agencies or local government and non-state institutions such as a VOPE, High Education Institution (HEIs), Civil Society Organisation (CSOs) and development partners. During the inception meeting, presentations are done, in most cases by the institution providing oversight over the government-wide M&E system; for instance, in Kenya, it will be the Monitoring and Evaluation Department housed in National Treasury and Planning. The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa presents its M&E offerings in the Anglophone Africa region. The output of that meeting will be an inception meeting report.

Programme design phase

The Centre's work is informed by a Monitoring and Evaluation Situation Analysis (MESA), which is done to understand the prevailing M&E landscape of a country. The MESA is in the form of a mapping of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that underpin the incumbent M&E system of a particular country. The Centre uses the MESA tool that is a qualitative in-house tool for the assessment of supply and demand of M&E in a given country. The results of the situation analysis are presented in a validation workshop with different stakeholders whose input will be used to finalise the final M&E situation analysis report. The stakeholders may include, but not limited to, government, HEIs, CSOs and development partners. Naturally, the situation analysis culminates into a country M&E Capacity Strengthening Strategy. The strategy discusses the results that need to be achieved for the country to be able to improve its M&E performance and are listed along with the specific approaches to be followed for delivering those results (CLEAR-AA 2019). The strategy is accompanied by M&E Capacity strengthening plan that provides details on the results proposed in the strategy, indicating who will do what, when and what resources will be required and where these will come from.

Programme planning phase

The M&E oversight institution in the country, stakeholders and CLEAR-AA formulate and adopt a process to deliver change using in-country expertise that has contextual knowledge and relevant experience of the country M&E system. It is at this point that all other CLEAR-AA's programmatic areas come on board: capacity strengthening, strengthening legislatures, technical advisory services, and research and learning. It is important to note that the aforementioned country programme steps are not as linear as they appear, but are rather determined by the country interest and windows of opportunity. In simple terms, entry levels for each country are different and require different interventions depending on the maturity of the M&E system.

Barriers to negotiating, implementing/strengthening country monitoring and evaluation systems

Countries undergoing austerity measures

African countries have not grown their economies as anticipated because of myriad reasons. Recently, the dawn of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has worsened macro-economic performance in both developed and developing countries. Austerity measures are put in place to reduce government spending. Based on our experiences, and informal conversations with public sector officials in English-speaking countries, M&E services suffer the most when budgets need to be cut, indicative of the lack of acknowledgement of the value of M&E in improving government performance, transparency, accountability and social change. A possible risk of doing away with M&E because of budgetary constraints is that government officials may not uphold the principles of truth and transparency to the citizens of the state, as M&E is an integral element of accountable governance (Masuku 2015). A study conducted by Mthethwa and Jili (2016) in South Africa reports that a lack of effective M&E of public projects in government is a major challenge facing government officials because they are deprived of the opportunity to learn about what works and does not work.

Extreme bureaucracy in government leading to a lack of response for country-led programmes

Governments in Africa and elsewhere are known to be excessively bureaucratic; this, therefore, makes the initiating of ECD country programmes a challenging task, as approval needs to go through several senior administrators.

Low demand/appetite for monitoring and evaluation services

Monitoring and evaluation systems are at their nascent stages in most Anglophone African countries. As a result, the value of M&E is not well recognised (Mthethwa & Jili 2016). Monitoring and evaluation activities are still seen as 'policing' and 'witch-hunting' instead of opportunities for learning about what works and does not work, which would form the basis for the improvement of programmes and projects. Rarely is monitoring viewed as a managerial function and evaluation as a strategic function.

Technological advancements

Changes in how M&E is conducted will influence how data are collected and analysed. Governments in Africa invest less in quality and state-of-the-art data management systems that provide real-time data that is pertinent to providing early warning signs and/or responding to emergency situations.

Data management systems in Africa are still paper-based (CLEAR-AA 2019) and not accessible and are rarely utilised because of the data quality.

Donor influence

Donor funding drives M&E. Money, resources and skills are being pumped in African countries to conduct effective evaluations, to strengthen their M&E frameworks and develop departments (public sector units) that will be able to conduct evaluations by themselves. Holvoet and Inberg (2014) highlight that donor influence in Uganda's education sector is strong as donors place emphasis on indicators and targets based on budget support and the use of performance assessment frameworks. This raises questions around methods and tools, which should be Africa-centred with the ability to recognise context and an African worldview that encapsulates African realities. The influence of donors (development partners) is a phenomenon CLEAR-AA is aware of, and it is for this reason that CLEAR-AA's ECD strategy and approach seeks to include development partners throughout the lifecycle of ECD interventions: planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This inclusive approach also helps harmonise CLEAR-AA's ECD interventions with those of other ECD institutions working in the same countries.

Management changes

Shuffling of senior government officials and the reconfiguration of state institutions brings about changes in the management of M&E departments or units. Mthethwa and Jili (2016) argue that new management may lead to the abandonment of ECD projects or programmes. Without leadership possessing M&E skills, knowledge and appreciation, the M&E systems are poorly managed and ultimately become obsolete.

Inadequate institutionalisation of evaluations in government

African countries have a history of conducting evaluations. Goldman et al. (2018) indicate that, from the year 2010, evaluations conducted in Uganda amounted to 14, and in South Africa 32 evaluation reports were completed. A huge amount of evaluations are commissioned and conducted by international development organisations; for example, there are 520 evaluations that reference Tanzania in the African Evaluation Database (AFRED) database, a database jointly maintained and updated by CLEAR-AA and the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at the University of Stellenbosch. Situation analyses from five countries conducted in 2018 by CLEAR-AA further indicate that evaluations are being done on an *ad hoc* basis in the public sector, and it is not clear how governments (CLEAR-AA 2019) use the evaluations from both government and international development organisations.

Inadequate evaluation capacity

There is wide acknowledgement on the importance of evaluations in the public sector and the broader development ecosystem. However, the public sector does not have adequate skills to undertake quality evaluations. Inadequate evaluation capacity may lead to instruments such as tools, techniques for generating data and processing information into documents not being put into place (Bouckaert & Haligan 2008:28). Bester (2015) highlights that such evaluation capacities should be strengthened.

Poor linkages between planning, budgeting and monitoring and evaluation systems

Planning, budgeting and the M&E function are not integrated in most countries (this is a common finding in M&E diagnostic reports undertaken by CLEAR-AA for five countries [Lesotho, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania and Liberia]). Performance reporting is a prevalent practice in Africa. Unfortunately, performance reports and the lack of public sector institutionalisation of the evaluation function mean that M&E reports are not yet fully integrated into budgeting and development planning processes. Increased investment in M&E systems and harmonisation can improve these linkages. Monitoring and evaluation should be conducted in a way that it is linked to governance processes of planning and budgeting. Where possible, budget cycles and development planning processes should be aligned at national and sector levels to ensure integration (DPME 2014:14). Equally important is for M&E evidence to inform the development planning and budgeting processes.

Monitoring data that needs improvements

Monitoring is more pronounced compared to an evaluation in Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Ghana, Botswana and Namibia. Despite the prevalence of monitoring, constraints are still present in that data generated is of inadequate quality, untimely and without or with little verification processes for validity and reliability. Monitoring data should enhance learning to improve the effectiveness and impact of government (Masuku 2015).

Capacity strengthening of monitoring and evaluation systems: Emerging lessons

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa is accumulating substantive experience from implementing country M&E capacity strengthening interventions, so as to improve country M&E systems. There are lessons about what works best and what does not. Key lessons are discussed below.

Conducting a situation analysis is a prerequisite

It helps to understand the status quo or prevailing current situation of M&E in the country. The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa's situation

analysis tool looks at the 'wider ecosystem of M&E', that means it looks at the government itself, higher education institutions, CSOs, parliament and VOPEs. The analysis should zoom in on the supply and demand of M&E information, examining strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats. The analysis naturally feeds into an M&E Capacity Strengthening Strategy/ Plan. The Strategy/ Plan explains the results that need to be achieved for the country to be able to improve its individual, institutional and systemic M&E capacities, along with the specific approaches to be followed for achieving these capacities. The Strategy further indicates who will do what, when, what resources will be required and where these will come from.

Identification of a capable and mandated institution that oversees the implementation and practice of monitoring and evaluation in a country

This institution can be a ministry or department; this varies from country to country. Having a capable ministry at a centralised level, for example, the President's or Prime Minister's Office, demonstrates political and administrative will and buy-in for undertaking and utilisation of M&E evidence. On the other hand, however, decentralisation makes it easier for ministries, sectors and agencies to grow an interest in the evaluation work and utilisation of the evaluative evidence compared to viewing evaluations as a mandated practice enforced by a central oversight institution. The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa's partnerships with these local, in-country institutions has given effect to its principle of 'country-owned and country-led' M&E interventions across Anglophone Africa.

Capacity strengthening is a long-term effort and multi-pronged process that requires devotion, determination and dedication

It takes considerable effort and time to gain rapport in a country and start capacitation mainly because of how governments are structured. Proposals are channelled to different people in different offices until authorisation is permitted. It takes an average of 6 months to 1 year of negotiation before implementing M&E interventions in a country. The process of establishing a good working relationship (rapport) with governments requires time and patience, and was further complicated by disruptions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, there is also the historical mistrust that African states hold vis-a-vis non-state developmental institutions.

Need for powerful champions at political and senior administrative level

This can be a Minister, Director and Permanent Secretary among others. The role of a champion is that of promoting the value of M&E and the evidence that it generates and how useful it is in governance and development processes. By doing so, it breaks the barrier of underbudgeting of M&E in government. In the context of underdevelopment in African countries, where communities continue to live without basic services such as water, sanitation, health, school and energy, M&E can seem like a waste of money, without due recognition of how information from M&E can be used to improve service delivery and to alleviate these social ills.

Incentives and disincentives are an important aspect of both supply and demand

African governments do not offer incentives and disincentives for M&E practice. Incentives and disincentives offer the possibility of cultivating a culture of conducting M&E and utilisation of M&E evidence. The nature of incentives for a country will depend on how the country envisions using M&E information. It is not automatic or natural that M&E will be done, neither is it automatic that findings emerging from M&E will be utilised. Kusek and Rist (2004:139) assert that a key incentive that can encourage the use of M&E findings is the involvement and engagement of programme civil servants in the actual undertaking of M&E activities vis-à-vis a particular development intervention. Such incentives are important building blocks towards establishing sustainable and country-owned M&E systems that organically emerge from 'below' (within the government) rather than being imposed from 'above' (by external entities).

Demand for monitoring and evaluation information is important within the government

The demand is a prerequisite to assess whether there is a serious effort to capacitate and entrench the M&E system. This demand should also come from the high offices, for example, Heads of State and/or Government, Ministers, Permanent Secretaries and Directors-General. Courses aimed at raising awareness of the value of M&E are important in raising appetite among high office personnel.

Evaluation capacity development partnerships with government and development partners

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results – Anglophone Africa is finding that development partners have an established relationship of cooperation with many sector ministries across Anglophone Africa. It is important for CLEAR-AA to amplify these government-development partner cooperative relationships at the sector level so that the impact of ECD interventions is transmitted from central M&E oversight institutions to the sector Ministries and also subnational spheres where actual 'developmental' work and activities happen.

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of ECD interventions globally and within the African continent and situates CLEAR-AA's ECD perspective and philosophy within the broader ECD environment. The guiding principles and phases followed by CLEAR-AA in initiating ECD capacity strengthening interventions in a country follow

international best practice documented in existing literature, while also sharing nuances CLEAR-AA's has embarked on through experience and observation in Anglophone African countries. The article particularly shines the spotlight on identified barriers to negotiating and implementing/strengthening country M&E systems in Africa, and emerging lessons from strengthening and implementing country M&E systems in Africa. In each section, we explain and describe what we are observing and learning. Although the issues raised in this article might seem generic, M&E capacity strengthening in countries is largely informed by contexts such as the socio-political economy of the country. Experience from working with different M&E systems indicates that the development of M&E systems is not linear, but rather complex and influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Hence, the systems are at different levels of maturity. In strengthening the country M&E systems, the primary CLEAR-AA principle is that ECD interventions should be country-led, focused and owned to increase the likelihood of using the M&E evidence produced by the M&E system. The assumption is that in-country ownership should breed sustainable M&E systems. The use of local partners (both government and non-governmental institutions as well as development partners) who have knowledge about country M&E systems is a further advantage and privilege to be harnessed. Learning is a core element of these systems, as the systems are designed to support learning, critical reflection and curiosity on what works, does not work and in what conditions regarding the performance of development policies, programmes and projects. In designing or strengthening M&E systems in Anglophone Africa, CLEAR-AA is driven by the following questions: Are we doing the right things? How can we design and implement better country ECD interventions? What has changed as a result of CLEAR-AA ECD interventions and why has it changed? How can we effect meaningful M&E change through leveraging partnerships with local partners with intimate knowledge of the governance, development and M&E landscapes of the particular country? It is clear that we need to codify both theoretical and empirical research to build a body of African ECD knowledge that is shared across institutions providing M&E capacity strengthening in Africa and be able to improve strategies and interventions in these countries.

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Authors' contributions

T.C., A.D. and B.M. used empirical findings of evaluation scholars as well as the experience of CLEAR-AA in conducting its Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) work on the continent.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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