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2023

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UTILISATION OF PUBLIC SECTOR EVALUATION FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN EVIDENCE INFORMED DECISION MAKING

By

Musawenkosi Senda

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in 50% fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Sector Monitoring and Evaluation).

March 2023

ABSTRACT

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) function can assist governments in evaluating the performance of their programmes through the identification of those factors which contribute positively and those that do not contribute positively to service delivery outcomes. The value of evaluations is that they generate evidence that can be used to inform policy and practice and thus provide support to the government to achieve its development priorities. However, there is inadequate empirical evidence relating to evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making the public sector and, more specifically, in the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), South Africa. The purpose of this research is to explore the utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-informed decision making (EIDM) in the DALRRD.

The study followed a qualitative research strategy through a case study research design to allow for the in-depth collection of rich data from the respondents. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide, supported by reviewing the six evaluation reports (documents) from evaluations conducted by DAFF and DRDLR on agriculture support programmes. The review of the evaluation reports was guided by the use of a predetermined checklist with four distinct criteria. Purposive sampling of 13 departmental officials in the senior management service was used to identify interview participants. The unit of analysis was the department and the officials, who were the respondents were the unit of observation.

Six broad themes were identified from the thematic analysis to explain the findings. The themes were; understanding the value of evaluations in the National Evaluation Plan; factors that influence evaluation use; types of evaluation use; mechanisms of change in the use of evaluation findings as evidence in EIDM; evidence-informed systems or decision making, and practices or strategies that promote evaluation use. The major findings show that there is limited utilisation of the evaluation results in decision making across the six evaluations reviewed.

In conclusion, while there is some evidence of evaluation use, in general, the evidence shows that there is limited use of evaluation results in evidence informed decision

making. Further, strategies that promote the practice of evaluation utilisation, as recommended in the study could be considered for implementation, including institutionalising evaluations in the department.

Keywords: evaluation utilisation, evaluation use, evidence-informed decision making, DALRRD.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report titled "Utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-informed decision making" is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Sector Monitoring and Evaluation) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.



Musawenkosi Senda

Date: 31 March 2023

DEDICATION

This report is dedicated to my wife, Thembi and children, Lance and Lakeisha Senda, for their unwavering support during the two years of my studies. I would not have reached this stage without you being there to constantly encourage and motivate me when the chips were down. Ngiyalithanda kakhulu, Inkosi ilibusise. eNkundlande. Thank you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special gratitude and thanks go to my supervisor, Dr Candice Morkel, for her expert guidance, support and motivation throughout this research process, from the research proposal development culminating to this research report. Also, special gratitude goes the following;

- Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), for issuing the permission to conduct my study in the Department.
- Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) for assisting me with the evaluation reports.
- To all the respondents from the DALRRD who participated in this study and afforded me their invaluable time and undivided attention during the interviews.
- To my two special friends, Nqobile Dlamini and Refiloe Lidaga, for their unwavering support, encouragement and motivation, girls, you rock.
- My family for being my pillar of strength in this entire two-year journey and
- Finally, I give thanks to the Lord Almighty, who has made things beautiful in his time, Ecclesiastes 3:11

Without your assistance, this research would never have turned out the way it did. I will be forever grateful.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEG	African Evaluation Guidelines
AGSA	Auditor General South Africa
CASP	Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme
CRDP	Comprehensive Rural Development Programme
DAFF	Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries
DALRRD	Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development
DDG	Deputy Director General
DEP	Departmental Evaluation Plan
DPME	Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
DRDLR	Department of Rural Development and Land Reform
EBDM	Evidence-Based Decision Making
EIDM	Evidence-Informed Decision Making
ERP	Extension Recovery Programme
EQAT	Evaluation Quality Assessment Tool
EXCO	Executive Committee
FMPPI	Framework for Managing Programme Performance Information
GWME	Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation
MAFISA	Micro Agriculture Finance Institutions of South Africa
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTSF	Medium Terms Strategic Framework
NDP	National Development Plan

NEP	National Evaluation Plan
NEPF	National Evaluation Policy Framework
NES	National Evaluation System
PFMA	Public Finance Management Act
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RADP	Recapitalisation and Development Programme
SASQAF	South African Statistical Quality Assessment Framework
UFE	Utilisation Focussed Evaluation

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

1.0 Introduction

This study explores the utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in the South African government's evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) processes, particularly in the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). The experiences of the senior management service in the DALRRD on the utilisation of evaluation findings in evidence use in decision-making were illuminated through semi-structured interviews. In addition, the literature review and document review were bolstered by the review of agriculture-related evaluations commissioned by the South African Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). These two departments merged in 2019 to form the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). The Department's mandate is to ensure "equitable access to land, integrated rural development, sustainable agriculture and food security for all" (DALRRD, 2020, p. 22)

The Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), another government department, plays a crucial role in promoting the institutionalisation of evaluation and the implementation of the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) across all the spheres of government (National, Provincial and Local) and State-Owned Enterprises (DPME, 2019a). DPME promotes the use of evaluation as one of the tools for effective decision-making across all levels of spheres of government.

The NEPF is informed by the utilisation-focused approach, which is inherently desired and judges the value of an evaluation by the usability of its findings and recommendations in practice. It is worth noting that while the NEPF is utilisation focused, it does not, however, require the use of Utilisation Focussed Evaluation (UFE) as an approach. According to Patton (2008), as cited by (Patton & Horton, 2008, p. 1), UFE is "based on the principle that an evaluation should be judged by its utility. So, no matter how technically sound and methodologically elegant, an evaluation is not truly a good evaluation unless the findings are used." Evaluation findings and

recommendations provide credible, objective evidence to inform effective decision-making in planning, budgeting, policy reviews and programme management (DPME, 2019b), and the development of improvement plans further enables these once evaluations and their findings have been tabled. Furthermore, the improvement plan is developed by management, indicating how they implement the evaluation recommendations (section 2.4.4 discusses improvement plans in detail). Therefore, the NEPF encourages the utilisation and development of credible and quality evaluations that will improve the impact and effectiveness of government interventions (DPME, 2019b).

1.1 Background

The South African government's challenge is to be more effective and efficient in service delivery. The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) function can assist the government in evaluating the performance of its programmes through the identification of those factors which contribute positively to service delivery outcomes (The Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2007). In 2011 the Government of South Africa approved the NEPF, which set the foundation for the National Evaluation System and the subsequent implementation of the National Evaluation Plan (DPME, 2019b). In order to enhance government performance, development effect, accountability, and decision-making, the National Evaluation Plan (NEP) focuses on strategic evaluations of important government interventions (DPME, 2019a).

The knowledge gap that this study addresses is the inadequate empirical evidence on the extent of utilisation of evaluation findings and implementation of recommendations in evidence-informed decision-making on public sector interventions implemented within the agriculture sector. Onyura (2020), in the article "Useful to Whom? Evaluation Utilisation Theory & Boundaries for Program Evaluation Scope", underscores the shortcomings of empirical research on the use of program evaluation findings in the public sector, especially in the health professions sector. Tshatsinde (2015) also acknowledges that evaluation findings are underutilised in decision-making processes within the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, Republic of South Africa. Addressing this knowledge gap will provide further knowledge on the utilisation of evaluation findings and recommendations in public

administration, governance and decision-making, particularly in the use of evidence-informed decision-making.

The increased importance of evaluation has developed within a larger public policy context, including increased calls for accountability and greater emphasis on evidence-informed policy and best practices (Patton, 2015). The DPME (2019b, p. 17), defines evaluations as "the systematic collection and objective analysis of the evidence emanating from the review of interventions". Patton (2015), states that interventions are change initiatives that try to improve the world. They might take the shape of projects, programs, initiatives, policies, and strategies. The evaluation examines the initiatives' "relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency), value for money, impact, and long-term sustainability and makes recommendations for the way forward" (DPME, 2019b, p. 17). Evaluations are valuable because they generate evidence that can be used to guide policy and practice, which is an essential support for the government's pursuit of its development priorities (DPME, 2019b). As a result, the M&E function should be utilisation oriented and help to strengthen governance.

The NEPF principles of improving/refining policy and accountability contribute to public sector governance practices. The main goal of the NEPF is "to provide minimum standards for government-led evaluations by promoting credible quality evaluations that can be utilised to learn how to enhance the efficacy, efficiency, relevance, coherence, and impact of the interventions implemented by the government" (DPME, 2019b, p. 6). According to the DPME, the rationale for conducting government evaluations is anchored around the following five broad uses, namely; (i) improving or refining policy, (ii) improving or strengthening programmes and projects, (iii) improving accountability, (iv) building evidence bases and (v) contributing to more effective decision-making (DPME, 2019b). Furthermore, to give credibility to evaluations done in government, the NEPF-linked evaluations undergo a rigorous credibility quality assurance system where evaluations are peer-reviewed by experts to meet acceptable quality standards for usability (DPME, 2019b).

In the public sector, monitoring and evaluation are located within the corporate services or strategic management units involved in decision-making and governance. Using evaluation findings strengthens decision-making and helps to improve

governance deliverables like transparency, accountability, and, ultimately, effective service delivery. In this study, the evaluation findings and recommendations emerging from public sector evaluations will be analysed to explore if they are used in decision-making, particularly in the DALRRD, in the context of evidence-informed decision-making. This will be approached using the theoretical framework of EIDM and decision-making theory. Ideally, decision-making in the public sector should follow a systematic approach where evidence is vital in determining the fate of the intervention (policy, programme or project). The policymaking cycle in governance also states that evaluation findings and recommendations should be used as part of the body of evidence used when deciding the fate of a programme, policy or project. However, this has been a great challenge to achieve for evaluation and EIDM in general and particularly in South Africa (DPME, 2019b).

1.2 Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development

The Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) was established in 2019 through the merger of the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). According to the DALRRD website, the vision of the Department is to provide "equitable access to land, integrated rural development, sustainable agriculture and food security for all through accelerating land reform, catalysing rural development and improving agricultural production to stimulate economic development and food security through" (https://www.dalrrd.gov.za). The Department consists of 12 branches that are responsible for implementing its programmes. The branches of interest in this study, due to their involvement in the NEP evaluations, will be the Corporate Support Services, Rural Development, and Food Security and Agrarian Reform.

1.3 Evaluations of agriculture-related interventions in South Africa under the NEP

As stated before, some agriculture-related evaluations have been commissioned by the South African Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform as part of the National Evaluation Plan. Six

evaluations (see Table 1) of agriculture-related interventions conducted between 2011 and 2016 were reviewed as part of the study. These evaluations are archived in the DPME website evaluations repository (https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za), and the available documents include the evaluation report and, in some cases, a quality assessment report and an improvement plan. However, the DPME website evaluation repository currently has improvement plans and assessment reports for only two of the six evaluations reviewed in this study. Reviewing these also helped formulate questions for the semi-structured interviews.

Table 1: List of DALRRD agriculture-related evaluations in NEP

Year of Evaluation	Implementing Department	Title of Evaluation
2012/13	DRDLR	Implementation Evaluation of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme (RADP)
	DRDLR	Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP)
2013/14	DAFF	Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP)
	DAFF	Impact Evaluation of the Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA)
2014/15	DAFF and DRDLR	Diagnostic Evaluation of the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector
2015/16	DAFF	Implementation evaluation of the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan (ERP)

According to Chapman, Tjasink, and Louw (2021, p. 2), "These programmes represent some of the most important efforts over the past two decades by the South African government to realise their broad post-apartheid vision of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by promoting rural development and land reform. Interventions ranged from on-farm input and infrastructural interventions to microfinance, extension support, land restitution claims and value chain development."

1.4 Problem statement

The South African government has identified the lack of adequate use of evidence in decision making as one of the challenges it faces in service delivery (DPME, 2019b). The lack of evidence-based decision making can have some negative consequences for

service delivery. For example, it can lead to policies and programs that are not effective in addressing the needs of the citizens. Additionally, it can lead to a waste of resources and a loss of trust in the public sector. Cronin and Sadan (2015), in their survey of senior government officials in South Africa, found that a significant percentage relied on informal sources of evidence in decision making. Ba (2021) posits that effective decision-making informed by evidence has become essential to governance and accountability. The South African government has taken some steps to address the lack of evidence-informed decision making. For example, it has established the National Evaluation System (NES), which is responsible for conducting evaluations of government programs and policies. However, even with the establishment of the NES, there is a concern among evaluators as the generators of evidence on how the information from an evaluation process is used in practice and decision making (Donnelly & Searle, 2017). Evaluations are carried out to improve programme implementation, generate knowledge, and inform better decision making (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009).

The DPME (2019b), further states that some of the evaluation findings have not been effectively used in evidence-informed decision-making due to delays in the evaluation processes, unavailability of data to conduct credible impact evaluations, poor technical quality of evaluations and contestations on the evaluation findings. Liang and Howard (2011 identify the barriers linked to the utilisation of evidence in decision making are the lack of time, financial resources and relevance of management research, the lack of decision making authority to utilise the findings and implement the recommendations, resistance to change and constraint in resources for the implementation of recommendations. Lack of evidence in the decision-making process is a challenge for managers (Kumar et al., 2020; Liang & Howard, 2011; Witter et al., 2017). In addition, evidence use can shape decision making in different ways, e.g., scaling up an intervention, discontinuing or redesigning a particular programme (Witter et al., 2017). Although using evaluation results to inform decision-making is complex, Tshatsinde (2015) claimed it is important for evidence-based management decision-making processes. Tshatsinde (2015) noted the underutilisation of evaluation findings in decision-making within the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, Republic of South Africa. The mandate of the department is to ensure

“equitable access to land, integrated rural development and national food security for all” DALRRD (2020, p. 22); hence based on Tshatsinde's (2015) argument, the underutilisation of evidence for decision-making to achieve the on the mandate and vision of DALRRD has a possible impact on the implementation of the department's interventions, and their development impact.

Addressing these challenges and promoting evidence-informed decision-making can enhance the public sector’s capacity to deliver effective services, promote good governance, transparency, improve accountability, and ultimately contribute to better outcomes for South African citizens (Naidoo, 2011). It is important to develop a culture of evidence-based decision making within the public sector and to build the capacity of officials to use evidence in their decision making. It is also aspired that improved evidence-informed decision-making in the DALRRD will provide empirical evidence to support decision-making regarding the country's food security and agrarian reform.

1.5 Research purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to explore the utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa. To further help understand the utilisation of evaluation findings and recommendations the study will also seek to examine the factors that impinge on the utilisation of evaluation findings in DALRRD and recommend strategies to improve the practice of utilisation in evidence informed decision making.

1.6 Research questions

The research is underpinned by one central research question and five sub-questions.

The primary research question is:

1.4.1 To what extent have evaluation findings and recommendations been used as part of evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa?

The sub-questions are:

a. What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?
b. What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?
c. What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making?
d. What evidence-use mechanisms exist in the DALRRD that influence the use of evidence from evaluation reports?
e. How is evidence-informed decision making undertaken in the DALRRD?

1.7 Delimitations of the research

The research will be limited to the utilisation of evaluation findings in the context of EIDM within the South African DALRRD. The evaluation reports that were reviewed were only from the NEP evaluations commissioned by DALRRD between 2011 and 2016, focusing only on agricultural interventions. The unit of analysis was the department and the officials, who were directly involved with M&E and the evaluated programmes were the unit of observation. The study did not include the DPME officials, the programme beneficiaries or the evaluators of the programme interventions.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The significance or rationale of the study is in its potential contribution to understanding the use of evaluation findings in decision making in the South African public sector, more specifically, the DALRRD, and how evaluation findings can influence evidence-informed decision making (EIDM). Fleischer and Christie (2009) argue that evaluation findings and recommendations are to be used by decision-makers to inform decision-making and programme improvement. However, the practices of EIDM in evaluation are still relatively new and developing, as this is seen in this study's respondent's limited level of understanding of the concept. According to Banda (2022), using evaluation findings and recommendations in the South African public sector still requires more in-depth investigation since the available literature on the use of evaluations in the South African public sector is inconclusive. Also, the available literature is contradictory in findings on evaluation use (Banda, 2022).

This study, therefore, further builds on Tshatsinde's (2015) research work in the DRDLR in that it further explores the utilisation of evaluation findings as an intervention in evidence-informed decision-making beyond the UFE approach in the DALRRD by using the Knowledge Utilisation Framework, the Langer et al. (2020) mechanisms of evidence use (Figure 5) and the Mixed Model of EBDM (Figure 4) by Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) as part of its theoretical framework. Two of the evaluation reports reviewed by (Tshatsinde, 2015) also formed part of this study. The timing of the Tshatsinde (2015) study was soon after the evaluations had been concluded in 2013, and data was collected in 2014, with findings published in 2015.

The study further notes that there is a nine-year gap between this study and that of (Tshatsinde, 2015). While the nine-year gap may present limitations of availability of programme managers, turnover of officials, poor knowledge management and participant's memory as noted by Banda (2022), the purposive and snowballing sampling strategies (section 3.3.1.1) employed in this study sought to mitigate against these limitations. Section 3.5 of this report also notes these limitations and provides further mitigation strategies.

The evaluations reviewed were conducted during the 2009 – 2014 and 2014 – 2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), meaning that there has been a further government planning cycle in 2019 – 2024 to allow for further implementation of the findings. The implementation of the evaluation findings especially for those conducted at the end of the 2009 – 2014 MTSF could only be implemented in the 2014 – 2019 MTSF and similarly, those evaluations completed in the 2014 – 2019 MTSF could have been implemented in the 2019 – 2024 MTSF. This study's limitation is that there was no review of the DALRRD strategic plans aligned to the MTSF as indicated in Section 3.5. The researcher is of the opinion that in the (Tshatsinde, 2015) study not sufficient time had lapsed since the completion of the evaluation to observe significant effects in the utilisation of the evaluation considering the turnaround times in public sector planning and implementation cycles. This study collected data in 2022-2023, nine years after the evaluations were completed, and therefore the researcher believes that barring the above limitations it will provide both an extended and updated analysis of evidence utilisation in the DALRRD. Therefore, this research will contribute to understanding evaluation use, factors that impinge and promote its use, and the mechanism of evidence use in the DALRRD.

1.9 Outline of the research report

The research report is divided into six chapters, and they are briefly outlined below:

Chapter 1 – Introduction and background

This chapter provides the background to the study, the problem statement, the purpose statement and the research questions. The chapter further describes the justification and delimitation of the study.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

The chapter presents a detailed literature review to answer the problem statement, research purpose and research questions. The chapter will focus on evaluation, utilisation, and evidence-informed decision making.

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology

This chapter explains the research strategy, design, research procedure and methods that the study employed. It includes sampling, data collection instruments, methods, and analysis techniques. The ethical considerations, credibility and limitations of the study conclude this chapter.

Chapter 4 – Presentation of findings

The findings of the study emanating from data analysis are presented in this chapter. The findings are presented in response to the themes developed.

Chapter 5 – Discussion of findings

This chapter provides a detailed interpretation and discussion of the research findings underpinned by the literature review and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 6 – Summary, conclusions and recommendations

This chapter summarises the research report, makes conclusions based on the findings concerning the research questions and finally provides recommendations for further issues to be addressed by DALRRD, including opportunities for further research.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This research report section provides further context to the study by reviewing the study's fundamental concepts through relevant literature. First, the South African National Evaluation System and the related legislative framework are described. An overview of the existing literature on evaluations and the utilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision-making to provide context is undertaken through a review of the past and current research studies of interest. Notably, this study focuses not on evaluations but on evaluation utilisation; hence, much focus will be on the latter, not the former. Finally, the literature reviewed was synthesised into relevant topics and themes in answering the study's primary research question and sub-questions.

Further, the literature helped frame the interview questions to help answer the research questions. This chapter also reviews the research setting, the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), to give a background of the department and the evaluations of the study. Also, the processes involved in decision making relating to evaluations, particularly evidence-informed decision-making, are explained. Lastly, this section previews the theoretical framework that foregrounds the research findings' interpretation.

2.1 Overview of the South African Evaluation System

The South African National Evaluation Systems (NES) was established to support and promote the systematic production and use of evaluations within the government for public policy planning and service delivery improvement. The National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) and the policy framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation (GWM&E) System established the basis of the development and provided a regulatory framework for the NES. The NES are institutional arrangements the government drives to guide evaluation selection, implementation and use (Chapman et al., 2021). Further, the NES is closely linked to the national planning process, and some of the evidence collected through the NES is

utilised to guide policy and decision-making processes (Goldman et al., 2019). The NES is underpinned by the National and Provincial Evaluation Plans (NEP and PEP); promotes the production of quality evaluations; promotes the use of evaluation findings; and stimulates the demand for evaluations. Apart from GWM&Es and the NEPF, other policies and legislative frameworks govern M&E in South Africa and are described in the next section.

2.2 Legislative Framework on M&E in the Public Sector

In South Africa, public sector evaluations conducted under the NEPF are aligned with Section 195 of the Republic of South Africa Constitution. The principles of Section 195 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996) that govern public administration are the following, "efficient, economic and effective use of resources must be promoted; public administration must be development-oriented; public administration must be accountable; and transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information". The Constitution of the Republic, which establishes the framework for performance measurement, reporting, and accounting, serves as the foundation for the M&E function in the public sector (Banda, 2022).

Phetla (2017) notes that this constitutional provision has made it possible for M&E systems to be established in the public sector to provide factual information that will inform effective decision-making related to the planning, budgeting and implementation of interventions like development programmes. These systems include the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (GWM&E), the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (PFMA 1 of 1999), the Public Audit Act (25 of 2004), the National Evaluation Policy Framework (2011), Framework for Managing Programme Performance Information (2007) and the Statistical Quality Assessment Framework (2011). While the National Evaluation Policy Frameworks will be the principal policies and frameworks applied to this study, a brief review of the other policy frameworks is provided below:

2.2.1 Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (2004)

The Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWM&Es) is an overarching apex-level information system that unifies and incorporates the M&E standards, procedures, and guidelines utilized across the spheres of government (The Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2007). The following data terrains serve as the foundation for the GWM&Es, an overarching policy for M&E that draws on the component systems in the framework to create relevant M&E products for its users, namely (i) programme performance information, which focuses on data collected by public sector institutions during their ordinary course of implementing their mandates and government policies; (ii) socio-economic and demographic statistics, which focusses on data collected and produced by Statistics South Africa and other government institutions and (iii) evaluations of government programs, projects, and policies that concentrate on standards, procedures, and methodologies for organising and carrying out evaluations as well as communicating the findings thereof. The generated results inform the decision-making processes to improve governance regarding accountability, transparency, participation and inclusion.

2.2.2 Public Finance Management Act (No 1 of 1999)

The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) (No 1 of 1999) was enacted to regulate the national government's financial management and ensure that all government revenue and expenditure are managed efficiently and effectively. The PFMA aligns with section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Phetla (2017) argued that the public sector should embrace the scarcity factor as indicated in Section 38(b) of PFMA (No. 1 of 1999), which states that the accounting officers "is responsible for the effective, efficient, economic and transparent use of the resources of the department, trading entity or constitutional institution". Therefore, this means that resources should be utilised effectively, and there should be value for money. Banda (2022) further notes the importance of keeping records as per Section 40(a) of PFMA (No. 1 of 1999), which states that the accounting officer "must keep full and proper records of the financial affairs of the department, trading entity or constitutional institution in accordance with any prescribed norms and standards". These records allow for accountability by making information to be available in a timely, accessible

and accurate manner to constitutional bodies like the Auditor General of South Africa (AGSA).

2.2.3 Framework for Managing Programme Performance Information (2007)

The Framework for Managing Programme Performance Information (FMPPI) was introduced in 2007 by the National Treasury introduced in the public sector. The FMPPI makes definitions and criteria for performance information clear and, when necessary, encourages routine audits of non-financial data. The FMPPI further defines who is responsible for and their role in managing performance information. The FMPPI also promotes accountability and transparency by providing timely performance information that is accessible and accurate to the public, legislature (provincial and parliament) and municipal councils (National Treasury, 2007).

The National Treasury (2007) informs that the performance information of an institution indicates the institution's ability to carry out its intended objectives and to determine which policies and processes work. Performance information is essential in encouraging management to be effective in the way they plan, budget, implement, monitor and report. Using the best available credible information and data when making decisions will help the government fulfil its mandate to provide timely services.

2.2.4 Public Audit Act (No 25 of 2004)

The Constitutional provisions establishing and allocating duties to an AGSA are given effect by the Public Audit Act 25 of 2004. This act allows the AGSA to audit the institutions in the public sector and express an opinion on their performance. The AGSA audits and reports whether there has been value for money and if the resources have been used efficiently, effectively, and in compliance with existing policies. Phetla (2017) argues that auditing, according to the Public Audit Act, cannot be disassociated from M&E. Banda (2022) notes that no policy or legislation enforces the use and implementation of the evaluation findings. Therefore, the AGSA is not obligated to assess if public institutions use the evaluation findings in their performance.

2.2.5 South African Statistical Quality Assessment Framework

The South African Statistical Quality Assessment Framework (SASQAF) was created to offer a framework for evaluating the quality of statistics that have been produced and are available for public use and may be used in public policies or to make decisions. SASQAF has been developed to "provide the framework and criteria used for evaluating and certifying statistics produced by government departments and other organs of state and, in some circumstances, by non-governmental institutions and organisations" (Statistics South Africa, 2010, p. 2). Since data collected from public evaluation may be utilised in the planning, decision-making, and oversight of other public policies, it is also necessary that the evaluation data be compliant with the SASQAF standards.

2.2.6 National Evaluation Policy Framework (2011)

The development of a National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) in 2011 was foregrounded by the policy framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation (GWM&E) system formed in 2007. As a result, the NEPF established the basis for developing the National Evaluation System (NES), whose purpose is to support evaluations in government. The support includes the National Evaluation Plans, promoting the utilisation of evaluation results, promoting quality of evaluations and stimulating demand for evaluations. As a result, the NEPF offers a guideline for establishing criteria for organising and carrying out evaluations in government institutions (DPME, 2019b). The NEPF will be discussed further in section 2.3.1.

2.2.7 Summary of policy and legislative frameworks guiding the utilisation of M&E in the South African public sector

These M&E legislative frameworks demonstrate the commitment of the South African government places on the importance and significance that M&E plays in the public sector. The M&E function assists the government in evaluating the performance of its programmes to service delivery outcomes. The frameworks all focus on governance which is important in the evaluation as they foster accountability. The frameworks

provide a suitable enabling environment for M&E to thrive, where decision-making, accountability, value for money, inclusion, participation, credible and timely data and effective management and utilisation of resources are important. The frameworks, however, have a limitation in that they do not provide for mandatory use of the evaluation findings, and they cannot enforce the implementation of the evaluation findings and the improvement plan. Banda (2022) proposes that a regulatory framework for enforcing the use of evaluation findings should be considered and developed. With the help of this rule, oversight organisations like the AGSA and parliamentary legislative committees will be able to hold public institutions accountable for their use of evaluations.

2.3 Evaluations in the Public Sector

The Public sector in South Africa includes organisations established in conformity with the law and run by the government to deliver goods and services to its citizens. The organisations or departments are located in the three spheres of government (national, provincial and local) and state-owned entities. A functional public sector is essential for the function of the South African economy and efficient service delivery. The DALRRD (the focus of this study) provides agriculture and land-related services to its citizens, and due to its mandate, it is integral to the public sector. To deliver on its mandate, it has to make vital informed decisions on its programmes and activities. This mandate is derived from the constitution, legislation, Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and National Development Plan (NDP), amongst other legislative frameworks.

Evaluations conducted within the public sector and have a national priority are carried out under the National Evaluation Plan (NEP), while those with a provincial footprint are under the Provincial Evaluation Plan (PEP). In addition, government departments also conduct evaluations under the Departmental Evaluation Plan (DEP). All these evaluations follow the NEPF guidelines. In this study, the focus is only on NEP evaluations that either former DAFF or DRDLR implemented.

2.3.1 National Evaluation Plan

The National Evaluation Plan (NEP) focuses on the strategic evaluation of critical government interventions to enhance government performance, development impact, accountability and decision-making. The NEP is guided by the NEPF and is implemented by DPME in partnership with affected government institutions (DPME, 2019a). The programmes or topics selected to be part of the NEP must be aligned with the government's key priorities as guided by the NDP and MTSF, including other relevant legislation and policies. The NEP is approved by the Cabinet, and all the evaluation reports are submitted to the Cabinet for noting and approval. The government can learn what works and what does not through the NEP and evaluations and pinpoint areas that need improvement.

According to the NEPF, the DPME (2019b, p. 17) describes evaluation as "The systematic collection and objective analysis of the evidence on public policies, programmes, projects, functions and organizations to assess issues such as relevance, performance (effectiveness and efficiency), value for money, impact and sustainability, and recommend ways forward". Görgens and Kusek (2009, p. 2) define evaluation as “the systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, program, or policy, including its design, implementation, and results”. Evaluations are conducted to ascertain their relevance in achieving the desired objectives. Michael Scriven's (1967) definition of evaluation, as cited by Alkin and King (2016), is that evaluation is the "judgment of merit and worth".

Evaluations must be useful in that they can be applied in a specific situation and at a particular time. The relevance or value of the evaluation is linked to the usefulness of the information produced in informing the Department's decision-making process. In addition, the evidence from the evaluation explores causality by explaining why targets or outcomes were achieved or not achieved (Görgens & Kusek, 2009). Evaluations provide an assessment of a program, project, or policy that is planned, continuing, or finished and frequently address inquiries about design, implementation, and outcomes (Gertler et al., 2016).

The NEPF has characterised evaluations into six categories, namely: “diagnostic (What are the underlying situations and root causes of the problem?); design (does the theory of change seem strong?); implementation (what is happening and why?); economic (what are the cost-benefits?) and impact (has the intervention had an impact at outcome and impact level, and why?)” (DPME, 2019b, p. 21). The sixth category is evaluation synthesis which involves synthesizing results from various evaluations. This terminology allows the NEPF to be consistent in the evaluation description across all government sectors. Three types of agriculture evaluations in the NEP are part of this study. The evaluation types are implementation, impact and diagnostic. Understanding the type of evaluation helps to understand its use as well. The impact evaluation helps decision and policymakers to assess if the interventions are generating the intended effects; promotion of accountability in allocating the scarce public resources across various platforms; in understanding what is working and not working, and measure changes that are attributable to the intervention (Khandker et al., 2010).

For the review of evaluation reports in the DALRRD, this study considers the two impact evaluation reports for the Micro Agricultural Finance Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA) and the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP). The subsequent three evaluation reports that were reviewed in the study were implementation evaluations, and the programmes evaluated were the Recapitalisation and Development Programme (RADP), Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) and Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan (ERP). An implementation evaluation or process evaluation allows for the primary stakeholders of the intervention to review the intervention's progress at specific points in the project cycle to reappraise the objectives and the outputs of the intervention (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2013). The implementation evaluation is the most common among the six as it provides rapid feedback into the policy (Goldman et al., 2019). The final evaluation that was analysed was the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector, which was a diagnostic evaluation. Chapman et al. (2021) found that this type of evaluation is not widely known except in the South African NES. A more common evaluation type is clarificative evaluation, designed to aid programme stakeholders in conceptualising the interventions and improving their coherence, thus improving the chances of realising the desired programme outcomes (Owen, 2006). The clarificative and diagnostic evaluations are both similar in that they are both ex-

ante, meaning they are carried out before the implementation of the intervention. The difference in this study is that the diagnostic evaluation was carried out on already existing interventions (CASP, MAFISA RADP and others). Diagnostic evaluations were conducted in the DALRRD to inform the South African government on reviewing some of the post-apartheid agricultural policies and programmes implemented to benefit small-scale farmers since 1994. The DPME (2019b, p. 23) defines diagnostic evaluation as "preparatory research (often called ex-ante evaluation) to ascertain the current situation prior to an intervention and to inform intervention design."

The six programmes that were evaluated and are part of the study are further discussed below to provide context and background. The detailed evaluation findings and recommendations per the evaluation reports are attached in Annexure 3.

2.3.2 Agriculture Evaluations in the NEP

This study delimits its agriculture evaluations only to those done by the national departments and only under the NEP. Most of the evaluations in the NEP are from the agricultural sector and were conducted mainly by the two departments that have since merged (DRDLR and DAFF) and a few provincial departments. In the National Evaluation Plan 2020 – 2025, seven agriculture evaluations were identified and conducted by the two departments (DPME, 2019a). Banda (2022) also notes that since the establishment of the NEPF in 2011, at least 29 agriculture evaluations have been implemented by two national departments (the DAFF and the DRDLR) and the Western Cape and Gauteng provincial agricultural departments. Of these 29 evaluations, only seven (7) are in the NEP and were conducted by the National Departments. It is important to note that the departments also conduct their own evaluations under the Departmental Evaluation Plan, which falls outside the NEP. The evaluation reports and Improvement plans are archived in the DPME evaluation website repository. However, not all evaluation reports in the DPME repository are accompanied by improvement plans.

The evaluation reports were reviewed to identify "clues" as to whether or not there was any information you could derive from them to tell you more about whether or not

they were used. The improvement plans are a legitimate document as they provide a guide on how the department plans to use the evaluation findings hence the importance of reviewing them in this study. Their absence or delays in developing them put the spotlight back on the evaluation if there was any use (Banda, 2022). The development of an improvement plan (or absence of one) helped to triangulate the interview data on the utilisation of evaluation findings. The table below shows the six purposively selected evaluations in the NEP and conducted between 2012 – 2016. All the chosen evaluations are agriculture focussed and were conducted in the two departments, DRDLR and DAFF. The analysis of the reports and a discussion of the findings is found in section 4.1.

Table 2: Agriculture evaluations in the NEP that are part of the study.

Year Conducted	Implementing Department	Type of evaluation	Title of Evaluation
2012/13	DRDLR	Implementation	Implementation Evaluation of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme (RADP)
	DRDLR	Implementation	Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP)
2013/14	DAFF	Impact	Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP)
	DAFF	Impact	Evaluation of Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA) Impact Assessment
2014/15	DAFF and DRDLR	Diagnostic	Diagnostic Evaluation of the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector
2015/16	DAFF	Implementation	Evaluation of the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan

All six evaluations were sourced from the DPME evaluation website repository and some from the DPME via e-mail.

2.3.2.1 Description of the Implementation Evaluation of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme

The land reform programme in South Africa is part of the government's key priorities and one of the core pillars of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP). While the land reform programme has been successful in increasing access to land, its long-term viability and sustainability have been questioned by both public and private sector actors. However, there have been reports that some of the lands transferred have yet to reach the desired productivity levels. While others have remained unproductive and non-operational since the transfer, this has not improved the livelihoods of the beneficiaries of the land reform programme. In response to the identified challenges encountered, in 2010, the DRDLR introduced the Recapitalization and Development Programme (RADP), a strategic land reform programme (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2013).

The main objectives of the RADP, also called RECAP by the respondents, were to establish rural development rangers and generate employment possibilities in the agricultural sector (monitors), develop emerging or small-scale farmers into commercial farmers, increase food production and guarantee food security (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2013). The RADP focused on land reform farms that were in distress but had the potential to be sustainable. Some of these land reform farms had received insufficient to no support from the government. The distressed farms received government support to ensure their revitalisation and sustainability through technical and financial support. Also, the distressed projects/farms were assisted through the strategic interventions of strategic partnerships and mentorships (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2013).

The Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria was appointed as an external evaluator in 2012 to conduct the implementation evaluation. The evaluation value was R2.5m, and the evaluation period was from the inception (2010) of the RADP to June 2012. The main implementation evaluation objectives were to (i) evaluate the RADP performance of RADP and draw strategic information on its implementation; (ii) assess the effectiveness of stakeholders during the implementation of the RADP; and (iii) draw lessons learned and make recommendations on the way forward (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2013).

2.3.2.2 Description of the Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme

The Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) implementation evaluation was conducted in 2012 by Impact Economix and finalised in 2013. The implementation evaluation covered the period from inception in June 2009 until June 2012. The value of this evaluation was R1.8m. The evaluation was done in collaboration with DPME and DRDLR. The CRDP was launched in July 2009 by the DRDLR as an all-inclusive, whole-of-government programme supported by many different departments and spanning all the three spheres of government. The CRDP's primary objectives were to achieve social cohesion and rural development through better access to fundamental social services, enterprise development and village modernisation. The CRDP was implemented through a three-legged strategy that focussed on rural development, agrarian transformation and land reform (Impact Economix, 2013).

The CRDP implementation evaluation objectives based on the Impact Economix (2013) report were to assess (i) the appropriateness and clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the existing institutional arrangements that support the implementation of the CRDP; (ii) whether the CRDP policy goals are being achieved; and (iii) how the learnings from the evaluation outcomes can be used to strengthen and upscale the CRDP further.

2.3.2.3 Description of the Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP)

The impact evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP) was conducted in 2013 by the Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria in collaboration with the DPME, DRDLR and DAFF. The value of this evaluation was R2m. In its evaluation report, the Business Enterprises University of Pretoria (2015) reports that the primary objective of CASP was to address the post-settlement support needs of the targeted land reform beneficiaries and other previously disadvantaged producers. CASP was launched in 2004 as a schedule 4 conditional grant that promotes and facilitates agricultural development by targeting vulnerable and marginalised

groups, including women, youth and people living with disabilities. Moreover, CASP aims to increase agricultural output and the standard of living for people in the following groups: (i) the less food secure; (ii) the historically disadvantaged farmers, including those at subsistence, emerging and commercial levels; and (iii) the entrepreneurs (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2015)

The impact evaluation aimed to determine whether CASP is accomplishing policy objectives. The evaluation also sought to establish the impact that CASP has had on the quality of life for the programme recipients and further inform how the programme can be strengthened (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2015).

2.3.3.4 Description of the Impact Evaluation of the Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa

The Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA) impact evaluation was conducted in 2013 by the Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria DPME and DAFF. The impact report from Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria (2014) states that MAFISA was formed in 2005 because the agriculture sector, particularly smallholder farmers, was underfunded and rural financial services remained inaccessible and expensive. MAFISA, one of the government farmer support programmes, aimed to enable farmers and entrepreneurs in the micro- and small-scale agricultural sector to grow their enterprises and enhance their standard of living. Three financial intermediaries piloted MAFISA between July 2005 and December 2007 in three provinces chosen by DAFF, and by the end of the 2008–09 fiscal year, there were nine financial intermediaries (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2014).

The MAFISA impact evaluation had two main objectives, (i) to determine whether the intended policy goals of MAFISA have been achieved and (ii) to assess the effects of MAFISA on the livelihoods of beneficiaries with a particular focus on improved agricultural production, new jobs created, improved entrepreneurial skills, creation of easy access to credit facilities and poverty alleviation (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2014).

2.3.3.5 Description of the Implementation Evaluation of the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan

The implementation evaluation for the agriculture extension recovery plan (ERP) was conducted between November 2015 and September 2016 and focussed on the financial period 2008/09 to 2014/15. The evaluation was valued at about R1.5m. The external evaluator contracted to conduct the implementation evaluation was McIntosh Xaba and Associates, in association with RMI. This evaluation report is unavailable on the DPME evaluation website repository and was sourced via e-mail directly from the DPME evaluation department. The evaluation steering committee that provided oversight comprised DPME, DAFF and Provincial Departments of Agriculture (PDA) officials. According to the McIntosh Xaba and Associates (2017) evaluation report, the ERP was implemented in 2008/09 and provided funds to enable provinces to build and revitalise the state and capacity of agricultural extension and advisory services in South Africa. The ERP was implemented through the following five pillars, namely: (i) increased visibility and accountability of extension; (ii) improved image and professionalism of extension; (iii) increased recruitment of extension practitioners; (iv) reskilling and reorientation of extension practitioners and (v) provision of information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and other resources.

The goals of the ERP implementation evaluation were to look at the implementation of the ERP thus far, checking if the implementation was efficient and effective. Also, the evaluation had to identify areas that need strengthening going forward.

2.3.3.6 Description of the Diagnostic Evaluation of the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector

This evaluation was conducted by Khulisa Management Services and completed in 2016, and it had a value of about R1.2m. Unfortunately, it is unavailable on the DPME evaluation website repository or the DALRRD website. The evaluation was requested from DPME, DALRRD and Khulisa Management Services and was received from DPME in January 2023. The aim of the diagnostic evaluation of the smallholder farmer supporting sector, according to Chapman et al. (2021, p. 2), "was to develop the basis for a more integrated and ultimately evidence-based set of solutions that draw on a more comprehensive understanding as to what is working, and what is not, on the

whole for small-scale farmers across South Africa." According to Khulisa Management Services & University of Cape Town (2016), the evaluation sought to compile the lessons learned from the previous evaluations, which would then serve as the foundation for creating a framework of policies supporting smallholder farmers across departments involved in farmer support. The diagnostic evaluation influenced the review of some of the major policies and programmes in the agriculture sector that the South African government had put in place to promote small-scale farmers since 1994 (Chapman et al., 2021). This study's programmes, like CASP, CRDP and MAFISA, formed part of this diagnostic evaluation.

2.4 Factors contributing to Evaluation use in the South African NES

The South African NES was established to support and promote the systemic use of evaluations within the public sector. The NES further promotes the production of quality evaluation reports and the use of evaluation findings. For evaluations to be useful, they must be disseminated from the evaluator to the end user and its stakeholders. Figure 1 below describes the processes followed once an evaluation is declared complete.

The dissemination of evaluation results is linked to the subject of the study, which seeks to explore the "so what?" question (that is, what purpose did the intervention serve in contributing to development impact?). Dissemination involves the communication of evaluation results to stakeholders, including decision-makers. Of importance to this study is the question: how are the evaluation results used once made available? The NES objective is to foster the use of evaluations in decision making. The evaluation results, which are the findings and recommendations, alternatively also called the "evidence", go through a series of processes, as illustrated in Figure 1, before they can be of use. First, the findings and recommendations are discussed with the stakeholders and management (EXCO) before being served at Cabinet. The EXCO (Executive Management Committee) is the department's premier decision-making structure, which comprises the Director General and the Deputy Directors General. Presenting to Cabinet is in line with the NEP guidelines and gives weight to implementing the improvement plan (Goldman et al., 2019). The DPME recommendations provide a structured follow-up procedure for implementing the

improvement plans. For two years, the DPME is to receive six-monthly progress reports. The follow-up process is to confirm if the evaluation has been used as recommended in the improvement plan.

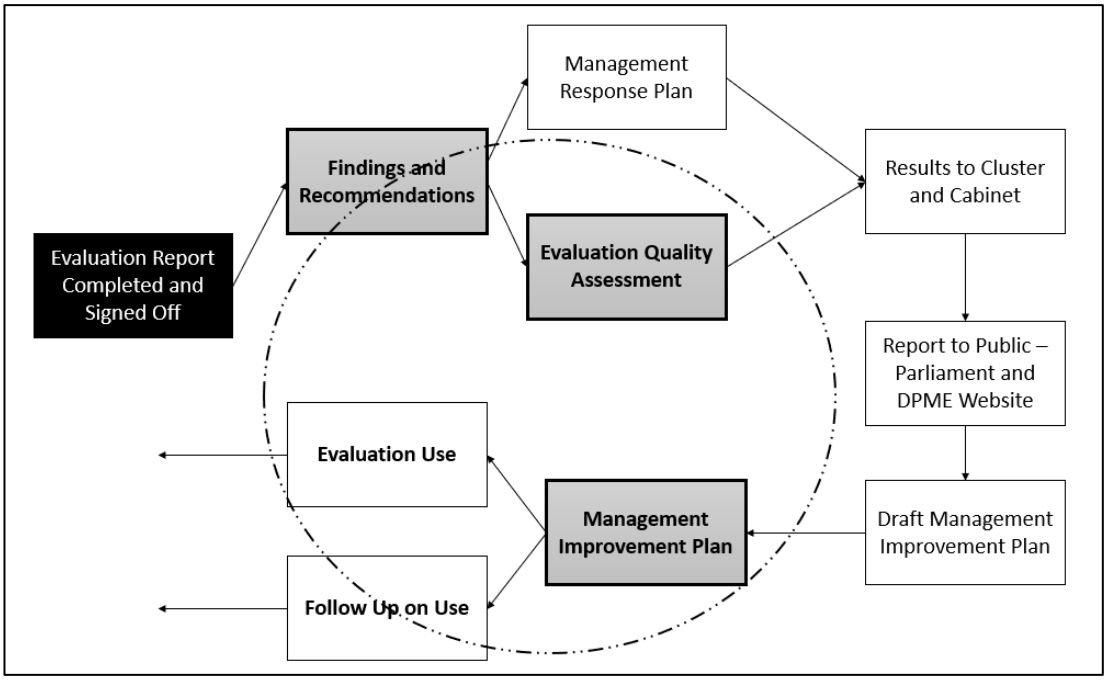


Figure 1: Process of disseminating evaluation information

Authors own description

This study has interests in the darker boxes of the above illustration, "*evaluation findings and recommendations*", the "*quality assessment score*", and the "*management improvement plan*" to provide an argument on how disseminating information in these processes affects evaluation use and evidence-informed decision making.

2.4.1 The importance of the Evaluation Report in Dissemination and Evaluation Use

The evaluation reports produced in the National Evaluation System are a product of the process indicated in the NEP. The evaluations are commissioned by the DPME and the custodian department (DALRRD). An external service provider conducts the evaluation to allow for independence and objectivity of the evaluation. The evaluation report is considered completed only when the Project Steering Committee (PSC), after their input, signs it off and considers it a technical valid independent report (DPME, 2019a). The purposes and objectives of the evaluation of the six interventions of this

study are provided in section 2.3.2 of this report. In ensuring that the evaluations are transparent and facilitate informed decision making on the programmes being implemented, the DPME publishes the evaluation reports undertaken under the NEP on its evaluation website repository (Leslie et al., 2015).

In addition, evaluation results must be communicated promptly to avoid being worthless to potential stakeholders and expressed in a format that consumers can understand without the use of research jargon (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). Evaluation information competes with other existing information as sources of evidence for decision-makers; hence the relevance of the evaluation information is important to users for it to be used. A quality evaluation report has the propensity to be used (or user-friendly) in decision making (Dhakal, 2014)

2.4.2 Findings and Recommendations

Evaluation findings and recommendations provide credible, objective evidence to inform effective decision-making in planning, budgeting, policy reviews and programme management (DPME, 2019b). According to the UNEG - United Nations Evaluation Group (2018), recommendations are related to the concept of utility, meaning they are a basis for management decisions used to improve projects, programmes, policies or strategies. The definition of evaluation recommendations by UNEG (2018, p. 3) is "proposals aimed at enhancing the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, relevance, sustainability, coherence, added value or coverage of the operation, portfolio, strategy or policy under evaluation. Recommendations are intended to inform decision making, including programme design and resource allocations." The findings and recommendations are the evidence generated from the evaluation, also referred to as evaluation results or information. This evidence can be used to inform the development of improvement plans, which are part of the evidence in informed decision making (Fleischer & Christie, 2009). Feinstein (2019) states that the quality of recommendations is important for evaluation utilisation, and they should not be more than 10 in an evaluation report (United Nations Evaluation Group, 2018). Also, the evaluations should provide reliable and pertinent information that can be

incorporated into the decision-making process of the commissioners of evaluations or intervention owners (Kabuye & Basheka, 2017).

In this study, the findings and recommendations of the six evaluations have been extracted directly from the evaluation report and are presented in Annexure 3. The findings are presented to the stakeholders and management for acceptance or dispute. Disseminating the findings and recommendations to management allows them to formally indicate which recommendations are accepted and which ones they dispute. This is accomplished through the management response plan, whose purpose is to give government departments a chance to reply to evaluation recommendations that they find objectionable. Also, the plan provides for those recommendations that the department agrees to and are carried forward for implementation (Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, 2014b). The recommendations are checked for clarity and relevance to the department's needs before being used to develop the Improvement plans. The presence of clearly articulated recommendations indicates the evaluation's achievement, and if the recommendations are implemented, then the evaluation has merit and is considered a success (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009).

2.4.3 Quality Assessment Score

Sidzumo (2016) avers that scientific rigour is the primary evaluation element that stimulates the demand for evaluation use in decision making by producing credible empirical/factual information. All the evaluations in the NEP are subject to the Evaluation Quality Assessment Tool (EQAT), which measures the credibility of the evaluation methodology according to specific criteria. The tool assesses the entire evaluation process phases, including planning and designing; implementation; report; and follow-up, use and learning. Leslie et al. (2015) inform that the primary documents reviewed as part of the evaluation assessment are the comprehensiveness of the terms of reference, inception report., the credibility of the data collection tools or instruments and the alignment of the evaluation report to set guidelines. Using the EQAT, each phase is scored “using a Likert-type rating scale where scores range from very poor (1), inadequate (2), adequate (3), good (4), to excellent (5)” (DPME, 2017, p. 3). Generally, a minimum score of 3 is the cut-off point when considering evaluations

acceptable and of adequate quality. Of the six evaluations of this study, only one was not assessed using the EQAT. The failure to take the Agriculture ERP through the EQAT process, as indicated by the respondents, was due to the failure of management to see the evaluation process to its logical conclusion. Of the remaining five, four scored above 3, and only one scored below 3. The EQAT developed by DPME is biased towards utilisation, where the value of an evaluation is understood in terms of the utility of the findings, conclusions and recommendations (DPME, 2017).

2.4.4 Improvement Plan

The Improvement Plan is developed to ensure that the evidence, i.e. findings and recommendations emanating from evaluations, are utilised to improve and strengthen the programmes, plans, policies and budgets in question (Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, 2014a). They are developed by management as a formal response to an evaluation indicating how they will implement the evaluation recommendations. According to DPME (2014a), the management is afforded an opportunity to indicate which evaluation recommendations they accept and which ones they disagree with, providing reasons. Further, the improvement plan provides a platform for tracking and monitoring the implementation of the recommendation of the evaluation to ensure accountability by the implementers. The improvement plan as an accountability tool keeps the relevant stakeholders updated on the actions taken to improve the programme, project or policy delivery, hence improving governance (Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, 2014a).

According to Dhakal (2014), as in the case of the DALRRD evaluations, the improvement plan provides a basis for effective evaluations by addressing the findings and recommendations and identifying responsibility and implementation timing. This assertion is further corroborated by Bamberger and Segone (2011), who contend that improvement plans provide a platform for the enhancement of use of evaluations to improve their implementation. Bamberger and Segone (2011) state that the improvement plan addresses the recommendations made by the evaluators and sets up the implementation to action the recommendations. According to Banda (2022), departments' inability to establish improvement plans or even delay their development raises the question of whether there was ever a strategy for their usage, considering that improvement plans are crucial to assessing evaluation utilisation. Evaluations that

are not used, regardless of their quality, are considered failures (Patton, 2015). However, this usually refers to instrumental use, which is defined as the direct application of evaluation findings on a specified intervention. There are typically four " use " types: instrumental, conceptual, symbolic and process. These are discussed in further detail in section 2.5.1. The improvement plan in the South African NES describes how the department will put the evaluation findings and recommendations into practice. As per the NEP guidelines, the improvement plans should be published on the DPME website. However, in this study, only two improvement plans for the CASP and CRDP evaluation were published. Failure to disseminate the improvement plans on public platforms has implications for use and accountability, such as not implementing important recommendations that could improve service delivery because the report is not in the public domain and the public does not know about it.

2.5 Utilisation of Evaluations

This topic is central to this study as it unpacks what evaluation utilisation is and what factors impinge on evaluation utilisation. This section also discusses those factors that promote the practice of evaluation utilisation with an organisation like the DALRRD. The NEPF is utilisation-oriented and places value on evaluation utilisation. The DPME's mandate is to promote the institutionalisation and use of evaluations in the public sector (DPME, 2019b). The utilisation of evaluation findings, though they provided useful evidence for the decision-making process, depends on many factors. In this study, the evaluation findings and recommendations are considered evidence that can be used in the DALRRD to aid informed decision making. These evaluation findings or evidence can be used at different levels in the DALRRD, and it could be at the project, program, institutional, sectoral and policy or strategic levels. It is worth noting that evaluations are part of the sources of evidence in decision making, and they compete with other interests, ideologies and institutional constraints when public administrators need to make a decision (Dhakal, 2014).

Evaluation scholars have used the terms evaluation use or evaluation utilisation interchangeably (Johnson et al., 2009), and in this study, both terms will also be used interchangeably. The definition of evaluation use or utilisation always refers to the use of the evaluation findings to influence something. Some standard definitions of

evaluation by evaluation scholars, including Johnson et al. (2009, p. 378), define evaluation utilisation as "the application of evaluation processes, products, or findings to produce an effect". Patton (2020, p. 8) defines evaluation utilisation as "the processes by which, and degree to which, an evaluation has effects, both intended and unintended". Onyura (2020, p. 1102) define evaluation utilisation as “the application of program evaluation processes and findings to influence thinking, decision making, or action about interventions and their host organisations”. Díez et al. (2016) also add that evaluation use concerns how the decision makers apply the findings and how they experienced the evaluation process.

There is a concern among evaluators as the generators of evidence on how the information from an evaluation process is used in practice and decision making (Donnelly & Searle, 2017). The following authors have been cited by Donnelly and Searle (2017) to explain the definitions of use so that the evaluation information is used correctly.

- Alkin and Taut (2003, p.1) reported that use is "the ways in which an evaluation and information from the evaluation impacts the program being evaluated".
- Patton (2008, p.37) identified use as "how real people in the real world apply evaluation findings and experiences".
- Johnson et al. (2009, p. 378) described use as "the application of evaluation process, products, or findings to produce an effect".

Similarly, Patton (2020, p. 8) defines evaluation use as "Whatever understandings, learnings, actions, changes, attitudes, and/or knowledge follow from evaluation findings and/or processes".

According to Kabuye and Basheka (2017), utilising evaluation entails using the findings of an evaluation and putting the evaluation's recommendations into practice and evaluation utilisation also shows the impact of evaluation research. Banda (2022) adds that the fact that evaluations are commissioned with the primary goal of informing judgments or decisions about the validity of the evaluand is what makes the use of results a basic construct in evaluations. Evaluations are undertaken with the primary goal of informing decision-making, which distinguishes them from basic research and when not utilised, it should be of great concern to those commissioning

the evaluation (Alkin & King, 2017). In our case, the intervention owner is the DALRRD, while the DPME is involved in the evaluation commission. There are factors that are enablers and barriers to the effective use of evaluations. These factors can emanate from the evaluation itself or from the organisation that is implementing the evaluation. Identifying and understanding these factors gives the decision-makers an advantage in developing mitigating or promotion practices.

In the public sector, officials can use evaluation information to assist them in: deciding how to allocate scarce resources; rethinking the causes of challenges in an intervention; identifying emerging issues before they become widespread; as evidence when to supporting competing or alternatives; as evidence to support public sector reforms; providing evidence of causality, relevance and impact of interventions (Kusek & Rist, 2004). These evaluation uses can be summarised as being relevant to the public sector's strategy, operations and learning in improving service delivery. Understanding the different evaluation uses will assist this study in determining to what extent the evaluation findings have been used, and recommendations have been implemented.

2.5.1 Evaluation use Typologies

Drawing on the classical work of Weiss, the following evaluation utilisation or evaluation use forms exist in the literature on evaluation theory: instrumental use, conceptual use, process use, and persuasive use (symbolic and legitimate). Enlightenment use is the fifth form of evaluation closely associated with process use. There can be an interaction between these different forms of evaluation use because they are not mutually exclusive. The effectiveness of the use of evaluations depends on the interest of the intended users of the evaluation and how the evaluation will be utilised, allowing for a better selection of evaluation methodologies (Onyura, 2020).

Based on the four broad types of evaluation use, Davis et al. (2022) argue that the first three types of evaluation use (conceptual, instrumental, symbolic) are associated with the findings from the evaluation of the intervention implemented, while the last one, which is process use, is associated with being part of the evaluation process and not

necessary from evaluation findings. The four evaluation use types relevant to this study are explained further to understand their relevance better.

2.5.1.1 Instrumental use

Instrumental use refers to contributions made directly and visibly to decisions regarding the program being evaluated. It is making decisions on a specified intervention based on the evaluation findings, which means directly applying them (Díez et al., 2016). In addition, instrumental use occurs when an evaluation's findings and recommendations lead to changes or revisions that improve the programme's implementation (Davis et al., 2022). The direct use of the evaluation findings provided in Annexure 3 in the programme implementation will be instrumental use. The instrumental evaluation utilisation aligns with Patton's utilisation-focused evaluation (UFE) approach described earlier in this section, where UFE focuses on how the key intended users will use the evaluation's findings. The intended users in this study are the DALRRD decision-makers since they have the authority to use evaluation findings to inform their decision making on their programmes.

According to Patton (2008), as cited by (Patton, 2015) on, utilisation-focused evaluation (UFE) states that UFE is an approach to evaluation aimed at the use of evaluation findings by the intended primary users. These users are responsible for decision making to apply findings and implement evaluation recommendations. UFE provides an evaluative process, a strategy, and a framework for deciding on an evaluation's content, focus, techniques, and purposes for which it will be used. Patton (2015) further states that the primary intended users of evaluations are more likely to use evaluations if they own the evaluation process, findings, and conclusions; as a result, they must have actively participated throughout the entire evaluation process.

2.5.1.2 Conceptual use

When the evaluation's conclusions and recommendations enhance a program manager's comprehension and alter their perspectives on the program concept or

design, this is known as conceptual evaluation use. (Davis et al., 2022). In conceptual use, the evaluation findings are applied to influence new ways of thinking about the intervention. Conceptual uses take a more educational form as it contributes to having new knowledge about the evaluand (Díez et al., 2016). In conceptual use, findings indirectly lead to changes in the implementer's understanding of the programme-related issues (D'Ostie-Racine et al., 2016). Even if the evaluation findings are not implemented or ignored in decision making, the findings contribute to changing their understanding of the evaluand. Later, when the organisational conditions become favourable, the new conceptual understandings can be used instrumentally (Weiss, 1998).

2.5.1.3 Symbolic use

Symbolic evaluation use, also called political use, refers to using evaluation findings to persuade or convince others to support a particular position, practice or decision. It is used to secure political capital design (Davis et al., 2022). Symbolic use also manifests when the decision-makers request evaluation as a box-checking mechanism for funding or accountability or for the sake of reputation or status (D'Ostie-Racine et al., 2016).

2.5.1.4 Process use

Process use manifests itself in the change in the attitude, knowledge and behaviours of the programme managers or those involved in the evaluation due to their participation in it (Davis et al., 2022). In process use, the changes in individual behaviour and learning, changes in organisational procedures and culture are due to stakeholder involvement in the evaluation and the learning that happens during the evaluation process (Onyura, 2020). According to Patton and Horton (2008, p. 3), process use occurs "when those involved in the evaluation learn from the evaluation process itself or make programme changes based on the evaluation process rather than the evaluation's findings". Participating in an evaluation has unintended effects in that those participating learn to reason like an evaluator and increase their capacity to use

evaluative logic. The benefits go beyond the evaluation findings and accrue to the individual participants and the organisation.

2.5.2 Determinants of Evaluation use

Alkin and King (2017) analysed various literature on the factors or determinants of evaluation use and developed four themes or categories that can be used to explain the factors associated with evaluation use. These themes are categorised as user, evaluator, evaluation and organizational or social context factors, and they form part of any evaluation context.

2.5.2.1 User factors

The decision-makers, the programme personnel and the policymakers who utilise evaluations in any way are also called evaluation users (Patton, 2020). According to the user factors, a crucial component in determining whether people utilize evaluation is the "personal factor." This factor focuses mainly on the user's attitude towards the evaluation in general. The involvement of stakeholders, particularly the primary intended users, is important in the evaluation process and in facilitating evaluation use (Johnson et al., 2009).

2.5.2.2 Evaluator factors

The evaluator factor is influenced by how the evaluator engages with the potential users (DALRRD officials) in various aspects of the evaluation process. Johnson et al. (2009) posit that the capacity of the evaluator, the working relationship and the rapport with the users impact their credibility. The relationship between the evaluand and the evaluator, as observed by Kelly and Kelly (2017), is that a collaborative approach between these two stakeholders allows for a healthy relationship that can deliver more understandable findings and improve their utilisation.

The quality assessment score while it represents evaluation quality, should not be confused or perceived as the use of evaluation. The quality of an evaluation is

associated with the impact of the evaluation (Bundi et al., 2021). Evaluation quality or evaluators' competencies have also been found to be some characteristics that can influence evaluation use (Kelly & Kelly, 2017). Quality evaluations also help organisations provide useful and reliable decision-making evidence (GAO, 2017). Dhakal (2014) further suggested that the quality of the evaluation reports, which is a function of the evaluation capacity and independence of the evaluators, determines the utility of the evaluation findings.

2.5.2.3 Evaluation factors

This category significantly influences evaluation use (Alkin & King, 2017). This category refers not only to the evaluation procedure, relevance of evaluation information or the quality of the evaluation report but also to the appropriateness of the evaluation methods used, their credibility and acceptance by the potential users. Alkin and King (2017) further informed that if the findings produced by the evaluator do not meet the perceived need of the user, then that evaluation is likely not to be used.

Stakeholder participation involves having the users of the evaluation and other interested participants actively involved or participating in the evaluation process. The stakeholders can be involved in crafting the evaluation methodology and research questions and in finalising the recommendations. Díez, Izquierdo, and Malagón (2016) argue that participation in the evaluation methodology and crafting of recommendations promotes the process use of evaluations. Johnson et al. (2009) also noted that the active participation of evaluation users promotes all four categories of evaluation use, instrumental, symbolic, conceptual and process use.

2.5.2.4 Organisational factors

The culture and nature of the organisation conducting the evaluation substantially impact the success of achieving evaluation use. In addition, the institutional arrangements within the organisation, the age of the programme being evaluated and the extent of development of the programme within the organisation also affect evaluation use (Alkin & King, 2017). Højlund (2015) also states that the macro or

microenvironment, mainly the organisational context, shapes the practice of evaluation since evaluations are embedded within an organisation. Some factors within the organisation that can influence evaluation use include the pressure to evaluate a programme, and Johnson et al. (2009) note that if pressure or initiation is external, the likelihood of evaluation use diminishes. Organisations with an evaluation culture or institutionalised evaluation are more likely to use evaluation Loud and Mayne, (2013) as cited by (Kelly & Kelly, 2017). The organisation's evaluation capacity and capabilities positively affect the utilisation of evaluation findings as they increase the organization's capability to conduct effective evaluations and, as a result, use outcomes (Kabuye & Basheka, 2017).

2.6 Decision-Making in the Public Sector

The Public sector in South Africa includes organisations established in accordance with the law and managed by the government to provide goods and services to its citizens. The organisations or departments are located in the three spheres of government (national, provincial and local) and state-owned entities. A well-functioning public sector is essential in South Africa for the effective function of the economy and efficient service delivery. Due to its mandate, the DALRRD (the focus of this study) is an integral part of the public sector by providing agriculture and land-related services to its citizens. To deliver on its mandate, the DALRRD has to make vital evidence-informed decisions on its programmes and activities. This mandate is derived from the Constitution of the Republic, Legislation, the National Development Plan (NDP) and the Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), amongst other key legislative frameworks. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa calls for public administration to be development-oriented, economical and efficient in the use of resources; this means that there is a need for effective, informed decision-making that has an impact on the lives of its citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Furthermore, the Constitution of the Republic mandates the government to be accountable to its citizens and inform them of the performance of public programs. Therefore, evaluation can quantify programme performance and provide a strong foundation for transparency and accountability, which are the functions of governance (Gertler et al., 2016).

Decision making in the public sector can be explained by first understanding the role of public administration. The public administration field is multi-disciplinary and comprises government and governance systems, social systems, political systems, and economic systems (Van der Waldt, 2017). Thornhill and Dijk (2010) also note that the executive branch of government's operations, such as the creation and implementation of public policy and the interactions between people executing management and administrative tasks, is the focus of public administration. These functions are practised within a political ecosystem that seeks to satisfy the needs of society (Thornhill & Dijk, 2010). Lamidi (2015) further argues that public administration follows a pattern of routine actions, including, for example, planning, decision making, advising, coordination, negotiation command and data gathering, through which the responsibilities of the government are carried out.

Public sector decision-making is a process where decisions are a summation of many uncoordinated steps undertaken by different officials (Conaway, 2020). It also involves a process where these several steps are undertaken to determine the most viable route to take to achieve the desired needs or objectives. In the public sector, decisions made by public officials drive its programs and policies and impact the lives and livelihood of its citizens. The decision-making process in the public sector follows a similar pattern to the policymaking cycle. The National Policy Development Framework developed by The Presidency Republic of South Africa (2020) has four main stages in policy development: formulation, adoption, implementation and evaluation. In the first stage of policy formulation, once the problem has been defined, evidence is needed to diagnose the problem that needs an intervention. The Policy framework identifies four types of evidence that can be used to analyse the problem that needs an intervention, (i) research-based evidence, (ii) practice-informed evidence, (iii) citizen/participatory evidence and (iv) evaluation-based evidence. The research-based evidence is produced by academics, researchers and professional groups through rigorous scientific processes. The practice of informed evidence is derived from the experience of working with administrative data, e.g., programme or monitoring data. The citizen evidence is derived from the everyday experiences of citizens; this evidence can be sourced through surveys or community participation. This study will focus on evaluation-based evidence to understand the why, how and what did or did not work in the past. The evaluations that provide this evidence are the

diagnostic, implementation, impact and economic (The Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2020). Cairney (2016) informs that the use of evidence in the public sector is a complex process involving understanding the policymaking processes influenced by politics.

The core of managerial responsibilities is decision-making and Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) state that managers are under pressure to make decisions without complete information. In the field of EIDM, it has been recognised that decision-making is part of a political process that is influenced by the values, culture and experiences of decision-makers together with other technical considerations like fitting with existing systems, the available human resources and budgets (Amisi et al., 2021). Ultimately, evaluations are carried out to improve programme implementation, generate knowledge, and inform better decision making (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009).

2.6.1 Governance and Decision Making

The decision-making process and how choices are carried out or not are both included in governance. According to the United Nations Development Programme, “assessment, participation, accountability, openness, responsiveness, the rule of law, equity, efficient and effective government, consensus orientation, and strategic vision are the nine qualities of good governance” (United Nations Development Programme, 2014, p. 5). Transparency in reporting progress or lack thereof toward achieving the intervention's goals is critical in evaluation studies. This level of transparency in performance reporting promotes accountability and credibility to the government and citizens, thereby increasing public trust in government interventions (National Treasury, 2017). The accountability of public administrators to the citizens has been touted as one of the principles that also emanate from evaluations. Goldman and Pabari (2021) argued that the M&E systems established to respond to the challenges of accountability, transparency, and performance are factors of good governance.

According to Katsamunska (2016, p. 2), “governance is the institutional capacity of public organisations to provide public and other goods demanded by a country's citizens or the representatives thereof in an effective, transparent, impartial, and accountable manner, subject to resource constraints." Accountability is an anchor for

democracy and good governance, according to Prinsloo (2013), where those in public office have to be responsible for their decisions. The state and the decision-makers should be responsible and accountable to the public for their actions and decisions. Ba (2021) posits that attention to EIDM is growing due to the increasing demand for accountability. Therefore, effective decision-making informed by evidence has become essential to governance and accountability. The corollary is that an absence of EIDM is associated with poor governance and accountability, which further provides credence to the importance of examining the extent to which evaluation findings are utilised and recommendations implemented in the DALRRD.

2.6.2 Evidence-Informed Decision Making

In his speech at the African Green Revolution Forum 2021 (AGRF) summit, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta said that Africa should employ EIDM in policy development around food security in a period of erratic weather. The President said, "Equally important to note is that our renewed drive anchors our food systems transformation agenda on data-driven decisions. Armed with relevant and precise data, we are better able to make targeted interventions that address water scarcity, climate change, land pressure, and the competition between subsistence food crops and export cash crops" (Kairu, 2021). The realisation of the importance of the use of evidence is profound in food security which is the mandate of DALRRD.

In understanding EIDM, this study will first explain what evidence is in relation to evaluation utilisation. Cairney (2016, p. 3) defines evidence as “an argument or assertion backed by information”. The Health Evidence Network, as cited by (Aryeetey et al., 2017, p. 2), defines evidence as “findings from research and other knowledge that may serve as a useful basis for decision making in the public sector”. It is worth noting that this definition is not limiting itself to research findings but captures other key factors that may influence decision-making. Evidence used in decision making emanates from various sources, including scientific research, administrative information, public opinion surveys, traditional/indigenous knowledge and, in this study, evaluations (findings and recommendations) (Goldman & Pabari, 2020). Head (2013) refers to public sector evidence as the knowledge generated

through applied research and from studies conducted within or external of government. According to Head (2013), public sector evidence is the knowledge generated through applied research and studies carried out within or outside of government. This knowledge includes an overview of social and organizational processes and specific data gathered via program evaluations and performance indicators.

The use of evidence in policymaking and in basing or informing decisions has, in the last few years, been a regular mantra within government discussions around governance and management issues in Africa and internationally (Abrahams et al., 2021). According to Goldman and Pabari (2020), using evidence to inform decision-making contributes to improving policies, programmes and procedures in various fields, including international development. The use of high-quality, reliable and credible evidence as input for informed decision making or policy development in the improvement of service delivery has been widely agreed to be significant (Head, 2013). Well-informed decision-making processes have the benefits of improved capacity for effective policy design, better programme implementation and monitoring of performance, leading to improved service delivery (Head, 2013).

EIDM differs from opinion-based decision making and other *ad hoc* decision making processes (Davis, 2004) as cited by (Cronin & Sadan, 2015). Opinion based decisions rely on untested opinions from individuals or selective use of evidence (Segone, 2008). Barends, Rousseau and Briner (2014) define EIDM as making decisions based on evaluating, choosing, and applying the best available evidence from numerous sources for a favourable outcome. EIDM promotes public management and policymaking by establishing evidence-based decision-making rather than anecdotes, opinions and unsupported beliefs.

The best reliable evidence on the efficacy and efficiency of the proposed initiatives can be incorporated into the design of policies and programs using evidence-informed decision making (EIDM) (Stewart et al., 2018). Evidence-informed (or evidence-based) decision-making (EIDM/EBDM) terminology has been used interchangeably by different authors (Stewart et al., 2017). However, the term evidence-informed decision-making will be used in this study. Stewart et al. (2017, p. 2) define EIDM as "a process whereby multiple sources of information, including the best available

research evidence, are consulted before making a decision to plan, implement and (where relevant) revise policies, programmes and other services". EIDM is "the process of distilling and disseminating the best available evidence from research, practice and experience and using that evidence to inform and improve policy and practice" (National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools, 2012). Both definitions refer to the best available research evidence; the evidence is from evaluations in this study.

The importance of EIDM is that it provides for the utilisation of rigorous evidence for better decision making. EIDM has been recorded to have been used to improve policies, practices and programs across different sectors (Stewart et al., 2017). When EIDM is properly implemented, it has the ability to turn high-quality evidence into action and increase the effect, especially in the world's poorest settings (Aryeetey et al., 2017). EIDM emphasises how decisions are influenced by various inputs, with evidence being a key input. The use of evidence can be understood as a spectrum, where one end is about considering the evidence but deciding whether it is relevant or valuable for a specific context. At the other end of the spectrum, a decision-maker might consider a body of evidence and integrate the findings into the decision made. EIDM is thus not the product of a decision that is described as evidence-informed but the process of making the decision (Amisi et al., 2021). EIDM is an ecosystem of evidence generation, translation and evidence use. This study focuses on the later part of EIDM, which is evidence use because the evaluation reports revived are part of the evidence generation.

Interventions informed by evidence, e.g., policies and programs, can improve accountability and subsequent service delivery, one of South Africa's governance challenges. In governance, public institutions on every level make decisions, decide who should form part of the decision-making process, and implement such decisions. The officials accountable and responsible for the results of implementing choices that have an impact on society are also determined by governance. (Kanyane & Sausi, 2015). Evidence-informed decisions from evaluations have been identified as one of the sources that can be used for analysing problems in an intervention when formulating policy (The Presidency Republic of South Africa, 2020). Evaluation helps

decision-makers make informed decisions about the intervention and service delivery based on evidence by examining the extent to which an intervention is responsible for the measured results (Frankel & Gage, 2007).

2.6.3 Challenges in the use of evaluation findings in EIDM

The barriers linked to the utilisation of EIDM are the lack of time, financial resources and relevance of management research, the lack of decision making authority to utilise the findings and implement the recommendations, resistance to change and constraint in resources for the implementation of recommendations (Liang & Howard, 2011). At the same time, factors that encourage the practice of EIDM are linked to how the evaluation and findings of the study are presented, the relevance and applicability of evidence to the local context. The use of evaluation findings also hinges upon the intended users understanding and sense of ownership of the entire evaluation process, including the development of findings and recommendations (Patton, 2015). The underutilisation of evaluation findings has also been linked to bad timing of evaluations, poor responsiveness to the needs of the intended users, irrelevant findings, inadequate evaluation methodology and poor communication strategies (Segone, 2008).

Kumar et al. (2020) also agree that the poor quality of evaluation findings limits their use in EIDM as they lack credibility. The quality of evaluations conducted by the DALRRD was assessed using the Evaluation Quality Assessment Tool (EQAT). Kusek and Rist (2004) propose that quality evaluations should have the characteristics of being impartial, useful, technical adequacy, stakeholder participation, value for money, feedback and dissemination. Witter et al. (2017) argue that the limited use of evaluation evidence might be due to the fact that evaluations are more inclined to the evaluation audience than the needs of the decision-makers. Also, the period taken to conduct evaluations might lead to missed windows of opportunities within the policymaking cycle. The quality of evaluations and the priorities of the external evaluators and users of the evaluations are not aligned (Witter et al., 2017) because some evaluators are more focused on publication in peer-reviewed journals than on prioritising the evaluation objectives of the commissioning organisation.

Cronin and Sadan (2015), in their survey of senior government officials in South Africa, found that a significant percentage relied on informal sources of evidence in decision making. These informal sources included opinions from experts and their personal experiences. The government officials further indicated the need to use scientifically proven evidence as their basis for decision making. The OECD (2021) reports that there is a greater uptake for EIDM in countries that make their evaluation findings and recommendations public. In the DPME website repository, evaluation reports with their findings have been published and are available to the public (DPME, 2019b). However, it is also important to note that evaluations are not the only sources of evidence and are not superior to other sources and types of evidence that can contribute to EIDM (Witter et al., 2017).

2.7 Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development

The Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) is the study area, and the focus of this study is on the evaluations conducted in the last ten years under the National Evaluation Plan (NEP). The DALRRD) derives its mandate from sections 24, 25 and 27 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996). The DALRRD was formed in 2019 from the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) merger and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). The mandate of these two former departments had some commonalities: they operated within the agriculture and rural development space. The president announced the reconfiguration of the two departments into DALRRD in June 2019 as part of the sixth administration's reforms that will promote coherence, better coordination and improved efficiency within the government. According to DALRRD (2020), national, provincial and local legislation and policies inform the Department's legislative and policy mandates. DALRRD's vision is to “ensure equitable access to land, integrated rural development, sustainable agriculture and food security for all” DALRRD (2020, p. 22).

The Department implements its mandate through the 12 branches responsible for implementing its programmes. These branches are “agricultural production, health and food safety; land redistribution and tenure reform; rural development; food security and agrarian reform; economic development, trade and marketing; corporate support

services; financial management services; provincial operations; spatial planning and land use management; deeds registration trading entity; national geomatics management services and restitution" (DALRRD, 2020). Of these twelve branches, only three will be of interest in this study due to their involvement in the NEP evaluations: the corporate support services, rural development, and food security and agrarian reform. Each branch has Chief Directorates under it, as per Figure 2 below.

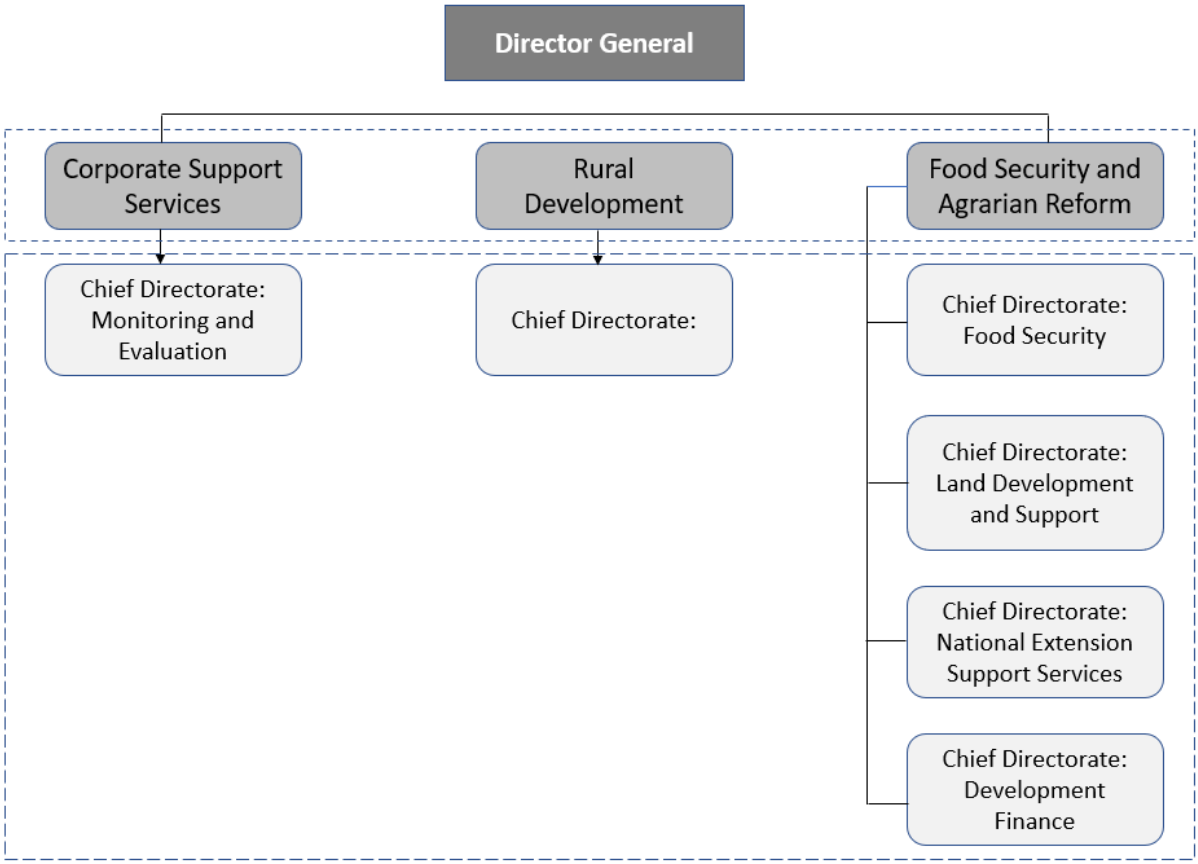


Figure 2: Structure of Branches part of the Study

The department is led by the Director General, the accounting officer, and the Deputy Directors General (DDG) lead the branches. The Director General and the DDGs are part of the Executive Committee (EXCO. The Chief Directors run a directorate made up of a number of different programmes to be implemented. The director level completes the senior management service, and their role is to implement the departmental programmes.

2.7.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate

The Monitoring and Evaluation function is located in the Corporate and Support Services Branch. This directorate is led by the Chief Director of M&E, with two directors leading the monitoring and evaluation. In addition, the Chief Directorate provides guidance and support in planning, monitoring and evaluation across the entire department. The Directorate further participates in the implementation of departmental and national evaluations.

2.7.2 Executive Committee

The executive committee (EXCO) is the department's premier decision-making structure. EXCO is chaired by the Director General and composed of all the Deputy Director Generals. This structure approves all the strategic decisions relating to adopting and implementing evaluation findings. Reference to the role of the EXCO based on the study participants' responses is made in the findings chapter (Chapter 4).

2.8 Institutionalisation of evaluations

Various authors have presented arguments on the importance of institutionalising evaluations. For example, Dhakal (2014) claims that institutionalising the use of evidence-informed decision making processes will solve the problem of timely demand and use of assessments in the public sector. Furthermore, according to Højlund (2015), institutions or organizations with an institutionalised assessment culture are more likely to have a culture that supports their willingness to utilise evaluations as a tool. Kabuye and Basheka (2017) also note the importance of social and organisational contexts in influencing evaluation use and say that evaluations should be integrated into the operational framework of public sector organizations since the degree to which evaluation outcomes are utilised depends on the institutional context. The institutionalisation of evaluations in the South African public sector is the mandate of DPME, and Dhakal (2014) argues that institutionalisation evaluations in the public sector are important in improving the use of evaluations.

2.9 Theoretical framework

Kivunja (2018) states that the theoretical framework is the synthesis of thoughts of leaders in the study by reviewing the theories linked to the research problem and question. Adom, Hussain, and Joe (2018) concur that the theoretical framework guides the choice of the research design and the data analysis plan. Data analysis and the interpretation of findings can be made through these theories. The positioning of findings within the theoretical framework provides rigour to the study (Kivunja, 2018).

According to Guba (1981), as cited by Kivunja (2018), the theoretical framework strengthens the credibility and transferability of qualitative data findings. The theoretical frameworks to be discussed in this study will be on evaluation utilisation, and evidence informed decision making.

2.9.1 Theoretical Framework on Evaluation Utilisation

In this study, evaluation utilisation is a key construct in characterising how an evaluation affects people and situations through its value chain of processes and findings (Pitts, 2017). The Blake and Ottoson (2009) Knowledge Utilisation Framework, amongst other theories, guided the analysis of data in this study. Knowledge utilisation spreads across many sectors, including agriculture, health, politics, social work, public administration, and others. The history of knowledge utilization may be traced back to early European societies that were interested in knowledge as the nexus of philosophy and science (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). To understand knowledge utilisation, Backer (1991), as cited by (Blake & Ottoson, 2009), uses the analogy of three waves to classify knowledge utilisation in American history. The first wave was from 1920 to 1960 when knowledge utilisation activities started with diffusion studies on agriculture innovations and improvements to the farmers. This led to an information explosion post World War 2 and increased attention to knowledge production, dissemination and application.

The second wave of knowledge utilisation, according to Backer (1991) as cited by (Blake & Ottoson, 2009), was between 1960 and 1980 and saw most studies focusing on embracing technological innovations by individuals and organisations. During this second wave, it was a period of great optimism for social betterment, and some of the

programmes, like Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, implemented at great expense, brought about government accountability measures. In this second wave of knowledge utilisation, a new field of scientific inquiry and professional practice was born: programme evaluation. This led to new funding for studying research utilisation being made available to understand how results affiliated with the new programmes produce outcomes that can be measured and have practical benefits (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

The third wave of knowledge utilisation was from 1991 onwards and is centred on how the utilisation of knowledge generated from research can improve the health, education and human services sectors. The Knowledge utilisation programmes in the health sector moved further to translational research, defined as "the idea that the goal of translation is to ensure that results of scientific research will be used to benefit human health directly" (Blake & Ottoson, 2009, p. 23). Beyond the third wave, Blake and Ottoson (2009) posit that knowledge utilisation has transitioned into evidence-based practice focusing on how scientific research or evaluation findings are used.

2.9.1.1 The knowledge utilisation process

Blake and Ottoson (2009) identify the following influences that shape the parameters of knowledge utilisation.

(i) What counts as knowledge:

Literature is replete with many types of existing knowledge which can be practical, intellectual, explicit (formal and easily communicated) or implicit (tacit and difficult to communicate), spiritual or unwanted knowledge. With these various types of knowledge Weiss (1980), as cited by Blake and Ottoson (2009), indicates that the primary focus on knowledge utilisation is knowledge derived from systematic research or evaluation. Knowledge is shaped by the context of those who send or receive it and can be interpreted differently by different users. Hence this places responsibility on the evaluator to be explicit on what counts as knowledge for use (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

(ii) What counts as use:

The domains of business, medicine, technology, and public policy have influenced knowledge utilisation. The use of knowledge can be grouped according to the end user, such as policy maker, decision maker, researcher or according to context, such as an organisation. When evaluating use from the knowledge utilisation lens, the following contextual variables must be considered: timing, resources, leadership, politics, communication and supportive social conditions (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). Knowledge utilisation can inform policies, decision making, development of new theories and other models for evaluation utilisation (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). One way knowledge utilisation can be used is through the work of Weiss (1998) when she described instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use and Patton's (2015) process use. These four-evaluation use types are discussed in detail (section 2.5.1) in this report and are briefly explained below. Davis et al. (2022) argue that the first three types of evaluation use (conceptual, instrumental, symbolic) are associated with the findings from the evaluation of the intervention implemented, while the last one, which is process use, is associated with participating in the evaluation process and not necessary from evaluation findings. Instrumental use entails the direct implementation of evaluation findings. Conceptual takes a more educational form as it contributes to having new knowledge about the evaluand (Díez et al., 2016). Symbolic use findings are used to secure status or political capital, and process use manifests in the change in attitude, behaviours and knowledge of those involved in the evaluation due to their participation in it (Davis et al., 2022).

2.9.9.2 Implications of Knowledge utilisation for Evaluation

Knowledge utilisation is the starting point of departure for an evaluation; the primary purpose for conducting an evaluation is the use of the findings. According to Shadish et al. (1991, p.52), as cited by (Blake & Ottoson, 2009), the evaluation theory has three elements on evaluation use: “a description of possible kinds of use; a depiction of time frames in which use occurs; and an explanation of what the evaluator can do to facilitate use” the importance of these three will assist in responding to the research questions on how the evaluation has been used and what strategies of practice need to be implemented to facilitate effective evaluation use. Blake and Ottoson (2009) add

the following four criteria closely linked to the three mentioned in the evaluation theory above.

(i) Understanding the evaluand

Understanding what is being evaluated (evaluand) by the evaluator when using knowledge utilisation is crucial. The evaluand can be a programme policy or project. The contextual influences of the evaluand and how the results of the evaluation will be also matter in knowledge utilisation. This observation raises a question on the capability of the evaluator, should an evaluator be a subject matter expert or an evaluation expert? If use is in mind or embedded during an evaluation's design or conceptualisation stage, then understanding the evaluand starts with understanding use (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

(ii) Valuing Use

Time was recognised as one of the criteria for valuing use (implementing the evaluation findings sooner rather than later). Other criteria like resources, intended users, and process of use also need to be considered in valuing use. The evaluation must be participatory, and all the key stakeholders must be consulted in the valuing process to determine what is successful knowledge and what counts as use (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

(iii) Knowledge construction

Finding or constructing knowledge in the first place is a challenge which is further compounded by the fact that once it is found, it has the potential to change substantially during utilisation, making it even more challenging to assess use. Therefore, knowledge utilisation must be monitored and tracked for changes over time across many contexts, stakeholders and forms of evaluand. Qualitative methods like interviews, observations and focus groups allow for tracking knowledge in action through an in-depth understanding of knowledge adaption. Furthermore, tracking knowledge utilisation ensures that the results of an evaluation are used effectively (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

(iv) Facilitating Use

Facilitating use is in line with Patton's (2015) process use, where stakeholders participating in an evaluation change their behaviour towards evaluation use by participating in the evaluation process. Blake and Ottoson (2009) state that use in evaluation needs to be a forethought, not an afterthought. Evaluations should be designed with use in mind to facilitate effective use, and when stakeholders and users participate in identifying the potential uses of knowledge, the opportunities for knowledge use in a particular context (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

2.9.9.3 Knowledge utilisation as an umbrella

Several subfields are included under the knowledge utilisation umbrella, such as technology transfer, information distribution and use, research utilisation, and innovation diffusion. It has implications for what and how utilisation is evaluated and assesses evaluation utilisation through "dissemination and diffusion; knowledge transfer; systematic implementation, and knowledge translation"(Blake & Ottoson, 2009, p. 27).

(i) Dissemination and Diffusion

This variable focuses on how information like evaluation findings and recommendations move from one place to another and, in most cases, to the end user of the knowledge. The dissemination and diffusion of knowledge are part of the factors that can address the challenges of underutilisation of knowledge from evaluation findings. The diffusion of evaluation knowledge is linked to knowledge utilisation (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

(ii) Knowledge transfer

The effective transfer of knowledge has utilisation at its centre. Organisations transfer knowledge if they can access it and understand what they are transferring, from whom and to whom and for what purposes. Knowledge is generally not transferable but is negotiated between the parties involved, who could be the knowledge generator and the end user (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). Therefore, the accessibility and understanding of the evaluation knowledge are important for utilisation.

(iii) Systematic implementation

According to Blake and Ottoson (2009), implementing knowledge utilisation focuses on the systematic movement of activities related to intended use designed to increase the use of knowledge, resulting in changed behaviours of individuals in organisations. To do this, the knowledge's end user must take part in all phases of research and evaluation implementation.

(iv) Knowledge translation

Knowledge translation includes creating and using knowledge (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). This translation process is iterative and requires participation by researchers or evaluators and intended users. There must be a knowledge translation process for knowledge to be used in policy or programme improvement (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). Developing negotiated evaluation recommendations, management response and improvement plans are part of the translation process.

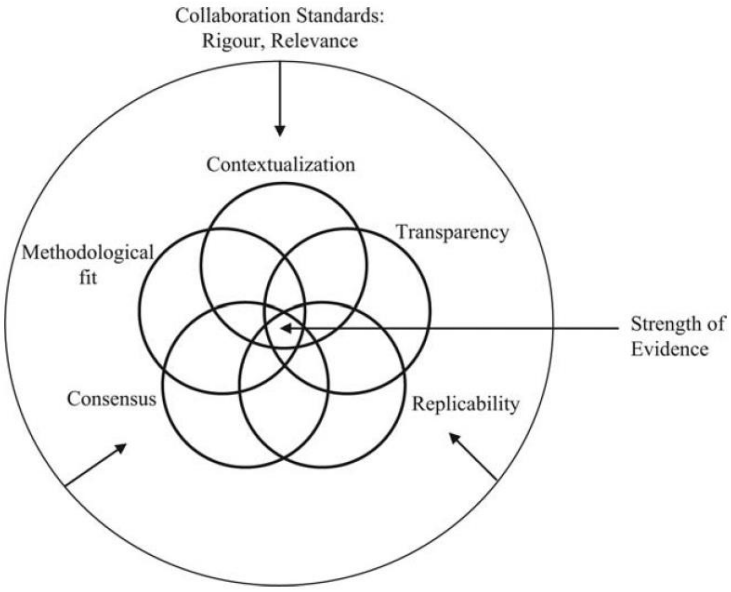
2.9.2 Theoretical Frameworks on Evidence Informed Decision Making

The two frameworks that underpin evidence-informed decision making and which are used to complete the triad of theoretical frameworks used in this study are the Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) Mixed Model of EBDM and the combined analytical framework of Langer et al. (2020).

2.9.2.1 The Mixed Model of Evidence-Based Decision Making

For public sector departments to be effective, they need to quickly make and implement better quality decisions (Kureshi & Asghar, 2015). Therefore, sound managerial decision-making in the public sector and any management practice is crucial, and in making such decisions, the importance of empirical evidence cannot be understated (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012). Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) further identify two stages in evidence practice for decision making. The first stage is generating evidence through empirical research, and the second stage involves the actual use of the generated evidence in making evidence-based decisions.

A theory of evidence (Figure 3) is presented to develop the best evidence from evaluation or research projects. It gives a set of qualities against which evidence can be evaluated, including methodological fit, contextualisation, replicability, and transparency. The evidence for use becomes more robust when there is expert consensus and agreement over the evaluation findings and also when there is a significant overlap of all the five qualities mentioned above. In essence, the theory of evidence aims to bring the qualities together. This convergence ensures that rigour and relevance are optimised. Thus, the principles of quality drive the theory in social science research (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012).



Adapted from Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012

Figure 3: Theory of Evidence

Following the evidence generation and evaluation stages (Figure 3) comes the evidence-based decision-making step, which is represented by the mixed-level model of evidence-based decision-making developed by (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012). This model explains the transformation of empirical evidence into management decisions within an organisation like DALRRD and will be used in this study to understand the utilisation of the evaluation-generated evidence. The model considers that EBDM is a mixed-level phenomenon that manifests at the personal level and is linked to cross-level structures at the individual, organisational, and institutional levels. Therefore, other considerations, such as policy, programmes, or decisions, must be considered

before the evidence may be used to guide action, according to Aryeetey et al. (2017). Other factors, including economic restrictions, advocacy, community preferences, customs, and values, may also be taken into account. In addition, leadership capabilities are critical when using evidence to inform policies and programmes (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012). The diagram (Figure 4) below describes the Baba and HakemZadeh mixed model of EBDM.

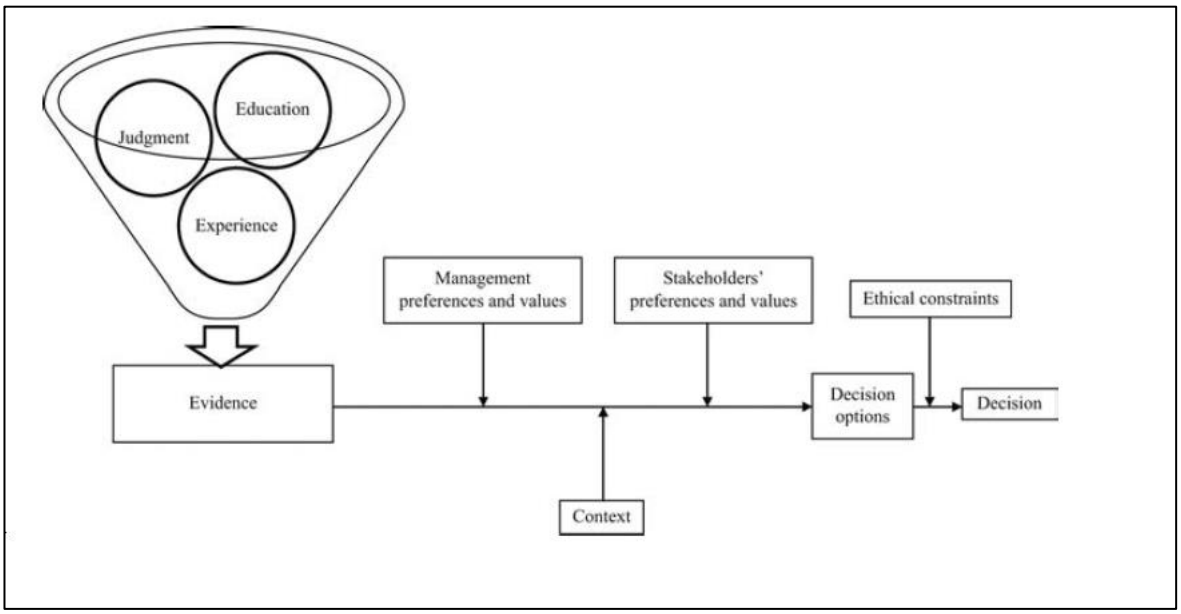


Figure 4: Mixed model of EBDM

(Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012)

The model posits that managers' use of evidence in decision-making at the individual level depends on their training, education, experience, and judgment. According to the mixed level model, a number of factors influence decision-making, including individual managers' preferences and values; institutional, organisational, and individual preferences; structural, environmental, cultural, and political constraints within which the decision is being made; and institutional, organisational, and individual ethical constraints (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012).

2.9.2.2 Combined Analytical Framework

The framework combined framework highlighted in Figure 5 emanates from the merger of the Science of Using Science framework and the Context Matters

Framework developed by Weyrauch et al. (2016) as cited by (Langer & Weyrauch, 2021). The Combined Analytical framework by Langer et al. (2020) conceptualises the evidence use of interventions and their effects on decision making. The framework supports decision-makers when exploring evidence use interventions. The combined analytical framework further supports "the conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of evidence use interventions" (Langer & Weyrauch, 2021, p. 34). Langer and Weyrauch (2021) also argued that within academic debates on evidence-informed decision-making, there are minimal discussions around the interventions that support evidence use within government departments.

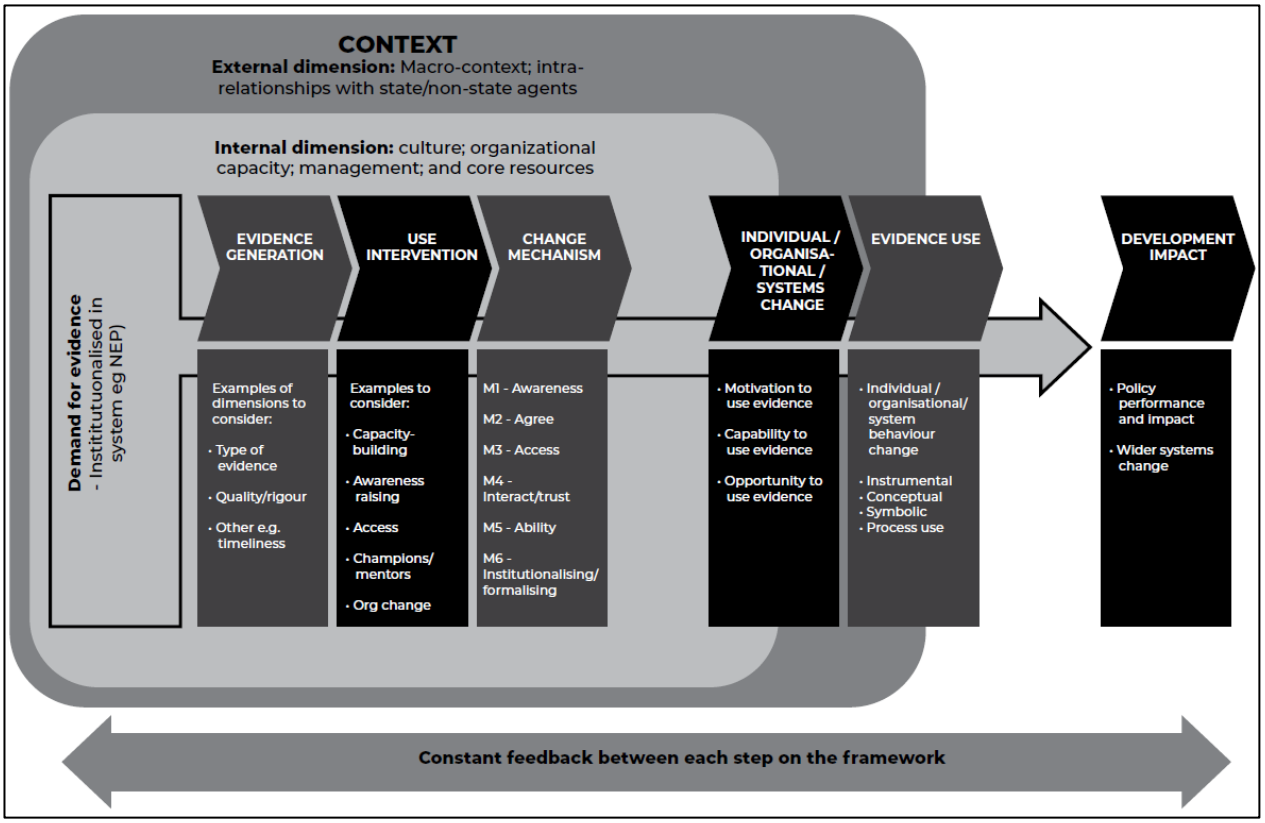


Figure 5: Combined Analytical Framework

Source: Langer et al. (2020, p.45)

The Combined Analytical Framework by Langer et al. (2020) combines two frameworks, namely the Science of Using Science framework and the Context Matters Framework.

(i) Science of Using Science Framework

Langer, Tripney, and Gough (2016), in the Science of Using Science framework, use two strategies: the mechanism typology to structure the evaluation use strategies and the behaviour change typology to structure the evaluation outcomes. This framework analyses different activities that lend to the use of evidence and assess if they have effectively changed behaviour (Langer & Weyrauch, 2021). Langer et al. (2016) focus on six underlying mechanisms of change in understanding the evaluation use strategies. These underlying mechanisms of change are the processes employed to achieve evidence use within a particular strategy.

The six change mechanisms (M) that underpin evaluation use, as denoted by M1 to M6, are awareness (M1); agreement (M2); access (M3); interaction (M4); ability (M5) and institutionalising (M6). The awareness (M1) evidence-use mechanism focuses on building awareness and the attitude of the decision-makers toward the importance and value of the EIDM concept. The agreement (M2) mechanism emphasises developing a shared understanding of the pertinent policy questions and the appropriate evidence required to address those questions. The access mechanism (M3) emphasises how important it is for decision-makers to receive and easily access evidence. The trust (M4) mechanism focuses on the interaction or trust relationship between the decision maker and the evaluator (evidence generator). Through trust relations, the decision maker is able to collaborate with evaluators in evidence generation. The ability mechanism (M5) emphasises the importance of the decision-makers accessing skills to be able to appraise and make sense of evidence. Finally, the institutionalising mechanism (M6) emphasises the significance of the structures and procedures that affect how evidence is used to make decisions (Langer et al., 2016).

Langer et al. (2020) agree with (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012) that decision makers behaviour also influences evidence use. Evidence use in this study will be observed when the evaluation findings and recommendations are integrated into the programme design to improve performance (i.e., instrumental use). For the use of evidence to increase, there needs to be a change in decision-makers behaviour (Langer & Weyrauch, 2021). Michie et al. (2011), as cited by (Langer & Weyrauch, 2021) states

that the "change in the behaviour of decision-makers is an interplay of three conditions, namely capability, opportunity and motivation", these three conditions influencing the behaviour systems are referred to as COM-B (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation – Behaviour Change) system. The behaviour change comes about by changing one or more conditions in the COM-B system. As seen in the intervention logic model in Figure 6 below, the Langer et al. (2016) paradigm combines the COM-B system for structuring behavioural change with the six change mechanisms for structuring evidence use.

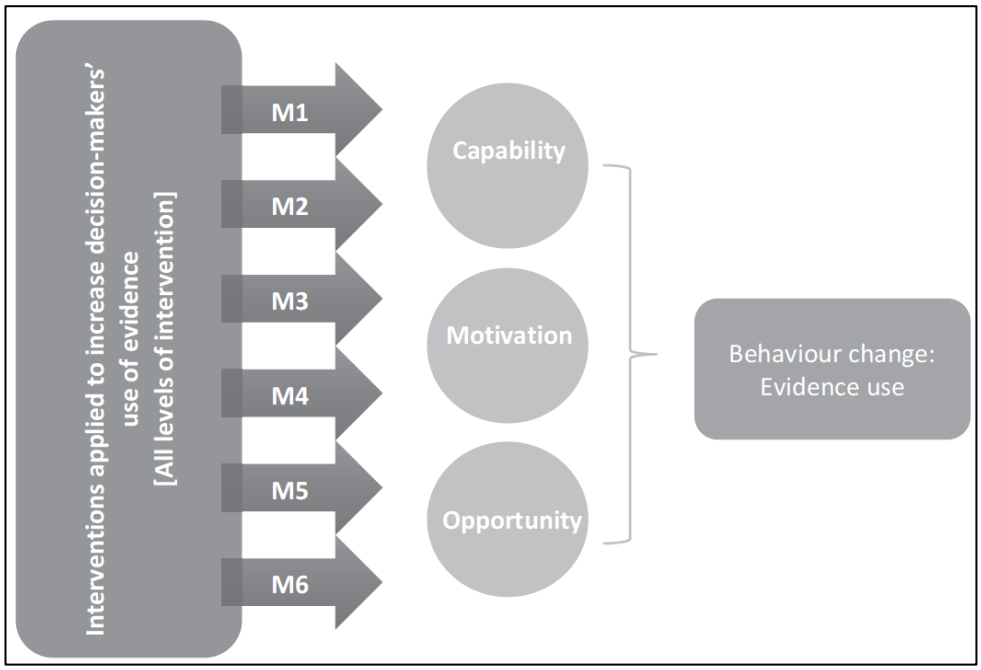


Figure 6: Intervention Logic Model

Source: Langer et al. (2016)

The six mechanisms of change work through either one or more of the COM-B components to change the decision maker's behaviour regarding evaluation use (Langer & Weyrauch, 2021). Behaviour change occurs at different levels, including individual, organisational context, broader organisation and broader context (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012; Langer & Weyrauch, 2021).

(ii) Context Matters Framework

The Context Matters Framework is divided into two categories, the external and internal environment faced by the decision-maker in evidence generation and evidence

use in decision making. The two categories of the Context Matter Framework integrate into the Science of Using Science framework through the six dimensions to ultimately form the Combined Analytical Framework shown in Figure 5. There are two dimensions under the external category, namely (1) macro context and (2) intra and inter-relationships with state and non-state agents. The internal category has four dimensions, namely; (3) culture, (4) organisational capacity, (5) management and processes and (6) core resources (Langer & Weyrauch, 2021). Including the Context Matter Framework assists decision-makers in better understanding how context may affect evidence-use strategies.

2.9.3 Summary of the study's theoretical frameworks

Table 3 below is the summary of the three frameworks to be followed in the study:

Table 3: Summary of the key point underpinning the three frameworks

Blake and Ottoson (2009)- Knowledge Utilisation Framework	**Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) – Mixed Level Model of EBDM**	**Langer et al. – Combined Analytical Framework**
Relevance to Study: Evaluation utilisation	**Relevance to study: Evidence-Informed Decision Making**	**Relevance to study: Evidence-Informed Decision Making**
• Evaluation findings and recommendations put into practice. • Dissemination and diffusion of evaluation findings • Knowledge transfer and translation • The receiver and the sender shape knowledge.	• Importance of empirical evidence in evidence-informed decision making • Transformation of empirical evidence into management decisions • Identify two stages in evidence practice for decision-making: generation of evidence and use of generated evidence.	• This framework is a combination of two frameworks (Science of using Science and Context matters) • Conceptualise evidence use interventions and their effects on decision making. • The framework supports decision-makers when exploring evidence use interventions.

Blake and Ottoson (2009)- Knowledge Utilisation Framework	Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) – Mixed Level Model of EBDM	Langer et al. – Combined Analytical Framework
• Contexts shape knowledge for those who send and receive it. • The following contextual variables must be considered in the knowledge utilisation lens, timing, resources, leadership, politics, communication and supportive social conditions. • Inform decision-making for evaluation utilisation. • Can be used through Weiss's (1988) classical work on evaluation use (instrumentals, conceptual and symbolic) • Understanding the evaluand • Participatory nature of evaluation • Accountability and tracking of knowledge utilisation. • Embedded evaluation use when designing evaluations with end users in mind.	• Qualities of best evidence: methodological fit, contextualization, replicability and transparency • Model manifests at a personal level and is linked to organisational and institutional structures. • Importance of leadership capabilities when using evidence to inform programmes or policies. • The model posits that manager's use of evidence at the individual level depends on their training, education, experience and judgement. • In addition, the model also considers contextual factors like economic constraints, environmental, traditions, values and community preferences, organisational, political, institutional, structural, cultural and ethical	• Supports conceptualisation, implementation and evaluation of evidence. • Science of using science uses two strategies: mechanism typology to structure evaluation use strategies and behaviour change typology to structure evaluation outcomes. • Behaviour change works in an individual, organisational and broader context. • Context Matters Framework works on internal and external environments the decision maker faces. • Internal environment dimensions are; culture, organisational capacity, management and processes and core resources. • The external environments are the macro context and intra and inter-relationships with state and non-state agents.

Blake and Ottoson (2009)- Knowledge Utilisation Framework	Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) – Mixed Level Model of EBDM	Langer et al. – Combined Analytical Framework
	constraints that influence decision-making.	

The evaluations in this study were interrogated using the Blake and Ottoson Knowledge Utilisation Framework, combined analytical framework and Mixed-Model of EBDM when exploring the extent of utilisation evaluation findings as evidence in evidence-based decision-making in the DALRRD. Table 3 above summarises what each framework describes and further explains the relevance of each of the frameworks in this study. The use of the three frameworks will assist in explaining and discussing the findings of the study. While other frameworks could have been selected the researcher chose this triad model because the Blake and Ottoson (2009)- Knowledge Utilisation framework will provide theoretical underpinnings on evaluation utilisation in the DALRRD. The Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) – Mixed Level Model of EBDM and the Langer et al. (2020) – Combined Analytical Framework will provide the theoretical underpinnings of Evidence-informed Decision aiming in the DALRRD.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The chapter explores the research strategy, research design, procedure, and methods adopted in this study to answer the research questions. The primary research question is: To what extent have evaluation findings and recommendations been used as part of evidence-informed decision-making in the DALRRD, South Africa?
The sub-questions are:

a. What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision-making?
b. What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?
c. What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence-informed decision-making?
d. What evidence-use mechanisms exist in the DALRRD that influence the use of evidence from evaluation reports?
e. How is evidence-informed decision-making undertaken in the DALRRD?

Also, the understanding of the implications of ethics, reliability and validity, limitations and positionality of the researcher to the study concludes this section. This section comes against the backdrop of the literature review, which was the first step in collecting data. The literature review helped formulate the research questions and frame the study's methodology. The literature review was done iteratively before and after data collection (Patton, 2015).

3.1 Research Approach

This research study explored the extent of utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-based decision-making in the DALRRD in South Africa. The empirical portion of the study was grounded on a constructivist and interpretivist research paradigm as it seeks to understand the experiences of public sector administrators in their decision-making process when faced with evaluation findings. The interpretivist paradigm is associated with the qualitative research strategy (Rashid et al., 2019).

The study employed a qualitative research strategy; Bryman (2016) defines qualitative research as a research strategy that focuses mainly on words, text, descriptive data or images in the collection and analysis of data. Patton (2015) further states that there is also a review of documents in qualitative research, and to this effect, this study encompassed a review of a selection of evaluation reports archived in the DPME website evaluation repository (https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za), and where they were not available they were requested from the DPME through e-mail. Furthermore, amongst other data collection methods, qualitative research allows for in-depth interviews (Saunders et al., 2016) and analysis of a phenomenon that quantitative studies cannot do. For this reason, this study followed a qualitative approach to provide an in-depth understanding of the utilisation of evaluation findings and recommendations in decision-making. In keeping with this method, the study allowed respondents to reflect on their lived professional and personal experiences on the evaluations and how these shaped their understanding of evaluation use in decision making. The advantage of the qualitative approach is that it offers the prospect of flexibility when conducting an investigation (Bryman, 2016). This approach allows for ease of adaptation of the research process to the prevailing circumstances during data collection or in accordance with emerging results. In this study, the qualitative research approach allowed for the generation of thick descriptions and rich data, which improved the study's credibility (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.2 Research Design

The research design provides a structure for collecting data or information and the subsequent data analysis to answer the study's research questions (Bryman, 2016; Serakan & Bougie, 2016). In qualitative studies, the research design can be "phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry or case study" (Patton, 2015, p. 166; Yin, 2016, p. 67). The case study is the appropriate research design for this study and aided in the in-depth collection of information on the utilisation of evaluation findings and recommendations in EIDM in the DALRRD. Case study designs are about a researcher's in-depth collection of data from information-rich sources within a bounded system. A case study is founded on the premise that different data collection methods must be employed to assess the real-life situation from numerous angles and perspectives (Serakan & Bougie, 2016). The

necessity to investigate an event or phenomena in-depth and in its bounded natural setting is a basic concept of case study research design (Peng & Shiyu, 2019). Creswell and Creswell (2018) define a bounded system as anchored on time, place, and the studied case. Patton (2015) further clarifies that a case can be a program, event, person, organisation, situation, activity or process.

Serakan and Bougie (2016) inform that a situation in which the researcher is interested in case study research can also be a case. Bryman (2016) further states that in a case study, research can be conducted in a single site, and that site is not the object or unit of analysis but acts as a backdrop for data collection. According to Bryman (2016), in these circumstances, the location is incidental and of little importance; the focus is on the sample from which data is gathered. Sedgwick (2015) notes that there usually is confusion between the unit of observation and the unit of analysis. He further asserts that "The unit of observation, sometimes referred to as the unit of measurement, is defined statistically as the "who" or "what" for which data are measured or collected. The unit of analysis is defined statistically as the "who" or "what" for which information is analysed and conclusions are made" (Sedgwick, 2015, p. 1). Furthermore, the unit of analysis is what the study wants to say something about at the end while the unit of observation is what we interview or collect data to help to understand the unit of analysis. In this study, DALRRD, the primary location is the unit of analysis while the key informants, the senior managers and the evaluation reports reviewed are the units of observation. Some authors described that there is no difference between the unit of analysis and observation. Yin (2016) also notes that not all studies need to be explicit in defining the focal study unit.

An example of the use of a case study as a method in evaluation research is Sidzumo's (2016) study of the "Utilisation of evaluation information in the Gauteng Department of Health", which employed a case study, and the department officials were the unit of analysis. In another similar study, Tshilowa (2018) examined the "Institutionalisation of the South African National Evaluation System (NES) in two National Government Departments," also using a case study research design. In Tshilowa's study, the process of institutionalising the NES is the case; hence in this study, the phenomenon or case under investigation will be the utilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision-making. Finally, Jacobs (2019) used a qualitative research strategy and a case

study design to conduct an exploratory study of "the institutionalisation of a monitoring and evaluation system in the case of the intellectual disability programme of the Western Cape Department of Health." The research design used by these researchers aligns very well with the proposed research design for this study.

The ability to get in-depth information using different data collection methods in a case study allows for triangulation due to multiple sources of evidence (Peng & Shiyu, 2019). Triangulation compensates for the weakness of the data collected with one method by using the strengths of the data collected using the other method. It bodes well that a case study was chosen as the primary research design to explore the utilisation of evaluation findings and implementation of recommendations in the public sector. The case study research design allowed the research to obtain rich information on the utilisation of evaluation findings, the barriers and enablers of utilisation and strategies that promote evaluation use in informed decision-making.

3.3 Research Procedure and Methods

This section outlines the actual research procedure and methods used to gather, process, and analyse empirical data. The research procedure and methods section is the most practical part of the research process (Wotela, 2017). The following are described in detail: target population and sampling of respondents, data collection instrument, data collection process and storage, data processing and analysis and the ethical considerations.

3.3.1 Target Population and Sampling strategy

The target population and sampling plans for interviews and the evaluation reports reviewed are discussed in detail below.

3.3.1.1 Interviews

In research, sampling starts by first defining the target population (Serakan & Bougie, 2016). According to Cohen et al. (2018), a target population is an interest group the researcher identifies. While the entire population does not participate, a selected group is chosen for the research study. For this study, the target population includes the

primary intended users of the evaluation. These users include all senior managers in the current DALRRD, the former DAFF and DRDLR who were directly responsible for the programmes evaluated under the NEP and the senior managers in the M&E directorate who were involved in the evaluations.

A sample of the target population was chosen in order to perform the study. Sampling is the process of choosing a portion or subset of the intended audience to be studied. The sample selection method may follow a probability or a non-probability approach (Bryman, 2016). Non-probability sampling is mainly used for but not only restricted to qualitative research, and when using semi-structured interviews, the sample size ranges from 5 to 25 (Saunders et al., 2016). Even in case studies where the focus is only on one organisation and data is collected using semi-structured interviews, there is still a need to select a case study sample (which is DALRRD in this study) and a group sample (the senior managers of DALRRD) to interview (Saunders et al., 2016). In his qualitative study on the "Institutionalisation of the South African National Evaluation System in two National Government Departments", Tshilowa (2018) has a sample size of 12. Zuma (2020), when exploring “the determinants of evaluation use within the South African education sector”, had a sample size of nine.

In qualitative research, the common non-probability sampling approaches can be purposive, convenience, snowballing, quota and dimensional. The non-probability method derives from the researcher targeting a particular group with the full knowledge that it does not represent a broader population (Cohen et al., 2018). Purposive sampling was chosen as the sampling technique for this study. The benefit of this method is that it enables the identification of information-rich cases that can offer a thorough comprehension and produce the most pertinent and abundant facts of the case being studied (Yin, 2016). The senior management officials from the branches/programmes identified in Table 4 below are the information-rich cases who will provide relevant information about the issues central to this research's purpose (Patton, 2015). The snowballing sampling method was also used in cases where the respondents recommended more information-rich cases that could be part of the study. Snowballing creates a chain of potential interviewees based on people who know people who would be good sources of information for the study (Patton, 2015).

This purposive sampling approach's main inclusion criterion was that the respondents must be in the senior management service (SMS) of the DALRRD or its former predecessor departments (DAFF and DRDLR). The senior manager services respondents are from the Director (level 13) to Deputy Director-General (level 15), as they are deemed to be decision-makers and have knowledge and influence to shed light on inquiry issues (Patton, 2015). In addition, another inclusion criterion to the study was that only the senior managers directly involved in the evaluation process or programmes evaluated under the NEP would form part of the study's respondents. As a result, 13 respondents drawn mainly from the senior management formed part of the study sample, as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Sample of Key Respondents

Sampling of Key informants	
Position in DALRRD	**Total**
Deputy Director General	2
Chief Director	3
Director	5
Other (deputy director/ Programme coordinator)	3
Total	**13**

Respondents are individuals invited to participate in the study; their responses or reactions are important to finalising the study's results and findings (Patton, 2015). Without these respondents, it is difficult for researchers to conclude the study, especially when the research is qualitative. The study respondents were senior employees or former employees of DALRRD who were managing or involved in the directorates that implemented interventions evaluated under the National Evaluation Plan and are part of this study. The main respondents' positions in the former DAFF, DRDLR or the current DALRRD were Director, Chief Director and Deputy Director-General. Of the 13 respondents, two no longer worked for the DALRRD, while the department still employed eleven. The age range of the respondents was between 40 and 65 years, and the gender split was five females and eight males. The average length of employment in the DALRRD was 13 years; the highest qualification was a Masters's degree (9), while the remainder had other postgraduate qualifications. The respondents provided in-depth information on the utilisation or non-utilisation of the evaluation

findings and recommendations in developing improvement plans and subsequently as evidence in decision-making. The Food Security and Agrarian Reform branch hosts most of the programmes evaluated under the NEP, while the Corporate Support Services is the branch responsible for monitoring and evaluation within the department.

3.3.1.2 Evaluation Reports

Saunders et al. (2016) state that primary data collection techniques (interviews) can be done simultaneously, as with document review. Document review is a qualitative method that involves examining and analysing data pertaining to past events, with documents being reviewed in light of the context in which they were created. The information collected through a review of documents can be integrated with the empirical data collected through the semi-structured interviews to enhance the strength of the findings. Data collection started with retrieving and reviewing evaluation reports, improvement plans, and quality assessment scores archived in the DPME website evaluation repository (https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za). The evaluation reports and the related documents not found in the evaluation repository were directly requested from the DPME and DALRRD officials. The inclusion criteria for the purposively selected evaluation reports were that they have to (i) be part of the NEP, (ii) be of an agricultural nature, (iii) evaluand implemented either by DAFF or DRDLR, (iv) be implemented between 2011 and 2019 and (v) be available on the DPME website evaluation repository. After using this criterion, six evaluations, as indicated below, were selected for review and to be part of the study.

1. Implementation Evaluation of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme (RADP).
2. Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP).
3. Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP).
4. Impact Evaluation of Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA) Impact Assessment.
5. Diagnostic Evaluation of the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector.

6. Implementation Evaluation of the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan (ERP).

It is worth noting that the researcher could not access the improvement plans and quality assessment score reports for some of the evaluation reports.

3.3.2 Data collection instruments

According to Saunders et al. (2016), data collection instruments are anything that can gather data in a research study. The literature review and the qualitative research approach informed the data collection instrument. Further, reviewing the evaluation reports also guided the structuring of the research and interview questions. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) identify different data collection instruments, the most popular being questionnaires, interviews, observations and surveys. Interviews and observations are commonly used data collection instruments in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). The data collection tool used in the study was an interview guide with the key respondents. In an interview, the researcher collected data through a reflective in-depth verbal engagement with the respondent. It is a social and interpersonal interaction, not just a data collection method (Cohen et al., 2018). Qualitative interviewing allowed the respondents to express their own understanding and lived experiences in their own terms of how involved they were in the evaluation process and how the evaluation findings were handled post the evaluation (Patton, 2015).

An interview is a focused, deliberate conversation between two or more people, and when an interview schedule is used, it may include both structured and unstructured sections, depending on its objective. The semi-structured interview guide used in the study was informed by the themes emanating from the research questions and was selected because it allowed the researcher to obtain detailed and extensive descriptions of the factors that influence the utilisation of evaluation findings in EIDM (Saunders et al., 2016). In addition, the semi-structured guide also enabled the researcher to seek clarity and pursue any new emerging themes in the study (Kallio et al., 2016). The other advantage of selecting the interview guide is that it allows respondents to discuss and interpret the world they live in according to their own points of view (Cohen et al., 2018). Also, an interview guide maximises the use of the limited time available in the interview due to delimiting the issues to be discussed in advance, thus ensuring

that relevant themes of the study are covered (Patton, 2015). On the other hand, the interview has the disadvantage of being time intensive and may be inconvenient to the interviewees. Using an interview guide allowed the researcher to conform the interview approach to the respondent's different levels of involvement in the evaluations conducted under the NEP.

3.3.3 Data collection process

Data collection involves gathering data or information from the sample to answer the study research question (Bryman, 2016). In a qualitative inquiry, data is collected through in-depth interviews, direct observations in the field, focus groups and review or analysis of documents (Patton, 2015). The data collection methods for this study involved interviews (primary methods) and the review of existing literature and evaluation reports (secondary methods).

3.3.3.1 Interviews with research participants

The interviews were conducted between October 2022 and February 2023 and formed the primary source of data collection as they are the commonly used instrument for data collection in qualitative studies (Cohen et al., 2018; Patton, 2015). The study used a semi-structured interview with a list of questions relevant to the research problem, research purpose and questions captured in an interview guide and put to the research respondents (Bryman, 2016). The respondents who formed part of the interviews have been described in the section on targeted population and sampling (Section 3.3.2), and after receipt of permission to conduct the study at DALRRD, the researcher rolled out the interviews. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to have a list of themes to be covered together with some key questions, and using an interview guide provided the advantage of pursuing the same line of inquiry with the different DALRRD officials interviewed (Patton, 2015). The interviews focussed mainly on the evidence highlighted in the findings and recommendations of the evaluation reports. The use of this evidence in the development of improvement plans and their subsequent use in decision making and what strategies can be employed to improve the practice of utilisation of the evaluation findings in the DALRRD.

The researcher conducted the semi-structured interviews face-to-face at the respondent's chosen interview site. The advantage of face-to-face interviews, according to Serakan and Bougie (2016), is that the researcher can adapt the interviewing style depending on the interview setting, and it is easy to establish rapport and trust with the respondents. Also, face-to-face allowed the researcher an opportunity to repeat or rephrase the questions if they were not clearly understood. Qualitative research collects data through the respondents' spoken words in an interview (Patton, 2015). Therefore, to ensure that this study captures the exact words of the respondents, an audio recorder was used in line with the ethical imperatives described under the ethics (Section 3.3.5) of this research report. It is worth noting that data was also collected through virtual web-based platforms (Zoom and Microsoft Teams), which provide audio recordings for interviews. Virtual platforms gave participants outside the Gauteng Province of South Africa and those unable to attend face-to-face interviews an opportunity to be part of the study. The virtual interviews provided insightful information like the face-to-face; the only drawback is that the respondent's emotions could not be established since the interviews were held off-camera.

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and password-protected in the researcher's computer and external hard drive and further backed up in the cloud. All the physical data collected as field notes was treated with confidentiality and stored in a secure lockable cupboard. The challenges experienced during data collection were the timing of the interviews, as some respondents preferred early morning virtual meetings, while some potential respondents were not interested in being part of the study due to varied personal reasons.

3.3.3.2 Review of Evaluation Reports

The review of the evaluation reports should not be confused with the literature review, as this was done to offer background information on the programmes evaluated and to comprehend the subsequent findings and recommendations made. Reviewing the evaluation reports also helped to inform the data collection tool and interview questions. The information collected in the review of the evaluation reports was also

triangulated with the information from the semi-structured interviews to strengthen the credibility of the findings (Section 5).

Document review using a checklist (Table 6) was the chosen data collection method by reviewing the six agriculture programme evaluation reports archived in the DPME website evaluations repository (https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za). A checklist with pre-determined criteria was used, and it allows for the collection of information that will allow the making of judgements about what the researcher needs to know. Document review is a method of collecting data from existing documents; in this study, the documents are evaluation reports. Through this method, data were systematically collected and analysed (Bretschneider et al., 2017). The documents were downloaded from the website in an electronic format. This document review's benefit is that it gives comprehensive background information on the results of the evaluation reports that are a part of this study. In addition, reviewing the documents helped to understand the evaluations in detail, and this method allows for triangulation with the interview data to strengthen the study's credibility (Peng & Shiyu, 2019). At the same time, disadvantages can include misrepresenting information since it was prepared for other purposes and might be outdated (Bretschneider et al., 2017). This document review will support the empirical findings and is part of the triangulation. Even though there are disadvantages, they will be mitigated through conformation with data from literature review and interviews.

The researcher followed the following process to access the evaluation reports for the study.

Table 5: Process followed in accessing Evaluation reports.

Activity	**Process followed**
1. Access the NEP Evaluations	• DPME Evaluation website repository https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za). • Request Evaluation and improvement plans from DPME and DALRRD
2. Compile and Download evaluation reports and related documents relevant to the study	**Delimitation Criteria:** • Agriculture-related evaluations were downloaded onto the computer. • Limited to programmes implemented by DRDLR and DAFF

Activity	Process followed
	• Evaluations conducted between 2011 and 2019
3. Identify findings and recommendations from the evaluation report	• Findings are identified. • Findings and recommendations of the evaluation report were extracted into a spreadsheet (Annexure 3).

The following checklist (Table 6) was used as a tool for guiding the review of the evaluation reports. This checklist has two columns, one with the research questions and the other with the criteria for reviewing the evaluation reports. The main criteria used in the review of the evaluation reports were:

- Evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated.
- An Improvement Plan is in place.
- Evaluation quality Assessment score
- Published on the DPME website.

These criteria were selected because of their importance in contributing to answering the questions in the utilisation of evaluation findings in the DALRRD in evidence informed decision making. The importance of each criterion has been discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2). The criterion for evaluation findings and recommendations is important in that they need to be practical, in place and clearly articulated for use (Fleischer & Christie, 2009; Kumar et al., 2020). The second criterion of an improvement plan is indispensable in that the improvement plan is the point of departure in expressing intentions for evaluation use (Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Dhakal, 2014). The third criterion of evaluation quality assessment score further informs the quality of the evaluation in terms of methodological rigour (Bundi et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020; Kusek & Rist, 2004). The last criterion is that the evaluation report should be published on an official departmental website or repository for accountability and transparency. Publishing evaluations encourage accountability and use, facilitating informed decision making about the programmes implemented under the NEP (Leslie et al., 2015; OECD, 2021).

Table 6: Checklist for reviewing evaluation reports

Research Questions	Criteria	References	Assessment (Yes/No/Partly/ Unknown)	Comment
To what extent have evaluation findings and recommendations been used as part of evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa?	- An Improvement Plan is in place.	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Dhakal, 2014)		
What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?	- Evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated.	(Fleischer & Christie, 2009; Kumar et al., 2020)		
	- An Improvement Plan is in place.	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Dhakal, 2014)		
	- Published on the DPME website.	(DPME, 2019b; Leslie et al., 2015; OECD, 2021)		
	- Evaluation quality Assessment score	(Bundi et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020; Kusek & Rist, 2004)		
What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?	- Evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated	(Fleischer & Christie, 2009; Kumar et al., 2020)		
	- Evaluation quality Assessment score	(Bundi et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2022;		

Research Questions	Criteria	References	Assessment (Yes/No/Partly/ Unknown)	Comment
		Kumar et al., 2020)		
	- An improvement Plan is in place.	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Dhakal, 2014)		
What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making?	- Improvement plans - Published on the DPME website. - Evaluation Quality assessment score	(GAO, 2017; Head, 2013; Højlund, 2015; Kabuye & Basheka, 2017)		
What evidence-use mechanisms exist in the DALRRD that influence the use of evidence from evaluation reports?	- Published on the DPME website	(DPME, 2019b; Leslie et al., 2015; OECD, 2021)		
How is evidence-informed decision making undertaken in the DALRRD?	- Improvement plans in place	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Conaway, 2020; Dhakal, 2014)		

Authors own checklist

These checklist outcomes were triangulated with the results of the interviews to explore further how the criteria influence the utilisation of evaluation findings in the DALRRD.

3.3.4 Data processing and Analysis

Qualitative data analysis involves interpreting interview notes, transcripts, observations, and documents to find meaningful repeating patterns and themes. This method will include searching for and organising interview field notes, transcripts,

and documents to better understand the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Finally, the themes and patterns are realised through preparing and organising data, evaluating and exploring data, designing a coding system for the data and assigning codes to the acquired data. A pattern is a descriptive finding, whereas a theme is a more categorical or topical interpretation of the pattern's significance (Patton, 2015). It is worth noting that not using descriptive statistics based on information from participants was to refrain from the possibility of comprising confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and also considering that the sample of 13 was very low, the descriptive information will be misleading.

3.3.4.1 Interviews

Before the data from the interviews were analysed, it was processed to prepare it for analysis (Wotela, 2017). Data collection and analysis was an iterative process. Saunders et al. (2016) advise that the data analysis process and interpretation should simultaneously occur as soon as data is collected during an interview, and research data processing involves converting raw data into useful information. Serakan and Bougie (2016) describe data processing as the preliminary steps taken on raw data before analysis. Processing data contributes to ensuring completeness, accuracy and suitability of data for further analysis. The audio recordings were first downloaded into a computer, transcribed verbatim, and converted into readable text. Bryman (2016, p. 697) defines a "transcript as a text version of a recorded interview." The transcripts were then used for analysis, and the period taken to transcribe a recording averaged about eight hours for a one-hour recording. The researcher transcribed all the interviews, providing an opportunity to be immersed in the data (Patton, 2015).

The Thematic Analysis method was the data analysis of choice in this study. Braun and Clarke (2012) argue that this method is a good analytical method for novice qualitative researchers. However, it was not selected for its ease of use but for responding to the study's needs. In thematic analysis, the researcher codes the qualitative data to find new themes and patterns related to the research question (Saunders et al., 2016). Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 2) define "Thematic Analysis as a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of

meaning (themes) across a dataset." The thematic analysis leads to rich descriptions, explanations, and theories. According to Saunders et al. (2016), it allows for comprehending large amounts of qualitative data and integrating related data drawn from different data sources, e.g. transcripts and notes. The themes aligned with the study's objectives and literature review. The interviews further led to a better understanding of the themes and in identifying new emerging themes.

The six-phase approach to thematic analysis, as discussed by Braun and Clarke (2012), was followed in this study. The phases followed were (i) Familiarising myself with the data, which involved reading and exploring all the transcripts to get familiar with the data and identify phrases and words that are relevant to answering the research questions, (ii) Generating initial codes, the phrases and words that came up repeatedly, or were emerging or similar to themes discusses in the literature review section and answering the research questions were noted and highlighted, this was the beginning of the coding system. This step produced many different codes, (iii) Searching for themes, the codes identified were then grouped into themes or sub-themes. A theme "captures something important about the data concerning the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2012, p. 7) and (iv) reviewing themes, the developed themes were reviewed in relation to the data collected (v) reviewing themes - the themes were defined and then grouped according to priority to identify if they fit into the data and are aligned to the research questions and (vi) the production of the research report.

3.3.4.2 Evaluation Reports

Data collected from the reviews of evaluation reports, improvement plans and quality assessment reports were analysed using document analysis. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a methodical procedure of evaluating printed or electronic documents that contain recorded content without the researcher's involvement. The purpose of consulting this analysis is to gain an understanding and develop empirical knowledge of the documents under review. The documents were reviewed based on a predetermined framework, a checklist that addresses the evaluation findings and recommendations, the improvement plan and the evaluation quality assessment score. The research questions and literature review inform the

checklist (Annexure 2) and, as alluded to earlier, focus on those features in the evaluation reports and related documents that responded to the utilisation of evaluation. The review of the documents allowed for the triangulation of data to provide a confluence of evidence that improves the study's credibility (Bowen, 2009). The analysis of the data collected through the interviews and review of documents assisted in addressing the purpose of the study, which is exploring the extent of utilisation of evaluation findings and implementation of the recommendation in evidence-based decision-making in the DALRRD.

3.3.5 Ethical considerations

Research that involves human participants (Medical or Non-medical) will always have ethical implications. Hence researchers need to include ethical issues earlier in their plans when designing their research studies. It will be the researcher's responsibility to comprehend the ethical difficulties in the study (Cumyn et al., 2019). Therefore, the researcher of this study observed all ethical issues by first applying for ethical clearance from the University of Witwatersrand.

Understanding and thinking about the four ethical principles at the design stage allowed the researcher to design the study with a legislative, regulatory, socio-economic and cultural lens. The four ethical principles considered during the research planning were Informed consent, confidentiality, vulnerability and risk. Implementing these principles improved the credibility of the study's findings as data will have been collected, analysed, reported and stored ethically. In addition, the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) requirements will be observed as it provides the constitutional right to confidentiality and protection of personal information obtained from the study respondents.

Since this study was conducted in a public institution, DALRRD, permission to conduct the study was obtained from DALRRD before any interviews could commence. Before the interviews could begin, all respondents were sent an e-mail that contained the participant information sheet and the DALRRD permission letter to conduct the study. During the interviews, the respondents were informed of the purpose and their rights in the interview, which included the right to withdraw at any

time and not to answer any questions if they did not want to. They were also informed that there would be no direct benefits from the study and no disadvantages or penalties for not participating. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. While anonymity could not be guaranteed during the data collection processes, it was guaranteed in the research report. The respondents were informed that the interview would stop immediately should they experience any distress or discomfort. This study completed all interviews without any respondent experiencing discomfort or requesting to terminate the interview. All respondents signed the informed consent form, and consent to audio record the interview and to use their quotes anonymously in the research report was also provided. All the data collected has been safely stored with all audio records password protected and backed up in an external hard drive and the cloud.

3.4 Credibility, Trustworthiness and Dependability

For this study to be credible, the researcher provides assurance that data was appropriately collected and interpreted to guarantee that the study's findings reflected and represented the true reality of what was studied (Yin, 2016). The data was collected, handled and stored as discussed in ethics (section 3.3.5). As the instrument for data collection in qualitative research, the researcher's expertise, competency, and rigour are also crucial to the study (Patton, 2015).

Further, this study will use the criteria for assessing the trustworthiness or credibility of qualitative research, as Bryman (2016) proposed, which identifies four parallel aspects to the reliability and validity criteria used mainly in quantitative analysis. In the qualitative study, we use credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, parallel to quantitative terms internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity, respectively. In addition, data collected through interviews and review of evaluation reports were triangulated. Triangulation of data improves the study's credibility by strengthening the study's validity and findings by aligning different perspectives in understanding phenomena of inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To further improve the study's credibility, the data collection instruments were peer-reviewed for usefulness, and the transcribed data from some of the interviews was member-checked or respondent validated by the key participants of the study to

confirm if the transcription correctly reflects their input (Terrell, 2016). However, some transcripts were not member-checked even though the transcripts were forwarded to the respondents.

In qualitative data collection, Agar (1993), as cited by Cohen et al. (2018), notes that in-depth and thick descriptions from the respondents and their intensive personal involvement provide sufficient validity and reliability. Transferability in qualitative research requires thick in-depth descriptions of data. Also, the reflexivity and ability to control the research bias helped improve the study's credibility. For example, all the respondents were allowed to express their opinions, and the researcher did more listening and did not unjustly interrupt them when talking. For the study's dependability, the researcher has an audit trail of the complete records of the research process (Bryman, 2016). The records include the evaluation reports, interview schedule, transcripts, signed consent forms, participant information sheet, ethical clearance letter, permission letters, e-mail correspondences, field notes and audio interview recordings.

3.5 Limitations, Feasibility and Positionality

The research was limited to the utilisation of evaluation findings in EIDM only to the DALRRD. The evaluation reports reviewed were only those in the NEP, commissioned by either DAFF or DRDLR between 2011 and 2017, focusing only on agricultural interventions. The review of evaluations created for a different purpose to what they are used for in this study also had the potential to be a limiting factor, but through in-depth discussions and probing questions, this limitation was mitigated. The evaluation reports and related documents were the only departmental documents reviewed. Due to time constraints, there was no review of the departmental strategic plans or any plans developed that are aligned with the MTSF.

The study focused only on the senior management officials of the DALRRD of officials formerly with DAFF and DRDLR who were directly involved with M&E and the evaluated programmes. The study did not include the DPME officials who co-funded the evaluations, the programmes' beneficiaries, or the evaluators of the programme interventions. The researcher being the research instrument of this study and has been involved as a service provider in implementing some of the interventions

that have been evaluated and are part of this study, e.g., the MAFISA and RADP programmes. The researcher's prior experience in the programmes evaluated did not influence the direction of the study as the research maintained objectivity. The attrition of some key senior officials with rich knowledge about the interventions evaluated was also a limiting factor; however, the researcher, through snowballing techniques, managed to reach out to them and still conduct interviews with them even if they were no longer with the DALRRD. The time lag between conducting the evaluation and the study was between six and nine years. This presented a limitation because some respondents had no clear recollection of evaluation reports and implementation of findings and recommendations. Providing the respondents with the evaluation reports during the interviews helped refresh their memory.

3.6 Conclusion

This section provided a detailed description of how the research was conducted. The research approach adopted was qualitative to provide an in-depth understanding of respondents' lived experiences. The research design and research methods employed were also discussed. The study's ethical considerations, limitations and credibility, trustworthiness and dependability concluded the chapter. The research study area was the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development, and the senior management service (sample of 13) were purposively selected to form part of the sample. The data collected from interviews were triangulated with data from the review of the six evaluation reports. Finally, thematic analysis was used to analyse the interview data and inform the findings. The study's findings are presented in the subsequent Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4 – PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the products of the empirical research (Chapter 3) and describes other comparable previous or existing research without interpreting or discussing them (Wotela, 2018). This study explored the extent of utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence informed decision making in the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development, South Africa. It is imperative to reiterate that this study is not focusing on the evaluation reports but on the utilisation of the findings and recommendations captured in the evaluation reports. The DPME (2019b, p. 28) states, "Evaluations seek to provide an objective view through rigorous research methods to inform conclusions about performance, reasons for good performance and poor performance, and to suggest recommendations for improvement". This study, through the review of the evaluation reports and the interview of respondents, provides empirical evidence on the utilisation of evaluations in EIDM.

This chapter pursues the products of the research methodology (section 3) and responds to the research questions (Wotela, 2016). The following research questions were followed in an attempt to achieve the objectives of the study;

The primary research question: To what extent evaluation findings and recommendations have been used as part of evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa?

The sub-questions are:

a. What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?
b. What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?
c. What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making?
d. What evidence-use mechanisms exist in the DALRRD that influence the use of evidence from evaluation reports?
e. How is evidence-informed decision making undertaken in the DALRRD?

To respond to the above questions, the study reviewed six evaluation reports and conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 respondents considered information-rich cases, and the output of this exercise lends to this chapter in demonstrating what the study found. In addition, relevant literature was reviewed and informed the theoretical frameworks and themes of the study. Wotela (2018) further states that at this stage of the research report, the presentation of findings should be void of the researcher's opinion but should provide for the responses from the respondents as provided for in the research methodology. The study findings are drawn mainly from the two collection methods, (i) the review of the evaluation reports and (ii) semi-structured interviews to solicit the experiences of senior managers in the use of evaluation findings in decision making. Reviewing previous or existing literature also contributes to presenting the study's findings.

4.1 Findings from Review of Evaluation Reports

The six evaluation reports were analysed using the checklist in Table 6 or Annexure 2. The four key criteria of the checklist, namely (i) evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated; (ii) an improvement plan is in place; (iii) evaluation quality assessment score and (iv) published on the DPME website, were explored under each evaluation report. The findings from the review of the evaluation reports using the checklist are presented in Table 7 below:

Table 7: Findings from the evaluation report review using the checklist.

Evaluation	Assessment of Review Criteria			
	Evaluation Findings and Recommendations are Clearly Articulated	**Improvement Plan is in place**	**Evaluation Quality Assessment Score**	**Published on the DPME evaluation website repository**
1. Implementation Evaluation of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme	Findings are clearly articulated and organised according to evaluation questions. There are 20 broad recommendations provided	Improvement plan is in place and has three clearly articulated improvement objectives with timelines, targets, responsibilities and budgets	Score of 4.10 out of 5, indicating that the evaluation is of good quality	Both the evaluation report and improvement plan are published on the website
2. Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP)	Findings are clearly articulated and organised according to evaluation questions. Recommendations are structured into four themes, with each theme having an average of four sub recommendations	Improvement plan is in place and has three clearly articulated improvement objectives with timelines, targets, responsibilities and budgets	A score of 3.71 out of 5, indicating that the evaluation is of good quality	Both the evaluation report and improvement plan are published on the website
3. Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP)	Findings are clearly articulated and organised according to evaluation questions. There are 17 broad recommendations provided	Improvement plan was developed but could not be accessed.	A score of 2.79 out of 5 on the EQAT indicates that it was of below-adequate quality and that there was	Only the Evaluation Report is published. The improvement plan was not published.

Evaluation	Assessment of Review Criteria			
	Evaluation Findings and Recommendations are Clearly Articulated	**Improvement Plan is in place**	**Evaluation Quality Assessment Score**	**Published on the DPME evaluation website repository**
			notable room for improvement.	
4. Impact Evaluation of the Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA)	Findings are clearly articulated and organised according to evaluation questions. Recommendations are presented according to five themes emanating from the evaluation.	Improvement plan was developed but could not be accessed.	A score of 3.8 out of 5, indicating that the evaluation is of good quality	Only the Evaluation Report is published. The improvement plan was not published.
5. Implementation Evaluation of the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan (ERP)	Findings are articulated but need some clarity in terms of presentation. The 23 recommendations made are linked to the five conclusions of the evaluation	Improvement plan was not developed and not presented for approval by EXCO.	No scoring was done. The report was not subjected to the Evaluation Quality Assessment Tool to gauge evaluation quality	The evaluation report is not published on the website. Instead, the researcher sourced the evaluation report from DPME via e-mail.
6. Diagnostic Evaluation of the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector	Findings are clearly articulated and organised according to evaluation questions and the smallholder farmer category. There are seven broad recommendations	Improvement plan was developed but could not be accessed.	Score of 3.8 out of 5, indicating that the evaluation is of good quality	Both the evaluation report and Improvement plan are not published on the website. The researcher sourced the evaluation report from DPME via e-mail.

Table 7 above shows that all the study evaluations had clear, well-articulated findings and recommendations. The findings and recommendations are the evidence generated from the evaluation. This evidence generated can be used to inform the development of improvement plans, which are part of the evidence in informed decision making. The number of recommendations was very high for most evaluations. All the evaluations had an improvement plan developed for them except for the Agriculture ERP evaluation, which was never presented to the EXCO. At the same time, the Agriculture ERP evaluation was the only evaluation not subject to the evaluation quality assessment tool, which measures the quality and methodological rigour of the evaluation. The evaluations subjected to the quality assessment scored favourably, with the RADP evaluation being the high scorer at 4.10 out of 5 on the EQAT score. The lowest-scoring evaluation was the CASP evaluation report which scored 2.7 out of 5. Using the EQAT, a score of 3 and above represents a good quality evaluation, while a lower represents a below-adequate quality evaluation. The CASP evaluation was the only one with a score below 3 and was rated below adequate quality. The quality of an evaluation contributes to its usefulness in decision-making (Bundi et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020). While there is not much available literature on the value of publishing evaluation findings, the DPME, in its evaluation guidelines, states that all evaluations in the NEP, together with their improvement plans, should be published. Four evaluations are published in the DPME evaluation website repository, while the two, the Agriculture ERP and Government Supported Smallholder Farmer sector evaluations, are not published. Throughout this study, only two improvement plans were accessed and published on the DPME website, while the other three were not published, and one was never developed.

4.1.1 Conclusions

The finding from the review of the evaluation reports using the checklists points out that only four of the six evaluations are in the DPME website evaluation repository. Access to published evaluations is important for accountability. The two evaluations not on the evaluation repository website of the DPME were requested from the DPME via e-mail, and both evaluation reports were provided. Publishing evaluation reports is mandatory for all NEP evaluations, provided there is no resultant security risk from

publishing. The improvement plans for four evaluations were also not on the evaluation website repository, while the evaluation for the Agriculture Extension Recovery Programme never reached the stage of improvement plan development. The non-development of the improvement plans would question whether there was any evaluation use. On average, the evaluations were of good quality based on the Evaluation Quality Assessment Tool (EQAT) standards, with most evaluations with a quality score above 3 indicating adequate quality. The CASP evaluation scored lowly at 2.79 out of 5, while the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan evaluation never went for quality assessment, and no improvement plans were developed for it. The findings and recommendations, which are the evidence for this study, were clearly articulated; however, an observation made was the high number of recommendations provided per report. To further understand the implementation of the improvement plan, interviews were held with department officials, and the interviews' findings are discussed in the next section.

4.2 Findings from Interviews

The use of evaluation findings is presented from the views of current and former senior managers in the DALRRD who were involved in the programmes evaluated or involved in the evaluation process. The responses from the respondents are captured verbatim. The interview findings are structured around the emerging themes emanating from the literature review and interview data. From the thematic analysis of the results, six main themes were identified. The main six themes of the study depicted in Figure 7 are (i) understanding the value of evaluation in the NEP, (ii) factors influencing evaluation utilisation, (iii) types of evaluation use, (iv) evidence use mechanisms in the use of evaluation findings in EIDM, (v) evidence informed systems or decision making and (vi) practices or strategies that promote evaluation use. It is worth mentioning that in some instances, there will be some overlap when presenting the findings across the six themes.

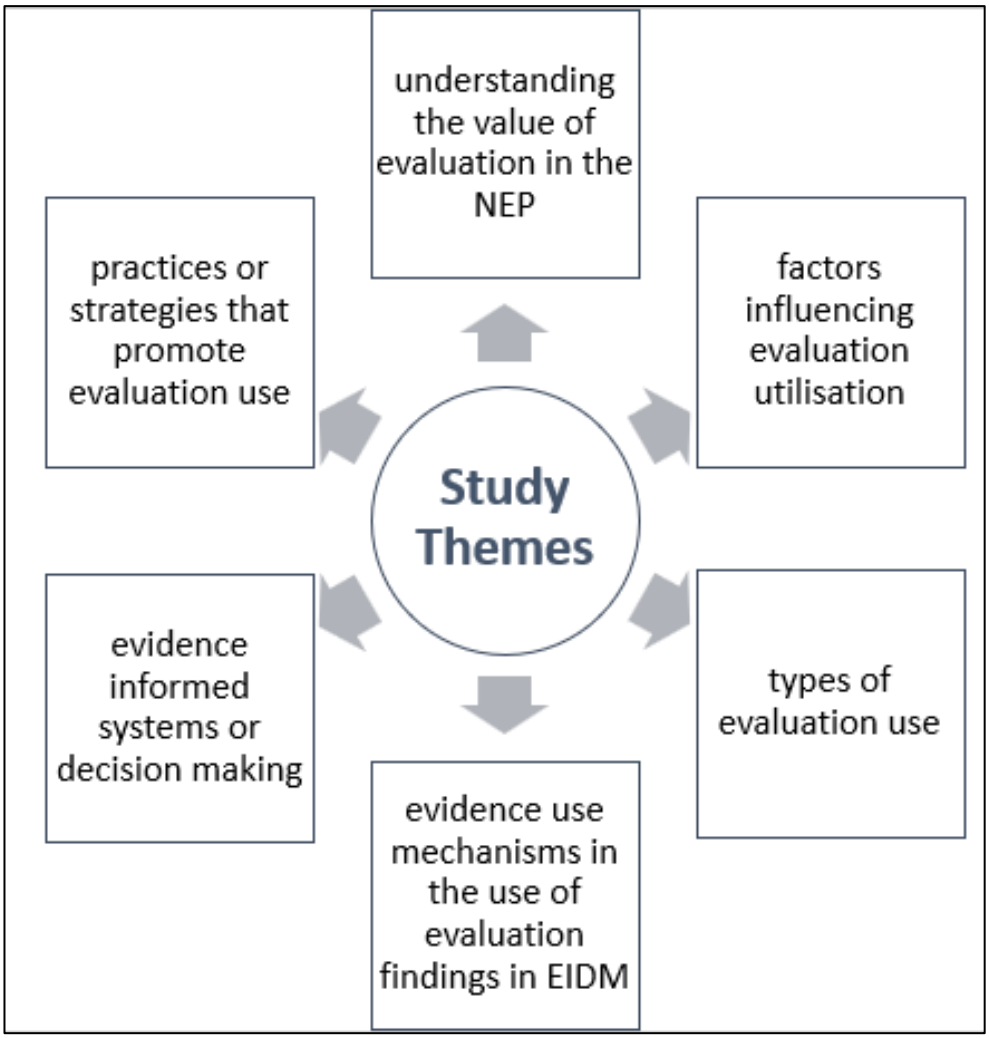


Figure 7: Broad Themes of the study

Each of the broad themes presented in Figure 7 is discussed in detail below:

4.2.1 Theme 1 - Understanding the Value of Evaluations in the NEP.

This theme responds largely to the primary research question, which seeks to understand the extent to which evaluation findings and recommendations have been used as part of evidence-informed decisions in the DALRRD. Evaluations in the NEP are considered priority evaluations due to the role of the programmes evaluated in addressing the country's strategic objectives and also the size of budgets allocated to these evaluations (DPME, 2019b). Therefore, it was necessary for this study first to establish the respondent's level of understanding of the NEP evaluations and their

value to the custodian department implementing the evaluation. The findings under this main theme are addressed through the following three sub-themes, the rationale for conducting the evaluation; initiating the evaluation and participating in the evaluation process.

4.2.1.1 Rationale for conducting evaluations

Evaluations are generally conducted to generate scientific evidence informing an organisation's decision-making. To gauge the understanding of the level of knowledge and the importance of evaluations that the respondents were involved in, it was necessary to elicit responses on how they view evaluation in the NEP. Most respondents indicated they had a very good knowledge of evaluations and understood the rationale behind conducting the programme evaluation. The evaluations must be of national importance, as one respondent suggested.

> *"…we don't just elevate any evaluation to the NEP, so it must be at least an evaluation of national importance" (Respondent 001, 2022).*

Other respondents indicated that the value of the evaluation lies in providing knowledge on the design and success or the impact their programmes have on the beneficiaries.

> *" It is important because it begins to provide you with some of the issues that you might have missed at the time when you develop some of these programs, and it provides you with an opportunity to take a breather and look backwards and say what has gone wrong what has gone right what are the lessons that we are learning out of this how can we improve on the current situation or as we move and develop and design new programs how then do we learn from these evaluations" (Respondent 002, 2022).*

The respondents also highlighted that the evaluation promotes the identification of weaknesses in the programme design and how best they can improve on it.

> *"I think the main issue was just to see what impact it has, and then from the research. I think you are also able to identify the weaknesses that are there with the view of making improvements going forward" (Respondent 004, 2022).*

The implementation evaluations were undertaken to learn about how the programme is being implemented and if the intended objectives are being met. The following were some of the responses related to learning as the rationale for the evaluation,

> *"…and that is the reason why I am saying the evaluations were indispensable now the results from those evaluations are supposed to inform us, you know, based on the results what course of action we must take going forward yeah, so those evaluations are very important" (Respondent 007, 2022).*

> *"We wanted to find out whether the model that we are using assisted us to achieve the objectives of the program and to evaluate whether the resources that are availed to implement the project are used in line with the different government prescripts like your PFMA, your supply chain and if they are not can they still be regarded as compliance to government principles" (Respondent 008, 2022).*

Some participants knew the different types of evaluation and could distinguish between implementation and impact evaluation. Out of the six evaluations reviewed in this study, three were implementation evaluations, the other two were impact evaluations, and one was diagnostic (Section 2.3.5). These are responses as reflected in the quotes below.

> *"I think that evaluation was more focused on the implementation, not the impact of how did we implement the extension recovery plan so that the results of the evaluation are supposed to help us, in fact, probably give us other institutional mechanisms" (Respondent 003, 2022).*

> *"We wanted to evaluate the implementation model of the program to see whether we are on course or if there are any things that we need to change within the system before we can say we fully implement so that one evaluation went through in that line it was not an impact evaluation we were just evaluating how the model how the programme is being implemented" (Respondent 008, 2022).*

Measuring the value for money was also highlighted as one of the reasons for carrying out evaluations. Most programmes evaluated in the NEP consume large chunks of the department's budget. The following responses are aligned to value for money being one of the rationales for conducting the evaluations;

" … for every program that we implement, we spend money, there are budgets involved, there are human capacities involved capital capacities involved, and therefore it is prudent that such an evaluation should be done so that at a particular stage we are able to determine if we have achieved something through the program or if we are standing still, if we are regressing or if we are moving forward and if there is value for money" (Respondent 007, 2022).

"According to me, the evaluation was to really determine the success of those programs and the impact that they have brought about and as well as looking at issues of integration and better coordination of the resources so that we are able to stretch the rand better to be able to accommodate more producers for support" (Respondent 002, 2022).

Both financial and human resources were described as important for the success of the programmes evaluated. The results of the evaluation have the potential to improve the coordination of these scarce resources to allow the programme to reach more beneficiaries.

4.2.1.2 Initiating the evaluation.

In conducting evaluations, the custodian department or the evaluand may initiate that the programme be part of the NEP. The respondents did indicate that they initiated the evaluation, while others indicated that the DPME initiated the process.

"OK, remember when we did the evaluation of the program, it is us who requested the DPME to do the evaluation of the RECAP program" (Respondent 008, 2022).

"So, we are the ones who actually approached our M & E to say we want to do the impact evaluation on the ERP, and they said no, this is too early to do the impact evaluation; hence we can do implementation evaluation and hence we requested to do the implementation evaluation then" (Respondent 010, 2023).

One respondent further clarified that initiating the evaluation within the custodian department could be either through the department's M&E unit or the programme

owners. He indicated that, generally, it is not the DPME that initiates the evaluation but the programme owners, as reflected in the quote below.

> *"It is not the DPME that initiates the evaluation. It is the custodian department; however, within the custodian department, there is a difference if the M&E unit initiates an evaluation with the DPME and a difference when a programme manager says I want my program to be evaluated" (Respondent 006, 2022).*

Respondent 006, 2022, further informs that evaluation utilisation is better when the programme manager initiates the evaluation than the department's M&E unit.

> *"I have seen in cases where a program manager comes forward and say I want my program to be evaluated. It worked out better, and the utilisation was better compared to a situation where you find the M&E unit within the department submitting concepts to DPME to include in the national evaluation plan [pause] without much support from the program managers themselves" (Respondent 006, 2022).*

When the initiator of the evaluation is the programme manager or officials that are directly linked to the programme they increase the chance of utilising the evaluation results as they have an interest in the improvement of their programme.

4.2.1.3 Participation in the evaluation process

The respondents indicated that they were involved in all and others in certain parts of the evaluation value chain. The evaluations were mainly conducted by the external service providers with the programme managers or decision makers involved through steering committee meetings and not on the actual implementation. The evaluation chain includes conceptualising the need for an evaluation, preparing for an evaluation (developing terms of reference and appointing an external evaluator), implementing the evaluation (participating in the project steering committee or as a resource person), responding to the findings and recommendations (management response) and finally implementing recommendations (improvement plan). The following quotes reflect the respondent's views.

"We were also involved, but we were not the drivers because you can't be a player and a referee at the same time, you know, so the DPME simply wanted us to fund the evaluation, but the DPME was the one which was appointing and they the evaluators" (Respondent 007, 2022).

"also involved in the process of selecting or recruitment of service providers and serving in the steering committees for the two evaluations" (Respondent 006, 2022).

" I was involved because it is us who drafted the terms of reference when we appointed the service providers to do the work, and so DPME were giving directions, and we were also unpacking some principles around the program so that when they were crafting their questionnaires, they were following exactly what the objective and what the program is doing so we were giving guidance in that regard" (Respondent 008, 2022).

" so we were involved in terms of periodic reports, the number of people and probably stakeholders that need to be interviewed, including the number of provinces that should be interviewed." (Respondent 003, 2022).

" so with regard to the involvement, we had quite extensive involvement with the people who were working on this evaluation project. I think they had inception meetings with us to try to understand what MAFISA is. After that, we also provided them with the information, and as they were doing the work, there were times when we had to meet with them so that they could update us on what they have done" (Respondent 004, 2022).

"I have mentioned serving in the Steering Committee and then and after the Steering Committee then approve the reports, assisting the program managers in developing a management response and then assisting with the development of the improvement plan and also tracking progress within the department on the improvement plans that were developed and reporting progress to DPME as required" (Respondents 006, 2022).

All the evaluations of this study were conducted by external evaluators appointed through a tendering system that allows for competitive bidding. The respondents confirmed that while participating as evaluation steering committee members, they

were not directly involved in the evaluation implementation to allow for independence and objectivity.

> *"The Service Provider was Macintosh Xaba and Associates, so that's the Service Provider that was deeply involved in terms of implementing the evaluation and asking questions because we wanted it to be independent, not to be spearheaded by the department so that we don't influence the recommendations" (Respondent 003, 2022).*

> *"From our side, because this is an external evaluation, our role is limited to the conceptualisation of the evaluation. So, our role is mainly during conceptualization and also of oversight, through your steering committee meetings, but we are not like hands on the evaluation because there is a service provider that is sourced to conduct these NEP evaluations" (Respondent 001, 2022).*

The other respondents indicated their involvement in finalising the findings and recommendations of the evaluation, which are the key parts of this study.

> *" I would say we were involved because what they would have done was that after they crafted their findings, they presented the first draft to us, and we were looking at their first draft and start questioning some areas, then they went back and pick up those areas that they left within the study and bring back into the report that is how we involved in the finalisation of the of the report not necessarily directed them on what to say" (Respondent 008, 2022.)*

> *"... and then we were able to raise any issues that we had at the time, and I think even at the end of the evaluation, we were provided with the report before it was published, and we were able to make our inputs as well before its final release" (Respondents 004, 2022).*

> *"The recommendations were actually workshopped. I think it was a workshop for that report where by now, provinces got to interrogate the report and cross-examine the responses and the recommendations. Some of them we were happy with some of them you know not everything you will be happy about, but if it is based on the report that was developed and it was a scientific report, then you get to take them" (Respondent 010, 2023).*

Respondent 008, (2022); Respondent 012 (2022) and Respondent 010 (2023) indicated that they actively participated in the crafting of the recommendations of the study. Participating in this critical stage allowed them to have a better understanding of the evaluation process and how the findings and recommendations were reached.

4.2.1.4 Summary of Theme 1

This theme of understanding the rationale of conducting evaluations in the NEP provided insights into the respondent's understanding of evaluations since evaluations mean different things to different respondents. Most respondents understood the purpose of the evaluation and were part of the evaluation process in different capacities. Some of the respondents were involved in the conceptualisation and some in implementation through project steering committees or as informants. This theme provides information on the importance of evaluation knowledge and participation by programme or intervention owners in the evaluation process. Knowing the importance and value of an evaluation and participating in the evaluation process is important in achieving evaluation utilisation.

4.2.2 Theme 2- Factors that Influence Evaluation Utilisation

Evaluation is judged by its use (Patton, 2020) and by understanding what are those factors that determine their use in decision making. The literature review and interviews with the respondents identified different factors that influence the use of the evaluation in the DALRRD. Accordingly, the respondents gave detailed accounts of the factors they perceive to influence the utilisation of evaluation findings on the DALRRD. The responses are categorised into seven sub-themes as they were the most recurring patterns in the interviews. The sub-themes are resources and capacity, leadership, quality of evaluators, the practicality of recommendations, attitude and behaviour, acceptance of evaluation findings and improvement plans.

The theme on factors influencing evaluation utilisation responds to the following research questions.

- To what extent evaluation findings and recommendations have been used as part of evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa?
- What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?
- What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?

4.2.2.1 Resources and capacity

The availability of resources, be they financial or human is critical in contributing to the utilisation of the evaluations. The respondents identified the lack of financial resources as one of the factors that hindered the implementation of the recommendations (Respondent 001, 2023; Respondent 004, 2022; Respondent 002, 2022.) Also, the lack of capacity by those who are supposed to implement the recommendations or develop the improvement plan were identified as one of the factors. Human capacity is vital in understanding and implementing decision-making findings and recommendations. The following were the responses provided.

> *"I can say one of the challenges is the resources. You can bring evaluations and come up with good recommendations, but you find that the resources are just not enough, and that can make the intervention owner to defer almost everything on the evaluation simply because there is not enough funding or there is no capacity to implement" (Respondents 001, 2022).*

The other respondents added that resources and capacity are interlinked. Therefore, these two need to be at appropriate levels to achieve the utilisation of the evaluations.

> *"the second thing may be the issue of resources. Some of the recommendations they would require to deploy more resources, either financial or human and both of them are obviously interlinked. You cannot increase your capacity without increasing your financial resource" (Respondent 002, 2022).*

Another respondent advised that the capacity to understand evaluation is there, but there is room for improvement.

> *"Yeah, well, uh, I think the capacity was there, but I think it was limited" (Respondent 004, 2022).*

It was, however, encouraging to note that the DALRRD has a fully-fledged evaluation directorate under the chief directorate of Monitoring and Evaluation. This directorate's role is to provide the evaluation capacity needed by the department, but it still has a long way to go (Respondents 001, 2022).

4.2.2.2 Leadership

It is also important to note that the department's leadership has the final say on whether to implement or not the evaluation findings based on other factors within and outside the organisation. The final decision makers in the DALRRD is the Executive Committee (EXCO), which consists of all the Deputy Director Generals and is chaired by the Director General, the accounting officer. The following are responses from the respondents.

> *" However, I think for the former DRDLR, the Director General of the department had an understanding or was appreciating the benefits of undertaking any evaluation, so in the end, if the DG supports it, you as a program manager who can be a DDG or Chief Director you will have to end up doing or developing an improvement plan because also the DG is also in support of the evaluation"(Respondent 006 2022).*

Leadership importance is also highlighted by Respondent 001,2022, and Respondent 006, 2022, who informs that it can break or make an evaluation.

> *"...so leadership is very important, and when you are not forward-looking, also your team tend to view the evaluation as a negative process towards what they are doing so a person can make or break an evaluation and can create an atmosphere of resistance" (Respondent 001, 2022).*

A respondent also indicated how inept leadership led to the non-development of the improvement plan for the ERP evaluation.

> *"so that study was very key on the evaluation of the implementation of the ERP and its recommendations, now the status quo just continues as such because this report was never taken into action by the senior management" (Respondent 003, 2022).*

"I think it is a buy-in from management as well as they would have pushed harder for this ERP evaluation to be done and completed, and we would have had the management improvement plan" (Respondent 010, 2023).

The non-development of the improvement plan for the ERP evaluation was further linked to a lack of buy-in from leadership.

4.2.2.3 Quality of evaluators

External evaluators conducted all the evaluations that were part of the study due to capacity constraints within the department. The Business Enterprises at the University of Pretoria conducted three evaluations, while Impact Economix, Khulisa Management Services and McIntosh Xaba and Associates conducted one each. The table below (Table 8) shows the external service providers and the evaluations they conducted.

Table 8: List of External Evaluators involved in the study evaluations

External Service Provider	Evaluation
1. Business Enterprises at the University of Pretoria	Implementation Evaluation of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme
	Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP)
	Impact Evaluation of the Micro Agricultural Financial Institutions of South Africa
2. Impact Economix	Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme
3. McIntosh Xaba and Associates	Implementation Evaluation of the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan
4. Khulisa Management Services & University of Cape Town	Diagnostic Evaluation of the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector

There was a mixed reaction to the quality and competency of the external evaluators. Most respondents indicated they were competent and produced good quality evaluations, but some suggested that the quality was not up to the level required for evaluations in the NEP.

"OK, I think one thing that I have already mentioned was also the quality or capability of the appointed or the reputation of the appointed service provider and the quality of the report" (Respondent 006, 2022).

The respondent further provided information to support the assertion made on the quality of the external evaluators by stating that.

"...the other issue was also the service provider that was appointed to some extent. Yeah, I do not know whether to say they were not capable of doing the evaluation. Strangely enough, we had to assist as a department with organizing the fieldwork, so it is like they did not even understand the program itself" (Respondent 006, 2022).

The above observation was taken further by another respondent who felt that the external evaluator's background also had an influence on the evaluation report.

" If you take an academic and ask them to review a program, then there would be more bias from the academic side, but if you take somebody who is a farmer, a seasoned farmer and says you evaluate this programme, they would come with different reports because they come from different schools of thought one is more from the academic side the other one will be coming from the more practical side" (Respondent 002, 2022)

The evaluators' quality also influenced the evaluation's completion time and the subsequent development of improvement plans. For example, Respondent 010 (2023) reported that.

" and maybe because of the limited efficiency again of the evaluator, some of the milestones were dragging, and one would end up really stretching the evaluation more than it is supposed to be because this report comes, and it is not good just to go back and then six months is added, and it ends up now dragging the momentum so we can even say maybe I do not know we can actually make sure that we are getting the best evaluator for the job."

External evaluators are considered independent from the department, and their work contributes to improving the programmes evaluated. There was recognition of the work of evaluators.

" ...you know, sometimes these findings or messages coming out from external evaluators, people tend to take it more seriously compared to when it is coming from internal stakeholders" (Respondent 006, 2022).

4.2.2.4 Practicality of recommendations

One observed thing is that too many recommendations were provided in the evaluation reports. Also, many sub-recommendations were lumped into one broad recommendation. Nevertheless, the evaluation recommendations were generally accepted (Respondent 001, 2022; Respondents 004, 2022; Respondent 006, 2022; Respondent 009, 2022). The practicality of the recommendations contributed to their use.

" ..so I think what influenced us to make use of them is because, you know, it was not more of an academic exercise. It was more of a practical thing coming up with practical recommendations that we also knew is like that as a result" (Respondent 004, 2022).

There were opinions that some of the recommendations were too theoretical and not practical to implement.

"... you get a sense that there is more of theory, and as compared to the practicality of what is happening on the ground, there is sometimes a disjuncture between theory and what is really happening on the ground. There are those that are real, and then they can actually be implemented and because they are more practical than the others" (Respondent 002, 2022).

4.2.2.5 Attitude and fear towards evaluations

The attitude and behaviour of those involved in the evaluations also came to the fore in contributing to the evaluation use or no use. For example, respondent 001 (2022) noted that while some decision-makers are interested in the evaluation process, some want to see the evaluation completed so their work can continue. Their attitude to evaluation is that it is a box-ticking process.

"Some people they just want to see the evaluation progressing, but they are not interested. But some are involved, and they want to understand the process part

of the work, but for others, they are just there maybe to release the funding so that their work can continue" (Respondents 001, 2022).

The lack of capacity and understanding of the evaluation also brings fear of what the outcome of the evaluation will mean for the programme or position. Respondent 001 (2022) further informed that *"some programme managers will say if you allow evaluation in your space, then you will start to have problems because these guys are just coming there to recommend the death of your intervention, so I can say attitude matters as well."*

The fear of the evaluation outcome will also impact utilisation, as noticed by respondent 006.

"… and also maybe to mention the program managers, you know I have seen people when you evaluate their programs they take it personally as if you are evaluating them as individuals, so I think that also affects utilisation" (Respondent 006, 2022).

The fear of making decisions was also identified as one of the negative cultures in the public sector, and in this study, the respondents linked fear to not implementing the evaluation findings, as reflected in the quote below.

"The general culture in the public service people fear to take decisions if you have got an evaluation such as the evaluation which was done on CASP do you know how much the budget for CASP is 2.4 billion rands a year and then there is an evaluation then there is an evaluation with recommendations you do not even wink" (Respondent 007, 2022).

As reflected in the quote below, the fear and ignorance of the evaluation outcome also impact the evaluation use.

"They will blame the evaluation; they will say no; this process is harmful to my work, so people have a way of reacting to bad news and evaluation. Sometimes you know it is not just bringing out the bad, but they are also proposing good things for improvement, but people tend to focus so much on the negatives that the evaluation is magnifying, and sometimes people just want to act like they do not understand because it suits them it reinforces their position to not act on issues" (Respondents 001, 2022).

Leadership should create a culture of awareness and acceptance of evaluations as interventions that improve programme implementation rather than punitive tools. Respondent 006 indicated their sadness when at some point, a leader within the department stated that heads should roll based on the outcome of the evaluation reports.

> *"I was a bit disappointed because our DG then said yeah, there you have it, a scientific study. You know heads should be rolling, and that is not the reason why you do an evaluation. You do an evaluation for learning to improve to make evidence-based decisions" (Respondent 006, 2022).*

4.2.2.6 Acceptance of evaluation findings and recommendations

The majority of the findings and recommendations of the evaluations were accepted uncontested, and only a few were subjected to further reviews and negotiations (Respondent 001, 2022; Respondent 006, 2022; Respondent 007, 2022; Respondent 009, 2022). The accepted recommendations were included in the improvement plan.

> *"Yeah, they were accepted overall, but you know, with some maybe some of the recommendations being challenged and, like I said, an opportunity was provided to give additional information or even recommend other program staff to be interviewed or provide information to inform the findings of the evaluation, but overall they were accepted" (Respondent 006, 2022)*

In some instances, the findings were accepted, but at the same time, they were not what the department expected, as explained by Respondent 007, 2022.

> *"We appreciated the findings of the report, but the findings also made us sad because the findings were not positive, for example, CASP" (Respondent 007, 2022).*

> *"Yeah, well, I think we were quite open, and we accepted the recommendations based on what we know was something that was that was true, although some of them were not really [long pause]. I think we accepted most of them, and those that were not accepted, we disputed them" (respondent 004, 2022)*

Some respondents reported that findings were accepted only after negotiating with the evaluating team. The negotiations were on clarification seeking and making available additional project documentation that had not been shared with evaluators.

> *"I think [long pause] I think generally management accepted the findings, and you know those findings they are kind of negotiated findings, the department negotiated with the researching body" (Respondent 009, 2022).*

The rejected findings were partly due to the evaluators not considering some key variables in determining their findings or not having been furnished with documentation to assist in the evaluation.

> *".. there were some findings and recommendations that we rejected and were rejected them because key variables in determining the findings were not taken into consideration after we advised" (Respondent 008, 2022).*

Where evaluation findings and recommendations were rejected or disputed, the evaluators were provided with additional information to help revise the findings (Respondent 006, 2022). This action also supports the view of negotiated findings punted by Respondent 009, 2022.

> *"yeah, then it was just suggested that if you think the findings are not a true reflection, then provide additional information for the service providers to consider it yeah and revise some of the findings (Respondents 006, 2022).*

Acceptance of evaluation findings and recommendations paves the way to developing an improvement plan. However, the dispute of evaluation findings raises the question of how acceptable it is for an evaluand to "agree" or "disagree" with evaluation findings. The evaluation findings are based on robust evidence - and should only be disputed in the face of alternative, robust evidence? The issue of negotiated findings was highlighted by Respondent 009, 2022, where the evaluand and evaluator settle on the common ground after the findings have been disputed. Respondent 009, 2022, termed these findings a "negotiated settlement".

4.2.2.7 Improvement plans

The respondents indicated that all the evaluations they were involved in, except the Extension Recovery Plan, had an improvement plan developed. The improvement plan legitimises the use of evaluation recommendations (Respondent 010, 2023) and takes the recommendations to project and activity levels (Respondent 001, 2022).

> *" so I think it would help act on these recommendations regardless of the improvement plan, but it is always good to be having a legitimate document to refer to, like the improvement plan would be a legitimate document" (Respondent 010, 2023).*

The confirmation of implementing the improvement plan was only limited to the respondents' interviews. The departmental documents like quarterly progress reports and annual performance plans were not part of the documents of the study. The quality of the improvement plan was also brought into question.

> *"So the improvement plan itself, even though it was done, but it was not convincing of a good quality. I remember we even struggled to get a progress report on the improvement plan (Respondent 006, 2022).*

The improvement plan for the Extension Recovery Programme (ERP) evaluation was not developed and was not served to the cabinet as per the DPME requirements, and this researcher could not get any clear explanation of why this was the case, but the respondents highlighted the following:

> *"Unfortunately, this evaluation ended at that stage of compiling that management response plan, and there was no management improvement plan developed it was not developed. There has been follow-ups on developing the improvement plan, but nothing has materialised. I am not sure where the problem is" (Respondent 010, 2023).*

> *"I really do not know what transpired from there, and I never heard this ERP report being presented at EXCO so that it can influence how ERP is being implemented as per recommendations from the evaluation. So the only evaluation which I think was never taken into consideration or seriously is the one of the ERP" (Respondent 003, 2022).*

"For the ERP evaluation, there was difficulty in getting the management response, and also the development of the management improvement plan and the evaluation also did not serve at cabinet. Even on the NEP plan, it says difficulties in getting a Management response and Improvement plan. The evaluation did not serve in cabinet and is closed" (Respondent 006, 2022).

The respondents over-emphasised the importance of the improvement plans and that they are the starting point for using the evaluation findings and recommendations. There were also questions on the actual implementation of the improvement plan.

"let me let you in like on CASP, as I am telling you an improvement plan was done, but I cannot tell you what actually happened" (Respondent 007, 2022).

4.2.2.8 Summary of Theme 2

This theme of factors that influence evaluation utilisation was pivotal to this study as it helped to understand the barriers and enablers to evaluation utilisation in the DALRRD. The identified factors were resource availability; leadership of the evaluand; the quality of the evaluators and the evaluation report; the practicality of the recommendations; attitude towards evaluations; acceptance of the findings, and the development of improvement plans. The evaluation findings were generally accepted, and the recommendations were utilised in some instances only after a negotiated settlement. The absence of an improvement plan for the ERP evaluation was also noted as a barrier to legitimate use. The outcomes of respondent interviews confirmed what has been highlighted in the literature review as the factors or determinants that affect evaluation utilisation, like the quality of the evaluation report, attitude towards evaluation and the development of improvement plans. The factors that influence evaluation utilisation provide a backdrop for understanding the different types of evaluation use and how to develop strategies that promote evaluation utilisation practice.

4.2.3 Theme 3 - Types of Evaluation Use

This study found evidence of the four broad categories of evaluation use among the six programmes evaluated under the NEP. The respondents indicated that they had used evaluation findings and recommendations for different purposes, and they never attached evaluation use to the four categories or typologies as they did not know them. The evidence of the existence of the four categories of evaluation use discussed as sub-themes is instrumental use, conceptual use, symbolic use and process use. Literature review reveals that these forms of evaluation use are not mutually exclusive, and there can be interaction amongst each other. This theme of types of evaluation use responds to the primary and two sub-research questions.

- To what extent evaluation findings and recommendations have been used as part of evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa?
- What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?
- What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?

The use of the evaluation depends on the purpose of the evaluation and the intended user's needs (Onyura, 2020). Most of the respondents reflected on the use of the evaluation only after the evaluation process had been completed. However, some respondents indicated that they learned something during the evaluation process. It is important to mention that the types of evaluation use were never mentioned to the respondents but were deduced from their responses. The respondents were asked to comment on the evaluation's usefulness; from the probing interview questions, it was easy to establish the type of evaluation use. Most respondents indicated that evaluation was useful, and those who did not see any value also were allowed to express their views.

> *"It was useful because it started to change our mind or our approach in terms of how best we can do things" (Respondent 008, 2022).*

> *"yeah, it was useful as I am saying, we already started implementing some of the recommendations, so it was useful" (Respondent 010, 2023)*

Some respondents did not see the value of the evaluation as they felt that they did not learn anything from it. For example, Respondent 009, 2022, commented on the CRDP evaluation.

> *"I do not think so. I do not think we learned anything new from the evaluation" (Respondent 009, 2022).*

The findings on evaluation use are presented according to the six evaluation reports reviewed in the study.

4.2.3.1 Evidence of evaluation use in the RADP evaluation

With the RADP, there is clear evidence that the evaluation recommendations were implemented to a significant extent. Most respondents indicated that they applied the evaluation findings directly to the programme to improve its implementation (Respondent 001, 2022; Respondent 002, 2022; Respondent 006, 2022; Respondent 008, 2022). The evaluation shaped the development of the policy on Land Development and post-settlement support (LDS), which became a successor of the RADP and the development of new RADP guidelines. Also, the evaluation raised the profile of the RADP within the department and the farming community. The RADP evaluation has evidence of instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use. Summarised responses from the respondents on the use of the RADP evaluation are captured in Table 9.

4.2.3.2 Evidence of evaluation use in the CRDP evaluation

With CRDP evaluation, one respondent indicated that they did not see much use of the evaluation findings and did not learn from the evaluation (Respondent 009, 2022). Tshatsinde (2015) also confirms the views of the respondents who felt the findings and recommendations of the CRDP evaluation were not useful. However, the same respondent later informed that despite not seeing the evaluation's value, it did raise the profile of the CRDP. The findings of the study identify evidence of conceptual and symbolic use. The conceptual use is evident when the evaluation was used to some extent to shape the policy and practice on rural development where different departments were working in silos. The evidence of symbolic use manifests through

the raised profile of the CRDP due to the evaluation, where the stakeholders and participating departments were previously unclear about the CRDP. Summarised responses from the respondents on the use of the CRDP evaluation are captured in Table 9.

4.2.3.3 Evidence of evaluation use in the CASP evaluation

The CASP evaluation results had evidence of instrumental and conceptual use. The CASP intervention is the department's premier agriculture support programme, and its evaluation, while having a low-quality assessment score, was beneficial in programme improvement. The evaluation findings were directly applied to improving the programme, like the inclusivity of marginalised groups (Respondent 011, 2023). The evaluation recommendations were that there is a need for a total overhaul of government-supported farmer programmes, and this evaluation also influenced the development of the National Policy Comprehensive Producer Development Support (CPDS), hence its conceptual use. The CPDS policy is designed to bring all producer support programmes from both the private sector and government in a coordinated manner. The CASP implemented by the DAFF was always in competition with the RADP implemented by DRDLR (Respondent 008, 2022). Hence the merger of the two departments brought the farmer support programmes under one roof, and this can be, to a significant extent, credited to the evaluation, which recommended the alignment of the programmes provided by the two departments. This evaluation had symbolic value for both the policy and the programme, raising their profiles. However, some recommendations were not implemented, and business is continuing as usual as if the evaluation never made any recommendations (Respondent 007, 2022). Summarised responses from the respondents on the use of the CASP evaluation are captured in Table 9.

4.2.3.4 Evidence of evaluation use in the MAFISA evaluation

The MAFISA evaluation was conducted simultaneously with the CASP evaluation. These two programmes were farmer support programmes, and their mandate was nearly the same, with CASP being a grant while MAFISA being a loan programme

(Respondent 005, 2022). There was evidence of conceptual use in that the MAFISA evaluation recommendations also informed some sections of the Agriculture Agro Processing Master Plan and the Blended Finance System (Respondent 004, 2022 and Respondent 005, 2022). An important finding is that the evaluation recommended that "The state should continue to offer wholesale funding to provide financial services that meet the needs of the spectrum of smallholder farmers" (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2014). However, despite those recommendations, the respondents reported that there was non-use of the evaluation recommendations to continue or improve the programme. After the evaluation was completed, the programme was defunded instead of the department continuing with MAFISA as per recommendations (Respondent 005, 2022).

> *"Yeah, the recommendation were not implemented; instead, they were parallel programs trying to address blended finance as well as the agriculture agro-processing master plan. Currently, MAFISA is now defunded. Remember, they took the MAFISA fund back to the treasury, I think 2014" Respondent 005, 2022).*

> *" then I think the department decided to come up with parallel structure to MAFISA as I have said now is I think it is dying its own slow death because it is never funded anymore and there are no activities taking place" (Respondent 005, 2022).*

This observation was further corroborated by another respondent who advised that MAFISA is operating at a very low scale, and management is currently deciding whether MAFISA should continue or be scrapped (Respondent 004, 2022).

> *"so I think currently there is a decision that still needs to be made in terms, do we continue, how do we continue do we recapitalize if we recapitalize, and in what form going forward, so I think that is the stage where we are, but it is still operating but at low scale" (Respondent 004, 2022).*

Despite the overwhelming non-use, there was evidence of instrumental use where the development finance intermediary reporting systems was improved in response to the evaluation recommendations (Respondents 004, 2022; Respondent 005, 2022). Summarised responses from the respondents on the use of the MAFISA evaluation are captured in Table 9.

4.2.3.5 Evidence of evaluation use in the Agriculture ERP evaluation

Even though the ERP evaluation did not have an improvement plan developed, it did not stop the implementation of some of the recommendations to improve its policies around the norms and standards of extension (Respondent 010, 2023). Conceptual and process use were evident in this evaluation, as seen when the evaluation findings were used as part of the evidence when reviewing the norms and standards policy of extension. The process use evidence is in the lessons learnt from the evaluation workshops and the failure to prepare improvement plans, which underpins evaluation utilisation. Summarised responses from the respondents on the use of the Agriculture ERP evaluation are captured in Table 9.

4.2.3.6 Evidence of evaluation use in the Government Supported Smallholder Farmer Sector evaluation

This evaluation was a synthesis of the other evaluations of this study, including the RADP, CRDP, CASP and MAFISA evaluations. This evaluation has strong evidence of instrumental, conceptual, symbolic, and process uses. The Comprehensive Producer Development Support Policy (CPDS) was shaped by the outcomes of this diagnostic evaluation (Respondent 012, 2023 and Respondent 013, 2023). The profile of the four agriculture support programmes mentioned earlier were also further highlighted as part of the challenges of having different government support programmes that support the same farmer. This diagnostic evaluation led to the direct process of developing a database or farmer register of South African farmers. While the President of the Republic of South Africa was mulling around combining the DRDLR and DAFF into one department, this evaluation also identified the duplication of activities by the two departments. It made an argument for the synchronisation of activities. The steering committee members indicated they gained more information on the evaluation than before their involvement. The difference between monitoring from evaluation was also cleared up through this evaluation, and this is one of the challenges that some officials face where they cannot distinguish the two terms (Respondent 012, 2023). Summarised responses from the respondents on the use of the smallholder farmer sector evaluation are captured in Table 9.

Table 9 below provides the respondent's views on evaluation use for the six evaluations based on the four types of evaluation use.

Table 9: Evidence of evaluation use in the six DALRRD evaluations

Evaluation Type	Feedback from the respondent on the use of evaluation results (Evidence of use)
1. Recapitalisation and Development Programme (RADP)	**Instrumental Use:** • *"Look, evaluation outcomes have got a number of uses. They can be used to improve and correct the situation. They can also be used or tracked by the other state organs like your auditor general" (Respondent 002, 2023),* • *"Also, in terms of [pause to think] threshold or maximum amount that can be provided as part of RECAP that I think was also revised" (Respondents 006, 2022)* **Conceptual Use:** • *"No RECAP is longer existing no, it is not on my existing replaced by, in fact, not replaced. It was discontinued, and now we came up with a new program called land development support (Respondent 008, 2022).* • *"We designed the first program, the Land Development and Post settlement Support (LDS), which was meant to replace the RECAP, and it was modelled with the understanding and taking into cognisance the lessons that we learnt from RECAP" (Respondent 002, 2022)* • *"But overall, the policy for RECAP was revised because of the evaluation a number of things were strengthened, so that is why evaluations that I can say the findings were really utilised by the program staff" (Respondent 006, 2022)* • *"I think the RECAP study ended up influencing the convergence of the two Departments because, remember, the mandate of land reform by then was to say you acquire land, but we introduced post settlements support because and the former DAFF through CASP which was mainly introduced to support land reform farms that they did not because they have their own mandate" (Respondent 008, 2022)*
2. Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP)	**Conceptual Use:** • *(Respondent 009, 2022) findings, so I cannot actually remember any of the findings myself would say, but I do remember there was taken up, and I remember that some of those findings were brought into the following year's planning.* **Symbolic Use:** • *I think I think I am trying to think hard now. I think it created awareness in the department. (Respondent 009, 2022)*
3. Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP)	**Instrumental Use:** • *"CASP was implemented differently before it was changed into this kind of a grant. That is how provinces were able to do whatever they liked with money, but now the change from that regime to the new one really gave the national office more control over the provinces which, for me, it says that there were lessons learned and appreciation of these valuations when they are done" (Respondent 002, 2022)*

Evaluation Type	Feedback from the respondent on the use of evaluation results (Evidence of use)
	• *"The inclusivity of women, youth and people with disabilities were part of the findings, now when we approve the provincial plans, we make sure that women, youth and people with disabilities are represented" (Respondent 011, 2023)* **Conceptual Use:** • *"Even when we do our frameworks, some of the decisions are based on those findings. Even in our engagement with Provinces, the reference always goes to those findings" (Respondent 011, 2023)*
4. Micro Agriculture Finance Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA)	**Instrumental Use:** • *"It was important because I think it revealed some of the things that, you know, we were also not aware of, so I think because it was a useful intervention (Respondent 004, 2022).* • *"Yeah, I think one of the findings was that the MAFISA is inconsistent and incomplete, and we developed a reporting plan" (Respondent 004, 2022).* • *"We listened to the recommendation saying there was poor record keeping, so we recommended that we improve on our record keeping that kind of recommendation" (Respondent 005, 2022).* **Conceptual Use:** • *"so some of the recommendations were taken up in the development of the blended finance the agricultural processing master plan" (Respondent 005, 2022).*
5. Agriculture Extension Recovery Plans (ERP)	**Instrumental Use:** • *"Hence, the recommendations were partially implemented. For instance, there were recommendations that were pointing out all of the deliverables on the ERP that were not working OK yeah, and there were suggestions on what could work, so much were taken up for because those deliverables were actually taken out (respondents 010, 2023)* **Conceptual Use:** • *"When we were reviewing the norms and standards, we were already looking at what the ERP evaluation was saying about this particular element. We could change it there" (Respondent 010, 2023)* **Process Use:** • *"But if people can just accept that this thing the purpose is for learning and also to improve, and the program is going forward so that it achieves its objectives and impact" (Respondent 006, 2022)* • *"The recommendations were actually workshopped." (Respondent 010, 2023)*
6. Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector	**Instrumental Use:** *"The Farmer register and the categorisation of smallholder farmers happened as a direct result of the diagnostic evaluation" (Respondent 013, 2023)*

Evaluation Type	Feedback from the respondent on the use of evaluation results (Evidence of use)
	"The blended finance scheme was a product of the diagnostic evaluation" (Respondent 013, 2023) **Conceptual Use:** • *"I get a sense that when the National policy on comprehensive producer development and support was developed and they also took cognisance of some of the challenges that they had in the previous programs that they ran implemented CASP. This was an outcome of the smallholder producer support evaluation" Respondent 002, 2022)* • *"the evaluation outcome, I suspect, was also used to inform the merger of former DAFF and DRDLR. The evaluation informed of the lack of coordination among the farmer support programmes offered by the two departments" (Respondents 012, 2023)* • *"The national policy on comprehensive producer support actually encompasses almost all the recommendation of the evaluation" (Respondent 013, 2023* **Process use:** • *I learnt the difference between Monitoring and Evaluation. We need to go back and re-educate people about the two" (Respondent 013, 2023)* • *I got empowered a lot by participating in the project steering committee. It was extremely helpful to understand what evaluation is and how I can use it. I have used the learnings to my own advantage" (Respondents 012, 2023)*

Adapted from Goldman et al. (2019)

4.2.3.7 Summary of Theme 3

This theme on the types of evaluation use provides information on how the findings and recommendations of the six evaluation reports reviewed were utilised. The most dominant evaluation use type was instrumental use and conceptual use. Table 10 below provides a summary of the evaluation use types that were identified.

Table 10: Summary of evaluation use type on the six evaluations of the study.

Evaluation	Type of use (Yes/No /Partly)			
	Instrumental	Conceptual	Symbolic	Process
RADP	Yes	Yes	Partly	No
CRDP	No	Yes	Yes	No
CASP	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
MAFISA	Yes	Yes	No	No
Agriculture ERP	No	Yes	No	Yes
Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Through the interviews, there was limited evidence of process use, but it could be deduced that through the participation of the respondents in the evaluation process as part of the steering committee, there was some transfer of evaluation knowledge. On the other hand, the Agriculture ERP and CRDP did not show evidence of instrumental use, directly applying the evaluation findings to programme improvement.

4.2.4 Theme 4 - Evidence use mechanisms in the use of evaluation findings in EIDM

The Langer et al. (2020) analytical framework investigates the effectiveness of interventions that support the utilisation of evidence in decision making and has been extensively reviewed in Chapter 2 of this study (Section 2.2). This study uses this framework to explore the evidence use interventions, which promote the practice of using evidence in decision making. In this study, the evaluation findings and

recommendations are the evidence that decision-makers need for informed decision making. The six mechanisms of change that support decision makers' use of evaluation evidence, as developed by Langer et al. (2016), are; awareness, agreement, access, interaction, ability and institutionalising. The use of evidence by decision-makers includes integrating the evaluation results into programme design or policy formulation. A case example is the Comprehensive Producer Development Policy's development aligned to the diagnostic evaluation of the government-supported smallholder farmer's sector.

One particular finding was that the respondents indicated they had heard of the concept of Evidence-Informed Decision Making (EIDM) but were not well informed about it. They noted that they use evidence in making decisions but do not necessarily align it or call it EIDM.

> *"I really do not know what Evidence-informed decision making is all about, but I know I can answer this because I understand English words. But I am liking this term of evidence-informed decision making, so for forwardly going, I will probably use it at some point" (Respondent 010, 2023).*

> *"Evidence-informed decision-making actually allows the department to implement programs in a much more informed position rather than the way it is currently" (Respondent 003, 2022).*

> *"We make decisions that are based on science or research and, in this case, backed by evaluation evidence, but we never call it evidence-based decision making. Thank you for bringing up this term, I will look it up further" (Respondent 005, 2022).*

> *"I do not know [pause] I have heard about the term, but I think the way we do our work, I think it is evidence-based" (Respondent 011, 2023).*

The EIDM concept was explained to the respondents, and the six mechanisms of change were also described to provide a platform for them to give informed responses on EIDM use in the department. However, due to the limited knowledge of EIDM by the respondents, the researcher managed to glean the following three evidence-use mechanisms from the response provided: awareness, agreement and access. The mechanism is discussed below in no order or priority.

4.2.4.1 Awareness

The Awareness mechanism aims to build awareness of the decision makers' positive attitudes towards EIDM interventions and stresses the value of valuing the concept of EIDM (ACE & DPME, 2020). Unfortunately, from the interviews, there was a scarcity of evidence demonstrating the awareness of those interventions that will promote evidence use in decision making. However, the respondents did indicate their awareness of the importance of evaluation evidence and that the value of the evaluation lies in its usefulness (Respondent 00, 2022; Respondent 006, 2023).

> *"Awareness of the evaluation is important because it provides first-hand information about the evaluation and its benefits" (Respondent 001, 2022).*
>
> *"When you first start to create awareness of how evaluation findings can be used, you will be in the right step towards utilisation" (Respondent 006, 2022).*

This awareness mechanism can be linked with the strategies to promote the practice of utilising evaluation discussed in section 4.2.6. In addition, the DALRRD has an M and E unit that conducts workshops to sensitise the departmental officials on the values and benefits of evaluations and how they can improve programme implementation (Respondent 001, 2022).

4.2.4.2 Agreement

The agreement mechanism involves building mutual understanding and agreement on the type of evidence needed to answer the programme, or policy-related questions are at the heart of the Agreement mechanism (Langer et al., 2016). The evidence generated in the evaluation was agreed on between the evaluators and the project steering committee. Another respondent indicated that it was a negotiated settlement (Respondent 009, 2022). The project steering committee, while not directly involved in the implementation of the evaluation, provided oversight and direction in generating evidence that will assist decision-makers in responding to the needs of the evaluated intervention. There was an agreement between the two parties to co-produce useful evidence (Respondent 001, 2022' Respondents 006, 2022: Respondent 009, 2022)

"you need to agree on the evaluation questions, you know you need to agree on the focus of the evaluation, you know you need to agree on the type of evaluation that may be suitable for certain interventions, you need to agree on the findings and recommendations" (Respondent 001, 2022).

" I would say we were involved because what they would have done was that after they crafted their findings, they presented the first draft to us, and we were looking at their first draft and start questioning some areas, then they went back and pick up those areas that they left within the study and bring back into the report that is how we involved in the finalisation of the of the report not necessarily directed them on what to say" (Respondent 008, 2022).

" ... and then we were able to raise any issues that we had at the time, and I think even at the end of the evaluation, we were provided with the report before it was published, and we were able to make our inputs as well before it is final it's final release" (Respondents 004, 2022).

Through the steering committees and workshops, the respondents indicated agreement in the build-up of findings and recommendations, which is the evidence used to respond to policy or programme questions.

4.2.4.3 Access

The access mechanism emphasizes the importance of convenient access to evidence by the decision-makers (ACE & DPME, 2020). Decision makers must have ready access to evidence in the first place to make evidence-informed decisions. Knowledge repositories like the DPME evaluation website repository are commonly used to access the evidence. An important finding was that access to the evaluation reports was found to be easy for those decision-makers who are involved with the evaluation. However, access to other evaluations for other programmes where the decision maker was not involved had challenges. For example, as mentioned in section 2.3.2, only four evaluation reports and three improvement plans out of a possible six are published in the DPME evaluation repository. The following quotes reflected the views of the respondents.

"OK, I think maybe from our side maybe, we can do more internally, but I think that is where it is on the DPME website. So I think maybe that is something that we can do. I think we can also make it available on our website" (Respondent 004, 2022).

"but the way our websites are structured is difficult to really find them. You end up thinking that they are not there, yet they are there" (Respondent 002, 2022).

"We had discussions in our management meetings on what has transpired on the findings and recommendations and how we need to use them going forward. The report is available upon request" (Respondent 008, 2022).

"the evaluation report, remember, it needed a sign-off by EXCO. Now if that exercise did not happen, I doubt very much that anyone could have accessed the report with the exception of the project team" (Respondent 003, 2022).

The two evaluation reports not posted on the DPME website are the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan and the Government Supported Smallholder Farmer Sector. Accessing these reports took the researcher more than a month. In addition, one of the respondents indicated that they also have difficulty accessing these reports that are not on the website (Respondent 012, 2023).

4.2.4.4 Summary of Theme 4

This theme was very important in understanding what mechanisms, according to Langer et al. (2016), support evidence use intervention in EIDM. The finding from this theme showed that within the department, there is limited knowledge of the EIDM concept, which slightly made it difficult for the respondents to provide relevant information on what mechanisms of change are there to promote evidence use of evidence in informed decision making. Only three evidence-use mechanisms, awareness, agreement and access, could be established from the interviews. There was no significant evidence on the other three mechanisms, interaction, ability and institutionalising emanating from the interviews. It is, however, important to note that these other three mechanisms are discussed not as evidence-use mechanisms but as part of strategies to promote evaluation use (section 4.2.6).

4.2.5 Theme 5 - Evidence-Informed Systems or Decision Making

It is also important to note that the department's leadership has the final say on whether to implement or not the evaluation findings based on other factors within and outside the organisation. The final decision makers in the DALRRD is the Executive Committee (EXCO), which comprises all the Deputy Director Generals (DDG) and is chaired by the Director General (DG), the accounting officer. Some of the respondents of this study are part of the EXCO, and their participation provided insight into how evaluation results end at their table for final informed decision making. The respondents indicated that the EXCO is the premier decision maker of the department, and they are responsible for the final approval of the improvement plan (Respondent 007, 2022; Respondents 003, 2022). Therefore, for evaluations to be utilised, EXCO has to approve the improvement plan, and the Director General has to sign off.

> *"I would say decisions are taken at a DDG level because that is where the plans are actually recommended, but I say the final decision rests with the DG. (Respondent 010, 2023).*

> *"If it is a matter of internal policy, it just goes to the EXCO, and then once it is approved by EXCO, the relevant DDG signs off the evaluation report, but if it is departmental policy, it can be signed by the DG, or it can be signed by the minister" (Respondent 002, 2022).*

The respondents also indicated that while strategic decisions are taken at the EXCO level, operational decisions are taken at the Chief Director and Director levels due to the delegation of authority (Respondent 004, 2022). This finding puts the EXCO at the centre of decision making on the evaluation results. For the evaluation to be utilised, the EXCO has to approve the improvement plan and its implementation.

4.2.6 Theme 6 - Practices or Strategies That Promote Evaluation Use

This theme sought to understand the strategies or practices that promote the use of evaluation findings as evidence in decision making within the DALRRD. The respondents provided the current practices that are taking place and proposed other

mechanisms that could be used in the department. This theme responds to the primary and two sub-research questions.

- What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?
- What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making?

The following six sub-themes were identified as the most recurring from the interview responses; evaluation capacity development, participatory and ownership, the appointment of credible evaluators, dissemination of evaluation information, institutionalisation for accountability and monitoring mechanisms for accountability.

4.2.6.1 Evaluation capacity development

The lack of adequate capacity to understand the value of evaluations caused fear among the programme officials. Capacity was identified under theme 2 as one factor influencing evaluation use. Evaluations, in their nature, are judgemental, and the respondents indicated that there was fear that should the evaluation findings not be favourable, it would reflect negatively on their performance. Below are the reflections from the respondents.

> *"so some are not involved because maybe technically you know they are not capacitated to engage the evaluation work so that maybe discourages them from asking a lot of questions" (Respondents 001, 2022).*

> *"Yeah, well, I think the capacity it was it was there, but I think it was limited" (Respondent 004, 2022).*

Fear of adverse evaluation outcomes impacts utilisation (Respondent 006, 2022; Respondent 008, 2022). The respondents gave the following responses.

> *"… most of the programmes are not being evaluated because people feel that things would be exposed" (Respondent 008, 2022).*

> *" .. I have seen people when you evaluate their programs, they take it personally as if you are evaluating them as individuals, so I think that also affects utilisation" (Respondent 006, 2022).*

A capacitated workforce will be able to understand the importance of findings and recommendations of evaluations and view evaluations as contributing to the improvement of programmes and service delivery rather than as a threat to their employment (Respondents 003, 2022).

> *" the department needs to understand the recommendations and the reasons and probably the purpose and objectives why those evaluations were done. That is the first departure point once you understand the purpose and the objectives of doing those evaluations, then each and every person from an SMS level will be very much interested in the recommendations because the recommendations lead us to service delivery improvement of the service deliver" (Respondent 003, 2022).*

4.2.6.2 Participation and ownership

The respondents' involvement in the evaluation process was two-fold, either through the project steering committee or as part of the evaluation interviews. Through the project steering committee, the respondents were able to participate in the entire evaluation process by providing guidance, support and oversight to the external evaluators. Participation in the project steering committee allows a front-row seat to the evaluation and further contributes to evaluation use. Participation in the entire process by the project steering committee members is encouraged (Respondent 001, 2022; Respondent 010, 2023). Under theme 1 (Section 4.1.3), participation in the evaluation is extensively discussed. However, this response below sums up how participation and ownership in the evaluation affect the extent of evaluation utilisation.

> *"Ok, I can say with regard to the evaluation process, I think it needs to be a participatory process. As I said, they need to take ownership of the evaluation as the intervention owner. You need to involve the intervention owner from the beginning up until the end" (Respondents 001, 2022).*

> *" and then also the other thing that will affect its ownership for me, you remember I said in some of these evaluations and attendance of the steering committee was not consistent and also the issue of initiated the evaluation. I*

think it also, to a large extent, affects how or whether findings are utilised or not because I have seen cases where a program manager comes forward and say I want my program to be evaluated; it worked out better, and the utilisation was better" (Respondent 006, 2022).

However, there were also some challenges with participation in that there were inconsistencies in attendance by the project steering committee members (Respondent 006, 2022; Respondent 010, 2023)

"However, there were, to some extent, inconsistencies in terms of the attendance of steering committee meetings. I recall for RECAP, a program manager was a bit shocked with the findings, and it is because, you know, initially you start with them, then along the way, and I do not know whether to say they lost interest or they delegated other staff to attend the meetings" (Respondent 006, 2022).

"OK, these evaluations are pitched at a DDG level but only to find that maybe the DDG will be only attending at an initial stage whereby it is the introduction of the evaluation and lose the whole process" (Respondent 010, 2023).

The project steering committee was established for oversight purposes and to approve the evaluation. The Project Steering committee generally comprises the manager of the evaluand, officials from the M&E unit if it is there and stakeholders of interest from other departments or units (Respondent 001, 2022: Respondent, 007, 2022).

4.2.6.3 The Appointment of Credible Evaluators

Four different external evaluators (section 4.2.3) conducted the evaluations reviewed in the study. The credibility and capacity of the evaluators came under the spotlight as they impacted the quality of the final evaluation report. The quality of the evaluation report influences the utilisation of the findings and recommendations in decision making (Respondent 002, 2022; Respondent 006, 2022; Respondent 010, 2023). The external service providers are selected through a tendering system overseen by the DPME and the custodian department. The quality of evaluators was also discussed under theme 2 (Section 4.2.3) as one of the factors influencing evaluation utilisation.

The following respondents also highlight the importance of evaluator quality in promoting evaluation use, as reflected in the quotes below.

> *"I would say DPME or whoever does a national evaluation appoint the contracting team that's suitable for this work, and we can do it jointly, so DPME and the client department appoint contract jointly so now we agree we have appointed somebody we both agree on has the capacity to do the work" (Respondent 009, 2022).*

> *"I think the other challenge here was when service providers submit a proposal, they put forward certain kinds of people or names, but when during the actual implementation of the evaluation, then you do not find those people, so that also, in a way affects the quality of the evaluation, so those are some of the elements on what influence the utilisation and or non-utilisation" (Respondents 006, 2022).*

The respondents' opinions also reflected satisfaction with the quality of some of the evaluation reports indicating satisfaction with the quality of the evaluators (Respondent 001, 2022; Respondent 002, 2022; Respondent 008, 2022).

4.2.6.4 Dissemination of Evaluation Information

While the evaluation reports are supposed to be published on both the departmental and DPME websites, some are not readily available to the rest of the department officials. Also, on the DPME evaluation website repository, only four of the six evaluations and three improvement plans were published. The stakeholders involved in the evaluation or the programme are the ones who usually have sight of the evaluation report. The importance of publishing reports was reported as a practice promoting transparency and evaluation use (Respondent 001, 2022).

> *"and that is why the evidence mapping process at DPME sometimes faces hurdles because certain reports maybe be a no-no, you know to publicize them and all that, but I think that goes to the heart of transparency in the public sector, not just maybe evaluation reports, but many other reports are transparent are we as the public service" (Respondent 001, 2022).*

" No, it is just a few people, maybe the top management, that would know that such an evaluation is taking place, and this is the feedback, and so forth, so it is not publicized to an extent where all employees of the organization will be aware, and maybe that is something that should be considered going forward so that you know people are held accountable if they do not implement certain things, particularly for programs which have a lot of money" (Respondent 007, 2022).

Accountability is enhanced when the evaluation findings are published per the DPME guidelines, as informed by Respondent 007 (2022).

4.2.6.5 Institutionalisation for Accountability

The institutionalisation of evaluations is one of the practices that have been punted by the respondents, which can contribute to evaluation utilisation. This institutionalisation finding also links well with one of the six evidence-use mechanisms that underly evaluation use interventions proposed by Langer et al. (2016). The responses identified the importance of making evaluations part of the DALRRD through systematised institutionalisation (Respondent 007, 2022). Some of the main reactions to institutionalisation are the following:

"but for evaluation to be taken seriously, institutionalise it otherwise, if it is a side thing, you know nobody will pay attention yeah because remember there are certain things which are done in the organization so if you do not fight to put it in the centre it will just be a side thing" (Respondent 007, 2022).

"so I would say the existence of an evaluation unit in a department also contributes in a positive way and towards the utilisation of evaluation findings" (Respondent 006, 2022).

"Institutionalisation, I think, is a challenge for many departments, not just our department. The focus, unfortunately, is more on monitoring because that is what people interact with on a daily basis, you know, so people do more monitoring than evaluation because evaluation is not done by the officials. It is done somewhere" (Respondent 001, 2022).

The DALRRD currently has an M&E Chief Directorate and an Evaluation Directorate whose role is to champion the institutionalisation of evaluation; however, it has not gained as much traction as hoped (Respondent 001, 2022)

> *"so institutionalisation of evaluation, I can say in the new department has not gained traction because the previous department, like your former DAFF, did not have like evaluation unit. Their evaluations were like they were just doing the concept note, but everything was like commissioned, so with former DRDLR, we were conducting internal evaluations" (Respondent 001, 2022).*

Over and above institutionalisation, one respondent brought up the concept of embedding evaluation into programme design to promote evaluation utilisation. However, this observation was not identified from other responses, and it was added to this report as it is seen to contribute to evaluation utilisation.

> *" I think the most important thing is that when programs are designed or when programs are being implemented, let us embed evaluation there as well so that evaluation should not only be something that is done by the evaluation unit, which is somewhere even the people who are working on the programs let them have an understanding and appreciation of this, and then it makes it easier to evaluate when things were done properly with evaluation in mind" (Respondent 004, 2022).*

One respondent succinctly summarised the importance of institutionalising evaluations, that if there is no institutionalisation, the evaluation results will not be implemented and will disappear over time (Respondent 009, 2022).

4.2.6.6 Monitoring Mechanisms for Accountability

The lack of adequate monitoring of the implementation of the evaluation findings and recommendations brings the question, was there ever adequate use of the evaluation, and were the findings implemented? Therefore, there is a need to have a monitoring mechanism that tracks the implementation of the recommendations beyond developing an improvement plan (Respondent 002, 2022).

" Yeah, so if you put in a plan that would then be monitored as part of your control in terms of making sure that whatever has led you to conduct the evaluation ultimately get to be concluded logically, so then you need to put that planning phase and track it, and it is implementation until it is completed accordingly, and I think that is what we are lacking" (Respondent 002, 2022).

Implementation of accountability mechanisms is essential in contributing to evaluation use, and where they have not been adhered to, there must be consequence management (Respondent 001, 2022).

"I think from an evaluator's point of view accountability mechanisms are important to ensure that officials account because we spend money towards this evaluation. So if things are not moving, there must be reports that go to the higher structures to say so, and so is not implementing anything. I think you know that can also improve, you know, the use of evaluation findings where people account for lack of action. That would also involve your consequence management for those dragging their heels" (Respondent 001, 2022).

The respondents identified the importance of quarterly reporting on the improvement plan as one of the mechanisms for accountability, just as they do with the strategic plan (Respondent 007, 2022). The following responses reflect the views of the respondents.

"Once the improvement plan has been finalised, it must be submitted to DPME, the coordinating department, so that they make sure that it has been developed, and then there must be quarterly reporting. Why can't we do it? I mean, we report on a quarterly basis in terms of our strategic plan" (Respondent 007, 2022).

"I think that the management improvement plan was implemented, but the follow-ups on that became very few and far between over the years. So subsequent to the implementation of the management plan, how many review issues did you have to see if you were achieving the actual recommendations? I would not know" (Respondent 009, 2022).

To explain the importance of reporting, an EXCO member, who is also a respondent, informed of the lack of quarterly reporting on implementing the improvement plan (Respondent 007, 2022).

"OK, for example, that will be food security you understand the actual decision would say on a quarterly basis; we want reports on the implementation of the improvement plan. So you understand reports will be coming every quarter and tabled at EXCO, people discussing those and other decisions that will be coming, but we have never had something like the CASP report we have never had something like that, but the other thing I must tell you CASP is the premier support programme of this department, but until now we don't we do not get any quarterly reports on CASP as the executive committee of this department it is a flaw" (Respondent 007, 2022).

However, other respondents indicated that the Departmental working group is a formal structure established to receive and interrogate reports on the progress of the improvement plan implementation.

"The system of monitoring progress is there. We have the departmental working group, we are satisfied with the system, but we need to improve going forward" (Respondent 001, 2023).

To foster compliance in reporting on evaluation, one respondent argued that an evaluation report should always be part of the agenda in their quarterly review meetings.

"When we have our quarterly review meetings where we assemble this senior management of the department to consider how we have performed as a department for that particular quarter, there must never be a program of quarterly review meetings without something said about evaluations. Institutionalise the concept, which is only when there will be seriousness about it. Otherwise, it will be a side thing, and no one will pay attention" (Respondent 007, 2022).

4.2.6.7 Summary of Theme 6

This theme responds to the research question on strategies and plans to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in the DALRRD. The respondents highlighted the importance of proactively institutionalising evaluations and strengthening the existing monitoring mechanisms for implementing the improvement plan. Also, developing the

capacity of the officials; appointing credible evaluators; participating in the evaluation process and disseminating evaluation information were found to contribute to evaluation use. These findings will further contribute to enhancing evaluation use with the DALRRD.

4.3 Conclusions

The study triangulates the findings emanating from two data collection methods, the semi-structured interviews and the review of the evaluation reports (document analysis). Triangulation strengthens the study's credibility and allows for the validation of the findings. Through these two data collection methods, the study explored a number of issues that influence and promote the practice of utilisation. Also, the findings provided different opinions and perceptions on this study's core attribute: evaluation utilisation and evidence informed decision making. The responses came from the senior management service, which includes both decision makers at the strategic level and implementers at the operation level.

Most respondents indicated that to some extent evaluations were utilised to improve programme practice or policy development. However, the research could not ascertain the extent of utilisation, but there was some evidence of instrumental and conceptual use. There were also strong views that the evaluations were not utilised not only because of the quality of the evaluation but also through non-implementation or development of the improvement plan. Six broad themes were identified from the thematic analysis to explain the findings and they are presented in a tabular format together with their sub-themes as Annexure 4. The themes were; understanding the value of evaluations in the National Evaluation Plan; factors that influence evaluation use; types of evaluation use; mechanisms of change in the use of evaluation findings as evidence in EIDM; evidence-informed systems or decision making, and practices or strategies that promote evaluation use. The major findings show that there is limited utilisation of the evaluation results in decision making across the six evaluations reviewed. This has also been demonstrated in the follow-up on use for accountability has not been adequately implemented per the improvement plans. Also, while the department has used some evaluation results as part of the evidence alternatives in

decision making, the concept of evidence informed decision making has not yet made inroads within the departmental officials.

Overall, there was a great deal of variation in the responses of interview participants. Because each program evaluated was different and the evaluation was done when DAFF and DRDLR were still separate departments, such variance was expected. The EIDM is still a novel concept to the department, and the structures, which are the mechanisms of change that promote the interventions that lead to evidence use, are not yet established. The evidence-use mechanisms identified to a lesser extent are awareness, agreement and access. The respondents highlighted the importance of proactively institutionalising evaluations and strengthening the existing monitoring mechanisms for implementing the improvement plan. The factors that are enablers and barriers to evaluation utilisation were identified, and practices that promote evaluation utilisation were recommended.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section presents the products of describing, analysing and interpreting the research findings. This section complements the presentation of research findings (section 4) but differs in that the research findings section provides the presentation of the findings based on the data research methods and procedures. However, this section provides an explanatory model or theoretical framework for interpreting the findings and reflects on the literature review (Wotela, 2016). The purpose of this research is to explore the utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa. The study also explored the factors that impinge on the utilisation of evaluation findings in DALRRD and recommended strategies to improve the practice of utilisation in evidence informed decision making. The mechanism of evidence use that promotes interventions supporting evidence use was also explored. The primary overarching research question will be responded to after discussing the sub-research questions. The discussion and interpretation of findings will be mainly through the triad of theoretical frameworks, namely the Blake and Ottoson (2009) knowledge utilisation, the Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) Mixed Model of EBDM and the combined analytical framework of Langer et al. (2020) discussed in section 2.9 of Chapter 2. This section also delimits itself to discussing the study findings according to the six research questions. The primary research question aimed to explore the utilisation of evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa. The following five research sub-questions are also discussed.

- What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?
- What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?
- What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making?
- What implementation mechanisms exist in the DALRRD that influence the use of evidence from evaluation reports?
- How is evidence-informed decision making undertaken in the DALRRD?

The findings of the study presented in Chapter 4 were addressed through the six broad themes, namely (i) understanding the value of evaluation in the NEP, (ii) factors influencing evaluation utilisation, (iii) types of evaluation use, (iv) evidence use mechanisms in the use of evaluation findings in EIDM, (v) evidence informed systems or decision making and (vi) practices or strategies that promote evaluation use. However, in this chapter, the discussion of findings is presented according to the six research questions and is informed by the outcome of three data collection processes, literature review, interviews and review of evaluation reports. The triangulation of these processes provides rigour to this discussion.

5.1 What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?

The response to the research question is reflected in the findings from the interview process as captured in the first theme, "*understanding the value of evaluation in the NEP*," and the second theme, "*factors that influence evaluation utilisation*". The respondents provided their opinions based on their involvement in the evaluation. The value of an evaluation is judged by the usability of its findings and recommendations in practice (Blake & Ottoson, 2009; DPME, 2019b; Patton, 2015). First, the respondents' knowledge of evaluations in the NEP and their opinions on the value and importance of evaluation was sought to understand evaluation use. The different interview insights proved that evaluation meant different things to different respondents. However, the study's findings generally show that all respondents had some knowledge of and understood the value and importance of an evaluation. The respondents indicate, amongst others, that the value of an evaluation is that it provides feedback on the design, lessons of what went wrong, how the programme can be improved, value for money, and the impact it has on the recipients. This observation is in line with the views expressed by Gertler et al. (2016), who stated that evaluations provide an assessment of an intended, ongoing or finalised program, project or policy and often answer questions related to the appropriateness of design, the implementation status and impact of the results. The knowledge and appreciation of the importance of an evaluation put the end user, decision maker or programme

implementer in a better position to utilise the evaluation findings. The importance of evaluation can be summarised by the observation made by Respondent 007, 2022.

> *"…and that is the reason why I am saying the evaluations were indispensable now the results from those evaluations are supposed to determine are supposed to inform us you know, based on the results what course of action we must take going forward yeah, so those evaluations are very important" (Respondent 007, 2022).*

The study found different factors that influence the utilisation or underutilisation of the evaluation findings in evidence informed decision making in the DALRRD. The pattern of factors that emerged repeatedly is briefly discussed below. Alkin and King (2017, p. 445) identified the following evaluation use factors "users; human factors: the evaluator; evaluation activities; and organizational/social/political factors." The study found that these four factors (section 2.5.2) interplay in determining evaluation use.

5.1.1 Initiators of the evaluation

The evaluations in the NEP may be initiated by the DPME or the custodian department (DALRRD). Evaluations in government are anchored amongst other uses in improving accountability and contributing to more effective decision making. The study's findings show that most evaluations of this study were initiated within the programme and then later proposed to the department and then to the DPME. Initiating the evaluation signals an interest in accountability and improvement, which has the potential to contribute to the achievement of evaluation utilisation. The respondents indicated that utilisation of evaluation is better when the programme managers initiate the evaluation rather than the DPME.

> *"I have seen in cases where a program manager comes forward and say I want my program to be evaluated. It worked out better, and the utilisation was better compared to a situation where you find the M & E unit within the department submitting concepts to DPME to include in the national evaluation plan [pause] without much support from the program managers themselves" (Respondent 006, 2022).*

Initiation of the evaluation provides for ownership, and where managers have control, they are bound to support the evaluation process and utilisation.

5.1.2 Participation in the evaluation process

The respondents participated in various capacities in the evaluation process, which allowed them to understand the process. Participation was in various forms, with most respondents participating through the evaluation Steering Committee while others were involved in the conceptualisation or as informants of the evaluation. Participation in the evaluation allows for further learning, and the respondents are immersed in the evaluation process even though they were not evaluators. The knowledge utilisation framework of Blake & Ottoson (2009) posits that evaluations must be participatory for them to be of use. Participation strengthens the ownership of the evaluation, and it further allows for the buy-in of the evaluation findings and is important in contributing to evaluation use. The following were the responses from the participants about their involvement in the evaluation.

> *".....after they crafted their findings, they presented the first draft to us, and we were looking at their first draft and start questioning some areas, then they went back and pick up those areas that they left within the study and bring back into the report that is how we involved in the finalisation of the of the report" (Respondent 008, 2022).*

> *"... I think even at the end of the evaluation, we were provided with the report before it was published, and we were able to make our inputs as well before its final release" (Respondents 004, 2022).*

> *"The recommendations were actually workshopped that I think there was a workshop for that report where we got to interrogate the report and cross-examine the responses and the recommendations" (Respondent 010, 2023).*

Participating in an evaluation facilitates use as the stakeholder's behaviour towards the evaluation changes due to participating in the evaluation process (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). This type of evaluation use emanating from participation is called process use, and some respondents indicated that participating in the evaluation capacitated their understanding of the evaluation.

5.1.3 Attitude towards evaluations

The attitude toward the evaluation focuses mainly on the behaviour of the respondents towards the evaluation should the evaluation findings not be favourable. The respondents' knowledge of an evaluation and its implications was established in section 4.2.1. However, there was fear of the impact of unfavourable findings on their job security; this led to the view that evaluations as a disciplinary process when findings are negative. For example, Respondent 006, 2022, reported that a senior manager in one of the meetings indicated that heads should roll due to unfavourable evaluation findings. The attitude of fear is one of the factors that lead to the non-use of the evaluation findings, which could be linked to an inadequate capacity to understand the importance of evaluations. Another dimension of fear was the fear of making decisions when faced with the evaluation findings. This was revealed by respondent 007, 2022, *"The general culture in the public service people fear to take decisions."* The culture of fear of making decisions or implementing the outcomes of the evaluation contributes to the non-utilisation of evaluation. The Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) mixed model of EBDM indicates that a manager's personal values, experience, culture and judgement affect the use of empirical evidence in management decisions. In order to promote utilisation, managers' behaviour and attitudes toward evaluation and the application of evaluation findings should be favourable. (Langer et al., 2016) Science of Using Science framework under the combined analytical framework also indicates that a change in a decision-maker's behaviour influences evidence use. The change in behaviour can be through an interplay of one of the three conditions: capability, opportunity and motivation (COM – B system).

5.1.4 Quality of evaluators

The evaluation reports of the study were developed by four external evaluators selected through a tender system and considered competent. This study did not include the evaluators as part of the respondents as it only wanted the views of the departmental officials in the senior management service. The study's findings were that the evaluators had the capacity and were competent to produce credible good, quality reports. However, some respondents differed with this observation and felt the

evaluator quality was not at the level of NEP evaluations. Blake and Ottoson (2009) inform that understanding the evaluand by the evaluator matters in knowledge utilisation, and this begs the question if the evaluator should be a subject matter expert or just an evaluation expert. The evaluator being a subject matter expert was also raised by Respondent 008, 2022, who questioned if there is a difference between academic evaluators and subject matter expert evaluators. The quality of the evaluator has an impact on the quality of the evaluation report. Alkin and King (2017) list the credibility of the evaluator and the rapport they have with the potential users as one of the four factors determining evaluation use. The evaluation reports in this study were assessed for quality, and out of the six evaluations, four were of good quality (section 4.1), scoring above 3 on the evaluation quality assessment score. Only one report had an EQAT score of 2,79 and was deemed to be of inadequate quality. The quality of evaluation reports which impact on use has also been linked to the quality of the evaluators (Dhakal, 2014; Kelly & Kelly, 2017). The Mixed Model of EBDM by Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) states that the best robust evidence must be from a sound methodological process and be replicable and transparent. All these conditions refer to the quality of evidence which capable external evaluators should generate.

5.1.5 Availability of resources and capacity

The availability of financial and human resources was one factor that influenced the utilisation of evaluation findings. Therefore, for the findings and recommendations of the evaluation to be implemented, there is a budget and human resource requirement, as reflected in the quotes below.

> *"You can bring evaluations and come up with good recommendations, but you find that the resources are just not enough, and that can make the intervention owner to defer almost everything on the evaluation simply because you know there is not enough funding or there is no capacity to implement" (Respondents 001, 2022).*

> *"the second thing may be the issue of resources. Some of the recommendations they would require to deploy more resources, either financial or human and*

both of them are obviously interlinked. You cannot increase your capacity without increasing your financial resource" (Respondent 002, 2022).

Evaluation findings compete with other programmes within the DALRRD for limited financial resources. If sufficient resources are not budgeted to implement the evaluation findings, this will lead to deferment of the implementation or complete abandonment of the recommendation, thus impacting the use of the evaluations. The knowledge utilisation framework of Blake and Ottoson (2009) identifies resources and time as some of the key criteria for valuing evaluation use. When recommendations are deferred and not implemented on time, they are overtaken by events. The Mixed model of EBDM finds that a manager's use of evidence in individual decision-making is a function of capacity (training, education, experience and judgement) (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012). The capacity of managers to utilise evaluation findings in decision making is important. This links with one of the COM- B behaviour conditions of capability which state that the manager should have the capability and skills to search for evidence (Langer et al., 2020).

5.1.6 Leadership

Leaders who are the decision-makers who embrace the importance of evaluation and support the evaluation process influence evaluation use. The study's findings are that there was buy-in from leadership in implementing the evaluation findings, as shown by the high number of Improvement plans developed for the evaluation reports. The eptitude of decision-makers who are the leaders in the department was found to contribute to effective evaluation use. The evaluation findings and recommendations are approved for implementation at the departmental Executive Committee (EXCO) level, which is the premier decision maker. The non-development of the Improvement plans for the Agriculture ERP evaluation indicated a lack of buy-in from the leadership, as quoted by the following two respondents.

"so that study was very key on the evaluation of the implementation of the ERP and its recommendations, now the status quo just continues as such because this report was never taken into action by the senior management" (Respondent 003, 2022).

"I think if we could have had a better check of the evaluation, one did feel that also that lack there and then lastly, I think it is a buy-in from management as well as they would have pushed harder for this ERP evaluation to be done and completed and we would have had the management improvement plan" (Respondent 010, 2023).

The support and participation of decision-makers from the department play a role in the utilisation of evaluations. The importance of leadership in an organisation as a factor in influencing evaluation utilisation as evidence in informing decision making on policies and programmes has been described to be one of the important factors (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012; Blake & Ottoson, 2009). As the branch leader where evaluations are conducted, the Deputy Director General should be part of the entire evaluation process to add depth and seriousness to the evaluation.

5.1.7 Practicality of recommendations

The clarity of recommendations is very important in contributing to the evaluation's usefulness. Recommendations in an evaluation are used in developing improvement plans, a document that legitimises evaluation use. The study's findings are that most of the recommendations were clearly articulated, and Peck and Gorzalski (2009) state that clearly articulated recommendations indicate the evaluation's achievement. However, there were too many recommendations recorded per the evaluation report. A long list of recommendations is most likely to result in a weak uptake or inclusion into the improvement plan due to other competing priorities within the department (Banda, 2022). Furthermore, not all recommendations in the evaluation reports were captured in the improvement plan, which, therefore, brings into question whether there is a need for too many recommendations in an evaluation report. Also, recommendations are usually framed as suggestions and are not directives to the department hence non-use for some of them (Feinstein, 2019).

5.1.8 Acceptance of evaluation findings and recommendations

The evaluation findings alone will not lead to evaluation use but need to be accepted at the project steering committee and EXCO levels before use can occur. Accepting

the evaluation findings is critical in informing the decision making on developing improvement plans which are the first step in the utilisation of evaluations. There was an overwhelming acceptance of the evaluation findings and recommendations. This was expected due to the stakeholders' participation, including the respondents, in the evaluation process (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). Negotiations occurred in cases where there was a dispute about the evaluation findings, and a consensus was agreed upon after submitting outstanding information to the evaluators. The findings accepted by the project steering committee are recorded in the improvement plan, which contributes to evaluation utilisation.

5.1.9 Improvement plans

Improvement plans are used as the first step in the utilisation of evaluations, but there is no systematic programme that tracks the active implementation of the improvement plan within the department (Respondent 006, 2022). The development of improvement plans is the basis for the effective use of evaluations (Dhakal, 2014). The Agriculture ERP evaluation, out of all the evaluation reports reviewed in this study, did not have an improvement plan developed, meaning there was an absence of a legitimate document to track any use of the evaluation. The non-development of the improvement plan for the Agriculture ERP evaluation questions the use of the findings and the accountability thereof. The improvement plan provides a list and timelines of improvements to be made to the programme based on the recommendations. Timelines are important for valuing use and allow for the ease of tracking achievement in implementing the improvement plan (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). The improvement plan is to track accountability and intention to improve the ERP; hence its absence shows there are no consequences in the systems for not developing one. Without the improvement plan, the R1.5m spent conducting the evaluation can be equally classified as a fruitless expenditure and is considered a failed evaluation (Patton, 2015).

5.2 What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?

The response to the research question is reflected in the findings from the review of the evaluation and the literature review as captured in the second theme, "*factors that influence evaluation utilisation*". The responses to the research question (section 5.1 above) also contribute to answering this research question on evaluation features. Alkin and King (2017) identify evaluation as one factor contributing to evaluation utilisation. The study found four further criteria that can be used when reviewing the evaluations for their usefulness. These criteria form the checklist (Annexure 2) used to analyse the six evaluations of the study. The four criteria developed for this study are (i) evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated; (ii) an improvement plan is in place; (iii) evaluation quality assessment score, and (iv) published on the DPME website. These criteria were carefully selected, and the study found that for evaluation use to occur, the findings and recommendations must be clearly articulated and agreed upon (Peck & Gorzalski, 2009). All six evaluations clearly articulated evaluation findings and recommendations, as discussed in section 5.1.7.

The second criterion, the improvement plan, is important because it marks the first step made by DALRRD to acknowledge the evaluation's importance and utilise the evaluation findings. The improvement plan must be in place as it forms the legitimate basis for the utilisation of evaluation (Dhakal, 2014). However, in this study, only the Agriculture ERP evaluation did not develop an improvement plan. The absence of the improvement plan for the ERP evaluation has been discussed in section 5.1.9, and the findings were that its absence affected the legitimate utilisation of the evaluation. However, it is important to note that while the improvement plan was developed for the other five evaluation reports reviewed, there is no guarantee that all the findings were utilised. The outcomes of the improvement plan report were corroborated with the interview outcomes (Section 4.2) to ascertain if the evaluation findings were used.

The third criterion is the presence of the quality assessment score. According to DPME's evaluation quality assessment methods, evaluations with a score of 3 and higher are regarded as acceptable and of high quality (DPME, 2017). The effectiveness of an evaluation in aiding decision-making is influenced by its quality

(Bundi et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020). The ERP evaluation was the only evaluation not subjected to the quality assessment score (section 2.4.3). The quality of an evaluation denotes the appropriateness of the evaluation method used, its credibility and its acceptance by the users (Alkin & King, 2017; Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012). In this study, four evaluations scored above 3, and the CASP evaluation was the only one that scored 2.79, which is considered inadequate quality. Alkin and King (2017) posit that an evaluation user should not use the results of a technically inadequate evaluation. One of the respondents indicated that despite the low score, the CASP evaluation had some use, while the other stated that they did not use the evaluation findings. This study could not determine whether non-use was because of the quality of the evaluation or if it was other factors. Chelimsky (1997), as cited by (Kelly & Kelly, 2017), states a paradox in linking evaluation quality with use. He states that poor quality or mediocre evaluations can still be used if the findings fit a particular preconception or a political narrative. However, at the same time, good quality evaluations can be ignored or not used if the findings are uncomfortable to the decision makers. In some instances, what seems to be a non-use of evaluations may be due to the inadequate capacity of the evaluator, thus producing poor-quality evaluations (Alkin & King, 2017). Conducting quality assessments has the benefit of learning and improving evaluation quality to standards of best evaluation practices (Leslie et al., 2015).

The fourth and final criterion is the publication of the evaluation reports on the DPME website. This criterion was significant in that it allows for transparency and accountability so that the public can know what is happening to the programmes which are supposed to service their needs. The DPME evaluation guidelines state that all public sector evaluations in the NEP and their improvement plans should be published. In this study, regarding publishing evaluation, it was found that only four evaluations are published in the DPME evaluation website repository, while the two, the agriculture ERP and government-supported smallholder farmer sector evaluations, are not published. In addition, only two improvement plans were accessed and published on the DPME website, while the other three were not published, and one was never developed. The non-publishing of the two evaluation reports also produced contrasting outcomes; the Agriculture ERP was never published and had no legitimate use since no improvement plan was developed, while the diagnostic smallholder evaluation was

also not published but has been extensively used in overhauling the government farmer support programmes. This evaluation also informed the development of the National Policy on Comprehensive Producer Development Support. Publishing evaluations and improvement plans may not directly influence evaluation use, but it places transparency and accountability to implement at the forefront. Goldman et al. (2019) note that the extent to which evaluation reports that have been made public are used is unknown, according to Goldman et al. (2019). This is because there is no publishing of the progress in the implementation of such evaluations.

5.3 What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making?

The findings of the study that respond to this research question are well captured in the following two themes, *theme 4 – mechanisms of change in the use of evaluation findings as evidence in EIDM* and *theme 6 – practices and strategies that promote evaluation use*. Findings linked to theme 4 are discussed under section 5.4, which responds to research question 4. Above the existing practices in the DALRRD, like having evaluation steering committees and the departmental working group, five strategies presented in the findings section (section 4.2.6) were identified as contributing to evaluation utilisation in evidence-informed decision making; evaluation capacity development, the appointment of credible evaluators, dissemination of evaluation information, institutionalisation for accountability and monitoring mechanisms for accountability. These strategies, informed by the respondents' interviews, are discussed below:

5.3.1 Evaluation Capacity Development

The findings were that there is insufficient capacity to engage in the evaluation work, as highlighted by the respondents (section 4.2.6.1). Developing the capacity to produce and use evaluation information in decision-making can improve evaluation utilisation. Building the evaluation capacity of those involved in programme implementation and decision-making will promote utilisation, as punted by Kelly and Kelly (2017), who noted that organisations with programmes being evaluated need to build the capacity

to understand and engage with evaluations to promote evaluation use and build the value of evaluation processes. The capacity to use the evaluation findings in decision making in the public sector requires further and continuous development to minimise the risk of falling into a capability trap where there is insufficient capacity to use the evaluation outputs (Goldman et al., 2019). Decision-makers need to capacity to understand what counts as credible evidence that can be used to promote interventions that support decision making (Blake & Ottoson, 2009). The mechanisms of evidence-use framework developed by (Langer et al., 2020) also highlight the importance of having the capacity to discern the mechanism that decision-makers need to have in promoting those interventions that support evidence-informed decision making. Baba and HakemZadeh (2012), a Mixed model of EBDM, avers that a manager's use of evidence in individual decision-making is a function of training, education, experience and judgement, which all indicate capacity. Therefore, the capacity of managers to utilise evaluation findings in decision making is important.

5.3.2 Appointment of credible evaluators

This report has discussed the quality of evaluators extensively (section 4.2.3), and the findings were that a majority of external evaluators appointed had the capacity to conduct the evaluation. However, some respondents indicated that some evaluators' capacity was inadequate to conduct the evaluation. The issue of evaluators being subject matter experts was also raised as important in understanding the evaluand. Assessing the role of evaluators through the Blake & Ottoson (2009) knowledge utilisation lens, evaluators do the actual evaluation and develop the findings and recommendations of an evaluation must have good knowledge of the evaluand. According to Dhakal (2014), the value of evaluation findings is also dependent on the calibre of the evaluation reports, which is a result of the evaluators' independence and capacity for evaluation. The quality of evaluators is also highlighted by Alkin and King (2017), who mention that the quality of evaluators is one of the important factors affecting evaluation utilisation in decision making.

5.3.3 Dissemination of evaluation information

To improve the use of evaluations, they must be publicised so that the citizens will know what the outcome is and what plans are put in place to improve the evaluand. The publication of evaluations in the NEP on the DPME website is part of the evaluation guidelines. However, two evaluation reports in this study were not published on the website, and only two Improvement plans were published. The non-publishing of the evaluations and the improvement plans goes against the spirit of transparency and accountability (Leslie et al., 2015). For example, the Agriculture ERP evaluation was never published, and no improvement plan was developed for it, while the diagnostic evaluation of the smallholder farmer sector was also not published, but the improvement plan was developed. Langer et al. (2016) state the importance of decision-makers accessing effective communication and evidence-use interventions in the mechanism of evidence-use framework. The evaluation publication on the DPME website is one of those interventions that promote access to evaluation evidence. The evaluations are conducted at an enormous cost, with the RADP and CASP evaluations costing R2.5m and R2m, respectively. This expenditure needs to be justified by making the evaluation findings known to the public. The knowledge utilisation framework of Blake and Ottoson (2009) informs that knowledge utilisation is evaluated through the dissemination and diffusion of evaluation findings (section 2.9.9.1). The dissemination and diffusion of knowledge are part of the factors that can address the challenges of underutilisation of knowledge from evaluation findings. The diffusion of evaluation knowledge is linked to knowledge utilisation.

5.3.4 Institutionalisation for accountability

The institutionalisation of evaluations was found to be not very strong in the DALRRD and was recommended by most respondents as a practice that can promote the utilisation of evaluation in decision making. The DALRRD has a fully-fledged evaluation directorate within the M&E chief directorate; however, the institutionalisation of evaluation is still a long way to go. The institutionalisation of evaluations in the South African public sector is the mandate of DPME, and Dhakal (2014) argues that institutionalisation evaluations in the public sector are important in

improving the use of evaluations. The institutionalisation of the evaluation function in the DALRRD will allow for evaluations to be treated as an important function for accountability and to be able to track progress on implementation (Goldman et al., 2019). Respondent 009, 2022, indicated that if the evaluation function is not institutionalised, the evaluation findings will not be implemented and will eventually disappear over time. Institutionalising is one of the evidence use mechanisms punted by Langer et al. (2016) in that it influences decision making structures and processes within the DALRRD. The structures can be in the form of evaluation audit committees with a similar mandate to the Audit Committee to allow evaluations to be taken seriously and utilised. Goldman et al. (2019) believe that management in the public sector needs to be open-minded and commit to institutionalising evaluation by establishing Evaluation Committees as a formal management structure where evaluation evaluations will be served. Institutionalisation is part of the organisational factors Alkin and King (2017) identified that influence evaluation use. Organisations with institutionalised evaluation were found to be more likely to use the evaluation than those without Loud and Mayne (2013) as cited by (Kelly & Kelly, 2017). Institutionalisation is one of the contextual factors identified in the Mixed Model of EBDM by Baba and HakemZadeh (2012) that influences the use of empirical evidence in decision-making, while Langer et al. (2016) identify institutionalisation as one of the evidence-use mechanisms that influence decision making structures and process in an organisation.

5.3.5 Monitoring mechanisms for accountability

The study's findings were that there is inadequate monitoring and tracking of the implementation of the Improvement plans. Challenges to tracking implementation can also be linked to the department's weak institutional structures that are inadequate to monitor implementation. For example, the respondents indicated that information tends to disappear over time in a department with a high staff turnover if there are no institutional structures (Respondent 007, 2022). The knowledge utilisation framework of Blake and Ottoson (2009) posits that tracking evaluation findings ensures that the evaluations are used effectively. According to Goldman et al. (2019), reporting on the improvement plan must be strictly adhered to, and a more robust system to track its

implementation and institutionalisation will assist. One of the thought-provoking responses from Respondent 009 was, "*So What*". This was when he informed the researcher that the improvement plans had been developed, but beyond that, nothing happened and there was no record of implementation.

5.4 What evidence-use mechanisms exist in the DALRRD that influence the use of evidence from evaluation reports?

The evaluation findings that respond to the research question are categorised in *theme 4 – evidence use mechanism in the use of evaluation findings in EIDM.* Langer et al. (2016) analytical framework is used in this study to explore the evidence use interventions, which promote the practice of utilising evidence in decision making. In this study, the evaluation findings and recommendations are the evidence that decision-makers need for informed decision making. The six mechanisms of change that support decision makers' use of evaluation evidence, as developed by Langer et al. (2016), are; awareness, agreement, access, interaction, ability and institutionalising. The concept of evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM) and the six mechanisms of change were briefly explained to the respondents to assist them in having a grasp of this research question. The study found that the respondents have heard of the EIDM concept and unconsciously practice it; however, they were unclear about what it is and confused it with a portfolio of evidence. The importance of the evidence-use mechanism is that it identifies areas that decision-makers need to focus on to improve the uptake of evidence when making informed decisions. The concept of EIDM needs to be introduced into the department, and institutionalisation of evaluations will assist in this endeavour. Based on the interviews with respondents, the study could only identify three evidence-use mechanisms related to the use of evaluation evidence in decision making: awareness, agreement and communication/access.

The awareness mechanism emphasises how crucial it is for decision-makers to value the concept of EIDM. (Langer et al., 2016). Furthermore, it aims to build awareness and positive attitudes towards EIDM interventions (ACE & DPME, 2020). The study found that there is scarce evidence for awareness of the interventions that support the

practice of EIDM. The departmental M&E unit indicated that through its departmental working group, they conduct workshops to sensitise departmental officials on the value and benefits of evaluation evidence (Respondent 001, 2022). The DALRRD needs to create awareness within its structures of how evaluation evidence can be used in decision making.

The study identified agreement as the second mechanism, which aims to foster knowledge and agreement on the type of evidence required to address questions pertaining to programs or policies (Langer et al., 2016). The evidence generated from the evaluations was an agreement between the evaluators and the project steering committee. The importance of co-producing evidence between the evaluators and project staff allows for better acceptance of the findings and recommendations, which contributes to evaluation use. Unfortunately, even after explanation, the limited knowledge of EIDM could not provide any new information beyond the project steering committee on how the agreement mechanism can be further used to support interventions that promote evidence use.

The final mechanism identified during the interview was access and communication. According to Langer et al. (2016) framework, this mechanism emphasises the significance of decision-makers accessing and communicating evidence effectively while still having convenient access. Decision makers must have ready access to evidence in the first place to make evidence-informed decisions. Knowledge repositories like the DPME evaluation website repository are commonly used to access the evidence. An important finding was that access to the evaluation reports was found to be easy for those decision-makers who are involved with the evaluation. However, access to other evaluations for other programmes where the decision maker was not involved had challenges. For example, as mentioned in section 2.3.2, only four evaluation reports and three improvement plans out of a possible six are published in the DPME evaluation repository. For decision-makers to make evidence-informed decisions, they must have access to evidence in the first place. However, the existence of evidence does not guarantee that decision-makers will use it, especially if they are unaware of this evidence or have no access to it, hence the importance of access (ACE & DPME, 2020).

5.5 How is evidence-informed decision making undertaken in the DALRRD?

Weiss (1972, p318), as cited by (Alkin & King, 2016), made a point that "The basic rationale for evaluation is that it provides information for action. Its primary justification is that it contributes to rationalising decision-making unless it gains serious hearing when program decisions are made, it fails in its major purpose". The fifth theme under the study's findings, *"evidence-informed decision making",* responds to this research question. The premier decision maker of the department on evaluations is the EXCO, which makes decisions based on the recommendations made by the project steering committee. For evaluation to be used, the improvement plans must be approved, budgeted, and captured as part of the departmental annual performance plans. The study found that while the evaluations are pitched at the EXCO level, the EXCO members generally do not consistently participate in the evaluation process, as reported by Respondent 010, 2023.

> *"OK, these evaluations are pitched at a DDG level but only to find that maybe the DDG will be only attending at an initial stage whereby it is the introduction of the evaluation and lose the whole process" (Respondent 010, 2023).*

5.6 To what extent evaluation findings and recommendations have been used as part of evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa?

The above primary research question for the study is informed the *theme 3 – types of evaluation use*, of the research findings. In response to this theme, the classical work of Weiss (1998) describes knowledge utilisation through the typologies of instrumental, conceptual and symbolic use. In addition, process use is another typology used to determine the extent of evaluation use (Patton, 2015). These four categories of evaluation use are described extensively in the literature review (section 2.5.1).

The study's main findings were that there is some evidence of all four types of use when decision-makers are faced with evaluation findings. There was limited use of the

evaluation findings in almost all the evaluations reviewed in this study. Onyura (2020) states that evaluation use depends on the intended users' interest and the evaluation type. This study has three types of evaluations; implementation, impact and diagnostic (section 2.3.1) and two intended user erstwhile departments (DAFF and DRDLR) of DALRRD. The semi-structured interviews provided evidence of conceptual use in all six evaluations, followed by instrumental use in four evaluations and the least recorded was the process use in two evaluations. These forms or evaluations use are not mutually exclusive, there can be more than one use in an evaluation, and there can also be interaction among each other, as seen in Table 10, where four evaluations have evidence of three evaluation typologies (Onyura, 2020). The first three typologies, instrumental, conceptual and symbolic, are associated with the findings of the evaluation of the intervention implemented (Davis et al., 2022). The observation by Davis et al.(2022) helps explain why conceptual and instrumental use were more evident in almost all the evaluations because evaluations are carried out with the primary purpose of utilising the findings for improvement.

The conceptual use of evaluations was the main evaluation use type identified in the study, as alluded to above. It takes a more educational form in contributing to having new knowledge about the evaluand (Davis et al., 2022; Díez et al., 2016; D'Ostie-Racine et al., 2016; Weiss, 1998). The study respondents indicated that the evaluation helped them better understand their programmes, and in some instances, new policies were borne out of the evaluation. For example, the RADP evaluation influenced the land development and post-settlement support policy. In contrast, the National Policy on Comprehensive Producer Development Support was influenced by the diagnostic evaluation of the smallholder farmer sector, a synthesis of the other agriculture NEP evaluations conducted on MAFISA, CASP and RADP. The MAFISA evaluation informed some sections of the DALRRD agriculture agro-processing master plan and the blended finance system (Respondent 004, 2022).

The study also found limited instrumental use, which involves making decisions based on the direct application of the evaluation findings (Davis et al., 2022). Some changes were made to the evaluands as a direct implementation of the evaluation findings. Instrumental use is the most common use for decisions making as it is all the direct

use of the findings to address the challenges or make improvements to the evaluand. The respondents indicated that the value of an evaluation is to improve their programmes. Those who embrace evaluations consider them an indispensable tool that helps to improve programme delivery (Respondent 007, 2022). The evidence of instrumental use albeit limited shows that some of the evaluations were taken seriously and that the evaluation evidence changed the way the programme was implemented. Evaluations are carried out mainly to use their findings to improve the programme or policy, decision making, and accountability. Instrumental use is at the heart of evaluations, and the respondents confirmed this by indicating that there were changes in programme design, resource allocation and the implementation of the project (Respondent 002, 2022; Respondent 006, 2022; Respondent 013, 2023).

There was limited symbolic and process use of evaluations in decision making. For example, through symbolic use, the agriculture evaluations in the NEP raised the profile of agriculture farmer support interventions in the country. Symbolic use is associated with securing political status (Davis et al., 2022). There was no evidence that the evaluation was conducted as a box-checking mechanism or for political capital. However, the failure to see the Agriculture ERP evaluation to its logical conclusion also begs the question of whether the evaluation was conducted as a box-checking mechanism. The absence of the improvement plan, a legitimate document to implement the Agriculture ERP evaluation findings and recommendations, places the entire evaluation in jeopardy of non-use. The diagnostic evaluation on the smallholder farmer sector had some symbolic or political use, where the evaluation findings contributed to the merger of the DAFF and DRDLR into the current department DALRRD (Respondent 012, 2023). Process use is another evaluation utilisation type that manifests through the behaviour and knowledge changes of the programme manager or those involved in the evaluation due to their participation. There was evidence of process use through increased participant capacity to use evaluative logic. The importance of process use is that it increases acceptance and understanding of evaluations, directly influencing evaluation use. The low evidence on process use was because some respondents were not involved in the entire evaluation process, but those involved indicated that they gained knowledge.

"I got empowered a lot by participating in the project steering committee. It was extremely helpful to understand what evaluation is and how I can use it. I have used the learnings to my own advantage" (Respondents 012, 2023).

Overall, the study found that there is limited utilisation of evaluation findings in evidence informed decision making in the DALRRD. The four categories of evaluation utilisation proposed by the classical work of Weiss are evident in the utilisations of this study; however, the extent of evaluation use could not be verified as this research was only limited to the interviews and review of the evaluation reports described in Chapter 3. Furthermore, the research did not review the departmental strategic and annual performance plans, which are the documents that DALRRD use as a guide to meeting its strategic objectives and goals, thus fulfilling its mandate. It is also worth noting that while the intention of evaluations is that they are used, this is not always the case, and failure to utilise the evaluation can be due to other factors (Alkin & King, 2017). For example, the agriculture ERP evaluation had some significant recommendations for use but was never used, and one of the reasons behind that is the inept leadership that failed to see the evaluation through the improvement plan and assessment stage. Therefore, this led to the non-use of the majority of the recommendations as there was no legitimate document to inform its use.

The evaluations conducted in the NEP are costly in terms of both financial and human resources. The CASP evaluation cost R2.5m, The CRDP R1.8m, and the RADP R2.5m; the values of the other three evaluations could not be established. The non-utilisation of the evaluation's findings means the whole exercise was fruitless as these funds could have been deployed to address some citizen needs. Evaluations are about accountability and transparency; accountability is compromised where the evaluation evidence is not used. Evaluation evidence provides evidence on what works; hence non-use means the continuous perpetuation of inefficiencies as described by Respondent 001, (2022).

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter provides an analytical discussion of the study's findings presented in Chapter 4. The discussion of the findings was guided by the six research question questions to understand the problem statement. The six themes identified in Chapter 4 provided the basis for answering the research questions, and some themes featured in more than one research question. In addition, the data from the review of evaluation reports, literature review and semi-structured interviews were triangulated to explain the observed findings. The checklist for reviewing the evaluation reports provided four key criteria that can be used to assist in assessing evaluation utility. The theoretical framework is underpinned by the Blake and Ottoson (2009) knowledge utilisation framework, the Baba & HakemZadeh (2012) Mixed Model of EBDM framework and the Langer et al. (2016) framework on evidence-use mechanisms. The study also used other theories around evaluation utilisation and evidence-informed decision making to augment the three frameworks mentioned earlier. In conclusion, the analysis of the research findings explored the factors that influence the utilisation of evaluation findings in decision making, the evidence informed decision making process in the DALRRD, the extent of evaluation utilisation and proposed strategies for how the DALRRD can further utilise evaluations in evidence informed decision making. Evaluation utilisation in the DALRRD is influenced by both internal and external factors to the organisation, The decision maker's preferences, capacity and behaviour are also at play while the quality or the evaluation reports and evaluators also contribute to the utility of the evaluations (Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012; Blake & Ottoson, 2009; Langer et al., 2020).

CHAPTER 6 – SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter summarises the research report, offers conclusions based on the findings underpinned by the six research questions and finally provides recommendations for further issues to be addressed by the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development, including opportunities for further research. The research aimed to explore and understand the utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-informed decision-making in the DALRRD, South Africa. This study is premised on the fact that there is inadequate empirical knowledge on the utilisation of evaluation findings in evidence informed decision making in the DALRRD. The study followed a qualitative research strategy focused on reviewing six evaluation reports using a checklist and conducting semi-structured interviews with 13 purposively selected respondents with front-row knowledge of the evaluations. The DALRRD gave the permission to conduct the study, and the University of Witwatersrand also issued an ethical clearance certificate classifying the research as having minimal risk to the participants. All data were ethically collected, and signed informed consent was provided. In addition, past and current studies were reviewed as part of the literature to help guide the theoretical framework and the development of research, interview questions and themes of the study. The semi-structured interviews provided valuable data on the respondents' experiences regarding evaluation utilisation and evidence informed decision making in the DALRRD. The interview data were triangulated with the data emanating from the review of the evaluation reports and the literature review.

The literature review provided background information and scholarly articles on past and current studies that lend to this research. The scoping of the literature was mainly focused on evaluations in the public sector, evaluation utilisation and evidence informed decision making. The literature review provided insights into the theoretical framework to help explain some of the observed phenomena. The literature review generated a number of hits around the topic of evaluation utilisation, thus indicating interest in evaluations. The study area, the DALRRD, has not been extensively studied,

but its erstwhile departments, DAFF and DRDLR, have been the subject of many evaluation studies. Below is a summary of the key findings of the study.

6.1 Summary of research findings

The analysis of the research findings was presented in Chapter 5 (Discussion of Findings), where data from Chapter 4 (Presentation of Findings) was triangulated with data from Chapter 2 (Literature Review). Therefore, this section presents the key findings that responded to the research questions. The basis for presenting the research findings is the data collection methods used: review of the evaluation reports and in-depth qualitative interviews.

6.1.1 Key findings from the review of evaluation reports

The study reviewed six evaluation reports conducted under the NEP and implemented by the erstwhile Departments of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform (DRDLR). These two departments merged to form the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD). The evaluation reports reviewed comprised two impact evaluations (CASP and MAFISA), three implementation evaluations (RADP, CRDP and ERP) and one diagnostic evaluation (government-supported smallholder farmer sector). The review of the evaluation reports was through a checklist (annexure 2) that had four criteria, (i) evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated; (ii) improvement plan is in place; (iii) evaluation quality assessment score and (iv) published on the DPME website. These checklist criteria were selected as they were found to contribute to the utilisation of the evaluation reports in decision making.

Through the first criterion of clearly articulated evaluation findings and recommendations, the study found that almost all evaluations had clearly articulated findings and recommendations. However, the recommendations were generally very long, with some evaluations having more than 20 broad and sub-recommendations. Clearly articulated findings and recommendations help in the development of improvement plans which form the basis of evaluation use. The second criterion of the checklist was the t improvement plan, and the study found that not all evaluations had

improvement plans developed. According to the DPME (2019b), the improvement plan is a mandatory document for evaluations in the NEP, and it provides a legitimate timed framework for implementing the evaluation recommendations. In this study, the Agriculture ERP evaluation did not develop an improvement plan, and the reasons for non-development ranged from lack of interest by the leadership and the attrition of officials responsible for its development.

The third criterion of the checklist is the evaluation quality assessment score. This score is calculated using the evaluation quality assessment tool developed by the DPME and measures the quality of evaluation on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is poor, and 5 is good quality. Unfortunately, the Agriculture ERP evaluation was not assessed for quality; hence there was no score to determine the methodological rigour and credibility of the evaluation. However, the other five evaluations were assessed, and the majority had a score of above 3, which indicates good quality, while the CASP evaluation and a score of 2.79 indicates inadequate quality. The quality of an evaluation is an important factor in evaluation utilisation (Alkin & King, 2017; Davis et al., 2022; Díez et al., 2016; D'Ostie-Racine et al., 2016). The last criterion of the checklist is that the evaluation should be published on the DPME website. Publication of evaluation is about accountability and improving access to the evaluation evidence (Leslie et al., 2015; OECD, 2021). The DPME guidelines on evaluations in the NEP are that they need to be published together with their improvement plans on the DPME evaluation website repository (DPME, 2019b). The findings were that not all study evaluations were published, and the Agriculture ERP and the government-supported smallholder farmer sector evaluations were not published. In addition, only two improvement plans for the RADP and CRDP evaluations were published. The failure to publish goes against the guidelines set by the DPME on evaluations in NEP and indicates the absence of consequences for non-compliance. These findings from the review of evaluation reports were further used to understand the findings observed from the interviews.

6.1.2 Key findings from interviews

Through the interviews, the study's research findings are presented through six broad themes, carefully selected and informed by the literature review, review of evaluation

reports and the interviews. These themes were generated through the thematic analysis process described in section 3.3.4. The main six themes of the study are (i) understanding the value of evaluation in the NEP, (ii) factors influencing evaluation utilisation, (iii) types of evaluation use, (iv) evidence use mechanisms in the use of evaluation findings in EIDM, (v) evidence informed systems or decision making and (vi) practices or strategies that promote evaluation use.

(i) Understanding the value of evaluations in the NEP

The study found that the respondents participated in the evaluation process and understood the value and rationale behind the evaluations. The respondents were involved in various capacities in the evaluation, from conceptualisation to implementation and utilisation. In addition, their participation in the steering committees allowed for the development of recommendations that had been agreed upon, which contributes to evaluation use (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

(ii) Factors influencing evaluation utilisation

Evaluation utilisation does not occur in a vacuum but within a complex organisational environment that different factors affect. Alkin and King (2017) identify four categories of factors that influence evaluation utilisation; user, evaluator, evaluation and organisation/social context. The study findings are also in line with the findings from the literature review. The following were the dominant factors found in this study that influence evaluation use; resources and capacity, leadership, quality of evaluators, the practicality of recommendations, attitude and behaviour of programme managers, acceptance of evaluation findings and improvement plans. The factors were found to influence the utilisation of the evaluations in the DALRRD. The theoretical frameworks considered in the study also assisted in unpacking the factors that influence evaluation utilisation.

(iii) Types of evaluation use

The types of evaluation use were analysed using the classical work of Weiss (1998), who describes knowledge utilisation through the typologies of instrumental,

conceptual and symbolic use. In addition, process use is another typology used to determine the extent of evaluation use (Patton, 2015). The study found that all four types of use exist and are not mutually exclusive, as there can be more than one use in an evaluation. The frequently occurring use types found in this study were instrumental and conceptual use, as they are associated with the findings of the evaluation of the intervention implemented (Davis et al., 2022). There was evidence of the symbolic and process use but to a lesser extent. The evaluation findings were used to improve and strengthen programme delivery. They were used to improve or develop new policies and raise the profile of the evaluated agriculture support programmes. Overall, the study found that there is limited use of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision-making in the DALRRD. However, the extent of use could not be ascertained, and this is an area that a quantitative study can further pursue. The other key finding is that the evaluation findings also influenced the merger of the DAFF and DRDLR to form the current DALRRD; this is symbolic use. The findings in the evaluations (annexure 3) identified the silo mentality in DAFF and DRDLR, yet they served the same farmer, and recommendations were made to streamline these programmes into one.

(iv) Evidence use mechanisms in the use of evaluation findings in EIDM,

The study found that the respondents have heard about the concept of evidence informed decision making (EIDM) and unconsciously practice it without being explicit that it is EIDM. This theme directly responds to the research topic, and the findings were explained using Langer et al. (2016) six mechanisms of evidence use (section 2.9.9.2). Through the interviews, there was limited evidence on the activities that promote the evidence use interventions in EIDM. However, the following three mechanisms, awareness, agreement and access, were present in the DALRRD. These three mechanisms facilitate the use of evaluation evidence in evidence informed decision making in the DALRRD. While the department uses evaluation results as part of the evidence alternatives in decision making, the concept of evidence informed decision making has not yet made inroads within the departmental officials. This shows that within the DALRRD, there are not enough conversations on how evidence use interventions can be supported. Langer & Weyrauch (2021) also noted minimal

discussions around interventions that support evidence use within government departments.

(v) Evidence-informed systems or decision making

The study found that the decision to use evidence from evaluation does not lie within one structure. The project steering committee, which is involved in the evaluation process through oversight, is the first structure to approve the evaluation and its evaluation findings, and at this point, the evaluation is completed. The approved evaluation recommendation is developed into the improvement plans for presentation to the departmental Executive Committee (EXCO). The EXCO is the final structure that approves the evaluation for use. This structure is the premier decision-maker for the DALRRD. These two structures are critical in the utilisation of evaluation findings. The study also found that while the EXCO is the premier decision maker, they do not consistently participate in the evaluation process due to their demanding work schedule.

(vi) Practices or strategies that promote evaluation use in EIDM

The study also identified six strategies that can further promote the use of evaluation findings in contribution to EIDM; evaluation capacity development, participatory and ownership, the appointment of credible evaluators, dissemination of evaluation information, institutionalisation for accountability and monitoring mechanisms for accountability. These strategies were not the only ones but the most recorded from the interviews. The proposed strategies will complement those already existing in the department to improve the use of evaluation evidence in EIDM. These practices are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this report. Suffice it to say that the most popular was the evaluation capacity building, institutionalisation of evaluations and the development of monitoring and tracking mechanisms for accountability. These strategies are further recorded as recommendations to the DALRRD in section 6.3 of the study.

6.2 Conclusions

The conclusions are drawn from the research findings and are informed by the research questions. The rationale for conducting public sector evaluations, according to the DPME, is anchored around the following five broad uses, namely; (i) improving or refining policy, (ii) improving or strengthening programmes and projects, (iii) improving accountability, (iv) building evidence bases and (v) contributing to more effective decision-making (DPME, 2019b). Therefore, this study attempted to explore and understand the utilisation of public sector evaluation findings and recommendations in evidence-informed decision-making in the Department of Agriculture Land Reform and Rural Development, South Africa.

The study concludes that there is limited utilisation of evaluation findings and recommendations in EIDM in the DALRRD. Utilisation varies across the different evaluations, with the agriculture ERP evaluation facing the challenges of legitimate use due to the absence of approved improvement plans. The instrumental and conceptual use were the most commonly identified evaluation uses due to their association with the findings of the evaluation intervention implemented. Instrumental use is when evidence is an input that directly shapes a specific programme decision, and conceptual use is when evidence shapes ideas, concepts or insights into our understanding of a specific issue, problem or solution (Alkin & King, 2017). Challenges to evaluation use were identified, which were in line with information obtained from the literature review. The concept of EIDM was pursued, and its importance was discussed during the interviews with the Langer et al. (2016) mechanism of evidence use providing that platform. The researcher noted that this concept was new to the respondents even though they could identify what it is all about through its name. Nevertheless, some respondents indicated that this study had taught them something about EIDM, and they look forward to reading more about it, as recorded in the two quotes below.

> *"I really do not know what Evidence-informed decision making is all about, but I know I can answer this because I understand English words. But I am liking this term of evidence-informed decision making, so for forwardly going, I will probably use it at some point" (Respondent 010, 2023).*

"We make decisions that are based on science or research and, in this case, backed by evaluation evidence, but we never call it evidence-based decision making. Thank you for bringing up this term, I will look it up further" (Respondent 005, 2022).

The study responded to all the research questions and concludes by proposing recommendations to the DALRRD and identifying opportunities for further study.

6.3 Recommendations

The study identifies recommendations to the DALRRD, which were informed by the respondents and recommendations for opportunities for further study informed by the researcher's immersion in the research data.

6.3.1 Recommendations to the DALRRD

The recommendations to the DALRRD are informed by the research findings and can potentially improve evaluation practice and utilisation in evidence informed decision making. The DPME (2019b) lists five broad uses of evaluations, and these recommendations, if adopted, will contribute to achieving these uses, namely; (i) improving or refining policy, (ii) improving or strengthening programmes and projects, (iii) improving accountability, (iv) building evidence bases and (v) contributing to more effective decision-making.

(i) Evaluation capacity development

As evaluations continue to gain traction within the public sector, there is a need to capacitate the programme managers and decision-makers with evaluation skills that will help them use evaluation for decision-making and accountability. Therefore, all senior management services (SMS) in the DALRRD should be capacitated in evaluation. A capacitated senior management service involved in programme implementation and decision making will promote evaluation utilisation (Blake & Ottoson, 2009; Goldman et al., 2019; Kelly & Kelly, 2017).

(ii) Institutionalisation of evaluation

The public sector's evaluation function, particularly the DALRRD, should be institutionalised. Institutionalising evaluations in the DALRRD will allow evaluations to be treated as an important function for accountability and tracking progress on implementing the improvement plan. Evaluation can be institutionalised by establishing evaluation committees that perform a nearly similar function to the audit committees. Organisations with institutionalised evaluations were found to be more likely to use evaluation than those without (Alkin & King, 2017; Dhakal, 2014; Goldman et al., 2019; Kelly & Kelly, 2017).

(iii) Tracking and monitoring mechanism for accountability

When evaluations are institutionalised, the established governance structures can monitor and track the implementation of the improvement plan. The proposed evaluation committee can be mandated with this function of follow-up use and accountability. The implementation of the improvement plans can be recorded in the departmental strategic plans and form part of the annual performance plans. Tracking the implementation of the improvement plan will promote utilisation and accountability (Blake & Ottoson, 2009; Goldman et al., 2019).

(iv) Evidence-informed decision making

Introduce the concept of evidence-informed decision making (EIDM) to assist decision-makers in making decisions when faced with multiple sources of information. The EIDM ecosystem covers evidence generation, translation, brokerage and use. The decision-makers should be able to identify what counts as credible evidence and how to identify those interventions that promote evidence use in EIDM. Attending a course in the practices of EIDM will change the way decision-makers view evaluation evidence. Evidence use is part of the third wave proposed by Backer (1991) as cited by (Blake & Ottoson, 2009).

6.3.2 Opportunities for further study

Further studies exploring and developing an evidence use plan in the DALRRD when faced with evaluation findings are recommended for promoting the practices of EIDM. Also, since this study could not establish the extent of evaluation utilisation, quantitative research should be conducted focusing on implementing and tracking improvement plans in the DALRRD.

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APPENDICES

Annexure 1: Data Collection Instrument

Title: Utilisation of Public Sector Evaluation Findings and Recommendations in Evidence-Informed Decision Making.

SECTION A: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

1. What is the current position or level of employment in DALRRD?

Director	
Chief Director	
Deputy Director-General	
Director-General	

2. Which branch are you operating under?

Corporate Support Services	
Rural Development	
Food Security and Agrarian Reform	

3. Name of Chief Directorate you are in? (For Chief Directors and Directors Only)

Monitoring and Evaluation	
Food Security	
Land Development and Post-Settlement Support	
National Extension Support Services	
Development Finance	

4. The number of years employed in the Department (including years either in DAFF or DRDLR before the merger in 2019)?

Less than one year	
1 – 2 years	
3 – 5 Years	

6 – 10 Years	
Longer than ten years	

5. The number of years in your current position (including years in either DAFF or DRDLR before the merger in 2019.)

Less than one year	
1 – 2 years	
3 – 5 Years	
6 – 10 Years	
Longer than ten years	

6. What is your highest educational level?

Bachelor's degree	
Master's Degree	
Doctoral Degree	

7. The following programmes were evaluated under the National Evaluation Plan and are part of this study. Which Programme/s were you involved in at implementation or evaluation?

Recapitalisation and Development Programme (RADP)	
Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP)	
Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP))	
Micro Agriculture Finance Institutions of South Africa (MAFISA)	
Small Holder Farmer Support	
Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan	
None	

SECTION B: KNOWLEDGE OF PROGRAMMES IN THE NATIONAL EVALUATION PLAN (NEP)

8. What is your understanding of the National Evaluation Plan?
9. What are your perceptions of the importance of the NEP to the management?

SECTION C: UTILISATION OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

10. How involved were you in the evaluation process and development of evaluation findings and recommendations (evidence generation and evidence use)?
11. How receptive were the management to the evaluation findings and recommendations, and were they accepted or rejected?
12. Which findings and recommendations were included in the Improvement Plan for implementation?
13. Which findings and recommendations included in the Improvement Plan were implemented?

SECTION D: FACTORS THAT UNDERPIN EVALUATION USE IN EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

14. What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of the evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision-making in the Department?
15. Langer et al. (2016) identify six change mechanisms that underpin the use of evaluation findings as evidence. Which ones do you find important and relevant in your case: M1- Awareness, M2- Agreement, M3- Access, M4- Trust, M5- Ability and M6-Institutionalisation?
16. According to you, what are the features of the evaluation process and evaluation reports that contribute to their usefulness?
17. What individual managers' behaviours influence the use of evaluations as evidence in informed decision-making?

SECTION E: EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION MAKING

18. What is the decision-making process in the Department in conducting evaluations?
19. What are the structures within the Department that promote the use of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision-making?

20. To what extent have the evaluation findings and recommendations been used as part of the Department's policy development?
21. What strategies can be implemented to improve or promote the practice of the utilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision-making?

Annexure 2: Checklist tool for review of evaluation reports

Research Questions	Criteria	References	Assessment (Yes/No/Partly/ Unknown)	Comment
To what extent have evaluation findings and recommendations been used as part of evidence-informed decision making in the DALRRD, South Africa?	- An Improvement Plan is in place.	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Dhakal, 2014)		
What factors influence the utilisation or underutilisation of evaluation findings in evidence-informed decision making?	- Evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated.	(Fleischer & Christie, 2009; Kumar et al., 2020)		
	- An Improvement Plan is in place.	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Dhakal, 2014)		
	- Published on the DPME website.	(DPME, 2019b; OECD, 2021)		
	- Evaluation quality Assessment score	(Bundi et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020; Kusek & Rist, 2004)		
What are the features of evaluations that contribute to their usefulness?	- Evaluation findings and recommendations are clearly articulated	(Fleischer & Christie, 2009; Kumar et al., 2020)		
	- Evaluation quality Assessment score	(Bundi et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2022; Kumar et al., 2020)		

Research Questions	Criteria	References	Assessment (Yes/No/Partly/ Unknown)	Comment
	- An improvement Plan is in place.	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Dhakal, 2014)		
What strategies can be used to promote the practice of evaluation utilisation in evidence informed decision making?	- Improvement plans - Published on the DPME website. - Evaluation Quality assessment score	(GAO, 2017; Head, 2013; Højlund, 2015; Kabuye & Basheka, 2017)		
What evidence-use mechanisms exist in the DALRRD that influence the use of evidence from evaluation reports?	- Published on the DPME website	(Baba & HakemZadeh, 2012; DPME, 2019b; Langer et al., 2020; OECD, 2021)		
How is evidence-informed decision making undertaken in the DALRRD?	- Improvement Plans in place	(Bamberger & Segone, 2011; Conaway, 2020; Dhakal, 2014)		

Annexure 3: Extract of Evaluation Findings and Recommendations

Evaluation	Findings	Recommendations	Improvement Plan	Quality Assessment Score
Implementation Evaluation of the Recapitalisation and Development Programme	RADP is viewed and understood differently by different stakeholders; The appropriateness of the RADP design was inadequate to meet the programme's intended objectives. Some of the RADP objectives were found to be unachievable as they were too ambitious. The selection criteria for beneficiaries and projects of the programme were not clear. There is no clearly structured M&E system of the RADP. The national and provincial organisational structures are not well defined. The RADP funding model is indifferent to farm enterprises and agroecological contexts. The RADP grant funding approach is not sustainable, given the limited resources. The RADP design does not promote collaboration with the DAFF in implementing the programme. The two interventions of mentorship and strategic partnerships are not resulting in the capacitation of the beneficiaries/farmers. The financial sustainability and efficiency of the RADP were questioned due to the relatively	Review and clarify the objectives of RADP and make them to be specific. Develop an all-inclusive understanding of the RADP amongst all the key stakeholders. The RADP should have its own separate organisational structure with its own full-time personnel and not rely on secondments from other DRDLR units. Improve the administrative and functional efficiency of the RADP through the provision of additional and appropriately qualified personnel dedicated to the RADP. The M&E Unit of DRDLR should establish a structured and systematic monitoring and evaluation programme for RADP. The selection criteria for all beneficiaries of the programme should be in line with the objectives of RADP. Review selection criteria for strategic partners and mentors.	Improvement Objective 1: To strengthen the design and appropriateness of RADPs for rural development and land reform. Improvement Objective 2: To improve the organisational structure for RADP and the skilling of RADP staff and beneficiaries. Improvement Objective 3: To improve the RADP programme model.	4..1

Evaluation	Findings	Recommendations	Improvement Plan	Quality Assessment Score
	high spending per project (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2013).	The funding model is to be reviewed to consider production cycles and funding needs. The loan funding model should replace the current grant funding model. To improve the sustainability of farmer support programmes, the DRDLR programme should be coordinated with the DAFF programmes that provide technical support to beneficiaries. (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2013).		
Implementation Evaluation of the Comprehensive Rural Development Programme	There is a low buy-in capacity and willingness to implement the CRDP at a local level. There is a widespread misunderstanding of what CRDP is all about. The M&E function of the CRDP has been found to be weak, affecting implementation and delivery. There are mixed results towards achieving the CRDP goals, and much work must be done to improve the achievement of the CRDP objectives. No value has been added to the land reforms attributable to CRDP due to the limited land size of the CRDP sites.	Strengthening the CRDP's institutional arrangements and inter-governmental coordination while clarifying the roles of the Provincial Government. Improve the measures that will result in the CRDP's attaining its objectives. The focus should be on measures that will improve the strategy to mobilise and empower communities and the approach to targeting vulnerable groups. (Impact Economix, 2013).	Improvement Objective 1: Strengthen the institutional of the CRDP arrangements and the local-level institutions that operate in each site. Improvement Objective 2: Focus on measures that will improve the attainment of the CRDP policy goals and objectives. Improvement Objective 3: Improving the	3.71

Evaluation	Findings	Recommendations	Improvement Plan	Quality Assessment Score
	The CRDP target groups have benefited from the programme. The poor efficiency and effectiveness of CRDP support services resulted in the programme not achieving value for money. (Impact Economix, 2013).		upscaling of the CRDP and the programme's value for money and sustainability.	
Impact Evaluation of the Comprehensive Agriculture Support Programme (CASP)	The programme has reached its target groups; however, participants beyond primary production have not benefitted. The CASP support increased in the areas related: agricultural information, inputs, market access, extension advice, training, and infrastructure. Little progress has been achieved in commercialising the projects supported. For crops and livestock commodities, there was a positive impact on agriculture production after introducing CASP. Employees' full-time and part-time livelihoods improved after CASP (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2015).	The institutionalisation of CASP within DAFF should be prioritised. Other pillars of CASP should be entrenched in other relevant sub-directorates. Coordinating other farmer support programmes between DAFF, DRDLR, and other government departments should be facilitated by the National Treasury to avoid duplication and wastage of resources. The current CASP model should be discontinued as it fosters dependence and promotes the entitlement mentality of the beneficiaries. CASP scope should be revised to focus on viable projects, not all projects (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2015).	The improvement plan was developed but unavailable on the DPME evaluation website repository or the DALRRD website under Resources	2.79
Impact Evaluation of the Micro Agricultural	The MAFISA loan programme positively contributed to the beneficiaries and should be continued in a tailored and targeted fashion. The	Principle: MAFISA should continue as a wholesale funding instrument to	The improvement plan was developed but unavailable on the	3.8

Evaluation	Findings	Recommendations	Improvement Plan	Quality Assessment Score
Financial Institutions of South Africa	programme positively contributed to the general livelihoods of loan beneficiaries; jobs were created, and productivity increased. MAFISA has been unsuccessful in offering smallholder farmers comprehensive financial services (savings, insurance, credit and transactions). Access to MAFISA's loans has not reached a wide range of commodity producers and smallholder farmers. MAFISA has not developed a balanced distribution of financial capacity as the loans are not easily available across all agricultural subsectors, typologies of farmers and provinces. The only formal production loan facility that the smallholder farmers could access is MAFISA due to being underwritten by the state, but the long-term sustainability of MAFISA comes into question (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2014).	meet the needs of smallholder farmers. MAFISA design: MAFISA should review its status and mandate; i.e., is it a credit scheme/ programme that can be implemented by a line department or existing development financial institution, or is it an independent development financial institution? MAFISA implementation: DAFF should develop the capacity to effectively support its accredited Financial Intermediaries and M&E competencies. MAFISA, CASP and rural development: Financial intermediaries must be able to draw on other interventions like CASP for infrastructure and equipment acquisition. MAFISA Costs: The financial intermediaries should be allowed to propose or develop other financings that will address the needs of smallholder farmers. (Business Enterprises at University of Pretoria, 2014)	DPME evaluation website repository or the DALRRD website under Resources	

Evaluation	Findings	Recommendations	Improvement Plan	Quality Assessment Score
Implementation Evaluation of the Agriculture Extension Recovery Plan (ERP)	The quality and availability of extension services and advice provided to farmers have improved due to the ERP interventions. The M&E functions of the department have been inadequate to monitor and direct the implementation of the ERP. The PDAs do not have adequate systems to be weaned off the ERP funding and are still reliant on it. The objectives of the ERP remain appropriate and have been made to be part of the mainstream extension delivery activities. Therefore, continued ERP funding should be made available for this purpose. There are shortcomings in the policy, procedures and systems that guide and facilitate the implementation of the ERP. Different provinces are implementing the ERP funding rules differently, some in a cost-ineffective way. The ERP gave impetus to Extension Science being incorporated as a professionally recognised Field of Practice under the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) in January 2014. The effect of staff recruitment on the extension-to-farmer ratio was significant but less than expected.	Strengthen the policy, procedures and systems for ERP implementation. Strengthen the M&E capacity to manage and monitor the ERP at the national and provincial levels. The purpose of ERP funding should be clearly defined to inform future ERP spending to achieve the ERP's strategic objectives. The DAFF and PDA staff members should be encouraged to join SACNASP and the South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE) for continuous professional development. The DAFF should investigate the mechanism for compliance with the professional registration of extension practitioners as a new condition of employment. The DAFF, DRDLR and PDA jointly plan and undertake an evaluation to quantify the demands made by the Government's CRDP and Land and Agrarian Reform Programme as they affect the design and budgeting of extension services.	There was no improvement plan developed	No evaluation quality assessment score

Evaluation	Findings	Recommendations	Improvement Plan	Quality Assessment Score
	The curricula offered by the universities for agricultural qualifications are often not in alignment with the skills required by extension practitioners (McIntosh Xaba and Associates, 2017).	The findings and recommendations of this evaluation should be part of the evidence that informs the design of the ERP going forward (McIntosh Xaba and Associates, 2017).		
Diagnostic Evaluation of the Government-Supported Small Holder Farmer Sector	The focus of current interventions is weak. The objectives and measures of effectiveness and sustainability of current interventions overlap considerably. There is limited information on government-supported smallholder farmer programmes' research and development activities. The current suite of government-supported smallholder farmer programmes offers a wide range of services. Access to on- and off-farm infrastructure was the most significant success factor across four of five programmes. With respect to institutional arrangements, a lack of coordination among governmental structures was found to be one of the key factors undermining programme success, leading to duplication of funding within and between programmes. In relation to programme efficiency, poor targeting and uncertainty regarding programme	The evaluation recommendations should be part of the evidence to be considered in the final revision of the Comprehensive Producer Development Strategy (CPDS). The evaluation outcome should be considered in operationalising the new extension policy. A national database of different categories of farmers should be developed through a comprehensive survey. DAFF should target the provision of extension services where the most impact could be felt, i.e. the smallholders in informal value chains, Providing private extension services to small farmers in formal value chains should be encouraged, and DAFF should create an enabling environment for private providers.	The researcher could not access the improvement plan of this evaluation from the DPME or the DALRRD website, but it was developed in conjunction with that of the MAFISA evaluation.	3.8

Evaluation	Findings	Recommendations	Improvement Plan	Quality Assessment Score
	scope emerged as a primary constraint affecting programme effectiveness and efficiency. Overall, the support services offered to smallholders have had limited success. Therefore, the evaluation team recommends that the government align the Comprehensive Producer Development Strategy and the operationalization of the Extension Policy with the activities and programmes proposed in this evaluation (Khulisa Management Services & University of Cape Town, 2016).	This could improve the extension-to-farmer ratio. Small-scale commercial farmers through DAFF should be integrated into the mainstream commercial services sector through incentives and using BEE targets to achieve greater parity in service delivery (Khulisa Management Services & University of Cape Town, 2016)		

Annexure 4: Summary of Broad Themes and sub-themes

