

https://dspace.org/

Building National Evaluation Systems: the Role of Development Partners

Morkel, Candice

2022-06-04
CLEAR-AA
https://hdl.handle.net/10539/33018

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Not for publication

Building National Evaluation Systems: the Role of Development Partners

Address to the 2022 SIDE International Conference: Global Trend of International Development Evaluation

Candice Morkel (PhD), Director CLEAR-AA

This address is based on the following previously published work:

Morkel, C. & Bradshaw, G. (2021). Context of Evaluative Institutions and Governance in Khumalo, L. , Morkel, C., Blaser Mapitsa, C., Engel, H. & Jore Ali, A. African Parliaments: Evidence Systems for Governance and Development. Stellenbosch: SUN Press.

Fraser, D.I. & Morkel, C., 2020, 'State of monitoring and evaluation in Anglophone Africa: Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa's reflections', African Evaluation Journal 8(1), a505. https://doi.org/10.4102/aej. v8i1.505

Morkel, C. & Mwangiro, N. 2019. Implications of evaluation trends for Evaluation Capacity Building in Evaluation Landscape in Africa. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media

Introduction

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is one of the six regional centres in the CLEAR Initiative working globally to strengthen capacity to undertake monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and to use evidence to improve programmes and support policymakers and implementers in making better decisions. It has been operational for over 10 years, focusing on African countries in which English is an official language, and has developed a rich body of experience and an extensive network of relationships that give it valuable insights into the growth and development of M&E system in Africa.

Contemporary challenges, including the global Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, and the widening inequality gap, have pushed states to acknowledge the need for systems of evidence-informed decision-making and mechanisms for effective monitoring, evaluation and action to avert the global crises affecting the very existence of the planet and its inhabitants. There is therefore some optimism that authentic efforts are being made to ensure that governments in Africa become real agents for development change as well as champions for justice and equitable development through the use of evidence.

There has been significant growth in the efforts to establish M&E systems and functions in governments, particularly in the Global South. Countries, such as South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda (amongst others), have built M&E systems to assess various strategies and national development plans (CLEAR-AA 2013). One of the reasons for this is the pressure on governments to implement their Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and report on their performance in the periodic Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) presented by Heads of State to the High-Level Political Forum at the annual United Nations General Assembly (United Nations c. 2020). One of the effects of the growth in M&E systems is a shift from accounting for budget expenditure to a focus on the achievement of development results, which is a welcome development. Monitoring and evaluation now needs to be located in the broader discourse around sustainable development and the achievement of systemwide development.

The literature on a systems approach to building national M&E systems is also fairly nascent. A systems-based approach to M&E strengthening is essential, as the utility of M&E almost always relies on the extent to which systems for collecting, synthesising, analysing, reporting and using evidence

are integrated into systems for policy-making, planning, learning and adaptation. Monitoring and evaluation are often treated as adjuncts to policy, programme and project implementation, but to add real value, they need to be integrated from the outset into the management planning and decision-making processes and components of institutional systems.

At an institutional level, specifically one in which systems of evidence production and use operate, we, at CLEAR-AA, recognise that this includes the enabling environment, the human and nonhuman, technical and financial elements that make up the system, as well as rules (formal and informal) about how decisions are made and actions are taken. Although our work at the Centre focuses primarily on these elements, we are also mindful of their interconnectedness to broader local and global socio politico-economic systems, and the potential influence of the various parts on each other.

The maturity of both monitoring and evaluation is uneven across the African continent, where systems of routine monitoring of performance exist, even if they are often poorly curated and managed. The bifurcation and decoupling of monitoring from evaluation are worsened by the widespread split between policy, planning and M&E structures and functions. In many administrations, ministries of finance (or treasuries) remain primarily responsible for fiscal planning and budgeting, which they do with little or no engagement with entities responsible for the generation and utilisation of evidence. This concurs with Masuku (2015), highlighting that government departments work in silos and other entities are often not included. Government sectors take their cue from decisions about programme delivery made by national fiscal and sector planning processes, and evaluation findings rarely find their way into the budget decision-making system. One key observation has been that there are prevailing weaknesses in national systems for the collection and management of administrative data, and in some cases, even basic recordkeeping on the delivery of public goods is poorly managed. These systems are often treated as entirely separate from initiatives to build national evaluation systems, which contribute to weaknesses in integrated governance and accountability, and ultimately the broader concerns of evidence-informed policy-making.

The role of Development Partners

Historical Context

Efforts at building systems of evidence in African parliaments are influenced by historical and contextual factors around the state and state formation, alongside global development imperatives and increasing pressures to strengthen evidence-informed decision-making (EIDM). The history of pre-modern, colonial and post-colonial state formation in Africa and the rise of democratic regimes across the continent as well as their intersection with an increasingly globalised development agenda have carved a pathway for the rising popularity of EIDM in the state. This historical production of the state in Africa and its various institutions brings into sharp perspective the importance of state orientation and its architecture in relation to the various competing interests in society.

Over the last four decades in particular, newly independent African states often adopted the nature, forms and machinery of governance they had been accustomed to in the narrow interstices between colonial and post-colonial state formation. Building strong states, with the ability to wield both territorial and economic power, as well as the enduring Weberian notion of bureaucratic authoritarianism and efficiency, have continued to determine the nature and role of institutions of the state, including parliaments, in Africa. Therefore, such orthodox conceptualisations of the state and development in Africa may actually drive the state to prioritise performance management and monitoring for the end-goal of bureaucratic control, governance and accountability, and for

strengthening the executive. This has come at the expense of learning, reflection and protecting the socio-economic rights and needs of citizens.

These links between economic and political systems have governed thinking around growth and development and directed state behaviour in Africa. Several key features of this symbiosis are well documented in political studies and public administration yet are rarely linked to the evolution of Monitoring and Evaluation, particularly in African systems of governance. These features include the wave of New Public Management that influenced systems of governance in developing countries, linked to the growing popularity of modernisation and neo-liberal views on development and the Third Wave of democracy, which upheld Weberian efficiency and private-sector approaches to governance as the ideal bureaucratic machinery with which to govern. This created conditions that facilitated a financial accountability-driven approach to development, financed largely by international finance and Bretton Woods institutions in developing countries in Africa, and a fetishising of performance auditing and financial accountability.

Growing aid dependency for the delivery of public goods, the globalisation of the development agenda, and the powerful hegemony of Western methods and approaches to science, research and M&E, have also crowded out much of the room for states to self-determine their approaches to building evaluation systems. The result has been a teleological approach, which acknowledges the need for their existence but fails to harness their potential for achieving development outcomes.

The increasing demand for evidence has driven governments and public actors towards building institutions that can ably measure and track performance, and provide certainty on the value and impact of investment in development initiatives. All institutions have been compelled to pay closer attention to their ability to gather, synthesise and use evidence for decision-making. This has become particularly important for states which have been at the receiving end of development assistance for decades. Since the era of Structural Adjustment Programming, the ability to account for expenditure and results has been made conditional to the financing package. As mentioned above, countries that have been at the behest of these packages have not had the luxury of designing these financial and non-financial accounting systems for themselves but have had to endure the performance metrics and matrices imposed upon them by donors. These have often been onerous and have had very little to do with a learning agenda and were perhaps overly concerned with accounting for financial expenditure. Moreover, the targeted recipients of such information were largely external (i.e. the donors) rather than recipient states themselves.

This may be one of the reasons why international evaluators continue to lead the production of evaluation reports on the continent. In a study conducted by CLEAR-AA and the Centre for Research on Science and Technology (CREST) at Stellenbosch University, we found that 40 out of the 59 evaluation reports that we examined, were led by evaluators from outside of the country. Only one of the cases observed had a combination of local and international evaluators involved. Only five of the cases studied were led by local evaluators. In the vast majority of cases (n=28) local stakeholders were involved only in data collection, closely followed by no role (n=23). This aligns with Tarsilla's (2014) findings on the 'parachuting' of international evaluation expertise onto local communities.

The prevailing notion of Capacity Development to build NES

The historical roots of capacity development in Africa are well-documented (Basheka, 2016; Denney & Mallett, 2017; Development Bank of Southern Africa, African Development Bank and World Bank, 2000). As mentioned before, the post-independence Africa of the 1960s was characterised by structural adjustment programming and the influence of Bretton Woods institutions, which shaped

the interventions undertaken to ensure the continent's growth and development (Basheka, 2016). Assisting the African continent to emulate the growth trajectories of the 'West' became the focus of the international development community as the ideal model of addressing the continents' poverty and social welfare crisis (Denney & Mallett, 2017:6). The decade of the 1960s was also punctuated by the growing popularity of the modernisation theory of development, which incorrectly assumed that Western modes of materialism, economic growth and the principles of the "free market economy" would release the continent from the grip of under-development (Davis, Theron & Maphunye, 2009; Denney & Mallett, 2017). Technical assistance or "technical cooperation" therefore became synonymous with building the capacities of developing countries through "international experts" who were meant to transfer their skills to local counterparts (Demongeot, 1994:479).

Tarsilla (2014:2) argues that Evaluation Capacity Development remains donor centric and reproduces the old, self-serving pattern of strengthening local staff of international organisations rather than strengthening local, contextually relevant ownership of evaluation. Since the 1980s and 1990s (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015:79-80), a tidal wave of initiatives solidified the importance of evaluation capacity development in Africa and a host of institutions, such as the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) and others were established in order to focus on building the capacity of evaluation in Africa. Preskill and Boyle (2008:443) suggest that the first decade of the 21st century marked the beginning of the wave of interest in and focus on evaluation capacity building, particularly in North America.

Short-term training is a necessary, but not sufficient, part of capacity building and strengthening National Evaluation Systems. Such interventions need to be combined with an integrated strategy to enhance individual and organisational capability if they are to be effective at a systems level.

Despite the rising tide of criticism against the weaknesses in capacity development in Africa and the absence of evidence that these have any impact on building national capacity at all (Demongeot, 1994:479), capacity development initiatives (and their budgets) continue to increase (Wubneh, 2003:166; Denney & Mallett, 2017:v; Kotvojs, 2017:13). For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) spends about one quarter of its budget on capacity development activities, with direct spending on capacity development growing by 6% from 2015 to 2016 (IMF, 2017:1-2). Between 1991 and 2016, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) committed US$700 million to capacity development in sub-Saharan Africa alone (ACBF, 2016:5), and the global investment in capacity development now exceeds US$30 billion annually (Kotvojs, 2017:13), despite yielding less than stellar results (Kotvojs & Hurworth, 2013:5; Kotvojs, 2017:14).

As part of the study of the evaluation landscape across 12 countries in Africa by our Centre and CREST as mentioned before, an online survey was conducted in 2016 to 3032 individuals via an e-mailed link. These included e-mails listed in the evaluation reports on the African evaluation database; e-mail addresses from the South African, Ethiopian, Ghanaian and African evaluation associations; and e-mail addresses from CREST's own internal database. A total of 564 individuals completed the survey. The findings showed that evaluators in Africa appear to be highly qualified, and despite the fact that 76 respondents possessed a master's degree in evaluation, 126 respondents possessed a diploma in evaluation studies, respondents were actively working in evaluation practice, and either conducted (n=185), managed (n=113) or provided technical assistance in evaluations (n=91), the stated need for additional training was significantly high (123 out of 407 responses). This points to the possibility that the problem of building or strengthening National Evaluation Systems in Africa goes well beyond capacity development, and that technical as well as political and contextual factors need to be taken into consideration as part of the solution.

The need for country-owned solutions: co-production, collaboration and partnership

The localisation of evaluation practice as well as the empowerment of local evaluators and indigenous peoples (or the 'beneficiaries' of development interventions) beyond tick-box 'participation' in the global South is rapidly gaining momentum. This is taking place within a broader African debate around the decolonisation of curriculum in the academe in general. In order to remain relevant and to respond to this demand for indigenisation and cultural responsiveness, Evaluation Capacity Development and supporting governments in building national evaluation systems needs to re-calibrate. Related to this is the need to break free of the decades-long pattern of international evaluators dominating the local evaluation scene. African evaluators need to be empowered to develop the knowledge, experience, and skill to respond to specific donor frameworks and templates for evaluation-related activities in order to compete equally with the international evaluator community. Rather than bemoan the state of affairs, more disruptive ways of addressing the challenges are called for. For example, commissioners of evaluations (particularly donors) could, for example, require as part of evaluation contracts that local evaluators be 'inducted' into the process of an evaluation from the inception of the project as part of a skills-transfer initiative, or that a certain percentage of local evaluators be required to jointly lead the evaluation.

Zenda Ofir, the second President of AfREA and an international evaluator who has remained vocal about the need for an Africa-centred approach to evaluation, remarked in 2018 that:

> *We tend to slavishly teach and use evaluation theory and practices imported from outside the continent. Our evaluation terms of reference specify the use of (DAC) criteria without sufficient tailoring for what matters to us. The African Evaluation Guidelines reflect some of our context, but we seldom use them. Our evaluation priorities are still driven primarily by international programming rather than by what best serves the interests of our continent. Our universities and short courses prepare emerging young evaluators by espousing almost exclusively imported knowledge, at best with a few tailored examples from Africa (emphasis authors' own) (https://zendaofir.com/made-in-africa-evaluation-part-3/).*

In response to calls to transform evaluation (a term that has suffered many controversies, but for which there is little time to unpack in great detail here), there has been a definitive response and recognition from the international development community that it can no longer be "business as usual". Development Partners have responded in various degrees to the clarion call for greater collaboration and cooperation with country governments and local partners to co-produce solutions to the establishment or strengthening of national evaluation systems. One such response has been the establishment of the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI) https://www.globalevaluationinitiative.org/, which is a partnership platform, hosted by the World Bank that seeks to bring together international and local partners, evaluation expertise, government and non-government entities to coordinate and scale-up support for evaluation and monitoring systems and capacities.

CLEAR AA, as an implementing partner to the GEI, has committed to a country-led, country-focused and country-owned approach to strengthening national M&E systems and capacity strengthening. Our work has led us to move away from thinking about linear supply chains (i.e. supply of and demand for evidence). We are increasingly adopting a system perspective in our country strategies, where we recognise the need for diverse, tailored packages of interventions that include, but are not limited to, building individual capacities. Although the demand continues to be presented as a need for training, we seek to combine this with technical assistance, policy support, institutional system development, the creation of enabling environments and the building of individual capacities. In working together

with country partners, there is greater appreciation of the need to view capacity strengthening in a more holistic and integrated manner, which builds in-country sustainability in the area of M&E, and can (in a sense) be thought of as capacity building through the process of engagement. We have also developed a real appreciation of the limits individual organisations face in strengthening country M&E systems. Specialised organisations that focus on, for example, certain kinds of evaluation or training can have a catalytic impact on strengthening parts of the system, but no single intervention, on its own, can constitute the whole solution. The work of CLEAR-AA (and indeed the work of the CLEAR network as a whole) is, therefore, built on a highly collaborative approach, and our partnership with a multitude of organisations (both state and non-state, local and international) is an intentional aspect of our practice.

The recognition that partnerships are essential to achieve success in strengthening the M&E evidence production and use value chain is gaining traction in the sector, and we have seen a global shift towards such collaborations (such as the Global Evaluation Initiative, in which the CLEAR network is a key implementing partner). Such efforts recognise that collaborative partnerships are essential to achieve success at scale (particularly in the light of the urgency towards the achievement of the SDGs as well as other pressing global challenges such as the COVID-19 and climate crises).

Concluding remarks

There are five key lessons we, as CLEAR-AA, have distilled from our experience in adopting a systems approach to strengthen M&E systems in our work in Anglophone African countries over the last decade, which speak to the role of development partners. The first and most important of these is that the journey cannot be taken alone, and the domination of one or few partners or approaches working in enclaves will not achieve the result of a system-wide change. Adopting a collaborative, partnership-based approach to strengthening systems is therefore essential, and we need to draw on the strengths of various partners in development broadly, and in the M&E and evidence sectors more specifically, in order to address the challenges we have outlined in this article at various scales and levels of the system.

Secondly, M&E is not a stand-alone process and has no intrinsic value if separated from systems of decision-making. These are inextricably linked to budget and planning processes, and therefore efforts must continue to be directed towards integrating M&E into planning and budgeting processes (whether in state- or non-state-led interventions).

The third lesson is that strong leadership and the championing of the M&E cause are catalytic to strengthen the performance and institutionalisation of M&E systems at country level. We, therefore, need to foster networks and communities of practice so that we can build a cadre of leaders who can act as champions, who are bolstered by a growing professionalism and deeper learning in the sector. This includes supporting the growth of voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPES), 29 of which are registered with African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) across the continent. Other networks, such as Twende Mbele, represent a very unique network of countries cooperating to learn from each other, and others, such as the Africa Centre for Evidence and African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE), are driving evidence use by policymakers and decision-makers.

Fourthly, capacity building must be considered as a comprehensive, whole-of-system intervention, and not to be confined to training only (and especially not only of the 'supply side'). Training and other kinds of capacity-building processes also need to be customised and tailored to the context, as systems

are not all alike, and different incentives and disincentives that are part of the enabling environment need to be considered.

This links to the fifth takeaway, which is the need to support country governments in the development of indigenous policy frameworks that are crafted according to their particular governance and policy contexts. In recognition of the *sui generis* nature of governance systems, and the peculiarities of governance systems based on Africa's colonial past and the historical legacies they had left behind, we need to recognise the hybridity of post-colonial governance systems and work more deliberately to empower and invigorate an appreciation of this context, and be an enabler and advocate for the indigenisation of localised responses to the challenges they face in terms of evidence production and use. We must be facilitators of a transformational approach to evaluation, where an Africanised, contextually relevant approach to M&E is honoured, welcomed, valued and used. In addition to experiencing the lessons, we have acknowledged the importance of reflection and learning from our work, and therefore we have prioritised research and learning (R&L) as a distinctive area of focus in CLEAR-AA.

In conclusion, what we are learning in our collaborative work with country partners and other organisations has allowed room for growth, in that we recognise the need for much more sustained research – both theoretical and empirical – on these areas of work, so that we get better what we are doing. Much needs to be done in documenting and building a solid body of knowledge, including case studies and theoretical frameworks, upon which we can improve our strategies and interventions at a system level. The bottom line, though, is country ownership, and country leadership – and our role as development partners is to support these endogenous efforts at strengthening National Evaluation Systems.

References

Bamberg, J.; Perlesz, A.; McKenzie, P. & Read, S. 2010. Utilising implementation science in building research and evaluation capacity in community health. Australian Journal of Primary Health, 16(4):276-283. https://doi. org/10.1071/PY10027

Basheka, B. 2006. Evaluation capacity building (ECB) in Uganda. Administratio Publica, 24(2):95-121.

Demongeot, P. 1994. Market-oriented approaches to capacity building in Africa. Public Administration and Development, 14(5):479-488. https:// doi.org/10.1002/pad.4230140504

Denney, L.; Mallett, R. & Benson, M.S. 2017. Service delivery and state capacity: Findings from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium. London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium.

Development Bank of Southern Africa, African Development Bank and World Bank. 2000. Monitoring and evaluation capacity. Conference discussion paper. Johannesburg, 25-29 September

IMF (International Monetary Fund). 2017. 2018 Quinquennial review of the fund's capacity development strategy: Concept note. Unpublished paper. Washington, DC.

Kotvojs, F. 2017. The capacity development evaluation framework: Tested on three initiatives. Evaluation Journal of Australasia,14(4):13-24. https://doi. org/10.1177/1035719X1701700403

Kotvojs, F. & Hurworth, R. 2013. Valuating capacity development: What do we really want to know? Evaluation Journal of Australasia, 3(1):4-14. https://doi. org/10.1177/1035719X1301300102

Masuku, N.W.K., 2015, 'A global overview of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and its meaning in the local government context of South Africa', Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review 3(2), a79. https://doi.org/10.4102/ apsdpr.v3i2.79

Preskill, H. & Boyle, S. 2008. A multidisciplinary model of evaluation capacity building. American Journal of Evaluation, 29(4):443-459. https:// doi.org/10.1177/1098214008324182

Tarsilla, M. 2014. Evaluation capacity development in Africa: Current landscape of international partners' initiatives, lessons learned and the way forward. African Evaluation Journal, 2(1):1-13. https://doi.org/10.4102/aej. v2i1.89

United Nations, c., 2020, High-level political forum on sustainable development sustainable development goals knowledge platform, viewed 04 May 2020, viewed from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf.

Wubneh, M. 2003. Building Capacity in Africa: The impact of institutional, policy and resource factors. African Development Review, 15(2-3):165-198. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8268. 2003.00070.x