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Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in Five African Countries

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DIAGNOSTIC REPORT

Current status of the National Evaluation System in Ghana

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Acronyms

AfREA	African Evaluation Association
APR	Annual Progress Report
CLEAR-AA	Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSPG	Cross-Sector Planning Group
DPCU	District Planning and Coordinating Unit
DETPA	Development Evaluation Training Programme in Africa
DPAT	District Assembly Performance Assessment Tool
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GIMPA	Ghana Institute for Management and Public administration
GMEF	Ghana Monitoring and Evaluation Forum
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
HEI	Higher education institution
ICT	Information and communications technology
ISSER	Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MIS	Management Information System
MMDA	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly
MME	Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation
MTDP	Medium-Term Development Plan
NDCC	National Development Coordinating Committee
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
NDPF	National Development Policy Framework
NES	National Evaluation System
PPMED	Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Division
RCC	Regional Coordinating Council

SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNEG	UN Evaluation Group
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VOPE	Volunteer organisation for professional evaluation

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The relevance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as a development management tool is gradually gaining prominence in the Ghanaian development landscape, largely due to the leadership and political support of the present government. Notwithstanding that the over-politicisation of issues in Ghana has to a large extent undermined the quest for accountability and transparency, the current president's commitment to M&E and pursuit for programme improvement is providing impetus for evaluation practice in the country. This is evident in the establishment of the Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation (MME) to oversee the implementation of government priority programmes at the sector level, initially under the Office of the President in January 2017, but later transitioning to a full ministry in 2018.

The president's vision is teased out into various frameworks for plans to be developed at the sector and the assembly level, with the planning process following a bottom-up approach. The views of the Ghanaian citizens are sought through their representatives at the Cross-Sector Planning Group (CSPG) and the Regional Coordinating Council (RCC), which is made up of chiefs representing the local people within towns and villages. However, beyond these representations, the planning process does not factor in the values and opinions of the indigenous people.

Despite the president's promotion of a culture of results definition and planning, a critical setback is the lack of continuity of plans and results delivery frameworks because of the change of governments, which has resulted in almost all previously defined results and plans being set aside. Nevertheless, there are many high level political champions across the political divide interested in driving M&E and the use of evidence in government systems.

In 2012, the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) selected Ghana as one of its core countries in which to carry out its work towards building stronger evaluation systems. This was not only based on previous analysis of the supply of and demand for M&E in Ghana, but also on the premise of the country's capacity to do so. In the years that followed, CLEAR-AA, through the Ghana Institute for Management and Public administration (GIMPA), identified appropriate partners to help address the growing demand for M&E in Ghana, as well as those that could help finance a medium-term intervention. In addition, CLEAR-GIMPA has developed a post-graduate degree in M&E to cater for a growing cohort of local evaluators.

1.2 Purpose

Against this background, this diagnostic study sought to unpack the current status of a national evaluation system (NES) in Ghana, using CLEAR-AA's *10 Functions of a National Evaluation System* as a conceptual framework, in order to determine the most appropriate interventions for strengthening national evaluations in the country.

1.3 Approach

The process followed to conduct this study was broken down into seven steps:

Step 1: The study began with a ***background note*** based on a literature review of the socio-political and economic context of Ghana, including details of key political and/or developmental transitions that have shaped the country's development path, as outlined by its key national development plans, as well as significant milestones the country has achieved and the key challenges it faces.

Step 2: Next, a ***stakeholder mapping*** exercise was conducted to identify the diverse stakeholders who fill different functions within the Ghanaian national evaluation ecosystem and plot their roles and relationships in order to define points of collaboration and competition, as well as niche areas. This exercise also pointed out some of the power dynamics and key points of influence within the Ghanaian NES.

Step 3: Once the key organisations and individuals had been determined from the mapping exercise, ***interviews*** were carried out with them, either in person, telephonically, or online.

Step 4: Data gathered from the interviews was transcribed and analysed using various data analysis techniques (such as content, narrative, discourse analysis, and framework analysis) and used to draw up a ***draft diagnostic report***.

Step 5: The draft then went through a ***peer review*** process, which included cross-checking of factual information and critical review of findings in line with the diagnostic guidelines, after which it was revised accordingly.

Step 6: The revised report then underwent an ***external review*** by in-country supporters comprising of key experts and role-players who were in strong positions to critically review the document from a context-specific perspective.

Step 7: Finally, the report went through a process of stakeholder validation at a ***validation and ecosystem mapping workshop*** which included senior-level staff of government departments or ministries, experts in the field, and other key stakeholders, such as civil society organisations (CSOs), volunteer organisations for professional evaluation (VOPES), and academics. Participants of the workshop gauged whether the overarching conclusions and recommendations adequately examined the functions of a NES and validated whether the recommendations were feasible for the prevailing national contexts.

1.4 Defining concepts

Monitoring and evaluation are concepts that seem inseparable; party because the use of M&E as a term has come to have its own meaning, but also because of the symbiotic relationship between the two. In this report, there are instances were monitoring and evaluation will appear as standalone and distinct activities, and others where the catch-all M&E term will be used. This is because while most countries talk of M&E, not evaluations, and have established M&E systems, CLEAR-AA aims to see more development institutions and governments undertake and use evaluations, and therefore indicators that specifically look at evaluation are required.

The UN Evaluation Group (UNEG) defines ***evaluation*** as an assessment, conducted as systematically and impartially as possible, of an activity, project, programme, strategy, policy, topic, theme, sector, operational area, or institutional performance. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) adds that evaluation uses social research methods and practices to measure what changes the programme, projects, and policies have contributed to, and to obtain a mature understanding of how it happened. This is differentiated from ***monitoring***, which is routine collection of programme/project implementation and performance data, mostly to track progress. Monitoring data provides regular feedback to implementers, programme/project sponsors, and other relevant stakeholders, but does not always answer the questions why and how.

While the precise definition of an ***M&E system*** varies between different organisations and guidelines, in this report, an M&E system will be used to refer to indicators, tools, and processes used to measure if an intervention (programme/policy/project) has been implemented according to the plan (monitoring) and is having the desired result (evaluation). ***M&E*** itself will refer to processes and systems generating programme/project performance information, and not systematic analysis/assessment of achievement of outcomes and impacts, which is what evaluations provide.

An ***evaluation system*** or ***NES*** will be used to refer to a system that exclusively defines the undertaking/commissioning and use of evaluations. This report uses a combination of the Furubo and Sandahl (2008) and Lazaro (2015) definitions of evaluation systems, which state that an evaluation system exists when "evaluation is a regular part of the life cycle of public policies and programmes, it is conducted in a methodologically rigorous and systematic manner in which its results are used by political decision-makers and managers, and those results are also made available to the public." Lazaro further points out that intertwined in such systems are values, practices, and institutions associated with a particular political and administrative system (Lazaro 2015:16). In other words, evaluation systems are not separate from the administrative systems that host them, whether in government, CSOs, or international development agencies. This diagnostic study process therefore assessed not only the existence of technical components of a country's M&E system, but also the functioning of other public service management systems and evidence production and use by non-state actors, such as development partners and VOPEs.

Although this report focuses on country level M&E and evaluation systems, it is important to note that these can also be sectoral, such as a Health M&E system, Education M&E system, etc. These different systems are also not necessarily mutually exclusive; different systems can co-exist within a country/organisation, for example, the sector or ministry system can be a subset of a national system that is coordinated at the centre of government but might have parts that are not reflected in the national system. In this report, in cases where a ministry is reported to have a robust or well established system, explicit mention is made of a sector evaluation or M&E system. However, the diagnostic process did not attempt to map all systems and sub-systems in Ghana, as the focus was on its NES.

1.4.1 Conceptual framework: 10 Functions of a National Evaluation System

In addition to defining what an evaluation system is, CLEAR-AA developed a framework that defines the functions of an evaluation system which illustrate why evaluation systems are so important for

countries or sectors. The *10 Functions of a National Evaluation System* is a holistic framework which was used in the diagnostic process to assess and identify areas of strengths or readiness and entry points for a NES in Ghana. While it is significant for common understanding, consensus, coherence, and effective coordination of support and capacity development (Mapitsa 2018), it is important to note that the framework is not an ideal type, but rather a tool that can be used to better grasp the complexity of evaluation systems. Understanding the different functions within a NES, and how they relate to each other, is crucial for both defining a range of sub-systems and providing a more nuanced analysis of the capacity of an evaluation system and the ways different stakeholders interact within it. CLEAR-AA defines these functions as:

1. ***Defining results and planning:*** Defining results for a programme is one of the most critical functions of an evaluation system. This is reflected in recent changes in terminology in the M&E sector, through which M&E functions are now articulated as planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Evaluation systems, if empowered to play a role in governance, are key to defining programmatic results, bringing evidence to planning processes, and setting programmatic direction.

2. ***Performance monitoring*****:** Evaluations do more than just monitor performance; in fact, in Africa in particular, evaluation systems are often explicitly designed to assess whether a programme has performed effectively or not, and why. Given the tremendous investment in political will, resourcing, and institutional strength, although focusing on assessing performance may constitute a disproportionate part of a NES and contribute relatively little in addition to monitoring systems, it does merit its own function.

3. ***Institutional arrangements:*** Taking a systems approach to a NES requires a focus on the linkages between the different components of the system, and while institutional arrangements may vary across evaluation systems, there is almost always a core custodian of these arrangements. This function requires dedicated attention and can include both normative and practiced roles of stakeholders, as well as policies, legislation, and standards.

4. ***Evidence production and research*****:** The process of undertaking an evaluation simultaneously uses and generates evidence; however, as with conducting research, evaluations face many boundaries, constraints, and contextual considerations. Nevertheless, evidence-production is a key function of a NES, and therefore these challenges require specific consideration. For the purposes of this diagnostic study, CLEAR-AA is particularly interested in the research and evidence-production associated with monitoring systems and evaluations and how these findings translate into decision-making.

5. ***Evaluation practice*****:** As an emergent profession with lively debate around the competencies necessary for evaluators, the systematisation of evaluation is essential for the evolution of evaluation practice, and a process of co-definition is currently underway among those institutionalising evaluation systems and those practicing evaluation in the region. This is evident in the emergence of collectively developed competency frameworks, quality assurance frameworks, and so forth.

6. ***Disseminating evaluation results*:** Evaluation systems play an important role in disseminating evaluation results. The mechanisms and extent through which they do this varies, but dissemination, to users and a wide range of additional stakeholders, is one of the main factors that makes a NES effective.

7. ***Using evaluation findings*:** A NES must not just disseminate evaluation results to be effective; it must also use these findings for, among others, planning systems and programme re-design, advocacy, accountability, and bolstering other evaluation functions.

8. ***Capacity-building*:** Given both the variation in capacity around evaluation practice and the emergent systematisation of evaluation, capacity-building is an inherent component of evaluation systems. This includes building capacity for evaluation practice in general, as well as within each component of a NES to ensure it functions as a whole.

9. ***Shifting norms*:** Through the systematising of evaluations and the use of their results, evaluation systems can be a powerful tool for shifting norms and practices around the way decision-makers engage with evaluation processes.

10. ***Shaping axiologies*:** Evaluation systems are designed around value systems in the way they define and measure results. Through a systemic practice of evaluation, particularly through the local ownership of evaluation systems in Africa, the process through which values are reinforced is changing.

2 Overview of M&E in Ghana

2.1 Institutional arrangements

Monitoring has already been institutionalised in Ghana's public sector, and there are various structures, systems, and processes in place to support this function. However, the highly complex and technical nature of generating evaluation evidence makes it more difficult to institutionalise evaluation within the emerging M&E space, in which there are different levels of capacity. Currently, M&E activities are mainly undertaken by four key actors, namely the MME and the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) at the national level; the Policy Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Divisions (PPMEDs) at the Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) level; and the District Planning and Coordinating Units (DPCUs) at the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assembly (MMDA) level. Whereas the MME only oversees the implementation of priority flagship government programmes and projects through real-time monitoring and periodic evaluations of the programmes and projects, the NDPC is mandated by the constitution to monitor, evaluate, and coordinate development programmes of all kinds. The PPMEDs and the DPCUs oversee M&E activities at the sector and the assembly levels respectively. Other players within the M&E space include academic and research institutions, development partners, and CSOs, such as the Ghana Monitoring and Evaluation Forum (GMEF) as a VOPE.

2.2 Roles and responsibilities

Advocacy for M&E is driven mainly by the GMEF and, more recently, by the MME and the president himself, who has demonstrated high levels of commitment to the use of evidence for decision-making. The MME is headed by a very experienced cabinet minister who champions the practice of M&E, and directors for M&E and district chief executives serve as champions and oversee the implementation of M&E at sector and assembly levels respectively.

The NDPC is mandated by the Constitution to coordinate planning activities and has two main functions, namely planning and M&E. In 2017, the Ministry of Planning was formed to provide executive direction for the formulation and coordination of national plans, including the Coordinated Programmes, Medium-Term Plans, and other national plans. The planning units of the NDPC coordinate all planning activities at the national level, while the PPMEDs and DPCUs oversee planning activities at the sectoral and assembly levels respectively. The NDPC prepares its budget annually and funds are released for planning, monitoring, and evaluation activities. In 2017, for example, the NDPC budgeted for $1,276,595.74, out of which it received $638,297.87 (representing 50% of its budget).[1]

The policy-planning-M&E cycle begins with the National Development Policy Framework (NDPF), a blueprint developed with input from the CSPG and RCC (representing citizens), comprising of MDAs, the private sector and other stakeholders. The NDPF identifies national development issues within the context of their linkages to development, while the sector and district development frameworks are designed to transform policy objectives and strategies into actionable programmes and projects

The NDPC issues guidelines in accordance with the NDPF to the districts and sectors with clear instructions on the format, content, and process to develop their localised Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs). These are then aggregated to produce the National MTDP. The districts and sectors are required to submit quarterly reports on the implementation of the plans, which are collated to produce Annual Progress Reports (APRs) by the NDPC, while the MME submits quarterly reports to cabinet.

The NDPC collects its data through these APRs, as well as through collaboration with the Ghana Statistical Service, field visits, and surveys, and is currently working on acquiring a Management Information System (MIS) to manage its database. Of note, however, is that while evidence from evaluations and the APRs are expected to feed into the planning cycle, often this expectation is not met, largely due to late reporting of the APR. There are also no clear mechanisms in place to ensure citizens' aspirations are reflected in development plans, except for a few ad hoc representations at the district and national levels. For example, in the run up to elections, political party leaders conduct ''listening tours'' around the country to receive requests from citizens in order to inform their party manifestos, and a vibrant media landscape, particularly radio stations, does ensure that citizens' concerns are articulated – however, these concerns are rarely reflected in planning and M&E activities.

[1] Feedback from the interviews reveals that a chunk of the budget allocation ends up in planning activities. One official interviewed indicated that due to the already constrained budgets, allocations for M&E activities are often redirected for other activities.

2.3 Performance monitoring

Ghana has a strong performance monitoring culture, mainly driven by the desire for accountability and transparency. However, often performance reports delay, or are not used at all to inform, major decisions, such as budgetary allocations. In addition, the country's M&E system lacks the required capacity to undertake this monitoring function.

As there is currently no national M&E policy, the different sectors have developed their own guidelines for programme implementation. The Office of the Head of Civil Service, for instance, has the Performance Management Policy aimed at helping managers improve individual and organisational performance. The policy spells out a performance management system with a six-step cyclical process involving performance planning, performance measurement, performance monitoring, performance evaluation, annual performance reporting, and a performance improvement plan. Two levels of assessment are identified in the policy, namely institutional, which requires all public institutions to undertake bi-annual institutional level assessments; and individual, which requires all heads of public service, chief executive officers, chief directors, heads of departments, and other staff to render an account of their stewardship.

The NDPC also provides sectors and assemblies with a template and guidelines based on the development plans from which to develop monitoring frameworks. Performance measurement is routinely done on programme and project implementation, with MMDAs and MDAs mainly using field visits and routine surveys to collect project performance data on their respective indicators. However, the fact that performance monitoring is manual/paper-based has many negative implications on the efficiency and effectiveness of M&E practice in the country, chief among them delays in the release of the APRs, delays in parliament response, and, ultimately, executive decisions which are not backed by any form of evidence. Furthermore, even though the key values that drive evaluation practice in Ghana are evidence for decision-making, transparency, and accountability, the system for holding people accountable for poor performance is seemingly weak.

3 Country evaluation system

3.1 Level of formalisation

Even though there is no policy in place governing the practice of evaluations, the NDPC did develop manuals and guidelines for the development and implementation of M&E frameworks when formalised M&E activities were attached to the Medium-Term Development Plans in 2003. The government is currently working towards the development of a National M&E Policy and, while data collection in most institutions is still manual, there is a strong drive towards an automated process. For instance, the Ministry of Education has developed an Education Management Information System (EMIS), an online information system which receives data inputs from the district or assembly levels. Other ministries are also using or in the process of developing a MIS, such as the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Food and Agriculture, and the MME is working towards acquiring a dashboard to enhance real-time monitoring of priority programmes and projects.

The country's NES is in a fledgling state at present, and evaluation outputs are scant. Most interventions by government and development partners have M&E as key component, and jobs in the

field now require extensive M&E training and experience in carrying out evaluations. The NES has very little indigenisation, however, and approaches and methods of evaluation are largely borrowed from the western world, although some strides have been made recently to ensure accountability in the public sector through the introduction of the Functional Organisation Assessment Tool, now called the District Assembly Performance Assessment Tool (DPAT), which assesses the performance of the various assemblies.

3.2 Capacity of government to undertake evaluations

Evaluation practice in Ghana is anchored on the constitution, which requires all sectors and local assemblies to undertake evaluations. However, inter-sectoral collaboration and coordination is weak, which sometimes leads to duplication of efforts and resources. Nevertheless, trainings, workshops, and technical backstopping have helped strengthen the practice of M&E over the years, as has the condition by many donors that progress reports and evaluations are submitted as requirements for continuous support.

Public sector staff have high academic qualifications, with the minimum entry requirement for all M&E technical staff in the ministries and the NDPC a masters' degree, and a first degree for the district and municipal assemblies. Nonetheless, M&E competencies among these technical staff is still evolving and mainstream M&E programmes are emerging within many academic institutions.

The use of information and communications technology (ICT) to optimise planning in Ghana still needs some improvement. For example, even though the PPMEDs and DPCUs have dedicated offices where ICT systems are used, they are often not harmonised with systems from other sectors, districts, and the NDPC. Another challenge in the implementation process at institutional level is the lack of adequate human and financial resources, especially in the assemblies.

3.3 Approach to evaluations

M&E practice is hinged heavily on performance monitoring and compliance to submit quarterly reports to the NDPC, and there is no clear policy guideline that gives direction on how evaluation of public programmes and project should be conducted or systems in place to absorb evaluation findings into the planning cycle and assist in major decision-making. Furthermore, most evaluations are donor-driven and there is little room for the indigenisation of evaluation practice. Evaluations are rarely carried out, due to limited funding and capacity within the MDAs and MMDAs. The few that are undertaken are usually done on selected government flagship programmes or as impact and outcome evaluations that are mandatory for continuity of programme/project donor funding.

While donors and development agencies have driven most of the demand for evaluations in Ghana in the past, some local institutions within academia, the private sector, and CSOs have now been identified to conduct evaluations. However, as it stands, there are few government-led evaluations, and these are mostly commissioned by the NDPC and undertaken by external evaluators within private evaluation firms and higher education institutions (HEIs), such as GIMPA and the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER) hosted by the University of Ghana. GIMPA mostly conducts process and outcome evaluations, while ISSER specialises in impact evaluations.

3.4 Use of evaluations

There is limited use of evaluation findings for evidence-based decision-making by relevant stakeholders, partly due to the time constraints in producing evaluation results and partly because of competing political ideologies and interests. One example where results of an evaluation were used was in the setting of the premium for the National Health Insurance, however, generally, because evaluations are rarely done and monitoring reports are mostly released late, there is not much evidence to prove the use of evaluation findings within the public sector – even where some level of capacity does exist to do so, such as the PPMED directors with M&E training. The legislature's research unit in parliament also lacks capacity to use evaluation findings for decisions-making, and parliament's poverty alleviation sub-committee, which scrutinises M&E findings, lacks technical M&E support to carry out its mandate. There are no mechanisms for developing improvement plans for interventions which are evaluated either, although this has been considered in the drafting of the National M&E Policy.

3.5 Dissemination of evaluation results

The NDPC, Ghana Audit Service, and now the MME are responsible for making available evaluation results. There are many avenues through which evaluation findings are shared. The NDPC, for example, usually publishes evaluation findings of the APRs on its website, distributes copies of its monitoring reports to the libraries of research and academic institutions, and submits the APRs to parliament for scrutiny and for parliament to hold the executive to account. Most sector ministries and assemblies have public relation officers who act as communication officers between the public institutions and the citizenry, and, with the establishment of the MME and the current government's emphasis on M&E, the media is gaining interest in M&E. CLEAR-GIMPA sees an opportunity here and intends to partner with the government through the MME to build the capacity of the media in evaluations. The training will equip members of the media with deep insight into the usefulness of evaluations for public accountability and improving government performance, and strengthen their skills for reporting on evaluation findings.

In terms of the results and findings of M&E regarding public policies, programmes, and projects, the Ministry of Information is the government outlet for engaging with citizens. However, the level of accountability and transparency is relatively low on the part of the government, which allows some "meet the press" and "town hall meetings" to engage the media and citizens, but provides limited and biased information at them, which has in the past led some individuals, media houses, and CSOs to take court action in order to access the information. This lack of transparency should change now, however, under the current government, which has committed to the full disclosure of all evaluations funded from the public purse.

4 Capacity-building for evaluations

4.1 Professionalisation of evaluation

Interest in evaluation as a profession is growing in Ghana, particularly with the recent demand for evaluations being driven by the current government. Within the space of the VOPEs, the GMEF is a professional M&E association with 641 registered members, out of which 245 are active. The GMEF

organises an annual conference and forum across the 10 regions of Ghana and an M&E debate for tertiary institutions on various M&E topics. It is currently seeking funding to form M&E clubs at the secondary and tertiary levels of education as well. Ghana also receives substantial support from the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), which has its head office in Accra.

4.2 Provision of training and other capacity-building initiatives

There are a diverse range of academic programmes sprouting within the M&E space. The University of Ghana's School of Public Health, for example, has advertised for enrolment into a Masters' degree in Public Health with an M&E option, while its Business School awaits accreditation to commence a Masters' programme in M&E; and the postgraduate diploma programme and the Development Evaluation Training Programme in Africa (DETPA) currently being run by CLEAR-GIMPA for executives and M&E practitioners has already built enormous skills and capacity for staff within the public sector.[2]

A broad range of key stakeholders have also taken enormous interest in developing M&E capacity within the public sector, resulting in collaboration between the various CSOs (led by GMEF), CLEAR-GIMPA, AfrEA, NDPC, and the MME, who often support with the funding of training. There are currently efforts to engage the parliament of Ghana through the Strengthening Legislative Oversight (SLO) Programme by CLEAR-GIMPA as well.

Within the public sector, in 2017, M&E focal staff within the ministries were sponsored by the MME to be trained in the M&E foundation course at the DETPA programme and were scheduled to have advanced training on the advance programme in 2018.

Several public institutions also have capacity development arrangements within their bigger HR plans which encompass M&E capacity development, however, execution is often a challenge because of limited budget for training.

4.3 Evidence production and research

Evidence is produced by a wide array of think tanks, HEIs, and government agencies in line with their institutional strategic interests, and government gives some research funding to universities and HEIs as well. However, this is given to individual researchers, rather than their institutions, and the allocations are too insignificant to fund any meaningful research. Furthermore, the evidence produced is largely not used for the intended purpose. Discussion is therefore underway by government to abolish this system of research funding and instead pool all the resources into one National Research Fund in order to ensure that there is enough research funding capacity to support certain prioritised research and evidence production. Some international funding organisations support research and evidence production in HEIs as well, although the evidence produced is aligned with specific international development measurement frameworks, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

[2] One GMEF official interviewed indicated that membership grows daily, but challenges are experienced with members paying-up to activate their membership.

At government level, the major evidence-producing entities, that is, the NDPC and the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), and other key stakeholders work together, and development statistics generated by the GSS feed into the planning work of the NDPC, along with data generated from monitoring processes. Donor agencies are still significant drivers of demand for evidence, seeking out academia in evidence production that is independent of national processes, but this also means that the culture around evidence production remains largely for academic purposes. The media also play a role in creating demand for locally-generated evidence.

5 Conclusion and recommendations

Many challenges exist with regard to M&E in Ghana, such as weak capacity and inter-sectoral linkages, poor data quality, and delays in the production of the APRs. In addition, the culture of monitoring government projects and programmes within the public sector is more institutionalised compared to evaluations. Emphasis has often been placed on mandatory monitoring reports, while evaluations receive minimal attention. Notwithstanding these shortfalls, there is great demand for evaluations emanating from commitment at the highest level of government, and calls for transparency and accountability by civil society groups have led to a plethora of activities aimed at justifying the need for evidence-based decision-making, which will in turn strengthen the NES. This study has unravelled a number of issues in the NES based on which the following recommendations are proffered:

- The definition of results and planning in Ghana's NES is largely based on data obtained from the MDAs and MMDAs. However, the structures in place to verify the validity and reliability of this data are quite weak, which potentially affects the quality of the results and subsequent planning. Data quality assessment and control systems in the planning process should therefore be strengthened – but this can only happen when the culture of using evidence in planning is strengthened and timeliness in providing or sharing evidence from evaluation findings is improved.

- In addition, all public policies, programmes and projects should be evaluated and the results made publicly available for interested stakeholders. The National M&E Policy should also make reasonable provision for findings from evaluations that are conducted by donors and development agencies to be shared.

- Using evaluations for decision- and policy-making should be encouraged. One way to do this could be to introduce performance budgeting, which would justify why public institutions need budgetary allocations for specific projects at the same time.

- Linkages and collaboration between the various institutions and sectors involved in M&E practice in Ghana need to be fostered, and the processes for carrying out M&E functions standardised. This could be achieved by introducing a provision in the newly developed National M&E Policy outlining a clear approach on how to ensure inter-sectoral collaboration.

- While moving towards digitisation and automation will certainly strengthen the systems and structures in the NES for collecting, analysing, and storing data, ensuring data quality assessment and validation is essential to boost stakeholder confidence and trust in M&E

results. Digitisation would also enable real-time monitoring, thereby speeding up the production of reports.

- Beyond the conduct of research, more capacity development programmes are needed to strengthen the teaching and practice of evaluations in HEIs.

- Merging sector and academia expertise, increasing financial resources, and incentivising innovative approaches will boost evidence production and research in the country.

- Increasing awareness among citizens on why it is important for all public policies, programmes, and projects to be evaluated, and why they should demand accountability and transparency from public officials, is crucial. Their views must also be incorporated in programme planning and improvement.

- The practice of evaluation should be augmented by supporting the advocacy work of the VOPEs through conferences, fora, seminars and workshops on evaluation. More evaluations need to be conducted and this should be underpinned by a strong professional practice with an effective regulatory body.

- Finally, the president's strong commitment and leadership should be leveraged to fully institutionalise evaluations in the development framework of the country beyond just the government's priority programmes.

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