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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 Rwanda

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Acronyms

AfREA	African Evaluation Association
AIMS	African Institute for Mathematical Sciences
CESB	Capacity Development and Employment Board
CLEAR-AA	Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa
CSO	Civil society organisation
ECD	Evaluation Capacity Development
EDPRS	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy
GDP	Gross domestic product
GWM&ES	Government-wide monitoring and evaluation system
HEI	Higher education institution
ICT	Information and communications technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPAR-Rwanda	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research Rwanda
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
M&ERL	Monitoring and evaluation, research and learning
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MINECOFIN	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
MIS	Management Information System
NDP	National Development Plan
NES	National Evaluation System
NISR	National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
PM&E	Performance monitoring and evaluation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RBM	Results-based management
RMI	Rwandan Management Institute
RPF	Rwanda Patriotic Front
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNEG	UN Evaluation Group

UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VOPE	Volunteer organisation for professional evaluation
WHO	World Health Organisation

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Economic and developmental context

Since at least 1994, Rwanda has experienced a period of 'miracle' economic growth, as seen by the country's gross domestic product (GDP), which has grown by 6% per annum on average over the last 24 years – a characteristic of a developmental state[1] (World Bank 1998; International Monetary Fund 2007; Mashinga 2000; National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda 2008). This is largely as a result of the government's productive use of party and military-owned enterprises, as well as agrarian reform in order to better advance Vision 2020. In addition, the country follows a trajectory of a knowledge-based service economy over a manufacturing economy (Republic of Rwanda 2000a).

Appreciating the national evaluation functioning of Rwanda depends on understanding the country's historical discourse and the general context of the country. Over the last twenty years, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) has rebuilt post-genocide Rwanda (World Bank 1998; World Bank 2007) and taken great strides in ensuring that the bureaucracy is efficient and free of corruption (McKay *et al.* 2007; Republic of Rwanda 2004). Rwanda has an impactful national planning system, and understanding the effectiveness of the public sector in remaining corruption free, coherent, and efficient depends on understanding the steps that have been taken to achieve this. Core key national achievements include rapid economic growth and a reduction in poverty, low level of government debt, market-friendly policy environment, political stability, rule of law and zero tolerance for corruption, and a comprehensive programme of investment in energy, agriculture, information and communications technology (ICT), tourism, and a commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Mashinga 2000; Republic of Rwanda 2000a; Republic of Rwanda 2000b).

Development of M&E

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in Rwanda has grown over the past 16 years, fast becoming an independent government-led national system of integrated planning. Monitoring and evaluation, research and learning (M&ERL) in the country began with a process of macroeconomic monitoring under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank-supervised reporting on resource procurement and distribution (ODI 2010, 4). These pro-poor policy interventions stimulated a period of relative stability for the country. The first attempt at consolidating M&ERL at national level was brought about by legislative processes of decentralisation aimed at setting out M&ERL requirements at local level. Baseline population and socioeconomic surveys were further conducted to feed into the country's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

National development planning

Rwanda's national planning system has two main contributing instruments to track development progress, namely Vision 2020 and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy

[1]A developmental state is known as a 'hard' state that leads the macroeconomic planning and industrialisation of a country. The developmental state uses strong intervention and extensive regulation and planning to lead the industrial drive (Republic of Rwanda 2000a; 2000b; 2000c; 2000d). It will typically try to mobilise capital for the most promising industry with the greatest spill-over effects for the rest of the economy.

(EDPRS). Based on well-defined goals, including the former Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the case of Vision 2020, these two mechanisms are driven by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (MINECOFIN), which encompasses both the finance and planning roles of government, in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Vision 2020 was established in 2000 and is a framework for Rwanda's development. Stemming from this are the first EDPRS, which ran from 2007 to 2012, and EDPRS 2, which was informed by an evaluation of the EDPRS 1 and ran from 2013 to 2018. Both these five-year strategies were intended to pave the way to inclusive economic development subsequent to the genocide. Additionally, the Smart Rwanda 2020 plan captures the communications infrastructure and human capital development plans in recognition of ICT as a key driver for economic growth.

1.2 Purpose

Against this background, this diagnostic study sought to unpack the current status of a national evaluation system (NES) in Rwanda, using the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) 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

This diagnostic study consisted of the following seven steps:

Step 1: The starting point was to develop a ***background note*** based on a literature review of the socio-political and economic context of Rwanda. The context included details of key political and/or developmental transitions that have shaped the country's development path, as outlined by its national development plans (NDPs), as well as the significant milestones achieved and challenges faced by the country.

Step 2: Next, a ***stakeholder mapping*** exercise was conducted to identify the diverse stakeholders who fill different functions within the Rwandan 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 Rwandan 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 sectorial, 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 Rwanda, 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 Rwanda. 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 Rwanda

2.1 Institutional arrangements

The Parliament of Rwanda has its own M&E system built into its institutional structure, with both houses of Parliament (the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies) having dedicated M&E officers in their support staff structure. M&E officers work with planning officers to monitor the implementation progress of planned activities and present the findings to the Clerk (as the permanent secretary of Parliament), who then engages with the relevant portfolio committees on aspects that require attention. They, in turn, engage with the relevant ministries and departments. The support staff structure also includes researchers who conduct analysis mainly through secondary data, such as departmental and research reports, but also through conducting field visits to cross-check information, which is then presented to Members of Parliament (MPs) who exercise oversight through the committee structures.

The Senate is guided by the EDPRS 2, which outlines an M&E framework that includes regular ongoing monitoring, annual assessment of the strategic plan, independent mid-term evaluation aimed at improving strategies where challenges are experienced, and a final evaluation that will inform the next EDPRS. However, the need to flesh out this outline of the M&E framework in terms of specific guiding tools and developing realistic indicators is considered an urgent need.

Performance monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) in Rwanda is guided by the Results-Based Management (RBM) policy, which is coordinated by MINECOFIN. The policy provides in-depth descriptions of the NES, planning process, and roles of all stakeholders, and is widely known across all institutions, ministries, and partner agencies, but other than this, there is no any other official document guiding M&E. While this policy does provide guidance for the planning and monitoring process, it is thin on evaluation practice across ministries. Furthermore, despite the policy-prescribed quarterly reporting by all state-owned institutions, these reports, consolidated at every level of the hierarchy, are mainly for consumption by principals at national level and have very limited use at the institutional level.

2.2 Roles and responsibilities

In Rwanda, the planning, monitoring, and evaluation functions are all coordinated by MINECOFIN, as opposed to be being located in a standalone ministry as is the case in some countries. These functions are guided by the RBM policy, which complements the country's other two primary planning tools, Vision 2020 and the EDPRS. MINECOFIN plays a critical role in ensuring that the RBM policy with all its prescripts is applied across all institutions, but other ministries, such as the Ministry of District Development, also play a coordinating role in processes, such as *umuganda*, or community work, where some level of citizen monitoring is conducted, while the Office of the Prime Minister is responsible for coordination and oversight.

2.3 Performance monitoring

Although MINECOFIN is well capacitated in terms of the number of officials and skillsets, in order to ensure an efficient and effective public service delivery, the government introduced a performance-based management tool known as *imihigo* in 2006. *Imihigo* are performance contracts entered into with all government officials with the aim of ensuring economic progress and reducing poverty within communities, and are measured against an agreed set of governance, economic, and social indicators in line with the SDGs.

Through the *imihigo* and *umuganda* processes, as well as the RBM policy, Rwanda has developed an effective reporting process. On the other hand, the obligation to perform and demonstrate performance, together with the emphasis on accountability from the top, creates a strong culture of reporting at the expense of monitoring. Learning is therefore overshadowed by the need to remain accountable, rendering the role of evaluations negligible in this context.

3 Country evaluation system

3.1 Level of formalisation

While there is an RBM policy, there is no specific evaluation policy or plan and, therefore, no framework to govern evaluation standards or quality.

3.2 Capacity of government to undertake evaluations

The Rwandan evaluation system, and evaluation capacity in the country generally, are weak. In addition, since the practice of M&E within the government-wide monitoring and evaluation system (GWM&ES) is guided by the RBM policy, the policy's weaknesses are reflected in the GWM&ES, such as its over-emphasis on reporting, accountability, and activity- or output-based monitoring. Likewise, the policy's limited inclusion of non-governmental institutions in M&E is also evident in practice. For example, as much as CSOs implement programmes collaboratively with government, they tend to practice evaluation independently of the GWM&ES, in part because of the state's onerous processes for commissioning studies. Nevertheless, the current emphasis on developing an effective internal M&E framework with clearly defined verification mechanisms (including useful tools and realistic indicators) demonstrates that there is a concerted effort and interest in improving M&E practice and culture in government.

Evaluation capacity outside the GWM&ES is equally weak, to some extent because the Rwandan M&E Association is still nascent. In fact, it does not have any legal standing in the country yet, even though it is fully registered with the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), and has limited membership, despite the fact it boasts a selection of very influential founding members with good contacts within the various ministries in their individual capacity.

Overall, there is a large dependency on external, rather than local, evaluation practitioners, both by government itself, and international agencies and evaluation consulting firms.

3.3 Approach to evaluations

There is a sense that evaluation practice (while widely respected as a function) is not yet well understood, especially within the GWM&ES. This may be due to poor evaluation capacity combined with poor systems and low investment for capacity development. In addition, as discussed, there is far more emphasis on planning, reporting, and accountability than on evaluations and learning, and even though data for specific reporting requirements is produced – mainly influenced by the desire to report against SDGs – whether the existing data is used optimally remains questionable. Furthermore, the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), which was established in 2005, depends entirely on data collected by the various state institutions and ministries and does not collect primary data itself. The institute therefore performs the role of aggregating and packaging the monitoring data and availing it for various users. Nonetheless, since 2018, its function has expanded to include an evaluation function in order to carry out evaluations of national performance contracts previously conducted by the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research - Rwanda (IPAR-Rwanda). These evaluations have, to date, focused predominantly on implementation and output and, thus, overlooked higher-level results – partly because there is no guiding framework on evaluation standards and quality. Over and above these evaluations, only the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education seem to be conducting evaluation studies. Although there are some evaluations produced by international agencies, there seems to be reluctance to share findings and lessons with the respective state institutions.

3.4 Use of evaluations

Since the process of producing national evaluations is routine, structured, and closely controlled, the mechanisms for convening dialogue towards using results is equally as structured, and Rwanda's strong planning system makes it easy to review the plans in light of evaluation results. For example, leaders across ministries and institutions meet annually to discuss respective results, and new plans and policies are set on the basis of these evaluations. Furthermore, the process of evidence use is led through settings such as the *umuganda*. However, because accountability tends to dominate evidence use, at least within government, learning as a form of use is limited, and there does not seem to be any demonstration of systemic capacity to facilitate use of externally produced research or evaluation evidence either.

3.5 Dissemination of evaluation results

Annually, after the release of the *imihigo* evaluation results, a leadership retreat is convened at which ministers, institutional leaders, and selected CSOs discuss the results and recommendations. However, besides routine reporting coordinated by MINECOFIN to the Office of the Prime Minister and the posting of evaluation results on the MINECOFIN website, there is no official process for disseminating research or evaluation results. Furthermore, while, government has displayed exceptional capacity in achieving and reporting against the SDGs, the reports are neither informed by nor made available to the public. In other words, government's strong belief in the importance of evidence-based policy-making, governance, and performance does not seem to translate into a culture of sharing of evaluation results. In addition, despite recent efforts to build an electronic system to enable citizens and officials to communicate directly, this project was reportedly unsuccessful due to poor participation by state officials, characterised by not supplying performance information.

4 Capacity-building for evaluations

4.1 Professionalisation of evaluation

Due to limitations in data collection, it is not clear if evaluation functions are made explicit and clearly documented in job descriptions of the various office bearers, however, a review of ministerial websites confirmed that none of the job titles had the word 'evaluation' in their framing, and most of the planning and performance management positions are without an evaluation function either.

4.2 Provision of training and other capacity-building initiatives

Despite government's acknowledgement of the value of M&E and clearly expressed need for evaluation capacity development (ECD), the Capacity Development and Employment Board (CESB), a state-funded agency responsible for government-wide capacity development which carries out training through the Rwandan Management Institute (RMI), offers only limited and somewhat theoretical programmes on ECD. Furthermore, the country has not developed an ECD plan as yet, and while the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences (AIMS) has displayed the ability to train in data science and data systems, such training is not tailored for government officials. In addition, there are only two institutions in the country that offer evaluation training, and only as part of a master's programme. Nevertheless, a number of donors across ministries and other organs of state have made an effort to build evaluation capacity. However, while this has had a significantly positive effect on ECD, it has also resulted in a wide variety of M&E standards and approaches.

4.3 Evidence production and research

While national evaluations are conducted centrally through IPAR-Rwanda, some ministries, such as education and health, have started producing evaluation studies as well, although most are either fully or partly funded by donor agencies, for example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Moreover, while international agencies continue to produce their own respective studies, they do not share evidence with government, despite collaborating with them in social programmes. In addition, evaluation institutions rely on expats for evaluation production due to inadequate local evaluation capacity and the widely shared perception that locally-produced evidence is of a lesser quality.

Locally, the University of Rwanda does have some pockets of research excellence, although the research output is yet to reach a point where it can actually influence policy as much as IPAR-Rwanda does, but the Rwandan Evaluation Association is still in its infant stages and cannot therefore be expected to facilitate evidence production at this point.

5 Conclusion

While Rwanda's production of evaluation evidence and general practice of evaluation can still benefit from further capacity development, the broader NES is robust. Nevertheless, although there is generally openness to use data and a politically-driven push for evidence-based decision-making, there are obvious capacity gaps. Despite a clear planning and reporting system, the issue of data use at subnational levels of the system is still a challenge, largely caused by an over-emphasis on accountability. Similarly, evaluation of the *imihigo* is closely pushed by leadership and highly characterised by accountability at the expense of learning.

Strict and selectively solicited participation of civil society in the planning and performance management system is viewed as a perpetual discouragement of engagement by CSOs in the country. This is normally indicated by lack of awareness of CSO-produced evaluations studies by state officials and poor rates of evidence sharing between the state and civil society.

While there is an obvious need for, and an explicitly stated, desire for evaluation capacity development, there two main challenges that need to be addressed to achieve this: the lack of clarity about the availability of financial resources to fund capacity development, and the poor capacity to provide and/or support the provision of ECD within the country.