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# practice

## Policies for evidence: a comparative analysis of Africa's national evaluation policy landscape

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**Background:** African countries are developing their monitoring and evaluation policies to systematise, structure and institutionalise evaluations and use of evaluative evidence across the government sector. The pace at which evaluations are institutionalised and systematised across African governments is progressing relatively slowly.

**Aims and objectives:** This article offers a comparative analysis of Africa's national evaluation policy landscape. The article looks at the policies of Zimbabwe, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya (not adopted) and Uganda. To achieve the aim we unpack the different characteristics taken by the national evaluation policies, emerging lessons for countries who wish to develop a national evaluation policy, and key challenges faced by countries with regard to evaluation policy development and implementation. The article draws on both a desktop review and action research approaches from the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa to build national evaluation systems across the region. The approach has included peer learning and co-creation of knowledge around public sector evaluation systems.

**Key conclusions:** The national evaluation policies reviewed share certain common features in terms of purpose and composition. They are also struggling with common issues of institutionalising the evaluation system across the public sector. However, there are variations in the countries' guiding governance frameworks at a national level that shape the nature and content of policies, as well as the ways through which the policies themselves are expected to guide the use of evaluative evidence for decision and policymaking, and programming.

**Key words** national evaluation policy • evidence use • monitoring • evaluation

### Key messages

- Peer-to-peer learning is important for sharing experiences on developing national evaluation policy.
- Countries should develop their policies in line with their state architecture, context and relevance to their needs.
- Policies necessitate new ways of thinking about the practice of monitoring and evaluation.
- This article fills an important empirical lacuna on evidence use and policy development in Africa

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## Introduction

In Africa, National Evaluation Policies (NEPs) are regarded as important for the building of coherence and capacity across public sector evaluation systems, and also as the source of evaluative evidence for decision making. Systems to implement and facilitate these policies have proliferated over the past two decades, with objectives including performance measurement and impact assessment and planning for future programmes and projects. Governments are required to account to their electorate on the effectiveness of public sector programmes (Porter and Goldman, 2013). Since 2011, South Africa has implemented a National Evaluation System (NES) governed by the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) as a component of the government-wide monitoring and evaluation system. Through the NES, located in the Presidency, the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) systematically evaluates programmes and policies of national priority, and has widened the reach to include provinces and departments by institutionalising mid-term and annual planning and budgeting allocation for evaluation (Goldman et al, 2018).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include country-led systems, which measure the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, coordination, and impact of development interventions. Evaluation practice has a long history on the continent, but without an enabling policy environment it has not translated into a system which enables sound public-sector decision making based on the best available evaluation evidence. Supported by international development agencies and donors, evaluation has historically taken place outside government systems and has not shaped African governments' reflection and learning. However, the institutionalisation of evaluation through NEPs is an opportunity for African governments to demand and use evaluative evidence, thereby creating a virtuous cycle that strengthens national evaluation capacities. Using examples from the region, this article aims to demonstrate how an NEP can foster an evaluation ethos in the public sector and set normative expectations, thereby creating a culture that is conducive to the demand for and use of evaluative evidence by policymakers and implementers.

This article explores the role that NEPs can play in public sector reform, and shares lessons on the policy development process. Certain process elements and features of policy development, such as high-level political support, have the potential to shape practices within the evaluation system. This article does not provide a detailed analysis of the political context in which evaluation policies are formulated and implemented or the contested landscape of evidence use in African public sector institutions. While these factors are important and interesting, this paper focuses on defining and articulating the opportunities and pitfalls of how evaluation policies can promote the use of evidence within public sectors. Mwijande (2018) cautions that the absence of such policies can potentially leave programme and policy planning processes up to the whims of bureaucrats, thereby compromising the efficiency and effectiveness of development policies. However, much of the existing literature on evaluation policies and systems relates to the Global North. The context of development and public sector evidence use is different in Africa, where the emergence of evaluation systems has had a unique trajectory (Basheka and Byamugisha, 2015; Amisi and Chirau, 2019). For these reasons, it is important to specifically consider the process of policy development in African countries.

We compare the approved NEPs of South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya (not approved but awaiting approval), Uganda, and Zimbabwe, examining the respective local elements of NEP, and highlighting key components that may be pertinent for countries in the region currently developing NEPs or considering ways to institutionalise and systematise monitoring and evaluation (M&E) through policy formulation, as has been done in Ghana, Ethiopia, Lesotho, Namibia and Tanzania. Because much has been written about the South African NES and policy, and one of the authors of this article was part of the team that helped to establish that system, the paper draws largely on the South African experience. The article uses [Holvoet and Renard's \(2007\)](#) framework for an effective NES to explore the linkages between evaluation policies and the development evaluation systems in the various countries. The article further examines emerging lessons and key challenges in the development of NEPs and their implementation by means of an NES, and draws on action research approaches from the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) to build the respective NESs across the region.

## What is a National Evaluation Policy?

While there is no consensus on the definition of NEP, there is consensus in the literature on certain components. [Hojlund \(2015: 430\)](#) defines an NEP as 'a systematic and institutionalised M&E framework in several interdependent organisational entities with the purpose of informing decision-making and securing oversight functions'. Hojlund adds that NEPs differ from other evaluation policies because they guide the evaluation practice for heterogeneous organisations collaborating to achieve common national development goals. This distinguishes NEPs from evaluation policies of multinational donor organisations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), or the United Nations' agencies, which may only apply to one bureaucratic system. There should be a direct link between NEP and NES, but this varies nationally and between institutions. As [Naidoo and General \(2010\)](#) point out, evaluation systems within the public sector are rarely unified; rather, policies guide a range of different systems and approaches to evaluation.

Unlike other public policies, such as the youth policy and poverty alleviation policies, NEPs tend to be limited to the conduct of public sector evaluations, with the exception of Uganda where attempts were made to coordinate evaluation practice across sectors through the government evaluation facility, but the power to shape practice in international development agencies is still limited. Most NEPs only provide guidance for evaluation within the public service. The 2011 South African NEPF, for example, did not prescribe how private sector or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) should conduct evaluations, and jurisdiction was limited to national departments. The 2019 revised policy framework extended the reach of the policy to include parastatal entities. Although provincial government departments adopted the NEPF, questions were raised about whether a national cabinet-approved policy could be applied to other spheres of government within the context of a semi-federal political system, as defined in the South African Constitution and governed by the Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act of 2005. The scope and application of NEPs require careful consideration as increasing numbers of countries move towards adopting NEPs. While there are clear drawbacks to a policy of limited scope,

the experiences of the countries investigated suggest that policy interventions, even if limited in scope, appear to advance evaluation practice within the public service. This will be elaborated upon later (CLEAR-AA, 2019).

The absence of evaluation policies or systems does not necessarily hinder evaluation practice. This has been demonstrated in South Africa, where evaluations have been conducted by certain government departments, some of which, such as the National Department of Human Settlements, formulated their own M&E policy before the NEPF was passed (Chirau et al, 2018; Goldman et al, 2018). This is the case in Ghana, where evaluation practice is well established in the public sector, despite the absence of a prescribed national policy. However, the absence of a policy framework creates a vacuum. The public sector functions according to the rules imposed by policy and regulation. If public sector initiatives are unregulated or do not adhere to some form of regulatory or public sector management instrument, initiatives can easily be deprioritised, particularly if budgets are constrained. In addition, as experienced in South Africa, the absence of policy guidance on evaluation definitions and practices can result in significant variance in the outcomes of evaluation. Many evaluations are carried out that fail to meet acceptable definitions of evaluative evidence or rigour.

Compared to the establishment of other components of an NES, there is no correct sequence to be followed when a country is developing a NEP. In South Africa, for example, the evaluation policy was established prior to the formalisation of an evaluation system, while in Uganda, the NES was established prior to the development of policy (Goldman et al, 2018). This is a key lesson for countries establishing evaluation systems as it suggests that countries do not need to wait for the adoption of an NEP before institutionalising evaluation in the public sector. The authors of this paper are, however, cognisant of the fact that while NEP is important, is not the only means of institutionalising evaluation within the public sector.

In the public sector, policy position can be established through a number of instruments, including on the instruction of finance ministries, treasuries, public service administration ministries, and so on. Irrespective of the instrument, the same objectives – setting evaluation priorities, describing the plan, and formulating rules – can be achieved with these instruments as can be achieved with standalone policy. Using other public sector policy instruments governments can define evaluation, why it is needed, and how it fits into the public service management system, and can allow for budget to be allocated for evaluations. Therefore, though this paper focuses on standalone national evaluation or M&E policies, the term policy is applied in a broad sense.

## Why national evaluation policies?

The spread of the New Public Management (NPM) approach in African governments, fuelled by the World Bank public sector reform initiatives and demands for aid accountability, are largely responsible for the proliferation of government M&E initiatives. The NPM, with its emphasis on outputs, outcomes, accountability, and transparency, has increased demand for M&E as a means by which governments can be informed on the investments they are making and whether investments ultimately fulfil their objectives (Basheka and Byamugisha, 2015). As African countries emerged from civil wars and oppressive regimes they became more stable and citizens' voices and demands became increasingly important. Organised civil society has emerged as

**Table 1: Evaluation influenced country's national evaluation policy and system**

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

Source: [Goldman et al \(2018: 6\)](#) Data supplied by government partners  
+ includes 2 for 2017/2018

an important third sector in different countries calling for government and private sector accountability and defending human rights. These various developments have collectively driven governmental demand for M&E evidence, leading to the establishment of monitoring systems largely for financial accountability.

Recently, the need for African governments to demonstrate the results of aid initiatives has increased the demand for evaluations, not just monitoring, across all spheres of government. Evaluations are a means by which policies, programmes, and projects are measured and assessed for effectiveness, impact, and efficiency ([Dassah and Uken, 2006](#)). The SDGs' call is for evaluations to measure the effectiveness of initiatives geared towards addressing the Agenda 2030 prescripts ([Rugg, 2016](#)). [Mwajjande \(2018: 17\)](#) argues that 'when we talk of increasing demand and use of evaluations, we are faced with a chicken vs egg query, which one comes first? Should there be a NEP to guide demand for the use of evaluations? Or should there be a culture for evaluations that would demand a guiding policy?' Evidence shows that the adoption of a formalised policy incentivises governments and increases the demand for and use of evaluative evidence, thereby building a culture of evaluation. In Zambia, the 7th National Development Plan (NDP) is informed by the evaluation findings of the 6th NDP ([Ministry of National Development Planning, 2017](#)). In South Africa, the introduction of the NEPF consolidated previous efforts of different institutions such as the Public Service Commission and national departments, and increased the frequency of evaluations from sporadic to systemic, supported by capacity-building initiatives promoting demand for and supply of evaluations. Thus, the necessity for a policy becomes apparent when an evaluation system that has functioned in an ad hoc manner develops to the point that it requires greater clarity in scope and mandate ([Chirau et al, 2020](#)). [Table 1](#) indicates the number of evaluations influenced by policy.

However, in countries still in the process of policy formation, there is vigorous debate among government ministries, departments, agencies, academia, think-tanks, and development partners on whether an NEP weakens or strengthens the undertaking of evaluations ([CLEAR-AA, 2019](#)).

## Comparative analysis framework

[Holvoet and Renard's \(2007\)](#) six characteristics for effective NES provide the conceptual framework for this article, namely, policy, methodology, organisation, capacity, the participation of other actors, and the use of evaluation. They are illustrated in [Figure 1](#) below.

This conceptual tool for evaluation systems, rather than policy analysis, was selected because this discussion concerns the ways in which the policy processes currently shape national systems.

## Comparison and discussion on the five countries' NEPs

### Policy

Of the five countries studied, four NEPs have been approved by their respective cabinets. These are: South Africa (2011), Zimbabwe (2015), Uganda (2012/13) and Nigeria (2017). The titles of the policies differ; Kenya and Zimbabwe's policies are titled the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, Uganda's is titled the National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation, Nigeria's NEP is titled the National Evaluation Policy, and South Africa's is titled the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF). These variations in title indicate that there are diverse purposes served by these policies. For example, some policies have a limited focus on evaluation and are, in fact, largely national monitoring, reporting, or performance management systems. In South Africa only evaluation is considered within the remit of the policy framework. These variations point to the important differences in national context that shape the use of evaluation evidence and its governing principles.

Annually, Uganda and South Africa, in accordance with their national development plans, formulate a cyclic evaluation plan which prescribes priority evaluations for that year (Genesis, 2016), whereas other countries do not follow this process. All reviewed NEPs highlighted the need for transparency and impartiality, emphasising the importance of independent service providers to ensure that the results of evaluations are unbiased and objective.

South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Kenya's policies have a system for providing feedback and dissemination of information on evaluations. However, dissemination of evaluation information remains largely 'technocratic and can be enhanced to widen knowledge of evaluation results, in government, parliament and by the public' (Goldman et al, 2018:6). In the five countries, the linking of evaluation, budgeting

**Figure 1: Characteristics of an effective National Evaluation System by Holvoet and Renard (2007), arranged by Jamie Robertson of Genesis Analytics, 2016, used with permission.**

1	Policy	The evaluation plan	M vs. E	Autonomy & impartiality	Feedback	Alignment planning & budgeting
2	Methodology	Selection of results areas to be evaluated	Priority setting	Causality chain	Methodologies used	Data collection
3	Organisation	Coordination & oversight	Statistical office	Line ministries	Decentralised levels	Link with interventions
4	Capacity	Problem acknowledged	Capacity building plan			
5	Participation of Other Actors	Parliament	Civil society	Donors	Private sector	
6	Use	Effective use of evaluation	Internal usage of evaluation findings			

and planning remains a challenge, as the compilation of evaluation information is time consuming and planning is done in silos.

### *Methodology*

South Africa and Uganda's evaluation policies state which types of evaluation should be utilised in their M&E systems; Zimbabwe, Kenya and Nigeria are silent on this. South Africa's policy outlines six types of evaluation – diagnosis, synthesis, design, implementation, process and impact. The Ugandan policy mentions mid-term, impact, summative, and ex ante or baseline evaluations. This indicates the emergent professionalism of evaluation practices, and the different ways that vocabulary in the evaluation field is standardised. In the South African policy, sources of data collection are primarily quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-research methodologies. In most cases, programmes are implemented without theories of change, logic models or results chains, although both South Africa and Uganda now require these for all new programmes. Currently, these are retrospectively developed for evaluations. This suggests that both South Africa and Uganda are developing policies that apply to both the supply and demand aspects of the evaluation sector, while the other countries restrict their focus to public sector consumption and managing of evaluations.

It is important that the NEP identify what is to be evaluated. In South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, the NEPs are aligned to and prioritised according to the NDP of each respective country. The DPME in South Africa prioritises 14 outcomes<sup>1</sup>. In Uganda, areas requiring evaluation are identified at the beginning of each budget cycle by departments, agencies and ministries in alignment with government priority areas. The benefits of assessing the types and objectives of evaluations to be undertaken are that the assessment process institutionalises evaluations throughout the government and standardises evaluation terminologies.

### *Organisation*

Evaluation practice is enhanced by both the NES and policy. The policies clarify the roles and responsibilities of different organisations. Lopez-Acevedo et al (2012: 8) argue that institutional arrangements differ with respect to the overall leadership and centralisation of systems. However, commonalities exist among the policies, for example, when the system is managed by a central oversight and coordination office within the executive. This demonstrates political and administrative support for evaluations and utilisation of evaluation evidence. In South Africa, the DPME within the Office of the Presidency and Cabinet is the custodian of governmental evaluation. In Zimbabwe, responsibility for M&E rests with the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC). In Uganda, the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) coordinates and oversees M&E activities. In Kenya, the Monitoring and Evaluation Department (MED) falls under National Treasury and Planning and plays a crucial role in coordinating M&E activities. In Nigeria, the National Monitoring and Evaluation Department falls under the Ministry of Budget and National Planning (MBNP). In many cases, ministries, departments, and agencies also have their own M&E units which are responsible for day-to-day activities.

There are advantages and disadvantages for both centralised and decentralised evaluation systems. In centralised systems such as in South Africa and Uganda, the

ministry or institution managing the system controls the procedural framework, methodology, and quality assurance of the evaluations. Without centralisation and standardised processes, the system will be fragmented (Genesis, 2016), as has been seen in evaluation systems within departments and agencies which have their own standards and guidelines, but lack horizontal integration. The DPME and OPM have been successful in this regard. Day-to-day operations are undertaken by ministries, agencies, and sectors. Decentralisation, however, enables ministries, sectors and agencies to own and facilitate the use of evaluation work, as opposed to evaluations being regarded as a practice imposed externally by the central institution (Lopez-Acevedo et al, 2012; Ahonen, 2015).

### *Capacity*

All five countries report a lack of human resources and financial capacity to support policy implementation. While all countries reviewed have M&E officers and M&E units, the emphasis of these units is largely on monitoring and not evaluation (Porter and Goldman, 2013). In the public sector, there is often little or no availability of experience in conducting programme and policy evaluations, though some capacity for research and policy analysis exists. The dearth of technical evaluation specialists in the government sector is common to all the reviewed countries. Evaluation policies focus explicitly on government staff's function of managing evaluations rather than conducting them (Goldman et al, 2018). Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives focus on strengthening the commissioning and management of public sector evaluations, as opposed to the practice itself (Morkel and Ramasobana, 2017). While this is a step in the right direction, a recent study indicated that gaps in the South African government's evaluation resources were not linked to inappropriate skills, but rather to ineffective procurement systems that hamper access to these skills (Philips, 2018). A policy can provide guidance and structure for national evaluation capacity development efforts. Capacity-strengthening initiatives have been implemented in Uganda where the policy delegates the responsibility for capacity building to the Ugandan Evaluation Association and the Ugandan Management Institute. In South Africa, the National School of Government, universities, and the South African M&E Association offer evaluation capacity building in line with the NEPF. Despite capacity-building initiatives in the various countries, evaluation capacity remains a challenge, with the bulk of evaluations being undertaken by external consultants.

The policies of South Africa, Kenya and Uganda indicate that there is a need for a budget for evaluations, without which implementation of NEPs is problematic. In Uganda, when government budgets are inadequate, the government and the use of a 'basket of funding' make decisions on donor resources from donors, and government ensures that no single donor influences an evaluation (Goldman et al, 2018:7).

### *Participation of other actors*

The NEPs reviewed acknowledge that successful systems require the support of a wide range of stakeholders with assigned roles and responsibilities. South Africa, Kenya and Uganda's policies refer to statistics agencies, for example, the Uganda Bureau of Statistics, Kenya Bureau of Statistics and Statistics South Africa, as being



the primary sources of credible and quality data. The NEPs of South Africa, Kenya, and Uganda emphasise the critical role that the ministry of finance plays in M&E and the improvement of feedback mechanisms between budget alignment, planning, and learning. This helps to establish an enabling approach for the implementation of evaluation recommendations by streamlining processes and providing the budget for implementation (Lopez-Acevedo et al, 2012: 10). Lopez-Acevedo et al (2012) argue that inclusion allows for independence and minimises the political conflict that often arises when one actor implements the system and policy.

The role of non-state actors, for example Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and institutions of higher learning, cannot be underestimated. CSOs play a significant role in generating M&E data, however, the use of the data by government ministries to improve performance and policymaking is limited, and this was the case in all reviewed countries. CSOs act as watchdogs that monitor government accountability to citizens and this often leads to mistrust and suspicion. In 2018 and 2019, CLEAR-AA conducted workshops in Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Ghana with the aim of strengthening the CSO and government interface by capitalising on their respective strengths and encouraging collaboration to improve development outcomes and advance social change; their mutual engagement was considered critical by all participants.

### *Quality and use*

If evaluations aim to influence and shape the behaviours of policymakers and programme implementers, the findings should be widely shared. Despite consensus on the importance of disseminating information, Nigeria and Uganda's policies fail to indicate how evaluation findings are to be disseminated. A policymaking cycle is complex and, as such, it is important that communication does not only occur at the end of the project. The South African NEPF makes it mandatory for all evaluations in the National Evaluation Plans to be presented to Cabinet (DPME, 2011), which gives weight to implementation for influencing policy and decision making. The NEPs of Zimbabwe, Kenya and South Africa state that evaluation information should be posted on websites for public consumption.

Political buy-in and ownership of evaluation evidence are important in enforcing evaluation recommendations. Briceno (2012: 38) argues that 'the extreme enforcement version, the M&E body has direct power over the evaluation agenda and enjoys a prominent position and support from the legislature'. This is the case in South Africa, Uganda, and Nigeria. Decision making that is informed and corroborated by reliable evaluation evidence enhances the chances of success of policy and programme interventions (Rubio, 2012: 133). The policies reviewed have formulated mechanisms to ensure quality and credibility and these include evaluation steering committees, use of experienced consultants, and standardised guidelines. In South Africa there is a quality assessment system which scores the completed evaluations (Leslie et al, 2015), the intention of which was to reassure Cabinet that evaluations met acceptable standards. Such mechanisms not only ensure methodological rigour but also outline evaluation principles, standards and ethics and provide templates for reporting on evaluation studies.

## Emerging lessons and key challenges

As evaluation policies and plans proliferate in Africa, the emerging lessons can be harnessed to better understand the extent to which evaluation policies can support the systematic use of evidence in decision making.

### *Learn, but avoid mimicry*

Countries reviewed have learned mutual lessons during their journeys of developing and implementing their NEPs. For example, the Twende Mbele programme was established to foster and encourage peer learning between African countries institutionalising evaluation. However, the process of learning should be distinguished from mimicry. Countries should develop a policy that is relevant and responsive in the context of their own country. This includes recognising capacities, government incentives and disincentives to use evidence, resources available, and the structure and institutional arrangements of government. Failure to do so can result in a futile policy.

### *Political and administrative support is vital*

As with any policy, political and administrative support is important to ensure that the policy shapes behaviour and incentivises meaningful demand and use of evaluative evidence. The development of an NEP requires political support, buy-in, ownership and inclusivity to prevent the policy becoming yet another layer of compliance and programme policing. Political support can be built/cultivated through the use of political champions.

### *Demonstrate the value of evaluation*

The value of evaluation is not always apparent to those who are unfamiliar with evaluation or who have been implementing programme/policies without evaluative evidence. Therefore, to prompt a culture shift towards evaluative evidence, the value of the evidence must be clearly demonstrated and this can be achieved by promoting evaluation and encouraging buy-in (Amisi and Chirau, 2019). Therefore, it is important to carry out strategic evaluations even before a policy is complete and to demonstrate the model while building the elements of the policy. Goldman et al (2018:9) argue that 'having the policy in advance (as South Africa did, but Uganda and Benin did not) does not seem necessary although there needs to be some definition of how the system will work, how it will provide for impartiality, etc.'. The culture of evaluation and recognition of the value-add of evaluation precedes the actual establishment of the policy.

### *Take a participatory approach*

Partners are critical to sustain evaluation systems. Key government ministries, civil society organisations, and academic institutions are needed to manage a NES. Partners could potentially support, benefit, or hinder the process of establishing a national evaluation policy; partnerships should be built incrementally and be based on need.

Partners, who might not initially see their role in the system, may understand their role more clearly as the system matures and begins to conduct evaluations.

The reviewed countries face common key constraints. Firstly, there is a lack of evaluators in the public sector with the ability to conduct, commission, and manage evaluations. Evaluations are often outsourced to practitioners outside the government sector who are internal or external to the country. This poses potential problems on how evaluations are defined. This would be the case if western norms and standards are applied during programme evaluations in Africa, and would ultimately be impractical and costly in the context of many countries in the region (Amisi and Chirau, 2019). Countries need to be open to explore institutionalisation of other evaluative evidence while committing to systematically invest in strengthening national evaluation capacity. Institutionalisation efforts need to be cognisant of what is happening outside of government. Information obtained from a CLEAR-AA African evaluation database indicates that most evaluations are conducted by international organisations with governments frequently unaware of these evaluations and what can be learnt from such evaluations.

Secondly, public sector administration focuses predominantly on monitoring and is generally unmoved by sound rationale for including evaluation in the policy. Monitoring usually takes place during implementation and focuses on inputs, activities, and outputs, rather than on results which could improve effectiveness, efficiency, and impact. This is partly because monitoring systems are often primarily geared to respond to questions of fiscal accountability rather than organisational learning and programme adaptation.

Thirdly, the role of CSOs in policy implementation is limited, as CSOs are not able to access the information generated by the public sector M&E with which it could hold government accountable for its decisions and performance.

## Conclusion

A policy is an important vehicle through which governments can influence demand and promote the use of evaluative evidence for decision and policymaking. Evaluations are likely to improve governance, transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in public sector programming. This article compared the policies of South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria. It is clear from the analysis of the policies that the structures are largely similar, all having the ultimate purpose of structuring, systematising and institutionalising evaluation practice across the government sector. The policies are influenced by different factors: national contexts, technical expertise available and reform strategies. Each country, however, has taken steps to systematise processes of evaluation within the public sector, as well as create coherence within existing processes of procurement management, or results-based planning. Peer-to-peer learning has become important in African countries, particularly those that share democratic or developmental similarities. Countries such as Niger and Ghana, which are in the process of developing NEPs, can learn from the experiences of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Uganda. When developing NEPs, it is critical to understand public administration structures, the political economy of evidence use, and the cycles of policy development and implementation. For African countries to build country-led

NEPs, a thorough knowledge of existing policies is essential to ensure a wider spread of evaluation systems which align with national state architecture and development needs. It is not clear from the policies how the demand and use of evidence can be strengthened. However, there are entry points which can be strengthened, for example improving the nexus between M&E systems and parliamentary evidence use systems. The requirement that evaluations must be submitted to Parliament would help to inform Parliament and increase the demand for evaluations for oversight and legislation purposes (Chirau et al, 2020). It is key that capacity-strengthening initiatives be targeted at senior administrative personnel and parliamentarians who make decisions to enable them to ask cogent policy questions, to demand evaluative evidence, and to interpret and understand evidence (any type of evidence including evaluations), thereby increasing the probability of use of evaluations.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.za/issues/outcomes-approach>

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### Research ethics statement

The authors of this paper have declared that research ethics approval was not required since the paper does not present or draw directly on data/findings from empirical research.

### Contributor statement

TC led the conceptualisation and writing of the first and subsequent drafts of the manuscript, CBM responded to the comments from reviewers, and MA further responded to other comments towards the finalisation of this article.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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