



TWENDE MBELE

GUIDELINE

How to Establish a National Evaluation System

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Twende Mbele Guideline No 1

How to establish a National Evaluation System

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Addressed to	African governments who are considering establishing a national evaluation system (NES). Development partners interested in supporting a NES.
Purpose	The purpose of this Guideline is to give practical guidance on how to develop a national evaluation system.
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1 Introduction

Twende Mbele supports African governments to learn from each other and use monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to improve government performance and accountability. Evaluation in particular seeks to understand whether interventions are working and why and how to improve them. Evaluation *systems* seek to embed evaluations into a permanent system where evaluations are undertaken and used. A national evaluation system (sometimes referred to as an ecosystem) is one where this is established for the country as a whole.

This guideline seeks to help countries who are thinking of establishing a national evaluation system (NES) and suggests the minimum requirements for doing so. At present in Africa there are three countries with established NESs, Benin, Uganda and South Africa. These systems are outlined in Goldman et al., (2018). This guideline draws from the experience of the three countries and more widely, drawing on authors from those countries¹.

The guideline covers what an evaluation system is (section 3), why it is important (section 4), when it is relevant (section 5), the components of a NES (section 6), diagnosing the situation prior to establishing a NES (section 7), the approach to establishing a NES (section 8), phases in establishing a NES (section 9), critical success factors (section 10) and the basic conditions needed (section 11).

2 Purpose of the guideline

The purpose of the guideline is to provide practical guidance for governments in Africa on establishing a NES. It links to other resources which can assist governments and their development partners in this endeavour.

3 What is meant by evaluation?

3.1 What is evaluation?

“Evaluation is an applied inquiry process for collecting and synthesising evidence that culminates in conclusions about the state of affairs, value, merit, worth, significance, or quality of a programme, product, person, policy, proposal, or plan. Conclusions made in evaluations encompass both an empirical aspect (that something is the case) and a normative aspect (judgement about the value of something). The fact that evaluation measures the merit or worth of something distinguishes evaluation from other types of inquiry, such as basic science research, clinical epidemiology, investigate journalism, or public polling.” (Fournier, 2005: 140). Scriven (1996) suggests that evaluation focuses on three key questions: What? So what? Now what?”. ‘What’ explains what happened in the implementation process of a programme, project or policy; while ‘so what’ determines what the findings mean, and why they happened. ‘Now what’ is concerned with providing recommendations based on the findings? (Patton, 2012:3). The purpose of evaluation is to elicit evidence that is reliable and can be used for decision making and improvement of interventions e.g. policies, strategies, and projects. A utilisation focus of evaluation is key as it allows for sound evidence, learning, transparency and accountability to inform decision making (European Commission, 2015).

¹ Contributors to the guideline include Ian Goldman, Takunda Chirau, Aloyce Ratemo, Cara Waller, Thokozile Masangu, Stanley Ntakumba, Abdoulaye Gounou, Nana Opere-Djan, Kwabena Agyei Boakye.

Evaluations can apply to specific public *policies* (e.g. understanding drivers of COVID-19 vaccination hesitancy), *programmes* (e.g. public employment schemes), *projects* (e.g. sanitation infrastructure projects) or *systems* e.g. government coordination systems.

3.2 What is meant by an evaluation system?

Arnold and Wade (2015) define a system as an interdependent group of items forming a unified whole. Each element of a system is unique but contributes to the ultimate purpose of the whole, and there is no single element that has monopoly over the other.

An evaluation system is “one in which evaluation is a regular part of the life cycle of public policies and programmes 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”. (Lázaro, 2015). In other words, evaluation systems are permanent frameworks, processes and cultures that institutionalise and standardise evaluation (Furubo & Sandahl, 2002). There are certain characteristics of an evaluation system which include but are not limited to: presence of evaluation in the political, administrative and social discourse; existence of a common epistemological framework; organisational responsibility and permanency (Lazaro, 2015). Evaluation systems acknowledge that the system should provide sound evidence (supply) and also should possess individual and institutional capacity to use information (demand), and that supply and demand need to be mediated by knowledge brokers, such as government M&E Units (Goldman et al., 2021).

3.3 And what is a National Evaluation System?

National evaluation systems (NES) are formal processes that guide how evaluations are selected, implemented and utilised at a country level (Goldman et al, 2018). *Formalised/informal systems* are recognised or not recognised through the formalisation of policy. Centrally coordinated systems have a central champion who coordinate the system. Sectoral evaluation systems are systems within a broader system for example education and health sector evaluation systems. These systems can co-exist with each other.

A NES implies that elements of the systems² *articulate* with each other through clear institutional roles, responsibilities and expected contributions. A well coordinated NES contribute to improved coordination of policy development and programme implementation using evidence. Hence a coordination role is a key element of the system.

While not always the case, NES commonly operate through the *framework* provided by a national evaluation policy (NEP) which structures, systematises and institutionalises the practice of evaluation. A policy outlines the purpose, responsibilities and organisation for which public sector evaluators can carry out evaluations in a national evaluation system (Chirau, Waller & Blaser-Mapitsa, 2018). In this sense, NES find their normative framework in the NEP. The presence of a national evaluation strategy or plan further institutionalises evaluation across the public sector. This is because evaluations will no longer be undertaken on an ad hoc basis (Lazaro, 2015) but in a structured and systematised manner.

Institutionalisation of evaluation normally happens through a *central institution* which coordinates the practice of both monitoring and evaluation across the public sector, for example the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Uganda, Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in South Africa.

² Marelize Gorgens & Jody Zall Kusek (2009) Making Monitoring and Evaluation Systems Work: A capacity development toolkit. The World Bank, Washington DC.

4 Why is it important to have an NES

Countries face the question of the adequacy of public policy and complex socio-economic challenges like poverty, climate change, economic inequality, joblessness, lack of economic growth and corruption (so-called wicked problems). Evaluation is critical to help understand and explain policy and programme performance and generate evidence that can inform policy and decision-making, and help to improve performance and impact. In this sense it is being used for learning to improve performance. Evaluation is also important in terms of accountability by government on the performance of its policies and programmes.

Having a NES means that evaluation for both learning and accountability forms part of the public management process. Hence a mature NES is embedded in a system of results-based management and implementation of a country, which also incorporates budgeting and other accountability systems.

In some cases NESs have been championed by development partners, including UN agencies, African Development Bank and the evaluation capacity development community (e.g. Twende Mbele/AfREA/CLEAR). However, one of the key features of the NES is that it must be government-led rather than donor-led and should be implemented in partnership with all key stakeholders in the evaluation ecosystem of that country.

5 When is a NES relevant

In general most countries start using monitoring to keep track of what their policies are supposed to be doing. Once monitoring systems have started to take root, more in-depth systems of M&E might be relevant, especially if there is a growing pool of skilled personnel within the country that can be drawn upon (both local and international). The next step is where evaluative questions are being asked such as are programmes working or not working and why, and how they can be improved. Typically this starts in particular sectors, often where development partners have been funding programmes.

As governance systems mature, and a culture of accountability grows, governments have a need to provide evidence of results to parliament, citizens or development partners. Evaluations start to become more widespread, but this often happens in an ad hoc way, often driven by development partners.

Building a national evaluation system is particularly relevant when policy makers want to improve government performance, and they need to understand how to improve policies and programmes, and increase the impact on citizens. They have to be prepared to face failure and learn from mistakes. This is a big challenge and some countries are not willing to acknowledge problems.

Even in the countries most advanced in evaluation in Africa there is still some way to go for a learning culture to become embedded. Goldman et al., (2020) define M&E culture as “a shared set of ideas, values, beliefs, and practices at an organisational level about M&E’s role, functions and practice, and use of the knowledge generated for managing, reporting, learning and accountability and to improve performance.” In Benin, Uganda and South Africa respondents to a survey conducted by Twende Mbele on M&E indicated that half of managers said ‘problems are never/rarely treated as an opportunity for learning and improvement’.

if there is a budget cut you will find that some entities will first think about cutting M&E because don’t appreciate the importance of M&E in their work. There are some civil

servants who look at M&E function as witch-hunting and they would not like to be associated with such a function.” (Uganda respondent 3)

Table 1 shows that overall the value of M&E to help improve organisational performance was recognised by around half of managers, who are open to change, using evidence from evaluation, and using problems as opportunities for learning. However the other half of managers are indicating stringent hierarchies, closed compliance cultures and lack of appreciation of learning from experience by the management, which is a serious impediment to improvement.

Table 1: Values and culture barriers to the effective use of evaluation in decision-making, learning and accountability in your department

Are the following a barrier?	% of respondents saying always/often in		
	SA	Benin	Uganda
There is no consistent demand for evaluation from ministers and management	23.1	28.2	32.0
Time pressure means decisions are often taken without proper diagnosis of the problem	42.3	44.3	41.3
Resistance from senior management to transparent decision-making processes	27.9	35.6	33.3
Senior management do not champion M&E and honesty about performance	41.4	40.3	34.7
Little respect for evidence-based decision-making in the department	27.9	30.9	34.7
The hierarchy makes it difficult to openly and robustly discuss performance	38.5	40.3	42.7
Managers fear admitting mistakes or problems	54.8	49.0	46.7
Problems not treated as an opportunity for learning and improvement	40.4	45.0	46.7
The concealing of findings is a barrier to the effective use of M&E	31.7	24.2	34.7

Source: Goldman et al (2020).

Not all governments are ready to heavily invest in a national evaluation system and for some countries it is neither relevant or appropriate. What is critical for an evaluation system to take root is that governments welcome findings on areas that are not working, recognising that this enables addressing blockages, improving implementation, and improving impacts on citizens.

A country should develop a national evaluation system that is relevant to their country context, including recognising capacities, government openness to critiques and use of evidence, resources, and structure of government. For example, where there is no political support for feedback on government policies or programs, a government-wide evaluation system may not be appropriate. Similarly, in very resource constrained settings, formal evaluation systems may not be a priority for government spending.

6 What can be the components of a NES

Table 2 outlines the main components of the evaluation system in Benin, Uganda and South Africa. This shows the range of elements in a NES ecosystem.

Table 2: Main components of the evaluation systems in Uganda, Benin and South Africa

Component	Benin	Uganda	South Africa
Policy			
National evaluation policy	National Evaluation Policy Framework, 2012 revised 2019.	National M&E Policy 2013	National Evaluation Policy Framework, 2011 revised 2019.
National evaluation plan	No	No	Annual since 2012/13
Other evaluation plans	Strategic action plan for both central and decentralised level	Some sectors have plans, eg. Health Sector Evaluation Plan	All provinces and some departments have evaluation plans.
Methodology			
Guidelines	A national evaluation methodology guide	National Evaluation Guidelines, 2015 Training, reporting and methodological guidelines – approx 3	30 guidelines and templates
Organisation			
Central champion coordinates	BEPPAG (moved between Presidency and Ministry of Planning)	Office of Prime Minister	DPME in Presidency
Line ministries	Have M&E units	Have M&E units	Have M&E units
Decentralised levels	Communes	Line ministries have M&E Units. District-level M&E is within Planning Units	Provincial M&E units, and in cities
Capacity			
Competences	Yes	Yes (+ Scheme of service for M&E)	Yes
Capacity building plan	Yes	No (In progress)	Yes
Short courses		Yes, run through Civil Service College	5+ courses developed now run through National School of Government
Postgraduate courses	Masters in evaluation run through national universities and two certificates	Post-graduate course six universities	Postgraduate courses in M&E and in evaluation
Availability of local evaluators	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participation of actors outside government			
Parliament	No formal role. Evaluations not sent to Parliament once gone to Cabinet	Informal requirement that all evaluation reports go to parliament, after Cabinet	No formal role. Evaluations sent to Parliament once gone to Cabinet
VOPE	Two exist but not really active	Very active VOPE with close links to government	Very active VOPE and DPME has close links
Civil society	Close participation in activities with government and evaluation courses	Active member in National Evaluation Working Groups, eg. National M&E Technical	No formal role. Participate in steering committees of some evaluations

Component	Benin	Uganda	South Africa
		Working Group, National Evaluation Subcommittee	
Quality and use			
Evaluation standards	Yes	Yes	Yes. Also quality assessment of national evaluations.
Improvement plans	No	No Improvement Plans. Follow-up recommendation implementation after 6 months. Govt Annual Performance Review also used to track recommendations and use.	For national evaluations. Some provinces also use.

7 Diagnosing the situation and how a NES may be relevant

A NES is part of the government-wide/country-wide monitoring and evaluation system, which should be an integral part of the public sector performance management system³. As a pre-condition for designing and implementing a National Evaluation System (NES), it is crucial to have a contextual understanding of how evaluation fits for a particular country and its government and how the system might develop. For example in 2020 Benin undertook an assessment to inform development of their system.

The situation analysis is conducted to understand the state of evaluation and other aspects which act as enablers and constraints of undertaking, institutionalising and systematising evaluation in a country. The table below indicates some of the steps that are key when performing a diagnostic.

The Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI) has developed a Monitoring and Evaluation Systems Analysis (MESA) Diagnostic Tool Guidance Note which provides guidance for undertaking a M&E situation analysis. The guidance can be accessed here⁴ and the outline of the report proposed is in Annex 2. Some key steps are:

Table 3: Steps in undertaking a diagnostic

Steps	What gets done
Getting agreement on the situation analysis and what should be covered	Meeting with stakeholders including those who may be funding this to agree what should be covered and the methods and process, and partners to work with
Possibly agreeing a steering structure to oversee the diagnosis and possibly later implementation	Consider whether an existing structure is appropriate to play a steering committee role for the diagnosis. If appropriate develop a new structure.
Preparation for in country fieldwork for the diagnosis	Identification of local organisation or consultant and briefing or training. This could be a partner like a CLEAR centre, who may employ a local consultant.

³ Babete Rabie & Ian Goldman (2014) The context of evaluation management. In: Fanie Cloete, Babette Rabie & Christo de Coning (2014) **Evaluation Management in South Africa**. Sun Media, Stellenbosch.

⁴ Link to be provided soon

Determine stakeholders to be interviewed and key documents	Establish stakeholders to be interviewed for the situation analysis and key documents to be reviewed on the planning, M&E systems
Conduct the diagnosis	Data is collected using an agreed report structure and tool, like the GEI MESA
Validation workshop	Draft report is presented in the country to stakeholders

Once the situation analysis has been conducted a plan may well be prepared for how to take forward the NES.

8 Approach to establishing a NES

A key question is what *authorisation* is needed to establish a system, for example a law or a policy. Neither Benin, Uganda nor South Africa yet have a law, although Morocco does have evaluation in the Constitution. It is helpful to have some guidance but a full policy is not necessarily needed when starting a system. Key stakeholders in the system in government and wider are shown in Table 2, and ideally all these stakeholders should be involved when anticipating creating a NES.

A *utilization-focused approach* is key for an evaluation system to have impact. Goldman & Pabari, (2020) point to lessons from institutionalising evidence use, including from evaluations. A co-creation and ownership building approach are key, so that stakeholders own the system, and that policy makers are willing to use the evidence. This also points to the importance of systems being *locally owned*, and that development partners help to build national evaluation capacity, rather than just implementing their own systems⁵. This includes finding ways that development partners can fund evaluations as well as the development of NESs, ideally creating basket funds to support the system, so simplifying the process for national governments.

A *reflective and action learning approach* is important to establishing the system, so that the system does not develop by copying a system elsewhere but builds based on local realities, piloting and experimenting so that systems that work in the local context are tested before becoming policy.

9 Phases in establishing a NES

This section provides a picture of how different NESs were developed in Benin and South Africa, and the basis of moving towards a NES in Ghana. This is to give a feel for countries considering developing a NES. It concludes by drawing out lessons in the phasing of establishing a NES.

9.1 Implementing a NES - example of Benin⁶

Creation of the Bureau of Policy Evaluation and Analysis (BEAP) (2007-2010)

A Bureau of Policy Evaluation and Analysis (BEAP) was established in 2007 which later became the Bureau of Public Policy Evaluation (BEPP). The Bureau is mandated to conduct the whole process of promoting evaluation, focusing (i) on institutionalization activities, (ii) the development of norms and standards in evaluation, and (III) in capacity building activities. The first evaluations were commissioned during this period. Some of the lessons from a 2009 evaluation are discussed in

⁵ A forthcoming report from the UN Evaluation Group draws out lots of lessons on how UN agencies can building evaluation capacity.

⁶ This draws on a case study by Emmanuel David-Gnahoui for a UNEG Study on support to member states in implementation of NECD by UN Agencies since UN Resolution A/RES/69/237 of December 2014: Benin case study

Kouakonnou et al (2020). In 2010 the BEPP commissioned an assessment of evaluation capacities in Benin. The situation in 2010 was as in Table 4.

Table 4: Overview of evaluation capacities in Benin - 2010

LEVEL	Component		
MACRO Strategic Institutional National	Vision	Policy	Legislative framework
	Yes	No	Yes
MESO Organisational Structural	Evaluative function	Specific budget	Specific skills
	Weak	No	No
MICRO Operational Technical Tools	Professional resources	Specific training	Quality evaluations
	Weak	Weak	Weak

Evaluative practice takes root (2010-2013)

Evaluations are being commissioned and institutionalization is happening with development of an evaluation quality charter, the Evaluation Policy and a National Evaluation Council. A study on evaluation capacity needs is conducted in 2010 (Davies and Houinsa, 2010).

BEPP becomes a full-fledged ministry (2013-2015)

BEPP becomes the Ministry of the Evaluation of Public Policies. Evaluation is now opened to line ministries, parliament and municipalities. Preparatory work for the law on the evaluation of public policies starts. A new inventory of evaluation capacities is undertaken. Significant progress is made as shown in Table 5.

Strengthening evaluation (2016-2019)

In 2018 a theory of change is made mandatory to be implemented with effect from 2020. The West African Capacity on Impact Evaluation (WACIE) project starts to strengthen impact evaluation capacity in the region (Amazou et al, 2020). By this time many tools are in place, including: a strategic evaluation plan; the national methodological guide for evaluation; a methodological guide for the development or reconstruction of the theory of change; a methodological guide for gender-sensitive evaluation; an evaluation database; an Evaluation Knowledge Management Platform; an evaluation communication strategy; control and quality assurance systems on evaluation in Benin, support for the Beninese Evaluation Association, development of a specialised master's degree in evaluation, a protected budget for evaluation. In total 21 evaluations have been conducted through the NES.

Table 4: Overview of evaluation capacities in Benin - 2016

LEVEL	Component		
MACRO Strategic Institutional National	Vision	Policy	Legislative framework
	Yes	Yes	Yes
MESO Organisational Structural	Evaluative function	Specific budget	Specific skills
	Strong	Yes, but ...	Yes
MICRO Operational Technical Tools	Professional resources	Specific training	Quality evaluations
	Average	Average	Average

Developing an Act (2020-2021)

The requirement of a theory of change for public programmes and projects requires considerable work by ministries and municipal administrations to develop their theories of change. Work on the law is progressing. A first draft was produced in July 2021. The generalisation of the theory of change

and the potential passage of the law on the evaluation of public policies and programs are important turning points in the progress of evaluation in Benin.

9.2 Implementing a NES - example of South Africa

The initial work on monitoring in South Africa's post-Apartheid state was the codifying of key monitoring roles by National Treasury, initially with a system of strategic plans (SPs) and annual performance plans (APPs) with quarterly performance monitoring. In 2007, a Policy Framework was published to guide the overarching government-wide M&E System. This included the need for specific policy Frameworks for Programme Performance Information (FMPPi) (developed in 2007), quality of statistical data (developed in 2008), and evaluation (only developed following the establishment of DPME). Meanwhile evaluation had developed in some departments, and there was a well established VOPE (SAMEA) which had focused a lot on evaluation (Phillips et al., 2014).

Establishment of DPME as a M&E champion (2010)

In 2009 following national elections a new Ministry of Performance M&E was created in 2009 in the Presidency and in 2010 a Department of Performance (later Planning), M&E (DPME), with a mandate to use monitoring and evaluation to improve the performance of government. DPME initially focused on planning delivery of the priority outcomes, and monitoring these, but in 2011 the pressure was on to develop DPME's evaluation function and to develop the outstanding policy framework (Phillips et al., 2014).

Developing the policy framework (2011)

As one of the first steps in 2010-11 an *audit* was undertaken to find existing evaluations that could be used. The next step was to develop a policy framework. In early 2011 consultations were held with departments that were already undertaking evaluations to find out what was happening at present and to determine what should be the next steps. It was decided to learn from peer countries and to undertake a *study tour* in July 2011 to middle-income countries with well established evaluation systems, with Mexico and Colombia selected. The team included the Deputy Minister, Director General, some DPME staff and the group that had been consulted earlier. The study tour was well organised as a learning journey and proved very powerful, with agreement reached in the team (including the Deputy Minister and Director General) on the type of system needed. The technical team met three weeks later to brainstorm the *Policy Framework*, which had been edited and was ready for public consultation by the end of August. It was finally approved by Cabinet in November 2011 (Goldman et al., 2015).

The initial *concept for an outcomes evaluation and research unit* to drive the evaluation system was approved in September 2011 which by September 2014 had grown to 15 staff. At the same time as the NEPF was being developed the decision was taken to start some pilot evaluations, with the first pilot evaluation started in October 2011 and completed in June 2012 (on Early Childhood Development, ECD). What was very helpful at this stage was the presence of an evidence-based policy programme in the Presidency, which had funds for the audit, study tours etc, as well as technical staff with experience of evaluation⁷ (Goldman et al., 2015).

Developing evaluation systems 2012-2015

The experience was used to develop guidelines of how the system should run, e.g. developing terms of reference, inception phase, peer reviewers, management response, improvement plan⁸. The core

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/PSPPD/>

⁸ The 27 guidelines and templates are available at <https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/pages/guidelines-other-resources>

team that worked on the Policy became a cross-government Evaluation Technical Working Group established to support the emerging system. The 2012 and 2013 National Evaluation Plan (NEP) was approved by Cabinet in June 2012, with 8 evaluations, the first of which were commissioned in October 2012. The 2013–2014 NEP was approved in November 2012 with 15 evaluations and the 2014–2015 NEP, also with 15 evaluations, in November 2013. During 2012 work started on developing competences and also on evaluation standards, funded by GIZ. These eventually were used as the basis for a quality assessment system, and a repository of evaluations⁹ (Goldman et al., 2015). An evaluation of the national evaluation system was undertaken in 2016/2017 (Goldman et al., 2019).

DPME's role under threat 2017-2019, re-emerging in 2020

During 2017 DPME came under threat due to dynamics between government departments, a new director general and minister, and a possible move to close the department. Attempts to create a Planning/M&E Law failed to get through Cabinet. Five key staff left the evaluation unit at this point and evaluation stagnated. From March 2020 with the much delayed appointment of key staff to replace those who had left DPME once again began to take on again its dynamic role as the champion for evaluation in the country. In total there have been 73 national evaluations in National Evaluations plans, of which 58 have been finalised. In addition there have been many provincial and departmental evaluations conducted¹⁰.

9.3 Moving towards a NES – example of Ghana

Beginning the practice of M&E

M&E has long been practised in the governance of Ghana. The Public Administration Restructuring and Development Implementation Committee (PARDIC) in the early 1980s, Civil Service Performance Improvement Programme (CISPIP) and the National Institutional Renewal Programme (NIRP) of the 1990s contributed to M&E practice through capacity building. The National Development Planning Commission was created in 1994, including a M&E function.

Developing the tools guiding M&E (2000-2016)

Over the years public programmes funded by government or development partners have adopted various approaches, methods and tools for M&E. These include the use of project appraisals, special audits, project-specific matrices for measuring of outputs and outcomes, commissioned mid-term and end-of-project evaluations. However, in practice development programmes are rarely evaluated for decision making and evaluation practice has been driven mainly by development partners. A formal monitoring and evaluation framework was introduced to track the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy 1 (GPRS 1) of 2003 by the NDPC. A capacity building programmes was funded by Japanese aid (JICA) in 2007. A Manual was developed to guide M&E practice in 2013 which was revised in 2016, which combines monitoring and evaluation guidance, e.g. in data collection, but does not have specific evaluation guidance¹¹. The NDPC produced 11 Annual Progress Reports (APRs) for the years 2002 to 2013 to review government performance and to provide policy options for discussion. All ministries and development agencies now prepare M&E Plans and APRs. The NDPC uses a checklist to review and provide feedback on the draft M&E Plans and APRs to ensure compliance with the key requirements of the M&E Guidelines and Report formats.

Development of a political champion for M&E – the 2010s+

In the 2010s a unit in the Presidency led the political championing for M&E, focusing on the priority initiatives of the President. In 2017 a Ministry of Monitoring and Evaluation was created, again

⁹ <https://evaluations.dpme.gov.za/evaluations.aspx>

¹⁰ Presentation by Thokozile Molaiwa, DPME, at National Evaluation Seminar, 2021.

¹¹ NDPC, 2016. It does have an example of evaluation TORs.

focusing on political priorities. In January 2021 the responsibilities returned to the Presidency, under the Office of the President for the state. Meanwhile the NDPC continued to provide key M&E functions. Successive governments in Ghana have sought to institutionalise M&E practices through executive Instruments, legislation and rollout of a number of M&E initiatives. The development of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy can be described as a critically important milestone towards the strengthening of the national evaluation system and improving the demand, supply and management of evaluations across the different levels of government especially the sector ministries, departments and agencies. The initial draft was produced in 2018 (Ministry of M&E, 2019). This has a section on the Evaluation System, and includes:

- a) A 4-year National Evaluation Plan based on the NMTDF, which includes strategic and innovative policies, and programmes which must be approved by Parliament. Ministries, development agencies and district assemblies are also required to prepare and implement evaluation plans approved by the respective governance organs.
- b) National/Regional and District Evaluation Reports (NERs): In order to assess the progress of implementation and achievements of government policies and programmes, annual evaluation reports that details the performance and impacts of the interventions as well as provide recommendations and options, that can enhance future design and implementation of government interventions.

However this is yet to be presented to Cabinet for approval, and so Ghana's system is not yet operational, with fragmented evaluations being conduited, primarily funded by development partners.

9.4 Examples of challenges in the establishment of NESs

In looking at some of the challenges facing the establishment of NESs we highlight three experiences to learn from: Kenya and Ghana which have elements of a NES in place but not yet a functioning evaluation system; and South Africa which has a system which has functioned well but suffered a major check from 2017-2020, and is now recovering.

The challenges facing institutionalization of evaluation in Kenya

The national M&E Directorate in the Ministry of National Treasury and Planning is the central champion for M&E. A national M&E Policy is waiting for Cabinet approval, and the M&E Directorate are already implementing some aspects of the Policy. These include: organizing annual M&E conferences since 2012 to date, developed M&E Norms and Standards for the Public Sector, and Developed Evaluation guidelines. Once it's approved one key aspect that will benefit M&E in the Country is financing of M&E. Evaluation guidelines were completed in 2020 (*Kenya Evaluation Guidelines*, 2020). In December 2021 CLEAR Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) ran training of trainers to roll these out. Norms and standards have also been developed (*Monitoring and Evaluation Norms and Standards for the Public Sector*, 2020).

Key challenges facing Kenya include a lack of or inadequate dedicated M&E budget for monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects at national and devolved levels of government. This has hindered the institutionalization of the M&E function in the country despite the M&E Policy recommending adequate resources. The M&E Policy provides for all ministries, departments, agencies and counties (MDACs) to have a separate budget component for M&E with adequate resources. In addition, all development programmes/projects are supposed to provide budgets earmarked for monitoring and evaluation. This has contributed to delay in the production of M&E information which is key for evidence-based decision making. The same applies to conducting evaluations, especially impact evaluations which require massive resources.

A second problem area is inadequate technical M&E capacity. Despite the Government of Kenya's efforts in collaboration with partners in strengthening M&E capacities in the country, there are still capacity gaps. M&E trainings for both national and county government managerial and technical officers have not been regular and continuous as envisaged in the National M&E Policy. This can be attributed to inadequate funds for capacity development. These capacity challenges have in one way or another contributed to low supply and demand for M&E in the public sector.

Kenya provides an example where there is *insufficient capacity and resources* in government, but nevertheless sufficient to start enacting the system and implementing the Policy. There is some interest in government in NECD, but this needs to be strengthened to create the political will to drive an evaluation system. The different actors are fragmented and the elements have not yet coalesced effectively to support the NES. The UN agencies are working on NECD, but the collaboration on this could be strengthened considerably, as well as with other donors. Many donors are funding evaluations and these can be repurposed to build the system.

Example of Ghana

Despite the appreciation and acceptance of the need have an M&E Policy/Strategy and the enthusiasm at the conceptualisation stage, the approval and operationalisation of the Strategy has encountered a number of challenges principal among which are: securing and sustaining high political support, lack of a high level political champion, inadequate resources and fragmented support by donors,

Securing and sustaining high political support: One of the key challenges to the development and implementation of the NES has been inadequate ownership and sustained political commitment. The drafting of the Strategy was done within the stipulated time. However, the draft Strategy is yet to be submitted for Cabinet approval as the Strategy was not considered as a priority by the political leadership. The situation was further exacerbated by the change in government priorities due to the incidence of covid-19.

Lack of high level champion: Although, the technocrats appreciated the value of the NES, the Ministry could not secure a dedicated high-level political champion to serve as an advocate and a gatekeeper to push and create space for open discussion on the documents as well as mobilise high-level political support for the Strategy.

Inadequate resources and donor coordination: One of the key challenges was inadequate funding since most of the donor partners were not sure of the likelihood that the Strategy was going to be approved soon. In this regard, they were not willing to put in additional resources. Coupled with this was the fact that most of the financial support went into the technical components of the process but not the required engagements that could have created the needed enabling environment as well as galvanizing leadership support for the approval and operationalisation of the policy.

Inadequate awareness creation and sensitisation of relevant stakeholders: There was not enough awareness creation and consultation with the relevant stakeholders especially the media. The process focused more on the technical components of the Strategy. Not much was done in terms of sensitising key stakeholders including the citizenry on the relevance of the Strategy to the national development process. The development of the National M&E Strategy did not take onboard the key political actors right at the beginning of the process. It therefore lacked political buy-in since most of the key actors were not aware and had not been involved in the process.

Ensuring continuity across political and administrative transitions

A key challenge is maintaining the system across *political and administrative transitions*. Earlier it was mentioned that DPME in South Africa went through a significant transition from 2017-2020. Although the different M&E systems were well established, rivalries across ministries, and changes in staff and minister led to an exodus of staff and a decline in DPME's status and capacity, which is now recovering. Similarly Benin has had a series of transitions with BEPP/BEPPAG moving from different ministries, Presidency etc. Ghana established a National Development Planning Commission which took on M&E functions many years ago, a Ministry of M&E was created in 2017 but in 2021 was absorbed into the Presidency. Some lessons emerge:

- **Make sure there are a range of champions who can carry on with evaluation.** The fact that there was a coalition meant that there were sector and provincial champions who carried on despite the problems in DPME. This helped when recovery was possible;
- **Once the system is established it is important to embed the system in legislation to safeguard continuity.** In South Africa's case development of legislation only started in 2017, 7 years after initiation of the M&E system, and in Benin in 2021. In retrospect it would have been ideal to do this after around 3 years, when the main systems were established and working;
- Establish the **links with Parliament** using evaluations, which can then be embedded in legislation, so that Parliament becomes a champion for evaluation.

9.5 Suggested phasing for a country planning a NES

Goldman & Mathe, (2014) discuss the process elements required for institutionalisation of M&E systems (see Table 6). Building on Table 6 and the country examples the following phases seem to be appropriate, starting with diagnosis.

Table 5: Process elements in a framework for institutionalisation of M&E (Goldman and Mathe, 2014)

The process
1. A clear diagnosis of the existing situation and an understanding of where delivery must improve;
2. The reform strategy and plan defined before the structure, so a clear policy direction with a commitment to results;
3. The process should not rely on legislation and regulations to be implemented;
4. A clear and effective implementation strategy;
5. A talented team to drive the system and solve problems early and rigorously;
6. The courage to rethink processes completely;
7. Experimentation, piloting and scaling-up;
8. A major investment in communication;
9. Care not to over-engineer the system;
10. Establishing the culture and capacity to analyse, learn, and use M&E evidence;
11. Role of structural arrangements to ensure M&E objectivity and quality and reliable ministry data systems.

Diagnosis – undertaking some form of *situation analysis*, formally or less formally, to understand what are the key external factors affecting the appetite for an evaluation system at this time, as well as the key elements of the ecosystem: an interested government champion, in the executive or parliament, either in the centre of government (e.g. Presidency), in a sector ministry, or in Parliament; an active VOPE; source of funding for evaluations and for developing elements of the evaluation system;

evaluators available in the country; training in M&E etc¹². Stakeholder mapping and engagement are important components of this phase.

Developing a concept for a system – this could be a *policy* where that is essential to even start, or a concept to guide experimentation, prior to developing a policy. This should specify the approach (e.g. a utilisation-focused approach, evaluations made public), some definition of the types of evaluation to be considered (including rapid evaluations); outsourced or internal evaluations or a combination; how evaluations will be funded; how results are made public. It should also have an implementation plan.

Building **political will to support evaluation**, both from ministers and senior managers – this might involve exposing them to successful examples elsewhere in Africa, where Twende Mbele can be helpful.

Establishing a **capable core team** to drive the process, which can be enlarged as it proves the value. This needs to be supported by a **cross-government group** to lead on the evaluation system. This means that the process is not just about one department but a coalition across government, and potentially with other allies like the VOPE, universities teaching evaluation.

Piloting evaluations and using these to test out the concept for the way the system should work. In the process, being prepared to rethink processes from scratch for a locally relevant 'Made in Africa' approach.

Making considerable efforts to **communicate** within the champion unit/department, with the political champion, with allies and across government, so that all have a clear idea of what is being attempted and why. Also communicating with the VOPE and universities so that a coalition is built that is wider than government.

Developing systems incrementally, such as guidelines for phases of the evaluation process, evaluation types, competences and standards, improvement plan system, training courses etc. These should help to build the quality and reliability of evaluations and the system. A complex system is not needed to start and it will get more complex with time. One core element is a **national evaluation plan/agenda** to prioritise evaluations to be supported.

Implementing the system - going through a consolidation phase where evaluations are being implemented, capacity to undertake and use evaluations is built, and a culture of learning from evaluation starts to be established. During this phase extending the system to devolved levels can be undertaken, eg provinces/regions, and local government.

Learning also means **evaluating the system** after 5 or so years. It is good to practice what you preach and evaluate how well the system is working and how it can be improved.

'Freezing' the system by embedding in **legislation** – to minimise the dangers from political and administrative transitions once the basic model of the system is tested and known, it would be helpful to freeze this in legislation.

10 Critical success factors

¹² Note the Global Evaluation Initiative is developing a M&E System Analysis tool which would be very helpful here.

Some key factors emerge as critical success factors, particularly drawing from the progress made in Benin, Uganda and South Africa and the slower progress in other countries and the framework for institutionalisation of M&E in Goldman & Mathe, (2014). Part of this framework is used in Table 7 to apply to establishing a NES in Africa, while the process elements are covered in Section 9.

Table 6: Framework for institutionalisation of M&E (Goldman and Mathe, 2014)

Enabling conditions	Lessons for application
1. Key role of a powerful and capable central 'champion' with sustained political will for the long haul and a coalition to support	Ideally one starts with a <i>central champion</i> such as BEPPAG, OPM or DPME, to coordinate implementation of evaluations across the whole-of-government and whole-of-society in a joined-up government fashion. A department/agency that has dedicated skills, funding and infrastructure are critical for ensuring that political championing is complemented by requisite technical competence to run the NES. Failing this one can start with a sector champion and use this to demonstrate what is possible. <i>Political will</i> by government, and possibly parliament, seen in Benin, Uganda and South Africa. <i>Buy-in of key stakeholders</i> within decision-making authorities like political leadership (Cabinets), strategic management in government, VOPEs, think tanks, academia, civil society is crucial for ensuring that the NES functions within the broader evidence ecosystem. It is important to build a <i>coalition</i> to support the system including a range of ministries and possible devolved governments (e.g. provinces), which helps to ensure legitimacy, wider use of evaluation, and more resilience in the system. In Benin the was the National Evaluation Council, in South Africa the Evaluation Technical Working Group.
2. Utilisation seen as the measure of 'success'	It is critical that a utilisation focus is used from the outset so aiming to ensure that evaluations are likely to be used. Key implications include building <i>ownership of the evaluations</i> by custodian departments, establishing the <i>credibility</i> of the evaluation, ensure the product is <i>usable</i> (e.g. the 1/5/25 page summary report used in South Africa), maximising the likelihood of follow-up by taking national evaluations to Cabinet, and having an <i>improvement plan</i> which is monitored.
3. Substantive government demand	There needs to be demand for evaluations from government. Ideally this would be from a central champion, and widely across government. If necessary one can start with sector champions or Parliament. Undertaking rapid evaluations or synthesising existing evaluations may help to build demand. It is helpful to codify the demand in a national evaluation plan or agenda.
4. The importance of establishing incentives (including the ability to use hard and soft authority effectively to enforce change);	Incentives are key – whether 'carrot's, 'sticks' or 'sermons' (Bemelmans-Videc et al., 1998). This means creating positive incentives (<i>carrots</i>) such as using evaluations to unblock programmes, celebrating success, enabling access to donor funds; <i>sermons</i> such as a President talking about evaluations; or <i>sticks</i> such as poor performance in evaluations requiring changes, requiring improvement plans from evaluations being reported on. The prevalence of a punitive bureaucratic culture often emphasised by audit means these have to be handled carefully (see Table 1).
5. Performance management/M&E system which is dynamic.	The M&E system must be able to develop to incorporate an evaluation system, and ideally a diversity of evaluation tools from rapid evaluations or evaluative workshops to rigorous implementation or impact evaluations.
6. Continuous evaluation capacity development (ECD)	Continuous ECD is also fundamental for ensuring that there is a critical mass of evaluators in society and government institutions with necessary evaluation systems and resources. Key elements of ECD include training, learning-by-doing, knowledge sharing, coaching, mentoring, internships and learnerships. Again, VOPEs and training providers like universities and consultancies play an important role on ECD.

11 Basic conditions for establishing a NES

Section 9.6 talks about the suggested phasing of establishing a national evaluation system. The core that is needed to establish a system includes:

- A **driver** – a core government champion to lead the process, with a small team of 2-3 people, which can later expand;
- An **initial concept** for how the system should work (see 9.6);
- Some availability of **flexible funding**, eg from development partners, which can be used to fund evaluations to pilot the system, and to develop elements of the system. This needs funders who are committed to national evaluation capacity developmenty (NECD) and are prepared to implement their work in such a way that it builds local capacity and systems;
- **Political will** to be prepared to face constructive criticism from evaluations, and to support evaluations happening, and for a system to develop.

What is key is to start the journey, building on the evaluations that are happening to establish a will to develop and widen a system. That needs a central champion with the mandate and political support.

Annexes

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Annex 2: M&E System Analysis tool (MESA)

Table 7: Structure of the MESA

1 Introduction to the MESA		
1.1 Introduction to the MESA		
1.2 Objective of the MESA		
1.3 Methodology and process conducted		
1.4 Structure of the report		
2 Country Background		
2.1 Country Profile		
2.2 Government Structure		
2.3 Political economy and link to M&E		
2.4 Organizational culture of government and M&E		
2.5 Interest in M&E at the beginning of the MESA		
3 Overview of Planning, Budget and M&E systems (PBM&E)	4 Monitoring and reporting systems	5 Evaluation systems
3.1 PBM&E legal and policy background	4.1 Systems for government monitoring and reporting at national level	5.1 Evaluation at national/subnational levels
3.2 Key PBM&E actors	4.2 Systems for government monitoring and reporting at subnational levels	5.2 Government capacity to manage and coordinate an evaluation
3.3 Planning and budget systems	4.3 Monitoring of government by Parliament	5.3 Government capacity to manage, commission or undertake evaluations
3.4 M&E systems	4.4 Government's monitoring and reporting capacity	5.4 The systems/incentives for ensuring that evaluation is acted upon
3.5 M&E stakeholders (national statistics, audit offices, VOPEs)	4.5 Civil society role in government monitoring system	5.5 Capacity to undertake evaluations
3.6 Statistical and administrative data	4.6 Systems/incentives for acting on monitoring	5.6 Systems/ incentives for ensuring that evaluation is acted upon
3.7 Resources for M&E	4.7 Use of monitoring information by government	5.7 Use of evaluations by government
3.8 Communication of M&E evidence		5.8 Use of evaluations by Parliament
3.9 M&E capacity development initiatives		5.9 Use of evaluations by civil society and the media
3.10 Equity/gender considerations in the PBM&E systems.		5.10 Role of civil society in government evaluation system
3.11 Climate and environmental sustainability considerations in the PBM&E systems.		
6 Overall findings and conclusions		
6.1 An overview of the status of the M&E system		
6.2 Areas working well and areas for improvement		
6.3 Opportunities for interventions which are triggers for wider system change/development outcomes		
6.4 Conclusions		

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