



Mere compliance or learning –
**M&E Culture in the Public Service of
Benin, Uganda and South Africa**

21 August 2019



BUREAU DE L'ÉVALUATION
DES POLITIQUES PUBLIQUES
RÉPUBLIQUE DU BÉNIN



Office of the Prime Minister
The Government of Uganda



planning, monitoring
and evaluation
Department:
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Acknowledgements

This research was conducted by a team led by Wole Olaleye and Michael O'Donovan, drawing on the field research support of Prosper Houssou (Benin), Doris Kembabazi (Uganda) and Rendani Manugu (South Africa) who provided administrative support to the country research teams – Gildas Adowe (Benin), Luc Gbenagnon Zanmenou (Benin), Elelwani Mudau (South Africa), Nobungcwele Holiness Mbem (South Africa), Justine Namagala Kyewalabye (Uganda), and Toko Jimmy Brian (Uganda).

Cara Waller, as the Programme Manager of Twende Mbele, played a major role managing the production and dissemination of the work. The authors are Ian Goldman, Wole Olaleye, Stanley Ntakumba, Mokgoropo Makgaba and Cara Waller.¹ Oversight was provided by the reference group, comprising Stanley Ntakumba (South Africa), Ian Goldman (South Africa), Abdoulaye Gounou (Benin), Timothy Lubanga (Uganda) and Laila Smith (South Africa).

The case benefited substantially from constructive advice and feedback from many staff of the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa (*CLEAR-AA*). Peer review was provided by Stanley Ntakumba (South Africa), Deo-Gracias Houndolo (Benin); Njeri Wabiri (South Africa), and Mayanja Gonzaga (Uganda).

The original survey was commissioned by Twende Mbele, funded by DFID and Hewlett Foundation. The views expressed in this paper, however, are solely those of the authors.

GLOSSARY

AFREA	African Evaluation Association
AFRED	African Evaluation Database
BEPPAAG	Office for Evaluation of Public Policies and Actions, Benin
DDG	Deputy Director General
DG	Director General
DPME	Department of Monitoring and Evaluation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NGOs	Non-government organisations
NES	National evaluation system
NIMES	National integrated monitoring and evaluation system
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister, Uganda
PM&E	Performance monitoring and evaluation
SA	South Africa
SAMEA	South African M&E Association
SPSS	Statistical package for social scientist
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Summary (Ian)

Abstract

This chapter builds on research on performance culture in Benin, Uganda and South Africa conducted through the Twende Mbele - an African M&E partnership - to provide a context for the cases in the book. The research was conducted with approximately five national departments per country. We see a mixed picture, but with similarities across all three countries. Overall there are significant planning and monitoring systems and an established evaluation system. Around half of managers are seen to be using evidence from M&E, with evaluations used particularly in ex-post role, rather than during the life of interventions. There is also evidence of negative behaviour, using reports to conceal information, not interrogating the cause of failure. The survey is itself a baseline for Twende Mbele and it will be interesting to see the trends in these figures.

Keywords

Evidence-based policy-making, evidence-informed decision-making, M&E, monitoring, evaluation, performance culture.

Introduction

Background

Many countries in Africa are using monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as part of their efforts to improve performance of the public sector (Porter and Goldman, 2013). Three pioneer countries in establishing government-led national evaluation systems are Uganda, Benin and South Africa (SA), who have been working together since 2012 to share experience around M&E. Since 2016 this has been formalised through the Twende Mbele African M&E partnership, along with the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA). One of Twende Mbele's projects was a survey of the state of performance M&E culture in national departments in the three countries, tracking progress as they strengthened their M&E systems. This chapter draws on this research and integrates other literature to critically analyse the context for using evidence in African governments. The research findings describe the organisational context of the three governments, building on the analytical framework guiding this book in Chapter 3, particularly the component on context drawn from Politics and Ideas (Weyrauch et al., n.d.).

Prior to this study there was little systematic empirical information on M&E culture within the public sector in Africa. Despite evidence suggesting that M&E within the public sector is gaining political recognition, its ability to influence the efficacy of policies, projects, programmes and interventions remains unclear. South Africa has done some initial work in this regard (Umlaw and Chitepo, 2015).

The purpose of the research was to assess the state of performance M&E culture in the three participating governments by seeing how each country's various M&E systems interact to improve performance and accountability, with a specific focus on policy, approach, concepts, framework and organisational arrangements in the public sector in Benin, South Africa and Uganda.ⁱⁱ Initial interviews were conducted with 14 managers and used to help design the survey. A representative probability sample size of 490 managers was selected from across 22 national departments and ministries. In total, 368 managers were interviewed – 149 from Benin, 127 from South Africa, and 92 from Uganda. A survey instrument was administered either in a face-to-face interview or in writing and submitted electronically. The interviews were conducted using in-country researchers in French and English. Quantitative responses were analysed using STATA.

This chapter also draws on wider literature from the three countries, and highlights some of the barriers and facilitators.

What is a M&E culture that promotes performance?

Culture conveys a sense of identity to employees, provides unwritten and, often, unspoken guidelines on how to get along in an organisation ... An organisational culture is reflected by what is valued, the dominant leadership styles, symbols, the procedures, routines, and the definition of success that make an organisation unique (Cameron and Quinn, 1999: 15). (pp.2–3).

Monitoring and the evaluation cultures are distinct. Monitoring involves tracking what has been planned, while evaluation is a systematic and rigorous analysis of interventions to assess and strengthen their performance (DPME, 2011). A monitoring culture is often closely linked to compliance with reporting requirements, while evaluation is usually more linked to a learning culture.

The United States General Accounting Office, in an assessment of five agencies' strategies to develop and improve evaluation, defines a performance M&E culture as an "institutional commitment to

learning from evaluation” (Government Accountability Office, 2013). Mayne, (2010) describes an organisation with an evaluative culture as one that:

... deliberately seeks out empirical information to learn how to better manage its programs and services, and thereby improve its performance...[It] is this evidence-seeking behaviour that characterises an evaluative culture and distinguishes it from a more general learning culture. (p.6)

M&E culture is composed of perception, underlying assumptions, beliefs and values, reflected in the degree of support by senior management, people’s behaviour and institutional practices and embedded in policies, guidelines, tools and procedures (Mayne, 2010). The predominant M&E culture drives the extent to which the institutionalisation of national monitoring and evaluation systems is entrenched within and across government ministries, departments, or agencies.

For an organisation to establish a culture that goes beyond monitoring to promote the use of M&E evidence for change, it must be open to critical evaluation reports, and have a system in place to use what may be critical evaluative information for learning and improvement. An organisation with a strong evaluative culture appreciates the value of critical thinking and learning and is likely to use empirical information to influence policy-making and implementation.

We 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”.

How the organisation context contributes to M&E use - an emerging analytical framework

There are few empirical studies on M&E culture in Africa published in peer-reviewed journals. Much of the information is in the form of grey literature, which is difficult to access. Hence the importance of this research undertaken in Benin, Uganda and South Africa.

The analytical framework for the book in Chapter 3 identifies the following elements around the organisational context: Macro-context; Organisational capacity; Management & processes; Culture; Intra- and inter-institutional linkages; Other resources.

We use some of the results emerging from this research and other literature to elaborate the context of the three countries and how this may inform their use of evidence. The key elements covered by this study which relate to this framework are shown in Table 1. The first two dimensions are external, and the latter four internal to the organisation.

Table 1: How the research relates to the contextual framework for the book

Dimension of context	Relevant issues covered in the research
1 Macro-context (external)	Crisis and transitions Legal base Location of M&E units and power Strategic planning culture
2 Intra- and inter-institutional linkages (external)	Coordination among agencies Communication with stakeholders Formal channels of interaction with researchers Consultation and participation in policy processes by non-government actors Use of performance information for wider accountability.

Dimension of context	Relevant issues covered in the research
3 Culture (internal)	Attitudes to success, failure and learning Institutional incentives When is evidence used
4 Organisational capacity (internal)	Leadership Capacity of M&E Units Capacity of management to use evidence
5 Management & processes (internal)	Degree of systematic planning PAs linked to plans Monitoring implementation Evaluation being undertaken Timely information to decision-makers Evidence informs decision-making, planning and budget Formal processes to access and use evidence in policymaking Communications processes
6 Other resources (internal)	Budgets for evaluation/research Knowledge infrastructure Whether information system integrates information needed by managers

Source: Adapted from Weyrauch et al. (2016)

We discuss the findings in relation to the elements of this framework, indicate the enabling and hindering factors identified in the research and from other sources and conclude.

Findings

The survey did not cover many questions in relation to the first two dimensions, macro-context and inter-institutional relationships, and so we primarily use other sources for that information.

Macro-context

Weyrauch et al (2016) see the macro-context as the over-arching forces that establish the “bigger picture” in which policy is made, including political, economic, social and cultural systems, and, consequently, how research can or cannot inform it.

Political will was a factor in the development of all three national M&E systems¹, and in all three cases a structure for championing M&E was established either in the Presidency or Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), so making it easier to oversee sectoral ministries (see Table 2). This means that these three organisations have high-level *leadership/champions*, both at a technical (Head of Department) and political (Minister) leadership levels, which serve to champion and institutionalise M&E systems within their respective organisations and governments. This was mentioned by interview respondents as an important strength (Table 8).

Table 2: The situation with regard to evaluation/M&E units in each country

Components	South Africa	Benin	Uganda
Institutional champion	DPME in the Presidency.	BEPPAAG in Presidency for evaluation.	Department of M&E with Government Evaluation Facility in OPM
Evaluation and/or M&E	All national and provincial departments have M&E	All line ministries have their own M&E system	M&E Policy recommended creation of M&E units. OPM

¹ The development of the M&E systems in each country are discussed in Goldman et al., 2018.

Components	South Africa	Benin	Uganda
units in line ministries	units. Sector M&E units link vertically.	that links to the Ministry of Planning.	is working with Ministry of Public Service to establish M&E units.
Evaluation and/or M&E units at decentralised levels	All provinces have M&E units, but connection between national and provincial M&E is not systematic, except within some sectors.	All municipalities have M&E units. Their units are not connected to national ones.	M&E function is performed under district planning units. Efforts underway to have specific evaluation staff.

Source: Goldman et al (2018: 8)

Particular *transitions* and events have provided pressure for change and to establish M&E systems, as well as to undermine them. In Benin and South Africa, leadership changes have meant that the strength of the national champions has varied, while there has been stronger continuity in Uganda. In Benin this has been particularly due to changes of President, and shifts of the location between a ministry and the Presidency, while in South Africa it is due to changes in leadership of the M&E champion. These changes also play out at sectoral level and can have major impacts on performance.

“When political people came, they removed all the people with M&E skills. I was doing M&E of local government in 2008/09 and another Minister came and he dismantled the whole M&E branch which was responsible for overseeing the work of the sector country-wide... That led to a collapse of a very strong M&E system which has not been yet been revived.” (SA respondent).

None of the countries yet has *legislation* for overarching M&E, although sector laws may well include M&E roles. All three have *policies* for M&E (Uganda) or evaluation (Benin and South Africa).

Besides leading the M&E function, if a government-wide M&E system is desired it must be *mainstreamed* into all other bodies within the public sector through transversal policies, systems and coordination mechanisms. All national departments in Benin and South Africa have M&E units and M&E units are being established in Uganda, as shown in Table 2. However, in all the countries around 50% of respondents said these units had little influence (Table 4). Some respondents indicated that M&E units had most influence when they were located in the office of the head of department/ministry, as in the South African Department of Trade and Industry.

Intra- and inter-institutional linkages

According to Weyrauch et al., (2016 p35) “two particular types of relationship exert significant influence over how knowledge interacts (or not) with policy. One is related to *internal relationships* between the government institution and other related government agencies. The second one relates to *interaction with relevant users and producers of knowledge* who can affect or be affected by policy design and implementation.” Factors that influence evidence use include formal channels of interaction between policy-makers and researchers, policy forums, and involvement of civil society in policy processes. Some of these relationships can be seen in the level of the degree of coordination within government, the degree of communication between stakeholders, and then the degree to which performance information is used by wider stakeholders for *accountability of government*. We explore these in turn.

Coordination

Coordination is seen to be necessary when “an outcome can only be improved or attained through coordinated government action, and when the benefits...outweigh the costs.... But coordination takes

time, resources and energy, so it needs to be carefully planned and focused to be effective” (New Zealand Public Service Commission. 2008).

Government departments working in silos appear to be a universal norm and governments struggle to coordinate across these silos. Cultural issues including leadership, skills and incentive systems are key to achieve coordination. Often one of the reasons for the gap between government’s stated intentions and the reality of government services experienced by citizens is due to poor coordination (Gregory, 2006).

All the countries have created coordination structures to support evaluation systems. In Benin, this is the National Council for Evaluation, in Uganda the National Evaluation Board, and in South Africa an M&E Forum and a National Evaluation Technical Working Group. These structures provide oversight of the system, support the system, and are involved in selection of priority national evaluations (Goldman et al., 2018). However, coordination is difficult.

In the three countries there are also several organisations with key roles related to M&E, and this was found to cause confusion and fatigue.

“When you are done with your Annual Performance Plan you are supposed to submit to the National Treasury, Office of the Auditor General and DPME. Whereas you submitted the same thing to all these institutions, you find out that their feedback is contradictory and confusing... I must monitor and report on the targets on a quarterly basis.” (SA respondent)

The effect of duplicate reporting requirements from these external bodies strengthens the culture of malicious compliance as much of the available effort and energy is directed to compliance reporting and not for learning and continuous improvement.

Communication with stakeholders

The Mo Ibrahim index (2018) on access to public information shows overall South Africa scoring highly, Uganda midway, and Benin very low and falling. However, in the research around 60% of respondents in all three countries indicated that evaluation reports were shared with 45–53% of respondents indicating websites were used to share evaluation reports. However there are serious attempts to make available performance information e.g. all three countries have a public repository for evaluation reports, Uganda puts all the performance reports on the budget transparency initiative website (www.budget.go.ug), and South Africa also has online budget information for national and provincial government (www.treasury.gov.za), and a municipal budget website (<https://municipaldata.treasury.gov.za/>). There is a much lower use of other communication mechanisms e.g. the use of newspapers for communication with the public is low. One Ugandan respondent indicated that giving feedback to stakeholders is always a challenge (Uganda Respondent 4).

Involvement of stakeholders happens on specific evaluations in all three countries. For example, one Uganda respondent indicated that “... we map out the key stakeholders in these programmes which are going to be evaluated, we liaise with them, plan with them and share our findings with them in terms of what we would have found on the ground versus what they think is happening...” (Uganda Respondent 3). Most of the cases in this book point to the efforts to involve stakeholders and the importance of this.

In Uganda and Benin there are much higher levels of *involvement of civil society* in M&E systems, with civil society and donors represented on the M&E coordination structures, whereas in South Africa the involvement of civil society is weak (DPME, 2018a).

Stakeholders use performance information to hold government accountable

In the Mo Ibrahim index, South Africa scores highly in Africa in access to records, accountability and sanctions for abuse of office. Benin and Uganda are in the middle of African countries (Mo Ibrahim Foundationⁱⁱⁱ). All three countries have systems for wider accountability of government to stakeholders. For example, Uganda publishes a Government Annual Performance Report and a Local Government Performance Assessment^{iv}. In South Africa departments produce annual reports - published on departments' websites - but produced for compliance and to report to Parliament, and are not good for communicating with wider stakeholders.

Parliamentary committees "scrutinised all our performance reports on a quarterly (basis) and there are even follow-ups on whether evaluation recommendations have been implemented and that must be done in writing through the presentation." (SA Respondent 1). In Uganda and Benin, the reliance on donors for programme support and evaluations has benefits in terms of creating demand from performance information that is used for accountability, but presents risks in terms of creating parallel reporting systems to both donor agencies and the central bodies like the OPM.

Culture

We earlier defined 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 all the three countries respondents felt that *learning is documented and used* to improve results (71% of managers) and changes are implemented to improve the results (also 71%). One of the challenges is how organisations respond to negative findings. The survey explored how organisations respond to both negative and positive findings in M&E results and reports.

Table 3: Perceived responses when the ministry/department's performance is below expectation

How likely are the following:	% of respondents saying always/often in		
	SA	Benin	Uganda
Information required to understand why it happened is not available	44.2	26.9	38.7
Results are ignored	10.6	26.9	8
Managers tend to reject the accuracy of results that are poor	23.1	24.9	22.7
The responsible official is sanctioned	33.7	28.9	62.7
The responsible official is required to explain and identify how results can be improved	72.1	69.8	80.0
Learning is documented and used to improve future results	69.3	72.5	70.7
Changes are implemented to improve results	71.2	69.8	74.7

Table 3 shows the response when performance is below expectations. Respondents from all three countries indicated that negative findings are reflected on, learning is documented and used to improve future results, and that changes are implemented. Only in around 25–30% of cases do

managers reject the findings and are reluctant to change – so around three quarters are open to change.

A difference between the countries was that when performance is poor, 62.7% of respondents in Uganda said that responsible officials are sanctioned for poor performance, much higher than in Benin or Uganda. The quote below illustrates that some civil servants look at the M&E function as a punitive function. It is concerning that Benin indicates that 26.9% of the respondents say the results are ignored.

If you look at the MDAs (ministries, departments, agencies) you will realise that they are having some entities who .. don't understand the need for it (M&E). That is why if there is a budget cut you will find that some entities will first think about cutting the 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" (Uganda respondent)

Table 4: 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
M&E is regarded as the job of the M&E unit, not of all managers	54.8	63.8	54.7
The M&E unit has little influence in the department	51.9	45.6	48.0
M&E is seen by management as policing and a way of controlling staff	44.2	43.0	37.3
The concealing of findings is a barrier to the effective use of M&E	31.7	24.2	34.7
Concerns from managers about "unhelpful" conclusions about policies' effectiveness	52.9	42.3	50.7

Table 4 focuses on cultural barriers to learning, use of evaluation and accountability. The fear of making mistakes can be seen in that half of managers said 'problems are never/rarely treated as an opportunity for learning and improvement'. Yet when performance was above expectations 20–30% of managers were perceived as taking personal credit for good performance rather than crediting the team.

Overall, the value of M&E to help improve organisational performance is recognised. Around half of managers are open to change, 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.

In Benin, comments were that there is lack of ownership of evaluation at national level and the M&E culture is still not strong. Ugandan comments also related to lack of ownership of the M&E function, lack of feedback and slow decision-making.

The quote below illustrates this emerging culture in some departments in South Africa:

We are one of the best countries in terms of business process outsourcing simply because we did an evaluation which made it easy to look at how we can improve on the design and implementation.....it needs a certain level of maturity to understand what is happening because the opposition can take the result and make them political. So it needs maturity in every level both within the institution and outside the institution. The whole idea is not to get a perfect solution but it is to get continuous improvement. Our minister always says that continuous improvement is better than nothing (SA Respondent 6).

Organisational capacity

Weyrauch et al., (2016: 23) define organisational capacity as “the ability of an organisation to use its resources to perform... to design and implement public policies. It includes human resources and the legal framework that determines how resources can or cannot be used. It establishes interactions between its members.” In terms of this definition, both leadership and general human resource capabilities are deemed important alongside other aspects like policy and legal capacity and internal communication mechanisms.

Around half of respondents indicated that the *most senior person* responsible for M&E within ministries are at Director General (DG) or Deputy Director General (DDG) level, or their equivalents - so at a high level - with the other half indicating that the most senior people responsible for M&E were at Director level or below. M&E units are well *staffed* with a mean of 8.47 posts (11.6 posts in SA, 6.3 in Benin and 10.6 in Uganda). Actual filled positions is a little lower.

In general M&E is seen as the *role* of the M&E unit rather than the role of all managers (58.8% of respondents in SA, 63.8% in Benin and 54.7% of managers in Uganda). This can mean M&E gets side-lined to M&E units rather than being seen as the role of all managers. It is interesting that the outstanding ministry in South Africa in terms of evaluation, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture in South Africa, deliberately did not set up a M&E unit but left M&E as a strategic function in the office of the head of department (Joyene Isaacs, Head of Department: personal communication).

The challenge of the *role* of M&E units was illustrated by one respondent:

“M&E has not been institutionalised within most of government departments. When they see you as an M&E person they think you are the expert that must produce reports on their behalf. For example, ... feedback [from DPME and the Auditor General] showed areas of weakness and instead of all senior managers being requested to address these, I was tasked to fix the problem by myself. I had to call all senior managers one by one to ask them what they were trying to say about their programmes in the plan. The managers were so defensive and I had to explain that

you are not here for an interrogation... So M&E is not institutionalised in a manner that even senior managers can understand its role within an organisation.” (SA Respondent)

However, some key respondents indicated major concerns about the *capacity of M&E units* to do their jobs. Some pointed to the inability of M&E officials to analyse and produce their own reports. There are concerns regarding the capacity to manage and undertake evaluations with around 55% of managers indicating the capacity to conduct evaluations is weak.

A smaller proportion say that managers do not have the *skills to understand and use evaluation recommendations* (33% in SA, 28% in Benin and 25% in Uganda), as well as of having the *management skills to use evaluation results*. Some of the capabilities in government needed to use evidence effectively include analytical thinking, the ability to interpret evidence and knowledge of the problem (adequate diagnosis). In practice, officials tend to use informal sources and trusted experts for their sources of information rather than rigorous sources from research, evaluation or research synthesis (Paine Cronin and Sadan, 2015). This is partly a skills issue, partly the lack of staff to conduct research and generate evidence in government and also lack of awareness of the evidence that may already be available^v. Uneke et al., (2011) working with health policy makers in Nigeria found a high correlation between levels of academic qualification and the capacity to use research evidence.

Management & processes

Strategic planning

All three countries have national development plans which are monitored by government, civil society and development partners, with a national agency responsible for the national development plan.

There is an underlying problem in that around 50% of respondents indicated that diagnosis of problems to inform planning happens ‘rarely’ or ‘never’; confirmed in training of senior managers across government conducted in the three countries. During this training a major cause of poor performance of programmes was identified as addressing symptoms rather than root causes of problems^{vi}.

There is some use of improved planning tools like theories of change through the influence of the national evaluation system. For example both Benin and South Africa have introduced the need for theories of change in their planning system, in Benin’s case for policies (see Chapter X), in South Africa’s case for departmental planning (DPME, 2018b).

Linking plans to individual performance

A key link in the golden thread between ministry plans and individual performance are individual *performance agreements*. Respondents were asked whether ‘departmental performance expectations as recorded in strategic and annual plans are linked to individual performance agreements’. There was a strong linkage in Uganda (72.0%) and South Africa (75.6%) but much weaker in Benin (42.9%). Only 10% said they did not know whether departmental performance objectives are linked to individual performance agreements.

Monitoring implementation

In all three countries departments/ministries have annual plans, with over 80% of respondents reporting that indicators are embedded in these plans, and that reports reflect progress. So all three countries undertake routine monitoring of performance. However, 45-52% of respondents indicated

the focus of M&E is on activities and outputs (what we do) rather than outcomes and impact (i.e what we achieve), reinforcing a compliance approach rather than encouraging learning about the achievement of the desired development results contained in National Development Plans.

Key sectors like health and education generally have integrated M&E systems that cover the sector from service point to national levels.

Evaluation being undertaken

All three countries have national evaluation systems, with basic systems in place and some process of evaluations related to national priorities. Goldman et al., (2018) report on the characteristics of the different systems. Table 5 below summarises the number of national evaluations being undertaken. In South Africa there are also provincial and departmental evaluations being undertaken using the national evaluation system, and in all three countries other evaluations in sectors supported by donors.

Table 5: Total number of national evaluations completed or underway

Total number of national evaluations completed or underway	South Africa	Benin	Uganda
As at 31 December 2016	56 (from 2012)	15 (from 2010)	23 (from 2008)
As at 31 December 2018	67	17	

Source: (Goldman et al., 2018), updated. SA for 2018 from Jabu Mathe, DPME. Benin for 2018 Elias Segla, BEPPAG.

While all three countries are undertaking evaluations, only around half of respondents in all three countries indicated that evaluation was always/often undertaken as a systematic research process (Uganda 49.3%; 47% in Benin, 41.4% in SA).

Respondents indicated that strengths around evaluation include implementation of the policy, systems being in place and the ability to show evidence of government's performance. Weaknesses included capacity, budget, limited evidence on use of evaluation results (Table 8).

Timely information provided to decision-makers

This question is answered indirectly in "Time pressure means decisions are often taken without proper diagnosis of the problem". Around 41–44% of respondents in all three countries indicated that this happens always/often while as mentioned above around 50% of respondents indicated that diagnosis of problems to inform planning happens 'rarely' or 'never'. This suggests that there is a problem with key evidence being available when needed to make decisions. Some relevant observations were: "The system is already institutionalised but there are a lot of weaknesses. The information gets to us but not on time and most times it is not clear. The information is not usually used to make decisions - not used to get the desired results" (Benin Respondent 2).

Clearly there is a need to get more rapid information for decision-making and the Twende Mbele programme has an initiative to look at rapid evaluation to plug this gap.

Evidence used to inform decision-making

The whole point of generating evidence is so that it is used to support policy-making and implementation. On average 61% of respondents felt that M&E evidence was always/often used

(58,4% in Benin, 63,5% in SA and 64% in Uganda). A particularly important use is to inform planning and the budget which is described below.

However other respondents indicated the challenge. A Ugandan respondent from the Office of the Prime Minister said the “challenge which (evaluation) shares with the government assessment process is the issue of limited use of the findings. ... we are happy when we have at least 30% of the evaluation findings are adopted.” (Uganda Respondent 2).

What use can we see?

Chapter 2 page X describes instrumental, conceptual, symbolic and process use and in Table 6 we see levels of over 60% on each of these types of use. Around 45% of managers indicated they saw evidence of an improvement in management practices as a result of using M&E evidence, which could be instrumental or process use.

Table 6: How are evaluation recommendations used

How often are evaluation recommendations used to:	% of respondents saying always/often in		
	SA	Benin	Uganda
Make changes in the policies (instrumental use)	63.5	62.4	61.3
Improve understanding of the intervention (process or conceptual use)	64.4	67.1	72.0
Give legitimacy to a course of action taken (symbolic use)	66.4	63.8	69.3
Enhance value derived from stakeholders participation in the planning and implementation of evaluation (process use)	58.7	65.1	61.3

When is evaluation used?

Only rarely is evaluation evidence used through the programme cycle (8–15% of respondents); in the majority of cases, the evidence is used when evaluations are completed (Table 7). Nevertheless as shown in Table 6 around 60% of respondents did feel they learnt something during the evaluation process – differentiating process findings (eg understanding the intervention better), from was the recommendation implemented.

Table 7: Stage at which countries use evaluation evidence

When do you use evaluation evidence?	% of respondents saying always/often in		
	SA	Benin	Uganda
Throughout planning, designing and implementation of programmes and projects	15.5	12.2	8.0
Once evaluation is completed	32.0	47.6	42.7

One of the challenges for use is that 30-40% of respondents felt there were inadequate mechanisms for ensuring use (eg improvement plans), and 25-33% of managers do not have the skills to understand and use evaluation recommendations.

M&E evidence used to inform planning and budget

Respondents in all three countries indicated there were links between M&E, planning and budget. “There are officers in the ministry in charge of M&E system and they know about the results of the evaluation findings. They are also the ones that initiate the costing at the ministry level, and they

prepare the budget of all ministries” (Benin Respondent 1), while other respondents indicated that the link was still weak.

In Uganda, respondents indicated that the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) ensures that the recommendations from government assessment reports the previous year are the starting point for every departmental plan. The OPM compares Ministries’ outputs and outcomes, targets and indicators in the work plan against the previous years’ recommendation and against the budget. Each sector develops a budget framework paper and OPM wants to see that the budget framework papers has addressed the previous year’s recommendation and also the percentage of the recommendation from the year that are addressed. In Uganda a move from output-oriented budgeting to programme based budgeting was also identified (Uganda Respondent 5).

In South Africa respondents indicated there is some link, with annual reports, quarterly reports informing plans. Several respondents indicated the need to use evidence to justify budgets e.g. “these days when you go to National Treasury and you want money for a programme or policy they ask you .. what has informed your case... to say you want this money? So that is evidence coming through to be able to produce that evidence and when they give you money like the conditional grant, they want you to perform and to measure your performance and that is evidence.” (SA Respondent 3). However, DPME has struggled to get an elegant system nationally to inform budgets^{vii}.

The need to improve this linkage led Twende Mbele in 2018 to support an international literature review on the experience of linking M&E with planning and budget, seeking to find some tools from this to inform this function in the Twende partner countries.^{viii}

Other resources

We did not collect data to corroborate whether adequate budgets exist within departments/ministries for evaluation. However respondents in the survey reported that resources in terms of both people and finance are viewed as major challenges that hamper M&E practice and a culture of use of evidence for policy and decision-making (see Table 8). Around 70% of respondents indicated that there is insufficient funding for evaluations (73% in SA, 71% in Benin and 75% in Uganda).

Table 8: Summary of strengths and weaknesses (source: interview respondents, baseline study)

Country		Strengths	Challenges
Benin	Culture	Political will with introduction of evaluation in a ministry	Lack of ownership of evaluation at national level, M&E culture still not strong
	Systems	Some systems in place and institutionalised with some uniformity e.g. National Evaluation Policy with tools to implement e.g. guideline	Lack of sectoral evaluation plans
	HR		Turnover of staff and lack of institutional memory
			Inadequate capacity of stakeholders in evaluation. Lack of strong quality assessors
	Finance		Resources for evaluation
	Follow-up and use	Now able to provide evidence of the work we are doing and the other area is the issue around uniformity	Some recommendations not implementable, inadequate system to develop and follow-up recommendations
Timeliness		Information gets to us late	
Uganda	Culture		Some civil servants view M&E function as a witch hunting function
			Lack of feedback. Sharing of information is limited and most stakeholders are unaware of existing policies and procedures
			Coordination issues at all levels of government (ministry/district)
			Slow decision-making process in the system. The learning and accountability system is inefficient as evidence is not available timeously.
			Reporting is not done, or of a poor quality
	System	Implemented more than 65% of the national M&E policy Our department meets to discuss the reports that we submit to OPM every six months Tools have been developed and are used	System mostly geared towards monitoring, with less evaluation
			Poor systems in some places (eg some local governments) are hampered by poor infrastructure. People do not know how to use the internet and so they cannot provide information on time.
			Joint agreements but government and donors still sometimes work in silos
HR	Implemented a lot of capacity development	Skills gap and limited staff in each ministry and local government. M&E responsibilities in many MDAs not clear	
		Capacity and skills/linked is the poor quality of trainers in M&E	

Country		Strengths	Challenges
			Low salary and low motivation of staff
	Finance		No clear budget for M&E – supposed to be 3-5% but ad-hoc and shortage of resources for evaluations.
	Follow-up and use		Limited use of evaluation findings. Also challenge of implementing the decisions arising from the M&E committee
	Data	UBOS statistics are good and reliable.	Administrative data often not credible. Some people try to fake results eg fake schools.
	Timeliness		UBOS statistics often comes very late
South Africa	Leadership	(when) M&E function located in the DG's office it is much better	
		M&E led from the Presidency	
	Culture	Able to provide evidence of the kind of work being done	
	System	Government ownership leads to increased willing to use the results	Evaluations not fully independent
		Degree of standardisation	Lot of frameworks that are not streamlined or aligned
		Evaluation has become very strong. NES working very well. There is a National Evaluation Policy Framework, with clear capacity building, interventions and guidelines.	Non-regulation is a weakness because some departments don't do evaluation and the ones that do overdo it. An evaluation after every programme should be compulsory.
		Evaluation policy and guidelines	Problem of good monitoring systems. Monitoring information not necessarily providing good performance reports against APP
	HR	Fully fledged evaluation team in DPME	Don't work as well as should with provinces on planning and M&E
			Evaluations are done by departments separate from planning
			Capacity in the evaluation sector in general, with few service providers in the sector, and limited capacity, both policy-makers and technical staff
In government there are no (evaluation) people and some departments do not even have one person that is doing evaluation			
		While we are called M&E, most of us are not strong in evaluations	
		Need to develop more black evaluators	
		Turnover with the new person always starting something new	

Country		Strengths	Challenges
	Funding		Programme funding needs to include funds for evaluation
			Evaluation is costly
	Follow-up and use	Evaluations have been done of key programmes which may otherwise not have been done so that practices improve	Are managers using the reports?
	Timeliness		Usage of evaluation information sometimes doesn't happen as best as you want it
			Evaluation takes time

The enabling and hindering factors to M&E use

Factors related to values and culture

Some of the *enablers* related to values and culture which emerge are:

- Political will and authority with location of M&E in a strong central office e.g. in the Presidency (all three countries) and when a departmental M&E unit is located in the office of the head of department, as in the Western Cape Department of Agriculture in South Africa;
- Demand for evidence from ministers and management (around 70% of respondents);
- Recognition of the importance of M&E and learning in around 50% of managers, so there is a base of potential champions to work with;

When the question was asked on *barriers* to M&E use (Table 4), we see a series of cultural factors including:

- Turnover in leadership leading to desire for creating new systems, and resulting in instability (especially Benin and South Africa);
- Lack of ownership of M&E by around 50% of managers, not respecting evidence-based decision-making, not liking 'unhelpful' conclusions and with around 40% saying senior managers are not championing M&E (Table 4);
- M&E regarded as the job of the M&E unit, not of all managers;
- Existence of a compliance culture with punitive aspects, creating a fear of making mistakes and learning. Problems are not treated as an opportunity for learning and improvement (40-46% of respondents).
- Between a quarter and a third indicated that findings are concealed, with resistance from senior managers. Around 50% indicated that managers fear admitting mistakes and 37-44% indicated that M&E is seen as a way of policing and controlling (so command and control rather than a learning orientation)
- Around 40% of respondents indicated that the hierarchy makes it difficult to honestly discuss performance,

Evaluation system-related enablers and barriers

System related factors that foster use of M&E were cited as:

- There is a national system in place, so it is institutionalised and standardised, which is important in systems mainly driven by compliance;
- M&E information is made public in the three countries, creating a valuable resource for wider society.
- When donors reinforce government M&E systems, as in Uganda;
- M&E information is made public in the three countries.

In terms of hindering factors, we see:

- Weaknesses in the public services
 - Limited resources for M&E, and in particular evaluation;
 - Poor salaries (Uganda & Benin) and poorly motivated public servants (all countries);

- Limited capacity to undertake evaluations (55% of respondents), while managers do not have the skills to understand and use evaluation results or recommendations (33% in SA, 28% in Benin and 25% in Uganda).
- Systems challenges:
 - Duplication in reporting requirements creating reporting fatigue (for SA);
 - Weak, manual data systems, especially in rural areas, contributing to poor quality administrative data (all);
 - M&E and planning systems not aligned or used in budget decisions (all);
- Evidence generation
 - Evidence generation not planned to anticipate the needs of ministers or senior managers, meaning decisions are taken without effective diagnosis because of time pressure (all);
 - Quality of evaluations - 50% of respondents felt that conclusions are often not helpful;
 - Weak follow-up from evaluations due to absence of improvement planning system, e.g. Benin and Uganda, or because improvement plans are not followed-up adequately, as in South Africa (DPME, 2018a)
- Donors sometimes operating parallel evaluation systems (all);
- Involvement of civil society weak in holding government to account, with civil society linkages weakest in South Africa.

Conclusions

Table 9 summarises the overall picture against the contextual elements identified at the beginning of this chapter and the pattern for the three countries is surprisingly similar.

Table 9: How the research relates to the contextual framework for the book

Dimension of context	Summary
1 Macro-context (external)	In all 3 cases there are powerful centre of government M&E roles. In some cases these are a consequence of crises and transitions, which have also affected leadership. The role of donors is powerful in Uganda and Benin.
2 Intra- and inter-institutional linkages (external)	Coordination is weak across government generally, stronger in M&E space Some transparency and reports are shared. Much more work on communication needed Consultation with non state actors in M&E system weak in South Africa Performance information (eg evaluation reports) is used for wider accountability
3 Culture (internal)	High demand from ministers for evidence Half of managers are supportive of using evidence, but around half do not use problems for learning Historical evidence used more than real-time. Cultures still largely compliance driven Challenges with management attitudes, eg hierarchy which affects ability to take risks and learn
4 Organisational capacity (internal)	High level political leadership in M&E, and in a significant proportion of ministries the person responsible for M&E is high level. M&E units are of significant size – the central unit and ministry units. There are limits to management’s capacity and will to use evidence
5 Management & processes (internal)	All 3 have national development plans and monitor these. Benin is weak in linking performance agreements to the NDP and ministry plans. Monitoring is being done but largely for compliance and there is reporting fatigue. All 3 have national evaluation systems

Dimension of context	Summary
	Around 50% of managers are using evidence, with >60% for instrumental and conceptual use Basic communications are done, but not much wider media which would widen access
6 Other resources (internal)	The budgets for evaluation and research are limited Limited knowledge infrastructure eg evaluation repositories Managers felt information system provides information needed

Source: Adapted from Weyrauch et al. (2016)

What emerges is a mixed picture, where in these countries the location of the driver of M&E gives it some authority but that it may be siloed. There appears to be a significant demand for M&E evidence from ministers and senior managers, and in around half of cases, respondents indicated there was a positive environment for evidence use. Around 60-70% reported that evidence from evaluations is used, with instrumental, conceptual, process and symbolic use emerging fairly consistent across the three countries.

However, the mirror to this is that around half of respondents indicated there was a negative attitude to M&E, with findings concealed, senior management not championing honesty about performance, little respect for evidence-based decision-making, and managers fearing to admit mistakes. The hierarchy impedes learning and M&E is also seen as not very influential in creating change.

This creates a mixed environment for learning, with a compliance culture still dominant. We can see ministries which are performing better, have stronger M&E systems, and use evidence; while others are very weak.

With the ongoing work in the three countries supported by Twende Mbele, it is hoped a repeat of this survey will reveal a positive trend. Comparing the results of Table 4 in South Africa with similar questions asked in 2011 reported in Umlaw and Chitepo (2015) shows there has been some progress.

As Mayne (2010) says (p22):

Developing an evaluative culture in an organization will not happen through good intentions and osmosis, nor by building results systems and measuring results. It requires deliberate efforts by the organization and especially its senior managers to encourage, implement, and support such a culture.

This chapter has sought to provide a picture of the context to evidence use in three of the five countries in the book. Overall establishment of effective M&E systems is a component of creating a performance culture, but is not enough. We are seeing examples of systems, and 50% of managers are indicating that evidence is valued and used. It must become part of how organisations work. But developing such a culture is not a short-term project, and will require a concerted efforts by governments to enable and incentivise learning and improvement, rather than compliance and control.

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Endnotes

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ⁱⁱ National departments/ministries that formed part of the survey are: President/Prime Minister's Office/Agriculture/Education/Finance/Health/Social Development/Planning and Economic Development/Labour, Public Administration and Social Affairs/Higher Education and Scientific Research/Secondary Education, Technical and Professional Training/ Bureau of Evaluation of Public Policies and Analysis of Governmental Action of General Secretary of Presidency (BEPPAAG/SG-PR).

ⁱⁱⁱhttp://s.mo.ibrahim.foundation/u/2018/10/26211727/2018-IIAG-country-scorecards.zip?_ga=2.132075023.1604460325.1560161521-1633358436.1560161521

^{iv} The most recent Annual Performance Report for government is Sept 2015, and a Local Government Performance Assessment is June 2018

^v For example the AFRED database of evaluations developed by CLEAR AA and CREST indicates 521 evaluations that at least partly cover Tanzania. In a recent training of senior Tanzanian officials conducted they were completely unaware that this resource exists. Similarly in preparing an evidence map for Uganda, (White, 2019) had found over 500 evaluations in Uganda.

^{vi} Experience of facilitation of training in evidence-based policymaking of top 2-3 levels of the public service in the three countries, from 2013-2018 in South Africa, in 2018 in Uganda and in Benin (the latter included deputy ministers). In South Africa over 330 managers have been trained. In all cases very consistent messages come through around lack of diagnosis.

^{vii} A simple table has been developed using evaluation findings, recommendations, degree of implementation of the recommendations/improvement plans, and the implications for the budget process..

^{viii} The report is available at http://www.twendembele.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Twende-Mbele-Report-Final-Nov-2018_Budgets-Planning2.pdf, accessed 17 August 2019.