TWENDE MBELE

Using M&E to improve government performance and accountability

Photo credit: Doris Kembabazi

Introduction

The Twende Mbele programme strives to support African governments in their endeavours to improve their performance, as well as accountability and transparency towards their citizens, by strengthening their monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems and practices.
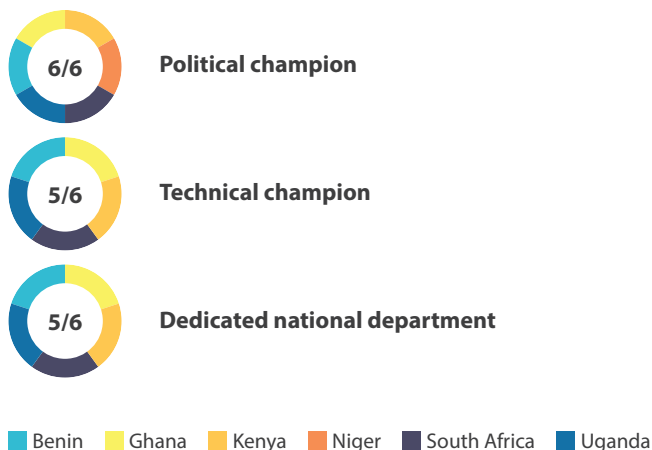
The core members of the programme are Benin, Uganda, and South Africa, as well as the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) and the Independent Development Evaluation unit at the African Development Bank.

Twende Mbele works with these and other African countries, building on global experience and growing the range of effective M&E mechanisms.

The programme aims to support peer-learning between existing and new partners in order to tackle common M&E challenges and provide a platform for countries to learn from each other. Although Twende Mbele only formally started in early 2016, some valuable lessons are already beginning to emerge, drawing from scoping studies in the three core member countries, as well as in Ghana, Kenya and Niger, a country consultation workshop held in March 2017, and a validation workshop on the evaluation of the South African National Evaluation System (NES) which took place in July 2017. While the countries are all at different stages of developing national M&E systems, these lessons can be adapted for each one's specific context.
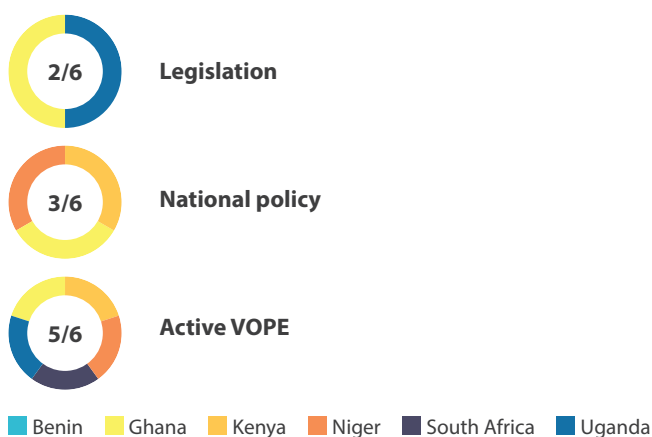
Emerging lessons

Leadership and linkages

6/6 **Political champion**

5/6 **Technical champion**

5/6 **Dedicated national department**

■ Benin ■ Ghana ■ Kenya ■ Niger ■ South Africa ■ Uganda

To build demand and support for national M&E systems, and ensure their successful implementation, countries need to have high level political and technical champions for M&E. Linking it throughout government and with stakeholders outside of government is also critical. In addition, a dedicated national department is needed, with the capacity to drive M&E. This is made easier if the department has status in government. In most countries this is the case, but in Ghana, for example, while there is a strong national technical champion in the form of the National Development Planning Commission, political will is emergent with a new untested ministry established after the recent elections. Niger, on the other hand, has a political champion in the Ministry of Planning and a parliamentary network for good governance, but has no technical champion and is the only country which does not have an M&E department in the office of the Prime Minister or Presidency.

Experience in all countries therefore shows that strong political will, dedicated technical and financial partners, and wide participation across all spheres of government, as well as donors, advisory and control bodies, and civil society is essential for embedding government-wide M&E.

Institutionalisation

2/6 **Legislation**

3/6 **National policy**

5/6 **Active VOPE**

■ Benin ■ Ghana ■ Kenya ■ Niger ■ South Africa ■ Uganda

Institutionalising M&E is undoubtedly important, but is legislation necessary, or is a policy enough? In Kenya, for example, there is a burgeoning legal framework and, although the long-term development plan is a legal basis for the National Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES), it is more administrative. Ghana has no overall policy framework and evaluations are donor-driven. The evaluations are not freely available and there is no central repository. Niger also lacks a national evaluation policy (the draft document prepared in 2010-2011 has not yet been adopted) and a harmonised, institutional and regulatory M&E framework. Institutional instability poses the problem of institutional anchoring of evaluation as well.

In South Africa, while there is no M&E policy, there is a national evaluation policy, and evaluation is becoming institutionalised. This policy was enough to get the evaluation system established, but to ensure sustainability and implementation across government, the decision has been taken to pass legislation, and drafting is underway. Uganda has set up a Government Evaluation Facility to evaluate public policies and major public investments, and its national M&E policy addresses gaps in existing legislation and administrative practices in terms of tracking the performance and evaluation of public policies and investments. This entrenches discipline and results-oriented performance.

These examples demonstrate systems that have been developed without policy or legislation, but where there has been a move to formalise, or, as in the case of Ghana, where plans are to develop a policy prior to establishing a system.

A significant challenge facing countries currently in terms of institutionalisation is the fact that while Voluntary Organisations of Professional Evaluations (VOPEs) have been recognised at county level, they are not yet operational. As a result, getting broad-based buy-in is difficult and there is a culture of compliance, rather than one of improvement and learning.

Capacity

2/6 **Formalised capacity development framework/plan**

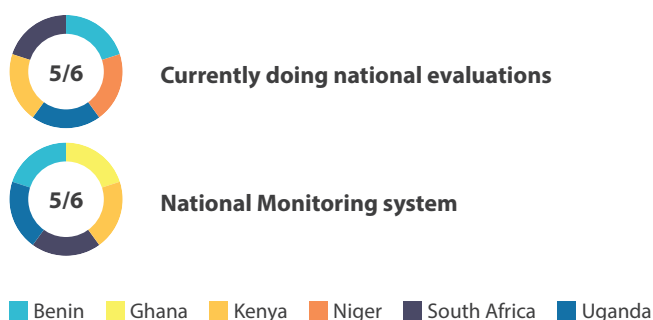■ Benin ■ Ghana ■ Kenya ■ Niger ■ South Africa ■ Uganda

All countries identified that there is a gap in technical capacity, which needs to be addressed. This includes resourcing for training and tool development, as well as improving the link between M&E and planning. Uganda highlighted that improvements in evaluation require strong skills and experience in quantitative and qualitative methods, while Kenya demonstrated that capacity shortfalls remain a challenge for many aspects of M&E, from planning, management and execution, to financial resources and building a strong VOPE. In Ghana, while there is M&E and data capacity within some units in all ministries, departments and agencies and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, these units are small and their capacity is limited, particularly in evaluation. Staff are usually not trained in M&E, except for one or two short courses, despite the presence of well-established evaluation consultants.

Benin and Niger also lack sufficient staff dedicated to evaluation, and in the latter case, the absence of a budget dedicated to the promotion of M&E in the National Budget is problematic. Likewise, in South Africa, there is an inadequate supply of skilled evaluators, and Twende Mbele is now supporting a diagnostic in the three countries around evaluator supply and demand.

A few ways capacity could be improved across all countries is through developing new evaluation tools for the provision of rapid and inexpensive evaluation exercises, developing technical courses around M&E, and strengthening the methodology of evaluations by trying different approaches.

Addressing weak planning is also important, and it has a direct impact on the effectiveness of M&E systems. Standards to drive change need to be developed and more training is needed. Reporting mechanisms also need to be improved, particularly for the submission of evaluations and improvement plans, which are often delayed and have knock-on effects for the whole M&E process. One way to improve this particular aspect is through incentives and disincentives. In the experience of both Kenya and South Africa, a combination of both has proven very effective. Examples of incentives include part-funding the evaluations, providing training, providing an opportunity to participate in evaluation technical working groups (ETWG), and recognition, such as awards for best evaluation and being chosen to present at conferences. Disincentives include a requirement for departments to follow the system once an evaluation is selected, evaluation results being sent to Cabinet, Parliamentary Portfolio Committees and being made public, management of the evaluation being undertaken by steering committees, rather than departments, and funding being dependent on compliance and performance.

Quality and use of evidence and evaluations

5/6   **Currently doing national evaluations**

5/6   **National Monitoring system**

■ Benin   ■ Ghana   ■ Kenya   ■ Niger   ■ South Africa   ■ Uganda

A common theme throughout is that quality is critical. Poor quality evidence could lead to wrong, or even destructive, recommendations, or discredit research evidence in general. Because M&E should be used to improve performance and accountability, and not just as a compliancy exercise, it is important to undertake to do things differently as a result of the findings and lessons which surface, and funding and project plans should be flexible enough to respond to opportunities that arise.

Photo credit: Benoît Koffi

Benin points out that the quality of evaluations is key in the use of evaluation results, and can be measured in terms of the relevance of the evaluation recommendations. The quality of the evaluation of public policy and its ownership by the actors responsible for implementation is closely linked to their level of involvement in the evaluation process. Stakeholder involvement and participation at all stages of the evaluation process is needed to maximise the likelihood of the use of evaluation results. In Benin, ownership of recommendations has led to significant efforts by departments for the use of evaluation results and recommendations in the improvement of public service. Similarly, the focus in South Africa on utilisation of evaluation results means that a great deal of effort has been made to ensure that a learning approach to evaluation is implemented, as well as maximising ownership of results. However, there is tension with ensuring that departments respond to the findings and recommendations.

This example also shows how valuable sharing results and evidence in a user-friendly way is, and highlights that communication needs to be strengthened, for example, through seminars or community workshops. There is also a need to find other ways to communicate key messages to stakeholders, such as through the media and the publication of articles in referred academic journals, something that Twende Mbele can play a significant role in helping to achieve.

In South Africa, there has been an increased understanding about evaluation within the government system, which has in turn bred a stronger evaluation culture. One success has been the use of theories of change in evaluations, resulting in acceptance of these as a key component of effective planning.

Meanwhile, data quality remains a challenge for many countries. In Ghana, for example, while there are well-established monitoring systems and strong links nationally and in sectors, resulting in direct data input that is immediately available, there is also a disconnect between data collection systems and current plans and data needs, and data collection tools can be in short supply. The importance of routine, robust data collection and analysis is shown by five of the six countries that have invested in a national monitoring system. However, despite the existence of a system, all countries note the need for higher quality and timely access to data.

Conclusion

The policy- and decision-making environment is inherently political – both party political in terms of achieving an electoral mandate, and in terms of organisation politics and the political economy of the country. This leads to webs of power and influence, through which stakeholders must learn to navigate. In this context, evaluation evidence is one influence on outcomes. It requires translating complex evaluation findings into useable information and recommendations, building a portfolio of evidence, a coalition of stakeholders to support it, and ensuring its use requires planning and influencing strategies.

More importantly, a long-term view needs to be taken. Some evaluations create great changes, others little tremors – but a delay in implementing findings and recommendations does not equate to not using them at all. And ultimately, evidence-based policy and practice is a means to social betterment, not an end goal.

For evaluations to have meaningful impact, governments must have a serious commitment to facing the failures evaluations may bring to the surface, and to making the improvements suggested. Through Twende Mbele, countries can learn from each other, adapt learnings from their peers, and, where appropriate, develop common approaches. They can learn from each other's activities as well as those of other regional initiatives.

The successful collaboration of Twende Mbele countries can help to augment and entrench the use of M&E for change. This means that lessons need to be documented and shared, knowledge generated must be owned by all parties, and, perhaps most crucial of all, participating countries must be accountable to each other, and to their supporters in-country, with both peer learning and peer competition helping to drive change.

Country national evaluation systems at a glance

	Benin	Ghana	Kenya	Niger	South Africa	Uganda
National legislation on M&E	No	Yes	No, in the Constitution	No	No	Yes
National monitoring system	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
National M&E framework	Yes	Yes	Yes	Draft	Yes	Yes
Regular monitoring of national development plan	Quarterly	Quarterly	Quarterly	No	Quarterly	Quarterly
National and provincial departments have M&E plans monitored regularly	National, not sub-national	Yes	National, not sub-national	M&E plans, but no monitoring	National, some sub-national	Yes
Report to	Ministry of Planning and Development	NDPC	Director, M&E Department		Premiers and President	OPM
Regularly monitored programmes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Regularly monitored local government plans	Some	All	N/A	Some	Yes	Yes
National evaluation policy	Yes	Draft planned	Yes – awaiting approval	Draft developed	Yes	Yes
Evaluation of policies and programmes	A few each year	Uneven across departments	A few each year	A few each year	Yes	A few each year
National system for evaluations	Yes	Being built now	Mostly	No	Yes	Yes
Formalised M&E capacity development programme	Not formal (ad hoc)	Not formal (ad hoc)	Not formal (ad hoc)	Not formal (ad hoc)	Yes	Yes
Responsible for capacity development	Bureau of public policies evaluation and government action analysis	National Development Planning Commission	M&E department, individual ministries, and counties	Ministère du Plan et haut Commissariat a la Modernisation	DPME	Civil Service College Jinja under the Ministry of Public Service
Active volunteer organisations for professional evaluation (VOPE)	Somewhat	Yes, GMEF	Yes	Active, hosted AfrEA conference in 2007	Yes, SAMEA	Yes, UEA