4 Mere compliance or learning – M&E culture in the public service of Benin, Uganda and South Africa

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Summary

This chapter builds on research on the performance monitoring and evaluation (M&E)culture in Benin, Uganda and South Africa conducted through the Twende Mbele African M&E partnership, which is presented here to provide a context for the cases in the book. The research was conducted on approximately five national departments per country and 368 managers were interviewed: 149 from Benin, 127 from South Africa, and 92 from Uganda. We see a mixed picture and many similarities in the three countries. Overall, all three have 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 an ex-post role rather than during the life of interventions. The effect of each country's national evaluation system is recognised. However, 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 the trends in these figures will be interesting.

Introduction

Background

Many countries in Africa are using 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 (NES) are Uganda, Benin and South Africa (SA), which have been working together since 2012 to share experience around M&E. Since 2016, this has been formalised through the Twende Mbele African government +M&E partnership. One of Twende Mbele's projects was a survey of the state of performance M&E culture in national departments in the three countries. This chapter draws on this research and other literature to critically analyse the context for using evidence in African 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 is gaining political recognition in the public sector, its ability to influence the efficacy of policies, projects, programmes and interventions remains unclear.

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.[1] Initial interviews were conducted with 14 managers and used to help design the survey. A representative probability sample size of 490 senior 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 the questions were answered in writing and submitted electronically. The interviews were conducted using in-country researchers in either French or 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 to a performance culture.

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, pp. 2–3)

The cultures of monitoring and evaluation 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. A monitoring culture is often closely linked to compliance with reporting requirements, while evaluation is usually more linked to a learning culture (Goldman et al., 2018). Mayne (2010, p. 6) 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.

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

In this chapter 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 organisational 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. We also draw from other sources including research in South Africa (Paine et al., 2015, Umlaw and Chitepo, 2015), Ethiopia (Rogger and Somani, 2018) and Nigeria (Uneke et al., 2011).

The analytical framework for the book, presented in Chapter 3, identifies the following elements around the organisational context: macro-context, organisational capacity, management and processes, culture, intra- and inter-institutional linkages and other resources. The first two elements are external, and the remaining four are internal to the organisation.

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 this information.

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

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.

Development of the M&E systems in each country is discussed by the three country champions in Goldman et al. (2018). *Political will* was a factor in the development of all three national M&E systems, for example, in South Africa in 2010 (Phillips et al., 2014). In all three cases a structure for championing M&E was established either in the Presidency or Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), thus making it easier to oversee sectoral ministries (see Table 4.1). This provided high level *leadership/champions*, both at a technical (head of department) and a political (minister) level, championing M&E systems within their respective organisations and governments. This was mentioned by interview respondents as an important strength (Table 4.6).

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 national champions has varied, while there has been stronger continuity in Uganda. In Benin this has been due particularly to changes in the presidency and shifts of the location

Table 4.1 The situation with regard to evaluation/M&E units in each country

Components	South Africa	Benin	Uganda
Institutional champion	DPME in the presidency	Office for Evaluation of Public Policies and Actions, Benin (BEPPAG) in presidency	Department of M&E with Government Evaluation Facility in OPM
Evaluation and/or M&E units in line ministries	All national and provincial departments have M&E units. Sector M&E units link vertically	All line ministries have their own M&E system that links to the Ministry of Planning	M&E policy recommended creation of M&E units. Office of Prime Minister (OPM) 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, but these 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), p. 8.

between a ministry and presidency, while in South Africa it is changes in leadership of the M&E champion. These changes also play out at the sectoral level and can have major impacts on performance.

> I was doing M&E of local government in 2008/09 and another Minister came and he dismantled the M&E branch which was responsible for overseeing the work of the sector country-wide . . . he did not understand their role and saw them as people who are there to merely write up reports. . . . That led to a collapse of a very strong M&E system which has not been yet been revived.
> (SA respondent 5)

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

Besides leading the M&E function, if a government-wide M&E system is desired it must be *mainstreamed* within the public sector through transversal policies, systems and coordination mechanisms. All national departments in Benin and South Africa have M&E units, and these are being established in Uganda, as shown in Table 4.1. However, in all three countries, around 50% of respondents said these units had

little influence (Table 4.3). 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, p. 35),

> Two particular types of relationship exert significant influence over how knowledge interacts (or not) with policy. One is related to *internal relationship*s 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 in the following subsections.

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 State Services Commission, 2008 quoted in DPME (2014, p. 13).

Government departments working in silos appear to be universal. One of the reasons for the gap between government's stated intentions and the reality of government services experienced by citizens is poor coordination (Gregory, 2006). An evaluation of the interdepartmental cluster system in South Africa concluded that

> the structures are not optimally meeting their roles and mandates. . . . only 50% (of respondents) felt that the quality of decisions was good, and only 32% that there was good accountability for implementing cluster decisions. . . . On average only 6% of clusters' time was spent unblocking implementation, while 32% was spent on reporting.
>
> (DPME, 2014)

Cultural issues including leadership, skills and incentive systems are key to achieving coordination.

All three countries have created coordination structures to support evaluation systems: in Benin the National Council for Evaluation, in Uganda the

National Evaluation Board, and in South Africa an M&E Forum and National Evaluation Technical Working Group. These provide oversight and support the system, and they are involved in selection of priority evaluations (Goldman et al., 2018). However, coordination is difficult.

In the three countries there are also different organisations with roles related to M&E, and reporting to these organisations was found to cause confusion and fatigue. Duplicate reporting requirements strengthen malicious compliance, as energy is directed to compliance reporting and not for learning and continuous improvement.

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 M&E coordination structures, whereas in South Africa involvement of civil society is weak (DPME, 2018).

Communication with stakeholders

The Mo Ibrahim index (2018) on access to public information shows South Africa scoring high, Uganda midway, and Benin very low and falling. In the research, around 60% of respondents replied that evaluation reports were shared with only 45%–53% of respondents, indicating that websites were used to share evaluation reports. There are attempts to make available performance information, for example all three countries have a public repository for evaluation reports.[2] There is a much lower use of other communication mechanisms with the public.

In general, the resources involved in communicating with the public and wider stakeholders are limited. One of the recommendations in the evaluation of South Africa's national evaluation system (NES) was

> to allocate significant resources for evaluation communication, both financial and human. This will ensure full value is obtained from the investment currently being made, and that stakeholders are aware of the findings. This will also help to build trust in government.
>
> (DPME, 2018, p. xii)

Stakeholders use performance information to hold government accountable

All three countries have systems for wider accountability of government to stakeholders. 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 Foundation)[3]. Uganda publishes an Annual Performance Report for government and a Local Government Performance Assessment.[4] In South Africa, departments produce annual reports that are on departments' websites, but these are produced for compliance purposes and to report to Parliament rather than 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 for performance information that is used for accountability but presents risks in terms of creating parallel reporting systems to both donor agencies and central bodies such as the OPM.

Culture

In all three countries, respondents felt that *learning is documented* and *used* to improve results and changes are implemented for that purpose (around 71% of managers) (Table 4.2). One of the challenges is how organisations respond to negative findings. Respondents from all three countries indicated that negative findings are reflected on, learning is documented and used to improve future results, and changes are implemented. Only in around 25%–30% of cases do managers reject the findings and are reluctant to change (Table 4.2).

Some civil servants look at the M&E function as a punitive function. Thus 62.7% of respondents in Uganda said that responsible officials are sanctioned for poor performance – much higher than in Benin or South Africa (Table 4.2). Around half of the managers suggested that stringent bureaucratic *hierarchies* make it difficult to openly discuss performance, managers fearing admitting mistakes and managers never/rarely championing M&E (Table 4.3). These tend to indicate more closed organisational cultures. Of concern is that Benin indicates that 26.9% of the respondents say that results are ignored.

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'.

> If there is a budget cut, you will find that some entities will first think about cutting M&E because [they] 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 4.2 Perceived responses when the ministry/department's performance is *below* expectation

How likely are the following:	*% of respondents saying always/often*		
	SA	*Benin*	*Uganda*
Results are ignored	10.6	26.9	8.0
Managers tend to reject the accuracy of results that are poor	23.1	24.9	22.7
Responsible official is sanctioned	33.7	28.9	62.7
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 4.3 Values and culture barriers to effective use of evaluation in decision making, learning and accountability in your department

Are any of the following a barrier?	% of respondents saying always/often		
	SA	Benin	Uganda
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
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 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

However, 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 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 indicate stringent hierarchies, closed compliance cultures and lack of appreciation of learning from experience by management – a serious impediment to improvement.

In terms of respondent comments on strengths related to culture (Table 4.6), several respondents indicated that systems were in place and that governments were now able to provide evidence of performance. In terms of weaknesses it was suggested that in Benin, there is lack of ownership of evaluation at the national level and the M&E culture is still not strong, and in Uganda, lack of ownership of the M&E function, lack of feedback and slow decision making.

Organisational capacity

Weyrauch et al. (2016, p. 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'. In terms of this definition, both leadership and general human resource capabilities are deemed important alongside other aspects such as policy, legal capacity and internal communication mechanisms.

In 2018, CLEAR AA found that the central coordinating bodies for M&E and planning in Uganda have strong capacity and serve to provide guidance and support to national and local government institutions, while internal organisational capacity for M&E within other ministries is deemed to be quite weak compared to the external demands of central agencies. The evaluation of the South African NES also indicated that DPME played a critical role (DPME, 2018).

M&E units are well *staffed* with a mean of 8.47 posts (SA with 11.6 posts, Benin 6.3 and Uganda 10.6). In general, M&E is seen as the *role* of the M&E unit rather than of all managers (58.8% of respondents in SA, 63.8% in Benin and 54.7% in Uganda). This can mean M&E gets sidelined to M&E units. It is interesting that an outstanding ministry in Africa in terms of evaluation, the Western Cape Department of Agriculture in South Africa, deliberately did not set up an 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).[5]

Some respondents indicated major concerns about the *capacity of M&E units* to do their jobs, for example to analyse and produce their own reports or to manage and undertake evaluations, with around 55% of managers indicating the capacity to conduct evaluations is weak.

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). 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) and having the management *skills to use evaluation results*. In practice, officials tend to use informal sources and trusted experts as sources of information rather than research, evaluation or research synthesis (Paine Cronin and Sadan, 2015). This is partly a skills issue, partly lack of staff to conduct research and generate evidence in government and also lack of awareness of the evidence that may already be available.[6]

Management and processes

Systems in place

Many of the survey respondents indicated that M&E systems are in place and are institutionalised and standardised (Table 4.6). Some of these are discussed in the following subsections.

Strategic planning

All three countries have national development plans monitored by government, civil society and development partners, with a national agency responsible for the national development plan. However, around 50% of respondents indicated that diagnosis of problems to inform planning happens rarely or never, confirmed in training of senior public managers conducted in the three countries.

Linking plans to individual performance

Performance agreements are a key link between ministry plans and individual performance. Respondents were asked whether 'departmental performance expectations as recorded in strategic and annual plans are linked to individual performance agreements'. There was seen to be 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. 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 (what we achieve), reinforcing a compliance approach rather than encouraging achievement of desired development results. Key sectors such as 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 and some process of evaluations related to national priorities. Goldman et al. (2018) report on the characteristics of the different systems. 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 (49.3% in Uganda, 47% in Benin, 41.4% in SA). Overall, respondents indicated that strengths around evaluation include implementation of the policy, systems in place and the ability to show evidence of government's performance. Weaknesses included capacity, budget and limited evidence of use of evaluation results (Table 4.6).

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 or often. This suggests that there is a problem with key evidence being unavailable when needed to make decisions. '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' (Benin respondent 2). 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 help address this.

Evidence used to inform decision making

The 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 respondent from South Africa expressed the power of the use of evaluation:

> 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.
>
> (SA respondent 6)

This reflects a highly performing department that was an early adopter of evaluation in South Africa. 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 adopted.
>
> (Uganda respondent 2)

In Table 4.4 we see levels of over 60% in instrumental, conceptual, symbolic and process use. Around 45% of managers indicated they saw evidence of improvement in management practices as a result of using M&E evidence, either instrumental or process use.

Only rarely is evaluation evidence used through the entire programme cycle (8%–15% of respondents); in the majority of cases, the evidence is used when evaluations are completed (Table 4.5). Nevertheless, as shown in Table 4.4, around 60% of respondents did feel they learnt something during the evaluation process, rather than simply from findings and recommendations.

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

Table 4.4 How evaluation recommendations are used

How often are evaluation recommendations used to:	% of respondents saying always or often		
	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

Table 4.5 Stage at which countries use evaluation evidence

When do you use evaluation evidence?	% of respondents saying always or often		
	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

M&E evidence used to inform planning and budget

Respondents in all three countries indicated there were links between M&E, planning and the 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)

In Uganda, respondents indicated that OPM ensures that the recommendations from government assessment reports the previous year are the starting point for every departmental plan. Each sector develops a budget framework paper and OPM wants to see that these have addressed the previous year's recommendation and the percentage of the recommendation from the year that is addressed.

> (Uganda respondent 5)

In South Africa, respondents indicated that annual and quarterly reports do inform plans. Several indicated the need to use evidence to justify budgets, for example:

> 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?
>
> (SA respondent 3)

However, DPME has only managed to use a simple system drawing from evaluation findings to inform the national budget process.[7] 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 tools from this to inform this function in the Twende partner countries. Good examples proved difficult to find.[8]

Other resources

We did not collect data to corroborate whether adequate budgets exist within departments/ministries for evaluation. However, respondents reported that inadequate resources in terms of both people and finance hamper M&E practice and use of evidence for policy and decision making (see Table 4.6).

The enablers and hindering factors to M&E use

Enablers

Some of the *enablers* related to values and culture which emerged relate to *political will* and the *demand* for M&E evidence. The decision to locate the M&E champion in a strong central office was an example of political will. It gave these departments authority, and within departments the M&E unit had most authority when located in the office of the head of department or ministry. Around 70% of respondents indicated there was demand for evidence from ministers and management and recognition of the importance of M&E and learning in around 50% of managers, so a base of potential champions to work with exists.

Other system-related enabling factors are that national systems are in place, so systems are institutionalised and standardised, which is important in systems mainly driven by compliance. When donors reinforce government M&E systems, as in Uganda, this is enabling (and disabling when not the case). In addition, M&E information being made public creates a valuable resource for wider society.

Hindering factors

There were a number of *cultural barriers* to M&E (Table 4.3). Turnover in leadership caused some disruption, leading to a desire for creating new systems

Table 4.6 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

Country	Element	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. 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 look at M&E as witch-hunting
			Lack of feedback. Sharing of information is not good
			Most stakeholders are not aware of existing policies and procedures
			Coordination issues at all levels of government (ministry/district)
			Slow decision-making process in the system
	System	Implemented more than 65% of the national M&E policy	(System) mostly geared towards monitoring and not evaluation
		Our department meets to discuss reports that we submit to OPM every six months	Poor systems in some places, e.g. some local governments still use paper systems
		Tools have been good	Joint agreements but government and donors still sometimes do their own thing
	HR	Implemented a lot of capacity development	Skills gap – very few staff. Need M&E posts in each ministry and local government
			Poor capacity and skills, with poor quality trainers in M&E
			Low salary and motivation of staff

(Continued)

Table 4.6 (Continued)

Country	Element	Strengths	Challenges
	Finance		No clear budget for M&E and shortage of resources for evaluations
	Follow-up and use		Limited use of evaluation findings
	Data		UBOS statistics quality good and reliable
			Lot of admin data not credible leading to conflicting data
	Timeliness		UBOS statistics often comes very late
South Africa	Leadership	Much better when M&E function located in director general's office	
		M&E led from the presidency	
	Culture	Able to provide evidence of kind of work being done	
	System	Because led by government, more willing to use results	Evaluations not fully independent
		Degree of standardisation	Many frameworks not under one umbrella
		Evaluation become very strong. NES working very well. National evaluation policy framework, capacity building, and guidelines exist	Non-regulation is a weakness because some departments don't do evaluation. Evaluation after every programme should be compulsory
		Strength of what is done huge	Lack of good monitoring systems. Monitoring information not necessarily providing good performance reports against Annual Performance Plan
		Evaluation policy and guidelines	Don't work as well as they should with provinces on planning and M&E
			Evaluations done by departments separately from planning
	HR	Fully fledged evaluation team in DPME	Limited capacity of both policy makers and technical staff in the evaluation sector, with few service providers in the sector
			In government there are no evaluation people
			While called M&E, most of us are not strong in evaluations
			Need to develop more black evaluators
			Turnover, with new managers always starting something new

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

Source: Interview respondents, baseline study.

and resulting in instability (especially South Africa). Around 50% of managers reported lack of ownership of M&E with M&E regarded as the job of the M&E unit, not of all managers; lack of respect for evidence-based decision making; and with around 40% saying senior managers are not championing M&E. The dominant culture is one of compliance and punitive, with a fear of making mistakes and so inhibiting learning.

In terms of systemic factors, we see five main areas:

- *Weaknesses in the public service* with limited capacity to undertake evaluations (55% of respondents), but a 25%–33% proportion saying that managers do not have the skills to understand and use evaluation recommendations, or management skills to use results. This is perpetuated by limited resources for M&E, and in particular evaluation (70% of respondents) as well as poor salaries and poorly motivated public servants.
- *Systems challenges* due to silos leading to separation of M&E from planning and budget (all three countries); duplication in reporting requirements and reporting fatigue (mentioned for SA); weak manual data systems in some locations, especially in rural areas, a contributor to poor quality administrative data (all).
- *Poor implementation*, either due to inadequate quality of evaluations (50% of respondents felt conclusions are often not helpful), or weaknesses in following up evaluations, either because there is no improvement plan system (e.g. Benin and Uganda) or because improvement plans are not followed up adequately, as in South Africa (DPME, 2018).
- Managers not seeing their role as *anticipating the evidence needs* of ministers or senior managers, and being required to provide evidence at the last minute, meaning decisions are taken without effective diagnosis because of time pressure.
- Donors sometimes operating *parallel systems* (all).
- *Involvement of civil society weak* in holding government to account, with civil society linkages weakest in South Africa.

Conclusions

Table 4.7 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. What emerges is a mixed picture where, in these countries, the location of the driver of M&E gives it some authority. There appears to be significant demand for M&E evidence from ministers and senior managers and in around half of cases, respondents indicated there was a positive environment

Table 4.7 Summary of features of the context in Uganda, Benin and South Africa

Dimension of context	Summary
1 Macro-context (external)	In all three cases, there are powerful centre of government M&E roles. In some, these are a consequence of crises and transitions, which have also affected leadership. 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 weak in South Africa
	Performance information (e.g. 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, e.g. hierarchy that affects ability to take risks and learn
4 Organisational capacity (internal)	High-level political leadership in M&E. In a significant proportion of ministries the person responsible for M&E is high level. M&E units – the central unit and ministry units – are of significant size. There are limits to management's capacity and will to use evidence
5 Management and processes (internal)	All three have national development plans and monitor these. Benin is weak in linking performance agreements to the national and ministry plans
	Monitoring is done but largely for compliance and there is reporting fatigue
	All three have national evaluation systems
	Around 50% of managers use evidence, with >60% instrumental and conceptual use
	Basic communications occur, but not much wider media, which would broaden access
6 Other resources (internal)	Budgets for evaluation and research are limited
	Limited knowledge infrastructure, e.g. evaluation repositories
	Managers felt information system provides information needed

for evidence use; and 60%–70% reported that evidence from evaluations is used, with instrumental, conceptual, process and symbolic use emerging. This is fairly consistent across the three countries.

However, 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 not seen as very influential.

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

A high percentage of managers do not support M&E for learning because they lack the expertise and tools to deal with the M&E system, or because M&E may weaken their position and power in the organisation. Around 40% indicated the hierarchy made it difficult to discuss performance, and they feared admitting problems. This suggests it is autocratic management creating a punitive culture that impedes learning. In around a quarter of cases it appears that the skills to understand and use evaluation recommendations are a problem, and where culture is favourable, this may be easier to address through different capacity-strengthening interventions.

Compliance is clearly the dominant culture of the public service, and yet around half the managers believe that learning does happen. This is likely to ebb and flow, depending on the attitude and culture of top management. Autocratic managers are likely to promote compliance behaviour, as is a dominance of the auditor-general, with managers aiming for compliance rather than innovation. Some respondents indicated that evaluation is seen as a witch-hunt. Evaluation needs to be more widely understood and seen to be within a set of tools for adaptive management.

An action perspective

These three countries have a good base on which to build national evaluation systems that produce results to use for improvements. How can this be built on to reduce negative compliance behaviour? Several methods are suggested:

- Continuing to provide the message that evaluation is not intended to be punitive but for *continuous improvement*. This requires sustained approaches, and can be jeopardised by transitions.
- Providing *incentives* for using evaluations for learning, for example symbolic behaviour by politicians praising senior managers who learn and improve; focusing on Ministries of Finance requiring evidence to inform funding of new programmes; planning and performance management systems requiring managers to implement recommended changes; and donors using a learning mindset.

- Focusing on *champions* able to take evaluations forward in a learning manner.
- Building *coalitions* across departments to support M&E as part of adaptive management.
- Providing a range of evidence in a responsive way, so building up the perceived value of M&E, for example by having rapid methods as well as traditional evaluations.
- Sharing examples of *good practice*.
- *Training senior managers* in evidence, as has started in the three countries.
- Recognising that *autocratic management* has negative side effects and recruiting senior managers with more empowering management styles.
- Opening the evaluation process so that Parliament, the media and the public can bring pressure for improvements but handled carefully as it can increase fear of exposure from evaluation.

As Mayne (2010) says:

> Developing an evaluative culture . . . requires deliberate efforts by the organization and especially its senior managers to encourage, implement, and support such a culture. It needs to be clear to managers and staff that results information and evidence are valued and expected to be a regular part of planning, budgeting, implementation, and review.
>
> (Mayne, 2010, p. 22)

This chapter has sought to provide a picture of the context to evidence use in three of the five countries covered in the book. Overall, establishment of effective M&E systems is a component of creating a performance culture but is not enough. We see examples of systems, and 50% of managers indicate that evidence is valued and used. Using evidence must become part of how organisations work. But developing such a culture is not a short-term project. The evaluation of South Africa's NES concluded that establishing the NES is a 20-year project (DPME, 2018, p. xi), and these three countries have been implementing NES for 8–12 years – the reality is that developing M&E systems and culture that promote learning and use is an ongoing project.

Notes

1 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).
2 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), as well as a municipal budget website (https://municipaldata.treasury.gov.za/).

3 http://s.mo.ibrahim.foundation/u/2018/10/26211727/2018-IIAG-country-scorecards. zip?_ga=2.132075023. 1604460325.1560161521-1633358436.1560161521
4 The most recent Annual Performance Report for government is September 2015, and for Local Government Performance Assessment is June 2018.
5 This department has done 22 evaluations (Dirk Troskie, personal communication).
6 For example, the African Evaluation Database (AFRED) of evaluations developed by CLEAR AA and CREST indicates 521 evaluations that at least partly cover Tanzania. In recently conducted training of senior Tanzanian officials, it was found that they were unaware that this resource exists. Similarly, in preparing an evidence map for Uganda, White (2019) found over 500 evaluations in Uganda.
7 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.
8 The report is available at www.twendembele.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Twende-Mbele-Report-Final-Nov-2018_Budgets-Planning2.pdf, accessed 17 August 2019.

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