

In this issue of **From Evidence to Action**, we look at how the evaluation of government programmes can be invaluable in improving performance and service delivery. We showcase examples of where evaluation systems have been highly effective, for example Mexico's National Council of Evaluation (CONEVAL) system, which we present in our case study. A study tour to Mexico as well to Colombia and the United States to learn from their experiences in implementing evaluation systems was the basis for the drafting of South Africa's own National Evaluation Policy Framework, which we discuss in our feature article, *Evaluating our way to better government performance*. The Policy Framework was adopted by Cabinet on 24 November 2011. The Framework seeks to address the use of evaluation to promote improved performance and impact of government programmes, and at the same time improve accountability and decision-making. It aims to link

evaluation to planning and budgeting processes, improve the quality of evaluations undertaken, and ensure that evaluation findings are used to improve performance. A participatory workshop, known as a writeshop, was also used in the drafting process of the Framework, and we examine this approach in more depth in our Tools section. We turn the *Spotlight* on the Presidency's capacity development initiative for improved monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices in government, the M&E Learning Network, and present a range of resources, from events and training courses, to organisations and links.

From Evidence to Action aims to stimulate debate around evidence-based policy-making. If you have anything to contribute towards getting research into policy, and policy into action, whether successful or unsuccessful, please send your submissions to pan@hsrc.ac.za.



Evaluating our way to better government performance

In January 2010, Cabinet adopted 12 outcomes within which to frame public service delivery priorities and targets. However, to improve its performance in these areas, it must understand how its programmes and services are working – and this is the role of M&E. But while a great deal of effort has gone into developing monitoring systems in South Africa, evaluation of policy interventions, plans and implementation programmes by government in South Africa is still in its infancy.

In 2005, the Presidency brought out the Policy Framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System. This envisaged three policy frameworks, of which the first two, programme performance and the quality of statistical data, were produced in 2007 and 2008; but until now, the third, on evaluation, had not been produced. The development of systematic evaluation is critical because, as Mr Collins Chabane, Minister of Performance Monitoring, Evaluation and

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Administration, points out in the Green Paper on Improving Government Performance, “If we are to improve our performance we have to reflect on what we are doing, what we are achieving against what we set out to achieve, and why deviations, or unexpected results, are occurring. We cannot advance without making mistakes on the way, but we must evaluate and learn from our successes and our mistakes. Without this we cannot improve.”

What is the difference between monitoring and evaluation?

Monitoring is the continuous and systematic collection, recording and reporting of information to track progress towards the achievement of the objectives of an intervention, and identify the need for corrective action. While monitoring asks whether things are being done right, evaluation asks if we are actually doing the right things.

Evaluations can contribute to the improvement of government interventions by providing evidence-based assessments of their relevance and performance: they can strengthen accountability by providing reliable information on progress in the achievement of government’s objectives, and therefore identify the key factors driving success or failure which can then be addressed to improve performance.

A process of learning

While some departments are undertaking evaluations, this is sporadic and often does not inform planning, policy-making and budgeting sufficiently. This means we are missing the opportunity to learn from evaluations on how to improve government’s effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The Presidency’s Department of Performance Monitoring & Evaluation (DPME) has been tasked with taking forward government-wide M&E and a fundamental first step towards this was the development of the National Evaluation Policy Framework.

Inspired by the success of countries like Mexico and Columbia in setting up evaluation systems, and with a firm belief in a learning approach,

the DPME, with support from the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD), a partnership between the Presidency and the EU, organised a study tour to these countries in June and July 2011 to learn more about the lessons coming out of their experiences – from successes to failures – and how we could apply them to South Africa in putting together our own framework. The study tour team was led by Ms Dina Pule, then Deputy Minister of Performance M&E in the Presidency, and Dr Sean Phillips, the Director General of DPME. It also included seven senior managers from DPME, PSPPD, the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Department of Social Development (DSD), and the Office of the Public Service Commission (OPSC). A smaller group also travelled to the United States (US) to meet the World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group, other World Bank programmes, and some US government organisations.



Why Mexico and Colombia?

Both Mexico and Colombia have impressive national performance M&E (PM&E) and evaluation systems – particularly in terms of their integrated approach to planning, budgeting and M&E. Mexico’s National Council of Evaluation (CONEVAL), which we feature in our *case study* below, provides an innovative arrangement that offers an important degree of independence and ensures technical capacity and standards for evaluation work. In Colombia’s case, its National Management and Results’ M&E System (SINERGIA), built over the past 20 years, has achieved an advanced institutionalisation level which is notable for the way it has combined high-ranking, wide-ranging, formal mechanisms, such as the constitutional mandate and laws covering the whole of public administration, with the development of informal practices in key areas of the public sector, like the M&E activity in planning offices, programme management units, and managerial controls in the President’s Office.

Valuable lessons

One of the most important lessons coming out of the study tour is that evaluations have to be thought about, designed, and budgeted for, at the *start* of a programme, rather than at the end – and they have to be carried out throughout the entire policy process: before, during and after implementation.

Other key lessons which informed the drafting of our own framework are that for successful evaluation to take place, we need:

- An integrated planning, budget and M&E system backed by legislation;
- An annual evaluation plan;
- Standardised systems;
- Agreed types of evaluations;
- Ensured credibility, transparency and follow-up.

Developing a National Evaluation Policy Framework for South Africa

Following the study tour, the next step was to draw up a framework for South Africa. In line with DPME's participatory approach to policy development, the National Evaluation Policy Framework was drafted collaboratively through a writeshop (see our *Tools and methods* for more on this process), thereby maximising access to expert knowledge and ensuring buy-in from the government M&E community. This built on previous work that developed initial thinking around evaluation policy. In August, a draft of the Framework was submitted to all departments and Offices of the Premier and circulated widely for comment. Feedback was received and incorporated into a revised version, which was again circulated for comment and finally tabled in Cabinet in November.

The Framework provides the basis for a minimum system of evaluation across government and aims to address many of South Africa's evaluation challenges, including lack of clear policy and strategic direction; confusion around the difference between evaluation, performance auditing and research; lack of coordination between organisations and fragmentation of approaches; and poor quality plans which make evaluation difficult. The Framework's main purpose is to improve the effectiveness, impact and accountability of government, by reflecting on what is working and what is not working and assisting government to revise its programmes and policies accordingly. It seeks to ensure that evidence from evaluation is used in planning, budgeting and on-going project management. It provides a common language and minimum standards, and promotes the use of evaluation findings to improve performance. It targets the public sector, evaluators outside the public sector, and training institutions who must ensure that people have the requisite skills and competencies.

The seven key elements of the Framework are:

1. Large or strategic programmes, or those of significant public interest or of concern, must be **evaluated at least every 5 years**. The focus will be on government's priority areas, which are currently the 12 outcomes, including the 5 key areas of health, crime, jobs, rural development and education.
2. Rolling three year and annual **national and provincial evaluation plans** must be developed and approved by Cabinet and Provincial Executive Councils. These will be developed by DPME and the Offices of the Premier. These plans will identify the minimum evaluations to be carried out – departments will be free to carry out additional evaluations.
3. The results of all evaluations in the evaluation plan must be in the **public domain**, on departmental and DPME websites (excluding classified information).
4. **Improvement plans** to address the recommendations from the evaluations must be produced by departments and their implementation must then be monitored.
5. Departments will be responsible for carrying out evaluations. DPME and (in time) Offices of the Premier will provide **technical support and quality control** for evaluations in the national and provincial evaluation plans.
6. Appropriate **training courses** will be provided by the Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA), universities and the private sector to build evaluation capacity in the country.
7. DPME will produce a series of **guidelines and practice notes** on the detailed implementation of the policy framework, to elaborate various aspects of the system, and to set quality standards for evaluations.

Next steps: implementing the National Evaluation Policy Framework

The Framework is a working document that will continually evolve. However, if it is to be implemented, it not only needs DPME as a strong champion, it also needs broad buy-in across government. DPME has established an evaluation working group of experienced evaluation professionals across government who will work with the department to review policy documents, develop technical guidelines, and support the process of taking evaluation forward in government.

The fact that the Framework has been so welcomed is a very positive step forward for government. A professional evaluation system can make a major contribution in learning and improving what we do and can take government performance and service delivery to a new level for South Africa.

For more information visit <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=1689> or contact Jabu Mathe at jabu@po.gov.za.

Case study: Mexico's evaluation system and the role of CONEVAL

Recognising that a legal framework is crucial for successful M&E, the Presidency's Department of Performance M&E (DPME) decided to learn from the good practice of other countries with similar experiences. And so a study tour to Mexico, Colombia and the United States (US) was arranged earlier this year (see our *Evaluating our way to better government performance* feature article above).

Mexico, Columbia and the US all have well developed evaluation systems from which a wide range of lessons have been drawn, but in this case study we focus specifically on Mexico's CONEVAL evaluation system.

Mexico's performance M&E (PM&E) system is founded on a results-based management framework which emphasises a linkage between planning, budgeting and M&E. It has evolved over more than 30 years, with significant reforms and institutionalisation in the past 10 years. Important political changes in the late 1990s and in the 2000s led to increased demand for accountability and transparency as well as to new legislation and institutions to improve government accountability, external evaluations and public access to information. The evaluation of the *Progres*a conditional cash transfer programme in 1997 was also instrumental in Mexico's PM&E evolution, as it provided convincing evidence of the success of the programme. Using the evidence from the *Progres*a impact evaluation, the new government retained the programme, rebranding it as *Oportunidades*. The programme has continued with force and its impact evaluation has become

a model worldwide for the evaluation of social programmes.

As a result of this increase in confidence in the evaluation system, the government decided to strengthen evaluation of social programmes, and in 2004 an independent evaluation organisation, CONEVAL, was created to both manage evaluations in the social sector and establish the poverty line and monitor changes in poverty. CONEVAL has also provided technical leadership in the development of evaluation in Mexico more widely, working closely with the Ministry of Finance. CONEVAL coordinates evaluation activities in the social sector, sets standards and methodologies, undertakes and manages specific evaluations, and advises state governments on their M&E.

Credibility and legitimacy of evaluations is a top priority for the Mexican government and it therefore promotes external evaluations, as opposed to self, or internal, evaluations. Although external evaluations can potentially result in lack of ownership and poor use of evaluation findings for improvements, Mexico has managed to overcome this through the adoption of participatory

techniques to facilitate greater involvement and ownership by various stakeholder and beneficiary groups. In addition, the follow-up of evaluation recommendations (which includes an analysis of the recommendations and an examination of their feasibility as well as actions and plans for improvement) ensures the use of evaluation findings for learning and improvement.

In Colombia the team drew some valuable lessons from the role of the Department of National Planning (DNP), the national evaluation plan, and the close relationships between SINERGIA, the M&E component in DNP, and the Presidency.

The short visit to the US enabled the team to better understand the roles of PM&E, Congress and the supreme audit institution, the Government Accountability Office (GAO). The World Bank also provided an overview of comparative lessons on M&E, and based on that visit a partnership has been established with them.

Many valuable lessons came out of the study tour, including:

- The importance of institutionalising the links between planning, M&E and the budget process – effective M&E depends on good planning, and the results of evaluation need to be used to refine plans and inform budgets.
- Practical guidance on a series of elements of the system, such as a national evaluation plan, a central support unit, making evaluations open to the public, and standardised tools to support evaluations.

For more about CONEVAL, visit <http://www.coneval.gob.mx/cmsconeval/rw/pages/index.en.do>.



Spotlight on The M&E Learning Network

The M&E Learning Network was originally set up in 2006 to promote sharing on M&E issues across government. It was re-launched in 2010 as an M&E capacity development initiative for improved M&E practices in government through increased learning and sharing of experiences. The PSPPD assisted with championing the concept of a learning network, providing interim support to restart and facilitate the network, and funding a range of the events.

The M&E Learning Network gathers, packages and disseminates M&E information and models to practitioners through various channels, including publications and learning events. More specifically, the Network provides a platform for:

- Sharing of knowledge and innovative ideas around M&E;
- Providing updates on new developments, especially from DPME;
- Getting feedback from government officials on issues, including draft M&E policies and other tools;
- Capturing knowledge and good practices from local and international case studies;
- Informal M&E training and seminars.

“Currently, our focus is on government officials at all levels and across all spheres of government and public entities,” explains Stanley Ntakumba, Chief Director of M&E Policy and Capacity Building, a section of DPME that takes responsibility for the M&E Learning Network. “In many cases content is customised for specific groups, such as programme and project managers, data specialists, evaluation specialists, sector specialists and policy and strategic planners; but whoever the audience, our main objective is informal knowledge sharing and learning rather than the formal meetings and workshops that are hosted by DPME from time to time to discuss and decide on specific issues.”

A hugely successful component of the M&E Learning Network is its learning events. “In 2011,

two of the events acted as a critical platform for getting feedback on the need for national evaluation policy and evaluation capacity at the centre of government,” says Ntakumba. “We have received a very positive response from these events and people are requesting more time and space for the kind of reflections that are done in them.”

Going forward, the Network will continue with national workshops and seminars on special topics of interest to M&E practitioners in government. At least three major events focusing on local and international good practice, case studies and capacity-building are planned for 2012, as well as various other ad hoc seminars organised on the basis of visiting local and international M&E experts.

The Network will also work with at least three provinces to generate cases studies that would be presented in their own learning network sessions. “From a government-wide M&E perspective, we hope that the Network will contribute to ensuring

that we have a shared understanding of where we would like to be and the use of common terminology and conceptual base in approaching M&E in government, while being open to new thinking and ways of doing things,” Ntakumba reveals. “We are grateful for the financial and technical support from the PSPPD in hosting these high impact events. In the future, we hope to partner with many more organisations in our activities, including the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) and other similar international organisations.”

“Besides the workshops, seminars and mini-conferences, we plan to introduce online tools that will enhance interactions among M&E practitioners, such as webinars, discussion forums and customised tools similar to social networking sites, hopefully with funding support from sources like PSPPD Phase 2,” adds Ntakumba. “Most importantly, we would like to see improvement of M&E practices in our country to ensure better service delivery to the people.”



Writeshops: A collaborative way of developing policy

Developing policies can be a lengthy and complicated process, involving what can feel like an endless cycle of writing, editing, consultation and reviewing before arriving at a final product. Writeshops – participatory workshops where a team of people collaborate to produce material – are a highly effective tool for speeding up this process and making the gathering of expert knowledge needed for producing appropriate policies more efficient.

Following this approach, the DPME recently used the tool to draw up the National Evaluation Policy Framework (see our *Evaluating our way to better government performance* feature article above) in just five days. The writeshop drew on the experience from the study tour to Mexico, Colombia and the US (see our case

study: Mexico's evaluation system and the role of CONEVAL above). The study tour enabled the team to develop a good working relationship and a common understanding of evaluation good practice as a basis for the writeshop, at which they were joined by a few other contributors, including a representative from the Gauteng Office of the Premier and a DPME outcome facilitator.

The key sessions covered in the writeshop included:

- An overview of the current situation;
- Reviewing relevant resources that can be drawn on;
- Agreeing on the overall approach for the policy framework, its purpose, and its target group;

- Drafting the contents page of the framework;
- Brainstorming the content of the sections;
- Allocating sections to writers;
- Individual sections being written;
- Review of each other's work.

Dr Ian Goldman, head of Evaluation and Research in DPME, facilitated the writeshop and then edited the overall document. This example of effective collaborative work ensured co-ownership by the team of authors and resulted in a first draft being completed in less than a week, including editing.



Resources

Events and opportunities

6th African Evaluation Association Conference: Rights and Responsibilities in Development Evaluation

(<http://www.afrea.org/content/index.cfm?navID=4&itemID=915>)

Conference sub-themes include the rights and responsibilities of all primary evaluation stakeholders, how better evaluation can strengthen the rights discourse, mechanisms and systems generated by evaluation practice and how evaluation responds to national capacity and political interests.

Accra, Ghana - 9-13 January 2012

Case Studies in Development Evaluation:

Validity, Generalisation and Learning

(<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/50/39/48566842.pdf>)

Call for abstracts that address theoretical/methodological challenges as well as more practical experiences when using case studies in learning-oriented development evaluations, organised in collaboration with Evaluation: the international journal of theory, research and practice.

Copenhagen, Denmark - 21-23 May 2012

South African Early Childhood Development Conference

(http://www.unicef.org/southafrica/SAF_mediacaledar_ecdconf2012call.pdf)

The aim of the conference is to take stock of progress made on early childhood development (ECD) delivery in South Africa and to promote provisioning of quality ECD services for children from birth to school going age.

East London, Eastern Cape, South Africa - 24-26 January 2012

Online learning resources

Live webinars: Equity-focused evaluations

(http://mymande.org/index.php?q=equity_focused_evaluation&x=cl)

A new series of webinars to address the challenges and opportunities in evaluating the effects of policies, programmes and projects to enhance equitable development results, with a special focus on the effects to the most excluded, marginalised and deprived groups.

Monitoring and Evaluation Network of Training Online Resources

(<http://www.cpc.unc.edu/measure/training/mentor>)

Makes available free training materials and tools on M&E.

Monitoring and Evaluation News

(<http://mande.co.uk/>)

Focuses on developments in M&E methods for development programmes with social development objectives.

United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN)

(<http://www.unpan.org/ELearning/OnlineTrainingCentre/tabid/1456/language/en-US/Default.aspx>)

Results-Based M&E for Millennium Development Goals Implementation is a free online course offered by The UNPAN Online Training Centre.

WWW Virtual Library: Evaluation

(<http://www.policy-evaluation.org/>)

Online database of Internet resources for social policy evaluation.

Training

University of Stellenbosch Post-Graduate

Diploma in M&E methods:

<http://academic.sun.ac.za/crest/postgrad/mem.htm>

University of Johannesburg's Department of Governance Masters Coursework Programme in Policy Evaluation:

http://www.uj.ac.za/EN/Faculties/humanities/departments/publicgov/coursesandprogrammes/Documents/MA_Policy_Evaluation_coursework_module_outcomes.pdf

University of Cape Town's Institute for Monitoring and Evaluation short courses,

certificates and degrees:

http://www.commerce.uct.ac.za/Organisations/Institute_for_Monitoring_and_Evaluation/

Rhodes University's Public Service

Accountability Monitor training on a rights-based approach to monitoring service delivery implementation to those currently working in civil society or government departments:

<http://www.psam.org.za/>

Regenesis short course on M&E:

<http://www.regenesys.co.za/165/p-mne>

Southern Hemisphere courses on project planning, M&E and implementing a results-based M&E system through the year:

<http://www.southernhemisphere.co.za/>

Insidout in-house introductory courses in the development of monitoring systems within a results-based approach for organisations and government departments:

<http://www.insideoutresearch.co.za/index.htm>

Please send information on other training courses to pan@hsrc.ac.za

Organisations

African Evaluation Association (AfrEA)

(<http://www.afrea.org/home/index.cfm>)

An umbrella organisation that contributes to information sharing, advocacy and advanced capacity building in evaluation in Africa.

International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)

(<http://www.3ieimpact.org/>)

3ie seeks to improve the lives of poor people in low- and middle-income countries by providing, and summarising, evidence of what works, when, why and for how much.

Public Administration Leadership and Management Academy (PALAMA)

(<http://www.palama.gov.za/>)

PALAMA provides training for all spheres of government in South Africa including an introductory course in M&E for managers (funded by the PSPPD), and a 7 module course in M&E.

South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA)

(<http://www.samea.org.za/>)

Aims to support, guide and strengthen the development of M&E as an important discipline, profession and instrument for empowerment and accountability in South Africa.

World Bank Independent Evaluation Group

(<http://www.worldbank.org/oed/ecd/>)

Supports the development of government M&E systems.

Links

Policy Action Network: Resources on M&E:

<http://www.pan.org.za/monitoring-and-evaluation.html>

M&E Learning Network:

<http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=1690>

Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation:

<http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=1689>

Public Service Commission:

<http://www.psc.gov.za/>

Announcement

The Policy Action Network is restructuring its website (<http://www.pan.org.za/>) and building a more comprehensive set of information about M&E. Please assist us in this process by submitting documents to pan@hsrc.ac.za for inclusion.



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