Developing African Capacity for Monitoring and Evaluation

Good governance—supported by monitoring and evaluation (M&E)—is essential for sustained and rapid development in Africa, concluded participants in the Johannesburg 2000 Workshop and Seminar on developing African capacity for evaluation. Several converging priorities in public policy reform—reducing corruption, strengthening civil society, and reducing poverty—require sound analysis based on adequate information. Demand is growing for M&E and for the benefits of networking within a regional evaluation community to develop African perspectives on development and evaluation. Evaluation skills and experience exist on the African continent, but they are scarce. The challenge is to expand the supply of evaluation know-how, to create local ownership of M&E and to link it to other national development processes.

Johannesburg 2000
At a 1998 conference in Abidjan, teams of senior officials from 12 African countries and 21 international agencies for development assistance acknowledged that developing Africa’s capacity for M&E is essential for improving governance and ensuring the proper management of public resources. Participants highlighted the need for an African Evaluation Association; for more institutional support for the continent; for more training in evaluation design, methodology, and practice; and for databases of evaluators, lessons learned, and good practice. A newly formed African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) held its inaugural conference in Nairobi in 1999.

More than 300 evaluators attended, from 25 countries. The AfrEA committed itself to developing indigenous capacity for evaluation by providing high-level training throughout Africa and establishing national associations to conduct peer training. National professional associations were expected to collaborate with their governments to formulate national evaluation policies.

Building on progress made at the events in Abidjan and Nairobi, Johannesburg 2000—hosted by the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA)—was held in September to promote both the demand for and the supply of M&E in Sub-Saharan Africa. The workshop and seminar brought together 56...
participating from 11 countries (Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia) and 32 participants from multilateral and bilateral donor agencies. This précis synthesizes insights gained from the Johannesburg Workshop and Seminar, which were organized collectively by the evaluation departments of the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the African Development Bank, and the World Bank. Support was also provided by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

**Strengthening Governance and Economic Reform**

Over the past few years, with rapid changes in Africa’s political landscape, stronger governance has risen from relative neglect to the top of Africa’s development policy agenda. After years marked by authoritarian regimes and frequent political and economic disasters, since the early 1990s many countries have held multiparty elections, with high voter turnouts. Although sustained progress has been recorded in some countries, the record is uneven, and a number of countries are experiencing a veritable crisis in governance.

Weaknesses in governance are increasingly recognized as limiting the benefits from economic reform. A first group of countries, in which economic reform is more advanced, are more liberal, but more extensive reforms are needed to provide a strong institutional base for market-driven growth and to ensure that citizens can participate in the development that affects them. A second group of countries has been slower to adopt and sustain “good” policies for reasons that essentially reflect weaknesses in governance. And in a third group, which faces the breakdown of the state itself, governance issues loom large in the struggle for development.

M&E can support sound governance in several ways. First, the information produced can be used in government decisionmaking and in setting priorities, especially in the budget process. Second, it can help managers by providing information (particularly about costs and benefits) useful for planning or by monitoring the performance of ongoing activities. M&E can also be used to assess the performance of organizations and institutional reform. Third, by providing valuable information about the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of government activities, it can help hold managers accountable to their administrative superiors, and governments to parliament, citizens, the private sector, and donors. While M&E can support relationships in accountability within the government—between sector ministries and the minister of finance, for example, and between officials and the elected government—it can also permit public servants and politicians alike to participate in continuous learning.

**Comprehensive Development**

The Comprehensive Development Framework is a means of achieving greater effectiveness in reducing poverty. It is based on the principles of a long-term, holistic vision of needs and solutions; ownership by the country; country-led partnership among internal and external partners; and a focus on development results. Development is viewed as empowering people to take charge of their lives, while poverty is seen as depriving people of the rights needed to lead the kind of life they want.

The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative covers about 41 countries, 33 in Sub-Saharan Africa. To qualify for debt relief under the HIPC initiative, a country’s government must prepare a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). In accordance with the principles of comprehensive development, the strategy must be country-driven, with broad participation by representatives of civil society, key donors, and regional development banks. Progress on international development goals must be monitored with measurable indicators.

Both the Comprehensive Development Framework and the poverty reduction strategy papers emphasize measurable results and civil society’s role in assessing government performance.

**Poverty-Focused Evaluations**

Evaluators must address two basic questions: What are the right things to evaluate? And what is the right way to evaluate them? The very definition of development is based on a judgment about what development should be and about what dimensions or qualities of life are worth promoting. Development evaluation concerned with the consequences of public action should focus on outcomes in terms of the standard of living (outcomes in areas such as health, education, and income, especially for the deprived) and the social arrangements that bring about the desired outcomes.

Evaluation must pay attention to the socioeconomic incentives that motivate people and the governance structure that constrains their activities. Evaluation should also address an activity’s relevance, extent of ownership by the country, and long-term outcomes—key tenets of comprehensive development. Finally, M&E should be an integral part of development. The lessons learned should affect the course of development and representatives of civil society should participate in M&E to ensure that the value judgments embedded in the process are relevant to the needs of the country’s people.

**Developing National Capacity**

Developing national capacity for M&E requires building both supply (the skills, tools, technologies, and institutional framework for evaluation) and demand (awareness of the need for M&E and understanding of its purpose and uses). One size does not fit all—national M&E systems must be tailored to local conditions. Performance indicators, for example, must suit a country’s norms and values, not be taken off the shelf from international donor agencies and used “as is.” At the same time, countries can learn from each other, and emerging priorities across the African conti-
Preliminary thoughts on an International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) were presented at the meeting. It was suggested that IDEAS be formed as an association devoted to strengthening M&E capacity in developing countries, and that it exchange knowledge and build networks and alliances. This could be done through scholarships, internships, exchange programs, a biennial conference, and regional meetings.

A Pan-African Network

Top priority was given to strengthening national evaluation capacity, but there was general support for the African Evaluation Association—-independent of, but sensitive to, governments, nongovernmental organizations, and donors. It provides a forum for the exchange of ideas, information, best practices, and lessons learned; supports the development of new evaluation networks and provides a link between new and established evaluation networks within Africa; supports capacity building efforts and helps to deepen understanding of evaluation issues; and has the potential to channel human and financial resources to the right places, when possible. The African Evaluation Association is also reviewing good-practice evaluation standards with an eye to adapting them to the African environment.

Reflections after Johannesburg

The Johannesburg Workshop and Seminar provided the opportunity to strengthen Sub-Saharan Africa’s evaluation community and to sharpen its focus on M&E. Among the lessons learned:

- A number of themes and priorities in public policy reform emphasize good governance and public sector reform. These include fighting corruption, strengthening the role of civil society, and developing well-planned poverty reduction strategies with an emphasis on results.
- Monitoring and evaluation can help countries south of the Sahara meet the many and varied development challenges they face: there are clear links between M&E, good governance, and sound development.
- Donors and governments increasingly appreciate the need for sound analysis based on adequate information, fueling a growing demand for M&E.
- Meetings such as Johannesburg 2000 allow cross-country team-building and networking; provide a chance to exchange experiences, insights, and information; and allow participants to explore opportunities for collaborative work. A Pan-African network of experts in M&E will help systematize knowledge, establish standards and best practices, and stimulate growth in national M&E. Such a network needs to be constantly nurtured through regular contacts, communication, and collaboration within and across borders.
- Evaluation skills and experience are available on the African continent. The challenge is to strengthen local ownership of M&E and to link it to other national development processes.
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This Précis is based on the papers and discussions from Johannesburg 2000, available online at http://www.dbsa.org/M&E/M&E.htm. Proceedings will be available at www.afdb.org and at www.worldbank.org/evaluation/me. Direct queries on M&E capacity building to eline@worldbank.org. Précis are available to Bank Executive Directors and staff from the Internal Documents Unit and from regional information service centers, and to the public from the World Bank InfoShop.