

19. BENIN

THE PROCESS OF INSTITUTIONALIZING EVALUATION IN BENIN: PROGRESS ON QUESTIONS OF USAGE AND INDEPENDENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Benin first became aware of the importance of evaluation in 2007, when it incorporated this function within a ministry. The inadequacies noted in the practice of evaluation in Benin, particularly the low level of institutionalization, led authorities to address the problem by creating the Public Policy Evaluation Office (BEPP).⁷⁷ The office currently operates under the authority of the Prime Minister.⁷⁸

Following the 2010 audit of national evaluation capacity, the choice was made to institutionalize evaluation at three levels (institutional, organizational and operational), in particular by clarifying institutional measures, creating tools, carrying out evaluations and national-level capacity-building. This specific experience, driven by the strong political will of the government, made it possible to improve the evaluation process and overcome many obstacles.

This paper summarizes the developments in the institutionalization process and analyses the use of evaluation in relation to questions of independence.

77 Bureau d'Evaluation des Politiques Publiques.

78 BEPP operates under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Cabinet in charge of the Coordination de l'Action Gouvernementale, de l'Evaluation des Politiques Publiques, du Programme de Dénationalisation et du Dialogue Social (coordination of government action, the evaluation of public policy, the denationalization programme and social dialogue).

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION PROCESS

The government has mandated that BEPP evaluate and develop the evaluation of public policy in Benin.⁷⁹ Within this framework, the approach to institutionalization has been to clearly define the vision of the government in the area of evaluation: devise an M&E system to assist in decision-making and transparency, shared by the public administration, the institutions and all the other development players with the aim of improving the effectiveness of public policies.

In order to clarify the organizational structure of evaluation within the public administration, a formal system has been put in place. The Institutional Framework for the Evaluation of Public Policies,⁸⁰ created by the decree governing the adoption of the National Evaluation Policy, identifies all those involved in evaluation and specifies their roles. The BEPP is at the centre of the system used to carry out evaluations, disseminate information, capitalize on knowledge and strengthen capacities. This formal system is integrated into the Planning Programming Budget Monitoring and Evaluation process chain, and contributes to the evaluation of state projects, programmes and public policies. However, while this system works well at a national level, it is less effective at the sectoral level, particularly with regards to collecting, processing, analysing, centralizing and publishing data.

Following the implementation of the Institutional Framework for the Evaluation of Public Policies, Benin strengthened its approach to evaluation by drawing up and adopting the ten-year National Evaluation Policy⁸¹ in October 2012. The scope of its application includes the Strategic Development Orientations, the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2011–2015,⁸² other sectoral policies, the activities of public services and the actions of decentralized municipalities.

In addition, substantial resources have been invested to train and strengthen evaluation capacities of more than 150 managers working in ministries and municipalities. A biennial conference, known as the *Journées Béninoises de l'Évaluation*, was organized in 2010 and 2012 to mobilize the national and international evaluation community around the challenges of institutionalization. Despite making significant progress, substantial efforts are still required at both organizational and operational levels (see Figure 1).

USE OF EVALUATION

Evaluations carried out in Benin are mainly evaluations of public policies or evaluations of programmes and projects; they cover all social and productive sectors. The BEPP is responsible for carrying out evaluations of public policies and programmes that have national impacts; M&E focal points of BEPP within the programming and prospecting departments of each sectoral

79 Decree establishing the Office of the Prime Minister and decree governing the adoption of the National Evaluation Policy (Politique Nationale d'Évaluation).

80 Cadre Institutionnel de l'Évaluation des Politiques Publiques.

81 Politique Nationale d'Évaluation.

82 Stratégie de Croissance pour la Réduction de la Pauvreté.

FIGURE 1. DEVELOPMENT IN EVALUATION CAPACITY IN 2013

| LEVEL | COMPONENT 1 | COMPONENT 2 | COMPONENT 3 |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|
| MACRO (Strategic/ Institutional/ National) | VISION | POLICY | REGULATORY FRAMEWORK |
| | YES | YES | YES |
| MESO (Tactical/ Organizational/ Structural) | ROLE OF EVALUATION | SPECIFIC BUDGET | SPECIFIC SKILLS |
| | STRONG | AVERAGE | WEAK |
| MICRO (Operational/ Technical/Tools) | PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES | SPECIFIC TRAINING | QUALITY EVALUATIONS |
| | WEAK | WEAK | WEAK |

ministry are responsible for their ministry's projects and programmes; the Social Change Observatory⁸³ is in charge of evaluating the impacts of poverty reduction programmes.

Evaluations seek to assess the overall effectiveness of policies, but focus on specific aspects on a case-by-case basis. Evaluations are carried out by consultants and independent firms to guarantee the impartiality of the reports. In this matter, the BEPP has drawn up a code of professional ethics inspired by international standards.

Evaluations are used by the government, the administration, civil society and beneficiaries; they are used by decision makers (Council of Ministers), policy managers (ministries, technical departments) and technical and financial partners to provide information and help with decision-making. Evaluations help in the drawing up of new policy cycles and public programmes, and can help determine resource reallocations.

Because evaluation reports are not published, evaluations are not particularly useful for informing the public. However, the reports are made available to the public administration, technical and financial partners and to the professional associations of the sectors evaluated. BEPP is nevertheless keen to develop a participative approach to encourage better dissemination of information to civil society.

Analysis shows that the results of the M&E system are not sufficiently taken into account, although there have been positive developments in recent years. The quality of the evaluation reports and the M&E of the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy have improved, which has had a positive impact on the adoption of recommendations.

83 L'Observatoire du Changement Social.

PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES IN BENIN

In order to meet the needs of development, notably in improving the effectiveness of public action, there are a number of challenges to overcome that relate to the use of evaluation and its independence.

Planning

Evaluation provides information on the public management cycle. This understanding is fundamental with regards to problems related to using evaluation. This is because if evaluation activities remain disconnected from the public management cycle, it will always be difficult to ensure that evaluations are used correctly. It is therefore necessary for the practice of evaluation to become more systematic and for it to correspond to the government's planning and budget programming timetables.

Usefulness

Usefulness lies in the capacity of evaluation stakeholders to ask the right questions and use the results of an evaluation correctly in order to improve the quality of public actions. Absent a clear demonstration of how evaluation can be useful to Benin, evaluation will quickly be seen as a niche for a handful of specialists to whom resources are awarded unnecessarily.

Communication and dialogue

Evaluation must become a tool for dialogue and a means to achieve scientific, social and even political consensus around the policies evaluated. Evaluations must stimulate public debate and not be used by only managers, as is still the case in Benin.

Quality

It is absolutely essential that the development of evaluation practices does not have a detrimental effect on evaluation quality. Evaluations must remain rigorous and objective and must serve development purposes. To this end, evaluations must be carried out by skilled individuals who are independent, have no declared or apparent conflicts of interest and respect the standards of professional ethics.

Role of institutions and civil society

If evaluation is encouraged by the executive branch but not by other stakeholders, it is neither encouraging nor viable. In Benin, the parliament shows little interest in evaluation despite the efforts of the government; there is a lack of dynamism from civil society. This is a trend that needs to be reversed.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

To address these challenges, Benin is working to continue the evaluation development process while putting in place practical solutions.

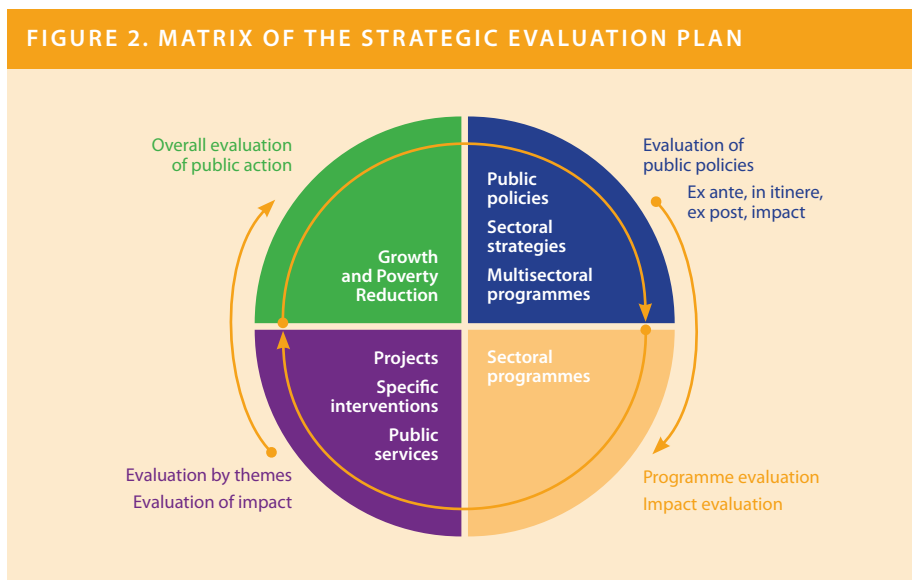
Strategic Evaluation Plan

The Strategic Evaluation Plan is a national evaluation programme based on the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Strategic Evaluation Plan brings together state interventions and technical and financial partners to systematically plan all evaluation activities considered to be a priority at the central level. By putting in place a tool to ensure that evaluation of the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy becomes operational, it will be possible not only to mobilize the structures around the priority policies, strategies and programmes to evaluate, but also to find suitable responses to the concerns of the government and the technical and financial partners.

Creation of the National Evaluation Council

The National Evaluation Council⁸⁴ was established in 2012 by a decree passed during a meeting of the cabinet. The council is in charge of: advising the government about evaluation and promoting the development of evaluation at the national, regional and municipal levels; supporting BEPP in drawing up the government's various evaluation programmes; and

FIGURE 2. MATRIX OF THE STRATEGIC EVALUATION PLAN



84 Conseil Nationale de l'Evaluation.

promoting norms, standards and methodologies. Its creation is a way to resolve questions of independence in evaluation. More perennial approaches, such as constitutionalizing evaluation, are foreseeable in the long term.

Capacity building

Strengthening evaluation practices entails increasing the demand for evaluation. To be intense and sustainable, the demand for evaluation must be fulfilled by evaluations that are independent, impartial and of adequate quality and quantity. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of both individuals and organizations and professionalize evaluation. Professional training is underway to this end, and a university programme was planned from late 2013.

Strengthening international initiatives

Support of international organizations—e.g. Regional Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—remains a formidable lever for developing evaluation practices. In the case of Benin, UNDP's support for BEPP and Benin's participation in forums such as the national evaluation capacities conferences have been very useful for promoting evaluation. It has made it possible to form new cooperative relationships with the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Department of the Presidency of South Africa, the Evaluation Commission of the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, the African Evaluation Association, the CLEAR Initiative and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation. It would be advisable to intensify this type of cooperation with countries of the global South.

CONCLUSION

Despite some operational difficulties, Benin's experience shows that institutionalizing evaluation is an important factor in improving the quality of governance and, therefore, for the development of African countries. The M&E system in Benin is still a work in progress, but the impetus generated by adopting evaluation at the national level means that it should be possible to gradually develop an evaluation culture.

With regards to the challenges to overcome, Benin's recommendations include:

- Strengthening institutional, regulatory, legal and constitutional measures to guarantee the independence of evaluation, its sustainability, and to require M&E public policies (e.g. an evaluation and results-based management act);
- Fostering the participation of parliamentary and civil society bodies in evaluation processes; and
- Promoting the synergies possible among donors in order to create centres of excellence and 'tool box' windows for countries to develop evaluation.

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