

Evaluation of Public Policies in South Africa Governance, Independence and Credibility.



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Introduction

- M&E practice in South African government is at an interesting point:
 - Public Service Commission with high level of evaluation output
 - Government-wide M&E System being institutionalised
 - Departmental M&E units
 - New Ministry for Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency
- Issues paper discusses implications for evaluation of public policies in South Africa from perspective of governance, independence and credibility
- Aim of this paper is to generate discussion

Evaluation independence and credibility: Do they matter?

Independence

- Evaluation carried out by persons and entities free of control of those responsible for design and implementation
- Free from political influence or pressure
- Access to all relevant information needed
- Full autonomy in conducting and reporting findings

Credibility

- Competence of evaluation team
- Personal credibility of team members
- Technical quality of evaluation (design, methodology, execution, reporting)
- Extent to which evaluation meets requirements

Evaluation
Excellence

The South African Government Monitoring & Evaluation System: An Overview

A collection of different systems evolving at different paces over time

Public Service Commission

- Constitutional mandate to investigate, monitor and evaluate public administration and advise
- Independent of the Executive, reports to Parliament
- Annual State of Public Service Report, Consolidated M&E Report, reports on various evaluations
- Most prolific public service entity in evaluation

Monitoring & Evaluation by departments

- High degree of variation amongst departments
- Most national departments have dedicated M&E Unit. Provincial departments less capacitated.
- Some conduct own evaluations, some commission external consultants to conduct evaluations
- Department responsible for local government has M&E system for municipalities

Government –Wide M&E System

- Integrated encompassing framework of M&E principles, practices and standards for use in government
- Serves as apex-level information system that draws on existing systems
- Track 76 national development indicators

Ministry for Performance, Monitoring & Evaluation

- Established in Presidency in 2009
- Design and manage Outcomes Performance Management System
- Institutionalising GWM&E System
- Unblocking service delivery

Issue #1: What is the appropriate balance?

Monitoring

- Government-Wide M&E System focuses on monitoring, 76 national development indicators
- Outcomes Performance Management System focuses on monitoring (30-40 output indicators)
- Departments focus on monitoring for many different reporting requirements

Evaluation

- PSC produces significant proportion of evaluations in government
- PSC emphasis on public administration policies and practices though does some evaluation of major policy initiatives
- Departments conduct evaluations of their core policies, tends to be ad hoc rather than part of an annual evaluation plan

Risks:

- Fewer comprehensive evaluations of policies
- Short circuit feedback loop between monitoring and evaluation

Issue #2: Does evaluation practice reflect independence?

- PSC is overtly independent:
 - reports to Parliament, not to the Executive
 - budget not linked to another Ministry
 - reports can be very critical of government departments
- Departmental M&E Units:
 - independence is not prescribed as case for Internal Audit
 - use external consultants who may or may not exercise independence
- Outcomes Performance Management (Presidency)
 - will rely on information supplied by departments/ministries
 - policy intention to use external moderators and experts (though not clear how this will work in practice)

Principle of evaluation independence is not reflected in GWM&E Policy Framework

Issue #3: Do evaluation bodies/units have capacity for credible evaluations?

- PSC adequately resourced relative to M&E units in departments:
 - 14 Commissioners to advocate for its role
 - dedicated M&E Branch, so there is a balance between investigative functions and M&E function
 - invest in development of PSC staff and contribute to community of practice
- Departmental M&E units have capacity constraints:
 - challenge to find suitably qualified and experienced M&E officials
 - budgetary constraints – departments expected to show ‘savings’ in operating costs
 - Departments don’t have all necessary policies and procedures in place for evaluations
 - commissioning external consultants does not guarantee of credibility as departments don’t always have capacity to design and manage evaluations

Issue #4: Legislation for M&E?

- Presidency Green Paper on Improving Performance states it may consider legislation, though purpose of introducing legislation is not clear
- Difficult to comply with existing legislative planning, budgeting and reporting requirements without putting a good M&E system in place
- Legislation gets people focused on minimal compliance so can be counterproductive
- An agreed Evaluation Framework (with norms and standards) could provide effective guidance to government departments

Good Practices: Peer review panels and Advisory Committees

- Peer review panels:
 - Members selected on basis of technical and professional expertise
 - Clear terms of reference
 - Offer independent professional critique of evaluation reports
- Advisory committees:
 - Members can be internal and external stakeholders
 - Can be involved from outset of evaluation (including design stage)
 - Should only advise and not make executive decisions
 - Positive: involvement throughout process means ‘no surprises when final report is submitted
 - Negative: slow process, challenge to stick to their mandate, political positioning

Good Practices: Evaluating the evaluators

- Important to submit evaluation bodies to independent scrutiny similar to independent review of audit practices of auditing firms
- PSC commissioned independent assessment of its impact
- Departments could have regular 'health checks' conducted on their M&E units

Good Practices: Joint evaluations

- Evaluations managed jointly by department and stakeholder group (or other government department) can enhance independence and credibility
- Must have independent evaluation team agreed to by both parties
- Could include independent peer review panel
- Could be used for large and/or potentially controversial evaluations

Example: Joint evaluation commissioned by UN and South African Government on Role and Contribution of UN System in South Africa

Remaining challenges

- Creating demand for and understanding of M&E by legislatures:
 - Make reports and presentations comprehensible to busy parliamentarians
 - Evaluate issues that are of concern to parliamentarians
 - Publish evaluation briefs
- Need for innovation in M&E capacity development:
 - E-learning and virtual universities to complement classroom-based training
 - Shared services (pooling of limited resources in a geographic area)

Thank you