

7. Burkina Faso: Assessment, Strategy and Action Plan to Strengthen National Capacity for Evaluation

MAHAMADOU BOKOUM

Director of Economic and Social Policy
Monitoring and Evaluation

ACHILLE R. YAMEOGO

Deputy Secretary-General of the Burkina Faso
Monitoring and Evaluation Network (RéBuSE)

SALIF ZOUNGRANA

Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, UNDP²²



INTRODUCTION

Despite progress, evaluation of public policies remains relatively rare in Burkina Faso. There is often confusion between monitoring, inspection and evaluation. This is partly due to the absence of a legal and regulatory framework governing the practice of evaluation and the weakness of national evaluative capacity and of demand for and use of the results of evaluations.²³ Thus, with the financial and technical support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Government of Burkina Faso launched a study to assess national evaluative capacity and serve as a basis for a strategy and action plan.

The objectives of this study, conducted in two phases, were twofold:

Phase 1: Conduct a stocktaking assessment of national evaluative capacity and the national evaluation system to know what is currently being done on a practical level in Burkina Faso. This consisted of taking stock of the state of the national evaluation system.

Phase 2: Support the development of a sustainable evaluation system that is integrated into national development objectives and complementary to existing structures, through the participative development of a strategy and action plan for the development of national evaluative capacity.

22 Also contributing to this paper were: Soukeynatou Fall, Monitoring & Evaluation Specialist, UNICEF, Burkina Faso; Ian C. Davies, Accredited Evaluator, and Albine Guitard, Evaluator, Ian C Davies Conseil Inc.; and Michel Ouédraogo, President of the Burkina Faso Monitoring and Evaluation Network.

23 Extract from the terms of reference of the study.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology was built around four major axes:

- Approach: participative and inclusive, involving the various stakeholders;
- Method: literature review and analysis; formal and informal interviews;
- Meta-analysis: report on evaluations conducted in Burkina Faso;
- Analysis framework: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) method.

DIAGNOSIS

The purpose of the diagnosis is to serve as a basis for the development and consideration of possible strategic directions for the initiative to develop national evaluation capacity and institutionalize evaluation of public policies in Burkina Faso.

Before conducting a strategic and operational diagnosis of evaluative capacity in Burkina Faso, we shall review the evaluation system.

EVALUATION SYSTEM

Stakeholders in the Burkina Faso national evaluation system include a wide range of actors: the executive branch of the Government (central, regional and local administrations); Parliament; universities and educational institutions; external technical and financial partners; civil society; and consultancy firms. See Table 1 below.

TABLE 1. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN BURKINA FASO

State	Supports the monitoring and evaluation of the National Economic and Social Development Plan (Plan National de Développement Économique et Social (PNDES)). Creates an enabling environment. Mobilizes necessary resources (financial, material and human).
Local authorities	Participate in the monitoring and evaluation process at local level.
Private sector	Participates in monitoring and evaluating implementation of the PNDES.
Civil society	Participates in monitoring and evaluating implementation of the PNDES and promotion of the evaluation culture.
Institutions and universities	Participate in educating actors in the evaluation system and also in research into evaluation.
Technical and financial partners	Participate in monitoring and evaluating implementation of the PNDES. Contribute to the mobilization of the necessary resources.

The evaluation system was examined and analysed to identify its internal strengths and weaknesses and its external opportunities and threats as illustrated below.

TABLE 2. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE EVALUATION SYSTEM

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional structures exist within Government and, in particular, in the various ministries, to conduct evaluations. • There is professional availability at national level, by a range of experts (consultancy firms, educational institutions, etc.), to support the conduct of evaluations. • The practice of evaluation for programmes conducted with external funds (i.e., contributions from technical and financial partners) is quite well developed. • There is a political reference framework, particularly the PNDES, that strongly emphasizes evaluation as an essential tool for its implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While there is administrative authority, there is no specific conceptual or terminological framework for the evaluation of public polices or frame of reference for understanding who is responsible for what with regard to both monitoring and evaluation. • Not all the actors in the system have a clear understanding of what evaluation is and there is a lack of specific capacity. • The evaluation reports that are produced are usually of quite low quality, particularly due to the lack of specific capacity. • There is little coordination of practices and approaches to monitoring and evaluation, including by technical and financial partners. There appear to be no systems for the evaluation of public polices at local level.
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The PNDES requires evaluations to be performed; a mid-term evaluation is expected, as is a final evaluation. • Projects, platforms and organizations to support the development of evaluation practice and capacity are in place in Africa (African Evaluation Association, Twende Mbele, Francophone Evaluation Network, etc.) and it is possible to connect to them. • At local level, evaluations systems could be connected to local projects and mechanisms for social accountability and citizen control to create or strengthen a public culture of evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation tends to remain a “paper” exercise in Burkina Faso. • In general, there is a risk of “waiting and seeing”, i.e., evaluation may never be implemented in the end or may be solely subject to the opportunity to see funds specifically allocated for this purpose. • Political will and efforts to strengthen the evaluation system may not endure when there are changes in government and/or administrations.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis addresses both strategic and operational aspects of the evaluation system as captured by the study.

At the strategic level, among the elements considered essential for good development of the national evaluation system in Burkina Faso, the study identifies the existence of:

1. A dynamic and clearly expressed conceptual framework, anchored in a theoretical and practical reference framework that is adapted to the realities of the country;
2. An available and accessible suite of educational resources on the theory and practice of evaluation;

3. Professional leadership in evaluation;
4. A permanent organization to develop and manage a strategy for operation of the national evaluation system at a mature stage.

At the operational level, the diagnosis concludes that there seems to be little mastery of evaluation methodology, as evidenced by the fact that what is generally presented as evaluation is more performance measurement and the reports produced are descriptive rather than analytical. As a result, analysis is often weak or non-existent and in most cases, there is no evaluative reasoning or appropriate conclusions.

THE STRATEGY

Strategic planning was conducted in a participative manner through working sessions. These sessions were used to develop a strategy which was then used to anchor reflections and discussions for the development of an action plan to institutionalize evaluation and develop national evaluation capacity. The strategy that follows is based on an analysis of the internal and external environment and on the vision, values, tasks and strategic priorities identified for evaluation in Burkina Faso and formulated in a participatory way.

Vision

“By 2022, Burkina Faso will have an independent national evaluation system that is inclusive, effective, coherent and dynamic.” Stakeholders considered it essential that evaluations should be independent, that is, that they should be the responsibility of an organization other than those responsible for the implementation of the projects and programmes that are evaluated.

Values

Based on the PNDES, the values underlying the exercise are: social equity; poverty reduction; the choice of a bold and realistic approach; development that draws on the legitimate and deeply-felt aspirations of the people; satisfying basic needs; democracy, social justice and freedom of opinion; and solidarity and the responsible participation of all in development and the management of public affairs.

Tasks

The tasks identified to address the principal weaknesses of the national evaluation system were coordination; institutional and organizational strengthening; and professional development.

Strategic priorities

1. Develop a conceptual and terminological framework;
2. Strengthen evaluation practice at national level (both order and execution);
3. Establish a mechanism for the coordination of evaluations;
4. Develop a legal and regulatory framework for evaluation.

Action Plan

1. Development of a conceptual framework and a common terminology to promote:
 - Understanding of what evaluation of public policy is, to distinguish it from other types or related or complementary activities and thus be able to use it correctly.
 - Applying the same concepts and the terms to the evaluation of public policies, in order to facilitate communication and the conduct of evaluation processes, from commissioning an evaluation through to use of the ensuing results.
2. Strengthening evaluation practice at the national level to ensure that:
 - Actors who commission evaluations and are to use the results have the tools, knowledge and skills needed to conduct high-quality evaluations (from commissioning to production of reports to use of the findings).
 - In broader terms, those involved in the system—at least some key actors initially—have increased awareness of evaluation and are thus able to make relevant contributions to the process.
3. Coordination of evaluations, to:
 - Allow better use of the resources dedicated to evaluation, through better management of processes and the articulation of different actions, for example to avoid duplications, or through sharing needs and resources for the conduct of certain processes.
 - Encourage the use of evaluation findings through, for example, better mobilization of stakeholders.
4. Development of a legal and regulatory framework to frame government action in respect of evaluation.

The detailed timetable for the action plan is set for the next 18 months.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. The open collaboration between the General Directorate of the Economy and Planning, the Burkina Faso Monitoring and Evaluation Network and UNICEF as part of the study was a positive development that resulted in the mobilization of actors.
2. The strong enthusiasm for evaluation and growing interest in evaluation on the part of the administration, Parliament and civil society should be encouraged and built upon.
3. There is a need for an evaluation when a policy is completed and for an evaluation of the Strategy for Accelerated Growth and Sustainable Development and sectoral policies.
4. The Parliamentary Network for Evaluation is an absolutely key player for the monitoring and evaluation of public policies.
5. There is a need for a critical mass of persons trained in evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTS

At the end of this diagnostic study of national evaluation capacity in Burkina Faso, we note the strong engagement of actors from various spheres of public life towards support for the national evaluation system. We also highlight that fact that the country is not starting from zero; it has a number of strengths, such as the existence of professional capacity for evaluation, the existence of some structures within government, existing practices in projects and programmes and a political reference framework. Nevertheless, the existing system does have certain weaknesses, such as a lack of coordination, and a lack of rules and standards and lack of capacity on the part of stakeholders.

The work done by all stakeholders has enabled the production of a planning and strategic management framework and an action plan that is appropriate to the needs stated, through the terms of reference, reflecting the aspirations and objectives of the main stakeholders in the national evaluation system.

Finally, this study and the successful collaborative work have laid the foundation for the sustainable institutionalization of evaluation and strengthening of national evaluation capacity in Burkina Faso.

Anticipated future milestones include passing of a law on the management of development; establishment of a National Evaluation Commission to coordinate evaluation actions; development of a guide to the evaluation of public policies; formation of a critical mass (14) of leaders through the International Program for Development Evaluation Training; and a third Burkina Faso evaluation day, in 2018.

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