

# Establishing a national monitoring and evaluation system

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South Africa has a number of actors with legal or constitutional mandates for monitoring and evaluation (M&E). There has been a major shift in emphasis since 2009, in part stimulated by a political need to improve service delivery, as well as extensive exposure to international experience by both technocrats and political leadership. As a result, a ministry and department of performance monitoring and evaluation (DPME) were created to advance the M&E agenda. DPME has introduced a number of initiatives, including a focus on the government's 12 priority outcomes; the assessment of management performance of national and provincial departments; a new system of monitoring front-line

services; and a national evaluation system. Two new systems are being piloted: a municipal performance assessment tool and a citizen-based monitoring tool. These represent a major increase in the availability of evidence for policy and decision-making. Rapid recent progress is due to strong support at the outset from the president, learning from international experience, and strong teams in DPME and National Treasury. Despite these positive developments, significant challenges remain to ensure the coherence of reform initiatives between central government departments, improving administrative data quality, and establishing M&E as a core role of management.



## THE NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEM

South Africa's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) work in the 2000s focused on monitoring, although some departments undertook evaluations. In 2011 a study tour to Mexico, Colombia and the US led to development of a National Evaluation Policy Framework, adopted by Cabinet in November 2011. A strategic approach has been taken focusing on important policies/programmes/plans, and those selected are embedded in a National Evaluation Plan. The focus has been on utilisation: all evaluations will be made publicly available unless confidential, and they must have an improvement plan, which is then monitored. The approach emphasises learning rather than a punitive approach, so as to build evaluation into the culture of departments and not promote resistance and malicious compliance.

Evaluations can happen from prior to an intervention (e.g. a diagnostic evaluation to identify the root cause of problems, and the options that could be considered for addressing them), through understanding implementation to looking at impact – identifying the impact and attribution of interventions, and how they can be strengthened.

Evaluations are implemented as a partnership between the department(s) concerned and DPME, and DPME partly funds the evaluations (with an average of R750 000 per evaluation). Eighteen guidelines have been developed, as well as standards for evaluation and competencies for programme managers, M&E staff and evaluators. A series of six training courses has been developed and over 600 government employees have been trained in the evaluation system.

The first National Evaluation Plan was approved by Cabinet in June 2012, with eight evaluations, and National Evaluation Plans approved for 2013/14 and 2014/15. Thirty-eight evaluations are completed, under way or starting, from evaluations of nutrition programmes for Grade R under-5s to business process outsourcing schemes, rural development programmes and human settlements programmes. A similar process is happening at provincial level, where two provinces have developed provincial evaluation plans (Western Cape and Gauteng). DPME is currently working with five other provinces to develop provincial evaluation plans. Three departments have also developed departmental evaluation plans, and one metro (Tshwane).

## MONITORING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local government is performing poorly and at present there is no integrated set of minimum norms and standards of performance (administrative, political or service delivery). Drawing on the monitoring of management performance of national and provincial departments, DPME is working with key national and provincial partners to establish a similar process for

municipalities, to provide an integrated and holistic picture of performance of each municipality. The objectives are to:

- enable strategic leadership of the local government sector and inform policy reform initiatives
- provide evidence for tailored and co-ordinated support and/or intervention measures to specific municipalities
- guide national and provincial departments to better support municipalities in identified areas of underperformance.

The municipal assessment tool is at a draft stage and covers planning, human resources, financial, service delivery, community engagement, and governance. It is being finalised and piloted in selected municipalities.

## CITIZEN-BASED MONITORING

Citizen-based monitoring (CBM) is an approach to monitoring government performance that focuses on the experiences of ordinary citizens in order to strengthen public accountability and drive service delivery improvements. A CBM tool has been designed and, in August 2013, Cabinet approved the CBM Framework for Strengthening Citizen-Government Partnerships for Monitoring Frontline Service Delivery. By approving the framework, the South African government has, at the highest level, committed itself to measuring its performance through the experiences of citizens. The first phase of the CBM pilot process has commenced in two sites in the Free State and KwaZulu-Natal and will be rolled out to further sites during 2014/15, with the aim to develop and test a model that can expand to national scale.

## EMERGING SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

Some initial impacts of the South African M&E system emerging include:

- increasing the strategic focus of government on achieving a limited number of outcomes. Quarterly reports provide Cabinet with a strategic agenda and a quarterly focus on progress in the key priorities of government
- introduction of whole-of-government planning linked to key cross-cutting outcomes, clearly linking inputs and activities to outputs and the outcomes
- a higher level of understanding of how the work of the different departments affects each other, and greater co-ordination between departments and spheres of government
- more systematic monitoring and evaluation is beginning to facilitate more efficient use of limited resources



- the emphasis on measuring results is working as a catalyst for change and some departments are embracing the approach, putting in place improvement plans, focusing on measurable results, and improving their data.

These successes have been supported by several factors. First has been presidential and high-level political commitment to a strong M&E system. Although the exact form of this has not necessarily been clear, has varied in focus, and has evolved in practice, this commitment has facilitated the rapid build-up of capacity, and DPME now has around 200 people on staff.

Institutional factors include

- a strong National Treasury, a well-established departmental planning and reporting system (even if there are some challenges with it), as well as support from Treasury to departments for improving financial management capacity
- capacity to undertake evaluations in some departments and the Public Service Commission
- the presence of the EU-funded Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD)<sup>2</sup>, promoting evidence-based policy-making. Having a flexible support facility has been crucial in supporting the emergence of DPME.

A very strong and high-quality team has developed in the DPME, which has enabled the rapid development and implementation of the system and the increasing credibility of DPME.

South Africa has sought to avoid re-inventing wheels, using study tours, research, exchanges and building on-going networks with peer countries to see what is useful. In addition reflective processes are being used to ensure that we learn as we go.

## CHALLENGES

The challenges to be addressed in our next stages can be broken down into several areas. In terms of coherence and co-ordination, they include:

- strengthening the coherence of centre of government departments and their roles in the M&E system, ensuring a common conceptual base and that systems integrate better. DPME is currently considering introducing legislation to address some of the gaps and overlaps
- strengthening the role of outcome implementation forums in co-ordinating implementation of the outcomes
- improving the status of M&E as a key part of the strategic function, essential for planning and budgeting, tracking progress, learning, and improving implementation.

In terms of monitoring and reporting:

- avoiding duplication of reporting, and addressing the view of some actors that DPME is duplicating

the work of the auditor-general, National Treasury, etc.

- strengthening the incorporation of monitoring as part of the management function, facilitating continuous improvement
- improving citizen feedback as part of the monitoring system, which can speed up improvement cycles
- strengthening monitoring of local government
- now that an evaluation policy framework has been developed, finalising a policy framework that includes monitoring.

In terms of planning:

- better integration of planning systems, and their linkage with M&E. A specific challenge is improving the planning of implementation programmes at much lower levels than budget programmes (including developing log frames with a matrix of indicators), which will facilitate programme implementation as well as M&E
- improving the ability to predict (and so hopefully avoid) problems – a key desire of politicians.

And in terms of support roles:

- strengthening the capacity to use evidence to support policy- and decision-making. This includes policy and data analysis skills and bringing in additional skillsets, such as operational analysts, to improve problem-solving
- improving the quality of administrative data and, where possible, getting single entry of data at field level.

## SUSTAINABILITY

The measure of DPME's success will be when many of its functions have been internalised in departments. Key ways in which sustainability is being addressed include:

- moving from a directive style to a co-ordinating style, where DPME is a champion and shows leadership around M&E, but builds the involvement and commitment of partners
- enhancing the use of M&E information, e.g. for Cabinet, so key decision-makers see the value
- building alliances, e.g. through the national Evaluation Technical Working Group, pro-active work with Treasury, joint study tours, M&E Forums
- building forums which strengthen the M&E voice (e.g. national and provincial)
- strengthening capacity around M&E, using learning events, exchanges, training
- strengthening the perception of the value that DPME provides to help departments achieve their objectives, to internalise M&E and to use it for improving performance, in the process ensuring that departments take the credit for





success (This was a significant lesson from the UK experience.)

- looking to simplify systems, e.g. to reduce duplication in reporting, and so increasing the perceived value
- increasing responsiveness to politicians, so they see M&E as adding value to what they wish to achieve.

Areas where further work is needed include:

- continuing to improve the effectiveness of outcomes planning and M&E and ensuring it is adding value
- developing political consensus on the importance of internal monitoring as part of a broader public service reform and management development process, and that supporting continuous improvement is a key task of a central M&E co-ordinating body like DPME
- strengthening the legislative base around M&E to institutionalise the role of the Presidency, thus reducing the risk of relying on a single strong political champion who is vulnerable to political changes.

Overall, the system has evolved tremendously in the few years that the DPME has been in existence. The systems are developing credibility and should be fairly well established by the end of the current term of government. Stability in the DPME team is needed for the systems established to flourish and have impact.

## CONCLUSIONS

South Africa is an example of rapid development and implementation of an M&E system within a sufficiently favourable situation, and also of how the use of international experience can speed up the process. Unlike its peers, South Africa has tried to establish the M&E system across both national and provincial levels, and is now developing the local government and citizen contribution components to the system. This reflects the reality that implementation happens at the local level, but it also increases the complexity of the process, with many different stakeholders who have to buy in to the system and change their behaviour.

The system is not yet consolidated across the multiple actors, and there is a long way to go in developing a culture of M&E in the government. The relationship between the key centre of government stakeholders, notably the DPME and the National Treasury, is a critical issue, and considerable work is under way to strengthen it through practical technical collaboration as well as higher-level relationship building.

The system is promising and much has been achieved in two years. However it is still emergent

and not yet fully institutionalised, and it is too early to see extensive use of M&E information in decision-making. The next three to five years will see what contribution the M&E system really makes to improving performance and accountability, and it is an important experiment to document. 🇿

## NOTES

1. The fully detailed 2012 article is available online at [www.africa-platform.org/sites/default/files/resources/establishing\\_national\\_me\\_system\\_in\\_sa.pdf](http://www.africa-platform.org/sites/default/files/resources/establishing_national_me_system_in_sa.pdf).

2. The PSPPD is a partnership between the Presidency and the EU. It supported a wide range of research and capacity development activities, including study tours, exchanges, seminars and conferences; supported the development of the M&E system (notably evaluation); and undertook some knowledge management.

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