

The use of evaluation results in government: what works, what doesn't and what can be improved?

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ABSTRACT

When designed and implemented well, evaluations can provide a wealth of information on the performance and impact of government interventions. Even before the publication of the National Evaluation Policy Framework in 2011, government departments were commissioning and using evaluations, albeit in a less structured manner. The demand for evaluations was driven by three main factors. First, there was a clear need for the political executive to account for service delivery. Second, increasing pressure was brought to bear on management to implement government intervention in an efficient and economical manner. Finally, and to a lesser extent there was an obligation to justify the use of donor funding.

This paper focuses on the intervening period between the introduction of the *Policy Framework for Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation* in 2007 and the release of the *National Evaluation Policy Framework* in 2011. In general, implementation evaluations or variants of it, were the most frequently used types of evaluation. Such evaluations were used by management to assess the performance of programme and in certain instances comply with legislative requirements for evaluation. Impact evaluations were used less often although most interviewees acknowledged their importance in the policy making process. The majority of evaluations were carried out by external consultants or research institutions. There is no consensus on the role of the M&E unit in commissioning and managing evaluation studies. This reflects the broader challenges around defining the role and position of M&E units in national departments.

Prior to the introduction of the *National Evaluation Policy Framework*, the results of evaluations were used to explore how programmes were implemented, what factors affected implementation, how efficiently programmes were delivered and whether the programme was delivered as planned. Implementation evaluations proved particularly valuable in the case of concurrent functions and became an important oversight mechanism for national departments. Evaluations were also used to measure the impact of priority government programmes such as the EPWP and Child Support Grant, which roused substantial public interest and where significant amounts of public resources was spent. For the most part, the departments were open to evaluations and engaged constructively with the results. Some informants noted that challenges only arose when methodology for the evaluation lack rigour.

Lessons from the experience of M&E practitioners before the publication of the *National Evaluation Policy Framework* are still pertinent nowadays. The findings demonstrate need to formalise a set of criteria to assess the readiness for evaluation of government programmes. Moreover, guidance around the role and positioning of M&E units would certainly help in legitimising the practice of evaluation with departments. Finally, building evaluative capacity over the long term requires a bottom up approach – that is targeted efforts to improve the capacity of M&E practitioners and strengthen the M&E function within departments.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The uses of evaluation results are well recognised and widely documented in research. The different types of evaluations provide governments and donors with objective information needed to make decisions. For policy makers, impact evaluations help them to: assess whether a policy has achieved its intended results, understand any unintended consequences and decide on whether the intervention should be expanded, replicated or terminated (Bonbright, 2012, p. 6). In a similar way, the results of *ex ante* evaluations can be used to strengthen the design of government interventions. By creating a logical framework in response to a problem statement, policy makers are able to improve the design of an intervention to optimise its impact on beneficiaries from the outset (United Nations Development Programme, 2012).

Evaluation theory also points to the importance of evaluations for public sector managers. More commonly known as implementation evaluations, these are used to measure the actual against planned performance. Implementation evaluations, act as a magnifying glass, focusing on all aspects of programme delivery and the causes of deviations from planned performance. The results of implementation evaluations can be used by managers to improve their management practices and establish the right systems and structures to effectively implement and monitor programmes (Gorgens & Kusek, 2009, p. 371).

Although, the results of various types of evaluation are utilised by different users, the distinction between policy makers and public sector managers is perhaps too stylistic in the South African context. Increasingly, policy makers are interested in the results of implementation evaluations, as a mechanism to hold public sector managers to account for their performance. Moreover, for policy makers, results of implementation evaluations identify what has worked less well in the administration and management of the intervention. The same principle applies to public sector managers who now need to understand the impact of their programmes before making proposals for expanding a programme, especially in the face of budgetary constraints.

Modern programme evaluation was popularised in the 1960's and an entire body of theory has been developed around this discipline. In South Africa, however, evaluations were slow to take off following the first democratic evaluations in 1994. Until recently in 2011, when the *National Evaluation Policy Framework* (NEPF) was published, government departments were commissioning and using evaluations on an *ad hoc* basis. The NEPF develops a systematic approach to commissioning, conducting and using evaluations. It offers guidance on the systems, structures and processes needed to institutionalise evaluations in government departments. While some of the recommendations contained in the policy bring fresh thinking to the approach towards evaluations in South Africa, others were already practiced to a greater or lesser extent within national government. Therefore, the experience of national departments who have commissioned and completed evaluations remains pertinent today.

This paper examines the experience of a wide range of national departments in using the results of evaluation studies. It canvasses the experience of public sector officials in selected national departments who have commissioned evaluations through a series of semi structured interviews. The paper explores the ways in which the results of evaluations have been used to improve programme performance and whether they may have led to the redesign or termination of government programmes. Where possible, the paper draws on the experience of monitoring and evaluation practitioners before the release of the NEPF.

Specifically, this research paper examines whether the role and location of the M&E unit in commissioning the evaluation matters when it comes to the use of results? Moreover, the paper assesses how the results of evaluations were communicated to the programme managers, senior management and where warranted the political executive. This research paper also discusses how government departments have responded to findings within evaluation studies that were contentious. It ends with recommendations on improving the use of evaluations and their results in national government.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study draws on the insights of key informants around the use evaluations and their results in the national government. The research was conducted between July and September 2013 and involved interviews with key informants within national departments and seasoned evaluators. For the interviews, monitoring and evaluation practitioners within various national departments were contacted². Part of the challenge from the outset from getting public officials to discuss the experience of their department in commissioning and conducting evaluations.

A number of interviewees were not comfortable discussing the experience of their department without consent from their Director Generals. Since obtaining consent from Director Generals would have taken substantial time, key informants were interviewed in their personal capacity as monitoring and evaluation practitioners and their identities are kept confidential. Although this practice does not impact of the findings of this paper, it makes illustrating the findings with sector specific examples more difficult.

Nonetheless, over the course of this research, the 6 respondents from national departments were interviewed. Interviews were moreover, held with 2 seasoned independent evaluators to gauge their perspectives on how evaluation results had been communicated within departments. Follow up interviews with conducted with key respondents in two national departments where the author had conducted evaluations to understand how the findings of those studies had been used. A desktop review was carried out to augment and flesh out issues raised by key informants. The table below reflects the sample for this study.

Table 1: Sample description

Description	Response
Number of M&E practitioners within national department contacted	17
Number of responses received	7 ³
Number of face to face interviews conducted	6
Number of independent evaluators interviewed	2
Number of interviews with evaluation-commissioning clients	2

Interviews were guided by a set of research questions, which amongst other things examined:

- Factors that trigger the demand for evaluations
- Types of evaluations used by government departments
- Role of the M&E unit in evaluations
- Use of evaluation results
- Communication of evaluation results (especially when they were contentious)

3. FINDINGS

This paper highlights some of the experience of national government with evaluations in the period between 2007, when the *Policy Framework for Government Wide Evaluations* was released and 2011 when the NEPF was published.

Need for evaluations

This report identifies four main drivers of evaluations prior to the release of the NEPF in 2011. These are changes in the policy and legislative landscape, the need for greater political accountability, shift towards greater managerial responsibility for implementation and obligations in respect of donor funded projects.

² The author is grateful to the DPME for providing the contact details of M&E practitioners in national government

³ The Department of International Relations and Cooperation responded saying that they had not conducted any evaluations on their programmes.

Changes in the policy and legislative landscape

Changes in the policy and legislative landscape that emphasize performance measurement have almost certainly contributed to an increase in demand for evaluations. Starting with the release of the *Policy Framework for Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation* in 2007, which identified evaluation as one of the three pillars of a government wide monitoring and evaluation system (The Presidency, 2007). Soon thereafter, the *Framework for Managing Performance Information* was published and introduced a logical framework to planning and budgeting and set the foundation for evaluations (National Treasury, 2007). More recently, at the beginning of the current electoral cycle⁴, the outcomes based framework was published to guide government wide efforts towards 12 key priorities. Collectively, these policies have brought about a sea change in the way national government thinks about and measures performance.

Key informants suggested that the initial wave of reforms between 2007 and 2011 triggered the greater demand for impact evaluations, particularly in the social sectors. For example, since its introduction in 2001, the PMTCT programme was a critical part of government's efforts to fight the spread of HIV/AIDS. It was seen as a priority programme for the National Department of Health and roused significant interest from civil society and the public. It became a natural choice for an impact evaluation and the first countrywide evaluation of the effectiveness of the National Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) was commissioned in 2010 (Goga, et al., 2012).

Political accountability for delivery

Although government has made significant inroads in improving access to public services, for many historically disadvantaged individuals, this has not been enough. With rising service delivery protests, the political executive faces more pressure to account for the delivery of public services. In these cases, evaluations assess what have been achieved over an electoral term, where problems have arisen and what could be done better. Midterm and end of term reviews are particular forms of evaluations that have been used to demonstrate the policy and delivery successes of the incumbent government and highlight factors that constrain service delivery.

Specifically, in South Africa, the ten and fifteen year reviews were used to measure and reflect upon government's performance (The Presidency, 2003 and 2009). These reviews synthesise information from research commissioned across various sectors as well as interviews with key informants (The Presidency, 2003 and 2009). Both these reviews summarised the key challenges and identified improvement opportunities for government. And, although these reviews cannot be seen as completely independent evaluations, they do provide the political executive with critical information on their performance and are an opportunity for introspection. More importantly, they respond to the public demands for accountable service delivery and feed into subsequent planning cycles.

In addition to the government-wide ten and fifteen year reviews, a number of departments carried out end of term reviews to evaluate their performance against their five year annual strategic plan prior to the 2009 elections. Informants suggested that end of term reviews served dual purposes. It allowed the department's political executive to reflect on their department's performance. The reviews also generated comprehensive institutional knowledge around the programmes and activities carried out over the previous term and paved the way for a smoother handover to a new Minister.

To summarise, pressures on the political executive to demonstrate their achievements have triggered the need for specific types of evaluations during and at the end of electoral terms.

Managerial responsibility for implementation

One of well-known reasons for evaluation is to improve the efficiency of implementation and enhance value for money. Even before NEPF, evaluations were used to diagnose implementation problems and ascertain the appropriate remedial action.

Informants suggest that for concurrent functions, these types of implementation evaluations were important mechanisms used by national departments to discharge their oversight function. Within the

⁴ The electoral cycle runs from 2009 to 2014.

intergovernmental relations framework, national departments make policy and legislation, while provinces and local government are responsible for implementation. This means that although national government is responsible for outcomes, they have limited influence over the implementation of policies and programmes. This accountability-responsibility gap often means that national government has limited insights into how and when implementation occurs in other spheres of government. To overcome this particular problem, some national departments have used implementation evaluations as an instrument to gather objective and reliable evidence, especially in cases where implementation has gone awry or programmes are not delivering as planned.

A key informant highlighted how his department used an implementation evaluation to diagnose the root causes of consistently weak performance within a specific province. An independent evaluation was commissioned to provide evidence on the project, financial and beneficiary management practices of the province. The results highlighted serious shortcomings in the project and contract management systems of the provincial department and described its negative impacts on service delivery. Learnings from the evaluation were used to strengthen processes not only in the province where the evaluation was conducted but across all other provinces.

Hence, the implementation evaluations have been used to interrogate the efficiency of activities and practices within programmes. This has proven especially helpful for programmes within concurrent function that span across national, provincial and local government.

Donor funded projects

Most donors require that evaluations are carried out on the projects they fund. In most instances, donors have their own evaluation policy based on either guidelines or frameworks issued by the Development Assistance Committee. In the opinion of a seasoned evaluator interviewed for this paper, most donor projects evaluated were in the social and welfare services, health, education and cooperative governance sectors. Specific types of evaluations, such as midterm and end of term reviews were generally undertaken and if the programme was large enough, impact evaluations were done. It is worth noting that the results of donor evaluations were rarely used by national departments themselves. This is unfortunate, as some of these evaluation reports were rigorous and contained insights on the structural and systemic factors within government that affected the implementation of donor projects.

Types of evaluations

The NEPF recognises six types of evaluations namely diagnostic, design, implementation, impact, economic and synthesis evaluations. By identifying the different types of evaluations, the NEPF creates some consistency in the terminology used.

Informants were asked about the types of evaluations used within national government before the publication of the NEPF. What is clear from interviews is that there was no clear consensus on the terminology, which makes identifying the types of evaluations used more complicated.

Evaluations meant different things to different people. M&E practitioners mentioned that there was some confusion around the difference between performance audits and evaluations. Other types of assessments such as due diligence which focuses mainly on governance and financial aspects of a programme were seen as implementation evaluations. The confusion was often exacerbated by limited knowledge of evaluation methodology within national departments. Key informants suggested that public officials mistook the quarterly performance reports produced for the National Treasury for evaluation reports. As one informant said during the interview:

“Often there is little understanding of the concept of “evaluation” itself – it is confused with the quarterly review against annual performance plan. So officials think that they have been producing evaluation reports all along and therefore do not see the value that an independent evaluation can add until the methodology is explained to them”.

Nonetheless, implementation evaluations or variants of it, were the most frequently used types of evaluation. Such evaluations were used by management to assess the performance of programme and in certain instances comply with legislative requirements for evaluation (e.g. the Division of Revenue

Act). Interviewees also reported that the M&E units had conducted rapid appraisals on the programmes within their departments. In a particular department, the interviewee shared her M&E unit's experience in conducting rapid appraisals across a wide range of projects and programmes. This findings of these evaluations were ultimately synthesised and submit to senior management. This led to changes in the department's planning process, specifically around how indicators were chosen and set for programmes.

Impact evaluations were used less often although most interviewees acknowledged their importance in the policy making process. Some interviewees noted that departments had tried to use impact evaluations for their priority programmes. For instance, the Department of Basic Education evaluated the impact of their Dineladi programme in improving educational outcomes in mathematics and science. The Dineladi programme was a holistic intervention that sought to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics and science and supply schools with equipment and textbooks (The Presidency, 2011).

Interviewees noted that the ability to conduct an impact evaluation often depended on the readiness for evaluation. Certain priority programmes had not been implemented for long enough to be able to demonstrate an impact. In other instances, although the programme was seen as a priority, the cost of the impact evaluation would outweigh its benefits. There were also those programmes where poor performance was the result of multiple challenges, and M&E practitioners thought that implementation evaluations would be more suitable than impact evaluation in these situations. From these interviews, it seems that M&E practitioners have thought up an informal set of criteria to establish the readiness for evaluation of government interventions.

There were also certain methodological issues that made impact evaluations less popular. For example, an impact evaluation requires the establishment of a control group whose results could be compared to the treated group. However, since evaluations were not planned for in the design of the programme, it was hard to establish a control group who had not received any government support. One interviewee also noted that impact evaluations were highly specialised studies and required knowledge of statistical analysis and modelling, skills often not found within the department. As a result, impact evaluations were outsourced to academic research institutions and consultants, which increased their cost and complexities around commissioning and managing them.

The role of the M&E unit in the evaluation process

Only two of the informants indicated that their department had carried out internal evaluations. In general, the role of the M&E unit has been to develop the M&E framework for department, to support and coordinate the commissioning of evaluations.

There are two different approaches to commissioning evaluations from external institutions. First, the terms of reference is written up by the programme or project manager and put out to tender, perhaps with the assistance of the M&E unit. In this situation, the programme manager takes the lead and is responsible for the commissioning of the evaluation and management of the research process. The advantage of this approach is that the programme manager is generally more involved and amenable to using the results of the evaluation. On the other hand, the programme manager may have vested interests in minimising any negative findings from the evaluation.

Alternatively, evaluations are commissioned by the M&E unit within the Department based on specific issues raised by senior management. In this case, the programme manager may become more antagonistic towards an "external" process, although this approach maintains the integrity of the evaluation.

Whatever the approach used, attempts were made at trying to incorporate the recommendations from evaluation into the strategic and annual performance plan of departments. This was done to ensure that recommendations were integrated into the department's own monitoring system. From interviews, the role of the M&E unit in monitoring recommendations is unclear. However, a few key informants argued for a stronger role for the M&E unit within departments. One of the suggestions is that the evaluation report should have same legal status as an audit report and that recommendations should be enforceable rather than just proposals. For many interviewees, the seriousness with which the results of evaluations were dealt with within departments also depended on the location of the M&E unit.

Accordingly, informants thought that M&E units should have direct lines of reporting to the Accounting Authority of a department. In the least, they suggested that M&E and Strategic Planning Directorates should be part of the same chief directorate or branch reporting to the Director General.

Elevating the evaluation report to the status of an audit report is problematic in itself. Turning evaluations in a compliance requirement may introduce incentives to game the system instead of using evaluations to promote learning and continuous improvement within a department.

Use evaluation results

Who uses evaluation results within a department? What are the results used for? These two questions are interrelated, as users of evaluations often commission evaluations for a specific purpose – either because it is a priority programme where there are pressures to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention. Alternatively, evaluations may be commissioned to diagnose the challenges and problems experienced during implementation. Other reasons such as to inform the allocation of resources are possibly mainly driven by compliance requirements around conditional grants.

This research identifies three main uses of evaluations prior to the NEPF.

Implementation efficiency

It seems that for the most part, evaluation results are used by senior management. Information from implementation evaluations provide valuable information on coalface service delivery issues. For example, with the Child Support Grant being one of the main sources of income for poor households, factors that discouraged access and disbursement undermined the overall objective of the grant programme. In 2010, an evaluation was commissioned by the Department of Social Development and UNICEF to assess problems in the disbursement of the grant. The evaluation results show that factors that hindered access to grants included: problems in getting documents from home affairs, lack of information around the application process and bureaucratic complexities and hurdles. Another key finding was around the preference of beneficiaries for the flexibility offered by the banking system (UNICEF, 2010). The results and recommendations from the evaluation went on to inform changes in way the Child Support Grant was implemented. There were efforts to fast track the application process at the Department of Home Affairs for potential beneficiaries of child grants. More recently, the SASSA card which uses the banking system to disburse grants was introduced informed in part by the preference and challenges in disbursing grants identified by this and subsequent evaluation reports commissioned by the Department of Social Development.

Redesign of policies and programmes

Evaluations were also used to redesign policies and frameworks. One such instance was the review of the National Curriculum Statement commissioned by the Minister of Basic Education in 2009 to assess the implementation of the Outcomes Based Education (OBE) system. At the time, it was apparent that there were major challenges with the implementation of Outcomes Based Education (OBE) in South Africa. The review was in effect an implementation evaluation that examined the different aspects around the delivery of National Curriculum Statement in provincial departments of education, districts and schools. Specifically, the review interrogated the policy framework and roles of different role players in the education system, the curriculum structure and design, approach to assessment and the capacity to implement the curriculum. The results of this evaluation led to widespread changes within the education system. Outcomes based education system was abandoned and subsequently curriculum statements were consolidated and streamlined into the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy (Dada, et al., 2009).

Impact of government interventions

Undoubtedly, one of the most important uses of evaluation results is to understand the impact of government interventions on beneficiaries. Although, the majority of informants recognised the importance of impact evaluations, they seem to be under-used between 2007 and 2011. In part, the cost of impact evaluations was seen as an impediment towards its use. One informant made an interesting argument that impact evaluations might produce results that the department could not

anticipate and perhaps were not ready to deal with. Compared with implementation evaluations, where the main issues and problems were known to the department, there were real concerns that the results would show little or no impact on beneficiaries or at worse that the intervention had unintended impacts.

That being said, there were a few important impact evaluations carried out over this period. For example, the evaluation of the impact of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) yielded positive evidence on the increase in income in households, with a member participating in the programme – and demonstrate the success of the programme.

Compliance with legislation

The Division of Revenue Act, tabled annually along with the National Budget and Estimates of Expenditure, requires the national department transferring a conditional grant to evaluate the performance of the programmes funded by the grant. Conversely, the Act requires the provincial department to evaluate and report on the performance of their programmes.

Termed “grant performance evaluations” by the National Treasury, these types of evaluations measure the service delivery impact of the grant, elaborate on financial performance, identify the outputs delivered, discuss the exogenous factors that influence implementation, explain deviations from planned outputs and make recommendations on improvement.

These evaluation studies are either outsourced to independent consultants or carried out by the national department itself. One of the earlier and better examples of “grant performance evaluations” was undertaken by National Treasury on the Neighbourhood Development Partnership Grant in 2009/10. This grant was established to use public sector spending on infrastructure in certain neighbourhoods to leverage private investments in these communities. The “grant performance evaluation” provided a comprehensive overview of the Neighbourhood Development Partnership, highlighted the achievements, progress to date and challenges experienced and ended with recommendations for improvement (National Treasury, 2010).

Communication of evaluation results

External evaluations were treated as discrete projects within department. This meant that a project steering committee was established to oversee the evaluation study and deal with the results. The Project Steering committee generally comprises of the project manager, additional representatives from the project team, the M&E unit and strategic planning unit. Once the project steering committee had approved the evaluation, the report was submitted to the department’s management committee.

The process seems somewhat different for internal evaluations. Reports drafted by the M&E unit are submitted through their line manager to the department’s management committee. The management committee thereafter decides whether how recommendations are addressed. This may be in the form an instruction to the project manager to respond to the issues raised and develop an “improvement plan”. Alternatively, management may ask the strategic planning unit to monitor the implementation of certain recommendations.

Interviewees were also asked how results were communicated when the findings are contentious. There was general consensus that controversial results could be relayed in a diplomatic manner as long as the methodology used in the evaluation was defensible and rigorous. As one informant recounts:

“Manco could not approve the results because they [the service provider] has not done a good job. The methodology was contested by the programme manager, who pointed out the weaknesses. Until now, the report has not been finalised.”

Another seasoned evaluator noted that sometimes, the M&E unit was hesitant and uncomfortable in presenting the results of their evaluations, particularly when the findings are unfavourable to their colleagues. Part of it stems from the difficult situation the M&E unit finds itself in relation to its peers within the department, where an evaluation report formulates an opinion on the performance of a programme without the authority to make these judgements.

Strengthening the use of evaluation results

When asked what could be done to improve the use of evaluation results, most interviewees agreed the need for more capacity building and training. There were two elements to the proposals around capacity building. First, it was important to create a culture of results and implementation monitoring within government before the value of evaluations could be appreciated. M&E practitioners highlighted their struggles in getting managers to understand that monitoring was a fundamental component of their management responsibilities and not just a compliance exercise. Monitoring systems were also important as they produced the data needed for evaluations.

Second, building the knowledge around the approaches, methodologies and value of different types of evaluations amongst programme managers was necessary to create the demand for evaluations within departments. Informants mentioned that programme managers were more willing to cooperate and support the evaluation process if there was a clear benefit for them.

4. LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This brief paper contains some useful insights on the demand for, types of and uses of evaluation between 2007 and 2011.

On the need for evaluations

Although the NEPF and subsequent guidelines create a formal mechanism for planning for evaluations in the form of the National Evaluation Plan, they can easily become an administrative and compliance exercise. The findings demonstrate the importance of evaluations that stem from requests by the political executive in the department. Often these requests are in response to service delivery pressures that impact on beneficiaries of public services. Ideally, a planning mechanism should allow for the evaluation needs of the political executive to be included in the evaluation plan.

For managers, implementation evaluations are clearly an important source of information on performance of departmental programmes. However, past experience shows that for concurrent functions, implementation evaluations are an important tool for the national department to understand and oversee the implementation and delivery of services within provincial and local government. That being said, the credibility of evaluations in concurrent functions depends on the participation (and not just consultation) of other spheres of government in the evaluation process.

Hence, methodology for evaluations across concurrent functions should allow provincial and local government the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the study, discuss and respond to findings to ensure that the results are reliable and final recommendations are agreed upon and accepted.

On the types of evaluations

The evaluability of any project is an important aspect in planning for an evaluation. Albeit informally, M&E practitioners have developed criteria to assess the extent to which a programme is ready for evaluation. These include amongst other the timeframe for impact, the cost versus benefit of the evaluation, and the contribution to outcomes. This criteria should ideally be formalised in a guideline from the DPME.

Not all evaluations can be outsourced to external institutions. Internal evaluations can provide valuable insights for departments. Rapid appraisals are particularly useful in assessing the process and implementation efficiency of programmes. The main concerns raised were around the validity of the results produced by internal evaluators. These concerns however can be dealt with the application of rigorous evaluation standards (already developed by the DPME) and by building better capacity amongst M&E practitioners in departments. It can be argued that building evaluative capacity over the long term requires a bottom up approach – that is targeted efforts to improve the capacity of M&E practitioners and strengthen the M&E function within departments. Relying mainly on policies and guidelines – top down initiatives – is unlikely to create a sustainable and effective system of evaluation.

Compliance driven evaluations on conditional grants are an important tool for government to understand whether value for money is achieved and outputs are delivered as planned. Since no consistent framework exists that governs these types of evaluations, it may be useful to align them with the prescripts contained in the NEPF. This would ensure that although they remain compliance driven evaluations, they provide helpful information on the use of government funds.

On the role of the M&E unit

There are no clear guidelines around the role and location of the M&E unit. The focus on monitoring and evaluation is still a fairly recent development in government and M&E units have struggled to find their place with departments. Some informants conflate the role of the M&E unit with an 'audit' type function arguing for more stringent evaluative and enforcement powers. This approach is likely to turn evaluation into a compliance exercise and detract from one of the primary goals of evaluations – to foster learning and improvement within the public sector and maximise the impact on beneficiaries. M&E units should ideally be positioned where they can maintain an arm's length relationship with line functions in order to maintain objectivity and evaluative integrity. There does seem to be complementarity that can be achieved by ensuring that the strategic planning and M&E units work closely.

On the use of evaluation results

The results of evaluations were used in four ways to: assess the implementation of a programme, inform the redesign policies and programmes, measure the impact of a government intervention and to promote compliance with legislative provisions prior to the NEPF. Findings ways to escalate evaluation results where appropriate to the political executive is an important aspect of ensuring that policies and frameworks are evidence based. In the same vein, ensuring that evaluation recommendations are adopted, institutionalised and monitored through existing systems is likely to increase their utilisation.

On communicating evaluation results

There is some indication that project management processes were put in place to manage external evaluations. Results of these evaluations were escalated to management committees so that departmental senior management could approve the results and decide on how to best use the recommendations. Less formal processes exists for the results of internal evaluations and guidelines may be needed on approaches to dealing with the findings of these types of evaluations.

5. CONCLUSION

Evaluations provide credible and reliable information to government on the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of interventions. Internationally, evaluation has become an important tool for governments not only to assess their performance but also to enhance political accountability. The NEPF is the last of three components of a government wide monitoring and evaluation system to be promulgated. The framework sets out the overarching principles governing the utilisation of evaluations. However, before the framework, government departments were commissioning and using evaluations for various reasons. The lessons from the pre-NEPF era are still pertinent and can be used enhance the practice of evaluations.

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