Understanding better when and how to support the strengthening national evaluation systems

A presentation on findings of a study on the demand & supply of evaluation in five sub-Saharan African countries at Uganda Evaluation Week 2014

David Rider Smith

May 21, 2014

Head, Capacity & Quality Group, Evaluation Department Evaluation and Results Adviser UK Department for International Development (DFID)
Conditions for use

Literature identifies the critical prerequisite of a variety of demand-side elements in the use of evaluation and evaluative research in public policy and programmatic decision making. These can be identified in four categories:

1. Political System: openness of political system to evidence and argument
2. Organizational System: embedded in national system, country-led not donor driven
3. Individual Leadership/ Capacity: policy makers who have interest in analytical work and/or knowledge of subject matter
4. Individual Evaluation Issues: factors affecting individual product impact relating to timing, and focus of the evaluation
Provider requirements

On the supply side, the elements can be categorized into three groups:

1. **Framework for Evaluation**: evidence of legal, policy and strategic framework
2. **Systems for Evaluation**: evidence of complete system or elements of system for designing, commissioning and disseminating credible evaluation
3. **Capacity to Evaluate**: strong social science community and consultancy arena, associations who conduct the evaluation/evaluative research
How does this map in Africa?

Political system (WGI)
How does this map in Africa?
Political system (WGI)
Organizational System + Individual Leadership  
(DFID perception + WGI)

Median score against 4 criteria all graded on 3-point scale:
1) Powerful evidence using institution (source: DFID staff)  
2) Government Effectiveness (WGI)  
3) Established policy fora (DFID staff)  
4) Individual Leadership - M&E Champion (DFID staff)

NB. South Africa not included in DFID assessment
Combination - Political + Organizational

NB. South Africa not included in DFID assessment
Where is DFID providing ECD assistance?

- Support to the Presidency
- Support to Ministry of Education
- Support to Office of Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance & Bureau of Statistics

Support to the Presidency

South Africa, Zambia, Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Nigeria, Uganda, DRC, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Zimbabwe

Support to Ministry of Employment & Social Welfare & Ministry of Education

Support to Office of Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance & Bureau of Statistics

Support to Office of Prime Minister, Ministry of Finance & Bureau of Statistics

Financing local university participation in DFID evaluation

Planning to support evaluation association

Strongest

Weakest
Where has DFID conducted further ECD investigative work?
Directly addressing capacity –
Key challenges in capacity development per se

• **Context.** Lack of awareness of institutional, organisational and managerial features of the programme country. Prior political economy analysis might result in non-engagement, e.g. disfunctional civil service. Technical approach to programme design/ content with little regard for local knowledge and practice or for socio-political and organizational factors that affect capacity.

• **Ownership.** Supply driven by donors. Mismatch between what is provided and the needs

• **Relationship and Quality of Support.** Lack of clarity of roles and expected results between ‘seeker’ and ‘supplier’. Unclear distribution of decision-making authority and accountability can constrain implementation. TA personnel frequently lack the skills and professional profiles for effective engagement

• **Lack of evidence of what works.** CD efforts often small and scattered, not captured by M&E frameworks, lack of methodologies to evaluate capacity.
Study in five SSA countries

Purpose of Study:
1) Enhanced understanding of factors influencing demand and supply of evaluation and evaluative research in selected countries
2) Mapping demand and supply of evaluation
3) Identifying opportunities for effective evaluation capacity development

Intended Users:
• Evaluation associations in SSA countries
• Governments
• Development partners
• CLEAR-AA
## Conceptual framework (NEC Matrix)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Evaluation Capacities</th>
<th>Managing Evaluations</th>
<th>Conducting Evaluations</th>
<th>Using Evaluations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government (central gov. line depts)</td>
<td>Universities, ThinkTanks, Consultants</td>
<td>Parliament Political parties, Civil Society, Media</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guiding questions

• Which are the critical political economic and social contextual factors for evaluation demand and supply?

• Are there actual, potential and latent evaluation DEMANDs?

• What is the situation with respect to actual and potential evaluation SUPPLY?

• Where and how can evaluation supply be strengthened to meet and foster evaluation demand?
Theory of Change

• Political economy is a key determinant of evaluation use. The political context determines whether the following mechanisms are activated:

• **DEMAND for Evaluation (DE)**
  - Interest in evidence to inform policy processes
  - Realisation that evaluation is a source of evidence
  - Availability of funds to contract evaluations

• **SUPPLY of Evaluation (SE)**
  - Actual and potential capacity to conduct evaluations
  - Actual and potential capacity to manage evaluations

• **(DE & SE) → Use of Evaluation for policy making**
Alternative formulation of the ToC

IF

i) There are sources of potential and latent demand which can be transformed into actual evaluation demand

ii) Capacities to conduct and manage evaluations are strengthened, generating supply of relevant evaluations

THEN

iii) Evaluations will be conducted and used
FINDINGS
1. Configuration of Political Economy affects entry points for evaluation

- Centralised Rents structure, sometimes called developmental patrimonialism (Rwanda and Ethiopia)
  - Regularised Accountability, transparency can hurt
  - Access for ECD is centralised and controlled
  - Challenging to know if you are supporting democracy or authoritarianism

- Dispersed rent structure, patrimonial (Malawi and Zambia)
  - Divergent Accountability, transparency does not hurt much
  - Can get access to a variety of entry points for ECD, but very few have their central objective as development
  - Challenging to know if you are reinforcing existing rents rather than development

- Democratic with elements of development and patrimonial systems (Ghana)
  - A range of entry points interested in investing in development
  - However, in a number of entry points loyalty is valued over performance
  - Important not to be seen as reinforcing opposition politics
2. Politics and Political Administration Matters

• The case studies show that politics determines the extent to which evaluation is undertaken for the public good (rather than serving lobby interests or a predetermined agenda) and it affects the enabling environment, influencing the incentives for evaluation.

• The decentralisation of public administration in Rwanda, Ethiopia and Ghana has created both challenges and opportunities for expanding evaluation demand and supply beyond the capital city.

• Aid modalities such as budget support, with the creation of sector working groups, including government officers and donors, have created opportunities, seized to a very limited degree, to link results of evaluations to budget allocation.
3. Turning Latent into Effect Demand

- **Evaluation is not perceived as a source of evidence and learning.** Evaluation is frequently confused with audit, monitoring and investigations. Very seldom is evaluation perceived as a source of evidence for evidence-based policy making, and the only function of evaluation that is emphasized is accountability, neglecting its learning function.

- **Case: Imihigo** shows how in the Rwanda context evaluation becomes possible through the strong centralized leadership. However, it is more a point to identify evaluations (for learning) rather than using evaluations for upward acceptability as this reinforces a command control structure.

- **Latent demand for evaluation is stronger than actual demand.** Whereas actual demand for evaluation in the five countries is weak, it is important to recognise that latent demand (the demand for evaluation that is not articulated as such but that it is implicit in the demand for evidence for policy making) is much more significant both for the Executive and for the Legislative.

- **Donor demand for evaluation drives the evaluation process.** The five studies show that donor driven demand for evaluation has dominated the evaluation scenario. Islands of evaluation practice have thus emerged in those sectors where donors focused their evaluations, such as health and education.
4. Potential capacity greater than actual capacity

- There is social science capacity (sociologists, economists, political scientists) which could be mobilized for evaluation work. Some of this capacity has already been used for donor led evaluations.
- In addition to social sciences in Rwanda and Zambia there is specific potential evaluation expertise in the health sector, which could be mobilised quite quickly.
- Think tanks could undertake further evaluation studies. A challenge is to promote synergies between evaluation consultancies and research;
- National capacities mostly used for monitoring. Monitoring of policies, and even more of programmes and projects, is undertaken by national professionals. Their work is mostly focused on data collection and collation, with very limited analysis and synthesis.
- Limited budgetary provisions for evaluation, cause /or symptom of problems. In some of the countries, like Ethiopia and Malawi, there are no budgetary provisions for evaluations, whereas in Ghana there are very small provisions for evaluation, which are conflated with monitoring and planning. In Zambia there is budget for M&E, but it is not known how this money is actually spent.
5. Supply continued: Foreigners dominate

- Most evaluations are conducted by teams led by foreign consultants. Not only evaluations are donor driven, but they are also donor managed, and almost without exception the teams are leaded by foreign consultants with symbolic participation of national consultants. As indicated when discussing demand, these evaluations have focused particularly on health, and on education. It should be added that local think tanks (which in all of the countries had undertaken some policy relevant studies), and universities, do supply some expertise to evaluation teams.
CONCLUSIONS
1. Incentives shaped by political context

• Incentives for conducting and for using evaluations are shaped by the political context
• In some countries, like Rwanda, leads to a strong demand for evidence (and consequently a latent demand for evaluations as sources of evidence), whereas
• In other countries, like Malawi, with a political culture of patronage based decision-making, the demand for evidence for policy making is weak, as it also happens
• In Zambia, where a neo-patrimonial state prevails and loyalty often matters more than performance, so demand for performance (and other types of) evaluations is not strong.

Political Context → Demand for Evaluation

→ Use of evaluation for policy making

Supply of Evaluation
2. Role of Civil Society

- Different types of civil society organisations are playing a role in nurturing demand for evaluation from government, civil society and parliament.
- In Rwanda a think tank, whereas in Ghana a voluntary organization of professional evaluators.
- In Malawi a think tank that initially was created within the University of Malawi to evaluate a set of programmes, evolved with the support of UNICEF into an independent research institution with capacity to conduct evaluations.
- A target of ECD work could be to orientate think tanks on evaluation approaches and techniques that they might not have encountered previously.
3. Policy not practiced, but new entities emerging

• Formal national M&E frameworks exist in all countries but have actually have been implemented to a very limited extent.
• On the other hand, a promising new development has been emerging with Offices of the President or Prime Minister starting to take an active role in monitoring and evaluation, such as in the cases of Ghana and Malawi, setting up Policy Units with monitoring and evaluation roles, and in both countries with an emphasis on the delivery of public services by public sector institutions.
• Government of Ethiopia recently established the position of State Minister for M&E, within the Office of the Prime Minister, although its role is still undefined. The extent to which these recently created Units and positions will actually function effectively to a great extent will be determined by politics
4. If not champions, then?

- No evidence yet that these new entities or the individuals within them can take the role of effective “champions” of evaluation capacity development.
- Some attempts were made in the past to identify champions but with no success.
- However, the case studies identified entry points for ECD, an approach that can be less risky than “picking champions” that may not perform as expected.
- In particular, Sector Working Groups, which are well positioned to influence sectorial policies, could play a key role in demanding evaluations to be managed (or co-managed), as well as conducted, by national consultants and/or organisations, emphasizing both the accountability and the learning functions of evaluation.
Working on a case by case..

- **Farmer Input Subsidies Programme**, Zambia. National debate on maize subsidies highlights interplay between various interest groups around policy processes, yet limited space for policy to be made and implemented according to evidence. Little evidence of poverty reduction through subsidies despite formal policy intent and actual implementation (where rents accrue to power interest groups) – potential entry point for evidence to retarget subsidies or removal. Important that evidence debated in public space, does not require high level of political demand.

- **Imihingo**, Rwanda, you need to work within the centralized political demand structures. Getting into the debate is harder but evidence use is once the political buy in should lead to improved implementation fidelity.
5. Variance of entry points

- On donor influence, usefulness of evaluation and identification of entry points.
- Sometimes it has been argued that donor influence may curtail the usefulness of evaluation. However, as the country case study of Rwanda shows, in a country that has strong ownership of its policies, this is a non-issue.
- In Zambia, the usefulness of evaluations would depend on the entry point(s), and the same applies to Ghana.
- In Malawi it is difficult to identify appropriate entry points for evaluations to be useful, and for ECD. One option is to argue that in cases where the political regime does not provide an enabling environment for evaluation nothing can or should be done with respect to ECD.
- The Ethiopia case study shows some of these possible entry points, which may contribute to create a dynamic process leading to a wider set of ECD opportunities in the future.
END