

Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity Development in Africa

A HIGH-LEVEL SEMINAR HELD IN ABIDJAN, CÔTE d'Ivoire, in November 1998, brought together teams of senior officials from 12 African countries and 21 international development assistance agencies. Their task was to look at the current status—and help plan the future—of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity development in Africa. Participants acknowledged that M&E was once seen as primarily a donor activity, but no longer. A number of African countries—like their counterparts in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean—are seeking to build national M&E capacity to realize its benefits within their own development agendas. The global trend toward more accountable, responsive, and efficient government has bolstered the appeal of M&E programs, as has their clear utility in supporting planned public sector reforms and maximizing the use of scarce resources.

Abidjan 1990, Abidjan 1998

In March 1987, a conference was held under the auspices of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to give donors and beneficiaries the opportunity to discuss evaluation. This exchange served to highlight the need to strengthen the evaluation

capacity of developing countries. From this meeting grew the plan for the first Abidjan seminar, which was held 2–4 May 1990. The objectives of the 1990 meeting included clarification of evaluation needs as perceived by the countries themselves and an exploration of avenues for strengthening self-evaluation capacity. The second Abidjan meeting was intended



to follow-up the many issues raised in 1990, but also to break new ground. It was organized by the African Development Bank, with support from the World Bank, and in consultation with DAC's Working Party on Aid Evaluation (WPAE).

The Agenda

The 1998 Abidjan seminar was convened with an ambitious set of goals. It was to achieve the following:

- Provide an overview of progress with the development of M&E capacities in Africa in the context of public sector reform and public expenditure management.
- Achieve consensus on the purposes, elements, and processes of M&E in support of development.
- Share lessons of experience in the development of M&E capacity development concepts, constraints, and approaches in Africa.
- Identify strategies and resources for building M&E supply and demand in African countries.
- Provide tools for developing a country M&E action plan.
- Equip the country teams, representing 12 African nations, with the knowledge and skills to develop preliminary action plans for M&E systems, based on the circumstances in each individual country.
- Create country and regional networks to encourage follow-on work.

To approach these issues, the seminar brought together senior participants from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea, Malawi, Morocco, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, and a large number of representatives of development assistance agencies, including the African Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, WPAE (DAC), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the British Department for International Development, DANIDA (Denmark), Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Cooperation Development Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the French Ministère des Affaires étrangères, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

What Is To Be Gained?

Seminar participants voiced a number of views of what developing countries stood to gain from the development of national M&E capabilities. It was noted that evaluation findings can inform government resource allocation, permitting greater clarity in decisionmaking, particularly in the budget process. Their application can also allow scarce resources to be used more effectively and deliberately. This view moves beyond traditional M&E

Box 1: M&E Redefined

M&E WAS LONG VIEWED AS PROJECT-BASED and donor-driven, focused on externally financed aid, and concerned with emphasizing accountability. This narrow view may be responsible for the low priority given to the development of M&E capacity by many development agencies and governments.

Modern views of M&E stress a focus on the overall performance of countries, sectors, and programs, as well as of projects. M&E is also seen as an aid to resource allocation and prioritization and to sound management—it offers past experience as a guide, and encourages the “voice” and participation of civil society.

at the project level. Instead, M&E is now cast as an approach to help governments assess and prioritize their overall budgets—including both external and domestic funding.

M&E also offers government managers a way to track the performance of ongoing activities at the national, sectoral, program, or project level. In this way, it serves as a results-based management tool that can lead to learning and improved performance.

The availability of M&E findings can also serve to foster the accountability of governments to their citizens for the effectiveness of development efforts and the quality of government.

Another aspect of accountability is the performance of development agencies—are their efforts achieving value for the money? And governments are accountable to development agencies and to the international community for their stewardship of aid flows. With greater global integration, it has become increasingly clear that policy convergence and sound macroeconomic policies cannot power long-term growth on their own—the quality of public expenditures is equally significant. Large-scale, low-return projects (which generally flourish where evaluation is weak) tend to aggravate financial crises.

Building M&E Capacities—Lessons from National Experience

A particular focus of the Abidjan seminar was the growing experience with M&E systems and frameworks in the governments of both developed and developing countries. The experience of developed countries amply illustrates the potential links between national M&E capacity and good governance. That experience also reflects the opportunities and difficulties of achieving cultural

change in a government. And it illustrates the elements that must be developed—in the areas of demand, supply, and information infrastructure—to achieve a robust M&E framework.

The main precondition for the development of an M&E framework is country demand. It is not that development assistance agencies cannot take the lead in “selling” the merits of M&E frameworks, but unless a country wishes to “buy,” unless it can conclude that an M&E framework has much to offer, it is unlikely to be sustainable.

Two building blocks for effective demand are the sensitization of key stakeholders to the need for M&E and the benefits it offers, and the building of awareness of suitable techniques and approaches.

Experience tells us that the main barriers to M&E in developing countries include a lack of genuine demand and ownership; the absence of a culture of accountability, often related to issues of ethics or corruption; the lack of evaluation, accounting, or auditing skills (the supply of these skills must be developed to match demand as it grows); the poor quality of financial and other performance information, and of accounting/auditing standards and systems; the lack of M&E feedback mechanisms into decisionmaking processes; and the need to develop M&E frameworks to the minimum critical mass needed for sustainability.

It is also clear that the development of an M&E framework should not be viewed as a stand-alone activity—it would be unrealistic to attempt to simply graft an M&E framework onto an existing structure of governance if the institutional framework and incentives will not support it. If the framework and incentives are insufficient, this is a strong argument for ensuring that the development of an M&E framework is part of a broader initiative to develop governance. This approach recognizes the strong synergies between performance monitoring/evaluation and performance management.

Building M&E Capacities—Elements of Success

It has become clear that a number of factors are needed to support the successful development of an M&E framework, and that such a course should only be pursued if these elements are present, or if there are reasonable prospects for developing or creating them.

Champion Ministries/Agencies

A *champion* ministry or agency can play a powerful role in supporting and encouraging the development of an M&E framework. This is related to the challenge of winning hearts and minds within government, which requires a lead agency with power and influence, such

as a finance or planning ministry (as in Australia and Canada, for example) or a national audit office. Countries such as Indonesia have found it valuable to have the support of powerful central agencies, as well as to create a core group or network of committed supporters within the ministries. An explicit and high-profile M&E strategy can also be effective in spreading the message, as can the support of individual ministers or the Cabinet as a whole, particularly through ministerial or presidential decrees. The constitution of Colombia, for example, includes a formal requirement that M&E be undertaken and reported, and in Indonesia there is a ministerial decree along these lines.

Sustained Commitment

Sustained government commitment is also important. An M&E framework cannot be developed overnight. It can take at least a decade at the whole-of-government level to embed such a framework in a sustainable manner—it simply takes time to win support, to develop necessary skills, and to set up civil service structures and systems to make full use of M&E findings. The counterpart of the requirement for sustained government support is the need for steady support from development assistance agencies.

The multilateral and bilateral donor agencies represented at the Abidjan seminar voiced a high level of support and commitment to the development of country M&E capacities. Acknowledging past problems of ad hoc, uncoordinated approaches, they committed their organizations to working together in a much more collaborative and coordinated partnership to support countries’ efforts to develop their M&E capacities.

Need for Tailored Approaches

A whole-of-government approach (as in Australia, Canada, Chile, and Indonesia) has advantages in achieving momentum and helping to ensure that laggard minis-

Box 2: Supporting M&E Development

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE AGENCIES HAVE much to offer in support of country efforts to develop M&E capacities. One challenge for the World Bank and other agencies has been to bring together the experience and expertise of its evaluation, advisory, and operational areas in a coordinated manner. The Bank has established a formal, internal partnership—including Operational Core Services, the World Bank Institute (the Bank’s training unit), and the Operations Evaluation Department—to help provide this support, in close collaboration with operational areas such as its Africa Regional unit and external partners.

tries endeavor to keep up with those in the lead. A whole-of-government approach might be especially feasible if a major series of reforms is being contemplated, such as significant changes in public expenditure management (budgetary processes and decisionmaking) in response to budgetary imperatives.

But a whole-of-government approach might be unrealistic in a number of developing countries—it can be too difficult to achieve. In many countries, a more realistic and modest approach might be to start with an initial focus on ongoing performance monitoring—possibly in selected ministries or sectors, to create a demonstration effect—and then to spread the approach to other sectors and ministries, and to other performance measurement tools and evaluations, as opportunities arise or can be created.

This kind of sequencing depends on perceptions that satisfactory benefits are being realized in return for the costs of the initial, more modest, approach. Chile has taken such an incremental approach, following an initial focus on performance information, and this has generated demand for answers about program outcomes and causality. These are the kinds of questions that only evaluations can fully answer.

Country Initiatives

As part of the seminar, each of the 12 groups representing developing countries was asked to identify the initiatives that appeared most feasible for inclusion in an M&E action plan for their country (see box 3). Several recurrent themes were identified:

- Institutional support—from both within and outside Africa—for developing M&E is seen as crucial. Improved legislation; new administrative guidelines for evaluation; increased awareness of the problems by national governments, donors, or international organizations are just a few of the possible measures—all avenues of support must be utilized. If the momentum for development of M&E is to be sustained, it may not be African governments alone that would do well to devise and program action plans, but the donor organizations as well.
- Training support in Africa (in M&E concepts, methods, and practices) appeared to be an important element of any program to develop M&E capacity.
- Databases were suggested, including one that would list evaluators (practitioners, consultants, government officials in charge of M&E, auditing boards, and private sector firms). A database that would collect lessons learned and good practices in M&E and make this information accessible was also suggested.

After Abidjan

As the participants departed Abidjan, they did so with the knowledge that the context for the development of M&E capacity has changed. Africa is experiencing a new development momentum. At the same time, the outlook for development partnerships across the development community is at its most promising. With the spread of results-based management, there is a growing demand for evaluation capacity development (ECD) pro-

Box 3: Summary of Initiatives Presented in the Proposed Action Plans

List of major initiatives in the proposed action plans	Number of action plans including the initiative
Institutional reforms	
■ Adoption and application of appropriate legislation associated with production of manuals, guides, and other tools	6
■ Building of consensus, awareness, and acceptance for M&E activities in key decision centers	8
■ Transparency rules applied to evaluations, enhancing accountability	1
Human resources development	
■ Training of trainers, officials, and technicians involved in M&E	10
■ Participation in joint evaluations with external funding agencies	1
■ Creation of a network of evaluators to facilitate exchanges	3
Resources management	
■ Allocation of resources for M&E	4
■ Creation of a database of information from M&E operations, with proper management tools to disseminate best practices	9

grams that will support public sector reform. The importance of this function has been magnified by the growing voice of civil society, which has brought the issues of good governance and more effective public administration to the forefront.

The diversity of experience offered by the participants also made it clear that there is no standard approach to ECD. Each country presents a unique profile of administrative culture, demand for ECD, and level of technical knowledge, and each country plan must be designed with those unique qualities in mind.

► This *Précis* is based on *Evaluation Capacity Development in Africa*, a joint publication of the World Bank and the African Development Bank. For more information on evaluation capacity development, please contact [Keith Mackay](#), tel: 1-202/473-7178. Available to Bank Executive Directors and staff from the Internal Documents Unit and from regional information service centers, and to the public from the World Bank InfoShop.

