

Tshediso Matona Speech: 2018 National Evaluation Seminar

Honourable guests

Good morning to all of you

Opening

Thank you for being here today, and for joining us at the third National Evaluation Seminar which has been supporting an emerging community of practice around evaluation in the public sector. We have invited all national departments, Offices of the Premier, provincial Departments of Cooperative Governance and for the very first time state-owned entities.

Statement of importance of significance of evaluation, democracy and country

The National Development Plan and our 14 national priority outcome areas (the medium-term strategic framework - MTSF) allow us as government to focus on the main priorities we set out to achieve, with a set of impact, outcome and output targets. But how do we ensure we are on the correct path, and how do we ensure to learn and improve? How do we ensure value for money and that we are investing in the appropriate things? As you know one of the main roles of DPME is now on budget prioritisation, a difficult task. For this we need evaluations to inform us on what is working or not and why, where investment is not producing the results needed and where we need to invest more

We need evidence to assist with a better understanding of policy performance and to inform decision-making. As we know, the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) is a knowledge organisation, which places emphasis on using evidence from monitoring, evaluation and research in guiding what is, or is not working and why and how policy, programme and projects are implemented and could be improved. While research delves into a problem and perhaps how it could be solved, evaluation focuses on specific policies and programmes to see whether they are working, whether we are doing the correct thing, and why.

As the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF, 2011: ii) mentions, *“If we are to improve our performance as government, we have to reflect on what we are doing, what we are achieving what we set out to achieve, and why unexpected results are occurring. We cannot advance without making mistakes on the way, but we must evaluate and learn from our successes and our mistakes. Without this we cannot improve”*.

From my perspective in working with the National Planning Commission, a key challenge is to make sure we are using evaluations to diagnose the critical challenges facing the NDP, and that we are using these evaluations to feed back into planning.

National Evaluation System

The National Evaluation System is in its seventh year of implementation, with seven National Evaluation Plans approved by Cabinet per financial year from 2012/13. There are 67 national evaluations completed or underway, with 44 completed reports. Eight of nine provinces have current provincial evaluation plans, with 102 evaluations included. 57 departments now have departmental evaluation plans. And to enable this

DPME has worked on standards, competencies, guidelines, courses etc, so this institutionalisation has proceeded despite only 16 staff supporting NEP evaluations and the national evaluation system. You will hear more of this today.

There are some challenges for the evaluation system, and as we aim to practice what we preach, we have undertaken an evaluation of the National Evaluation System to see how we need to adapt it to take it forward for the next 5-10 years. You will hear more about the findings and the improvement plan later. We have already taken on board many of the recommendations in the Evaluations Chief Directorate 2018/2019 Operational Plan. But I know the Unit wishes to use today to share those recommendations with you, as we have to build the system together, and it will only work through the commitment of all spheres of government.

DPME has also been asked to start undertaking M&E of state-owned entities. DPME has for the very first time in its 2017/2018 National Evaluation Plan an evaluation on Governance of State Owned Entities. We also have a target in the DPME APP to have 5 SOEs with evaluation plans. So at this seminar there is a parallel track on SOEs and we are looking forward to hearing how you suggest evaluation in SOEs should be taken forward.

While evaluation has progressed well in national and provincial government, DPME has only tested the water in what we should be doing with local government. A situational analysis on Gauteng metros was commissioned by the DPME in collaboration with CLEAR to understand what may be appropriate for metros, who have large programmes which do need evaluation. COGTA is the support institution for local government, so provincial Departments of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs have been invited to this seminar so that we can start a discussion on what we should be doing about evaluation in the local government space.

And we need to explore different models of evaluation, including quick and dirty evaluations that can feed rapidly into the policy process. We also have the opportunity now to take a broader view based on a number of programme evaluations to look at the broader sector. This has already started in the human settlements space, as well as in support to smallholder farmers.

We have succeeded in helping to create an evaluation profession, but we need to ensure that this is not monopolized by established operators and widen the diversity of evaluators. To this end DPME is championing an Emerging Evaluators Programme aimed at increasing access of evaluators in particular black evaluators.

But the conclusion of the evaluation of the NES is that we are well on our way to institutionalising a government-wide evaluation system, but that this is a 20 year project.

Importance of Cabinet's role

I can assure you that Cabinet welcomes these evaluations, which provide rigorous evidence in the process of evidence based policy making, and they find it an opportunity to get a deep dive into what is working and not and why. All too often monitoring reports skate on the surface but these reports provide an opportunity for ministers to understand in depth what is happening, and Cabinet often spends a whole

hour discussing them. We remain committed to using evidence from evaluations to ensure we are an efficient and accountable government of people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I want to thank you all for your commitment to not only undertaking evaluations, but also to use evidence to strengthen your policy and programmes. While DPME coordinates and facilitates the system, the national evaluation system depends on all departments participating, investing in evaluations and using the results.

As the evaluation system evolves, I would like to see that a culture of evidence usage is embedded in policy making, effective planning and implementation. We must ensure that the requisite capacity in all national and provincial departments is strengthened, that evaluations are undertaken in a cost-effective manner, and that we start to see improved policies and programmes as a result.

We thank you for your continued support in this process and I wish you fruitful deliberations in these two days.