A focus on M&E of results: an example from the Presidency, South Africa

Sean Phillips\textsuperscript{a}, Ian Goldman\textsuperscript{a}, Nolwazi Gasa\textsuperscript{a}, Ismail Akhalwaya\textsuperscript{a} & Bernadette Leon\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a} Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Pretoria, The Presidency, Republic of South Africa
Published online: 22 Dec 2014.


To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/19439342.2014.966453

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE
A focus on M&E of results: an example from the Presidency, South Africa

Sean Phillips, Ian Goldman*, Nolwazi Gasa, Ismail Akhalwaya and Bernadette Leon

Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Pretoria, The Presidency, Republic of South Africa

The Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency was established in South Africa in 2009 by an incoming administration to improve the impact of government on citizens, notably around delivery of services. DPME has established a number of planning, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems including around priority outcomes, a national evaluation system, and management performance assessments of departments. Key helping factors include political commitment, strong programme leadership, and some strong institutions. Inhibiting factors include the predominant compliance culture of M&E, poor programme planning, and poor administrative data.

Keywords: M&E; monitoring; evaluation; results; performance; South Africa

1. Introduction

This article is written four years after the establishment of a national champion for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in South Africa, a Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), which began operating in April 2010. It draws extensively from chapters in a forthcoming book on evaluation in South Africa. The article documents the very rapid development of this important policy experiment in developing a wide-ranging and ambitious M&E system. It highlights the development of four of the systems. Lessons are drawn from these systems of factors which are promoting or inhibiting development and use of results-based M&E, and which influence the sustainability of these systems going forward.

2. Overview of the approaches to results measurement in the South African government

2.1. Transforming the public service after democracy

Prior to 1994, the apartheid state was centralised and controlled by the security apparatus, with a veneer of parliamentary democracy, maintaining the political disenfranchisement of the majority, and the deliberate engineering of inequality. The passage from apartheid to democracy required a vital role of the state to mediate social and economic relations in this highly unequal society. New social and economic rights were embedded in the South African Constitution, and the public space opened for debate and dissent.

Three spheres of government were created (national, provincial, and local), with their own as well as concurrent competences, with each sphere having considerable autonomy. The Constitution recognises the need for a responsive, development-oriented public service,
with effective oversight by Parliament and the nine provincial legislatures. This has implications for a system of national planning and M&E, as national government cannot impose systems, and implementation requires the agreement of these different spheres.

National Treasury has been a big driver for change, empowered by the Public Finance Management Act of 1999, regulating financial management in national and provincial governments and seeking to ensure that all revenue, expenditure, assets, and liabilities of those governments are managed efficiently and effectively. Later, the Municipal Finance Management Act sought to do the same for local government. Treasury began codifying key monitoring roles, initially with a system of strategic plans (SPs) and annual performance plans (APPs) with quarterly performance monitoring. This was developed for provinces in 2000 and in 2010 was extended to national departments. Departments are also required to submit annual reports.

Another driver of performance strongly related to finance has been the emergence of a very strong Auditor General (AGSA), with its main focus on financial audit, but later adding the audit of reported performance against predetermined objectives. What the Auditor General has driven is also a focus on processes, as their key focus is compliance with legal process, as well as the accuracy and reliability of reported information. AGSA and National Treasury have been powerful drivers of performance, although with insufficient impact bearing in mind the relatively poor audit outcomes that prevail (see, for example, AGSA 2011).

2.2. The development of a government-wide M&E system

In 2005, Cabinet approved a plan for the development of a Government-wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWMES). The GWMES was envisaged as a ‘system of systems’ in which each department would have a functional monitoring system, out of which the necessary information can be extracted. An important departure point of the GWM&ES was that existing M&E capacities and programmes in line function departments should as far as possible be retained and synchronised within the framework of the GWM&ES (Engela and Ajam 2010).

In 2007, a Policy Framework was published to guide the overarching government-wide M&E System (Presidency 2007). This included the need for specific policy Frameworks for Programme Performance Information (FMPPI), quality of statistical data, and evaluation and in the process sought to strengthen the linkages between the Presidency, Treasury and the National Statistics Agency. Policy frameworks were developed for these elements between 2007 and 2011 (Engela and Ajam 2010, 2), including the FMPPI which sought to use a results-based management conceptual base with the structuring of departments’ budgets around high-level budget programmes and providing a framework for indicators and reporting (National Treasury 2007).

While a strong point in the original conceptualisation of the GWM&E system was acknowledgement that the system was to be built over time, this approach has proved difficult in practice. With different paradigms of reform and views of the state in different agencies, this approach has led to central departments creating separate reporting systems. Similar information may be requested several times from departments, leading to additional reporting burdens on departments already battling considerable constraints in terms of skills and capacity, and suffering from reporting fatigue.
2.3. **New administration in 2009**

The government that came to power following the 2009 elections faced a number of pressures, which included persistent poverty and inequality, widespread service delivery protests at municipal level, and loss of some political support in the 2009 elections. These pressures resulted in a greater willingness of the ruling party and the government to be frank about the quality of public services, corruption, and other governance problems as well as a political consensus to improve government performance. M&E was seen as an important mechanism to improve performance. This was partly linked to a desire by Cabinet and the ruling party to get early warning of problems, to understand what was going wrong, and how it could be corrected. This fits with the discourse in the ruling party on the developmental and activist state which must intervene to support social and economic transformation.

There was political pressure for the responsibility for planning not to remain de facto in National Treasury, but to create a specific unit responsible for planning. The Presidency looked at the experience of the Blair government in the UK focusing on a limited number of priority outcomes supported by a Delivery Unit in the Prime Minister’s Office, as well as experience in Malaysia and South Korea. After the 2009 elections, a Ministry of Performance M&E was created in the South African Presidency, and a new department (DPME) was created in January 2010. A planning body, the National Planning Commission (NPC), was established in the Presidency to focus on a 2030 vision and National Development Plan (NDP), although with an advisory rather than executive role.

2.4. **Responsibilities for M&E after 2009**

Post-2009, a number of organisations are responsible for planning and M&E in South Africa (Figure 1). Responsibilities and mandates are dispersed in national, provincial, and constitutional power/legislative.
local governments due to the semi-federal nature of the state, with national government having limited powers to drive M&E in other government spheres (provinces/states, and local government). In 2013, the responsibility for SPs/APPs was transferred to DPME, strengthening DPME’s role in medium-term planning. There has been some realignment post the 2014 elections with the NPC and DPME being merged to create a Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (also DPME).

The Constitution mandates the Auditor General and the Public Service Commission to carry out independent monitoring of certain aspects of government and report on this to Parliament. Three national departments have strong legal powers to regulate certain types of planning and by implication also M&E. National Treasury has issued regulations for departmental SPs, APPs, and quarterly reporting against these, although from 2013, DPME has been given the responsibility for the system. DPSA is responsible for the performance of the public service and service delivery improvement. The Department of Cooperative Governance is responsible for monitoring of local government. The President has powers from the Constitution to ensure coordinated government, and the Presidency has taken on certain planning and M&E roles, using the authority of its position and Cabinet decisions rather than legal powers.

3. DPME’s role in results measurement and M&E

3.1. Establishment of DPME

The DPME was established in January 2010, initially to introduce the outcomes approach to planning, and M&E of government’s top priority outcomes. Table 1 shows DPME’s main roles prior to the merger with the NPC in late 2014.

| M&E of national priorities | - Developing the MTSF/outcome plans (delivery agreements)  
| - Monitoring (that is, tracking) progress against the delivery agreements  
| - Evaluating to see how to improve programmes, policies, and plans  
| - Operation Phakisa – intensive planning, M&E, and problem-solving on priority programmes, building on the Malaysian experience |
| Management performance | - Assessing quality of management practices in individual departments (MPAT) at national/state level  
| - Assessing quality of management practices and delivery in local government (LGMIM) |
| M&E of frontline service delivery | - Monitoring of experience of citizens when obtaining services (joint with states) including citizen-based monitoring  
| - Presidential Hotline – including tracking responses and follow-up |
| Government-wide M&E System | - National M&E policy frameworks  
| - M&E platforms across government – nationally, provincially  
| - Structures of M&E units/capacity development  
| - National Evaluation System  
| - Five-yearly reviews of changes in the country – for example, 20-year review  
| - Annual production of development indicators and the 20 years review are specific named documents  
| - Data quality issues |

Source: Adapted from presentation to Standing Committee on Appropriations, July 2014.
The approach that DPME has taken to develop its mandate is shown in Box 1.

Box 1. DPME’s approach

- Clear political and technical champions, with a Minister and Deputy Minister for Performance M&E in the Presidency as well as DPME as the technical custodian of government-wide M&E;
- A government-wide approach, building a coalition across government so that M&E is not just seen as the Presidency forcing compliance;
- A whole of government approach – including both national and provincial governments, building partnerships between levels to ensure the cross-sphere impact;
- A strategic approach, for example, focusing on outcomes, rather than trying to tackle the whole system at once;
- Promoting a learning rather than punitive approach to overcome the current compliance-based system;
- Promoting transparency of M&E information to help name and shame and promote incentives for improvement;
- Using international experience to avoid reinventing wheels and fast-track learning and system development – based on study tours, research, exchanges, and building ongoing networks with peer countries, for example, the outcomes approach (focused on UK, Malaysia, and Indonesia); Management Performance Assessment (Canada, UK, New Zealand, and Turkey); Evaluation (Mexico, Colombia, Australia, Canada, and DAC);
- Not starting with legislation, but piloting approaches;
- Using M&E not just as a post-box for reports but also promoting assessments in the field.

The rest of the article focuses on four of the systems introduced by DPME: the outcomes system, the national evaluation system, the management performance assessment system, as well as the strategic planning system that DPME has recently taken over. It then draws out lessons emerging from DPME’s work.

3.2. The outcomes approach

The outcomes approach was introduced as a transformation initiative geared towards changing the way government works, informed by the theory of results-based management and influenced by international experiences such as that of the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit in the Blair Administration in the UK. It aims at strengthening the strategic focus of government, improving interdepartmental and intergovernmental coordination, and focusing attention on implementation of what became 12 (now 14) priorities. It also specifically aimed to ensure a result or outcome rather than activity focus of government – from what we do to what we achieve (Presidency 2009).

The work on outcomes became the initial focus of the new DPME. The 12 outcomes such as quality basic education, a healthy population, reduced crime, and so on were agreed in January 2010, building on the five priorities in the ruling party’s manifesto.
Performance agreements were signed with ministers in April 2010. Between July and November 2010, outcome facilitators were appointed at Deputy Director General (DDG) level to support implementation of the outcomes, and delivery agreements were concluded and signed by the different departments and provinces. The first quarterly monitoring report on the outcomes was produced in November 2010 (Phillips 2012). Since then, these reports have been produced on a quarterly basis, highlighting progress against the plans at output and sub-output levels, problems, and actions taken to resolve the problems.

Another key element of the post-2009 administration was the development of the NDP, adopted by Parliament in August 2012. For the new administration following elections in 2014, the outcomes have been linked to the NDP, with 14 outcomes (2 added), and with a five-year Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) developed based on the 14 outcomes as the five-year plan towards achieving the NDP. This was published in August 2014.

3.3. The national evaluation system

In 2011, a study tour to Mexico, Colombia, and the US was undertaken by a group of departments led by DPME to inform development of an evaluation policy. A National Evaluation Policy Framework was developed and adopted by Cabinet in November 2011 (DPME 2011). This takes a strategic approach focusing on important policies/programmes/plans for the outcomes, and those selected are embedded in a National Evaluation Plan (NEP). Three NEPs have now been approved and implemented since the first in June 2012 (DPME 2012a). The focus of the system is on utilisation, all evaluations are made publically available unless confidential, and they must have an improvement plan, which is then monitored every six months. 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 are implemented as a partnership between the department(s) concerned and DPME, and DPME part-funds the evaluations (contributing an average of US$90,000 for 2014/15). An Evaluation and Research Unit with 15 staff has been established in DPME to drive the evaluation system and provide technical support, supported by a cross-government Evaluation Technical Working Group. A key role is played by the outcome sector specialists in DPME, who work closely with each of the 14 outcomes and lead on the relationships with specific departments. Eighteen guidelines and templates have been developed as well as standards for evaluation and competencies for programme managers, M&E staff, and evaluators. Six short courses have been developed with the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results and over 600 government staff trained. An evaluation panel has been created with 42 evaluation organisations selected through a tender process.

The first evaluations only started in October 2012, but 39 evaluations are now completed or underway, covering around US$5 billion of government expenditure over the three-year medium term expenditure framework. Eleven have now completed with the first two already presented to Cabinet and so made public, with others on their way to Cabinet. Six of the 39 evaluations are impact evaluations. DPME has also undertaken an audit of evaluations conducted between 2006 and 2012, which have been quality assessed and a publically accessible evaluation repository created of those evaluations that passed the quality threshold of a score of 3/5. As at 31 August 2014, there were 119 evaluations in the repository that have been quality assessed and passed the minimum score.
A similar process is happening at provincial level, and both Western Cape and Gauteng provinces developed provincial evaluation plans for 2013/14, with the remaining seven provinces at different stages of developing provincial evaluation plans. Three national departments have developed departmental evaluation plans, work which will accelerate in 2015/16.

3.4. Monitoring the management performance of departments and municipalities

DPME undertook a study tour to Canada in 2010 where participants were impressed by the system for assessing management performance. Research was undertaken on similar systems in different countries and a system developed, now called the Management Performance Assessment Tool, MPAT. The first phase was rolled out in October 2011. The system has a number of underlying principles:

- A focus on management performance, not service delivery performance as different departments provide different services and it is difficult to provide a standardised assessment;
- Building on existing tools being undertaken by government departments, so aiming to promote buy-in and avoid reinventing wheels;
- Not including financial management, which Treasury was already leading on;
- A focus on facilitated self-assessment, followed by peer moderation, so promoting departmental ownership of the process;
- A collaboration with Offices of the Premier in provinces to perform a similar role for provincial departments;
- Repeating on an annual basis to track improvement.

Figure 2 shows the levels for 1 of the 31 standards, on M&E. In 2013, 43 per cent of national and provincial departments were not compliant with the legal requirements on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator name: Use of monitoring and evaluation outputs</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Performance level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department does not have an M&amp;E policy/framework or does not have capacity to generate information.</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Level 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring reports are available but are not used regularly by top management and programme managers to track progress and inform improvement.</td>
<td>Quarterly monitoring reports</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring reports are regularly used by top management and programme managers to track progress and inform improvement.</td>
<td>Quarterly monitoring reports</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All above in Level 3plus: Evaluations of major programmes are conducted periodically and the results are used to inform changes to programme plans, business processes, APP, and strategic plan.</td>
<td>All above in Level 3 plus: Evaluation Reports Changes to programmes and plans</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. The MPAT levels on M&E.
Source: Adapted from presentation to Standing Committee on Appropriations, July 2014.
M&E, 35 per cent were compliant and 23 per cent were ‘smart’, in this case implementing evaluations (up from 19 per cent in 2012).

All national and provincial departments have now completed the process, which has been through three annual cycles. Each national and provincial department is ranked on their performance against these indicators (see DPME 2013b), and the results are discussed in Cabinet and made public. These results get considerable media attention, and departments are sensitive to the naming and shaming which arises from the findings. Despite worrying results, the response to the process by departments has been very positive, and the self-assessment process encourages them to internalise the results and reflect on the findings. In general, management is very interested in how their departments perform compared to others, and many departments have already implemented improvements in preparation for the next assessment cycle. The MPAT process has also identified areas of management where national policy departments need to implement support initiatives.

A similar process is being implemented for municipalities, called the Local Government Management Improvement Model (LGMIM). As local government has standardised delivery of many services (notably water, electricity, sanitation, and waste), the quality of these services can also be monitored.

3.5. Linking monitoring of performance to plans
M&E systems should be closely linked to planning and budgeting. In South Africa until 2009, there was no clear planning mandate in government and no national plan. Prior to 2009, National Treasury managed the government’s basic planning and M&E system of five-year SPs and APPs.

When the outcomes system was established, the SPs had already been defined for 2009–2014, and so, it took time to try and ensure the alignment between the departmental plans and the cross-cutting outcomes. With the launch of the MTSF in August 2014, an integrated framework is in place and departments can align their 2015–2019 SPs/APPs to this.

4. How M&E evidence is being used in South Africa
Despite the compliance focus in government (see discussion later), there are increasing examples in South Africa of where M&E information is being used to inform policymaking and decisions and to improve accountability. Some examples of use and impact include the following:

- Quarterly reports on progress in implementing the priority outcomes, which have contributed to differing degrees in problem-solving and improving implementation, as well as providing a strategic focus for Cabinet;
- DPME preparing briefings for the President on the performance of ministers, drawing from the various M&E tools. These were used as a contribution to decisions taken on reshuffling ministers;
- Regular briefings to Cabinet and Parliamentary committees on management performance and on performance of frontline services that have contributed to decision-making;
- Departments who perform poorly in the MPAT process undertaking corrective actions to address some of the problems identified. Overall, the number of
departments compliant on at least 50 per cent of MPAT indicators has risen from 59 in 2012 to 65 in 2013;

- Some sectors/outcomes now having a wide range of evaluations (for example, education, rural development, employment, and human settlements) and an increasing number of national departments (currently 15/46) are undertaking evaluations. These are providing a significant evidence base;

- The first evaluations completed resulting in changes in the programmes, for example, findings from the evaluation on Early Childhood Development already being incorporated in a new ECD policy that was tabled in May 2014, and the Department of Basic Education moving the focus from quantity to quality in terms of rolling out the reception year of schooling;

- The MTSF launched in August 2014 incorporates actions and targets resulting from the experience from 2010–2014 on outcome monitoring as well as evaluations (see DPME 2014); and

- Improvements in response rate by national and provincial departments and local government to complaints to the Presidential Hotline. The response rate has risen from 64 per cent in 2010 to 93 per cent in December 2013 (DPME 2013a). In addition, 70 per cent of frontline facilities monitored showed improvements during second monitoring visits.

5. Lessons around factors which promote and which impede a focus on results measurement

5.1. Factors supporting use of M&E

There has been considerable pressure from the electorate and the ruling party to improve performance of the public sector, with M&E seen as a key tool for doing this. This has resulted in high-level political commitment in South Africa for a strong M&E system, from the President, from Cabinet, and from the responsible Minister. The President has himself seen M&E as critical for him to know what is happening across the country. This commitment has facilitated the rapid establishment of a strong champion, DPME, and the increase of its capacity to a department that now has around 200 staff. Robert, Poate, and Villanger (2014) point to the importance of leadership, communicating the need for results, resourcing results measurement, actively requesting results data, and showing that they have used results data as part of their decision-making. There is evidence of all these in the South African case, including leadership from Cabinet, the Minister, and the Director General. In addition, there is a strong National Treasury and Auditor General, which have provided rigour and depth to the system.

An important factor is that each M&E tool has a strong driver, a high-level programme manager of deputy-director general (deputy permanent secretary) rank. These have been an effective set of leaders/managers who have created systems from scratch and got them up and running extremely quickly, establishing strong teams to run them. In addition, unlike many government departments, these programme managers have had a high degree of delegated authority that has helped them to manage effectively.

South Africa has sought to avoid reinventing wheels, learning from others’ experience using study tours, research, exchanges, and building ongoing networks with peer countries to see what is useful, learn, and adapt. This has enabled rapid prototyping, piloting, and upscaling. In addition, reflective processes are being used to ensure that we learn as we go.
While the system is *domestically driven* and primarily domestically resourced, some donor support has enabled the system to develop much more quickly and to pilot systems before they are scaled up using government funds. The presence of an EU-funded programme, the Programme to Support Pro-Poor Policy Development (PSPPD) promoting evidence-based policymaking, was very important, providing a flexible support facility that has been crucial in supporting the emergence of DPME. Support from the Department for International Development, German technical assistance, and Canadian International Development Agency has also been important in helping to develop and pilot new systems.

5.2. Factors that hinder

In 2012, DPME undertook a survey of national and provincial departments to understand how M&E was used by departments, with a 62 per cent response rate. Figure 3 shows the disturbing results, which show the dominant *compliance culture*. As can be seen for many departments, M&E is not used as a way of learning, is not seen as a strategic function, and often the results are avoided. DPME’s work has been to turn this around and make evidence from M&E central to decision-making, but in a somewhat hostile environment where M&E is undertaken for compliance purposes.

Using *evidence* (including M&E evidence) is only one factor in decision-making, and the importance of M&E and other evidence still needs to be proven to some. It is also important to enhance the capacity of policymakers and managers to generate and use evidence to support policy-making and decision-making. For this reason, DPME is putting an emphasis on training for directors-general (DGs) and deputy directors-general (DDGs) in the use of evidence, and for Parliament in how M&E tools can help their

![Figure 3. Culture-based barriers to M&E in national and provincial departments. Source: DPME (2012b).](image)
oversight function. However, there is a long way to go, and for example, the parliamentary committee that DPME reports to was changed after the 2014 election, and all the members changed, so meaning that the significant investment made by DPME in the previous committee has to be restarted.

*M&E is not seen as a key part of the strategic function*, essential for planning and budgeting, tracking progress, learning, and improving implementation. All managers need to view monitoring as one of their basic management functions, facilitating continuous improvement. Evaluation needs to be seen as a strategic investment in strengthening what government does and directing future investment.

It has proved difficult to achieve optimal *coordination* among the core M&E stakeholders and avoid duplication of activities. This is partly due to ‘turf battles’ between departments but also reflects differences in views on the nature and role of the state and the best approach to public sector reform (Engela and Ajam 2010).

A key challenge arising from the outcomes work has been the difficulty of keeping the plans for the priority outcomes (delivery agreements) short and strategic – there is a tendency for too many indicators, which is difficult to manage, as well as a tendency to produce process indicators, rather than indicators that measure actual improvements at output or outcome level.

Most of the targets in departments’ APPs also relate to activities rather than results. There are usually no five-year impact or outcome level targets in the SPs, and the APPs usually focus on single-year activity-level targets. The APPs and reports against them are not really enabling effective measurement and evaluation of results, but rather processes. DPME has taken over responsibility for the system and is starting an evaluation of the strategic planning/APP system that will help in refining the system going forward.

The compliance mindset means that departments are not necessarily using the results of M&E to inform improvements in their programmes. The MPAT assessments of all 156 national and provincial departments for 2012 indicated that in only 34 per cent of departments were management engaging with their quarterly progress reports against the APP and using the reports to inform improvements. This raises fundamental questions about the purpose of producing the quarterly reports and their usefulness. It also raises questions about why management are not using the reports. In addition, some sectors are not conducting external evaluations through the NEP (for example, health, energy, crime, infrastructure, local government, environment, international, and social cohesion), or even where evaluations have been conducted, some departments are delaying taking evaluation results to Cabinet.

There is inadequate translation of the delivery agreements into departmental plans and from strategic to operational plans. In general, there is a gap between SPs/APPs and operational plans which impinges on implementation. This is related to the poor plans for implementation programmes (such as the Integrated Nutrition Programme, or Comprehensive Rural Development Programme), which make M&E difficult. DPME is addressing this with a guideline and proposals for roll-out of a support process to improve planning. In addition, budget categories do not necessarily fit these implementation programmes, with expenditure occurring in different spheres of government and across different parts of the vote, making it very difficult to get a realistic picture of expenditure. National Treasury and DPME are undertaking an Expenditure Review process that provides a compelling picture of this expenditure as well as the implications of different service options. A linked problem is that as the system does not formally recognise implementation programmes, there is no strong structural link between the plans for implementation programmes and the SPs and APPs. This means there is a disjunction...
between the indicators and targets in the SP and APP and the indicators and targets, which management need to monitor when implementing policies and programmes.

A major challenge is the quality of administrative data. South Africa has a relatively strong national statistics agency (StatsSA) that undertakes a number of regular surveys, apart from the census. Where there is good data, this is a powerful helping factor. A very positive example is the introduction of annual national assessments (ANA) of school learners by the Department of Basic Education. This enabled, for example, an impact evaluation of the effect of the reception year of schooling, as the data could be correlated with later learning outcomes through the ANA (DBE/DPME, 2013). However, in many sectors, administrative data are patchy, and there is a need for common data standards across government. Information management systems to produce the data required are not fully in place in many departments, and required data are often unavailable.

Evaluation capacity amongst service providers and in government is limited, and considerable capacity building is needed if the national evaluation system is to work effectively, and for supply to the likely demand for evaluation, which is anticipated to rise considerably over the next 10 years.

5.3. Incentives

A key issue in the effectiveness of the system is the incentives. At present, the incentives are primarily towards compliance – avoiding problems being highlighted, and in particular, minimising issues that the Auditor General will pick up. The Auditor General’s strict auditing against the FMPPI and SPs/APPs is driving an important change process in departments, including improving the precision of indicator definition and target setting, improving data collection and data management systems, and improving the accuracy and reliability of reporting. However, it is also having the unintended consequence of providing a perverse incentive for departments to game the system and to deliberately set targets low or to only set targets that are easier to achieve.

Figure 3 shows that 56 per cent of departments say that departments are not treated as an opportunity to learn. DPME has sought to bring in a culture where it is not mistakes that are punished, but rather the failure to learn from mistakes. This is a message that DPME is repeating regularly with Parliament and in the executive, so that departments do not avoid problems but work actively to solve them. A recent example was the impact evaluation of the performance of the reception year of schooling, which showed disappointing results in later learning outcomes. This was presented in a constructive way where the department was congratulated for the success of its roll-out, but that the quality now needed to be emphasised and a potentially difficult situation turned into an opportunity to improve. This provides a powerful message to departments that challenges will be addressed constructively. It is important to repeat the 2012 survey to see if the culture is beginning to change.

Political decisions use evidence as one source amongst several. Performance is being used in decisions, for example, the President having sessions with Ministers to review their performance. There is no legislation underpinning the M&E system, and so, the system is based on compliance with executive decisions. As evaluations come to Cabinet in 2014, this will give strong signals of how seriously Cabinet views evidence. Demonstrating the use of evidence in decisions provides a powerful incentive for this to continue.

DPME has sought to bring in a spotlight to highlight performance issues, to make these public, which then stimulates naming and shaming, and the motivation this generates. However, it also generates fear about issues being exposed and is a motivator for some departments not submitting evaluations for the NEP. In practice, at the moment,
consequences directly linked to poor performance are limited, not least as the system of performance assessment of heads of department is not working properly, with only 68 per cent of heads of departments having performance agreements in place in June 2013.

6. Sustainability

In the medium term, the measure of DPME’s success will be when many of DPME’s functions have been internalised in departments, and when action is being taken on the findings. In the short term, a concern is the sustainability of the key driver for M&E (DPME) as a department, in particular beyond the second term of the current President who initiated this phase of M&E, and the sustainability of the systems and capacities that have been developed, such as MPAT, or evaluation. Key ways sustainability is being addressed include the following:

- Enhancing the demand for and use of M&E information, for example, by Cabinet, by Directors General, by Parliament, so key decision-makers see the value;
- Increasing responsiveness to politicians, so they see M&E as adding value to what they wish to achieve;
- Building commitment to DPME’s approach by moving from a directive style to a coordinating style, where DPME is a champion and shows leadership around M&E, but builds the involvement and commitment of partners;
- Strengthening the perceived value DPME is providing 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;
- Building a coalition to support M&E, for example, through a national Evaluation Technical Working Group, proactive work with National Treasury, joint study tours, and so on, as well as forums that strengthen the M&E voice (for example, a National M&E Forum and Provincial M&E Forum);
- Strengthening capacity around M&E, using learning events, exchanges, and training; and
- Looking to simplify systems, for example, to reduce duplication in reporting, so increasing the perceived added value that DPME brings.

The 2014 elections saw a continuation of support for DPME, with a desire to strengthen its role and mandate. The planning function of the NPC is being merged with DPME to create a Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (still DPME). The exact ramifications of this are still being worked out in August 2014 at the time of writing. Key to the ongoing success of DPME will be stability in the DPME team for the systems established to flourish and have impact.

Areas where further work is needed to promote sustainability and the effectiveness of the systems going forward include the following:

- Strengthening use of the M&E systems for accountability functions, notably by Parliament;
- Continuing to improve the effectiveness of the systems and so their added 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 body coordinating M&E such as DPME;
Increasing the consequences around failures identified by M&E as well as celebrating successes, so M&E has greater impact on improving performance; and

Some feel that legislation is needed to back the system and ensure that it has to be followed.

Specific technical areas to be followed up include the following:

- Developing the system of performance dialogue with National Treasury and specific departments on their performance, the issues emerging, and linking this to the budgeting process;
- Looking to see how to integrate the information generated from DPME’s tools, for example, around specific sectors, issues, or departments to give a 360-degree picture to decision-makers around performance; and
- Expanding the evaluation system so that it is government-wide, through development of provincial and departmental evaluation plans.

7. Conclusions

Since 2009, a strong M&E system has been built in South Africa building on political support for M&E as a means of understanding what is happening in government and why and to see through the opaque glass of the bureaucracy. The political desire for this has strengthened in the 2014 election, partly due to the perceived value of the range of systems developed in the preceding four years. There has been strong pressure for the system from Cabinet, from the ruling party, and a political champion in a Ministry established in the Presidency. There is a reasonable degree of support across the bureaucracy, although there is resistance in places, and some evidence of the system being gamed (for example, delays in results of evaluations being published).

A strong technical team has been developed in DPME, which has helped to develop credibility for the new department, and meant that it is being given a stronger mandate following the 2014 election.

There have been one to two years of reporting from the tools that have been developed. More work is needed to see how to maximise the usefulness of the data, including drawing together information from different tools. It is early days to see the consequences arising from M&E data, whether in performance of individual ministers or directors general and changes to policies, programmes, or budgets. Some early results can be seen and evaluations are underway on the outcomes approach, as well as MPAT to see emerging results and lessons. The next two years will see how much the systems are adding value and leading to changes.

Many of the technical systems that have been developed have built on international experience. Similarly, DPME’s systems (such as evaluation standards, competences, guidelines, and courses) can be used elsewhere, and DPME is making efforts to share its experience, both within Africa and more widely. However, some of the systems, for example, evaluation and MPAT, depend on a willingness to admit mistakes, which many countries are not prepared to do. Implementing M&E as a change management approach requires a willingness to face failures and learn from them.
Notes
2. The highest level technical official in a government department is a Director General, equivalent to a Permanent Secretary, who works to a Minister and Deputy Minister. DDGs are therefore high-level officials, appointed at this level to be able to work effectively with the DGs of the different sector departments and provinces.
3. The PSPPD is a partnership between the Presidency and the EU, and funded research; supported a wide range of 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.
4. DPME publications are available at www.thepresidency-dpme.gov.za

References