



POLICY BRIEF:

SOUTH AFRICA'S NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEM: A REVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION BETWEEN 2011/12-2016/17

1. Background

The introduction of the policy framework for the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation (GWM&E) system in 2007, foregrounded the development of a National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) in 2011. These two policies provided a regulatory foundation for the Department of Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation in the Presidency (DPME) to build and monitor a National Evaluation System (NES), which sought to promote systematic use of evaluations to achieve good governance.

In 2011 DPME set out four clear objectives for institutionalising evaluations across government. These were to: (i) improve decision making; (ii) improve performance; (iii) generate knowledge; and (iv) ensure accountability. The four objectives have been espoused by evaluating strategic national level interventions selected through a rigorous process beginning with an annual call for departments to submit proposals

of potentials evaluations they wish for the DPME to undertake with them.

Over the past 8 years,

8 National Evaluation Plans (NEPs)

totally 71 evaluations on a national sphere of government have been undertaken, in line with the NEPs and in partnership with various departments.

This has resulted in over 60 evaluations being completed and tabled at Cabinet – along with 2-year improvement plans. It is further noted that tremendous buy-in at the provincial sphere of government has also taken place, with 8 out of 9 Offices of the Premier have developed and approved Provincial Evaluation Plans, mirroring that of the DPME. Furthermore, a total of 61 Departmental Evaluation Plans (DEPs) were developed from departments in both national and provincial spheres of government. This not only speaks to the institutionalisation of evaluation within the national and provincial spheres government, but to the demand and supply of evidence-based knowledge products,

leading to evidence-based decision-making.

In addition to managing complex evaluations of critical policies and programmes, DPME has established itself as a champion of evaluation in the public sector. It has provided considerable advocacy and administrative support to Provincial Offices of the Premiers and national departments – including financial support to the latter. Guidelines on evaluations have been developed and made public, quality assurance systems have been put in place, and massive capacity building has been rolled out in collaboration with the National School of Government.

2. Evaluation of the National Evaluation System

During the 2016/17 financial year, the DPME undertook an implementation/impact evaluation of the National Evaluation System (NES). The evaluation was conducted using a theory based approach, and also included international benchmarking. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess whether implementation of the system was having an impact in government, and to determine how the system could be strengthened to maximise impact and value for money by looking at comparable best practice countries.



3. Approach and methodology

The evaluation made use of the mixed method approach to draw out detailed insights into the implementation of the National Evaluation System. Data and information was used from sources such as: the Literature review, document analysis and international benchmarking; Primary data collection included 112 key informant interviews and 86 survey responses, and a cost-benefit analysis of a sample of

evaluations were undertaken. Case Studies were selected from a range of departments and provinces, these included: The Department of Basic Education (DBE), Human Settlements (DHS), Justice and Constitutional Development (DJCD), Social Development (DSD), and Trade and Industry (the dti). From the provincial case studies, the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Limpopo and the Western Cape were selected.

4. Key Findings

Overall the evaluation found that the DPME played a major and successful role in promoting the importance of evaluations within the South African government, and provided guidance on how different types of evaluations could be undertaken – at an administrative, as well as at a theoretical and practical level.



Evaluation use

Results showed that most of the earlier evaluations had led to significant changes to government programmes or policies evaluated. Furthermore indicating the commitment of departments to use evaluation findings for learning. However, The reporting on the implementation of improvement plans, over two years, by departments was inconsistent or weak, as departments raised concerns over the reporting burden they were faced with. This also resulted in departments not actively reporting on progress made, which hindered the DPME's ability to account for changes and impact achieved through evaluations undertaken in the NES. Nonetheless, the evaluation strongly concluded that preliminary evidence for use of

evaluations in departments was encouraging. It noted however that more effort was needed to deepen and institutionalise evaluation use through continued capacity building, more systematic communication of results, and setting aside budgets for implementing improvement plans. This would contribute greatly towards improving the system's ability to achieve long lasting results, and to better measure returns on value for money.

Results from the evaluation led to the DPME revising the NEPF, with the amended version set to be implemented in line with the 2019 – 2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF).

Budgeting for evaluations

One of the key frustrations voiced by departments was the overall lack of a systematic link between evaluation, budgeting and planning. This made it challenging to find funds to conduct evaluations, and based on the analysis of evaluation systems around the world, the report stressed that departments ought to be setting aside 0.5-5% of programme budgets for evaluation (depending on programme size). Additionally, programme plans should include various types of evaluations

as per the DPME Guideline for Planning.

There was also general consensus on the need for DPME to introduce more evaluation types into the system including viable options requiring less resources – such as internal evaluations where appropriate, those that can be done quicker (i.e. rapid evaluations), as well as avenues for officials to 'learn by doing'.

Stakeholder roles in the NES

The respondents acknowledged that while the NES had indeed become significantly more prominent across national and provincial departments, with DPME largely regarded as the appropriate champion for evaluation, the role of different stakeholders, at different stages in the system, was not always clear. In addition, a shared vision amongst key stakeholders for the NES

was not always evident. This finding stressed the need to build stronger partnerships to cement and promote the roles of institutions such as Offices of the Premier, centre of government departments, universities, civil society organisations, and programme beneficiaries throughout the evaluation lifecycle.

4. Key Recommendations

Based on the findings, the evaluation put forward 22 recommendations to address the gaps and weaknesses that were hampering the impact of the NES. The recommendations were organised into five categories presented below, along with some of the main changes required to strengthen the system.

1. Evaluation Mandate

- Evaluation should become a mandatory component of public management and improvement, and should be included in legislation. However, the key risk is that evaluation becomes an additional compliance task, and loses its learning and evaluative thinking functions. A clear developmental pathway is needed that allows departments and provinces to build their evaluation function incrementally.
- DPME's role within this mandated environment should be clarified.

2. Budgeting for evaluative processes

- The link between planning, budgeting and evaluation (and monitoring) should be systematised and strengthened, with evaluation evidence consistently feeding into the planning and budgeting cycles in a formalised way. Planning of new programmes, as well as improvements to existing policies and programmes, should be based on

evidence generated through evaluations and other sources of reliable evidence.

- New phases of programmes should not be funded until an evaluation of the previous phase is completed. For this to succeed, buy-in is required from provincial treasuries and National Treasury.
- Financial and human resources should be made available and spent on conducting evaluation-related tasks. Evaluation posts should be created in departments as opposed to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) posts. The expenditure of allocated funds must be monitored.



3. Capacity Development

- Capacity development of evaluation professionals within the public sector (and the extended evaluation system) requires further and continuous development. With extending evaluation to a public management requirement, there is a risk of falling into a capability trap in which there is no appropriate and sufficient capability to manage, or use evaluation outputs. A combination of capacity development options will need to be strengthened in a systematic way. Resourcing is required to drive this critical component of strengthening the NES, and must be made available.

4. Managing and tracking evaluations

- The 'backbone' of the NES, which is the evaluation management information system (EMIS), should be strengthened and used across all government departments, not only by the DPME, with regard to managing and tracking evaluations.

5. Strengthening use

- Assessing evaluation outcomes is only as good as the improvement plan implementation process and monitoring. Reporting on the improvement plans must therefore be strengthened.

5. Policy implications and direction

The process of revising the NEPF, which began in 2017/18, stands out as one of the first critical steps in taking forward the NES evaluation recommendations. The four improvement plan objectives are therefore presented alongside key revisions in the amended NEPF (2019-2024).

Notably, over and above the four objectives, the revisions in the policy encompass a series of deliberations between stakeholders in and outside of government throughout 2018/19.

6.1 NEPF 2019-2024

The revised NEPF not only takes forward the NES evaluation recommendations, but also takes into consideration broader evidence on how to develop and maintain an impactful and sustainable evaluation system, in line with South Africa's developmental agenda. The policy revisions were designed to respond to the country's medium term imperatives. Operationalisation of the policy will thus take place through implementing a five-year National Evaluation Plan (NEP), which will run from 2020 to 2025. In comparison with the previous NEPs, a five year NEP will be developed and annually reviewed to ensure relevance.

6.2 Key strategies for the next 5 years

The NEPF (2019-2024) explicitly focuses on ways to facilitate stronger/seamless linkages between the building blocks of the NES, and the state's holistic governance and management environment, in order to improve the broader impact of the evaluation system. In other words, the policy provides strategies to enhance institutionalisation of the NES through integration with the existing governance mechanisms.

In line with this approach some of the noteworthy revisions in the NEPF include:

- a) Extending the reach of the National Evaluation System to provide support to state owned entities (SOEs) and other relevant stakeholder in government;
- b) Expanding the types of evaluation approaches used in order to provide evidence timeously;
- c) Building the state's capacity to undertake evaluations and empowering emerging evaluators; and
- d) Supporting initiatives to transform and increase access into the evaluation sector.

These four important revisions are strategies to begin effecting the four improvement objectives of the NES evaluation.

6.3 Progress on Policy Implementation

a) Inclusion of prescribed mid-term and end-term evaluations in the revised FSAPPs

Importantly, in addition to the above, the government's revised Framework for Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans (FSAPPs), now prescribes the undertaking of mid-term and end-term evaluations to national and provincial

departments. The framework states that "government institutions must carry out at least two evaluations in the five year planning cycle". Furthermore, it emphasises that "improvement plans resulting from evaluations must inform the development of the Annual Performance Plans (APP), to ensure that key evaluation findings and recommendations are implemented."¹

NES Improvement Objective 1

The PM&E Bill incorporates evaluations as a mandatory component of the public management system to enable institutionalisation of evaluations in the public sector and SOEs, including linking evaluations with the planning and budgeting cycle. The National Evaluation Policy Framework is revised in line with this.

Policy Revision

Extending the reach of the national system to provide evaluation support to local government and state owned entities
Inclusion of prescribed mid-term and end-term evaluations in revised FSAPPs

b) Rapid evaluations

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NES Improvement Objective 2

Improved quality and range of evaluations through consistent application of strengthened processes, guidelines and tools to support evaluations across spheres of government and SOEs.

NEPF Revision

Expanding the types of evaluation approaches used in order to provide evidence timeously

¹ Revised FSAPPs, Chapter 8, p 64

c) Sector Wide Approaches

A guideline on Sectoral Reviews 2.2.23 has been developed. This is a larger more complex evaluation method, which assesses the performance of a sector. This is usually based on a sectoral plan, and therefore the review ought to provide an indication of how the sector as a whole is performing. Sector reviews provide a holistic and long-term strategic view on the entire sector. They are results-oriented, with a focus on broader sector performance, while programme / project-based approaches focus narrowly on results of specific projects or programmes.

d) Capacity building strategy

To support implementation of the amended NEPF, the DPME developed an Evaluation Capacity Building Strategy 2020-2024, which provides guidance on the department's approach towards cultivating an educated, skilled, and capable workforce. The strategy reflects on some of the challenges experienced since 2011, and discusses the root causes for government's strained capacity in evaluations. It then provides a Theory of Change for the oncoming policy implementation phase.



The strategy also puts DPME's role into perspective in building internal and external capacity moving forward, in the context of various capacity building initiatives in the wider M&E industry. Both private and public sector partners needed to ensure the strategy is a success are identified.

The strategy is founded upon three guiding principles:

1. **Ownership and relevance** - delivering appropriate and relevant capacity building programmes to various spheres of government, including SOEs; with a focus on co-production of commissioned evaluations in order to gradually move to doing selected evaluations internally.
2. **Integration** - with existing capacity building

platforms in and outside of government, acknowledging that capacity building is not DPME's core mandate.

3. **Usefulness** - initiatives should cater to the differing needs of various spheres, which are at different stages of developing capacity. In addition, programmes should take into consideration the 4th industrial revolution and encourage the use of technology in evaluations.

Despite concerns around the dropping of the evaluation standard in the most recent round of MPAT, from a positive light, this change presents the opportunity for evaluation commitment to develop organically within departments, on the basis of appreciating the value of evaluation, and therefore building capacity incrementally.

e) Financial implications

While the revised policy maintains emphasis on the critical task of commissioning objective and quality evaluations conducted by external service providers, the policy simultaneously takes into cognisance the need for state institutions to exercise fiscal austerity over the coming years, in order for government to reach its developmental goals.

As stated in the evaluation of the NES report, “the bulk of DPME’s budget has been put toward conducting evaluation [and] going forward, a better balance between conducting evaluation and institutionalisation activities, should be achieved”. This is especially important given the limited resources and increasing demand on the system, which calls on the DPME to rely more on innovation and collaboration to leverage on existing government systems, partnerships, and regulations, and enhance a sustainable evaluative culture across government.

As a result, DPME plans to cut back on co-funding departmental evaluations, as was the case with past NEPs. The new NEP will focus on cross-sector evaluations, which the DPME will fully fund and be accountable for.

f) Diverse pool of service providers

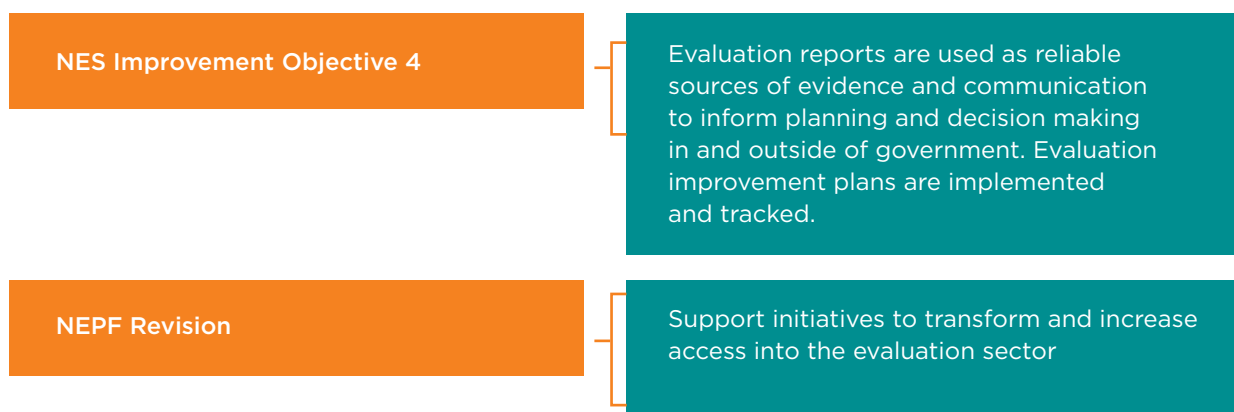
The third improvement objective is partly being pursued by expanding the pool of evaluation service providers in the system, to be more broadly inclusive. This means working with

service providers that could make use of various groups of skilled labour such as unemployed graduates, community workers, and other data collectors readily available within the public sector. A more diverse and competitive evaluation industry should contribute greatly towards cutting the overall costs of conducting an evaluation.

g) Use of evaluations in and outside of government

The fourth objective will be achieved by amongst others, using procurement as a tool to ensure that emerging evaluators are brought into the system, and encouraging the participation of a broader variety of universities in commissioned evaluations. The NEPF sets out that this initiative should target the following groups:

- Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) in the evaluation sector;
- Unemployed graduates/ postgraduate students in particular, that may be used for data-collection;
- Women, youth and people with disabilities;
- Retired former senior public servants e.g. Chief Directors, Deputy Director-Generals (DGs), Director-Generals (DGs) and Ministers; and
- Expanding the pool of users by making evaluations more responsive and participatory.



It is hoped that by expanding the network of service providers, this will inevitably increase the communication of evaluation results to broader audiences and users. This could possibly include communities and civil society, which would hold government accountable to its improvement plans.

h) Implementation and monitoring of improvement plans

In addition to expanding the audience and users of evaluation results for increased accountability, the effective implementation and monitoring of improvement plans is also dependent on the outcomes of the capacity building strategy, and effects of the revised FSAPPs prescriptions on evaluations. Should these be implemented

effectively i.e. promoting the ownership of evaluation results and recommendations by getting departments to undertake at least two evaluations per year; and encouraging internal evaluations to be undertaken, with officials would be more involved. This would result in the- implementation and monitoring of the improvement plan, and should then become an innate part of programme management, as a critical aspect of the evaluation cycle.

This will alleviate the pressure on DPME to monitor improvement plans implemented by autonomous departments, and will move the focus of the improvement plan system to larger scale evaluations that are of a cross-sectoral and coordination nature, as per the NEP 2020-2025.

Conclusion

In just under a decade great strides have been made in developing the system, and a good foundation has been laid to institutionalise evaluation. Fully establishing a sustainable national evaluation system is an ongoing and evolving project that requires continuous benchmarking, innovation, and adaptation. This can be done through a more systematic use of evaluation findings in financial allocations, accountability to follow through with undertaking planned evaluations, and promoting the development of an evaluation culture, which includes ongoing capacity building.

In order to maximise impact and enhance the value for money obtained from rolling out the National Evaluation System, full commitment must be given by all key stakeholders into implementing the NEPF 2019-2024. Progress made over the next few years, particularly in the above four policy implementation areas, will go a long way in making the NES a more nuanced, responsive, and swift system, that is capable of making tangible contributions to the attainment of South Africa's developmental goals.



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Disclaimer

This policy brief is drawn from the evaluation findings and recommendations. It does not necessarily represent the views of the departments concerned.