

Editorial – 2019: Omniscience of monitoring and evaluation



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Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) processes and results can illuminate; they can inform and they can make sense of a complex contextual environment but they also have the potential to obfuscate, to complicate and/or to over-simplify complex situations and practices. According to advocates of the results-based management framework, all we need are clearly defined expected results, a delivery strategy, to make sure we measure and evaluate performance, to make adjustments where necessary and we will be able to improve conditions over time – or at least we will have evidence to suggest effectiveness and efficiency. The good news is that governments in Africa, businesses big and small as well as the general public are beginning to accept the need for M&E processes and results that can inform planning and sustainable development. There is also a synergetic relationship between M&E and good governance. M&E contributes to good governance by promoting accountability among other things, and good governance – a reflective and responsive process designed to serve the best interests of stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe – creates an enabling environment for M&E. Good governance also includes a culture of self-assessment, to learn from experience and to improve the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the policies and programmes being pursued. The pursuit of good governance, be this at the project, programme or policy level, is a collective ongoing challenge. The principles of good governance should inform the M&E approach and outcomes so that developmental policies and their implementation are not constrained by the political, social and economic environments but positively influenced instead. This edition showcases M&E practices across the African continent and beyond in various contexts. M&E is used in the economy, for governance, for development and, most importantly, for learning.

Suranga, Senadhira and Rajakaruna (2019) from Sri Lanka share the use of the branch performance tool (BPT) developed by the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) as an effective tool for continuous monitoring of programme efficiency in the health sector. This article was included in this edition because the authors claimed that the BPT was effective for evidence-based decision-making on programme efficiency of service delivery interventions in the health sector. It also has potential for further improvement and replication in the health sector, which will contribute to the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 3. Muiro (2019) touches on the theme of social impact investment. She uses the example of B Lab East Africa that is engaging with hundreds of African businesses, large and small, as well as investors in assessing, comparing and improving their social and environmental impact. According to her, B Impact Assessment (BIA) offers measurable ways that companies can have a positive impact. It offers step-by-step guidance to assess business practices and tools to make positive changes. By actively measuring their impact, leveraging resources to improve impact and engaging with all stakeholders on impact, we believe this will lead to a more shared and durable prosperity for all.

From Kenya, Warinda (2019) discusses the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES) that is responsible for providing reliable data findings for decision-makers. However, the directorate hardly receives timely data as required, thus is unable to make timely decisions within the ministry of agriculture, livestock and irrigation in Kisumu County. He found the system to be dysfunctional as there is a lack of champions, limited human capacity on M&E and limited availability of data with unclear information flow to decision-makers and inadequate integration of NIMES in planning and budgeting. Rabie and Burger (2019) discuss the implementation of the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach to the evaluation of a transport subsidisation programme in Western Cape, South Africa. The objective of this article was to compare the findings from the adopted parallel mixed-methods design that included a perception survey and the MSC technique. This article presents the advantages of each approach and reflects on the benefits and challenges in applying the MSC technique. Cloete and Auriacombe (2019) revisit the impact of historical colonial value systems and practices in current knowledge generation, transfer and application processes and results in Africa (especially in South Africa). The objective is to identify concrete directions towards 'decolonising' research and evaluation processes and products to be more

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relevant, appropriate and, therefore, more effective to achieve sustainable empowerment and other desired developmental outcomes not only in lesser developed countries but also in traditionally more developed Western nations. This article foregrounds the issue of values in M&E and how these inform assumptions, practices and approaches.

The concern about ongoing capacity development for M&E in Africa has been addressed in various articles in this journal. There are more questions than answers. Mapitsa, Khumalo, Engel and Wooldridge (2019) ask if massive open online courses (MOOCs) can fill African evaluation capacity gaps. They point out that scholars of evaluation have alerted to a gap between supply and demand that frustrates both evaluation practitioners and commissioners. The article explored the possibilities and limitations of MOOCs to bridge this gap. Their study found that MOOCs can play important roles in evaluation capacity development. They can raise awareness of methods and tools that are not part of the traditional M&E curriculum, their reach for evaluation practitioners is wide and they build much-needed networks in the sector. However, their role in skills development has limits, particularly if they are delivered in isolation of other accessible contact learning options. Makiva, Ile and Fagbadebo (2019) evaluated the progress with the transformation of historically disadvantaged South Africans in the petroleum industry. The research concluded that the lack of critical resources, such as funding, land, infrastructure and critical skills, were the main reasons why the outcomes were DAC/OECD non-compliant. Tsala (2019) from Cameroon provided the only article in French for this edition, entitled: *La Chaîne des Résultats et la Théorie du Changement pour améliorer le cadre conceptuel d'une évaluation d'impact* [Results Chain and Theory of Change to improve the conceptual framework of an impact assessment].

Ishola and Cekan (2019) use a review of available literature to assess the overall body of knowledge on the evaluation of sustainability of health programmes in Nigeria. The review identified financial, technical, social and environmental barriers to sustainability. A clear understanding of operational indicators for sustainability, embedding sustainability early in the project cycle, community ownership, capacity building, effective collaboration, leadership and quality post evaluation are key for sustainable development in Nigeria. Chachu (2019) provides insight into the design and implementation of a theory of change-driven comprehensive M&E strategy in a child labour project rolled out in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Critical markers included the importance of stakeholders' involvement in the design and development of an M&E strategy as a prerequisite for buy-in and uptake. He found that capacity building was not just as a box to be ticked but an iterative process to improve knowledge, transfer skills and support learning. Goldman et al. (2019) provide details of the evaluation of the National Evaluation System in South Africa. It outlines the achievements of the system: 67 national evaluations completed, the development of provincial evaluation plans and 68 of 155

national and provincial departments have departmental evaluation plans. According to them, the system has spread widely, but there are issues of quality and the time it takes to do evaluations. Capacity building within the NES has included learning-by-doing (e.g. support by the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation [DPME] evaluation staff or the Offices of the Premier [OTPs]), the development of guidelines and templates by DPME, promotion of learning networks and forums, short courses and developing an evaluation management standard to drive establishment of evaluation capacity in departments. And lastly, Mbava and Dahler-Larsen (2019) reflect on the potential benefits of participatory approaches in theory-based evaluations (TBEs). They suggest that TBE in its most recent participatory versions offers promising opportunities towards more flexible epistemology. They further state that: when properly tweaked, tuned and adapted to local needs and demands in African contexts, better TBEs are possible. These contributions to this edition indeed point to the trans-disciplinary nature of M&E. The field of M&E is by nature interdisciplinary and requires the crossing of discipline research borders and boundaries to exact its utility value in the domains of education, economics, health, politics and development generally.

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