

# Growing and nurturing monitoring and evaluation on the African continent



**Author:**

Mark Abrahams<sup>1</sup> 

**Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Southern Hemisphere Consulting and Development Services, Cape Town, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Mark Abrahams,  
editor@aejonline.org

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The growing demand for evaluations and other evidence for decision-making requires African institutions, particularly universities to educate and train highly qualified and skilled evaluators who can produce evaluations of high quality and improve ways in which the findings are utilised by policy makers or governments. But not so long ago, a consensus view emerged, namely, that the following systemic challenges and capacity constraints existed and that only slow progress was being made.

- The limited existence of well-designed, well-run, affordable, customised-for-the-African-context education and training opportunities, providing the basis for quality life-long professional development that is cumulative.
- Lack of a common 'body of knowledge' and minimum education curriculum requirements for a course for evaluation suitable to the African context.
- Lack of adequate infrastructure for teaching evaluation courses to a 21st-century audience especially using blended-learning technologies. (Porter & Goldman 2013; Tarsilla 2014)

Several new texts by Cloete, Rabie and Coning (eds. 2014) and Blaser-Mapitsa, Pophiwa and Tirivanhu (eds. 2019) among many others are beginning to sketch an African Evaluation landscape that is very much aware of the challenges listed above and they describe examples of national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that are responsive to the demands and requirements of the field. There is greater awareness that the M&E knowledge that needs to be constructed should have both methodological and philosophical components. The methodological component refers to our toolkit(s) that focuses on the designs, measures, data collection and analyses that we use to create and arrange data. The philosophical component focuses on our understanding of development, the kind of things we can know about interventions, programmes and policies. Currently, most policy-relevant research by and for Africa is conducted by universities and think tanks. Think tanks are research organisations that generate policy-oriented research in social sciences with the aim of enabling public policy actors to make informed decisions. Think tanks can be university-affiliated, government-affiliated, independent think tanks or other affiliated structures. Universities and think tanks are both key role players in knowledge generation in Africa and they bring different but complementary skills and resources. The one broad group that has had a limited effect on M&E knowledge construction is the Voluntary Organisation for Professional Evaluation (VOPE). Except for the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA) and the Evaluation Society of Kenya, VOPEs on the African continent struggle to assert their influence as strategic partners in the academic and policy discourses of M&E.

What is required to catapult the growth and nurturing of M&E knowledge construction in Africa is a partnership of VOPEs, universities, think tanks and even government departments. South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association manages to place emerging evaluators as interns in key locations where they can get exposure to current best practices on top of the theoretical foundations provided by university partners. The benefits of M&E, that of generating useful evidence, providing feedback about progress, indicators of success or failure, are all harnessed in a creative partnership that involves the actors mentioned above. Moreover, the partnership can unleash a transformation agenda that will embrace the principles of African-centred evaluation where integrity, inclusivity and reciprocity are paramount.

The articles submitted for this edition speak more directly to aspects development and growth of M&E in Africa. The article by Chirau, Dlakavu and Masilela (2022) discusses and shares the evaluation capacity development (ECD) efforts and experiences of Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results, Anglophone Africa (CLEAR AA). Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results, Anglophone Africa's one of the six regional centres housed at academic institutions across the globe. The other CLEAR centres are in Senegal, Mexico, India, China and Brazil and are

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supported by the CLEAR global initiative in Washington, DC. According to the authors, the value of the CLEAR-AA mission is that it offers the possibility of improving decision-making, policymaking and implementation and better service delivery and development outcomes in English-speaking Africa. The state that ECD seeks to strengthen each of the identified pillars of a public sector M&E system and that typically, ECD interventions seek to ensure the use of evaluation findings in development planning, policymaking, general decision-making and budgeting, using evaluative findings for organisational learning as well as accountability. While the article is an overview of the capacity development initiatives, it shines the spotlight on identified barriers to negotiating and strengthening country M&E systems in Africa and emerging lessons from strengthening and implementing country M&E systems in Africa.

An article by Fish et al. (2022), also from CLEAR AA based as Wits University in South Africa, focuses on VOPEs and they argue for the need for African VOPEs to improve their internal financial and human capacity. Thereby enabling these professional associations to endeavour to contribute to strengthening the supply and demand sides of national evaluation systems, as well as refining their advocacy to reflect Africa-centred evaluation approaches and criteria. The article draws on a qualitative study involving VOPEs in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Senegal, Cameroon, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Ghana. Information about Namibia's VOPE was sourced primarily through interviews because this evaluation association is in its formative stages. The goal was to build a sufficient data set to look for emerging themes on VOPEs and to use the data set and the developed themes for further validation with key informant interviews and facilitated focus groups. An important observation is that VOPEs are experiencing membership growth; however, despite the growth, there are indications that VOPEs in the continent are still having challenges in retaining members and getting members to fully participate in the execution or management of VOPE-related activities. Furthermore, the lack of resources is a perennial challenge for African VOPEs, which is not unique to VOPEs in Africa. The authors conclude that VOPEs are emerging as vital NES stakeholders that ought to be targeted for technical capacity building as part of national evaluation capacity development (NECD) interventions. In the long term, technically capacitated VOPEs have the potential to play a major role in helping to build an M&E culture that sustains NESs in many countries.

Makadzange (2022) explores the level of institutionalisation of the two national M&E systems, that of Botswana and Zimbabwe. He claims that there has been significant progress in both countries towards fully institutionalising their national M&E systems. However, more is yet to be realised before attaining the expected gold standards. He recommends that both countries emulate and leverage on those African countries with much more advanced national M&E systems. The two countries were scored on the following domains: (1) Pervasiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation practice; (2) Diffusion and pluralism of Monitoring and Evaluation praxis

(3) National dialogue in Monitoring and Evaluation; (4) Existence of Monitoring and Evaluation professional organisations; (5) National institutional arrangements that support Monitoring and Evaluation; (6) Institutional arrangements in parliament to support Monitoring and Evaluation; (7) Pluralism of Monitoring and Evaluation institutions and Monitoring and Evaluation capacity building efforts; (8) Utilisation of Monitoring and Evaluation information; (9) Policies and regulations to govern Monitoring and Evaluation practice; (10) Multi-Stakeholders support on Monitoring and Evaluation efforts; (11) Democratic system that promotes Monitoring and Evaluation efforts and (12) Impact and outcome evaluation practice. The author states that the lessons identified can be used to support other countries that are seeking to institutionalise national M&E systems.

The concept of partnerships is discussed in the article by Mpofo and Govender (2022), more specifically, donor-nongovernmental organisation (NGO) partnerships. The authors report how the asymmetrical nature of the relationships manifests in practice in the work of NGOs. The study focused on human immunodeficiency virus infection and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV and AIDS) NGOs in Gauteng province in South Africa. Their findings revealed that 'partnership' is a false representation of the actual relationships between donors and NGOs. They report that accountability relationships are convoluted, with NGOs reliant on financial support from donors, supporters or the government. Accountability relationships within the donor-NGO-beneficiary nexus are diffuse, and a remote donor's oversight of local NGOs is weak. They state that it is crucial that the three significant stakeholders (donors, NGOs and beneficiaries) are involved in all interactions and communication stages. As a first step, it is critical to establish the power distribution and power relationship among the interest groups. They claim that non-governmental organisations operate in a competitive space, but they can collaborate with other NGOs when interests are aligned. Collaboration should be encouraged to view the potential benefits of sharing skills, devising common approaches to confronting challenges and adopting standard sectoral practices for community-focused health service strategies.

Authors, Igras et al. (2022) propose realist evaluation as an ideal methodological approach for norms-shifting interventions (NSIs), which are not well understood but gaining prominence in behaviour change programming in Africa and globally to foster enabling socio-normative environments that sustain behaviour change. Their article shares their reflections on tailoring realist evaluation approaches for use with community-based norms-shifting programmes. It describes how realist evaluation enables co-building of programme theory that conceptually underpins NSIs, guides evaluation efforts and yields benefits beyond theory proving. Across interventions, passages applied a systematic co-learning approach over a 2-year evaluation period starting with building partnerships, developing a

programme Theory of Change (TOC) that included norms-shifting pathways, answering key gaps in pathway evidence and evaluating intervention effects. They conclude that encouraging greater use of realist evaluation with NSIs and other SBC programmes in health and other sectors can expand current evaluation approaches and bring more Africa-centred innovation to the field. It creates a nexus and a unique and significant dynamic between programme implementers, local stakeholders and evaluators that transcends research and programme practice.

An article by Loye, Jansen van Rensburg and Ouedraogo (2022) explores the impact of pre-schooling and home environment on children's literacy in sub-Saharan Africa francophone countries. The context of the international agenda on sustainable development goals (SDGs) that calls for 'no one left behind' and to 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (SDG 4) is used as a backdrop for the study. The target 4.2 of SDG 4 highlights the importance to ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education. They emphasise the importance of pre-schooling, the home environment through language, reading, books and someone who speaks the teaching language at home. The findings show that there is a need to invest in pre-schooling to foster the literacy skill development of children. This skill development effort will help children in adulthood to better integrate through their work, employment and wider society. Early interventions in literacy have long-term effects. Countries should anticipate the problem and endeavour to develop standards for preschool programmes and increase the number of teachers and preschools similar to those in primary education schools and teachers.

The article by Masvaure and Fish (2022) explores the M&E capacity-strengthening initiatives in selected countries in Africa and how their effectiveness is being measured. The article addresses the following research questions:

- What approaches to M&E system capacity strengthening have been used in selected African countries?
- What are the gaps in M&E capacity strengthening in the selected African countries?
- What approaches, mechanisms and measures are being used to measure the impact of this capacity strengthening as well as the combination and quality of the interventions themselves?

The countries selected include Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. At the country M&E system level, very few participants thought that capacity-strengthening activities are taking place. Capacity-strengthening approaches at the country system

level focus on developing policies, frameworks and M&E systems specifically for state institutions. Participants indicated that organisations funding and implementing capacity-strengthening activities work in silos, without linking and coordinating with other role players. The lack of coordination of individual training activities also means that strengthening individual skills and knowledge is conducted on an *ad hoc* basis; it is not centrally coordinated and is conducted using different curricula and therefore fails to meet the capacity needs of an individual. A key lesson that emerged is that capacity-strengthening funding initiatives for countries and organisations need to prioritise country-level M&E capacity needs assessments to determine the capacity that exists at the time of the assessment and how it affects the overall practice of M&E within the country. The follow-up step is to develop a country-specific capacity development plan that details the necessary capacity improvements or makes recommendations on new types of capacity, which may be required. It is also important to develop measurement tools for assessing the impact, effectiveness and merit of M&E capacity-strengthening approaches. Key to the implementation of the plan is a robust knowledge management system where state and non-state institutions mine knowledge/evidence to enable productive reflection on what is working, not working, for whom and under what circumstances.

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