Faced with internal and external pressures, member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have developed a culture of evaluation tied to the implementation of public policies and programs. Unlike Western countries, African countries are still building their evaluation culture. However, several initiatives have been undertaken in different African countries including Benin, Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, Uganda and South Africa through the establishment of national evaluation systems or mechanisms and tools favoring the use of evaluation in the implementation of public policies. Such a culture is a key part of good governance and is fostered by the existence of a number of opportunities. Nonetheless, these countries face certain threats in their quest for creating an evaluative culture. These include a weak capacity in statistics, program monitoring and the challenge of evaluating certain public services. This article discusses what a culture of evaluation involves and what can be done to create and maintain such a culture. It focuses mainly on African countries. It also aims to promote the culture of evaluation in Africa.
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Key Messages

- The development of a culture of evaluation requires deliberate efforts by a country and strong leadership to encourage and support such a culture.

- Developing countries face challenges similar to those faced by developed countries in moving towards a culture of evaluation.

- For a culture of evaluation to be established and implemented in any country, interested stakeholders and a commitment to transparency and good governance are necessary.

A culture of evaluation: different approaches in culturally diverse regions including Africa

To develop effective evaluation functions, countries need a strong evaluation culture in which evidence is deliberately sought in order to allow better implementation and execution of their development programs. Without such a culture, any effort to put in place effective evaluation activities would be compromised (Stewart, 2014).

Developing a culture of evaluation not only involves good intentions and osmosis (Mayne, 2010), but also requires deliberate efforts by a country as well as strong leadership to encourage and support such a culture. To do this, managers and staff need to know that there is clear political will at the country level and that information based on results and evidence is valued. This should be an integral part of planning, budgeting, execution and review chains (ibid.).

A mapping of the evaluation cultures of OECD countries was carried out in 2002 by examining 23 countries on nine variables relating to: evaluation in policy areas, the availability of specialized evaluators, the existence a national discourse on evaluation and an evaluation profession, and the establishment of institutional mechanisms for conducting evaluations and sharing their results. The mapping found that Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States have the highest "rating of evaluation culture" among OECD countries (Furubo, Rist and Sandahl, 2002, cited in Imas and Rist, 2009).

OECD countries have developed a culture of evaluation in response to varying degrees of internal and external pressures. France, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Canada, the Republic of South Korea and the United States, for example, have developed a culture of evaluation largely due to strong internal pressures such as national planning, programming and budgetary requirements for new socio-economic spending programming, as well as legislative monitoring (Imas and Rist, 2009). Many of these countries were better equipped to do so because they have democratic political systems, strong empirical traditions, civil servants trained in the social sciences (as opposed to legal training), and efficient institutional and administrative systems (ibid.). Countries with high spending on education, health and social protection have adopted evaluation mechanisms...
in these areas, which then influence other areas of public policy. These pioneer countries have contributed to the dissemination of a culture of evaluation in other countries through evaluation organizations, training institutes, networks and consultancy firms (Imas and Rist, 2009). By contrast, some countries such as Ireland, Italy and Spain have adopted a culture of evaluation due to strong external pressures, mainly from the conditions of membership of the European Union (EU) including access to EU structural development funds. The latter were strongly influenced by the culture of evaluation of pioneer countries, as well as by the culture of evaluation rooted in the international community with which they interact (Imas and Rist, 2009).

In 2009, most of the thirty OECD countries had mature evaluation systems. However, establishing them was not an easy nor linear process. Three approaches enabled them to set up their systems. These are: an approach that focuses on the whole of government, one that focuses on parts of government and a mixed approach. The first involves extensive and comprehensive implementation of the system across government and requires time, at least a decade (in the case of Australia). The second approach focuses on a part or sector of government, such as a single ministry (for example, Mexico focused on social development, Jordan on planning and the Kyrgyz Republic on health). The third approach integrates the first two (the case of Ireland) (Imas and Rist, 2009).

Development of evaluation in Sub-Saharan Africa

Unlike OECD countries that already have sophisticated governance systems, those in Africa are just beginning to build an evaluative culture. The majority of external evaluations carried out in most African countries have been due to the requirement of donors (Tinsakré, 2013). According to Mouton and Wildschut (2017), donors remain the primary source for the request of evaluations on the African continent. However, this situation is not likely to encourage the effectiveness of public policies and the judicious use of state resources. Furthermore, the absence of a strong and internal political will to develop a culture of evaluation prevents its development.

Some countries have developed national evaluation policies and plans, of which the example of South Africa is very pertinent. Citing the case of Benin, Uganda and South Africa, Goldman said, “given their limited resources and capacities, the three countries started their respective National Evaluation Systems with national evaluation priorities indicated in an evaluation plan or program, using donor resources if necessary, but piloting the program themselves. This is important if the evaluation should be part of the countries' strategic agendas, and not just recommended by the donors” (Goldman et al., 2018, cited in Evaluation Matters 2018: 29-30).

Benin, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal have adopted mechanisms and tools that promote the use of development evaluations in the implementation of public policies (IPU, 2009, cited in Evaluation Matters, 2018: 31). In addition, since 2010, Benin, Uganda and South Africa have made considerable efforts to integrate evaluations into the work of public authorities, starting from very different political situations and with different resource constraints. There has been great local innovation in the establishment of these systems as well as evolutionary management as these systems develop. According to their different economic policies, South Africa undertook 56 evaluations in December 2016, compared to 23 for Uganda and 15 for Benin, reflecting a greater capacity of governments to fund evaluations. However, the scope of these evaluations differ from country to country.
Benin’s evaluations in particular are at the policy level rather than the program level, thus covering a broader field, but in a less in-depth manner (Goldman et al., 2018, cited in Evaluation Matters, 2018: 24–25).

The case of South Africa presents a good working example where a national evaluation system was implemented in 2012 and is headed by the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Department (DPME), previously the Ministry of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation. However, even while the framework for the national evaluation policy was being developed, the country pursued some pilot evaluations. The initial concept of an evaluation of results in addition to a devoted research unit (see Box 1) to drive the evaluation system was approved in September 2011. The aim was “to coordinate the evaluation function within government, ensuring that the high-quality evaluation and research underpin public policy and programming, to maximize the impact of government and services” (Goldman, 2012, cited in African Evaluation Journal Vol 3, No 1). The first pilot evaluation started in October 2011 and was completed in June 2012. The National Evaluation Plan (PNE) was approved by cabinet in June 2012, with eight evaluations performed (DPME 2012a). The 2013-2014 PNE was approved in November 2012 with fifteen evaluations (DPME 2012b) and the 2014-2015 PNE, approved in November 2013, saw fifteen evaluations (DPME 2013b) (Goldman, 2012).

Importance of a culture of evaluation

Other terms used for a culture of evaluation include a culture of results and a culture of performance (Mayne, 2010). In either case, such a culture uses results for decision-making and learning and is an adequate means for the implementation of a results-oriented policy (DAC, 2014). In addition, it promotes the use of information on results to improve organizational performance and is thus used for planning, monitoring progress, learning and decision-making (DAC, 2014). Information on results can also be used for reporting purposes or as a management tool. In the area of performance management, these are used to improve organizational performance and achieve better results. (DAC, 2014). Members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) use them primarily for external reporting for accountability and communication purposes, monitoring progress, and decision-making. Organization wide, performance information is primarily used for communication with the outside world. At the strategic management level, information on results is used not only for accountability purposes, but also to inform decision-making and lessons learned. At the level of projects or programs, they are used firstly to monitor progress and secondly to make decisions (DAC case, 2014). The culture of evaluation is key to building more effective approaches to managing and evaluating results (Mayne, 2010).

BOX 1. KEY ROLES FOR A RESEARCH UNIT (GOLDMAN 2012)

- Development and maintenance of an evaluation policy framework within government, as well as a three-year and annual evaluation plan.
- Construction of a whole-of-government approach to advance evaluation and ensure the use of evaluations to inform plans and budgets.
- Development of technical specifications, systems and guidelines for evaluation within government.
- Implementation and support of evaluations and research.
- Monitoring and quality control of a government-wide evaluation process.
Why develop a culture of evaluation in African countries?

Results-based management must aim to foster a culture of performance, hence a culture of evaluation (Mayne, 2010). Monitoring and Evaluation are a key part of this process. Monitoring is the ongoing part of project/program management, which involves the systematic collection and analysis of data based on intervention indicators. It is an internal assessment aimed at keeping interventions on track and ensuring the timely decision-making necessary to improve their design and operation. Outcome evaluations are essential for shedding light on gaps, determining when adjustments need to be made and what types of changes are required - change of focus and/or adjustment of the project/program strategy (theory of change, logical framework and/or implementation strategy), redefinition of priorities, capacity building, allocation of resources more effectively, etc. (Manual for Results-Based Management and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development). Thus, according to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC, 2014) the potential consequences of the absence of an evaluation culture can be summarized as follows:

- Difficulty in highlighting positive changes in expenditure allocated to development aid.
- Insufficient evidence to inform decision-making and lessons learned.
- Difficulty demonstrating the results of an intervention.
- Low valuation of performance information.
- Obstacle to the use of results for decision-making and learning.
- Lack of staff motivation, leadership and incentives.

In light of the above, the lack of an evaluative culture undermines attempts at good governance, transparency and accountability. It is therefore of paramount importance for African countries to support a culture of evaluation through the strengthening of good governance, democracy, improving the quality of public services and accountability.

In the quest for a culture of evaluation in Africa, there are several threats, possibilities and opportunities, which are summarized in Figure 1 [CAD, 2014; Dejean J. et al., 1998; Nasser, 2015; UNODC, 2019]

To progress towards a culture of evaluation, African countries must confront these threats and provide adequate solutions. The above favorable circumstances are an asset to achieve this.

Figure 1: Threats and Opportunities in Establishing a Evaluation Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Threats</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Weak capacities in statistics and program monitoring</td>
<td>• International leadership to integrate evaluation into the United Nations’ agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficulty evaluating certain public services</td>
<td>• Promotion of a culture of evaluation by the African Evaluation Association (AfREA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Support for the development and practice of the culture of evaluation by African international development support institutions such as the AfDB</td>
<td>• Commitment to evaluation in the 2030 SDGs Agenda and the 2063 African Union Agenda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
But, how does one recognize an evaluative culture? What are its key features?

**Characteristics of a functional culture of evaluation**

A culture of evaluation refers to a culture where empirical performance information is deliberately researched in order to use it to learn how to better manage programs and services, and thereby improve performance. Such a culture values empirical evidence on results. A number of authors and reports have examined the issue of an evaluation culture and how to achieve it. A synthetic presentation of the different results obtained by the studies carried out on the culture of evaluation highlights its characteristics in three main points (Mayne, 2010).

Firstly, a culture of evaluation deliberately looks for evidence of achievement through monitoring and evaluation. It is therefore evident in a self-assessment. Secondly, it engages in evidence-based learning, in other words, it promotes the creation of learning milestones, learning from mistakes made and poor performance; and encourages knowledge transfer. Thirdly, it encourages experimentation and change, that is to say, it supports risk-taking and searches for new ways of working (ibid.).

**Recommendations for developing a real culture of evaluation**

To encourage the development of an evaluation culture, it is recommended that African governments set up the minimum preconditions presented in Figure 2 below:

**Conclusion**

Evaluation allows countries to have confidence in their development programs, helping them evolve successfully and use evidence to guide their decisions. The promotion of a culture of evaluation

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**Figure 2: Minimum Preconditions for Developing a Evaluation Culture**

- **Assessment of organizational preparation:**
  - Evaluate current structures, practices and actions to identify those which are favourable or unfavourable to a culture of evaluation
  - Evaluate the evaluability of programs and services

- **Capacity Building:**
  - Develop staff capacity to carry out evaluations
  - Develop staff capacity to use evaluations

- **Development (strengthening) of organizational support systems:**
  - Committing necessary organizational resources
  - Foster a results-based accountability regime
  - Reward desired behavior change

- **Encouraging experimentation and change:**
  - Support deliberate risk-taking
  - Rewarding innovation and learning

(Adapted from Stewart, 2014)
across organizations in 2020 can only take place through an assessment of organizational readiness, planning for cultural change, capacity building, and strengthening of organizational support systems. Only these efforts can develop and create a flourishing evaluation culture.

The existence of national evaluation societies as well as the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA), whose vision is an Africa rooted in a culture of evaluation for equitable and sustainable development (AfrEA, 2017), are important assets that governments can rely on. AfrEA, which is increasingly working to promote “Made in Africa” evaluations, is ready to work with African governments to increase knowledge and use of evaluation approaches within public institutions. However, strong and sustained government leadership is paramount to achieving this goal.

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Endnotes

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References


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