The development field has witnessed an evolution of development evaluation from a purely donor-based activity to a tool for administration and accountability by national governments. Based on the experience of the African Parliamentarians’ Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE), this article presents the challenges and opportunities faced by users of evaluation, principally parliaments and parliamentarians, in their quest to demand and use evaluation as a tool for parliamentary oversight.
Introduction

Development evaluation is a burgeoning tool that can be used as evidence for learning and promoting development effectiveness and sustainable development in Africa. As more African countries democratize, the onus is on governments to become more efficient and accountable. Accountability requires that public officials, whether elected or appointed, respond to the demands of citizens without discrimination.

For development evaluation to make a successful contribution to the implementation of governance and public policy, an enabling environment needs to be created. Parliaments as public sector institutions have the fundamental role of ensuring open and free political deliberations and the representation of citizens. Through their core functions of legislation, representation and oversight, parliaments “sit at the centre of the web of domestic accountability” (Menocal and O’Neil, 2012). They hold governments to account on behalf of the people, ensuring that government policy and action are both efficient and commensurate with the needs of the public. Parliamentarians on the other hand, fulfil three crucial roles in governance. They hold governments to account, establish a transparent and trusting relationship between state and citizens, and enact and scrutinise government expenditures. Fundamental to all of these responsibilities is a commitment to, and knowledge of, evaluation: of policies, strategies, programmes and projects.

The demand for development evaluation is growing, as African governments are increasingly under pressure to employ effective strategies for stability, security and economic growth as well as be accountable for national resource use. Some countries, such as Côte d’Ivoire, Benin and Senegal, have adopted mechanisms and tools that support the use of development evaluation in the implementation of public policies. Despite the aforementioned, many African parliaments still lack the independence, knowledge and resources to perform their functions (IPU, 2009). As a result, the oversight role of parliament, and its role in shaping development strategies that reflect the concerns of the people, tend to be overlooked. This weakness is compounded by weak institutional or regional entities, where core building blocks for public sector effectiveness and governance – effective budget systems, planning mechanisms, core data, etc. – are lacking (Acevedo et al, 2010). As such, African parliaments have had to grapple with a lack of human capacity to fully understand the use and application of evaluation for development processes.

In response to this shortcoming, suppliers of evaluation within and outside Africa, ranging from civil society, Voluntary Organizations for Professional...
Evaluation (VOPEs) and international organizations, among others, are supporting governments to canvass and foster ideas and strategies aimed at increasing the supply of and demand for evaluation at the public sector and legislative levels. The objective behind this is not only to foster an evaluation culture in Africa, but also to build public sector capacity to use evaluation to inform policies and institutionalize effective and sustainable systems in governments.

The role of parliamentary networks on development evaluation in fostering demand for evaluation

Parliamentary networks are one of the ways through which African parliaments’ capacities to support the use of development evaluation in decision-making processes can be strengthened. The African Parliamentarians’ Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE)
is a network initiated by African parliamentarians in March 2014 in Yaoundé, Cameroon based on the recognition of the important function of evaluation in national decision-making and the crucial role of parliamentarians, as policy makers, in making good use of evaluation (PFDE and EvalPartners, 2015). The network works towards enhancing the capacity of both parliaments (as institutions) and parliamentarians (as individuals) to improve their oversight, policy making and national decision-making roles. This is done by undertaking multiple activities for bridging the gap between evaluators, who provide the evidence, and parliamentarians, who demand and use it; encouraging parliamentarians and parliaments to institutionalize evaluation; and empowering them to warrant evaluations that respond to their demand.

APNODE goes beyond governments, acknowledging that other stakeholders play crucial roles in development evaluation. As a result, membership is open to individuals and organizations demonstrating a keen interest in the network. These include current and former parliamentarians from Africa and other regions, national parliaments, civil society and private sector organizations, research institutions, national and regional evaluation associations, and development partners. The role of these stakeholders contributes to development, implementation, synergy and partnerships in strengthening Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) at individual and institutional levels (Kalugampitiya et al., 2014).

APNODE works with both institutions and individuals for whom credible and impartial evidence on what does and does not work is crucial. By facilitating training on the use of evaluation by parliamentarians, and their role in creating an enabling environment for evaluation, APNODE not only promotes an evaluation culture in regional member countries as part of AfDB’s evaluation capacity development initiative, but it also endeavours to build parliamentarian capacities as policy makers to effectively engage – in a strategic and meaningful manner – in national evaluation processes, leading to decisions and policies that are equity focused and evidence based.

To date, the network has trained more than 100 parliamentarians on various evaluation themes such as "Championing National Evaluation Policies and Systems", where parliamentarian capacities in strengthening national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are enhanced to allow for evaluating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a "no one left behind" lens on equity focused and gender-responsive evaluation methodologies. Trainings on the mainstreaming of evaluation tools at the legislative level have created opportunities leveraged by parliamentarians to demand and use evidence-based evaluation in their decision-making processes. In addition, workshops on the role of stakeholders in evaluation enable parliamentarians and parliaments to work with key stakeholders such as VOPEs, CSOs and donors in order to influence evaluation at the national level.

Networks such as APNODE provide the facility through which countries in Africa can learn from each other on how to engage their parliaments to use development evaluation at the parliamentary level. For example, in Togo, not only has a national chapter of APNODE been established, but a national evaluation policy has been adopted, managed by the Ministry of Planning and Development. The APNODE Togolese chapter regularly engages with the Speaker of Parliament, thus ensuring that evaluation is a constant theme in parliament. Other African countries can learn from this experience.
In Uganda, parliamentarians now demand the Prime Minister’s office to provide periodic reports on evaluation with recommendations by evaluators. This provides current and prospective APNODE members with an exemplary model of how effective evaluation can be used by policy makers at the parliamentary level, as well as how effective evaluation can be in ensuring decisions made are evidence-based.

In Zimbabwe, after their participation in the first APNODE Annual General Meeting held in Abidjan in 2015, members of parliament passed a motion that was tabled and debated, leading to the establishment of the APNODE National Chapter in Zimbabwe. Because the Chapter is based at the parliament, it has been able to successfully sensitize not only its members but also ministers on the importance of development evaluation in decision making processes.

An alternative approach used to engage the parliament in development evaluation is the establishment of a parliamentary caucus. This is the case of Kenya, where the local APNODE Chapter is established as a parliamentary caucus with the overarching objective to enhance the use of evidence by parliamentarians while undertaking their oversight, legislative and decision-making roles. The caucus brought together parliamentary health committees, the executive branch and outside think tanks. The caucus went further to solicit parliamentarians as champions for the use of evidence in discourse.

Challenges in promoting development evaluation at the legislative level

Despite the collaboration of parliaments and parliamentarians with and through parliamentary networks, the mainstreaming of evaluation into parliamentary roles remains a painfully slow process, mainly due to the following challenges:

- A significant number of donor organizations and institutions do not fund parliamentary networks directly, as most funding is directed to their country offices, who disburse the funds. The issue with this funding modality is that it is often not flexible enough for parliamentary networks whose members come from multiple countries. Secondly, donor organizations have priority countries where most of their funding is channelled to, and this hinders the chances of multi-country partnerships/networks that need support in order to grow and cement their membership. Lastly, the issue of funding may also stem from a lack of adequate understanding of what development evaluation is all about (Tarsilla, 2014) and what it entails by the donor organization, or exactly how the interplay between development evaluation, public policy and development can be achieved in Africa, especially at the national level. This also suggests that low interest for evaluation in Africa is due to eCD not being considered a programmatic area, but an add-on activity.

- In many African countries there is still, unfortunately, exclusive reliance on external expertise which results in evaluations that are inapplicable—no matter how technically sound—due to the absence of an organic link to the administrative apparatus (Schiavo-Campo, 2005). Internally, the government, through the parliament, needs to create strong in-house capacity to design, guide, and contract and monitor both internal and external evaluations. This in-house capacity requires a systemic connection to parliamentarians in whatever manner deemed effective in their respective countries (Schiavo-Campo, 2005).
Attracting and keeping parliamentarians interested in evaluation has been a major challenge. This issue lies predominantly with the slow progress in the demand for evaluation and in African countries slowly accepting development evaluation as an important tool in effective policy and decision-making and fostering good governance. Furthermore, development evaluation is not easily accepted by many parliamentarians for various political reasons, such as systematic alignment with the views of the government in place. Even if parliaments have robust power on paper, the political realities inside and outside parliaments make them regularly fail to exercise their duties (Tarsilla, 2014). In addition to the above, parliamentarians suffer a high turnover rate due to the electoral nature of their office, such that capacity can be lost after each election. When parliamentarians gain skills in development evaluation, these skills are lost to their parliament if they lose their electoral seat and/or leave parliament. This means that the demand for evaluation is further hindered, with knowledge and skills transfer at the parliamentary level – in reference to development evaluation – jeopardized. As such, laying a cornerstone for the demand for development evaluation by policy makers, principally parliamentarians, through training, knowledge transfer and application remains a challenge in the establishment of an evaluation culture in Africa.

Lack of resources and/or capacity is also an issue that has plagued the enhancement of evaluation at the legislative level. Parliament, also known as the legislature, is responsible for making laws. Effective law-making frequently requires expertise and capacity no one can expect from all parliamentarians especially in a new field such as evaluation. Since parliament does not consist of professional lawyers, and evaluators who can be expected to understand existing laws and suggest what new laws, and evaluate policies, as this function in most cases is reserved for professionals who are mostly outside the legislative jurisdiction, the role of Parliament is this case is therefore a very limited one of discussing legislation and approving it without implementing its oversight role.

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Opportunities in promoting development evaluation at the legislative level

In order to nurture development evaluation in Africa, the continued existence and expansion of parliamentary networks is crucial to create the link between the suppliers and users of evaluation, allowing parliaments and parliamentarians to understand the principles of evaluation. Parliamentary networks have the capacity to bring national parliaments and parliamentarians together, to work jointly towards a common understanding of the need for evaluation for effective decision-making. An increase in parliamentary network membership is therefore an important opportunity to create an enabling environment for learning.
exchange and cooperation between the suppliers and demanders of evaluation on the continent.

Secondly, from APNODE’s experience, for development evaluation to be effective, it needs to be actively used and promoted at the institutional level. Parliament exercising its oversight mandate at the legislative level offers another opportunity to promote the use of evaluation. It expands parliamentarians’ ability to manoeuvre, with development evaluation as the key instrument used to gain insights into the design, implementation and results of policy (Speer et al., 2015). Parliaments have a direct responsibility for putting evaluation on the political agenda, since evaluation of legislation and government expenditure is more often than not triggered by the parliament, whereby it demands evaluation through a parliamentary procedural request (Speer et al., 2015). More indirectly, members of parliament often question ministers on their policies, processes, content, progress, results, etc. Questions on evaluation are part of a broader controlling/oversight and monitoring role of parliament vis-à-vis government (Speer et al., 2015). It is paramount that both parliaments and parliamentarians work together to use evaluative knowledge for policy development and governance decisions at the micro and macro levels. In essence, parliament can stimulate both the demand and supply of evaluations as well as contribute to an enabling environment for evaluation by ensuring that a legal framework is in place and by advocating for evaluation (ECD Uganda, 2014), or as some APNODE members’ countries have done, institutionalizing evaluation into their constitution.¹

**Conclusion**

Capacity development is a long-term process wherein national governments or regional institutions must own and lead the process and provide long-term support in order to maintain crucial gains. This is more important in an age where development evaluation has moved from a purely donor-based activity to a tool for management and accountability by national governments. The support of governments needs to be more innovative and holistic, focusing on institutional development, individual training, and creating an enabling environment for the promotion of an evaluation culture (OECD-DAC, 2014).

In Africa, the evaluation capacity development journey has only begun. As parliamentary networks continue their efforts – with the support of development partners – to promote an evaluation culture on the African continent by strengthening national M&E systems, establishing regional networks and communities of practice, establishing evaluation platforms, and strengthening national and regional evaluation associations, there is a strong possibility that the architecture needed for sustaining evaluation may start to take hold. But this will only succeed if it is pulled by all local actors – both inside and outside parliaments – and not just pushed by parliamentary networks.

APNODE’s experience shows that development evaluation and ECD support must address both the supply (evaluators) and demand (users) side of evaluation, and that as users of..."Effective law-making needs evidence to back up results, expectations and consequences".
evaluation, parliaments and parliamentarians have an interest in development evaluation. Although challenges such as lack of financial, institutional and human capacity exist, the opportunities offered by parliamentary networks are there for the seizing.
Endnote

1 Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal, and Benin

References


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