Governments in African countries are making efforts to improve good governance, notably by taking evidence-based decisions, but their actions are hindered by the lack or the weakness of an evaluation culture. In most of these countries, the supply of and demand for evaluation are relatively low. The reason is that on the continent, while the decision-makers use monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data from relevant public services or from foreign evaluators, they fail to consider other actors' opinions—universities, civil society and private-sector evaluators.

Moreover, the shortage of training equipment and structures for evaluators compounds financial constraints and the lack of an evaluation culture, as African countries do not deem it necessary to train a significant number of evaluation practitioners and to set a sufficient quantity of dedicated training structures. Therefore, in this article, I propose some actions that may increase the supply and demand for evaluation in Africa.
Africa is a fast-growing continent, and governments have been making efforts to improve good governance, for which the evaluation of public sector actions is essential. Indeed, evaluation contributes to better measuring economic growth and development in terms of level, pace and efficiency. Thanks to evaluation, public servants can be held accountable for their acts. Despite their obvious willingness to assess government actions, many African countries lack a culture of evaluation and, as a result, the level of evaluation supply and demand remains relatively low.

African countries wrongly believed that the design of an evaluation policy or the creation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) units within public services would be sufficient to establish a culture of evaluation. However, creating a culture of evaluation requires a certain number of prerequisites. Firstly, political will, which shows that the government is aware of the need for evaluation and may be planning to engage in evaluation practice, is necessary. Secondly, African states should spare no effort to improve the quality and quantity of evaluation supply and demand. Thirdly, there is a need for synergy between all stakeholders, including the government, academia, the private sector, and development partners. Improvements in the supply of evaluation depend on this.

One of the major challenges is the lack of evaluation courses in Africa’s academic system. As a result, it is difficult to get trained in evaluation within the region. Where evaluation training institutes exist, they have a low intake capacity and do not have enough lecturers. To curb the shortage of lecturers, these institutions are obliged to hire senior evaluators from the West at a higher cost. Due to this high cost, Africa’s evaluation training institutes tend to have higher training fees that are unaffordable to a large segment of the population, making it a discipline for the “well-off”. This state of affairs excludes training for equally intelligent middle class and poor students.

Moreover, a large number of states on the continent do not have evaluation training institutes. Consequently, nationals of African countries who wish to get
One of the major challenges is the lack of evaluation courses in Africa’s academic system.

Some African universities have started offering evaluation trainings in partnership with foreign counterparts. Such joint ventures have led to the relocation of trainings from the West to the benefit of Africa. In Francophone Africa for example, training costs have plummeted owing to a partnership between the national school of public administration (École nationale d’administration publique ENAP) in Canada and universities in countries such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, Mauritania, Niger, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal and Tunisia. As a result, training costs fell by 50 per cent of their former value (e.g., as compared to Canada), but they remain very high for the average African.

The supply of evaluation in Africa is highly varied and categorized. Many countries still lack veritable evaluation training facilities, and the public authorities prefer public training facilities to private structures (technical or academic). This leads to reduced capacity for independent evaluation training institutions, and indirectly, to a categorization of evaluators according to the place where they got trained. According to their region of training, evaluation specialists of the continent are classified into three groups:

1. Evaluators trained outside the continent;
2. Evaluators trained in Africa; and

Evaluators trained outside the continent

African evaluators trained outside the continent typically represent the elite in the field of evaluation, as the institutions having trained them are generally world-famous institutions. Those institutions feature among the most well-known and are members of international networks across several continents. African graduates from such institutions are either from rich families or are scholarship recipients. In most cases, their respective countries regard them as references and they are particularly called on by the government/civil service. Training outside Africa is regularly perceived as being synonymous with the full possession of evaluation skills.

Evaluators trained outside the continent sometimes display a superiority complex vis-à-vis their peers.

trained in evaluation must avail themselves of options such as travelling abroad, especially to Western countries. For many African countries, scholarships are a good means of accessing training in the West, though in a dispersed manner. Unfortunately, in most cases, the scholarships are small in number (about a hundred per year). In addition, there is the thorny issue of the teaching language abroad. In evaluation, the favourite language is English, which does not give many opportunities to nationals of French – and Portuguese speaking countries of the continent and disadvantages them, unless they take time to master the English language before initiating any training. Even distance trainings, which are efficient means of increasing the number of trained evaluators and are often free of charge, are also in English. However, the various dedicated websites are unknown to the majority of African people; only a handful of the privileged have the opportunity to access the free trainings.
There are more evaluators trained in Africa than those trained outside the continent, because training in the region is more accessible to African people, most of whom cannot afford to finance their studies and their stay outside the continent.

Several countries have negotiated a relocation of evaluation trainings which were previously offered in the North. Such relocation of trainings, such as the above-mentioned partnership between ENAP and universities in several francophone African countries, enables Africans who want to be trained in evaluation but who lack the financial means, to obtain training in their region at lower cost.

This category is made up of people who have served as assistants to one or more evaluation experts for some time and who proclaim themselves evaluators. This category also comprises certain graduates who have more or less studied, to variable levels of depth, evaluation subjects, or who have gained some experience in this area.

Furthermore, any person working in an evaluation unit of a ministry, public agency or other governmental entity, may be considered a self-educated evaluator. They have not necessarily acquired any adequate training in M&E, but they call themselves evaluators on the African continent (E. W. Mbeck, 2018).
Other key impediments to the supply and demand for evaluation include a lack of national policy frameworks and guidelines to support the roll out of coherent national evaluations plans and programs. This comes on top of the shortage or insufficiency of training facilities, the lack of a culture of evaluation among public authorities – which demotivates already-trained evaluators and those to be trained – and the lack of collaboration between academicians and decision-makers (E. W. Mbeck, 2012).

The shortage or insufficiency of evaluation training facilities in Africa can be explained by two main factors:

- There is no political will to promote evaluation, since a good number of governments avoid any evaluation of their actions because they fear being judged or sanctioned; and

- The financial problems affecting African countries.

Findings of research work conducted at the University of Yaoundé additionally revealed that:

- Governments could reduce public spending on research by 40 per cent of its current value and obtain more reliable and consensually accepted results if they would accept to finance research and lab works.

- Many African governments resort to public-sector evaluation units or, sometimes, to international and national consultants, and tend to work in isolation with only these teams of experts. This significantly reduces evaluation demand and automatically leads to a decrease in supply.

It is important to involve private sector evaluators in public-sector evaluation activities.

A reinforced collaboration between these entities (government, the civil society and the universities), supported by development partners, will help to better understand the complementarity between self-evaluation (by the government) and independent evaluation (by other actors).

“Improving the supply and demand for evaluation in Africa requires a pooled and coordinated action of all actors – governments, universities, the private sector, associations of evaluators, and development partners”.

Strategies that can improve the supply and demand for evaluation in Africa

Improving the supply and demand for evaluation in Africa requires a pooled and coordinated action of all actors – governments, universities, the private sector, associations of evaluators, and development partners.

Governments should be open to national, non-governmental expertise. A good number of public sector managers and civil servants do not fully understand the rationale behind evaluation, and fear the concept on the grounds that “the political opposition” will use it to belittle the government’s actions. If all stakeholders join their efforts and work as a team, the supply of evaluation is likely to improve both qualitatively and quantitatively in Africa.
To achieve this, a number of measures should be taken.

Firstly, associations of evaluators should increase their visibility at the national level by undertaking activities that help citizens to better understand and appreciate evaluation work. This may include organizing conferences and other public events, realizing commercials, organizing workshops and interviews for secondary school and university students, and other sensitization activities (DSCE, 2009).

Secondly, African countries, with the support of development partners and the private sector, should work to develop the technical and intake capacities of universities and training institutes, so as to enable them to train more evaluators. In addition, these universities and training institutes need to hire more teaching staff to meet the demand of students. In this context, providing subsidies and incentives to trained evaluators is welcome. For now, several African governments simply organize seminars and workshops to train civil servants working in public-sector evaluation units. Such approach is not productive enough, as not only do they spend much money to train a small number of evaluators, but also the training of trainers that should ensure transfer of competences is lacking. With a more significant budget, the public authorities can hire the same experts from abroad to train several trainers who, in turn, will train hundreds or even thousands of evaluators in a relatively short time, thereby improving the quality and volume of the supply of evaluation.

Development partners could fund and encourage the relocation of trainings from developed countries to the African continent. This relocation operation will have the merits of reducing the transportation and living costs of evaluators being trained in Western countries, while enabling a greater number of Africans to be trained on their continent at a more affordable cost.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the supply and demand for evaluation in Africa is relatively low while the majority of governments advocate for good governance. One of the pillars of good governance is evaluation, and it should be a priority in the development of effective good governance structures.

African countries should reasonably be more open to other evaluation actors and not only to Western and public-sector experts, especially as concerns "independent" evaluations, so as to improve the quality of evaluations as a whole. Indeed, it appears that on the continent, a good number of governments have been hiring the same evaluation specialists, that is, their own teams of evaluators or foreign evaluators. In such circumstances, it is difficult to affirm that the evaluations being produced are independent and reliable, as the evaluators depend directly on governments, and even unconsciously, the evaluations they produce can be biased in favour of their client's objectives.

Efforts must be made by independent evaluation actors to foster collaboration between governments, academia and evaluation practitioners to establish and finance academic work and research – e.g. master's degree dissertations, doctoral theses, articles – in the areas that the government intends to evaluate. This innovative action should improve not only demand for evaluation, but also its quality and quantity of supply.

African countries should solicit support from more developed evaluation-minded countries, partners and institutions to focus specifically on training and
creating training facilities with the necessary capacities.

Specialists in evaluation should regularly organize public events covered by the media, symposia and scientific workshops, to sensitize the public on evaluation issues and arouse an increased interest by policy and decision-makers.

Finally, such initiatives can have a more significant impact if development partners and governments are interested in and support African evaluation groups by means of technical assistance and subsidies.

Endnotes


2 Calculation based on the prices applied by the same institution over a 5-year period.

3 Survey conducted in November-December 2017 with students of first year of research and some lab officers.

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Author’s profile

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