Supply and demand for evaluation can be thought of on the one hand in terms of the number of institutions that are involved in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and on the other hand the desire to utilize that information in various processes (policy, programming, development planning, etc.) for the purpose of having an impact.

Development planning processes and outcomes provide one of the means through which stakeholders can insist on evidence-based input into development planning. This challenges national governments to take ownership of the processes by strengthening M&E systems, thereby building effective supply and demand for evaluation. Given that national governments are the forerunners and owners of development planning processes and outcomes, strengthening of these processes will lead to increased emphasis on evidence, and translate into policies, programmes and systems that will in turn strengthen supply and demand for evaluation. Global and continental initiatives that are linked to development planning can provide an additional impetus to this trend.
Introduction

Development planning refers to the strategic measurable goals that a person, organization, community or a nation intends to meet over a stated period of time (Barker 2007). Nations or communities engage in development planning to enable them to deliver on particular objectives or development outcomes to a targeted beneficiary that will lead to changes in his/her condition. For the most part, development planning is an indispensable part of administering effective development policies and programmes within a country. Thus, it is important that the process is driven by evidence (Waterstone 1965: 107 in UNESCA 2011: 3). Development planning processes that yield the expected and desired development outcomes are built upon sound principles of accountability and transparency that are driven by a focus on evidence. This generalization will support the application of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) as instruments to guide development planners and provide the requisite information that is evidence-based, thus leading to the successful attainment of development planning outcomes.

Key Messages

- Supply and demand for evaluation looks at the various institutions involved in monitoring and evaluation on the one hand, and how these institutions make a demand on this information for the purpose of effecting policy, programming and development decisions on the other.

- Development planning provides the platform upon which supply and demand for evaluation can be built and enhanced due to its ability to mobilize development stakeholders to press national governments to be accountable, transparent, results-focused, goal-oriented, etc.

- Global and continental development initiatives that are linked to development plans provide the platform upon which development planning processes and outcomes can be utilized to build supply and demand for evaluation.

- Though relatively new on the African continent, evaluation is speedily growing as a profession and discipline through a growing network of evaluation institutions and has potential for building supply and demand for evaluation.
Practical engagement with development planning suggests that the failure to effectively utilize M&E as a tool to empirically assess development planning interventions does a great disservice to the building of supply and demand for evaluation. Experience as a development planner over the years has shown that there has been little room for evidence in informing the outcomes of development planning in most developing countries. However, a recent assessment of development planning processes across the continent has shown that the story is changing. With the increasing demand for accountability from governments and other institutions, not just by donor institutions but citizens alike, there is an imperative for more evidence-based application to development planning processes. This imperative not only raises awareness for an increase in the usage of M&E information that informs development planning processes but also stimulates the desire by national institutions to create and build effective supply and demand for evaluation information.

Development planning history: Two perspectives

The early history of development planning on the African continent suggests that development planning, beginning with the 1960s, was centralized and influenced by external actors. With little government ownership of the process, the product, which is the plan, appears less attractive, thus falling short of satisfying the aspirations of purported beneficiaries (UNeca 2011: 17). According to Mehmet (1975), this description is similar to the development planning history of Liberia.

In this case, development partners and not the State dictated the planning processes. The underpinning of this argument is that there has been little demand on government for accountability and transparency, particularly in planning processes. With governments not subject to any accountability threshold, the need for any form of evaluative process based on evidence was minimal, and resulted in less demand for evaluation which is further translated to mean limited ownership by government.

Development planning history in Liberia can be categorized under two time periods: pre-war and post-war development planning. Pre-war and post-war development planning in Liberia describe the periods before the civil war in Liberia, which is ideally from the early 50’s to 1990’s, and the period from 2003 to present. Though there is little-recorded history of pre-war development planning in Liberia, much of the information available speaks to the period beginning in the 1950’s with the formation of the joint USA – Liberian Commission for Economic Development (Mehmet 1975: 511).

Development planning processes during these periods were less participatory and the institutional framework around the outcomes was void of any empirical form of assessment. The significance of this point is to illustrate that development planning during this period was driven by a “top down” approach where citizens’ participation was limited and there was little attention given to M&E.

Evidently, this characterization is illustrative of a process devoid of evidence and points in the direction of limited scope for evaluation and evidence.
“a recent assessment of development planning processes across the continent has shown that the story is changing. With the increasing demand for accountability from governments and other institutions, not just by donor institutions but citizens alike, there is an imperative for more evidence-based application to development planning processes.”

The post-war development planning period provides a shift to a “bottom-up” approach which shows some semblance of an evidence-based approach and demand for evaluation. Beginning with the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (iPRSP)\(^1\), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and the Agenda for Transformation (AfT)\(^2\), development planning in Liberia took a twist from a business as usual approach of limited interest in accountability on the part of the government, to a relatively more accountable development planning process that is largely country led.

The World Bank Institute (2013: 7) recounts a number of tools used in the process of developing the AfT which included multi-stakeholder diagnostics, multi-stakeholder outcome-based results framework, institutional change process, etc., all of which provide some semblance of an evidence-based approach to the development planning process. Additionally, these development plans are being informed by sectoral plans that are generated from informed studies and engagements at the various sector levels. The understanding that each sector member, including Ministries, Agencies, and Commissions (MACS), is to formulate its individual plan which are subsequently consolidated into sector plans gives a good impression that the development planning process has been poised for the building of effective supply and demand for evaluation, though there are still challenges.

Though the outcome reports indicate progress in terms of significantly meeting the objectives of these post-war development plans, the non-enabling factors as recounted in the implementation reports of both the PRS (IMF 2012) and the AfT (GOL 2016), cite a number of challenges that affect implementation in terms of the expected impacts. Among these factors is the lack of a robust and strong M&E framework (GOL 2016: 132). Neither the PRS nor the AfT has had a legal framework for M&E. Policy-wise, though there is an M&E policy, the policy is inconsistent across the various plans, and there is a complete absence of legislation to guide M&E activities. Though there is an M&E Unit that is housed in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (the institution with the mandate to oversee the planning function in the country), the unit lacks the basic resource allocation through the national budget to carry out its functions effectively (GOL 2016: 137). Furthermore, neither of the two development plans has been evaluated for the purpose of assessing its impacts, at least from the government standpoint. These challenges or limitations in the M&E setup in Liberia mar development planning processes and contribute to ineffective outcomes.
Solution for ineffective development planning outcomes

An M&E system of such a description exposes the problems associated with the lack of an evidence-based approach to development planning. Such a system casts serious negative light on a country’s development planning processes and raises the question as to how informed the outcomes are, in terms of their intent to articulate citizens’ aspirations and solutions thereof. While there might be several other criteria to validate the effectiveness of the outcomes in terms of their ability to meet people’s aspirations, evaluation is the critical piece that provides the empirical backing needed to substantiate development planning results. What this has meant for Liberia is that the lack of an effective instrument for empirically assessing the outcomes of the planning process has resulted in unanticipated outcomes, as is being inferred in the Government’s midterm report (Gol 2016).

Demand for evaluation should be seen as the linchpin that links development planning with development outcomes, in this case, development plans. Building an effective evaluation system is one of the ways to deal with the problem of ineffective development outcomes that are a result of an ineffective process. While the government has made efforts to build the supply side of evaluation, there are still issues with developing the demand side for evaluation information from a development planning point of view. A look at some of the current initiatives being undertaken by the Government of Liberia, particularly with regard to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), tends to point in the direction of how to build demand for evaluation.

Development planning framework

Already current global and continental development planning initiatives, including the Agenda 2030 and its SDGs, as well as the Agenda 2063, are raising the bar for a more results focused approach to development that is enshrined in the concept of sustainability. For example, the SDGs implementation framework calls for a number of actions to be taken towards implementation. One such approach is MAPS, whose mainstreaming component calls for the integration of the SDGs into a country’s plans at all levels (UNDG 2015: 7). With these mainstreaming and integration efforts, countries would have to resort to an effective development planning process that is informative, time-bound, quantitative, sector-driven, inclusive of all stakeholders, able to articulate major shifts in policies and programs, and other cardinal ingredients to achieve the goals. In a nutshell, the development planning process and outcomes upon which the SDGs’ implementation is hinged have to be evidence-driven. Additionally, this can be enhanced by an approach that seeks to ensure that countries take ownership of both the planning and evaluation processes.
Country-led evaluations

According to Segone (2009: 23) building an effective evaluation system requires a shift from a joint evaluation process involving both donor and government, to a country-led monitoring and evaluation system. A country-led evaluation is an evaluation in which the partner country and not the donor leads and owns the evaluation process. Under this arrangement, according to Segone (2009: 24), the country makes the determination for the evaluation based on a number of considerations ranging from an understanding of the policy type to be evaluated, the evaluation methodology, and how the information or findings from the process will be communicated.

What country-led evaluation does is to cater to the information needs of the country (Segone 2008:24). It is an agent of change and is instrumental in the support of national development results. As stated above, it reinforces the concept of ownership for development planning processes and their outcomes, and provides the platform upon which to engender supply and demand. A similar concept is espoused in the Bellagio Forum report (CLEAR-AA 2012) in which there is an expression for “African led” or “African driven” evaluation. What this means for development planning is that it provides the basis upon which citizens and other stakeholders can insist on transparency, accountability, and dignity for the continent which are communicated through various development planning instruments. A look at evaluation on the continent and how it has engendered supply and demand help reinforce these points.

Defining demand and supply for evaluation: The African perspective

Historically, while there appears to be an adequate supply of monitoring information, which can be considered as (part of) the supply side of evaluation, across Africa and in most developing countries, demand for evaluation has been relatively low. Supply and demand for evaluation can be thought of in terms of the number of institutions that are involved in monitoring and evaluation on the one hand, and the desire to utilize said information in various processes including policy, programming, development planning, etc. for the purpose of deriving impact on the other hand (Porter and Goldman 2013: 2). In other words, when monitoring is the dominant part of a government’s monitoring and evaluation system, then there is an indication of a low demand for evaluation. This is a fundamental issue in most African government M&E systems. As pointed out by Porter and Goldman (2015), and has been stated earlier, demand for evaluation in Africa is much more stimulated by donors, which has given rise to M&E structures. However, the story is changing as there is increasing demand being placed on governments for accountability and transparency.

Evaluation as a tool and a profession is relatively new on the African continent. The history of evaluation in Africa goes back to the 1990’s, leading to the formation of the African Evaluation Association (AFREA), an umbrella organization for evaluators in Africa. Since then, there has been an increase in the number of (national) evaluation associations. Liberia is also a member of AFREA in principle, although her membership is not visible in terms of functionality. At the moment, the Liberia Evaluation Association (LEA) functions as an independent body that brings together professional Liberian evaluators rather than evaluation organizations (Liberia AFREA). At least 52 professional Liberian evaluators are members of LEA. Founded in November 2015, LEA’s objective is to bring all stakeholders involved in M&E to a common platform for the purpose
of sharing insights and developing capacity and standards on M&E (Liberia AfReA). Though there is no recorded engagement of LEA, the initiative to have this body as a member of AfReA is a positive step in the right direction. Juxtaposing this initiative to development planning and the potential for evaluation that is being generated, one can relish the fact that such potential will generate and build adequate supply and demand for evaluation, given the new dynamics in development planning that is tied in with countries’ commitment to implement global and continental development frameworks and the requirements thereof.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is important to restate that evaluation is crucial to assessing development outcomes and impacts, particularly in developing countries. Achieving this will require the building of effective supply and demand for evaluation. Many countries have gone ahead to establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks for the purpose of assessing development outcomes, however the emphasis is on monitoring which is regarded as the supply side of evaluation. Development planning can also be one of the many ways of building an effective demand and supply for evaluation. This is on the basis that it is largely undertaken by governments who bear the greatest responsibility for evidence-based accountability and transparency. Additionally, global and continental development trends and programs which are mainstreamed in a country’s development planning processes and outcomes, emphasize the need for data integrity that is linked to the building of a strong statistical foundation based on evidence. All of these efforts capture the fact that efforts on the continent to build strong demand and supply for evaluation are yielding positive results through the various evaluation networks and evolving trends in development planning.
Endnotes

1 iPRSP (interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) The iPRSP sets out the national socio-economic context, the preparatory process, dimensions of the emerging policy, capacity-building and program choices and priorities for poverty reduction and development, as well as anticipated implementation challenges.

2 AfT (Agenda for Transformation) Liberia’s second post war development strategy succeeding the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

3 The global development agenda that replaced the MDGs. Consists of 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators.

4 Mainstreaming Acceleration Policy Support.

References


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