20. GHANA

BUILDING M&E CAPACITIES TO ENHANCE THE NATIONAL M&E SYSTEM IN GHANA: THE WAY FORWARD

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BACKGROUND

The Government of Ghana is committed to effective public service delivery, strengthening government accountability to its citizens, ensuring that policy formulation and decision-making are based on evidence, and that results are achieved in relation to the country's growth and development targets. The 1992 Constitution and several acts of parliament recognize the need to use monitoring and evaluation to ascertain the extent of progress made towards achieving the objectives of national policies and interventions. There is also a general recognition that M&E are the main instruments for assessing the extent to which the government has done what it pledged to do within the context of its development policies and plans.

Ghana has elaborate institutional arrangements for M&E at the national, regional and district levels. The constitution and supporting legislation have defined M&E roles and responsibilities for government agencies, specific departments of sectoral ministries and units in regional and district administrations. The National Development Planning Commission (the Commission) is the apex body responsible for national M&E. The Commission's M&E guidelines emphasize the involvement of traditional authorities, civil society organizations and development partners to create a participatory approach for effective M&E and feedback mechanisms. The Commission recognizes the fact that both monitoring and evaluation are indispensable tools for measuring performance and development outcomes.

THE NATIONAL M&E SYSTEM

Over the past 10 years, the Commission has increased its efforts to establish a functional national M&E system and to eventually ingrain the culture of M&E in the public sector. The system is hinged on successive four-year medium-term national development policy frameworks and corresponding development plans at the sector and district levels.

National policy frameworks

National development policy frameworks are the principal development policy blueprints that are crafted by the Commission at the national level, with inputs from the public and private sectors. The Commission collates and analyses policy inputs from ministries, departments, agencies and other sources in order to produce a national development policy framework.

Realizing policy objectives depends largely on its effective linkage to development plans at the sector and district levels, and to the national budget. Consequently, effective M&E systems provide valuable feedback and lessons for continuous improvement of the policies, plans and the national budget. The indispensable linkages among these national development building blocks are depicted in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: POLICY, PLAN, M&E CYCLE AND BUDGET LINKAGES
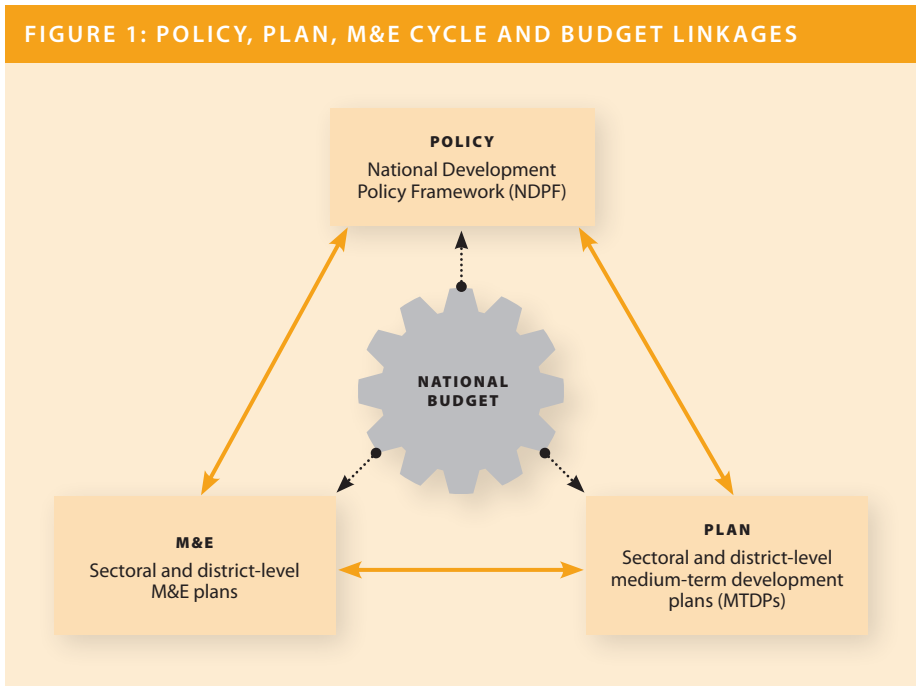
The last three national development policy frameworks were:

- Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I) 2002–2005;

- Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) 2006–2009; and

- Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda (GSGDA) 2010–2013.

Sector and district development plans

Plan preparation follows policy formulation within the planning cycle. It is the medium for translating the policy objectives and strategies of the relevant national development policy frameworks into implementable projects and programmes. The process integrates the spatial, social, economic and environmental issues into specific actions within the decentralized planning system. In this respect, guidelines are issued by the Commission that are in line with the national development policy frameworks and prescribe the process, format and content of the development plans to districts and sectors. Medium-term development plans are then produced by all the metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies and ministries, departments and agencies. These plans are prepared for implementation in order to achieve the policy objectives of the national development policy frameworks.

National M&E plans

M&E processes begin after plan preparation. Effective M&E systems are built on policy formulation, development planning and budgeting systems to provide valuable feedback to those systems. M&E is the main instrument for assessing the extent to which the government has done what it pledged to do in its national policy statements and development plans. The Commission has produced three national M&E plans in line with the GPRS I & II and the GSGDA.

Sector and district M&E guidelines

The Commission issues M&E guidelines for all metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies and sector ministries, departments and agencies for preparing an M&E plan for their corresponding development plans. The sectoral and district-level M&E plans form the basis for their M&E systems and serve as roadmaps for the monitoring and evaluation of corresponding development plans. The guidelines also contain formats and timelines for preparing M&E plans and quarterly and annual progress reports.

M&E training and backstopping

The Commission organizes basic M&E training for core M&E staff of metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies and ministries, departments and agencies in order to enhance their understanding and capacity to prepare and implement their M&E plans. The two-day workshops first discuss key concepts (i.e. monitoring, evaluation and participatory M&E). Attendees then participate in group exercises to explore the 10 steps of preparing an M&E Plan:

1. Identifying and analysing stakeholders;

2. Assessing M&E needs, conditions and capacities;

3. Monitoring indicators;

4. Constructing an M&E matrix;

5. Creating an M&E work plan and calendar;

6. Preparing an M&E budget;

7. Collecting, validating and collating data;

8. Analysing data and using the results;

9. Reporting; and

10. Disseminating information.

On request, Commission staff also organizes backstopping meetings and tailored training programmes to further enhance staff abilities to prepare M&E plans.

Annual progress reports

The majority of metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies and ministries, departments and agencies now prepare M&E plans and annual progress reports. Draft copies of these documents are submitted to the Commission for review and approval. The Commission prepares checklists that are used to review all draft M&E plans and annual progress reports submitted in order to ensure compliance with the key requirements of the M&E guidelines and report formats. Meetings are organized to provide feedback to all metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies and ministries, departments and agencies, in the form of general and specific comments on their M&E plans and annual progress reports. By so doing, the Commission has streamlined the national M&E processes, provided a standard yardstick for measuring progress and established the minimum requirements for any M&E system in the country.

The Commission has produced 10 national annual progress reports between 2002 and 2012. These reports have informed the government on its performance, where it is doing well and where there are weaknesses. The reports also provided policy recommendations on minimizing the weaknesses.

National M&E manual

A key recommendation from participants of the M&E training workshops organized by the Commission was the need for a reference manual. The Commission took up the challenge and produced a draft national M&E manual with   financial support from the World Bank and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency. Review work on the manual was planned for launching in the country. This document will supplement the M&E guidelines, M&E plans and other M&E documents produced by the Commission in collaboration with

its development partners. The manual covers all the essential elements of a national M&E system within the context of development in the Ghana public sector. The main themes of the manual are discussed in four parts: national M&E rationale and linkages, understanding key concepts, understanding M&E as a system and steps to developing an M&E system. The four parts are subdivided into seventeen chapters.

Other M&E activities

During this process of building the national M&E system, the Commission also:

- Conducted a poverty and social impact analysis in order to assess the consequences of certain government policy reforms on the poor and vulnerable under GPRS I;

- Undertook participatory M&E exercises on select national issues and produced citizens assessment reports in 2005 and 2008;

- Disseminated the national annual progress reports and organized regional dissemination workshops to discuss their content;

- Conducted advanced, tailored M&E training programmes for newly created districts in 2009;

- Conducted a baseline study on budgetary resources spent on M&E and statistics by ministries, departments and agencies in 2011; and

- Prepared biennial Ghana Millennium Development Goals reports (2002, 2004, 2006, 2008 and 2010) with the support of the United Nations Development Programme in order to gauge Ghana's progress towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals.

CHALLENGES

The Commission made steady progress, surpassing numerous challenges in its efforts to establish a functional national M&E system. These challenges included:

Weak demand for and utilization of M&E results

The demand for and utilization of M&E results in policy formulation and decision-making is still very low at all levels in the country. For example, national annual progress reports were produced largely in response to development partners' demands for information in the context of their direct support to the national budget through the Multi-Donor Budget Support process. A higher demand for M&E results by the government would have ensured that all interventions were monitored and the impacts of these programmes on citizens were effectively evaluated. Further, stronger demand for M&E results by parliament in its oversight role over the executive is needed. Civil society organizations also need to increase their demand for M&E results for advocacy and social accountability.

Limited resources and budgetary allocations for M&E

To date, M&E has received little priority in all ministries, departments and agencies, and in metropolitan, municipal and district assembly budgets; and actual disbursements were comparatively insignificant. The funds released for M&E activities are often insufficient to build and maintain effective systems. Some ministries, departments, agencies and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies lack the physical equipment required to undertake M&E and data-production activities (e.g. computer systems, transport and office tools). M&E expenditures often lose out when budgetary releases are inadequate. Evaluations are often not conducted primarily due to a lack of funds.

Weak capacity

Although the Commission provided some training to ministries, departments and agencies and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, intuitional and individual M&E capacities remain weak. There are limited resources to build the necessary M&E skills within ministries, departments, agencies, and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies or to ensure that M&E information is used to inform budget allocations and policy formulation.

Lack of incentives, rewards and sanctions

Ministries, departments, agencies, and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies are not held to account for the results they achieve and not required to demonstrate value for money or explain whether they have achieved what they said they would with the resources allocated. There are also no incentives at the individual level to reward staff for carrying out M&E activities.

Non-compliance with M&E reporting timelines and frameworks

The majority of metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies now produce their M&E plans and annual progress reports using the agreed formats in the guidelines. However, the adherence to reporting timelines remains a huge problem at all levels. The differing reporting cycles of ministries, departments and agencies impedes the coordination of M&E results across government and negatively affects the quality and timeliness of producing the national annual progress report.

M&E frameworks that are unaligned to the guidelines issued by the Commission are often due to development partners supporting different M&E systems instead of using the national M&E systems.

Poor data quality, data gaps and inconsistencies

Every year, the production of national annual progress reports must overcome inconsistencies in the data provided by ministries, departments and agencies for the same variables over the same time period, incomplete data in district-level annual progress reports and a lack of data for some indicators.

Inadequate management information systems and networks

Management information systems across ministries, departments, agencies, and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies are inadequate and, in some cases, non-existent. In

many ministries, departments and agencies, data from the district and regional levels is not transferred over a network.

THE WAY FORWARD

The Commission recognizes that the road to a functional M&E system is very long. The Commission is also aware that it will have to build solid partnerships and continue to refine the roadmap through a very participatory process. To move forward, one of the immediate steps the Commission must take is to enhance the M&E awareness and capacities of policy- and decision-makers at all governance levels. With the support of the Japanese International Cooperation Agency, the Commission will soon organize tailored M&E training programmes for ministers of state, members of parliament, chief directors, district chief executives and presiding members of district assemblies. If the political leadership understood and appreci-ated the value of M&E, this would translate into greater support for establishing a national M&E system and enhancing investments in evaluations.

Other steps the Commission must take in the near future include developing a national long-term policy on building institutional and individual M&E capacities to increase the pool of skilled M&E specialists in order to support the growth of the national M&E system. The Commission should also develop mechanisms to increase general awareness and recogni-tion of the necessity and benefits of having a strong national M&E system. This will enhance demand and use of M&E information by the office of the president, parliament, civil society organizations, research and academic institutions, development partners, the media and indeed all citizens of Ghana. There is an urgent need to shift from preparing annual progress reports merely to comply with statutory requirements or donor-related demands to gener-ating domestically owned M&E products as an integral part of good governance.

There is the need to institute rewards and sanctions for institutions and individuals that abide by or fall short in the use of time and resources to meet their M&E mandates. An example would be to strengthen the linkages between M&E results and the release of funds to ministries, departments, agencies, and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies.

The Commission should develop a long-term strategy for a sustainable funding mechanism for all M&E activities in the country—for example, by earmarking 2 to 5 percent of all develop-ment budgets for M&E (e.g. investment and service portions of the national budget, budgets of the medium-term development plans, budgets of projects and programmes).

There is a need to develop a long-term mechanism to progressively increase budgetary allocations to the Commission, ministries, departments, agencies, and metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, as well as the Ghana statistical service, in order to conduct evaluations, to collect credible data and to develop information management systems. There is a need to have database systems readily available to store, analyse, retrieve and properly use M&E information for policymaking and budgetary decisions. The information and communications technology networks between different levels of government also need to be addressed in order to ensure timely and quality reporting of information and data.

The Commission should develop a dialogue mechanism that will ensure that all develop-ment partners are aware and support the national M&E system and avoid duplicating efforts.

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