

BENIN: PRACTICE AND USE OF THE EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES

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INTRODUCTION

The quality of public policy design in Africa has experienced a marked improvement over the last decade with countries' development and adoption of poverty reduction strategy papers and strategic development guidelines. However, despite improvements in strategies and public policies, the results achieved in terms of development are not yet satisfactory because the implementation of public programmes still suffers from significant shortfalls.

Reduced development assistance and the scarcity of national resources challenge managers and governments to achieve quality in implementing poverty reduction policies. These challenges can be addressed by developing and implementing national evaluation systems to increase government accountability and efficiencies in service delivery.

Several stakes are linked to the dynamics involved in developing national evaluation policies. The most significant are the need to make evaluations useful and to instil a culture and standards that will lead to a sustainable national system of evaluation. Evaluation processes are not always properly used or, at best, are not used to full potential. It is therefore important to evaluate the use of evaluations as they are applied by countries and organizations.

This working document presents the experience of Benin over the past few years. It outlines the efforts the Government of Benin has made to create a national evaluation system in order to disseminate good practices and implement an effective mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction (SCRIP).

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES

The Government of Benin has recently acknowledged the importance of evaluation. The Prime Minister's Office has established the Office of Evaluation on Public Policies (BEPP) to

assume the responsibility for evaluation and to report to the government on related progress.

With the support of the Evaluation Office of the United Nations Development Programme, Benin conducted a national capacity study on evaluation. The study showed the low use of evaluation in management practices and identified significant dysfunctions, such as weaknesses in existing capacity, disorganization of evaluation activities, reluctance of managers and the scarcity of resources allocated to the few existing evaluation services.

Faced with the difficulties in disseminating information, cooperating for the efficient conduct of evaluations and establishing the basis of evaluations on public policies (EPP) in Benin, the BEPP drew up a global institutional framework that identifies the state and non-state actors called upon to play a role in public policy evaluation processes. This institutional framework specifies their roles in conducting evaluations and sharing information on public policies.

The 'Institutional Framework for the Evaluation of Public Policies' highlights several groups of actors:

- BEPP, a central structure of coordination and execution reporting to the Office of the Prime Minister. BEPP is responsible for conducting evaluations of national sector policies, programmes, projects, public–private partnerships and large state interventions. BEPP reports its results to the government;
- The National Council of Evaluation (yet to be created) will be a structure to promote evaluation practices and compliance with evaluation standards. Providing the framework for evaluation practices to ensure their quality, it will have a consulting and advisory role on matters of methodologies and implementation mechanisms to be applied;
- The National Assembly, Chamber of Accounts of the Supreme Court and the Economic and Social Council, which are the advisory and control bodies;
- The Ministry of Development (at the central level) includes structures for monitoring and evaluation, as do other entities responsible for planning and statistical and economic analysis. These include the Observatory of Social Change; the General Directorate for Development Policies (responsible for ensuring the coherence of public policies); the General Directorate for Monitoring of Projects and Programs; the Department for Monitoring Economic and Financial Programs; and the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Analysis;
- Sectorial-level structures, represented by the Directorates of Programming and the Perspectives of ministries, which are the focal points of the BEPP at the level of their respective ministries. They inform the BEPP about the programmes and projects that are carried out and serve as the gateway for applying evaluations;
- Local-level structures, including prefectures and decentralized government units; and
- Non-state stakeholders, such as non-governmental organizations, associations, beneficiary representatives, universities, research and development institutes, the private sector and technical and financial partners.

This institutional framework has been very well received by stakeholders. With the exception of the National Council of Evaluation, the framework is operational and ongoing, enabling evaluations to be conducted easier than in the past. This institutional framework has also proved to be important in planning and enhancing capacity development of public administration and non-state actors.

This institutional framework and its mechanism for implementing evaluations have led to increased efficiencies. The mechanism has enabled an increased stakeholder participation in formulating recommendations that take their concerns into account. The framework is also used for:

- Identifying evaluations to be conducted;
- Creating evaluation authorities in charge of steering and ensuring the scientific quality of evaluations;
- Ensuring different actors' participation in an evaluation;
- Disseminating results; and
- Monitoring the implementation of an evaluation's recommendations.

Following a conference during Benin Evaluation Day in June 2010, the government acknowledged the conference's recommendations and elevated the evaluation of public policies as a national priority. It is also committed to building national evaluation capacity, developing an evaluation culture and promoting its institutionalization.

IMPLEMENTING THE EVALUATION OF PUBLIC POLICIES

Implementing evaluation process in Benin will be analysed at two levels: the evaluation of public policies and implementing monitoring and evaluation of the SCRP.

Evaluation of public policies

Conduct of evaluations of public policies

Several evaluations are conducted in Benin, both by the state and by technical and financial partners involved in projects. This paper addresses the use of evaluations carried out on national sectorial public policies conducted by BEPP.

Between 2009 and 2011, BEPP conducted several evaluations of public policies in the areas of agriculture, education, rural electrification, public finances, administrative reform, decentralization and health. These evaluations have been carried out in order to ensure the policy's:

- Coherence;
- Effectiveness and efficiency;
- Appropriateness of goals and the means of achieving the goals;
- Effectiveness of organizational and institutional framework; and
- Sustainability of results.

The Office of Evaluation of Public Policy uses a participatory approach involving the sectorial ministries, professional associations, civil society organizations and technical and financial partners. In this regard, evaluation implementation is multidisciplinary and comprised of a wide range of experts and actors representing a broad and independent cross-section of opinion. To ensure the independence of the evaluation, BEPP has adopted an approach of outsourcing by using and building national capacities based on using independent firms for each evaluation. This approach has also led BEPP to develop, with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF Benin), a national directory of evaluators.

Evaluations are conducted based on an annual activity programme developed according to defined criteria. Evaluations are also launched at the request of the government to respond to specific concerns.

Use of evaluations

Evaluations conducted by BEPP have shown their usefulness to the government and other actors, assisting in decision-making processes. The results of evaluations are formally presented to the cabinet, which decides upon and approves the reports. Among other matters, the cabinet makes the necessary decisions on the recommendations made and instructs the ministries and related departments regarding implementing the recommendations.

Evaluations are particularly useful for actors inform and be informed. Decision makers are not always well informed on the evolution of a sector, on the policies that are implemented or on dysfunctions in the structures of execution. An evaluation report allows them to have a qualified level of information to better focus on future interventions in that sector.

At the level of executing structures and partners, evaluations improve implementation. The evaluation process is an opportunity to analyse and answer specific questions to improve a project or intervention. Evaluations enable a real exchange of information and create new synergies even before making any results available. Following the publication of results, an evaluation is an advocacy tool to secure new resources or review programming. Evaluations are also used to implement recommendations in practical terms and follow up on the Council of Ministers' instructions.

Evaluations have helped structures identify good practices and take steps to maintain the benefits and quality of their services. Evaluations have also become a valuable documentary source for developing new programmes and design future strategies.

At the level of civil society and the beneficiaries, evaluations inform stakeholders of the progress and difficulties in policies' implementation. Widely disseminating results enables remobilizing of civil society and local community actors around key policy issues.

At BEPP, evaluations are particularly useful for communicating on developments within a sector, proposing new reforms to the government, and informing the population, technical and financial partners, and other state structures in order to create the necessary mobilization to implement the most efficient policies or intervention designs.

BEPP also conducts follow-up activities on the Council of Ministers' recommendations and instructions. This exercise in post-evaluation management is particularly important and likely to lead to the establishment of committees for the recommendations of each evaluation.

EVALUATION OF THE GROWTH STRATEGY FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

Mechanism for monitoring and evaluation

The Government of Benin is aware that its definition of a growth strategy for poverty reduction is not sufficient in itself. It therefore follows that programmes to be implemented under the poverty reduction strategy must contain monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. The technical follow-up of the implementation of SCRP is ensured by the Observatory of Social Change, which also monitors the impact of strategies on poverty and social issues.

Periodic evaluations of previous SCRP implementations have shown that the implementations suffered from weaknesses in the system of data collection and a weak commitment on the part of the actors at the ground level. The mechanisms of the SCRP 2011–2015 address these problems by allowing for wider participation and better use of results. This new system will allow evaluating policies and programmes derived internally or externally.

The new system for monitoring and evaluating the SCRP has the mission of measuring the effects of policies and actions on target groups and on objectives of development (e.g. growth, poverty and social development). These evaluations will enable establishing linkages between programme and project execution to the results in terms of development and the welfare of the targeted groups. The evaluations will be better synchronized with the programming of the sectorial activities, the revision of programmes and sectorial strategies and that of the SCRP 2011–2015. Evaluations will serve to assess the effectiveness of priority programs with regards to long-term policy objectives in the strategy.

In terms of deliverables, the mechanism for monitoring and evaluation will provide outputs such as evaluations of the effectiveness of sectorial strategies and public policies ensured by the BEPP. The mechanism will produce selective studies of the impacts of policies and programmes on poverty as ensured by the Observatory of Social Change. The specifications for evaluations will be revised annually and take into account SCRP 2011–2015 priorities.

TOOLS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION THE SCRP

The Observatory of Social Change has adopted and experimented with two tools for monitoring and analysis of impacts adopted from The World Bank: the Local Participatory Impact Monitoring and Poverty and Social Impact Analysis. The Local Participatory Impact Monitoring tool is an iterative process by which actors commit to analysing household satisfaction of beneficiaries and analysing the effects and impacts services have on standards of living. The tool also requires monitoring the financial, material and human resources allocated to realizing services provided and measuring the performance of the structures involved in providing the services. Poverty and Social Impact Analysis entails analysing the distributional impacts of political reforms on the standard of living of different stakeholders, with particular attention to the poor and the vulnerable.

For implementation, both of these tools require the establishment of a steering committee. The steering committee is constituted not only of technical and financial partners, but also of Benin administration representatives authorized to implement recommendations. The steering committee is the transmission mechanism for the results in order

to help in decision-making processes. At the end of each study, the committee is also assisted by the operationalization of the recommendations under the aegis of the Observatory of Social Change and advice from the Council of Ministers as required.

PROSPECTS: NEED FOR A NATIONAL POLICY OF EVALUATION

The utility of the evaluations carried out in Benin has remained marginal. Several factors have hampered the development of the practice, such as:

- Lack of resources;
- Lack of statistical information;
- Human resources deficits;
- Low demand by officials;
- Limited effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation units that are only engaged in monitoring to the detriment of the evaluation;
- Poor definition of structures' mandates; and
- Unawareness of evaluation methods.

To improve this situation, many measures have been identified as necessary for evaluation development, such as:

- Increasing the accountability of a central structure;
- Providing necessary financial resources;
- Establishing a legal and regulatory framework;
- Building capacities;
- Raising awareness of decision makers;
- Promoting training; and
- Harmonizing approaches by development partners in accordance with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action.

A National Policy of Evaluation has been developed in order to define the overall framework for planning and implementing evaluations. The National Policy of Evaluation aims to promote institutional responsibility in research and managerial accountability. Its main objectives are:

- Promoting a culture of learning inside the public administration;
- Furthering knowledge management and the dissemination of good management practice;
- Enhancing accountability within the government;
- Systematizing accountability by institutions and citizens.

This policy applies to the government, the central public administration and its decentralized structures and administrations. It is integrated into all other public action by the public authority and can be the object of an evaluation, except for national security interventions.

Key factors affect national evaluation policy implementation, including:

- The professionalization of the evaluative function;
- The reform of follow-up evaluations contained within sectorial ministries through the creation of two units that are responsible for programme evaluation and monitoring and statistics;
- The creation of a National Development Fund for Evaluation to support development efforts of evaluation practices at the national level;
- The creation of a National Council for Evaluation with a mandate to train and develop evaluation practices in Benin;
- The establishment of a regulatory framework laying down the provisions of the various structures responsible for the evaluation process;
- The development and implementation of a programme for building national evaluation capacity;
- The assistance of the government for training and financial or human resources to support local governments wishing to develop evaluation mechanisms within their administrations; and
- The development and contribution of training institutes and national universities to offer continuing education cycles and professional training that make available specific skills in evaluation.

CONCLUSION

The use of evaluation procedures in Benin is in its infant stages and the prospects are good. Concerns over evaluations have been a significant obstacle. The establishment of the Office of Evaluation of National Public Policies and the actions regarding information and communication contribute to gradually overcoming this difficulty. It is expected that in the coming years the process evaluating policies will become more inclusive and participatory, thereby allowing a rational and systematic use of the results of evaluations.

The experience of evaluations on public policies conducted by BEPP proves that optimal use is possible, particularly if adequate support is given to following up the implementation of evaluation recommendations. For the national evaluation policy, it is part of the current program of the government to use the evaluation to increase the effectiveness of public policies for a better management of the populations' real needs. All stakeholders have acknowledged the necessity of developing evaluation practices in Benin; the national evaluation policy is a unifying tool for realizing this ambition. Its implementation will help Benin set an example in the evaluation community by gradually transforming its public administration into a well-performing and learning organization.