



Cameroon – Contribution to Evaluation Capacity Development in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities from the African Evaluation Association

SERGE ERIC YAKEU

Former President of African Evaluation Association,
Senior Evaluator and Visiting Professor

BRIEF HISTORY OF AFRICAN EVALUATION ASSOCIATION

Headquartered in Accra, Ghana, the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) is an umbrella body for more than 30 national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) associations and networks in Africa. It is also a resource for individuals in countries where national bodies or Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) are absent. The objectives of the association are to:

- support evaluations that contribute to real and sustained development in Africa;
- promote Africa-rooted and Africa-led evaluation by sharing African evaluation perspectives;
- encourage the development and documentation of high-quality evaluation practice and theory;
- support the establishment and growth of national evaluation associations and special evaluation interest groups; and
- facilitate capacity-building, networking and sharing of evaluation theories, techniques and tools among evaluators, policymakers, researchers and development specialists.

One of the pivotal roles AfrEA plays in international evaluation is that of hosting the biennial international conference. The conference facilitates networking, knowledge sharing and evaluation capacity-building activities for member associations, individuals, funders, partners and stakeholders globally but particularly in Africa.

As defined in the membership policy, the association consist of:

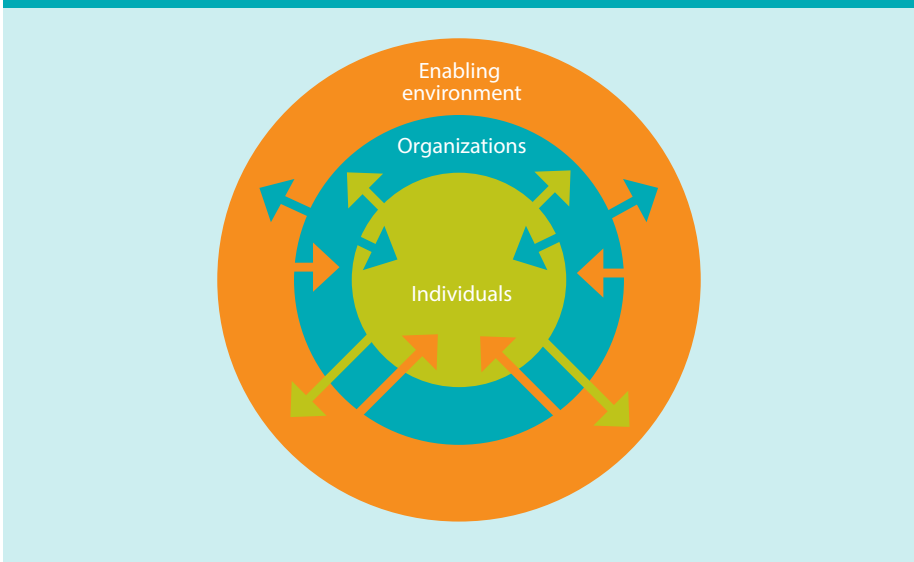
- individual members (available for those members who do not have access to VOPEs or would like to support AfrEA from outside the continent);
- VOPEs which encompass national evaluation associations, networks, societies and/or communities of practice; and

- institutional members such as bilateral, multilateral agencies, companies or research/academic institutions.⁶³

OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) involves both the organization or institution and individuals in an enabling environment. Capacity development is related to the ability of individuals, organizations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully. Figure 1 highlights the conceptual framework of capacity development which comprises the individual and organizational dimensions within an enabling environment. It defines the context in which individuals and organizations operate and is characterized by: i) the institutional structure of the country, ii) the implicit and explicit rules, iii) the power structures and, iv) the legal and policy environment.

FIGURE 1. THE ECD FRAMEWORK WITHIN AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT



The individual dimension of an ECD is related to knowledge, values, skills, attitudes, and behaviours. The organizational dimension is related to the operation and performance of any organization. It includes: mandates, systems, internal processes, organizational priorities, motivations (financial or otherwise) and career plans, mechanisms for collaboration between organizations, infrastructure and equipment. The arrows define the mutual interaction between individuals and their respective organizations.

63 For more details, please visit our website at www.afrea.org

AFREA'S KEY ECD INITIATIVES

AfrEA has completed various ECD activities among which the following have received the greatest international recognition.

P2P learning projects: This was a peer-to-peer (P2P) in the Global South for mutual learning between AfrEA and ReLAC (Latin American Network of Evaluation).⁶⁴ It was focused on institutional capacity, enabling environment, and individual members' evaluation capacities. This project was concentrated mainly in three experiences from AfrEA, which are clear strengths of its development as a VOPE, and are quite relevant for the situation of ReLAC:

- the development of the African Evaluation Guidelines;
- the work on 'Made in Africa Evaluation' or 'African-Rooted Evaluation';
- the partnership both with the academia (e.g. with Wageningen University) as well as with donors (e.g. the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, African Development Bank).

Although personal contacts have existed previously among members of these regional VOPEs, this project has inaugurated the first formal and institutional exchange. This was achieved through webinars, a face-to-face workshop, and the participation of ReLAC members in the AfrEA conference.

The different activities originally planned were developed and the outcome of each activity was reached fully. Without a doubt, the development of the webinars was quite important for ReLAC as the receiver VOPE. It was possible to agree on a general outline for each webinar, to translate the PowerPoint presentations from English to Spanish beforehand and to do simultaneous translation. As the PowerPoint was already in Spanish, it was easier for the audience to follow the content of the presentation. Each webinar ended with questions and answers, which made the exchange very productive. These webinars were attended by 10 to 15 participants, and the links of each were widely distributed to ReLAC's regional and national mailing lists.

The face-to-face meeting between an AfrEA representative and eight members of the ReLAC, including present and past executive committee, was a particularly rewarding experience. It provided an opportunity to talk about the new directions sought by AfrEA, as well as its experience in approaching donors and actors from academia. After the webinars, a working group was set in the ReLAC social media platform, inspired by the discussions and exchanges allowed by the project. The group worked on 'Evaluation from Latin America', and discussed the culture of competencies. About 50 participants from the region were reached for a very rich exchange of bibliography and opinions. The working group coordinators invited participants to a seminar in El Salvador the following year where the group shared some of their advances.

64 For more information for both parties, please contact Pablo Rodríguez-Bilella (pablo67@gmail.com) for ReLAC and Serge Eric Yakeu Djiam (Serge.eric01@gmail.com) for AfrEA.

A short presentation about this working group was produced in November 2013, both in Spanish and English. The Spanish version was developed to disseminate the work more widely among ReLAC and other evaluation-linked networks (e.g. RedLacME, CLAD – Centro Latinoamericano de Administración para el Desarrollo). New members have joined the group. Taking the advantage of the CLAD Conference in Uruguay at the end of October 2014, ReLAC members held a panel where this working group was introduced.

Finally, this experience with AfrEA encouraged two ReLAC participants (Pablo Rodríguez-Bilella and Esteban Tapella) to propose and develop a workshop at the AfrEA Conference in Yaounde. The topic of the workshop was the “*sistematización* approach, a Latin American participatory learning evaluation approach”, which was very well received by participants. AfrEA funded the participation of the two representatives of ReLAC at the 2014 international conference.

MAIN LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF THE PROJECT FOR OTHER VOPEs

- VOPEs language barriers in the exchange of experiences can be overcome if there is good will and appropriate capacity from members. The previous translations of the PowerPoints were necessary for allowing participants to follow the speakers in their presentations.
- Face-to-face interactions can be greatly improved by previous online exchanges, as was the case with webinars. Once evaluators actually met, they felt that there was an important previous knowledge of colleagues and their work, which helped a lot for fruitful interaction.
- Beyond the differences in the contexts of the regions, it was possible to discover key bottlenecks in the development of VOPEs, as well as to understand common interest (e.g. the role of culture in the evaluation work).
- It is important to involve participants as much as possible, and not restrict the exchange to board members. Many VOPEs members could be inspired by the exchanges produced.
- It was great to record the webinars in order to share them later with other people, members of the VOPEs or not. This is quite important in order to facilitate the diffusion of the exchange beyond those who were able to participate during its actual development.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS DURING AFREA BIENNIAL CONFERENCES

One of the pivotal roles AfrEA plays in international ECD is in hosting the AfrEA Biennial International Conference. The association has hosted seven such conferences, in Nairobi (1999 and 2002), Cape Town (2004), Niamey (2007), Cairo (2009), Accra (2012) and Yaounde (2014), constantly seeking to innovate while remaining faithful to its conference format. That format

comprises the traditional two-day pre-conference workshops during which participants take part in training sessions on very diverse topics around the main theme.

For the 7th conference in Yaounde, 30 pre-conference workshops were offered to beginners and experienced professionals on such topics as building M&E systems, equity and gender responsiveness, design and management of M&E data, strengthening of VOPEs and impact evaluation. About 350 participants attended the pre-conference workshops, nine of which were offered in French only. One innovation was a bilingual pre-conference workshop for parliamentarians organized and managed by the African Development Bank. About 50 parliamentarians from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia attended the forum for mutual exchange and learning on legislators' role in supporting an enabling environment for evaluation in Africa.

EvalMentors: With financial support from EvalPartners, AfrEA offered grants to four VOPEs to develop institutional capacity. Two Anglophone and two Francophone VOPEs were selected representing West Africa (Liberia Evaluation Association), Central Africa (Cameroon Development Evaluation Association) and East Africa (Evaluation Society of Kenya and Réseau National d'Evaluation du Burundi).

Under the co-chair of the AfrEA President and two volunteer colleagues from the Canadian Evaluation Society, this learning initiative was developed with the objective of fostering peer-to-peer exchanges with the collaboration of the Quebec Society for Programme Evaluation. Special attention was paid to their ability to play a strategic role in-country on promoting equity and gender sensitivity in evaluations. The following learning outcomes were achieved:

1. Ensure a firm commitment of the three parties involved from the beginning and sustain it over time and during changing periods of actors. This helps to improve communication and follow-up with VOPEs.
2. AfrEA support could be strengthened initially by communicating with its Board and its VOPEs, leading and monitoring the project from its VOPEs. This should be initiated from the beginning.
3. The concept of mentoring should be proposed but not imposed. Despite their initial opening, the VOPEs evolved into projects mobilize their internal forces without seeking external mentoring. The mentoring component is explicit from the outset and it is followed and supported to ensure its implementation.
4. The monitoring of VOPEs should be more systematic with support from the management committee of EvalMentors. A faster resolution of constraints on the ground and better adherence to schedules (re-reports) is highly important. However, more explicit and sustained support to VOPEs in a menu format should be provided when needed.
5. A linkage between national and AfrEA VOPEs for the financial aspect of the project to improve responsiveness need regular monitoring with the management committee when necessary. However, the parameters of the financial management and

monitoring should be better defined. It helps to ensure AfrEA's ability for a timely follow-up of this aspect of the project.

Mentoring (Roster of Experts): This is an initiative to map both professional and junior evaluation experts in Africa. The AfrEA office in Africa launched this activity in 2013 for all national VOPEs. However, it has to be updated and needs further improvement by the current and upcoming board. The objective is to generate a pool of evaluation experts per country to be used or recommended when needed and where necessary by AfrEA or by any partner.

The African Evaluation Journal: The *African Evaluation Journal*⁶⁵ forms an online platform for learning and knowledge sharing on theoretical and practical evaluation and ECD case studies in Africa. The first issue was launched during the 2014 AfrEA conference in Yaounde, which was indeed a significant highlight.

The editorial team members shared with participants the first issue and the second edition was published in 2015. Three thousand copies of the first issue were given free of charge to participants. This marked the availability of a platform and opportunity for evaluators in and outside Africa to document their work and share their expertise with a wider audience. The second issue received more than a thousand downloads from its website. This was an online product available for free.

Possible Future ECD Agenda: AfrEA is looking to work with other international, regional and national VOPEs to support the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁶⁶ adopted in September 2015 by the United Nations to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The AfrEA's ECD agenda for the SDGs still has to be developed. This will be part of its future ECD activities. The 17 SDGs and associated targets have the potential to transform societies and mobilize people and countries. This needs AfrEA contribution so that effective, accountable and inclusive institutions with sound policies and good governance could be established especially in Africa under an evaluation function and profession.

Recently in Bangkok (2015), VOPE representatives affirmed their availability and willingness to support the SDGs. They globally accepted the 'Bangkok Principles on National Evaluation Capacity for the SDGs' which comprise professional practices that span from government, private to non-profit sectors. Its achievements should be developed from internal management consultancy through formal independent oversight to academic and development research. Diverse experiences and common understanding on the challenges and opportunities for evaluation practice should be gathered to support the SDGs as a transformational vision for a world of universal respect for human rights, dignity, equality, and non-discrimination.

Even at the AfrEA level, the SDGs agenda shall be country-led and tailored to respective national priority setting. This should be aligned to its so-called "Made in Africa approaches

65 More information on the *African Evaluation Journal* can be found at <<http://www.aejonline.org/index.php/aej>>.

66 The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, are an intergovernmental set of aspiration Goals with 169 targets. The Goals are contained in paragraph 51 United Nations Resolution A/RES/70/1 of 25 September 2015.

to evaluation” under development. The concept seeks to identify and develop a uniquely African approach to evaluation. It emphasizes that context, culture, history and beliefs shape the nature of evaluations, specifically in the diverse, often complex African reality. It is known that context matters for performance. And it matters for if and how individuals, organizations and wider systems develop capacity. The entry point of the ECD for SDGs should be led at the national level. It could be associated with the following initiatives of the Bangkok Declaration: i) Conduct of country-level ‘SDG evaluation needs’ reviews and diagnostic studies; ii) Institutionalization of evaluation by fostering evaluation as component of national governance and public sector management reform; iii) promoting the establishment of national evaluation legal frameworks such as legislation and policies; iv) Driving resources for the conduct of evaluations; v) Providing local assistance to national and local data systems to monitor SDG progress; vi) Initiating opportunities for local, young and emerging evaluators; vii) Assisting national, regional and global evaluation professional organizations and; viii) Development of events such international forums of exchange between users and producers of evaluation, including pre-conference workshops during AfrEA conferences and web-based platforms for knowledge management.

FURTHER NEED FOR IMPROVEMENTS

With regard to the increasing demand for ECD activities in Africa, proper technical assistance should particularly consider the following items which represent the main conditions to achieve success:

- Institutional and individual capacities: as has been highlighted previously, the ECD is operating within an enabling environment for both individuals and their organizations. Its conceptual framework should guide any ECD activity.
- Format of an ECD: Its format varies depending on the length of the activity and the audience (from beginners to professional experts). This should be always linked to the expected objectives to be achieved (short-, middle- and long-term objectives).

REFERENCES

African Evaluation Association (AfrEA). 2012. Conference Narrative Report.

African Evaluation Association (AfrEA). 2014. Conference Narrative Report. Available at <<http://www.afrea.org/>>.

International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS). 2015. ‘Bangkok Principles on National Evaluation Capacity for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Era’. Available at <http://web.undp.org/evaluation/documents/NEC/2015/Bangkok_declaration.pdf>.

New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). 2010. ‘Capacity Development Strategic Framework.’

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2011. ‘Perspectives Note: The Enabling Environment for Capacity Development’. January 2011.

United Nations (UN). 2015. 'The Sustainable Development Goals'. Available at <<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>>.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2008. 'Capacity Development – Practice Note'. UNDP Capacity Development Group. New York.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2009. 'Capacity Development'. UNDP Capacity Development Group. New York.