

23. MALAWI

PROMOTING USE OF EVALUATION RESULTS BY SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN MALAWI

TED SITIMA-WINA
Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Economic Planning and Development

INTRODUCTION

In 2006, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development in Malawi developed the National Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan, which provides the main framework for monitoring economic and social development policies and programmes in the country. The government implemented the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy from 2002 to 2005, and has been implementing the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy I from 2006 to 2011; it is currently implementing Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (2011 to 2016) as the main frameworks for implementing national development activities. These national development strategies show that all stakeholders have a role to play in implementing, monitoring, evaluating and reviewing development initiatives. To buttress the National Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan, the Malawi government launched a 'sector working group' approach to implementing and managing development initiatives.

The roles and responsibilities assigned to various stakeholders have generated growing pressure on the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development to be more responsive to both internal (e.g. government officials) and external (e.g. civil society organizations) stakeholders on both downward and upward accountability to deliver the aspirations of the people and concrete development results. The penchant for results underscores the need to determine whether planned activities that are being implemented under a development strategy are inclusively improving the welfare of the people.

This pressure has prompted the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development to provide information and data through M&E systems (being established in all public institutions) to senior government officials, development partners and the public on a regular basis. The collection of information and its dissemination has been made possible by having a functioning national M&E system based on the National Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan. The National Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan describes the type of data to be collected for a specific time period for a particular national strategy per sector.

Previously, the challenge was that a great deal of data related to development initiatives was being collected by different stakeholders (e.g. research institutes, universities, government institutions, civil society organizations) and was hardly shared with the public. The establishment of the 'National Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan' ensured that collected data would be harmonized, streamlined, disseminated, discussed and utilized for decision-making within the national monitoring framework.

The national M&E system has therefore become an important public-sector instrument in managing and monitoring delivery of development results and other services.

THE FRAMEWORK ARCHITECTURE AND INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT

Sector working groups

On 20 November 2008, the Government of Malawi launched and institutionalized sector working groups in its development approach. The overall aim of sector working groups is to provide a platform for negotiation, policy dialogue and agreement on plans, strategies and undertakings among stakeholders at the sectoral level. There are a total of 16 sector working groups. Each group is composed of representatives from ministries, civil society organizations, development partners and the private sector. Groups are chaired by a controlling officer and co-chaired by a development partner representative. Sector working groups also provide an operational framework for Malawi's development assistance strategy, which aims to ensure that external resources mobilized by the government are effectively utilized to implement the 'Malawi Growth and Development Strategy'. The goals of the development assistance strategy promote the five norms embedded in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008): ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results and mutual accountability. The attraction of this approach is that although these documents were crafted to increase aid effectiveness, the principles are the same as those required to enhance the effective utilization of national resources.

To complete the equation of accountability, the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development put in place a programme to promote the use of evidence by controlling officers in managing development initiatives by establishing results-based management and M&E systems in all public institutions. The results-based M&E system has a component that emphasizes utilization of evidence-based evaluation results. This component aims to support the effective allocation of resources via an increased use of evidence to inform decision-making at programme, strategy and policy levels. In addition, it aims to enhance the likelihood that strategies and programmes will be effective in achieving their intended objectives, targets and results.

Utilizing evidence-based or evaluation results has the following objectives:

- Increasing the capacity of public policymakers and intermediaries to access, appraise and use available evidence;
- Increasing the capacity of policymakers and senior government officials to commission useful, relevant and high-quality research to inform their decisions;
- Establishing and strengthening working partnerships between government departments, research-institutions, universities, development partners and civil society organizations; and
- Informing capacity-building efforts that address skills gaps in application and understanding of evaluation results.

Technical working groups and committees

Technical working groups are key components in the development process, facilitating maintenance of technical standards and bringing best practices into the sectors. Membership is drawn from specific thematic areas, sector working groups and development partners to pursue actionable recommendations or decision points submitted through the secretariat. They are involved in reviewing technical studies and progress reports from implementing institutions and making recommendations to the sector working groups. The technical working groups are also responsible for selecting projects/programmes for implementation within the M&E framework.

OVERALL APPROACH

The approach focuses on the demand side through active engagement with senior government officials as research-users in which an environment is created conducive to understanding evidence-based assessments of development initiatives. The starting point is the Office of the President and Cabinet where a Monitoring and Evaluation Board was established. The board is chaired by the Chief Secretary; the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development is the secretariat.

Based on the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action, the board, through the Secretariat, demands that each ministry provides output-based annual budgets that have clearly articulated indicators, annual targets and baseline data. The Board then demands monthly and quarterly progress reports from the secretariat, highlighting contributions made to achieving annual targets as set out in the national development strategies.

The M&E Division of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development is responsible for coordinating all outcome and impact monitoring activities across all sectors in the country, and other *ad hoc* surveys conducted within and outside the national monitoring system. The evaluation/review results are synthesized into a management report and

submitted to the board. The secretariat is responsible for disseminating statistics and information through various channels (e.g. press releases, media briefings).

To ensure the functionality of the approach, line ministries have been provided with technical and financial support to build strong M&E sections that collect input and output indicator data and produce annual, quarterly and monthly sector review reports.

The planning process of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy and the economic recovery plan has been participatory, with wide consultations resulting in clearly defined indicators and targets for all sectors. The district-planning manual is a framework that links national strategies with the subnational strategies. The district-planning framework serves as the basis for National Strategy Implementation monitoring at the district level. This entails close integration of national and district-level monitoring systems.

M&E committees have been established at the district (subnational) level as a mirror of committees at the national level. These committees facilitate the discussion and dissemination of district-specific evaluation results and draw participation from a range of community and other institutions at the district level. As beneficiaries, communities take an active role in the actual assessment of local development activities. Comprehensive Community-based Scorecards serve as project and programme assessment tools. The scorecards have been provided to select communities and are being used as a benchmark for assessing the quality of public service delivery and as a feedback system in the public policy arena.

Civil society organizations are also part of the institutional framework at the level of data collection, analysis and feedback. The M&E Division of the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development has made efforts to collaborate with civil society organizations so as to provide independence and credibility to evaluation results. Civil society organizations play a crucial role in implementing community-based monitoring activities.

At the national level, a technical working committee considers monthly, quarterly and annual technical reports and recommendations from the secretariat, which include progress reports from implementing institutions. The technical working committee makes recommendations to the Principal Secretaries Development Results Monitoring Committee. The technical working committee draws on the expertise of its members (primarily research centres) on policy and impact analysis. This ensures the independence and credibility of evaluation results. Reports from the Principal Secretaries are summarized with key recommendations and submitted to the Office of the President and Cabinet for decision-making through the board.

There is also an annual Development Stakeholders Forum, which draws participants from civil society organizations, the donor community, media, academia and the private sector. It acts as a national accountability forum where issues of underperformance (based on the annual review of the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy) are raised and the government is called upon to act. The forum also facilitates information dissemination, discussion and policy recommendations.

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND CONCLUSION

Despite the aspirations to design and deliver coherent and harmonized M&E systems in Malawi, a number of challenges have worked to hamstring such systems' operationalization and functionality. These include weak stakeholder capacities to collect data at the district, council and sectoral levels, non-compliance to scheduled reporting timelines, and weak skills in data analysis, data quality, and storage and dissemination of development results to facilitate usage and accountability. The demand for evaluation results and usage is obvious, but the supply of credible research results is limited. For example, most of the demand is coming in the context of mid-term and end-term impact evaluations of policy and project interventions by government, donors and civil society. The skills and personnel to undertake such key development inputs are trifling or negligible.

On the supply side, Malawi does not have the type of research institutions that are active and prominent in other countries (e.g. independent think tanks, research institutions, evaluation networks or associations). Nevertheless, the establishment of the 'National Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan' provides an opportunity for evidence-based evaluation utilization. In addition, some evaluation institutions, such as 3ie and the University of Johannesburg, have shown interest and commitment to collaborating and working with the Ministry of Economic Planning and Development and local universities to harness the creation and use of evidence-based evaluation. This activity signifies South-South capacity-building initiatives.

REFERENCES

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