

UGANDA: NATIONAL EVALUATION CAPACITY

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OVERVIEW OF THE EVALUATION EFFORT

Policymakers in Uganda favour evidence-based decision-making, and they seek proven, successful programmes. This makes evaluation critical, as it is the only mechanism through which policymakers can be assured of what works and why. However, evaluation practice in government has been rather weak, as most focus has been on monitoring. With the advent of management-for-results practice, there is now a renewed desire to strengthen the evaluative capacity at all levels.

Evaluation takes place in various institutions in Uganda. Recently impact evaluations have been assigned to the Office of the Prime Minister, the overseer of government business. However, in the past civil society organizations (CSOs) sometimes conducted impact evaluations as part of their efforts to advocate for specific policies. For example CSOs conducted an impact evaluation of the structural adjustment policies of liberalization, privatization and civil service reform. On the other hand, research and academic institutions have also been evaluating policy impacts as part of their routine operations.

The Office of the Prime Minister has a directorate of monitoring and evaluation. This directorate is supposed to coordinate national evaluation activities, although actual evaluations are at times conducted by independent consultants. There are also efforts to engage directorate staff in evaluations in collaboration with other institutions.¹¹ (See annex 1 for a chart showing the relationships among the evaluation institutions.)

At the lower project cycle level (midterm and ex ante), evaluations have been conducted by the institutions that implemented the programmes. Post-programme evaluations have been conducted for many sector programmes by independent consultants. National evaluation activities have been largely funded by donors, though the demand for them has come mainly from the national government.

10. President, Uganda Evaluation Association.

11. Staff are planning to evaluate the impact of the resettlement of internally displaced persons in northern Uganda in collaboration with staff from the Economic Policy Research Centre, Uganda Bureau of Statistics and others.

NATURE AND SCOPE OF EVALUATIONS

In Uganda policies, programmes and projects are evaluated at national, sector and project level. The volume of evaluations has been inversely proportional to their level—that is, projects have been the subject of the greatest number of evaluations while policies have received the fewest. This has been attributed to the fact that, in moving from project to programme to policy, evaluations become more complex. This may be a reflection of the evaluation capacity constraints among the country evaluators.

In Uganda, there are three levels of evaluations:

- **Ex-ante evaluations** are undertaken to predict what will work and the socio-economic frameworks within which it will occur. These are aimed at mitigating the negative effects of new policies while enhancing the effectiveness of their implementation. A few have been performed for policies deemed controversial, such as the land use policy. This Poverty and Social Impact study was conducted as a collaboration between the Ministry of Lands, Ministry of Finance and Economic Policy Research Centre. The study, which took six months, consisted of statistical analysis of national data sets and a participatory consultation of a representative sample of beneficiary communities. The study findings were primarily used by the Ministry of Lands to finalize the National Land Use Policy.

Ex-ante evaluations, undertaken for policy planning, are focused mainly on the risks that need to be minimized for effective implementation. In a way these assessments test the programme theory underlying the policy or programme design.

- **Midterm evaluations** of various programmes have been conducted by independent consultants for implementing institutions. These are mainly sector-level evaluations conducted for donor-funded programmes. A midterm evaluation takes anywhere from three weeks to several months, depending on the size and complexity of the programme or project being evaluated. The results are used to inform future operations of the programme or project with a view to improving service delivery. Midterm evaluations usually entail an assessment of programme or project management; review of achievements and challenges; and examination of efficiency, relevance and sustainability. So to a large extent such evaluations are focused on activities, processes, outputs, organizational performance and, to a limited extent, service delivery.
- **Impact evaluations** have been conducted for both national and sectoral policies, programmes and projects. The most significant was that of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP, 1997-2007), which doubled as Uganda's poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP). The evaluation of the 10-year programme was aimed at assessing the effectiveness and relevance of national strategies in fostering pro-poor growth. The national evaluation focused on impacts, outcomes and service delivery, with some reflection on activities and processes. The exercise, which lasted more than six months, was aimed at informing the government's shift from the PEAP to a five-year national development plan.

USE OF EVALUATIONS

The main users of the few national policy evaluations conducted to date have been the government and development partners. Some demand-driven evaluations have been conducted, usually to inform policy shifts. The national PEAP evaluation, for example, was for policymakers, including the President, Cabinet and Parliament, as well as planning technocrats. To ensure ownership and use of the findings, key stakeholders were consulted during the design. To ensure objectivity and credibility of the results, the evaluation was commissioned to a reputable independent firm, while coordination was undertaken by the government evaluation agency, the Office of the Prime Minister. The coordinating agency was assisted by a multi-stakeholder steering committee that supervised the evaluation and provided quality control services. The evaluation report was published and widely circulated. A summary version was prepared along with summary thematic reports for specialized readers. The reports were launched nationally and later shared through the Internet.

With the practice of management for results, diverse stakeholders appreciate the value of evaluation, and demand is increasing. Funding is the biggest challenge, coupled with the weak evaluation capacity in the country. Another problem is timelines. Evaluation studies need ample time, which may not synchronize easily with policymaking processes.

INFLUENCE OF EVALUATION RESULTS

At the sectoral and programme levels many decisions have been based on both midterm evaluations and post-evaluations. But at the national level, evaluations have had two major influences on policy decisions in Uganda:

1. The government implemented structural adjustment policies from the late 1980s to the early 1990s. Economic growth was strong, ranging from 5 percent to 6 percent annually, but complaints about household poverty were rampant. Civil society groups argued that structural adjustment programmes were irrelevant and detrimental to poor countries. The government was debating abandonment of its stringent economic management stance.

However, an analysis of cross-sectional poverty data prepared in collaboration with the World Bank and the Statistics Department for the period 1992-1999 revealed that income poverty had sharply declined. This underscored that prudent economic management may not be sufficient but was a prerequisite to sustained poverty reduction. This work informed the government's decision to maintain its economic policies. This was the genesis of the government's quest for evidence-based decision-making.

2. The findings of the PEAP evaluation showed that the country fell short of various goals because of poor implementation resulting from weak monitoring and supervision of public programmes. As a result, the government has stepped up its monitoring efforts by creating new units, including a budget monitoring and accountability unit in the Ministry of Finance.

DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Monitoring and evaluation in Uganda is conducted by a wide range of skilled personnel, including economists, statisticians, accountants, auditors and other social scientists. Most of these individuals mainly monitor, having limited advanced evaluation skills. A capacity assessment conducted by the Uganda Evaluation Association in 2003 ascertained that the individuals performing monitoring and evaluation activities had varying capacities.¹² Around half (48 percent) had some rudimentary research skills while a quarter (24 percent) had basic monitoring and evaluation capacity. However, a dismal 3 percent had the skills needed for advanced impact evaluations, and 3 percent had skills in quantitative data collection. Just 4 percent could carry out quantitative data analysis. Only 2 percent had the expertise to perform qualitative data collection and analysis. Although the sample was small, it indicated the level of expertise available in Uganda. It was also noted that many evaluators (43 percent) had been involved in project evaluations, but only 16 percent had participated in programme evaluations and none had performed a policy evaluation. It was clear that the limited number of evaluations at the programme and policy levels was partly a reflection of the limited capacity to undertake these complex analyses.

However, the assessment made clear that there was an adequate supply of qualified personnel to manage systems for data collection, storage and dissemination; management information systems; and financial information systems. The Makerere University Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics offers training in data collection, quantitative analysis and dissemination, as do the Faculty of Economics and Management and Institute of Information Technology. Various university departments train students in research methodology. However, the adequate supply of support personnel does not translate into a critical mass of 'professional evaluators' for Uganda.

Although there is no explicit strategy for training public managers in monitoring and evaluation, the Uganda Management Institute offers a short course on monitoring and evaluation. This course provides basic knowledge on the subject.

The evaluation capacity within the government varies across ministries and departments. However, the skills most lacking in government are those needed for the most complex evaluations, those of national policies. Since the Office of the Prime Minister is responsible for these evaluations, to a large extent this capacity has to be built there.

The Uganda Evaluation Association was formed in 2002 as an independent institution to promote the practice, use, quality and ethics of monitoring and evaluation. Among its main objectives are:

1. Build capacity for evaluation through formal and informal training skills exchange, and other avenues that support professional development.
2. Create a national network to facilitate sharing and exchange of up-to-date literature, methods, procedures and practical evaluation frameworks among evaluators.
3. Promote professionalism in evaluation by defining standards and guidelines to evaluation practice.

12. The assessment was conducted for 49 members of the Uganda Evaluation Association working in government, parastatal organizations, the private sector and NGOs.

As a first step, the association has established a collaborative initiative with the Uganda Christian University aimed at designing a comprehensive skills training package.

CONCLUSION

There is a quest for evidence-based decision-making in general and evaluation in particular in the government of Uganda. The evaluation practice is still limited at the national level partly due to capacity constraints. However, efforts are being made to foster professionalism within the evaluation fraternity, and these efforts will need international support.

DOCUMENTS CONSULTED

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ANNEX 1. THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED M&E FRAMEWORK

