



Uganda – Improvement of Development Outcomes through an Evaluation: Uganda’s Evaluation of its Eradication Action Plan

ALBERT BYAMUGISHA

Associate Professor and Commissioner,
Monitoring and Evaluation, Office of the Prime Minister,
Government of Uganda

ALEX TURYATEMBA BASHASHA

Advocate

INTRODUCTION

When the National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in Uganda in 1986, the country had been through two decades of political and economic turmoil. GDP per capita had been reduced to 58 percent of the 1970 level, and subsistence agriculture had increased from 20 percent of GDP to 36 percent over the same period (Reinikka and Collier, 2001). The 1990s saw the introduction of fiscal measures seeking to control spending and inflation, and the merging of finance and planning functions to ensure fiscal discipline. This resulted in a period of macroeconomic stability where economic growth averaged just over 7 percent per annum, and inflation was reduced to single-digit figures after 1992. Political stability was addressed through the development of a new Constitution. Elections were held to a constitutional assembly in 1994 and the new Constitution was adopted in 1995.

Elections were held in 1996, and during the campaign, candidates, including the incumbent President, became increasingly concerned that the growth and stability the country experienced since 1986 was not reaching the poor. The first Household Budget Survey of 1992 revealed that 56 percent of the population were living below the poverty line predominantly in rural areas. In November 1995, a national seminar on poverty was convened, which included civil servants, academics, civil society and donors. The outcome was a decision to develop a Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP).

The PEAP was intended to provide a policy framework to address poverty over a 20-year period. This goal was defined by an ambitious target of reducing the proportion of the population living below the poverty line to 10 percent by 2017. The policy approach behind the PEAP was to enable the poor to benefit from market opportunities and to extend access to and improving the quality of basic social services, while maintaining the fiscal discipline started in the pre-PEAP era (OPM, 2008).

While the goal of the PEAP remained unchanged from 1997, two revisions to the plan were made, in 2000 and 2004. These involved adjustments and additions to the PEAP in

response to changing national political and economic conditions and to evaluate progress towards the targets. Among the changes were the introduction of pillars under which multidimensional strategies were developed. During its implementation, major social and economic policies were introduced under the umbrella of the PEAP pillars, such as universal free primary education, primary health care initiatives, a plan to modernize agriculture and a 10-year roads sector plan. Through the PEAP, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development played a central role in design, implementation and oversight.

THE DEMAND FOR AN EVALUATION

Prolonged GDP growth and reduced dependency on external assistance increased the Government's confidence in managing the economy and improving the people's welfare. But while the poverty headcount steadily declined over the PEAP period, major constraints to human and economic development persisted across the country along with increasing evidence of corruption and weak accountability. By the mid-2000s, there was some revival of support within the NRM for a more interventionist Government role to accelerate national development. By 2007 it became clear that a new PEAP would be required to update the NRM's 'mixed economy' approach and that longer term planning was needed akin to East Asian Tigers where rapid economic and equitable growth was attributed in part to strong long-term central planning. This view was supported by the newly formed National Planning Authority (NPA).

In July 2007, the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MFPED) established a 'PEAP revision task force' composed of representatives of the three coordinating institutions of Government, MFPED, the NPA and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), who is constitutionally mandated to lead Government business in Parliament and coordinate the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Government policies and programmes. At the first meeting, it was proposed that the revision process be made up of three elements; the preparation of the revision to the PEAP itself, some macroeconomic modelling work to provide scenarios for investment, and an evaluation of the PEAP over the period 1997-2007 to provide lessons to guide the revision.

This initial demand for an evaluation of the PEAP came from within the task force. Discussions centred on the management and leadership of the evaluation, who should be responsible, and who should implement the evaluation to ensure its independence and credibility; on the focus of the evaluation to best serve the needs for which it was to be designed; and the use and timing of the evaluation, where it was stressed that the evaluation must be completed to feed into the revision process. Even within this context, there were detractors, with some task force members suggesting that an evaluation was either unnecessary, as the lessons were already evident, or that a light review be conducted to produce quick findings, rather than a fully fledged evaluation. In short, establishing demand early on in the process was challenging. Nevertheless, the task force sanctioned the proposal, and OPM led on the design.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

Initially, the evaluation terms of reference focused on relevance, effectiveness and specific practices to inform the next revision. However, task force members considered it less important to focus on the relevance of the PEAP in guiding national policy, given that there was no easily constructible counterfactual to the PEAP. Moreover, it was felt that the purpose of the evaluation was to focus primarily on what could be learned from the PEAP experience, rather than whether or not it was a good idea in the first place.

Ultimately, the question of relevance was dropped, and the evaluation focused on how effective the PEAP had been as a consensus-building mechanism, what results had been achieved and the specific requirement to look at practices to inform the new PEAP.

To determine the scope, it was necessary to look at the theory of change of the PEAP. What results were targeted? How did it expect to achieve them? What were its operational modalities? What underlying factors were recognized to influence results, and which were not accounted for? The PEAP was focused on a series of objectives, which then became thematic pillars, all with objectives and indicators and with reference to operational structures and entities. Five streams of work emanated: results and performance, political economy, institutional arrangements, partnership and economic transformation and sustainable poverty reduction. In each of these streams, a series of questions were posed, which sought to understand what factors had played a role in the PEAP's successes and failures. By bringing together these streams, an overall assessment of the effectiveness of the PEAP could be made, focused in particular on what can be learned to guide the next revision.

To ensure that these streams and questions resonated with the PEAP and potential users of the evaluation, the terms of reference were circulated widely across the Government of Uganda, within the nongovernment community, and among evaluation and policy specialists globally. These comments and suggestions were fed back into the terms of reference which formed the platform for the evaluation.

DESIGNING THE EVALUATION

The evaluation design is focused on the methodologies employed that are best suited to the questions posed, and the nature of the intervention logic. The PEAP evaluation was an interesting mix, focusing both on impact-oriented questions related to the achievements of the PEAP, and looking at the underlying policy and process elements that contributed to these results. This presented particular methodological challenges.

Initially, it was hoped to focus the impact assessment work on identifying counterfactuals in order to answer the question: what would outcomes have been in Uganda in the absence of the PEAP? Four methods were suggested by the evaluation team to identify counterfactuals to the PEAP: before-and-after comparisons, with-without comparisons, simulation exercises and contribution analysis. Each method had its strengths and weaknesses, but it was hoped that elements of each may be used. However, as the evaluation progressed, it became clear that due to data limitations, time constraints and feedback on the initial proposals, it would not be possible to undertake rigorous counterfactual analysis.

Based on this assessment, contribution analysis was deemed to be the most appropriate approach. This method does not seek to identify a counterfactual, but has been developed as an alternative approach for circumstances when counterfactual analysis proves extremely difficult or infeasible. The purpose of contribution analysis is to try to draw links between inputs/outputs and wider outcomes, not by trying to quantify with precision the range of different factors which influence outcomes but rather, through careful and logical analysis, to make judgments about the importance (and strength) of these different influences. There is no presumption of providing proof of these relationships. Rather, contribution analysis seeks to draw 'plausible associations' between the inputs/outputs and the wider outcomes, thereby reducing the uncertainty about the 'difference' a programme is making (Mayne 2001). A truncated version of the six steps (from identifying the results chain to assessing alternative explanations and assembling the performance story) was used given time and data availability. The evaluation team also selected some policies under the PEAP which seemed most significant to the PEAP's high-level objectives, and to make the best use of available data and information.

The methods employed varied according to the areas of investigation. The evaluation was effectively broken into five components, based on the streams of work. The results and performance team used contribution analysis and some regression on the data available in key results areas. The investigations into the areas such as political economy and institutional arrangements utilized largely interview-based techniques and documentation analysis to plot the trends and relationships over the PEAP decade.

The evaluation findings were drawn into two documents, a volume (II) which had chapters on each work stream, and a volume (I) which synthesized the findings and relationships between the streams into a single report. Lessons were presented at both levels. Having designed the terms of reference, it was agreed that an international firm, or consortia of firms, would be commissioned to lead the implementation of the evaluation. This was put out to tender, and an international firm was recruited.

Two mechanisms were established to ensure quality in the process and the use of the evaluation. First, an evaluation subcommittee was set up with membership from the institutions responsible for the PEAP revision, namely MFPED, NPA and OPM as the chair. This subcommittee led the designing of the terms of reference, overseeing the selection of the consultants, reviewing the evaluation process and products, and disseminating the findings and lessons. The subcommittee met almost twice per month during the 12-month process, and with full quorum. Central to its effectiveness were its small size – just five members – its clear focus on the evaluation, and the strength of purpose and quality of the relationships between members.

The second mechanism was the reference group whose objective was to provide independent and expert opinion on both the evaluation design and the quality of the evaluation products. Experts from academia in relevant public policy areas from within Uganda, and evaluation experts globally were invited to participate, and a group of six were finally selected, coming from a variety of nations and institutional backgrounds. The subcommittee acted as a buffer between the reference group and the evaluators, to ensure stability and progress in the exercise. The group met virtually through the exercise, providing comments.

CONCLUSION

The dissemination process began with a briefing to Cabinet after which a one-day workshop was held in June 2008 where the findings were presented to an audience of over 200 from across the spectrum of public and private and non-state actors. This in turn led to a recommendation that one-day workshops be held with clusters of government institutions and partners to look in detail at the findings and recommendations, and to start preparing a government response. Between 15 and 18 September 2008, full one-day workshops were held with central institutions, service delivery ministries, commissions and agencies, accountability, internal and external relations ministries and commissions, and partners. A government response matrix was established focused on the key areas of the evaluation findings and recommendations, namely impact, implementation, prioritization, resource mobilization and other issues. In this, each group responded to each major finding and recommendation, which were then discussed and synthesized at a follow-up evaluation committee meeting. The outcome of this elaborate process was a Government white paper on the evaluation outlining the main findings, recommendations, the Government's response and proposed actions, including the responsible parties and time-frame for action. Follow-up on these actions has been done annually through the Government Performance Reports presented and discussed at cabinet retreats.

Alongside this, the task force preparing the National Development Plan (NDP), the successor to the PEAP, engaged fully in the dissemination and follow-up activities to the evaluation. A number of critical issues and lessons were discussed and drawn up from the evaluation in the NDP. These included the reflection that the PEAP had not provided operational guidance to achieve its results, including a failure to clearly align the budget to the PEAP targets. The NDP sought to redress this by costing the interventions outlined in the plan and taking steps to realign the budget and accountability mechanisms accordingly.

Second, the evaluation found that while poverty had reduced substantially during the PEAP period, it was uneven, with an urban bias and with growth tending to benefit the better-off. Investment productivity did not improve during the PEAP period, with constraints and inefficiencies in the use of human capital and poor infrastructure. This in part reflected the lack of attention paid to infrastructure and other potential drivers of the economy, such as agriculture. The NDP agreed that a new policy mix was required, still recognizing the poverty reduction objective. But it sought to improve economic infrastructure to reduce the cost of doing business, to promote competitiveness and encourage foreign investment, to transform agriculture to raise farm productivity, and to raise the quality of human capital to transform economic growth. The theme of the NDP of 'growth, employment and socio-economic transformation for prosperity' reflects this.

Finally, the evaluation highlighted serious deficiencies in the coordination of government business and its oversight. This has impacted the way in which the OPM, MFPED, NPA and the Ministry of Public Service seek to work together to apply coherent and harmonized messages and direct service-delivery arms of the Government. As a result of the evaluation of the PEAP, the following initiatives have been put in place that have strengthened the lives of the people:

- Successor NDPs (2010/11-2014/15) and (2015/16-2020/21) with the theme “growth, employment and social-economic transformation for prosperity” have been developed. The effects will continue to be seen as the NDP is implemented and monitored and there is improvement in development outcomes.
- The role of the Prime Minister in overseeing service delivery has been strengthened, and the oversight and monitoring and evaluation functions strengthened.
- Formulation of a national policy on public sector monitoring and evaluation and approval in 2003, which outlines the roles, responsibilities and minimum standards across the public service.
- In the specific area of evaluation, the Office of the Prime Minister has established a Government Evaluation Facility (GEF), which provides a systemic basis for expanding the supply of rigorous assessments to address public policy, and major public investment questions surrounding the effectiveness of Government interventions, and tackling underlying constraints to improved public service delivery. The components of the Facility are:
 - A two-year rolling Evaluation Agenda, approved by Cabinet to ensure high-level buy in to the topics including the SDGs evaluation agenda.
 - A virtual Evaluation Funds, where finances are pooled to facilitate the commissioning/conduct of evaluations, rather than having to look for resources on a case-by-case basis.
 - A national evaluation subcommittee composed of Uganda’s evaluations experts – drawn from economic policy research institutions, Government institutions, bureau of statistics, NGO community, private sector and donors. The subcommittee is intentionally small (around 10 persons) and oversees the management of the GEF.
 - A small secretariat in the Office of the Prime Minister, with a team of evaluation specialists who facilitate the GEF and the subcommittee, and lead on design and implementation where appropriate.

Since its inception, the GEF has done at least 10 major evaluations. The PEAP evaluation provided extremely valuable and accessible information of what worked and what did not during the 1997-2007 decade. Those lessons was debated and subsequently drawn upon in the drafting of the successor NDP. The effects will continue to be seen as the NDP is implemented and monitored.

REFERENCES

- Mayne, J. 2001. ‘Addressing Attribution through Contribution Analysis: Using Performance Measurement Sensibly’. *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation* 16(1).
- Office of the Prime Minister. 2008. *Independent Evaluation of Uganda’s Poverty Eradication Action Plan 1997- 2007*, Volume 1, Synthesis Report.

Reinikka, R. and Collier, P. (Eds.). 2001. *Uganda's Recovery: The Role of Farms, Firms and Government*. Washington DC: The World Bank.

Riddell, R.C., Bategeka, L., Kotoglou, K. and Ray, D.B. 2008. *Assessing and Measuring the Impact of Aid: Evidence, Challenges and Ways Forward*. Synthesis Report to the Advisory Board for Irish Aid. Oxford: Oxford Policy Management.