**BUILDING A ROBUST NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEM – A CASE OF MALAWI**

**Abstract**

Implementation of national policies, programs and projects requires systematic generation of evidence to determine efficiency, effectiveness and impact. By generating reliable and comprehensive data, a robust evaluation system aids policymakers in making informed decisions, optimizing resource allocation, and improving service delivery. It also promotes transparency and accountability by providing stakeholders with clear insights into government performance and outcomes.

Some of the standard steps that countries take in order to create a robust national evaluation systems include: (a) establishing a functional central evaluation unit; (b) formulating a policy that outlines purpose, scope, and guidelines for evaluation ;(c) providing training and support for evaluation officers across ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs); (d) developing a sub-system for collection and analysis of accurate data on policy, program and project implementation to gauge performance and aid in knowledge management and learning; (e) encouraging participation in evaluations from key and relevant non-state actors like the civil society, academia, NGOs and development partners in general; (f) establishing quality standards and guidelines for evaluations; and (g) integrating evaluations into the project and program management cycle

Cognizant of the need to create a strong national evaluation system, Government of Malawi has over the years, with the help of various stakeholders, made significant strides in this regard. Sanity is slowly creeping onto the once disjointed and chaotic public evaluation space. This has been demonstrated through interventions such as Development of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Master Plan; Implementation of a joint programme support for strengthening monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems; Implementation of the Development Effectiveness and Accountability Programme (DEAP); Assessment of the State of Monitoring and Evaluation; 2021 Assessment of the State of Monitoring and Evaluation; Development of a Capacity Strengthening Strategy; Development of the M&E Policy (2023-2027); Development of the Government-Wide; Monitoring and Evaluation Management Information System; and Staff capacity building in the development of an Evaluation Plan.

Despite such vital achievements, there are a number of challenges facing the evaluation sub-sector in Malawi. Flaunting a robust Evaluation System will therefore depend on how such challenges are addressed. These challenges include: lack of an evaluation plan; lack of National Evaluation Guidelines; inadequate capacity of M&E staff to undertake impact and programmatic evaluations; lack of advanced data analysis skills among M&E staff in the public sector; and limited Government-led evaluations. This notwithstanding, Malawi continues to press ahead with some reform work in both the monitoring and evaluation spaces. Key reform works include: (a) the production of a comprehensive National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy which was approved by Cabinet in 2023; (b) commencement of implementation of a Government-wide monitoring and evaluation management Information System project which has been designed to come up with a digital platform where various public monitoring and evaluation systems in the country will be harmonized through standardization of data instruments and provision of an electronic interface with MDAs systems; (c) development of a National Evaluation Plan Format which will culminate into a substantive national plan in due course; and (d) coming up with a capacity development strategy that covers requirements, including training, across all MDAs and other players.