TWENDE MBELE

STRENGTHENING PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS IN NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS

→ Insights from Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya and Ghana

This brief focuses on common challenges experienced by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Ghana in their efforts to share and collaborate with government ministries and departments on monitoring and evaluation. A series of workshops in these countries provided insights into how sharing and learning between governments and CSOs can be strengthened to improve contributions to development objectives.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND GOVERNMENT

Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) contribute significantly to the social and economic development of countries. Acting as intermediaries within their societies, CSOs cover a wide range of institutions and mandates, and include work at a community level – known as Community-Based Organisations (CBO) and professional Non-Government Organisations (NGO), as well as advocacy, lobbying and research organisations.

CSOs come with varying human and financial capabilities, and serve on issues ranging from basic social services to the protection of human and environmental rights. As such, CSOs represent a wealth of knowledge and potential influence, and have much to offer in the process of national development.

Within a countries evaluation ecosystem, CSOs play a significant role as a source of evidence generation. They employ monitoring and evaluation (M&E) professionals; commission evaluations in different countries, and in many cases, they have the more advanced M&E systems, generating significant amounts of data and evaluation evidence. However, the participation of CSOs in government evaluation systems both at national or sectoral level tends to be limited. And with that, there is a missed opportunity for sharing and learning between governments and CSOs.

While CSOs in the participating countries are faced with a number of challenges that are context-specific and determined by socio-political and historical factors that differ from country to country, there are some challenges that are common between them.

BACKGROUND

Recent diagnostic studies unpacked the current status of a National Evaluation System (NES) in five partner countries, in order to determine the most appropriate interventions for strengthening evaluation systems in targeted countries. This work highlighted the need for CSOs to be further included in government M&E systems to enhance Government performance and accountability.

In trying to find appropriate areas for collaboration, the workshops in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Ghana allowed participants to grapple with the extent to which CSOs contribute to their government M&E systems and where specific opportunities for strengthened engagement exist. Understanding the different functions within an NES, and how they relate to each other, is crucial for both defining a range of sub-systems, and providing a more nuanced analysis of the capacity of an evaluation system and the ways different stakeholders interact within it. We used this framework to provide insight into areas where collaboration or engagement can be strengthened or established.

To understand the status of CSOs in the NES, we asked workshop participants to identify areas that CSOs have been contributing to. The workshops also acted as a theory of change training, which saw participants presenting challenges to greater collaboration, and then designing a casual pathway to achieve their desired change.

SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP FINDINGS

There is a large degree of similarity regarding the challenges discussed across the four targeted countries and can be categorised according the Ten Functions of a National Evaluation System.[1] The main drivers of limited participation within their countries NES was expressed as a lack of collaboration opportunities between CSO; by donor priorities as the main driver of evaluation demand and use; as well as weak M&E capacity in the sector. The main outcome of the workshops was the desire for CSOs to become involved in their country's policy planning and implementation cycle. CSOs have limited opportunities to influence Government planning as CSO evidence was perceived to be less credible (or more controversial) and as such CSOs are rarely deliberations on using M&E in planning or program improvement. Capacity restrictions encountered by CSOs – particularly financial and human resources – also greatly affect CSO's ability to be involved in government M&E systems.

With the exception of a few, most CSOs lack the necessary in-house capabilities for policy analysis or research to engage effectively with the state. Fragmentation within civil society further weakens collaboration and agreement on key policy issues, meaning that CSOs lack a coordinated front to engage effectively through a centralised evaluation system. Despite the fact that CSOs are usually striving towards the same ultimate objectives of purposeful social change to enhance the wellbeing of people, harmonisation between these organisations and bodies, remains relatively weak.

1 Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa, 2018, Ten Functions of a National Evaluation System: https://www.wits.ac.za/clear-aa/

→ **A small number of CSOs participated in these workshops. The views of the CSOs who participated in the workshop and the findings made are valuable but might not be representative of the experiences of all CSOs in that country.**

AREAS IN WHICH CSOs CONTRIBUTE TO NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Evidence production and research

CSOs have access to information and data that can contribute to evidence-based decision making at a policy level. Whether mandated by design or by funder demands, CSOs are indispensable in generating evidence that can be used for improving service delivery, accountability and good governance. CSOs also undertake evaluations of their interventions, presenting government with key findings that might assist in planning and citizen feedback.

Capacity building

Capacity building of CSO staff occurs through donor-funded investments and the development community, which help build the M&E capacity of local CSOs. In addition, these investments may create capacity for CSOs to conduct evaluation that will have benefits beyond the programme. In countries where CSOs have organised platforms for collaboration, capacity building can be far-reaching, and able to strengthen the work of their peers and government.

Dissemination of evidence

CSOs are well connected locally, regionally and (often) internationally at both vertical and horizontal scales, and believe they are strong in disseminating evidence. Networks can be built thematically, regionally, or as a result of shared donors – the act of disseminating knowledge with other organisations, in fact, may be a requirement of funding. CSOs may also be part of formal and informal professional networks, where best practice is often shared, and feedback given. This can benefit government agencies wishing to incorporate further evidence into their planning and policy development.

Performance monitoring

CSOs are heavily engaged in assessing the performance of their programmes and those of government departments where there is collaboration. While this monitoring is often driven by donors, the organisations also make use of performance monitoring to inform what is working and what is not in order to improve the programming, make changes, and seek additional capacity (which may include further funding).

CHALLENGES CSOs FACE IN CONTRIBUTING TO NATIONAL EVALUATION SYSTEMS

Limited collaboration between CSOs

Collaboration between similar CSOs could result in optimising available resources and spreading the workload. However, exacerbated financial competition, dominance of the donor agenda, donor-shaped M&E systems, and differing ideologies between CSOs hamper opportunities to coordinate inputs on policy processes. Civil society itself lacks appropriate platforms to self-organise and the capacity to engage with other CSOs. An organised and informed civil society can leverage off of work already being done – avoiding duplicating of effort which frees up resources for other work. An organised civil society is better equipped to engage in policy processes.

Limited collaboration with government

A lack of political will to engage fully and meaningfully with CSOs hinders the uptake of evidence from civil society. Similarly, some CSOs may not seek to collaborate due to a lack of capacity and constricting donor requirements. Inflexible programmes, poor governance structures and inadequate human resources also contribute to a lack of collaboration and opportunities to engage. There is often mistrust between civil society and government due to a variety of reasons ranging from infringements on civil liberties, censorship of critical voices, capacity challenges at state level and so forth.

Influence of donors

While donor funding makes critical activities possible, the funding comes with an agenda that could take preference over the CSO's mandate, and may not be aligned with national needs. Donor-driven programmes can be inflexible to changes in context and may not contribute to a culture of sharing information, as the CSO is primarily focused on meeting donor requirements. The reliance on donor funding is also unpredictable and limited, and drives competition between CSOs. Government and CSOs follow different guidelines for collecting data based on the discrepancies between what donors and the government are looking for. There are often indicators for performance monitoring that are deemed irrelevant or inadequate for monitoring progress in service delivery at the local level.

Limited funding

Because of a limited capacity to bargain, and a lack of autonomy, CSOs often end up with short implementation periods for most of their programmes, and an inability to fund other activities. A lack of funding also means CSOs are not able to afford experienced evaluation experts, and end up with the lowest bidders in the market and usually unqualified staff.

Lack of power

CSOs have little influence over how the incentive structures or values of government M&E systems, and are often excluded from existing M&E structures, with an inability to influence the government system as a whole.

→ Twende Mbele has focused on how to improve the performance of accountability and transparency of the State using M&E as a tool; it has not specifically focused on CSOs, however in Twende's mandate to improve accountability, other actors have been included. This means Twende is interested in Government accountability to Parliament, for example, and accountability to wider Society – hence our work with CSOs. Twende has looked at how CSOs can help in the responsiveness and accountability of the State and what role civil society could play.

Twende's work has included country-level diagnostic studies on CSO involvement and, in particular, has looked at the role of CSOs in National Evaluation Systems. The project resulted in the development of theories of change in each country exploring what an active role in NES would look like.

Dr Ian Goldman, Twende Mbele Founding Member – South Africa

→ I believe there is an important role for think-tanks and we need to move away from seeing Government departments and Parliaments as the key audiences for evaluations. We see think-tanks as important knowledge brokers which interact with wider society on particular sectors.

Finding platforms where evaluations results can be shared and engaged with, could see greater participation in evaluation systems. In sharing content, civil society can see the work being done, and that which is not being done, and provide the necessary push back needed to make government more accountable.

Dr Ian Goldman, Twende Mbele Founding Member – South Africa

FINALLY…

Civil society organisations play a key role in promoting social change particularly in situations where governments has failed. However, the relationship between CSOs and government has been tainted with antagonism and animosity due to different ideologies around achieving development outcomes. CSOs that are interfacing with the government are normally those that are highly recognised and funded by international donors, normally working within the 'invited' spaces compared to 'invented' spaces. This brief demonstrated that CSOs produce research and evaluation evidence key to inform policy, decision making, programming and budgeting which can bring about social change. Furthermore, there is often limited interaction between CSOs and governments. This has resulted to less meaningful engagement thereof and as a result there is limited learning and use of products generated either by CSOs or government to inform social change. Leveraging opportunities between CSOs and governments will go a long way in improving governance, transparency and accountability.

REFERENCES

Amisi, M.M. (2015). Development of South Africa's National Evaluation Policy and System 2011-2014. www.aejonline.org.

Davies, I., C. (2017). National evaluation policy within a national M&E policy framework. Kenya

DPME. (2011). National Evaluation Policy Framework. Pretoria: Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation.

Goldman, I., Byamugisha, A., Gounou, A., Smith, L.R., Ntakumba, S., Lubanga, T., Sossou, D. & Rot- Munstermann, K., (2018) 'The emergence of government evaluation systems in Africa: The case of Benin, Uganda and South Africa', African Evaluation Journal 6(1), pp 1-11

Government of Zimbabwe (2015). National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy.

Hojlund, S. (2015). Evaluation in the European Commission: For Accountability or Learning? European Journal of Risk Regulation, Vol. 6 No. 1, Cambridge University Press.

Mwaijambe, F. (2018). Why Should Countries Have National Evaluation Policies? In IDEV (2018), Building Supply and Demand for Evaluation for Evaluation in Africa. Volume 1.

Office of the Prime Minister, (2011). National policy on public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation. Uganda.

Segone, Bamberger and Reddy (2015). National Evaluation Policies for sustainable and equitable development: How to integrate gender equality and social equity in national evaluation policies and systems.

The Presidency, Ministry of Devolution and Planning. (2016). National Monitoring & Evaluation Policy. Kenya.

TWENDE MBELE

TWENDE MBELE is a multi-country peer-learning partnership centred on country government priorities for building national evaluation systems in an effort to improve government performance and accountability to citizens.

www.twendembele.org

Phone: +27 (0) 11 717 3453; Email: cara.waller@wits.ac.za
CLEAR-AA, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Phone: +229 2130 1655; Email: esegla@gmail.com
Bureau de l'Evaluation des Politiques et de l'Analyse de l'Action Gouvernementale
03BP 743 Cotonou, Benin

clear
Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results
ANGLOPHONE AFRICA

The Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA) is a regional centre that develops high-quality, applied, cost-effective regional technical assistance and capacity-building programmes, and connects with global learning to produce innovative materials and methods to enable practical knowledge-sharing on M&E and performance management.

www.wits.ac.za/clear-aa

The Oval Building, University of the Witwatersrand
2 St David's Place, Parktown, Johannesburg
Telephone: +27 11 717 3157; Fax: +27 86 765 5860
E-mail: CLEAR.AnglophoneAfrica@wits.ac.za