Implications of Evaluation Trends for Capacity Development

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IMPLICATIONS OF EVALUATION TRENDS FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Evaluation capacity development (ECD) remains one of the most sought-after yet elusive outcomes in the evaluation sector (Picciotto, 1998:39; Stockdill, Baizerman & Compton, 2002:16). Although there are extensive efforts to strengthen evaluation capacity in Africa, the precise mechanisms by which evaluation capacity development strengthens evaluation practice is largely unknown. The absence of empirical evidence which confirms the link between ECD and improvements in evaluation practice exacerbates the challenge (Preskill & Boyle, 2008; Tarsilla, 2014). Regardless of the challenges, the sector continues to recognise ECD as one of the primary solutions to the persistent weaknesses and limitations in the demand and supply of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) capacity on the continent (Wao, Onyango, Kisio, Njatah & Onyango, 2017:1; Porter & Goldman, 2009).

Research and practice have shown that there has been an absence of coherent strategies or models for ECD in Africa, resulting in fragmentation and piecemeal approaches to capacity development (Basheka, 2016:115; Tarsilla, 2014:8; CLEAR-AA, 2016c:25). The lack of harmony in short-term training or formal graduate education in M&E across the continent could, in part, be attributed to the absence of agreed-upon norms and standards for M&E education provision, and uncertainties around how to build capacity for evidence use, or capacity development in general (Stewart, 2015:555; Denney & Mallet, 2017:1; Preskill, 2014:118). This is despite the existence of guidelines for evaluator competencies provided by, for example, the International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS), the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) and the American Evaluation Association's (AEA) Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation.

A superficial analysis of the problems associated with current approaches to ECD will lead some to wrongly assume that the problem rests with those who are responsible for conducting evaluations – commonly termed the "supply side". However, proponents of systems-thinking include the "demand side" in their approach to ECD – which incorporates the institutional capacity and appetite for conducting, institutionalising, and using evaluations. The terms 'supply' and 'demand' in evaluation have therefore become widely applied (Porter & Feinstein, 2014:7; Merkle, 2016:2; Porter & Goldman, 2013; Mulenga & Porter, 2013:3; Development Bank of Southern Africa, African Development Bank

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and World Bank, 2000:53) and the matching of the two has become common in the discourse on ECD (Smith & Morkel, 2018:41). However, assumptions that evaluation supply and demand mechanisms work in the same way as those of other products, services or commodities in capitalist markets may not hold. It is critical to understand the interplay between the drivers and contextual issues that mediate between supply and demand that can assist in developing effective solutions to ECD challenges (Blaser Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018:4).

This chapter examines empirical results of evaluation reports from the AfrED database in order to unpack the relationship between the demand for evaluations and the capacities needed to meet that demand. The analysis further explores ways in which current M&E training and education provision can be enhanced to respond to capacity development needs. In achieving its objectives, the chapter also draws evidence from a secondary analysis of the results of a survey of evaluation practitioners' perceptions of ECD challenges in the sector. The primary question guiding the chapter is: How can a snapshot of trends in evaluation supply, demand and practice provide an indication of the kinds of skills and capabilities that may be required of evaluators in the future and serve as a guide for those tasked with ECD?

Brief background to evaluation capacity development

Capacity development has been on the African agenda for the past six decades, yet contestations persist around the concept itself (Taut, 2007:120; Denney & Mallett, 2017:5; Kwang-Ho, 2009:201; Kotvojs & Hurworth, 2013:5; Compton & Baizerman, 2007:118). ECD in particular has been on the evaluation agenda for at least two decades, despite not yielding the expected results (Kotvojs, 2017:14). Many continue to highlight the weaknesses in evaluation 'supply', which is generally defined as the individuals who must produce evaluations (Wao, Kisio, Njatha & Onyango, 2017:1; Merkle, 2016:4; Holvoet, 2012:9; UNICEF, 2008:121; Podems, 2015:10). Findings from a 2005 study involving evaluation practitioners in South Africa, for example, illustrated the widely held opinion that both individual evaluation capacities and the quality of evaluation training were weak (Abrahams, 2015:4). Almost ten years later, a survey conducted on evaluation capacity in the South African government yielded similar results (Podems, Goldman & Jacob, 2014:76). Despite more than three decades of capacity building in Africa, and an increasing intensity in building evaluation capacity in particular, research has shown that the problems of capacity continue to

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persist (Wao, Onyango, Kisio, Njatha & Onyango, 2017:1; Basheka, 2016:95). It is plausible that inadequate diagnoses of capacity needs may result in ever-increasing ECD interventions, without the concomitant increase in evaluation capacity (Morkel & Ramasobana, 2017:7; Tarsilla, 2014:5). The scant use of diagnostic information to inform ECD interventions may also have a role to play in this (Kotvojs & Hurworth, 2013:5; Kotvojs, 2017:13). Although there is insufficient evidence to point to the exact reason for the mismatch, there is evidence that many ECD programmes do not implement systemic approaches that are known to be more effective, but instead continue to rely on short-term training programmes (Tarsilla, 2014:5).

The African Capacity Building Foundation, in its Africa Capacity Report 2019, defines capacity as the "ability of people, organizations, and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully" (ACBF, 2019:1). Capacity development, therefore, is broadly defined as a process by which "people, organizations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time". The contestation around the concept of ECD has added to the challenge. Some scholars and practitioners prefer to use the term 'evaluation capacity *building*' (ECB), whilst others prefer 'evaluation capacity *development*' (ECD). Stockdill, Baizerman and Compton (2002) use the term ECB, and define it as: "a context-dependent, intentional action system of guided processes and practices for bringing about and sustaining a state of affairs in which quality programme evaluation and its appropriate uses are ordinary and ongoing practices within and/or between one or more organisations/programs/sites". Others (Preskill & Boyle, 2008:444; Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010:3) argue that ECB is a systems-level intervention that incorporates both individual and institutional components. Tarsilla (2014:2), on the other hand, proffers that evaluation capacity *building* usually refers to the limited types of interventions targeting individuals, whilst evaluation capacity *development* focuses on effecting institutional and systems-wide changes. In this chapter, the term evaluation capacity development is used. It encompasses the entire spectrum of initiatives an organisation undertakes to strengthen evaluation systems, including the enabling environment. Where the intention is to refer to the building of individual human capacity in particular, the term 'training' is used explicitly.

According to Wubneh (2003:169-170), there are four dimensions to what is termed "capacity building", which would fit the definition of capacity development used in this chapter. The first dimension is the development

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of human capacity, and focuses on the development of individual skills and abilities; the second is value system re-organisation; the third is institutional restructuring, whilst the fourth is the review of organisational development practices. Though Wubneh (2003:169-170) focuses on the development sector in general, the typology easily translates to the evaluation sector, as the aim of ECD is to change the way an individual and an organisation behaves, in order to observe positive changes in practice.

Taking guidance from these definitions, it is clear that short-term training becomes a necessary, but not sufficient, part of ECD Interventions. Such interventions need to be combined with an integrated strategy to enhance individual and organisational capability if they are to be effective at a systems level. It is argued within the evaluation community that ECD is multi-faceted and systemic (Lennie, Tacchi, Wilmore & Koirala, 2015:326; Stockdill, Baizerman & Comption, 2002; Preskill & Boyle, 2008). Research has shown that training constitutes only one component of building competence as well as confidence in evaluation (Bamberg, Perlesz, Mckenzie & Read, 2010). Volkov and King's (2007) Checklist for Building Organisational Evaluation Capacity is instructive in this respect. It outlines eight guidelines for organisational evaluation capacity building, which have little to do with training. Examples of the guidelines include: cultivating a positive, ECD-friendly internal organisational context; purposefully creating structures to facilitate the development of evaluation capacity; building and reinforcing the infrastructure to support evaluations and securing financial resources to support an evaluation programme in the organisation (Volkov & King, 2007:1-3). The definition provided by Labin, Duffy, Meyers, Wandersman & Lesesnen (2012:308) also illustrates how ECD needs to be pursued beyond the individual, with their definition focusing on "an intentional process to increase individual motivation, knowledge, and skills, and to enhance a group or organisation's ability to conduct or use evaluation". Leviton (2013:93), in a paper on evaluation capacity building, poses a reminder that "training and technical assistance are a process, just as the experience of doing an evaluation is a process". Proponents of ECD would likely agree that training is only one aspect of developing evaluation capacity, however, a much narrower view is often adopted in the planning and execution of ECD interventions. In many cases, training (typically in the form of short-term courses) becomes the lodestar of ECD. There is a need for more integrated approaches to ECD, which apply existing knowledge about the effectiveness of combining multiple strategies and tactics and incorporating them into ECD interventions.

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A more long-term view must also be adopted in thinking about ECD if efforts at strengthening evaluation capacity are to be sustainable

Looking back to move ahead: What capacity development in Africa has taught us

History of capacity development in Africa and the influence on ECD

The historical roots of capacity development in Africa are well-documented (Basheka, 2016; Denney & Mallett, 2017; Development Bank of Southern Africa, African Development Bank and World Bank, 2000). The post-independence Africa of the 1960s was characterised by structural adjustment programming and the influence of Bretton Woods institutions, which shaped the interventions undertaken to ensure the continent's growth and development (Basheka, 2016). Assisting the African continent to emulate the growth trajectories of the 'West' became the focus of the international development community as the ideal model of addressing the continents' poverty and social welfare crisis (Denney & Mallett, 2017:6). The decade of the 1960s was also punctuated by the growing popularity of the modernisation theory of development, which incorrectly assumed that Western modes of materialism, economic growth and the principles of the "free market economy" would release the continent from the grip of under-development (Davis, Theron & Maphunye, 2009; Denney & Mallett, 2017). Technical assistance or "technical cooperation" therefore became synonymous with building the capacities of developing countries through "international experts" who were meant to transfer their skills to local counterparts (Demongeot, 1994:479).

Tarsilla (2014:2) argues that ECD remains donor centric and reproduces the old, self-serving pattern of strengthening local staff of international organisations rather than strengthening local, contextually relevant ownership of evaluation. Evaluation capacity development in Africa has its history in the 1980s and 1990s (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015:79-80). A tidal wave of initiatives solidified the importance of evaluation capacity development in Africa and a host of institutions, such as the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) and others were established in order to focus on building the capacity of evaluation in Africa. Preskill and Boyle (2008:443) suggest that the first decade of the 21st century marked the beginning of the wave of interest in and focus on evaluation capacity building, particularly in North America.

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Despite the rising tide of criticism against the weaknesses in capacity development in Africa and the absence of evidence that these have any impact on building national capacity at all (Demongeot, 1994:479), capacity development initiatives (and their budgets) continue to increase (Wubneh, 2003:166; Denney & Mallett, 2017:v; Kotvojs, 2017:13). For example, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) spends about one quarter of its budget on capacity development activities, with direct spending on capacity development growing by 6% from 2015 to 2016 (IMF, 2017:1-2). Between 1991 and 2016, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) committed US$700 million to capacity development in sub-Saharan Africa alone (ACBF, 2016:5), and the global investment in capacity development now exceeds US$30 billion annually (Kotvojs, 2017:13), despite yielding less than stellar results (Kotvojs & Hurworth, 2013:5; Kotvojs, 2017:14). Programmes such as the CLEAR Initiative, the International Programme on Development Evaluation Training (IPDET), capacity building by voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs) and universities have flooded the development community – yet the weaknesses in evaluation capacity and evidence use in Africa persist (Stockdill, Baizerman & Compton, 2002:16; Stewart, 2015:550; Denney & Mallett, 2017:v). Despite the misalignment between the proliferation of ECD interventions and strengthened evaluation practice, ECD is still seen as key to improving institutional capacities for evaluation planning and to produce high quality evaluations (Merkle, 2016) Therefore it is necessary to continue to produce evidence on "what works" in ECD so as to move beyond the impasse.

Challenges in the landscape of ECD efforts in Africa – what capacity, for whom?

Whereas twenty years ago it would have been less easy to find a suitable M&E training programme on the African continent, in recent times training opportunities have rapidly expanded for anyone desiring professional development in this area. There is an ever-growing variety of ECD actors in Africa, including private training organisations, individual consultants, international funding agencies, international development institutions, voluntary organisations for professional evaluation (VOPEs) as well as institutions of higher learning. Some attempts have been made to develop databases of the various evaluation education opportunities available globally as well as in Africa. For example, in 2017, a specialised task force of the Global Goals for Sustainable Development identified 31 institutions across the world that provide capacity development programmes in evaluation, ranging from

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academic institutions to multilateral organisations and civil society organisations (Agrawal, Rao & Kumra, 2017). A similar mapping exercise in 2016 charted 45 academic institutions across Anglophone Africa with programmes in M&E (CLEAR-AA, 2016a:24). However, there is no single, consolidated database or inventory of the myriad ECD opportunities and service providers in Africa or elsewhere, with little efforts at harmonisation and few attempts to measure their effectiveness.

Measuring and defining evaluation capacity is also an area of contestation. Competency frameworks, such as the Canadian Evaluation Society Competencies for Canadian Evaluation Practice and the Evaluation Competency Framework of the South African Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation provide an indication of what constitutes a good evaluator (Buchanan & Kuji-shikatani, 2014:34; Podems, Goldman & Jacob, 2014:81). However, these are not necessarily universally applicable and usually focus on the competency of the individual evaluator. Just over a decade ago, there was a disproportionate focus on individuals' technical skills in making M&E systems work (Blaser Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018:2) which may have influenced the dominance of individualised technical training to this day. However, it is widely recognised that evaluators need a broad range of skills, and that evaluation capacity is not limited to the individual, but applies to organisations as well (Wao et al., 2017:1; Lucas, 2013:6; Mapitsa Blaser & Khumalo, 2018:3; Edwards, Stickney, Milat, Campbell & Thackaway, 2016:265). Although thinking has transformed from an individualistic perspective on evaluation capacity towards a more organisational one (Labin, 2014; Volkov & King, 2007; Bourgeois, Toews, Whynot & Lamarche, 2013; Lennie, Tacchi, Wilmore & Koirala, 2015), individualised training programmes, focusing on technical aspects of evaluation continue to dominate ECD interventions, particularly in Africa (Tarsilla, 2014:4).

Two additional ECD short-comings in Africa were identified by Tarsilla (2014). One of these is the 'parachuting' of evaluation expertise from outside the continent, which strangles the development of local evaluation capacities in Africa (Tarsilla, 2014:6; CLEAR-AA, 2016a:3). Tarsilla also laments that most of the continents' ECD programmes are based on content developed outside of Africa, most notably North America, Europe and Australia, with little or no contextualisation to the African context.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse ECD interventions in Africa in its entirety, as it cannot do justice to its complex and emergent nature. The systemic

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nature of ECD is highlighted here so as to reinforce the point that Africa's evaluation capacity problems do not lie solely in improvements in evaluation education and training. The limitation, therefore, is that the data do not provide for an organisational or systemic perspective of ECD, highlighting the need for more empirical evidence on what needs to be done to improve evaluation capacity in Africa.

This chapter assesses the landscape of evaluation demand from selected AfrED evaluations to understand the kind of capacity required to conduct evaluations in Africa for the period between 2005 and 2015. An analysis of a survey conducted by CREST (Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology) with over 500 M&E practitioners in 2016 during the compilation of the AfrED provides a snapshot of the evaluation skills and capabilities that are available on the continent. Although the data may not be generalisable, it does provide an account of evaluation practitioners' view of ECD, and opens up the opportunity for further research on how ECD providers need to respond to the growing demand for evaluation services on the continent.

Approaches and methods

This chapter adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore trends about the effectiveness of evaluation capacity development interventions in Africa. Both qualitative and quantitative data were used, namely (i) literature on ECD and ECB; (ii) the results of an online survey conducted in 2016 with 564 evaluators/ M&E practitioners as part of the African Evaluation Database (AfrED) project; and (iii) the repository of evaluations on the AfrED.

An online survey was conducted between 10 and 29 November 2016 by CREST to 3032 individuals via an e-mailed link. These included e-mails listed in the evaluation reports on the African evaluation database; e-mail addresses from the South African, Ethiopian, Ghanaian and African evaluation associations; and e-mail addresses from CREST's own internal database. A total of 564 individuals completed the survey, amounting to a 22% response rate. The survey contains items relevant to this study (e.g. M&E qualifications and training; evaluation as a professional identity; and primary involvement in evaluation). Quantitative data relevant to the research questions were analysed using descriptive statistics. The open-ended questions in the survey were included as part of the qualitative data and analysis. In the survey, an open-ended question was posed to participants, asking respondents what they thought is the key to large scale,

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quality evaluation capacity development in Africa. A total of 407 responses were received for this question. Inductive coding was used to analyse the qualitative data and determine the main codes, categories, and themes emerging from the data.

The AfrED currently has a total of 2635 documents, with a geographical scope of twelve sub-Saharan Anglophone countries. A random sample of evaluations was retrieved from the database using systematic sampling. Every 30th evaluation report on the complete list of evaluations, per country, were selected using a random start. A total of 59 (n=59) evaluation reports were analysed using deductive coding. A set of *a priori* codes was developed, which included the following: evaluation type; evaluation design; data-collection methods; data-analysis method; evaluand country; sector; funder; government as client; lead evaluator local/international; lead evaluator consultant/private; and role of local stakeholders. The literature review on ECB and ECD provided the framework for the analysis and discussion of the survey responses as well as the evaluation reports. The subsequent section addresses the findings of this study.

Results and discussion: Snapshots of supply and demand and trends to guide the future of ECD

Evaluation supply trends – findings from the survey

The need for more training in technical competencies, with practical experience and opportunities for real-world practice

Evaluators in Africa appear to be highly qualified, yet most of the responses to the question on the key to large scale, quality ECD in Africa revolved around accessing more training. Despite the fact that more than half of the respondents were in possession of a master's degree (55%), and a smaller percentage possessed a doctorate (17%), the stated need for additional training was significantly high (123 out of 407 responses). Further exploration is needed to determine whether the content of ECD interventions are appropriately responsive to the differentiated needs of evaluation practitioners on the continent, as 76 respondents possessed a master's degree in evaluation, whilst 126 respondents possessed a diploma in evaluation studies. Respondents were actively working in evaluation practice, and either conducted (n=185), managed (n=113) or provided technical assistance in evaluations (n=91). These individuals were more likely to have a diploma in evaluation studies (between 48 and 60%)

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than any other qualification. This was followed by a master's degree in evaluation (between 37% and 51%). Those who trained others in evaluation (n=99) were equally as likely to have a diploma or a master's in evaluation studies (47%).

Respondents also reflected on a need for training in technical skills for evaluators such as project management, data management as well as quantitative and qualitative methods. This negates the view that the pendulum has swung in favour of ECD interventions that are contextual, and less technical. There appears to be a continued demand for training in fundamental technical aspects of M&E. For example, one respondent stated a need for training in: "evaluation design, outcome and impact evaluation, theory of change and results based evaluation methodologies, and using evaluation as evidence for decision-making". Another respondent stated that what was required is a "model that combines training, practice and reflection over a sustained period of time". This last statement is reflective of research that has shown that experiential learning is an important but insufficiently practiced component of ECD (Leviton, 2013:93; Tarsilla, 2014:6). More significantly, African practitioners who participated in Tarsilla's 2014 study viewed the practical utility of training courses as 'minimal', and despite facilitators' expertise, the training programmes provided no opportunity to put their learning into practice. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that respondents preferred training that provided opportunities for "real-world practice".

A second cluster of statements emerged from the data specifically around the development of skills in management and analysis of data. It appears that there are concerns amongst evaluators around the quality of data, and a need for training on the production and analysis of data as well as management information systems to support these. Examples of statements from respondents in response to the question on how to remedy this include:

> Provide capacity on techniques of monitoring database management that can fit into evaluation process"; "Recruitment of competent data collectors, use of real-time data-collection devices, effective training, co-ordination and close monitoring and follow-up"; and "In my opinion the key lies in having access to quality of data which assist in arriving at evidence-based conclusions.

Significantly, the second highest cluster of responses (110 out of 407) was categorised under the broad category of "Continuous professional development of the demand and supply side" (including leadership and evaluation culture), which also links to training. The statements on the need for more

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training, combined with this set of statements, represent more than half of the statements responding to the question on what Africa needs for high-quality ECD. This seems to indicate a great need for ongoing capacity building of both evaluators as well as those commissioning and managing evaluations. It is possible that the need for continuous professional development drives the popularity and unceasing demand for evaluation training in Africa. Therefore, a more nuanced view of ECD needs is required. ECD providers need to be cognisant of the needs of individuals in order to respond appropriately. Differences between sectors (particularly the state and civil society) and the practice and utilisation of M&E also matter. ECD providers therefore need to ensure that the design of ECD programmes are appropriately targeted to participants, particularly at post-graduate level. For example, whereas the fundamentals of research methodology, sampling and data-processing may be necessary for those who have not yet been trained in these areas, it could be an ill fit for participants with master's and PhD qualifications. Ongoing professional development for the latter cohort would need to provide learning opportunities on advanced, innovative and emerging issues in evaluation, rather than courses focusing on technical skills development of this nature. Evaluation theory and specialised curriculum design would be important for more advanced ECD. The importance of appropriate targeting is therefore emphasised, and the use of diagnostic exercises, pre-tests, training-needs analyses or skills audits would be useful before the design of any ECD programme.

Communities of practice

The remaining categories of statements were comparatively smaller than the statements around training and professional development, yet were large enough to categorise and compare with similarly smaller categories. This also assisted in exploring the hierarchy of ECD needs amongst evaluation practitioners. Forty statements were about collaboration and partnerships. Respondents reflected on the need for professional exchanges between the global North and South, and between senior and emerging evaluators. Mentorship, skills transfer and the building of communities of practice also emerged as important actions that needed to be taken, pointing to a possible realisation amongst respondents that training on its own is not sufficient in building evaluation capacity. Considering that the survey data also showed that the vast majority of respondents in the age category 31 to 40 identified themselves as managers, trainers and commissioners of evaluations, this could be an indication of an emerging need amongst mid-career evaluation

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practitioners to form part of professional communities where learning takes place. This is also the cohort that self-identified as evaluators, and considered evaluation as their primary discipline. They are mainly involved in managing, supervising or consulting on evaluations rather than carrying out all evaluation activities. Evaluation education should therefore be cognisant of the particular needs of this cohort of professionals, and steer more ECD interventions towards supporting the strengthening of evaluation management activities, and also consider more innovative means of ECD through, for example, professional exchanges and peer learning.

Country and place of work, professional identity, professionalisation and accreditation

The majority of respondents (62%) self-identified as evaluators in any capacity (this included trainers, students and managers). Evaluation was considered the primary professional identity of a large proportion of the respondents (43%), whilst for 31% of respondents it was considered their secondary professional identity. However, it is significant that most self-identified evaluators were responsible for managing evaluations (39%) or commissioning evaluations (14%). The largest employer for these evaluators was the state (24%), closely followed by the NGO sector (19%). This has important implications for ECD. Primarily identifying as an evaluator implies a much more concentrated focus on evaluation as a discipline, than managing it as a secondary discipline. Similarly, the contextual differences in evaluation practice between the state, national NGOs, international organisations and other sectors also have important implications for ECD. The skills and capabilities required to commission evaluations are different from those required of an evaluator, or someone who designs management information systems to support evaluation practice. For example, a director of agricultural projects who needs to evaluate the success of a micro-finance project may require only foundational theoretical knowledge in order to manage such an evaluation, versus the director of evaluation in the same state department. This once again points to the need for extensive diagnostics in order to differentiate between the various ECD needs and focus areas, whether at an individual or organisational level.

Respondents reported moderate levels of experience in evaluation-related activities. Fewer than half of the respondents (41%) had less than five years of experience in doing evaluation-related work. On average, respondents had about eight years of experience working in evaluation-related activities.

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Most respondents had about 6–10 years' experience in the various types of evaluation activities such as conducting evaluations (n=135), planning/contracting evaluations (n=87), technical assistance in evaluation (n=67), training others in evaluation (n=68) and in writing about evaluation (n=51).

Education and training institutions would also need to consider how newly established institutional arrangements for M&E in late-adopting countries would need to shape ECD. Approximately half of those between the ages of 31 and 49 (50%) were more likely to self-identify as primarily evaluators. A much smaller proportion (less than 30%) of those between the ages of 50 and 69 felt that they were primarily an evaluator. This is to be understood in relation to the dominance of South African respondents and the fact that evaluation is considered a relatively 'new' profession in the country. More professional opportunities to work in evaluation have emerged in the last decade and a half in South Africa, and therefore the results may represent this state of affairs. The need for foundational training and development may be more pronounced in these circumstances. How individuals identify their roles and functions in respect of their institutional structure has implications for how evaluation education may need to be shaped.

In terms of place of work, 38% of respondents worked primarily in South Africa as M&E practitioners in various organisations and in a range of capacities, followed by Ghana (9%). Those who worked in South Africa did mostly contractual work with national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (78% of respondents), whilst 70% were contracted by the state (national) and 69% by international development agencies (some may have multiple clients).

The implications for ECD in the case of evaluation practitioners (who have some experience in conducting a range of evaluation activities) would be around what would constitute effective continuous professional development in strengthening evaluation practice. The challenge in designing curriculum and capacity development strategies is that there are variations amongst professionals in the type of work that they will do, and the amount of time spent on it. For example, a senior public official who is tasked with planning or contracting evaluations has different capacity-building needs from those who are involved in providing technical assistance. ECD programmes need to take these variations into account in designing capacity development interventions, which poses a challenge to the ideal of harmonising competencies and curriculum across the continent (particularly for institutions of higher learning).

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The ideal curriculum and ECD programme would need to find the right balance between generic skill development and knowledge building, and specialised training subjects.

The issue around professionalisation and certification was certainly a concern to respondents. The fourth largest category of statements was around professionalisation, certification and building a pool/cohort of professionals (35 statements), whilst the fifth was around strengthening university programmes (34 statements). Respondents were also concerned about cultural representivity in building a pool of professionals. There may be a link between the desire for professionalisation and certification and the statements reflecting a demand for improved university-based evaluation education programmes. A major challenge for the evaluation sector is that few countries have been able to address the contestations that have dominated the professionalisation debate over the decades, as well as the binary positions that have been adopted around whether or not to 'professionalise' or 'credentialise'. A study by Podems (2014) indicated the highly contested and sometimes political nature of the development of competency criteria for evaluators, and has an effect on moving forward on the issue of professionalisation.

The desire for academic institutions to adopt a more definitive role in ECD amongst respondents is congruent with the rising demand amongst evaluation professionals in Africa for more university-based qualifications. It is also aligned to the increase in the number of academic institutions that are building post-graduate qualifications in M&E (as opposed to or in addition to executive short courses). Some of the statements included, for example: "Professionalising the evaluation field and expanding evaluation training institutions" and "Evaluation should be professionalised and made part of university curriculum". Building a cohort of professional evaluators who produce high-quality evaluations (and other related services) is key to addressing the perceived shortage of African evaluators on the continent.

Evaluation practice

In terms of evaluation purpose, 94% stated that they frequently or occasionally used evaluations for decision-making, followed by evaluations to improve practice. Although it is commonly thought that accountability and compliance too often drive an organisation's evaluation purpose, the findings show that this is the least common purpose of evaluation for respondents (24% never used).

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In terms of evaluation approaches used, respondents most commonly used participatory evaluation (88% frequently or occasionally used). The least common evaluation approach was feminist evaluation (76% never used). In terms of evaluation types, programme monitoring and process evaluation were most commonly used (93% frequently or occasionally used). The least common type of evaluation was evaluability assessment (44% never used). The most common evaluation method utilised was face-to-face interviews (98% frequently or occasionally used). In respect of the use of methods, various qualitative methods tended to dominate amongst respondents. These included individual interviews, focus groups and stakeholder interviews. Individual face-to-face interviews and document review were the methods most frequently used by most respondents with up to fifteen years of experience.

ECD interventions need to strike a balance between the depth and scope of subject matter covered in training and development programmes. Training programmes, in particular, need to weigh up whether the more pressing need is to develop a broad range of technical skills in specific methods, types, and approaches to evaluation, how much time to spend on evaluation management or whether the need is to provide skills development in only a limited number of specialist areas. The findings show that there is a need to broaden the repertoire of evaluation types, approaches and methods used in evaluation practice, which can be addressed by ECD institutions. The dominant use of interviews must also be more closely examined, as it is a common misconception that it is easier to collect and analyse qualitative data. The limited use of quantitative methods and those which rely on statistical tests may point to an absence of the technical skills that are required to perform these.

Although the second and third most frequently undertaken studies were process and impact evaluations (n=259), it is also commonly known that 'impact' is understood in different ways amongst evaluation practitioners. For example, the findings show that two quantitative approaches (surveys and testing) are less frequently employed, which are a large part of impact evaluation. It would be important that ECD providers pay attention to the need to harmonise the understanding of the concept to ensure that impact evaluations are rigorous, and that commissioners/managers of evaluation have a working understanding of conducting these.

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Contextualisation of evaluation practice

An important cluster of statements emerged around participatory methods, localisation and diversity (26 statements). Examples of the statements made by respondents to improve evaluation capacity building on the continent included a need for training participatory impact assessment and participatory monitoring and evaluation as well as capacity building to national evaluators on participatory and result-based monitoring and evaluation. It is important to evaluators that local stakeholders are involved throughout the evaluation process. The illusion of participation of stakeholders in evaluations is often created by the articulation of participatory data-collection methods in evaluation, such as focus groups. These, however, are not sufficient to address the challenge of ensuring that local communities (often the beneficiaries of programmes being evaluated) are sufficiently empowered to participate in meaningful ways in evaluations, beyond data collection. ECD interventions need to intentionally create awareness and capabilities that will strengthen practice in this regard. An illustrative statement from a participant reinforces this notion:

> Furthermore, there is a need for increased capacity to conduct evaluations but equally important is the ability to understand the context of the major stakeholders in the evaluation. In the African context technical knowledge of constructing evaluations will not be enough unless trust is established and relationships are managed at every stage of the evaluation. So leadership ability plays an important role.
>
> (Survey respondent, 2016)

These responses are linked to a number of recurring themes that emerged which were not repeated as frequently as the above (less than twenty statements each), but nevertheless are important issues that have resonated in the discourse on ECD. One of these was the need for training in Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) and understanding context and culture (sixteen statements). An example of a statement by a respondent echoed the need for ECD content that is rooted in African axiology: "Development of professional competencies for evaluators, development of a body that oversees the evaluation profession and the development of accredited, affordable evaluation courses. All of these must be rooted in African philosophies." Scholars such as Chilisa, Major, Gaothlobogwe and Mokgolodi (2016) posit that there is a need for a greater focus on indigenised, culturally relevant methods and approaches to evaluation in ECD. An endogenous approach to ECD, emerging from African-centric approaches to evaluation, is missing from the current range of ECD interventions (Tarsilla, 2014:8). The absence of this in ECD interventions on

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the whole, but curriculum and instructional design in particular, needs to be addressed in order for evaluators to remain relevant and effective in doing evaluation work in Africa.

Quality assurance

Two sets of statements that appeared with equal frequency (21 statements each) were clustered around standardised protocols across Africa as well as funding/resources. The issue of standardisation has been on the evaluation capacity development radar for a number of years. The defining of competencies and the standardisation of evaluation practice is a contested space, and no continent has been able to fully resolve it. Greater efforts by the ECD sector are required to provide an enabling environment for evaluators in Africa to improve the professionalism and quality of evaluation practice. This includes moving past the impasse around whether or not to standardise or to focus instead on the harmonisation of evaluation quality standards. A related and recurring theme deemed important (and linked to the concern over the weaknesses in evaluation competencies on the African continent and in some way to the standardisation of evaluation practice) was clustered around requiring high quality evaluations and quality assurance (ten statements). Examples of statements from respondents included the need for "training in quality assurance"; "Better evaluation quality control"; "More dedicated commitments by evaluators to quality evaluations"; and "Strong evaluation bodies that regulate quality of evaluations and maintain a pool of continuously learning evaluators". With regards to the resource challenge, respondents offered a number of solutions to what they perceive will lead to effective evaluation capacity and practice on the continent. These include: resource pooling, making training more affordable to Africans, as well as scholarships for African evaluators.

Evaluation demand – findings from the evaluation database

The review of the evaluations in the AfrED was an attempt to identify trends in the commissioning and conducting of evaluation to help provide an indication of the "demand environment" for evaluation. This provided insights into the kinds of skills that have been required to meet the demand, and what that means for ECD in Africa.

Donor-led evaluations

Trends in the data emerging from the AfrED point to the practice of placing a premium on the use of external evaluators from the West as opposed to local

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consultants (CLEAR-AA, 2016a:3). The data revealed that international evaluators continue to lead the production of evaluation reports on the continent (40 out of the 59 reports that were examined, were led by evaluators from outside of the country). Only one of the cases observed had a combination of local and international evaluators involved. Only five of the cases studied were led by local evaluators. In the vast majority of cases (n=28) local stakeholders were involved only in data collection, closely followed by no role (n=23). This aligns with Tarsilla's (2014) findings on the 'parachuting' of international evaluation expertise onto local communities.

What does this mean for ECD in Africa? It is still unclear why international evaluators dominate the local evaluation landscape. There is some speculation of an enduring perception that there is a lack of qualified, experienced evaluators on the continent. This may not hold water, considering that the data in this chapter revealed the high levels of experience and qualifications (general and evaluation specific) of evaluators in Africa. Another speculation is that African evaluators may not be *au fait* with the specific forms and frameworks that are used by individual donors for evaluating their interventions. There is a need, therefore, to empower African evaluators to respond to terms of reference and bids in a way that will enable them to compete on an equal footing with international evaluators, who may have (through experience) become familiar with donor requirements for evaluations. This may require bilateral organisations and donors to invest in local, country-led evaluation systems and to ensure that there is alignment between international needs for information about performance, and local needs for evidence for decision-making.

Evaluation types, design and methods of data collection

In the vast majority of cases observed (n=21), impact evaluation was the type of evaluation undertaken. The type of evaluation conducted appears to be related to the commissioner of the evaluation. For example, impact evaluations appear to be mostly commissioned by donors. Impact evaluation was also the type of evaluation least undertaken by respondents to the survey, whereas impact evaluations were the most common type of evaluations conducted by donors in the sample of evaluation reports observed. Whether or not a lack of experience and skills in impact evaluation amongst African evaluators exists, must be further investigated. However, the space for international evaluators to dominate local evaluation practice is evident in the area of impact evaluation.

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Further research is needed to understand whether these patterns are more generalisable and, if so, why.

A fairly even spread of other types of evaluation were undertaken such as formative evaluation, summative evaluation, process evaluation, and performance evaluation (between one and six cases spread across the various types). Document reviews (n=20), interviews (n=24) and observation or field work (n=15) remained the dominant methods of data collection amongst the evaluations conducted. In a vast majority of cases, a mix of these qualitative methods were used. It is expected, therefore, that thematic content analysis was used as the primary method of analysis in the vast majority of evaluations (n=46).

ECD interventions need to focus on the ability of evaluators to make observations about data that will produce high-quality analyses and evaluation reports that have a high utilisation value. The robustness of evaluation practice is important to commissioners and users of evidence. Evaluation training and education must begin to re-shape the content of curriculum and instructional design towards producing these kinds of results. Much of the curriculum and training in evaluation education (particularly short courses) tend to focus on the fundamentals of M&E, such as designing theories of change, logic modelling, and results-based management. This is important foundational training that is needed for all M&E practitioners, yet evaluators in particular need training that is focused on developing the technical and analytical skills revolving around the "how to" of evaluation. From the two sets of data analysed above, a case may also be made for greater variations in the types of evaluation education and ECD provided to different cohorts of M&E practitioners (for example, those who commission and manage evaluations – who may be more likely be employed in government – and those who conduct evaluations). The standardisation (or harmonisation) of ECD interventions can become a reality if stakeholders and role-players agree on the competencies that different M&E practitioners may need to have in various roles, and the pathways to professional development in each of these cases.

Conclusion

The evidence points to the continued need for ECD. However, proper assessments and diagnostics must be prioritised to recognise the differentiated capacity building and capacity development needs of individuals and institutions

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if evaluation practice is to be strengthened effectively and sustainably. The relatively young evaluator or evaluation practitioner population, both in terms of experience and age, points to a need for ECD to focus on building the profession "from the ground up" in Africa. A large proportion of evaluators have less than five years' experience, and although they are highly qualified in a range of disciplines, there is a gap in their experience in performing a range of M&E-related functions. ECD providers must respond by offering many more opportunities for experiential learning, in addition to classroom-based knowledge building and capacity development. ECD must move beyond classroom-based training and incorporate a broader range of interventions such as mentorships, create institutional structures and provide the resources that facilitate building individual capacities, and provide a supportive culture and context for individual and organisational learning.

There is a need to ensure that ECD programmes become more adept at targeting the right participants, particularly in programmes that would include professionals with a first (or higher) academic qualification. The need for foundational training and development may be more pronounced in some circumstances, whereas more advanced levels of training may be more appropriate in others. Furthermore, evaluation practitioners self-identify differently within the sector (e.g. primarily as evaluators or commissioners of evaluations, public sector or civil society). There is a need for continuous professional development (CPD) programmes that are clear about what learning outcomes are being offered, who is being targeted and which sector the programme would best suit. Practitioners and scholars can then select to participate in programmes and be confident about the results that they will achieve.

University-based training programmes are increasingly becoming important to evaluation practitioners, so academic institutions need to remain relevant in meeting the 'supply-side' desire for more robust, university-based qualifications in M&E. However, these cannot afford to ossify in theory, as respondents clearly articulated the need for opportunities in the "real-world". The inclusion of a practical component which simulates the realities in evaluation practice can no longer be considered a novelty for evaluation education.

Whether it is best to develop a broad evaluation knowledge-base or specific technical skills in conducting evaluations, and how much needs to be known

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around evaluation management, is not cast in stone. ECD providers need to strike the ideal balance between foundational/generic capacity development and building specialised capabilities (and may even further disaggregate according to specific sectors). Much more effort must, therefore, be put into building diagnostic studies, training-needs analyses and skills audits as a non-negotiable part of the process of the design of ECD interventions.

The limited range of evaluation types, approaches and methods used in evaluation practice observed in the evaluations examined in this sample of the AfrED perhaps points to a need to broaden the repertoire of evaluators. This includes the limited use of quantitative methods in impact evaluation, which is particularly concerning.

The impasse around standardisation/professionalisation/certification within the sector needs to be transcended if evaluation capacity is to experience a fundamental shift in the right direction in Africa. Evaluation practitioners have clearly articulated their desire for the ECD sector to provide an enabling environment and to take the lead in the professionalisation of evaluation practice in Africa.

The localisation of evaluation practice as well as the empowerment of local evaluators and indigenous peoples (or the 'beneficiaries' of development interventions) beyond tick-box 'participation' in the global South is rapidly gaining momentum. This is taking place within a broader African debate around the decolonisation of curriculum in the academe in general. In order to remain relevant and to respond to this demand for indigenisation and cultural responsiveness, the ECD environment needs to re-calibrate its curriculum and instructional design. Related to this is the need to break free of the decades-long pattern of international evaluators dominating the local evaluation scene. African evaluators need to be empowered to develop the knowledge, experience, and skill to respond to specific donor frameworks and templates for evaluation-related activities in order to compete equally with the international evaluator community. Rather than bemoan the state of affairs, more disruptive ways of addressing the challenges are called for. For example, commissioners of evaluations (particularly donors) could, for example, require as part of evaluation contracts that local evaluators be 'inducted' into the process of an evaluation from the inception of the project as part of a skills-transfer initiative, or that a certain percentage of local evaluators be required to jointly lead the evaluation.

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The role of HEIs in evaluation capacity development is crucial, in so far as they are the locus of individual learning and development, and the creation of bodies of knowledge that support the growth of a discipline. However, it is important that a collaborative posture is adopted between all actors who play a role in ECD, as improved qualifications and proficiencies only tell part of the evaluation capacity story. As more organisations raise the demand for academic qualifications in M&E, either in recruitment practices or as part of their internal capacity-building strategies, higher education institutions will need to pay more attention to consensus around the design of competency-based evaluation education programmes, the standardisation of qualifications, and curriculum design.

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