# What are the key factors influencing the success (or not) of M&E systems strengthening interventions in improving the demand, supply and/or use of evaluative evidence?

## Executive Summary

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems are indispensable to evidence-informed decision-making, yet the success of efforts to strengthen those systems varies markedly across settings. Enabling conditions identified in the literature include sustained political leadership, broad-based stakeholder engagement, institutional integration of M&E with planning and budgeting processes, and deliberate investment in professional and organizational capacity. These conditions raise demand for credible evidence, enlarge the domestic supply of high-quality studies, and normalise evidence use in routine decisions. Major barriers, such as weak political will, donor-driven agendas, low technical capacity, and fragmented governance, dampen those same dimensions. The review also underscores the importance of context-specific strategies that adapt to political economy realities, cultural norms, and levels of decentralisation. Persistent knowledge gaps include the long-term impact of capacity-building, evidence use in decentralised systems, and comparative insights across political regimes. Addressing these gaps through longitudinal and experimental research would refine guidance for future M&E-system reforms.

## Introduction

This literature review addresses the question, “What are the key factors influencing the success (or not) of M&E systems-strengthening interventions in improving the demand, supply and/or use of evaluative evidence?” Drawing on 39 sources that span conceptual frameworks, empirical case studies, and systematic reviews, the analysis proceeds in three stages: first, it examines enabling factors that amplify demand, supply, and use; second, it analyses hindering factors that impede each dimension; and third, it synthesises cross-cutting insights for policy and research.

## Enabling Factors for Strengthening Demand for Evaluative Evidence

Robust demand for evaluative evidence begins with unequivocal political and institutional leadership. Kanyamuna (2021) shows that presidential and cabinet-level endorsement in Zambia catalysed ministries to request performance data, while Chirau, Masilela, and Dlakavu (2020) report that visible champions signal seriousness to rank-and-file officials across Anglophone Africa. Legislative scrutiny and civil-society watchdogs reinforce that demand: Adams et al. (2013) observed rising parliamentary questions on programme impact in Ghana, and stakeholder coalitions have pushed governments toward transparency elsewhere (Hlaise-Msimang, 2023). Demand also climbs when M&E outputs are woven into core policy processes; Matsiliza (2019) documents how South Africa’s Government-Wide M&E system linked evaluation cycles to the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, making evidence a prerequisite for budget approval. Finally, awareness of evaluation’s intrinsic benefits – learning, accountability, reputational gain – drives demand, as theorised by Alkin and King (2017) and corroborated by empirical gains in Ghana (Adams et al., 2013).

## Enabling Factors for Strengthening Supply of Evaluative Evidence

The supply of evaluative evidence is facilitated by enabling factors, such as political commitment, institutional architecture, and resource flows, that create fertile ground for capacity-building interventions. Among these, existing capacity infrastructure-including institutionalised training pipelines and professional evaluation networks-plays a critical reinforcing role. Ghana’s Master of Arts in Evaluation, supported by donors but now embedded in a local university, has boosted the cadre of national evaluators (Adams et al., 2013), while Uganda’s Evaluation Association provides peer learning and mentorship (Niringiye, 2018). Development-partner assistance, though sometimes critiqued for overshadowing domestic priorities, can still fill critical funding gaps that national treasuries cannot (CLEAR-AA, 2020). Framing capacity as an enabling factor underscores that training succeeds only when broader systems (e.g., professional networks, accreditation standards, public-sector career incentives) allow newly acquired skills to be deployed and rewarded. Formal institutional frameworks likewise matter: South Africa’s Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation illustrates how a statutory mandate stabilises evaluation functions across electoral cycles (Matsiliza, 2019). Local research institutions and professional networks deepen supply by anchoring evidence production in contextual knowledge, as exemplified in Zambia (Mulenga & Porter, 2013) and Botswana (Makadzange, 2022).

## Enabling Factors for Strengthening Use of Evaluative Evidence

Effective use of evidence hinges on communication quality, participatory engagement, and organisational incentives. Evaluator communication skills and stakeholder involvement can translate technical findings into actionable insights (Alkin and King, 2017). Kuchenmüller et al. (2022) offer a concrete illustration: EVIPNet Europe’s knowledge-translation model uses policy briefs, rapid responses, and deliberative dialogues to package evidence in plain language aligned with decision cycles. Participatory designs further increase utilisation by fostering process use; Donnelly and Searle (2017) find that organisations internalise lessons when staff actively co-interpret data. Institutional cultures that privilege learning and accountability strengthen uptake; Bullock et al. (2021) argue that supportive governance arrangements and incentive structures embed evidence into routine policy deliberations. Finally, alignment with policy priorities is vital: Morton and Seditas (2018) show that evidence products framed around explicit “next steps” resonate more strongly with officials than abstract recommendations.

## Hindering Factors for Strengthening Demand for Evaluative Evidence

Unfavorable political economy dynamics represent a critical barrier to evidence demand. If leaders perceive M&E as punitive “policing,” they may underfund or ignore evaluation units (Chirau et al., 2022). Limited understanding of M&E’s value compounds the problem; Kanyamuna et al. (2018) report that parliamentary committees in Zambia rarely request evaluation briefs because they conflate monitoring with rigorous impact assessment. Donor-driven priorities may further distort local agendas, as observed by Chirau et al. (2020), prompting governments to conduct evaluations only for compliance, not learning. Bureaucratic silos and coordination failures cut across these issues, hampering a unified demand signal and allowing ministries to sidestep uncomfortable findings (Liverani et al., 2013).

## Hindering Factors for Strengthening Supply of Evaluative Evidence

Supply bottlenecks often start with scarce technical capacity. Ministries in Ghana and Malawi struggle to recruit and retain evaluators, leading to chronic vacancies (Adams et al., 2013; Kumwenda & Latib, 2013). Funding shortfalls exacerbate the deficit: even when budgets for evaluation exist, they may go unspent due to procurement hurdles (Mulenga & Porter, 2013). Excessive reliance on external consultants temporarily plugs gaps but discourages the cultivation of domestic expertise (Niringiye, 2018). Weak knowledge-management systems (including, for instance, absence of national evaluation repositories or data portals) further restrict access to completed studies (Kumwenda & Latib, 2013). Finally, fragmentation of donor-established M&E systems erodes coherence, creating parallel structures that duplicate effort and confuse standards (Masvaure & Fish, 2022).

## Hindering Factors for Strengthening Use of Evaluative Evidence

Use falters when findings are inaccessible, untimely, or impenetrable. Technical jargon, paywalled journals, and year-long publication lags alienate busy policymakers, as noted by Alkin and King (2017) and Morton and Seditas (2018). Organisations with weak learning cultures often relegate evaluation reports to archives, a phenomenon documented by Bullock et al. (2021) and Johnson et al. (2009). Political and ideological contestation can nullify even well-communicated evidence, with South Africa’s early HIV/AIDS policy being a stark example (Liverani et al., 2013). Finally, fragmented governance structures produce feedback loops that break midway; Makadzange (2022) describes how ministries in Botswana compile reports but rarely channel them into planning units, while Minyihun et al. (2022) highlight similar disconnects in Ethiopia’s health sector.

## Conclusion

This review synthesises a wide body of literature to map how enabling and hindering factors condition the effectiveness of M&E system-strengthening interventions. Viewed holistically, political commitment emerges as the initial catalyst, capacity and institutional frameworks provide the scaffolding, and communication plus participatory cultures supply the oxygen that keeps evidence alive in policy arenas. Conversely, disengaged leadership, fragile capacity, donor dependency, and fragmentation suffocate reform efforts. Context matters profoundly: decentralised polities may offer more entry points for evidence but require tailored capacity support; centralised regimes may achieve rapid institutionalisation but risk insulating decision-makers from critical scrutiny. Effective strategies therefore integrate political buy-in, sustainable funding, demand-driven capacity development, and explicit incentives for evidence use. Significant research gaps remain, particularly on long-term capacity outcomes, sub-national systems, and cross-country comparative learning. Future studies employing mixed-method longitudinal designs could illuminate causal pathways, enabling practitioners to fine-tune interventions to the contextual enablers and barriers identified herein.

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