

An African approach for gauging the gender responsiveness of national monitoring and evaluation systems

The importance of strengthening national evaluation systems is gaining traction with more states investing in developing the evaluation capacity of their institutions and systems for improved program delivery. Embedded in that approach, is the development of homegrown evaluation tools to conduct country-driven evaluations to improve overall government efficiency and effectiveness. Mainstreaming gender into evaluation policies and processes and involving national gender machineries should be part of the “modus operandi” of national evaluation systems. A national gender machinery monitors government actions to promote gender equality (Testolin, 2001). In Africa, Twende Mbele is a regional initiative that supports and documents the collaborative and individual efforts of state-led evaluations. Furthermore, Twende Mbele emphasizes gender mainstreaming as a cornerstone of national evaluations. This article presents the findings from a diagnostic study used to determine the gender responsiveness of national monitoring and evaluation systems in Benin, South Africa and Uganda. The conclusion is that while the three countries have implemented national evaluation systems, these systems need to be complemented with inputs from the existing national gender machinery in order to make a meaningful contribution to state evaluation policies, institutions and processes.

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Introduction

The importance of strengthening national monitoring and evaluation systems (NMES) is gaining momentum with more states investing in developing the evaluation capacity of their institutions and systems for improved program delivery. Embedded in that approach, is the development of homegrown evaluation tools to conduct country-driven evaluations to improve overall government efficiency and effectiveness. Establishing and building NMES within government processes has gained traction over the last decade with the intention of:

- **Generating knowledge** such that government can judge and improve service delivery and government performance more generally;
- **Enhancing accountability** for government to determine how much has been spent on financing policies and programmes; and
- **Improving decision-making** within governments because of the quality of information on service delivery available.

It is imperative that gender is integrated in the NMES to work towards the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women in society.

Tracking gender commitments in African national processes for monitoring and evaluation

Gender equality and the empowerment of women has been a principal goal of the global development agenda since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, and more recently, of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, better known as the "Maputo Protocol" and many other regional instruments, such as the recently adopted East African Gender Protocol and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Protocol, compel African member states to adopt and implement policies that will help them to achieve this important sustainable development goal. As a result of these initiatives, often building on existing gender equality and feminist movements within each country, African states have established national gender machineries to assist in mainstreaming gender into government policies and programmes.

Notable are Uganda's Gender Policy adopted in 2007, and South Africa's Constitution and institutional framework for promoting gender equality, established in 2000. The expectation has been that country national gender commitments will complement emerging government policies and programs to ensure an engendered mode of service delivery. However, the literature (and experiences of the authors of this article) shows that gender machineries continue to work on the periphery of government programs.

This issue has been revealed through the evaluation of governments' gender mainstreaming efforts. Various capacity constraints and patriarchal values attributed to this persistent paucity is covered elsewhere (CGE, 2015; UNECA, 2017). It is also worth noting that the evolving nature of evaluation methodologies and approaches in Africa covers diverse aspects of gender that cannot always be captured in an individual evaluation. Hence, this calls for a more robust multi-dimensional and flexible approach (Adu, 2017; United Nations, 2015). To this effect, the United Nations Entity for Gender ►

► Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) has adopted "an innovative systemic evaluation practice" intended to capture the complexities and prioritize issues related to the gender equality agenda (Stephens, et al, 2018: 6). These developments in evaluation present an opportunity for the development and use of an indigenous methodology and approach for national evaluations that can capture developmental aspirations and citizens' concerns such as gender equality.

The Twende Mbele Initiative is a peer-learning collaboration between African governments in South Africa, Uganda, Benin, and more recently Ghana, Niger and Kenya, to work together to strengthen their national monitoring and evaluation systems. CLEAR-AA and the Independent Development Evaluation (IDEV) of the African Development Bank are core institutional partners providing strategic and technical support. The Programme, funded by DFID and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, seeks to enhance the technical and institutional monitoring and evaluation capacities of African partners through an approach that utilizes networks and peer learning. As a country-driven programme, the strategic mandate of these countries has been to ensure that NMES embody the ideals of gender equality and the empowerment of women in society. To this end, Twende Mbele undertook a diagnostic of the gender responsiveness of the government-wide monitoring and evaluation systems in Benin, Uganda, and South Africa. The diagnostic tool was designed in collaboration by the African Gender and Development Evaluators Network (AGDEN).

Overview of African National Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

The evolution of NMES in Africa follows a trajectory that is based on a model that

was developed by Holvoet & Renard (2007) and adapted to developing countries context. A key part of this model is the national evaluation policy, that prescribes the national evaluation plan and the role that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plays in government programmes. The

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unit or department that is responsible for the NMES also coordinates evaluations undertaken by various ministries and levels of government. Three member countries of the Twende Mbele Programme have attempted to address and provide resources for capacity needs for implementation of the NMES. These NMES also acknowledge that the participation of actors outside of government is an area that could be improved. For instance, the role of civil society and development partners should be catered for to incorporate expertise in gender equality and to enhance the role of M&E at the national level. Finally, it is important that the M&E findings are of good quality and are useful for enhancing government delivery modes (Goldman et al., 2018). Benin, Uganda and South Africa have adopted NMES that are specific to their country contexts.

The NMES for Benin, Uganda and South Africa have been undertaking ►



► national evaluations guided by their respective national evaluation policy and processes (see Table 1). National evaluations have been conducted to inform the state of delivery of services, pointing to critical areas of concern with relation to individual national development priorities. A unit or department that is situated within the Presidency or the Office of the Prime Minister coordinates the policy framework in each of the three countries. South Africa began national evaluations in the 2012/2013 financial year, Benin in 2013, while Uganda commenced in the 2014/2015 year once the NMES were in place.

Gender Diagnostic of Selected African National Evaluation Systems

In 2017, Twende Mbele commissioned a diagnostic study to assess the level of gender responsiveness of the NMES for Benin, Uganda and South Africa, using a home-grown tool based on a robust, participatory and iterative approach (Jansen van Rensburg & Blaser-Mapitsa, 2017). This AGDEN gender diagnostic matrix was used as an analytical tool to assess the extent to which provisions to consider gender within the National M&E Plan and the NMES are evident, as well as the level of functionality of those mechanisms for improving gender mainstreaming.

The two components were assessed through six pre-identified criteria, whereby each of the criteria was investigated through a set of questions that were answered from the document review of policies and legislation and from information garnered through interviews with identified stakeholders in the NMES. The selected criteria are:

1. Gender equality: it refers to the equal rights, roles, responsibilities and priorities assigned to the different categories of women, men, girls and boys. Evidence of this criteria was sought in the national evaluation policy and NMES;
2. Gender-responsive budgeting: it is related to integrating the gender perspective in all the phases of the budget and restructuring revenue and expenditure to promote gender equality;
3. Participation looks at the mechanisms that allow both women and men to represent their interests and to express their opinions to influence decisions and programmes that affect them;
4. Decision-making examines who is empowered to make decisions in general and decisions related to gender as well as to implementation of NMES;
5. Evaluation and revision checks whether and how national evaluation ►►

Table 1: Evolution of country national evaluation systems

Country	Policy adopted	National Evaluations
Benin	2007 – ministry with evaluation mandate created 2011/2012 – policy adopted	2013
Uganda	2012/2013 – cabinet approve policy 2013/2014 – develop and adopt implementation policy	2014/ 2015
South Africa	2011/2012 – policy adopted	2012 / 2013

Source: Adapted from Goldman et al., 2018

- ▶ policy is examined and evaluated from a gender perspective;
6. Sustainability refers to whether the benefits of an activity are likely to be maintained over the medium term and measure whether NMES can support gender mainstreaming in future particularly for sustained financing.

Using the above criteria, a gender diagnostic matrix is used to evaluate country performance. The matrix interrogates two levels, representing the policy and system, with the advocacy dimension embedded in both levels. Fifty-seven (57) questions which target equity and gender-responsive criteria with performance scales were used to populate the matrix and present the findings for the gender diagnostic of the three country NMES.

Findings from the Gender Diagnostic study

The gender diagnostic reveals that Benin, South Africa and Uganda have areas that need improvement to enhance the gender responsiveness of their NMES. These challenges include: lack of provision or clear guidelines for gender mainstreaming; insufficient involvement or influence of national gender machinery to support national evaluation processes; a deficit in the competence for gender mainstreaming of key actors in the NMES; and limited areas for voluntary organizations for professional evaluators (VOPES) and gender equality advocates in evaluation processes.

In **Benin**, the NMES does not have an appropriate mechanism to effectively ensure that gender is integrated into evaluations. This state of affairs is the consequence of the virtual absence of appropriate expertise to make gender responsive evaluations at the level of the ministries and agencies responsible for national evaluations. A major effort is made by the National Institute of

Statistics and Economic Analysis to disaggregate data by sex. In addition, the Gender and Social Protection Technical Group effectively supports gender mainstreaming in the Country Poverty Reduction Strategy review and evaluation processes. Finally, the role of civil society in national evaluations is quite developed in Benin, where the civil society's expertise supports the development of the national evaluation plan.

For the case of **Uganda**, the results indicate there is no specific mention of gender equality in the policy for national monitoring and evaluation. The policy seems to address the 'what' and is silent on 'when' and 'how' gender can be mainstreamed in evaluating public policies. The evaluation policy does not provide guidelines on gender responsive evaluation – it does purport adherence to standards in data collection, analysis and reporting, including disaggregating data by sex, which will improve future evaluation. It also emerged that the policy mentions that participatory approaches should be used in evaluation, though it does not specify which groups should be involved and if gender should be considered to choose them. Despite having a long-standing Gender policy, gender equality advocates have so far been excluded from processes related to the evaluation design or forums to influence the gender responsiveness of national evaluations.

In **South Africa**, an established constitutional and institutional mandate prescribes for gender parity in government departments as well as in delivery of social services. This mandate affords the national department for M&E (DPME) the leverage to ask for gender reporting per sector. Nonetheless, the diagnostic found gender to be weakly reflected in the critical checkpoints that guide government delivery. South Africa's case also raised some debate around the polarities between, i) assigning responsibility ▶



► for gender equality oversight to separate departments, departmental units and constitutional bodies, or ii) ensuring that gender becomes the responsibility of all sector departments at all levels against a set of guidelines and standards. The diagnostic found that this responsibility of gender mainstreaming the NMES can well be managed from the DPME and should be centralised to this department.

In Table 2, the results show how the three countries fare in terms of engendering the national evaluation plans and NMES using the five criteria mentioned above: gender equality, decision making, participation, review and sustainability. The country performance remains average (50%) or below average for most of the criteria under 'national evaluation policy'. However, the average performance for review and revision of the national policy sits at 28%. Benin and Uganda score 17% and 22 % respectively, while South Africa scored 47%. The diagnostic reveals that

the review processes for the national evaluation policy are not specific for gender mainstreaming, a concern for the national gender machinery, and are not able to measure the advance towards a more equal society. This shows that an opportunity to engender the national policy may not fully utilised by the NMES.

Although NMES is a state-led initiative, other stakeholders, such as development partners and civil society organizations, including VOPEs, should be engaged to facilitate gender mainstreaming in the NMES. Overall the NMES performs better in the areas of 'participation' with South Africa and Benin scoring 78% for involving VOPEs, gender equality advocates and institutions that specialize in knowledge for evaluations. In Benin, for example, civil society and gender equality advocates participate in the validation workshops. Uganda scores the highest, at 83%, for sustainability because future funding for NMES is guaranteed, although it may not be directed toward the enhancing gender equality. ►

Table 2: Country results for Gender Diagnostic

Component/Criteria	Country performance rate			Average performance rate
	Benin	South Africa	Uganda	
National evaluation policy	44%	50%	37%	44%
Gender Equality	45%	51%	38%	45%
Decision Making	47%	47%	27%	40%
Participation	42%	58%	42%	47%
Review & Revision	17%	44%	22%	28%
Sustainability	56%	44%	56%	52%
National monitoring and evaluation system	33%	51%	49%	44%
Gender Equality	23%	40%	43%	35%
Gender Budgeting	33%	46%	46%	42%
Decision Making	17%	58%	50%	42%
Participation	78%	78%	56%	71%
Sustainability	50%	67%	83%	67%

Source: Twende Mbele, (2018c: 3, 4)

► The inference that can be drawn from the Gender Diagnostic study is that more synergy is required from the NMES and the national gender machinery. The diagnostic found that the national evaluation policy for the three countries was adopted after the creation of a national gender machinery. However, these policies did not take advantage of the existence of this machinery to improve the level of gender responsiveness of NMES. The diagnostic proposes that national gender machineries must be actively involved in the development and implementation of crucial policies such as the NMES.

Given the status of gender within the national development goals, NMES can maximize the premium of the gender machinery to engender its policy and processes. Some suggestions that are drawn from the gender diagnostic are proposed here to make NMES more gender responsive.

Recommendations for improved Gender responsiveness of NMES and national evaluation policies

The gender diagnostic study suggests that there is potential to enhance the gender responsiveness of NMES. To ensure that Africa achieves SDG 5, governments need to engage the respective national gender machinery and actors involved in the NMES to facilitate purposeful gender mainstreaming in their national M&E processes. We present a few suggestions that could assist country-led national evaluation systems to become (more) gender responsive.

NMES aligned to the national strategy and policy

The three countries hold gender equality as an ideal in their development priorities as stated in their national strategies or policies, which must be incorporated into the evaluation strategy. It is important to review

M&E systems and processes in order to improve their level of gender responsiveness, and put in place clear guidelines for gender mainstreaming into national evaluations. This could be reinforced by the development of clear and compulsory guidelines for gender mainstreaming in national evaluation. It will also be useful to improve the gender responsiveness of the national assessments tools, which are used by the NMES for monitoring and evaluation, by introducing gender-sensitive indicators in all sectorial programs and policies.

Capacity development

Explicit efforts should be made to develop or strengthen the capacities of officials and stakeholders within the NMES. Targeted training and resources should be made available to facilitate gendered analysis in evaluations. As a result, skills and competencies are transferred to the relevant actors and decision-makers of NMES as well as in the various sector departments. A case may be made to integrate gender focal points in the design of programs and policies and to conduct evaluations at the sectorial levels. This will strengthen the capacity of key actors and of the NMES on gender mainstreaming and gender analysis at all levels of government. It is equally important to allocate adequate (human and financial) resources required to evaluate and monitor gender-mainstreaming activities in national programs.

Mechanism to monitor gender responsiveness of evaluations

It may be useful to establish a mechanism to monitor the gender responsiveness of national and sector evaluations within the NMES. The Gender Focal Points in government departments could be used to assist, guide, monitor and report on gender mainstreaming with the NMES. This will encourage the national gender machineries to play a more active role of ensuring that evaluation practices respond to national gender imperatives. This mechanism ►►

► can include the involvement of civil society actors with gender expertise.

Conclusion

The article concludes that the three countries have a NMES that operates in parallel to their respective national gender machineries. As a result, this effort has not been systematically used in engendering NMES. The national M&E policy of each of the countries

needs to be reviewed to include aspects that are relevant to gender mainstreaming, as well as to mandate the NMES to enhance the level of gender responsiveness of evaluations. This article recommends that the NMES be aligned to national development imperatives for gender equality by providing policy direction and guidelines, increasing the capacity for gender mainstreaming, and providing a mechanism that can monitor the gender responsiveness of the NMES.

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Authors' profile

Cara Waller is the Programme Manager of the Twende Mbele African Partnership programme. She has been working in the evaluation space in South Africa for five years, coming previously from a career in Australia. With a Masters in International Health and Evaluation, she has worked in evaluation for over ten years, primarily in health promotion and youth development.



Parfait Kasongo is the most recent addition to the Twende Mbele team, and is the Communications & Learning Coordinator. He started life as an Engineer and has recently discovered his passion for facilitating story-telling and sharing new knowledge. His research interests include regional politics and governance, which he is pursuing through a law/international relations degree at Wits University.



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