

MONITORING AND EVALUATION LEGISLATION IN ZAMBIA – GAP ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that a good Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system is an essential source of information for streamlining and improving development interventions towards maximizing the likelihood of success. Evidence-based M&E can contribute to transformational policy and decision making through the processes of effective and efficient planning and budgeting for any given country or organisation. However, this only remains true if such M&E systems were based on sound legislation. This paper argues that M&E systems are supposed to be build and anchored upon stable and clear legal frameworks. In the absence of a law, systems for M&E face being redundant and un-used. In Zambia, the law that supports the development and strengthening of M&E has been found to be weak and if the trend persisted, the country risked failing to address the serious issues of public accountability, feedback and learning from what government does. The methodology used for the paper was investigatory and descriptive, whereby different research methods were employed. Intensive desk review of various sources and resources were consulted and predominantly these being government policy documents; expert publications by internationally acclaimed M&E practitioners; multilateral and bilateral agencies as well as interviews from among key informants within the Zambia – both from among state and non-state institutions. Essentially, the paper used published and unpublished materials including expert oriented feedback from the authorities charged with the responsibility of implementing M&E functions in the country.

KEYWORDS

Monitoring, Evaluation, M&E Legislation, Whole of Government M&E system

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

A results-based M&E system provides crucial information about public sector or organisational performance. It can help policy makers, decision makers, and other stakeholders answer the fundamental questions of whether promises were kept and outcomes achieved. M&E is the means by which improvements or a lack of improvements can be demonstrated [1, 19 & 22]. Consequently, many initiatives are pushing governments to adopt public management systems that show results. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) initiative, 2005 Paris Declaration, 2008 Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) and more recently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are some of the examples propagating for the global culture of results.

By reporting the results of various interventions, governments and other organisations can promote credibility and public confidence in their work. Providing information to the public also supports a development agenda that is shifting toward greater accountability for aid lending. According to [2 & 32], a good results-based M&E system can be extremely useful as a

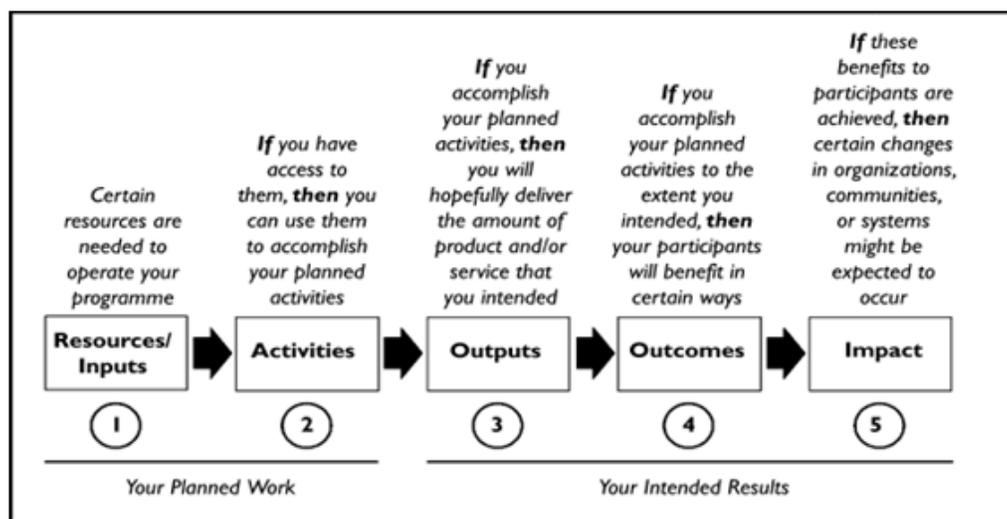
management and motivational tool. It helps focus attention on achieving outcomes that are important to the organisation and its stakeholders, and it provides an impetus for establishing key goals and objectives that address these outcomes. It also provides managers with crucial information on whether the strategy guiding the intervention is appropriate, correct, and adequate to the changes being sought through the intervention [3].

Given the above, a good M&E system is also an essential source of information for streamlining and improving interventions to maximize the likelihood of development success. It helps identify promising interventions early on so that they can potentially be implemented elsewhere (4). Having data available about how well a particular project, practice, programme, or policy works provides useful information for formulating and justifying budget requests. It also allows judicious allocation of scarce resources to the interventions that will provide the greatest societal benefits.

1.2 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) therefore need to be understood in the context of relevant theoretical positions. The Theory of Change (ToC), which according to Rogers (2014) and Vogel (2012) refers to a fundamental theoretical construct focused on both defining and clarifying long-term development goals, mapping them backwards and identifying necessary remedial preconditions. As a methodology for development planning, participation, monitoring and evaluation, the ToC uses a clearly defined causal relationship of results, i.e. inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts. To that extent, the ToC provides theoretical guidance in that when inputs or resources are properly utilised to undertake a set of related activities, expected outputs can be achieved. At that point, the outputs can then be used by the beneficiaries to give rise to the desired outcomes (change in behaviour) which then lead to the long term consequences, the impacts. See Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Theory of Change representation as an M&E theoretical foundation



Source: Adapted from W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004

Therefore, a functional Whole of Government M&E system would need to be established and informed by the ToC. That way, it will be practical to pursue development results which will benefit citizens and the country in general. Such a system would even do better when anchored on

a stronger M&E legislation, one that supports and protects those who undertake the functions of M&E within and outside of government. Legislation in form of constitutional provisions, parliamentary Bills and other policy related support to M&E function can go a long way in creating a results based Whole of Government M&E system for Zambia. Ultimately, a prosperous system for M&E at government level would then spur positive good governance practices and poverty reduction for a given country, such as Zambia.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper benefited from a number of sources and personal experiences of the authors on the subject matter of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) implementation in Zambia, particularly within and outside the public sector. Government reports such as National Development Plans (NDPs), Annual Progress Reports (APRs), and policies on national planning and budgeting as well as public financial management were consulted. Coupled with these, other published and unpublished institutional reports, books and journal articles were used. In addition, some views of key informants from within and outside government were obtained through interviews on their perceptions regarding the M&E implementation and legislation in Zambia (i.e. academia, civil society, cooperating partners, etc).

3. OVERVIEW OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION EVOLUTION IN ZAMBIA

In Zambia, the recent evolution of M&E in government can be generally traced around the beginning of the New Millennium in the year 2000, and particularly towards the end of the 20th Century in 1998/1999. During this period, the World Bank working alongside the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had launched the Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) as an alternative or reaction to the controversial and arguably failed Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) of the 1990s that saw most poor countries plunge into unsustainable external debt (Booth, 2000; 2005). Zambia developed her Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (I-PRSP 2000-2002) in 2000 and progressively, the first full PRSP (2002-2004) was launched and implemented together with other existing reforms in 2002. Still under the guidance of the World Bank and IMF, Zambia successfully implemented the first PRSP and qualified for external debt relief as prescribed for a country that reached the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) Initiative completion point in 2004.

In addition, some further reforms were made and in 2006, Zambia reverted to 'National Development Planning (NDP)'². Nonetheless, Zambia's return to NDPs came after a fairly successful implementation of two Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) which were instruments of poverty reduction prepared under the guidance of the World Bank and the IMF. Thus, NDPs continue to be used as strategies of tackling poverty and are designed to help realize the country's Vision 2030. The Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP) to cover the period 2006 to 2010 was developed and implemented. Equally, Zambia implemented her Sixth National Development Plan (SNDP) for the period 2011 to 2015/6. Currently, the country is implementing her Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP 2017-2021) [5].

M&E has been the core component in all the PRSPs and indeed the NDPs. To that extent, all these development strategies and plans have always carried separately elaborated chapters on M&E, outlining the details of how the government was going to holistically tackle the issue of NDP monitoring and evaluation. In this context, M&E is significant not only to the Zambian government, but also to the citizens and other stakeholders. That explains why governments globally are embarking on building M&E systems to enable them measure the quality, quantity and targeting of the various public development interventions implemented. M&E is understood to be an effective instrument towards determination of the extent to which outputs were achieving expected outcomes and impacts [6 & 22].

4. DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Monitoring: a monitoring exercise is said to be a continuous function that uses systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide management and key stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds [34].

Evaluation: an evaluation, according to [7, 11 & 34] systematically and objectively assesses a policy, programme or project which is on-going or completed, its planning, design, execution and results. The main focus of any evaluation should be determining an intervention's relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability with a view to appreciate its value, significance or indeed its worth.

M&E Legislation: this simply refers to available laws and accompanying legal provisions and guidelines in the country that support the practice and strengthening of the M&E function within and across government institutions as well as among non-state actors.

Whole of Government M&E System: this is a structural totality system or framework of operation upon which all M&E functions in an organisation, government or any development agency are supposed to be undertaken. [6] adds that a Whole of Government M&E system incorporates all M&E functionalities and relationships (i.e. vertical and horizontal functions and relations).

5. SECTOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN ZAMBIA

According to [4 & 30], the strength of whole-of-government M&E systems is dependent on the functionality of individual sector M&E systems. Therefore, to ensure that M&E information is used for internal sector management functions and meets the information needs of stakeholders outside of government, commitment of funds and other resources to strengthening sector M&E systems becomes inevitable. Such investment is thus, better focused on building the sector capacities in terms of human M&E skills and infrastructure. The significance of sector M&E therefore denotes the need for countries, especially the developing ones to prioritise building and strengthening sectoral M&E arrangements in order to be able to track evidence of progress in all public interventions contributing to poverty reduction agendas.

To implement the Zambian National Development Plans (NDPs), sector plans and strategies have been developed and like in the NDPs, M&E arrangements have been elaborated. The M&E systems of the sectors play a fundamental role in information gathering and work as input into the national M&E system that ultimately reflects government's performance. Moreover, more stakeholders including citizens, donors, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and others are usually keen to know where and how the public resources are being utilized with regards to the poverty reduction strategies.

Essentially therefore, sector plans contain details of resources, activities, programmes, and policies of what a given line ministry hopes to achieve during a defined period and exclusive summaries of these strategies are constituted and presented in the various chapters of the NDPs. Sector specific information with regards to operations and resource planning, utilization and management is also captured and stored by the sector M&E systems. For that reason, a successful Whole-of-Government M&E system (WoG-M&E system) becomes inevitable for Zambia but currently, there exist a number of challenges and the biggest being the lack of specific legislation to mandate and support national M&E arrangements [5].

6. THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION LEGISLATION GAP IN ZAMBIA

Although M&E has for more than a decade now been recognized as a significant component in the management of public resources by the Zambian government and other key stakeholders, the practice is not yet given a strong legal mandate. M&E is only articulated in National Development Plans (NDPs) and although this is a positive starting point, the role of M&E is very robust and its nature undoubtedly requires a law to back its functionality. The National Planning and Budgeting Policy of 2014 still falls short of providing clear guidance on how M&E is supposed to be conducted in Zambia. Only a vague mention of M&E is made in the policy – while this was positive, M&E did not need to be crowded out or down played especially in such important (policy related) documents. Thus, to some extent, it is unarguably correct that policy direction regarding national M&E exists in Zambia but however, the problem is with the lack of legal mandate or environment upon which M&E could be developed and sustained for the country. When successfully implemented, the WoG-M&E system gathers and has the responsibility of delivering both the good and bad news regarding the public sector performance. In this case, it is crucial to protect the M&E function by law so that the information and recommendations made (by M&E) are taken seriously to improve ongoing and future developments in the country.

With the necessary legal provision for the M&E function, it will be possible to strive towards a functionally sound WoG-M&E system. Until then shall it be practical to implement an M&E system adhering to the three (3) dimensions of a successful M&E system namely the; i) utilization of M&E information, ii) supplying good quality M&E information, and iii) sustainability (Mackay, 2007). An Act of Parliament that clearly stipulates and recognizes the distinct diverse roles of national M&E function will go a long way in creating sound management of public resources and help reduce poverty among the citizenry [6].

7. STATUS OF ZAMBIA'S M&E SYSTEM

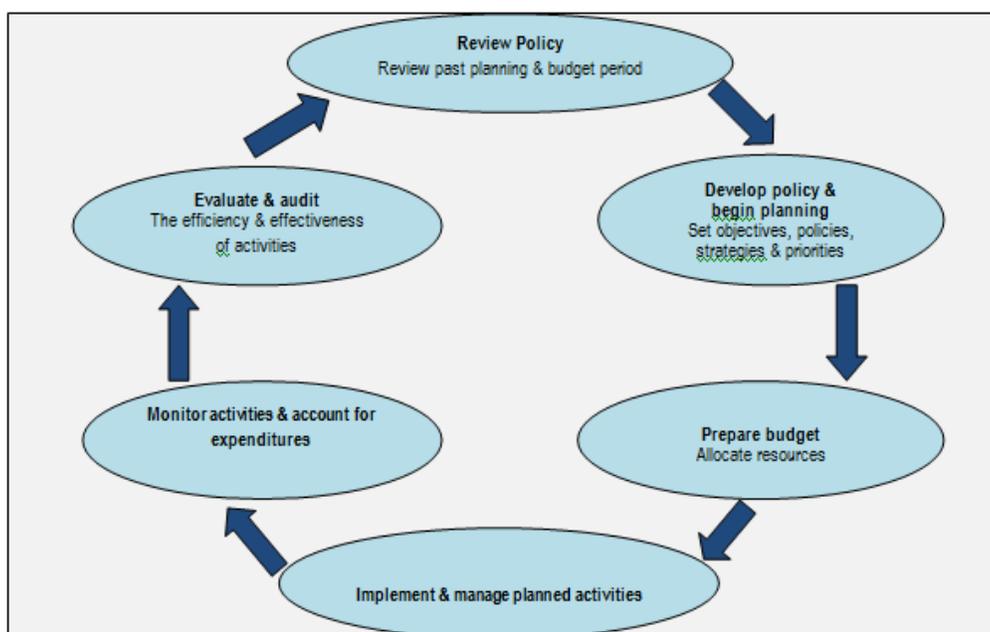
According to the 2011 OECD/DAC Monitoring Survey [7 & 23] on the implementation of the Paris Declaration (PD) as measured under indicator 11 (Managing for Results), Zambia scored a 'D' for its results-oriented frameworks in 2005, improving to a 'C' in 2007 and maintained its 'C' score in 2011, and this led to a shortfall in reaching the 2010 target of B or A. Despite this failure to reach the PD set target, the trend suggests an evolution to the effect that Zambia had made significant strides over the years towards bettering the M&E at national level. The scores of 'C' for 2007 and 2011 could be translated as Zambia being in possession of improved frameworks of M&E across the public sector and by implication, this could mean that Zambia is short but on course in terms of satisfying the PD agreement of having monitorable results frameworks. In addition, the World Bank [8] in its Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) Report also notes that Zambia's monitoring framework was insufficient. After monitoring and measuring the four CDF principles that include the long-term holistic vision; country-led partnership; country ownership; and results focus, although there were signs of advancement for all, the results focus principle showed the least progress made. This conclusion is crucial for Zambia's M&E reform agenda.

The above status for Zambia's country-level M&E system is worrisome especially that the nation/government wants to use its limited resources prudently. A strong M&E function backed by law and supported by all key public and other stakeholders will be necessary in building a sustainable WoG-M&E system.

8. BENEFITS OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGIES

As the call for a stronger legal backing for M&E in Zambia is being made, it is essential to stress the benefits that may accrue in sustaining a successful M&E culture in the country. There are basically three benefits that are commonly attributed to M&E by many scholars and development practitioners. All the M&E benefits are closely linked to the development policy cycle as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: The Policy Cycle: Linking M&E with Policy, Planning, Budgeting and Management



Source: Mackay (2010)

In attempting to express the multifaceted rewards that governments are likely to gain from implementing functional M&E systems, it is crucial to note that building and sustaining a good M&E system can be a solid foundation towards good governance because it enhances accountability and transparency of public operations [9, 18 & 21]. In the end, according to [10, 24 & 31], M&E has potential to improve the entire public service performance culture thereby help in supporting better policymaking, budget decision-making, and management functions.

8.1 IMPROVEMENT OF POLICY AND PLANNING

The development parameters for countries are normally defined and facilitated by governments through various policies, plans and strategies. In that case, M&E becomes an important component in helping to inform these processes by providing evidence-based information. M&E has generally come to be considered by the global development community as a powerful tool for gathering and providing evidence-based information crucial in planning and policy-making processes [11]. In fact, M&E systems can produce valuable information that may feed into development policy, planning and budgeting, organisational learning and ultimately improving the effectiveness of development cooperation [12]. For instance, during the preparation, implementation and review of PRS, M&E information could play an important role towards

changing and improving old policies, plans and strategies so that they become more responsive to the specific needs of the poor.

In addition, since most governments are faced with financial constraints, M&E information can be very useful in the process of prioritization and choosing which activities and programmes were cost effective. This means that M&E systems depending on the quality of information produced could play a significant role towards having successful public financial management (PFM) policies in a given country or sector. [2 & 20] reveals that indeed M&E systems may help to identify the most efficient use of available resources through the information on performance indicators that may signal which activities needed to be prioritized.

8.2 ENHANCEMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Most governments, especially those of developing countries are considered by stakeholders to be less committed to transparency and accountability. This is because these governments are usually faced with challenges to produce evidence as to how they implement public programmes towards poverty reduction. The lack of strong M&E systems in developing countries highly contributes to these perceptions. However, strong M&E systems according to [2] can help to reinforce efforts towards accountability and transparency in the management of public resources which may lead to positive impact on poverty reduction goals.

But the benefits are not inherent and to make sure that M&E yields these results, governments and organisations need to remain committed to improving the systems. It is for this reason that [13] asserts that in order for M&E systems to serve as a public accountability and transparency instrument, it is important that dissemination channels such as regular stakeholders' forums, reports and internet could be used to increase accessibility of M&E information. Similarly, for stakeholders such as CSOs and donors to manage to influence governments to demonstrate how public resources are being utilized, [14] note that unless the production and access to M&E information are practically improved, it does not make too much sense to expect enhanced accountability. The only sure way that can lead to sound accountability is to create mechanisms and arrangements that can guarantee the utilization of M&E information by stakeholders and improving the quality and credibility of the information itself [15 & 18].

8.3 SUPPORTING MANAGEMENT FUNCTIONS

Governments implement their various development interventions mostly through line ministries and agencies. These entities, using their elaborated sector specific strategies and plans implement activities that aim at reducing poverty. However, doing so comes with practical challenges especially on how best to utilize available resources which are normally limited. It becomes important for prudence and prioritization to be exercised by these line ministries but to so this, it requires relevant information on the priorities as well as on the budget provisions. This prompts for functional M&E systems, as [2] reaffirms that several governments have hope in functional M&E systems, no wonder a growing number of countries were strengthening their performance systems. So, an M&E system that collects relevant information regarding plans and budget implementation may provide quality management information for line ministries. [13 & 33] observes that in cases where M&E system findings and budget allocations are not integrated it is difficult to make proper linkages between the intended outcomes of agencies and programmes, and the budget classification.

Further, M&E when implemented properly is a tool that can fill the gaps of feedback and learning for government. M&E systems produce information of a wide range which can be applied at different levels of policy, programme, strategy and project. This information is collected, synthesized and packaged to make it usable by different stakeholders within the development

structures. To that extent, it is important that M&E information flows are effective vertically and horizontally so that feedback and learning needs can be satisfied. To reiterate the importance of feedback, [16 & 20] emphasizes that feedback mechanisms which can facilitate direct linkages between evaluation findings and future policy and programme development are crucial for that may be the only way to break away the future from the past performance failures. Thus, a sound feedback mechanism would provide relevant information which may allow comparisons across development entities and where possible learn from each other.

9. THE NEED FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION LEGISLATION IN ZAMBIA

The current Zambian constitution recognizes and provides some fundamental laws around the subject of Public Financial Management (PFM). It is acknowledged that public finance is crucial to socio-economic development. The question as to how the revenues and other assets of a country are acquired, invested, spent or otherwise disposed of is a major determinant of the socio-economic destiny of a country [17, 26, 27, 28 & 29]. Thus, transparency and accountability in public financial management are important to good governance and democracy. However, despite this recognition, M&E and its crucial input in the general and specific management of public resources have been left unelaborated in the Republican Constitution and other legislative laws of Zambia.

A law (preferably an Act of Parliament) that specifically addresses M&E issues is needed for Zambia to begin to take this important development function to a higher level of benefit. Instead of covering up or indeed concealing the role of M&E in other existing PFM laws, a separate legislation will go a long way in attracting concerned stakeholders and citizens to have an interest in holding public office bearers accountable and most importantly in providing evidence to development processes [6 & 25].

As mentioned already, although there are provisions in the national constitution and other legal instruments to guide and protect PFM systems and processes, Zambia needs a law that particularly promotes and elaborates stronger M&E practice in the public sector and beyond. The current ad-hoc, fragmented and generalised provisions lack explicit legal backing and the consequences of such gaps are weaknesses in the overall implementation of the M&E function by government, thereby failing to appreciate the processes of national planning and budgeting. When done, the strengthened M&E legislation will too potentially resolve the current weak role the Zambian parliament plays in enhancing sector and national M&E systems. As a developing country with the presence of many development partners (donors), the legislation in M&E will go a long way in harmonising the currently poor and parallel M&E systems between and among different stakeholders in the country.

10. CONCLUSIONS

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is crucial in providing evidence to inform development processes such as planning and budgeting through decision and policy making. In Zambia, the evolution of M&E in the last almost 20 years has shown to be on the increase with more and more M&E functions in both government and non-government institutions. However, despite this promising trend, the legal framework to guide and support the M&E function in the country has remained weak or worse off, non-existent. This is the premises upon which this paper was written. To try and identify this missing link and conduct a gap analysis and recommend ways of improvement going forward. Like many other countries, both in the developed and developing world, efforts were being made to legislate M&E so that the culture of results was anchored on solid legal foundations. That way, those tasked with the responsibility of conducting M&E as well as those charged with implementing public resources will work with the expected support

knowing very well that the law protects them even when they brought out undesirable performance evidence. Equally, both the public and government as well as other stakeholders will have a common platform to deal with accountability, feedback and learning issues.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the significance of the Whole-of-Government M&E system, the proposed legislation process may seek to take the following road map:

- Develop a national monitoring and evaluation policy which shall clearly spell out the M&E function at all levels of government and M&E practice in Zambia. Such a policy shall work as a platform upon which an ACT of Parliament shall be placed.
- There should be a separate high level function (establishment such as a ministry or an Evaluation Commission, etc) responsible for National monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in Zambia. Since M&E is about bringing evidence on the Planning and Budgeting processes and chatting ways for improvement, it is important to ensure that the linkages between the M&E function with the functions of planning and budgeting are well spelled out. In the current set up, the evaluation function is very weak in the WoG-M&E system.
- The national leader of the M&E function should be raised to the level of Permanent Secretary (PS) or Cabinet minister at the least or presidency at the most to create necessary clout.
- At sector/line ministry level, the M&E structure should preferably and at minimum be a directorate. This will bring M&E significance and practice at par with other key functions such as accounts, planning, etc. Since already M&E activities are usually played down in terms of financing and prioritisation, leaving them at unit/section level or worse still embedded within planning, M&E will remain weak and fail to provide the desired information.
- M&E function should be decentralised with operational systems at all government structures including national, provincial, district and sub district levels.
- M&E function should be linked with the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) since the two are responsible for (evaluating) public programmes, policies, strategies, performance and resources.
- M&E function need to have a direct linkage with the National Assembly/Parliament (institutional arrangement). This will improve the demand for M&E information and will ensure sustainability and strengthening of Government-Wide M&E system.
- Ensure that decisions of the National Assembly/Parliament on matters surrounding the monitoring and evaluation of public/national plans and budgets are binding legally (or have legal force).
- M&E forums should be created where public management information (M&E outputs) shall be shared as feedback to stakeholders and the citizenry at large on how the public plans and resources were transforming the nation's development and economic growth.
- The M&E function should be undertaking public sector 'evaluations' whose findings shall be crucial towards the learning process of government. Evaluations bring out areas of success and failure thereby providing an evidence-based platform to re-strategize for improved performance.
- Due to the expensive nature of 'evaluations' (which are very necessary nevertheless), there should be deliberate availability of resources (resource allocations) to undertake 'evaluations' regarding impacts of government programmes, policies and strategies.

- Enhance the incentive structure for the use of M&E information: Lack of motivation to supply or demand for M&E information has been largely attributed to weak incentive arrangements across government. A range of possible incentives can be explored including technical, political, financial management and skills training (capacity).

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