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MONITORING SYSTEMS IN AFRICA

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Chapter 9: Public Sector Monitoring Systems in Practice: The Case of Benin

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Introduction to Performance Monitoring Systems

Despite many changes because of reforms over 15 years, the core mandates of Benin's monitoring systems have remained relatively constant: to promote the institutionalisation of evidence use across all levels of government for improved service delivery and development. Over the years, this core function was located at the highest level of the centre of government, to ensure political championing and uptake of evidence use across ministries and departments in Benin. The increasing demand for evidence production and use, however, still requires significant work in terms of capacity development and putting in place systems and institutions that can work across the whole of government. For example, terms and concepts related to results are not consistently applied across the government system. Additionally, despite concentrated efforts by senior government officials to build a system that meets the knowledge needs of different stakeholders, monitoring is still being used primarily for compliance and control. In some parts of the government, it has been possible to foster a culture of learning, but there are still areas where monitoring generates perverse incentives to game the system for the purposes of compliance. A current priority is to systematise capacity building in M&E, so that there will be a more widespread shift in the way M&E is understood and used.

Many of the changes to Benin's monitoring systems have grown out of various reforms to both the public financial system, and the adoption of a results-based management approach to public administration. For the past two decades, the ongoing LOLF reforms have modernised Benin's public finance management systems.²⁵ This shift towards better alignment between financial planning, accounting, and development

25 Before this important reform, the budgetary procedure was oriented towards means rather than results. However, since 2001, the LOLF has been instituting a performance-oriented budgeting approach. The budget nomenclature is broken down into major sets of public policies and these are then subdivided into programs. Credits are allocated to each public policy, as well as objectives, along with indicators to assess their achievement. This has paved the way for results-based planning at other levels of government.

results has led to better targeting of programme budgets, as well as stronger accountability for results. The introduction of program budgets across the public sector has been gradual and phased, beginning with six pilot ministries in 2000, before expanding across all ministries in 2006. This process of implementing results-based management was recognised as a strategy to implement appropriate development tools, and ensure citizens were being served by the public sector and has been critical to promoting a culture of efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

In Benin, the monitoring and evaluation systems operate quite separately and come together under the guise of 'results-based management' to produce knowledge for policymakers and politicians. Over the years, as evaluation has received increasing attention and support (especially from the donor community) the role and importance of the monitoring system has been somewhat subsumed into thinking of monitoring only as part of a larger evaluation system. Prior to the central role evaluation has played in Benin's development planning, there has been a long monitoring tradition across the public administration. Benin's membership in ECOWAS and UEMOA has meant that there are a range of directives, convergence criteria, and policy guidance in terms of the monitoring systems required for project and programme implementation. This entrenched bureaucratic environment has laid a foundation for building institutions equipped with monitoring capacity to enhance public sector performance.

Before the implementation of the National Evaluation Policy, certain routine M&E activities were carried out by the public administration, but they were done without a broader link to results-based management. When the government introduced reforms to implement the Paris Declaration (2005), along with donors working in Benin, they were carried out in line with a principle of mutual commitment to improve aid effectiveness. This included a practical and concrete framework aimed at improving the quality of aid and its impact on development. However, there is limited engagement with impact evaluation for many reasons, such as the weak national capacity in impact evaluation methodology, the mismatch between the evidence from impact evaluation and the politicians' agenda, and the high cost of impact evaluation.

Benin has been a 'rising star' in its push for developing evaluation capacity in recent years, but what impact has this had in terms of a monitoring system that underlies these evaluations? This chapter will detail the public sector structures in place for monitoring and consider the implications these have had for governance and decision-making in Benin's political and institutional context.

The chapter is structured as follows:

- Broad introduction to the institutionalisation of M&E to date in Benin.
- The country context of Benin, including specific monitoring projects and programmes within its public administration.

- The system that has been developed and put in place to assist with monitoring the activity of government projects and programmes.
- The role of monitoring and evaluation in promoting good governance at the country level.
- Lessons learned and good practices in the development of national monitoring and evaluation systems.
- Analytical discussion on the country perspective of Benin.

Context of Monitoring in Benin's Public Sector

Benin has two levels of government, with 22 national departments, and 77 local governments and/or municipalities. Historically, public policies and programmes in Benin have not been evidence-based and there has been no culture of accountability, except to fulfil conditionalities imposed by development partners (Goldman et al. 2018). A diagnostic study carried out in 2010 by Davies and Houinsa found that evidence use, from both monitoring and evaluation, had not been institutionalised in the process of planning or implementing programmes, projects, and policies in Benin, with those mandated to collect and use knowledge working in silos.

New reforms taken in 2016 to strengthen good governance focused on improvement in the coordination of government action, moving the mandate for this coordination to within the presidency, with support from the Ministry of Development. This meant that the key office for monitoring the performance of ministries and municipalities to improve service delivery, the Bureau of the Public Policies Evaluation, was now situated close to the highest level of decision-making.

Having those responsible for monitoring and coordinating government action in the central office (Presidency) allowed for a stronger focus on supporting the National Development Plan (NDP). This plan establishes indicators to be monitored, and prompts the development of standards, norms, and regulations for the monitoring of government policies and programmes. While institutionalising this system remains a work in progress, the creation of institutional infrastructure now means that ministerial plans are required, and provide the information required for decision making.

In addition to the NDP, budgetary reforms have placed increasing importance on monitoring, thus strengthening the monitoring function in the context of the implementation of the budget reform and the adoption of results-based management. This has further led to growing interest in the development of evaluation and its management by the government, which resulted in its institutionalisation to strengthen RBM and to formalise the evaluation of public service through the creation of a dedicated ministry.

In recent years, the role of the Bureau of Public Policy Evaluation has expanded to include monitoring public participation. This has happened because of the establishment of a transversal performance indicator for each department around a specific form of public participation. The goal is to expand the monitoring and evaluation function to be a visible tool to promote transparency, strengthen trust in government, and strengthen systems of governance at a national and local level, while remaining in line with the institutional reforms and calls from the public to improve governance and transparency.

National Monitoring System Structure

Monitoring systems within Benin's public service are found in:

- The Monitoring and Evaluation architecture (to strengthen results-based management related to the NDP).
- Budget monitoring.
- Program planning and implementation at both the national and local levels.

Table 9.1: Outline of monitoring system components and actors

Actor	Monitoring Responsibilities	Link to other areas	Actions to improve their monitoring function
WAMEU	Directives implemented through NES	Monitoring is part of NES – system for accountability	LOLF reforms
Parliament	Receive performance reports, oversee budget decisions at the medium-term level		Have received training on better oversight
BEPP			
M&E units	All ministries and depts – responsible for monitoring performance, quarterly report on annual performance plans, as well as biannual reports to Cabinet. Over 80% of reports reflect progress against agreed on indicators which managers need for planning		

Since the establishment of the BEPPAG in 2008, there has been significant political will to ensure that monitoring and evaluation become a strategic management tool for development. This demand has been deliberately cultivated through the establishment of M&E units in national departments and municipalities. Figure 1 below illustrates the actors involved in the national evaluation system. This has

guided the stakeholder engagement for evaluation in Benin, given the need for widespread capacity building across all levels of government.

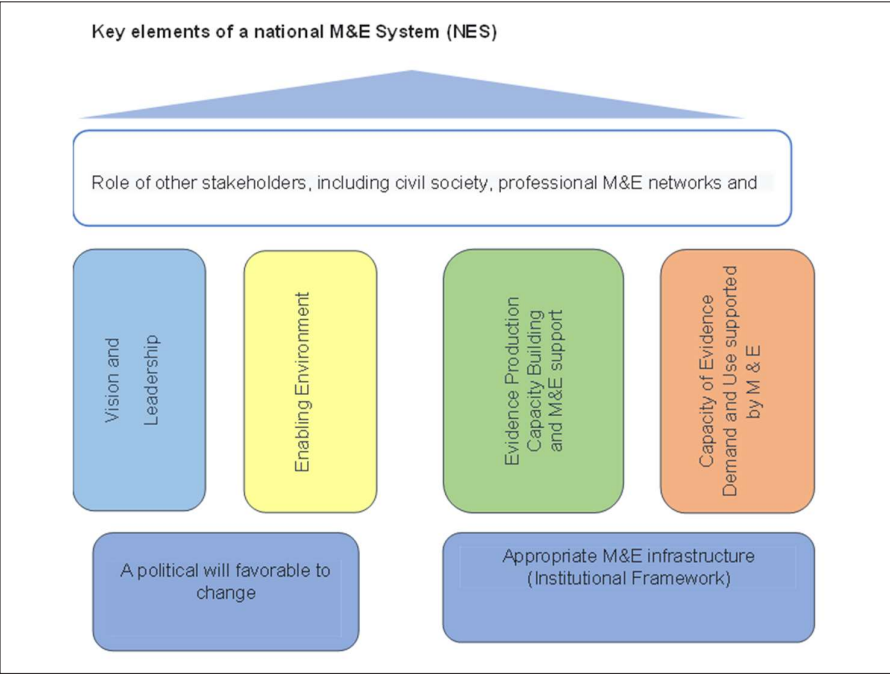


Figure 9.1: Adapted by the author from Lahey, 2013. Framework for a National M&E System.

Monitoring as Part of the National Evaluation System

The Government of Benin has recognised that monitoring is a critical function of evaluation, as monitoring feeds evaluations and influences decision-making. In Benin, the M&E systems have been built-in directives from WAEMU, and monitoring is seen as an important part of its National Evaluation System (NES) that leads to accountability. Current reporting systems allow the government to review programmatic progress on an annual basis and answer not only to Parliament but also the public on the results achieved, resources allocated, and policy decisions made as a result of implementation experience.

Monitoring and evaluation are two separate concepts. However, there are some commonalities. Monitoring and evaluation are both geared towards learning from what you do and how you do it, with a focus on cost-effectiveness. Monitoring also follows the criteria set out by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development criteria (OECD) such as efficiency, sustainability, and impact.

They have similar purposes in that they provide information that can help inform decisions to be made, improve performance, and achieve set results when used to adapt programme performance.

In 2012, a national evaluation policy was adopted to improve the effectiveness and results of government programmes, governance practice, and governance decision-making, including an institutional framework established to define the mechanisms for conducting evaluations. This framework included guidance on selecting evaluations, the engagement of stakeholders, the dissemination of results, and the monitoring of the implementation of recommendations. To assist with impartiality, independent service providers undertook the evaluations, whether universities, consultants, or civil society organisations. However, since the focus of the NES is on evaluation, there has been very little capacity development or work done to build strong monitoring systems or personnel.

All departments and ministries in Benin have M&E units, considering that M&E is not a function of programme managers. In fact, the head of M&E units are at least as senior as the managers responsible for programme implementation. These M&E units are responsible for monitoring performance, providing quarterly reports on annual performance plans, as well as biannual reports to Cabinet. Over 80% of reports reflect progress against agreed on indicators which managers need for planning, in an attempt to ensure a linkage between monitoring reports and evidence usage.

Monitoring as a Learning Path

Monitoring helps managers and policymakers by giving them evidence to see what results have been achieved based on inputs made, including budgeting and human resources (Goldman et al. 2018). Benin has deliberately aligned its M&E process to both the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and voluntary national reviews (VNRs). This has guided the monitoring system in its priorities to strengthen coherence and cooperation, with a singular goal of improving data production for learning and better decision-making. Both quality and availability pose significant challenges to the production and use of data for policy-learning processes. The monitoring system straddles the issues of both production and use, with a goal of meeting both needs, overcoming cultural hurdles related to the perceived need for – and use of – monitoring data that continue to inhibit the use of monitoring for learning.

Monitoring Capacity

The institutionalisation of M&E in Benin has been taking place in tandem with the benchmarking of skills, to better understand the skills required to be responsible for an M&E function or portfolio at all levels. As the organisational needs and institutional context becomes clearer, human resourcing units within government will be able to better determine the various levels at which civil servants with M&E responsibilities

need to be appointed. Now, while a high level of education is required to be appointed to an M&E position, there are no other specific skill requirements.

It is an ongoing process to select and recruit appropriate personnel for monitoring units across the country. Furthermore, there is a requirement for training programmes for M&E officers. While there are some capacity-building activities offered, dedicated training in data collection and monitoring needs to be strengthened to ensure that those who assume monitoring (and evaluation) responsibilities can better understand the function and qualify to focus in this area. Unfortunately, there are relatively few professional courses available to either monitoring or evaluation practitioners in Benin.

Monitoring for Decision Making: An Example of How Monitoring Contributes to Good Governance

Periodic reports on the progress of the Public Investment Program (PIP) represent the basis for assessing the achievement levels of development projects and programmes in Benin. The PIP is a key part of the M&E mechanism of the Growth Strategy for Poverty Reduction (SCRIP 2011–2015), and this, along with quarterly reports and other monitoring outputs, help different government actors to take appropriate decisions, to provide appropriate solutions to the shortcomings observed, and to anticipate and engage citizens for the improvement of the development and implementation of the PIP (and thus, the Growth Strategy for Poverty). The development of these reports follows a methodological approach consisting of four essential steps, which are: (i) collecting information, (ii) data management, (iii) drafting, and (iv) validation.

The Public Investments Program (PIP) monitoring system is governed by an institutional framework centred on four levels that support the national performance monitoring system. The Ministry of Development, Economic Analysis, and Prospective (MDAEP), through the Directorate General for Projects and Programmes Monitoring (DGSP), anchors the monitoring of projects and programmes at the national level.

The mechanisms and tools used at each level to produce evidence for decision-making are outlined below:

1. Local Level – Project Management Units (PMUs) and Town Halls.

The main role of PMUs is to ensure effective and efficient execution of projects, and to monitor the progress of government work. These PMUs periodically report on the performance of their activities to the Directorate of Planning and Prospective (DPP) of their line ministries where evaluation units are located. Some of these projects, given their size, have monitoring and evaluation units that facilitate this reporting work. The town halls ensure the proper execution of the projects by the central state. They produce monthly physical monitoring reports, which they send to departments (see below).

2. Regional Level – Prefectures and Departmental Directorates (DD) of State ministries.

The DDs act as relays for the Directorate of Planning and Prospective DPPs at the regional level. They monitor projects carried out by departments. Reports from town halls in all sectors will be sent to the prefectures, which in turn will send it to the Departmental Directorates of Development and Prospective (DDPD). These reports are studied during the Departmental Administrative Conferences (CAD), which is a consultation framework within which views on the development of work in the departments are harmonised. At the end of each quarter, the DD sends the summary of their respective sector to their 27 DPPs, focused only on achievement of outputs. DDPDs, in turn, summarise the department reports from all sectors. Coordination of the CAD to meet on the right date before the summaries reach the central level, either the DPP or the DGSP, is of utmost importance to streamline monitoring and planning.

3. Sectoral Level – Structures Represented by the DPPs.

These are responsible for centralising, synthesising, and validating the financial and physical data resulting from the execution of projects and programmes of departmental directorates. This data is used to compile a variety of documents, including Quarterly Review Reports, Departmental PIP Quarterly and Annual Progress Reports, and the Year-End Performance Report.

4. National Level – The Directorate General for Projects and Programmes Monitoring (DGSP).

This is responsible for centralising, analysing, and processing, in collaboration with the other coordination structures (DGIFD, DGB, CAA), the data sent by the DPPs from the ministries. The products resulting from this monitoring are the quarterly and annual progress reports of the national PIP, the dashboard for monitoring PAP indicators and the tour reports.

The PIP monitoring as described above is illustrated in Figure 2 below, illustrating the four levels of reporting on financial and physical monitoring for decision-making.

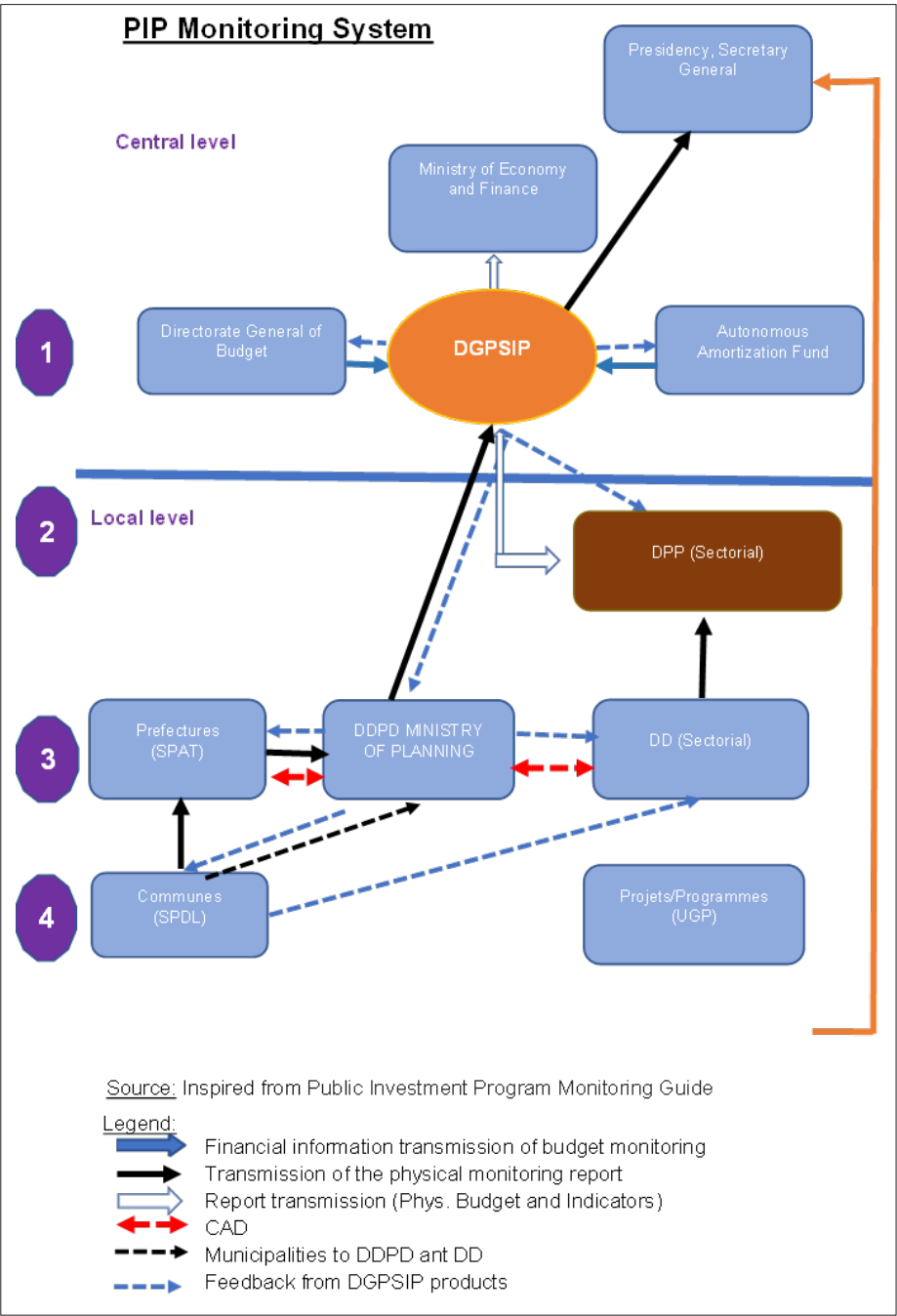


Figure 9.2: PIP Monitoring System

Adapted by the author from the Public Investment Program Monitoring Guide.

For programming needs, four main systems have been developed to harmonise the budgetary and performance indicators monitoring of the PIP:

1. the System Harmonised Information on Public Investments (SHIIP);
2. the Integrated System of Analysis and Programming of Public Investments (SIAPIP);
3. the Integrated System of Public Finance Management (SIGFiP) and;
4. the Harmonised and Integrated System for Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Investment Projects and Programmes (SHISEPIP), which takes information from SHIIP into account.

These systems are intended to be effective tools for monitoring, management, and evaluation of public investment projects and programmes, as part of a broader results measurement framework.

With the current reform (2021 onwards), a Programme/Project Monitoring Unit has been created within each ministry, comprising three specialist roles: i) financial management, ii) public procurement, and iii) monitoring and evaluation. To rationalise the use of government resources and better streamline decision-making processes, those units dealing with finance, human resources, and project management will work transversally to support the programme and project coordinators in the ministries, with the intention of generating an integrated set of information that can be used to improve decision-making.

Monitoring for Accountability Within the PIP

To provide appropriate responses to the requirements of budget reform and ensure improved synergy of actions taken at the national level, the institutional and organisational frameworks of the ministries responsible for development and finance have been bolstered through seminars as well as capacity-building activities, with financial and technical support provided by country donors. The aim of this was the improvement of the availability and accessibility of data, as well as reporting mechanisms that would allow for accurate and timely accountability reporting.

The main products resulting from this mechanism at the national level are, amongst others, the BGE, the PIP, the BGE execution reports, quarterly progress reports, and the annual PIP.

Local Level Monitoring for Accountability

At the local level, Benin has opted for decentralisation to lay the foundations for a sustainable and local democracy to ensure grassroots development. Thus, the municipalities are obliged to generate and adopt their municipal development plans. The Communal Development Plan (PDC) expresses the priorities of municipal policy

and constitutes an instrument for framing short- and medium-term development actions. In the PDC preparation guide (2008), it is stated that “the PDC are aligned to the national development plan which itself is aligned to SDGs Agendas (United-Nations and African Union)”.

Therefore, the PDC must fit into the development and performance management cycle at the national level. Indeed, the options defined in the PDC must fit into the national and regional development priorities that emerge from both national and sectoral reference documents. These include:

- Strategic Development Goals, Space Agenda.
- The Municipal Development Master Plan.
- National and sectoral policies, sector strategies, and the Growth Strategy for Poverty.

As part of the monitoring of the implementation of the Communal Development Plan, the municipalities are assisted by the decentralised structures of the State. The Prefectures and the DDPD provide the necessary advisory assistance. This forms part of the overall Program of Government Action, supported by the Bureau of Public Policy Evaluation and Government Action in the Presidency.

The primary product of the PDC monitoring mechanism is the Annual Investment Plan monitoring report. Unfortunately, not all the municipalities have the necessary skills for monitoring the projects and programmes included in the Annual Investment Plan. However, the support of the BEPPAG is critical to boost capacities through the M&E Units across the 77 municipalities.

Good Practice Examples from Benin's Monitoring System

The monitoring and evaluation system is an important tool to consolidate Benin's various monitoring systems for the implementation of the policies, programmes, and projects. Collaborative partners outside of government are essential to the development of specific tools linked to the monitoring of PC2D and government action and assist by augmenting technical capacity.

The strategy adopted by the Bureau of Public Policy Evaluation has centred on benchmarking M&E practice. This strategy has aided in the integration of this practice into international evaluation networks to demonstrate the value of the concept to diverse stakeholders, while also addressing issues of capacity, and being led by good practice. Having a dedicated structure at the national level that centralises both monitoring and evaluation is valuable as a strategy that strengthens evidence use in government. The Bureau of Public Policy Evaluation supports the public service with capacity building activities and standards definitions, while providing tools and procedures for improving results-based management.

Key Success Factors

The recent strengthening of the M&E institutional framework has led to substantial improvements in decision-making processes and the delivery of public services. Strengthened reporting mechanisms harmonised from the programme and projects M&E Units to the Presidency of the Republic through the M&E Units in the ministries and directorates located in the prefectures has been a key success. This institutional chain strongly contributes to strengthening the practice of accountability at both the local and national levels.

The following few elements have facilitated the culture of performance monitoring in the country:

- Political will at the top of the state supporting the institutionalisation of monitoring evaluation.
- Directives from WAEMU (RBM and LOLF).
- National institutional anchoring (Ministry of Development and Government Action Coordination and Ministry of Economy and Finance).
- Leadership to a dedicated national structure.
- Strong and dynamic partnerships with multinational and bilateral organisations: Twende Mbele and WACIE, etc.
- Effective regional and international networking and learning from other countries in Africa.

Constraints

In practice, the existence of an M&E system has not guaranteed the production and use of monitoring data, nor fed the multitude of decision-making processes. Without the above-mentioned institutional factors, it does not automatically promote a culture of good governance practices. Other considerations such as global country awareness, political will, decision-makers' strong engagement, and country capacities in monitoring and performance reporting mechanisms are determinants. Performance culture in Benin meets some facts can be strengthened by addressing the following factors:

- The lack of a legal framework to support the process (which has been addressed through the recent reforms).
- Poor systematisation of data collection mechanism using monitoring (the current digitalisation will improve this).
- Weak national capacity ensures the efficiency of the system which limits the synergy between monitoring and evaluation. To address this, both aspects of the M&E

function were taken over by the current Ministry of Development and Coordination of Government Action, since July 2022.

- The weakness of national financial resources allocated to monitoring (or evaluation) activities and quality data systems.

Key Debates in Monitoring Systems: Perspectives for Benin

Benin's approach to the development of its M&E system has enabled it to build its international reputation and to the innovative cooperation programmes presented above with its partners. The sharing of experience and learning from other country governments and technical partners has led to the development of collaborative governance tools that are improving the quality of transparency in public management in Benin. However, essential questions remain unanswered regarding the improvement of this system, which may allow it to optimise support of the production at the national level of quality of data evidence that can be used by all development actors.

Central Level

The main concern at this level is to digitise monitoring systems such that data on the implementation of public action is generated in real-time to enable accurate decision-making. In fact, since the COVID-19 pandemic, the government has undertaken a vast digitalisation reform within the administration, including the Councils of Ministers and online administrative meetings. Procedures, mechanisms, and working tools are being digitised in this context.

The feedback of digitised information in such an environment will improve the speed of data processing, increase transparency with citizens, and strengthen the overall quality of the data. This will be done by developing statistical capacity in line ministries to produce data related to their sector public policy.

Local Level

The creation of further synergies between municipalities and the central level to harmonise the collection of data and production of information that can be used for decision-making in programming and budgeting is an area of need. Current efforts at streamlining and institutionalising monitoring systems to provide data and evidence on the implementation of communal development plans are underway and are yielding promising results, albeit with a need for much greater capacity.

Role Parliament

The issue of parliament's involvement in monitoring and evaluation activities remains a challenge in national monitoring and evaluation systems, due to the need

to respect the separation of powers in a democratic regime. Indeed, the separation of powers within a strong presidential democratic regime like Benin means that government initiatives towards parliamentary monitoring remain ceremonial and bureaucratic. Parliament has remained stuck in the traditional way of taking charge of its prerogatives by using the conventional tools of oral or written questions to control government action.

In addition, the parliament is not currently properly equipped to conduct M&E activities and positions itself as a consumer of M&E activities rather than as an active actor in the production or oversight of monitoring. Even at this level, its capacities in this area are limited, which means that great advantage can be taken of it to control government action. Although an M&E Unit has been established inside the parliament administration, it struggles to achieve results to support parliamentarians with their M&E issues. Somewhat outside of its mandate, the critical role of parliament in oversight of public action has meant that BEPPAG, with the support of UNDP, has begun supporting the M&E unit in parliament with capacity building activities.

In recent years, BEPPAG, in partnership with the Beninese branch of the African Parliamentarians' Network on Development Evaluation (APNODE), has undertaken awareness-raising activities, capacity building, and some specific training for Beninese parliamentarians as to how M&E fits into their mandate and can aid in their duties. Thus, more and more parliaments are using M&E data, not only to understand the processes of implementing government action, but also to better exercise their control function for better governance.

Conclusion

Development policies and programmes at the global level demand more performance and efficiency, not only from the government but also from partners and donors. Monitoring is a mechanism to report on the commitments made to ensure good governance. It is a strategic steering tool that aids in the informing of decision-makers, both as a function of evaluation for evidence production and as a role of accountability.

Therefore, the actors from the national monitoring system institutional framework must take ownership of it according to their administrative context and pool their experiences to inform the decision-making with high quality administrative and statistical data to improve the governance.

This chapter calls for the establishment of solid engagement of the Directorate for Evaluation for the strengthening of the systems and the law on evaluation to create real effectiveness across the country, so that the gains of recent reforms can be sustained and scaled.

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