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DEPARTMENT: PERFORMANCE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Standards for evaluation in government

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Contact: Ian Goldman
Head of Evaluation and Research
Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation
ian@po.gov.za

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Introduction

In 2012 Department: Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) developed standards for government evaluations with support from GIZ. Inputs were also given from a range of other stakeholders including present and past SAMEA board members and the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR) based at the Graduate School of Public and Development Management, University of the Witwatersrand. The standards intend to support the use of evaluations conducted through the national evaluation system through setting benchmarks of evaluation quality.

This document is based on the National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF), approved in November 2011. This document and the NEPF should be read together. In the NEPF four main purposes of evaluation are described:

1. Improving policy or programme performance (evaluation for continuous improvement). This aims to provide feedback to programme managers.
2. Evaluation for improving accountability e.g. where is public spending going? Is this spending making a difference?
3. Improving decision-making e.g. should the intervention be continued? Should how it is implemented be changed? Should increased budget be allocated?
4. Evaluation for generating knowledge (for learning): increasing knowledge about what works and what does not with regards to a public policy, programme, function or organisation.

The South African government’s approach to putting into operation these four purposes intends to promote the use of evaluation. Likewise the standards contained in this document encourage the utilisation of findings and consider standards in relation to five stages of evaluation: (1) overarching considerations prior to the evaluation, (2) planning the evaluation, (3) the evaluation process, (4) the evaluation findings, and (5) the eventual use.

These South African government evaluation standards are based on a review of a range of international evaluation standards, their strengths, weaknesses, and appropriateness for South Africa. The OECD DAC standards were identified as the most appropriate starting point and they have also drawn from the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (JCSEE) and the Swiss Evaluation Society (SEVAL).

The standards are written in the present tense – with the standard being that the point in question is applied.

1 Overarching considerations

When carrying out an evaluation the following overarching considerations are taken into account throughout the process.

1.1 Partnership approach

In order to increase ownership of the evaluation and maximise the likelihood of use, and build mutual accountability for results, a partnership approach to development evaluation is considered systematically early in the process. The concept of partnership connotes an inclusive process in the production of the evaluation. This will involve work on a range of evaluation issues (e.g. questions, issues statement, terms of reference) with different stakeholders of the particular intervention. These stakeholders may include government, civil society, and target group (and in some cases international development partners).

1.2 Free and open evaluation process

Where appropriate the evaluation process is transparent and independent from programme management and policy-making, to enhance credibility. In some cases (e.g. for implementation evaluations), these will be undertaken jointly between evaluator and department, to maximise ownership and the likelihood of use.

1.3 Evaluation ethics

Evaluations abide by relevant professional and ethical guidelines and codes of conduct for individual evaluators. Evaluation is undertaken with integrity and honesty. Programme managers, M&E advisors and evaluators respect human rights and differences in culture, customs, religious beliefs and practices of all stakeholders. Evaluators and M&E advisors are mindful of gender roles, ethnicity, ability, age, sexual orientation, language and other differences when designing and carrying out the evaluation.

In addition the evaluation takes account of the ethics in dealing with informants in the evaluation process, including issues of anonymity, and using an ethics board where needed.

1.4 Co-ordination and alignment

To help improve co-ordination of evaluation and implementation of evaluation results, the evaluation process must take into account the roles of different stakeholders, seeking to ensure those critical to the intervention are involved in the evaluation, e.g. on the steering committee, and that others are consulted during the evaluation. These different stakeholders also need to be involved in taking forward the improvement plan arising from the evaluation, as appropriate. This may include partners who are not immediate partners in the evaluation process, but who can affect the implementation or usage of results from the evaluation.

1.5 Capacity development

The process of evaluation has positive effects on the evaluation capacity of the partners involved as well as developing the capacity of evaluators. An evaluation may, for instance, support capacity development by improving evaluation knowledge and skills, strengthening evaluation management, stimulating demand for and use of evaluation findings, and supporting an environment of accountability and learning. This capacity development should be through an explicit learning-by-doing process, as well as in the process adopted.

1.6 Quality control

Quality control is exercised throughout the evaluation process. Depending on the evaluation's scope and complexity, quality control is carried out through an internal and/or external process. Peer review is conducted of the methodology during the inception phase and upon the completion of the evaluation. An End of Assignment Quality Assessment (EAQA) will be conducted to reflect on the process as well as the product of the evaluation, and draw out lessons for future evaluations.

2 Planning, Design and Inception

2.1 Clear terms of reference for the evaluation

Clear terms of reference are developed for the evaluation which specify what is required and are appropriate for the policy, programme, or project being evaluated. The planning and design phase culminates in the drafting of a Terms of Reference (TOR), presenting the purpose, scope, and objectives of the evaluation; the methodology to be used; the resources and time allocated; reporting requirements; and any other expectations regarding the evaluation process and products. The document is agreed to by the Evaluation Steering Committee including the evaluation manager(s) and is refined during the inception phase. Guidance on the areas to be covered by the TOR are indicated in the *DPME Guideline* 2.2.1, “How to Develop Evaluation Terms of Reference”.

2.2 Evaluability

The feasibility of an evaluation is assessed. Specifically, it should be determined whether or not the intervention is adequately defined and its results verifiable, and if evaluation is the best way to answer questions posed by policy makers or stakeholders.

2.3 Resources

The resources provided for the evaluation are adequate, in terms of funds, staff and skills, to ensure that the objectives of the evaluation can be fulfilled effectively. Guidance is available from DPME on likely budget envelopes.

2.4 Stakeholder involvement, governance and management structures

Relevant stakeholders are involved early on in the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute to evaluation design, including by identifying issues to be addressed and evaluation questions to be answered.

A formal steering committee is constituted which includes these key stakeholders, and which meets to approve the TOR, inception report, other key reports, and to develop the improvement plan. The Steering Committee safeguards credibility, inclusiveness, and transparency of the evaluation. A guide has been produced on Evaluation Steering Committees which is available on the DPME website. The relevant department commissions the evaluation, organises the evaluation process and is responsible for day-to-day administration. Depending on the evaluation, these functions may be combined in one department or involve several departments.

2.5 Selection of evaluation service provider

The supply chain process is used effectively and transparently for selecting the evaluation service provider. The members of the evaluation team possess a mix of evaluative skills and thematic knowledge. Gender balance is considered in the selection of the service provide.

2.6 Inception phase

The terms of reference (TORs) are refined during the inception phase, where the scope of work is elaborated, and the methodology detailed in the Evaluation Plan, which may be part of the inception report. This report is agreed by the Steering Committee.

3 Implementation

3.1 Independence of evaluators vis-à-vis stakeholders

Where conducted externally, evaluators are independent from the development intervention, including its policy, operations and management functions, as well as target group of the intervention. Possible conflicts of interest are addressed openly and honestly. The evaluation team is able to work freely and without interference. It is assured of co-operation and access to all relevant information.

In some cases evaluations will be conducted internally. In these cases peer review is particularly important to ensure that there has been adequate impartiality in the conduct of the evaluation and that it is credible.

3.2 Consultation of stakeholders

The full range of stakeholders are consulted during the evaluation process and given the opportunity to contribute, most particularly the clients of the programme or policy in question. The criteria for identifying and selecting stakeholders are specified in the evaluation report.

3.3 Protection of informants

The rights and welfare of participants in the evaluation are protected, and an ethical committee used to review procedures, if needed. Anonymity and confidentiality of individual informants is protected when requested or as needed.

3.4 Implementation of evaluation within allotted time and budget

The evaluation is conducted and results are made available to commissioners in a timely manner to achieve the objectives of the evaluation. The evaluation is carried out efficiently and within budget. Changes in conditions, circumstances, timeframe and budget are reported. Any changes are explained, discussed and agreed between the relevant parties and approved at a Steering Committee.

4 Reporting

4.1 Intermediate reports

Where appropriate, intermediate reports are provided including: final data collection instruments and other tools; analysis plan; other technical or process reports, e.g. fieldwork report. These are specified in the TORs. Descriptions of metadata[1] are included in the final report. Financial expenditure on the evaluation is tacked in intermediate reports to the Steering Committee.

4.2 Evaluation products

Draft and final evaluation reports are produced which cover the full detail of the evaluation. Reports will be written documents. Final evaluation reports include a report in the 1/3/25 format described below. For large evaluations full reports will also need to be written. The full report will detail the questions, context, intervention logic, methodology, analysis, conclusions and recommendations, limitations and in an annex description on information sources, as described in subsequent standards. All forms of report will be accessible for the wider public. In addition if feasible, appropriate and useful, reports can also be presented in a variety of formats (e.g. video, presentations etc.).

4.3 The 1/3/25 report format

The 1/3/25 page evaluation report should be readily understood by the intended audience(s) and the form of the report is appropriate given the purpose(s) of the evaluation. It contains a 1 page policy summary, a 3-4 page executive summary and a 25 page main report. The executive summary provides an overview of the report, covering all the sections and highlighting the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and any overall lessons. Key evidence is included in the 1/3/25 report so it is authoritative. Full references should be provided as an attachment to these reports.

4.4 Coverage of the report

The report explicitly covers the following:

4.4.1 Evaluation questions answered

The evaluation report answers all the questions detailed in the TOR, or the evaluation management plan of the evaluation. Where this is not possible, explanations are provided. The original questions, as well as any revisions to these questions, are documented in the report for readers to be able to assess whether the evaluation team has sufficiently addressed the questions, including those related to cross-cutting issues, and met the evaluation objectives.

4.4.2 Context of the development intervention

The evaluation reports (full and 1/3/25) describe the context of the development intervention, including:

[1] Metadata include data descriptions and how data are dealt with in the evaluation. This is described in Annex 1 of the Guideline on Drafting Terms of Reference.

- policy context, related policies, objectives and strategies;
- development context, including socio-economic, political and cultural factors;
- institutional context and stakeholder involvement.

The evaluation identifies and assesses the influence of the context on the performance of the development intervention.

4.4.3 Intervention logic
The evaluation reports describe and assess the intervention logic or theory, including underlying assumptions and factors affecting the success of the intervention.

4.4.4 Explanation of the methodology used
The full evaluation report describes the evaluation methodology and its application in an annex and the 1/3/25 report provides a short summary. This includes clearly explaining attribution and/or contribution to results. The report acknowledges any constraints encountered and how these may have potentially affected the evaluation, including its independence and impartiality. It details the techniques used for data collection and analysis. The choices are justified and limitations and shortcomings are explained.

4.4.5 Clarity of analysis of conclusions
The evaluation reports present findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons separately and with a clear logical distinction between them. Findings flow logically from the analysis of the data, showing a clear line of evidence to support the conclusions. Conclusions are substantiated by findings and analysis. Recommendations and any lessons follow logically from the conclusions. Any assumptions underlying the analysis are made explicit.

4.4.6 Acknowledgement of changes and limitations of the evaluation
Any limitations in process, methodology or data are reported and explained. The full report indicates any obstruction of a free and open evaluation process which may have influenced the findings. Any discrepancies between the planned and actual implementation and products of the evaluation are explained.

4.4.7 Validity and reliability of information sources
The full evaluation report describes in an annex the sources of information used (e.g. documents, respondents, administrative data, literature) in sufficient detail so that the adequacy of the information can be assessed. The evaluation report explains the selection of case studies or any samples. Limitations regarding the representativeness of the samples are identified.

The evaluation cross-validates the information sources and critically assesses the validity and reliability of the data.

Complete lists of interviewees and other information sources consulted are included in the full report, to the extent that this does not conflict with the privacy and confidentiality of participants.

4.4.8 Acknowledgement of disagreements within the evaluation team

Evaluation team members have the opportunity to dissociate themselves from particular judgments and recommendations on which they disagree. Any unresolved differences of opinion within the team are acknowledged in the report.

4.5 Incorporation of stakeholders' comments

Relevant stakeholders are given the opportunity to comment on the draft report. The final evaluation report reflects these comments and acknowledges any substantive disagreements. The evaluators, in disputes about facts that can be verified, investigate and change the draft where necessary. In the case of opinion or interpretation, stakeholders' comments are reproduced verbatim, in an annex or footnote, to the extent that this does not conflict with the rights and welfare of participants.

5 Follow-up, use and learning

5.1 Timeliness, relevance and use of the evaluation

The evaluation is designed, conducted and reported to meet the needs of the intended users. Findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons are clear, relevant, targeted and actionable so that the evaluation can be used to achieve its intended learning and accountability objectives. The evaluation is delivered in time to ensure optimal use of the results.

5.2 Systematic response to and follow-up on recommendations

A formal management response is requested for each evaluation. An improvement plan is developed to cover all recommendations agreed arising from the evaluation. The improvement plan is tracked to ensure accountability for their implementation.

5.3 Dissemination of evaluation results

Systematic dissemination, storage and management of the evaluation reports is ensured to provide easy access to all development partners, to reach target audiences, additional interested parties, and to maximise the learning benefits of the evaluation. The key reports are available on websites including the full and 1/3/25 page reports, management response and improvement plans, unless there are major concerns about making these accessible to the public.

5.4 Reflection on the evaluation process and product

A reflective process is undertaken including with the Steering Committee to reflect on what worked well and what could have been strengthened in the evaluation. These are used to inform the wider national evaluation system and how it can be strengthened.