

Fostering African M&E expertise

The African Evaluation Association

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Oumoul Ba Tal is chair of the African Evaluation Association (AfrEA). She believes that evaluations can contribute to development, provided they go beyond the level of projects and programmes.

Can evaluations contribute to sustainable development?

Evaluations can only play an effective role in the development of a nation if they are carefully designed to serve the goals of development. For me, that means that evaluations must be nationally owned, and they must address issues and questions that are in line with local development needs and priorities. Also, they should be applied at the policy level, rather than at the level of individual programmes or projects at which most evaluations are currently conducted. Last, but not least, evaluations should contribute to decision-making processes, and serve as instruments for holding policy makers accountable for their choices.

What is the role of national bodies such as AMSE, the Mauritanian evaluation association, in strengthening evaluation capacity?

I believe that national associations can play an important role in promoting M&E at different levels of society, and in building capacity. They can explain the benefits to all stakeholders, as long as they simplify the language and use communication strategies that will be effective in reaching decision makers, programme managers and the users of evaluations, both actual and potential.

Due to their diverse constituencies ? which include practitioners and non-practitioners with different academic and professional backgrounds and levels of practical experience, and various interest groups ? the national associations can also serve as valuable forums for discussion. They can also contribute to the development of the evaluation function and the professionalism of evaluators in their countries, in line with international trends in the field. Since we are calling for national ownership and locally driven evaluations, we have to enhance our own capacities and contribute to the development of evaluation worldwide.

What added value does an Africa-wide association offer?

The association provides exposure for African experts, who are more likely to gain international evaluation experience and thus improve their skills. AfrEA is also working to strengthen the 'voice' of African practitioners, so that they can demonstrate to their governments and stakeholders that evaluation can be an effective strategy for leveraging individual and national development efforts. Moreover, AfrEA can help to launch programmes, involving several countries, to establish standards for evaluation across Africa. If every country had to do this on its own it would be a tremendous waste of resources.

AfrEA is facilitating the building of a body of 'African expertise' that in turn will attract attention and the resources needed for training, for the development of new tools and methods, and to enable members to attend international meetings. It is also contributing to efforts to focus evaluation research and practice on the needs of indigenous communities.



... e needed to build the evaluation capacity in Africa?

The association is now working to strengthen its own organisational structure, through what we call the 'formalisation' of AfrEA. Lots of proposals are being considered. As an informal organisation we have been effective in delivering value in terms of capacity building activities and projects. But for the future, having formal legal status would bring other benefits, including the ability to enter into contracts. It would also allow a longer-term perspective, encouraging institutional learning and contributing to the sustainability of the organisation.

Most of all, AfrEA needs 'champions' who are dedicated, understand the challenges, and can provide effective leadership and guidance for others. We must practise what we preach - we must behave as we teach others to do, in terms of the management of the association and its activities.

Links

[African Evaluation Association \(AfrEA\)](#)

[International Program for Development Evaluation Training \(IPDET\)](#)

[International Organisation for Cooperation in Evaluation](#)

[Nigerien Monitoring and Evaluation Network \(Réseau nigérien de suivi et évaluation, RéNSE\)](#)

[South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association \(SAMEA\)](#)

[UN Evaluation Forum](#)

[UNDP Southern Africa Capacity Initiative \(SACI\)](#)

Further reading

A.O. Hauge and K. Mackay (2004)

[Monitoring and Evaluation for Results: Lessons from Uganda](#). Capacity Development Brief 3, World Bank.

L. Morra-Imas and R.C. Rist (2006)

[The Capacity to Evaluate: Why Countries Need It](#). Capacity Development Brief 17, World Bank.