

Demand and Readiness for Monitoring and Evaluation in a Developmental State: A Case Study of KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa

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KEYWORDS Assessment. Information. Leadership. Participation. Performance. Stakeholder

ABSTRACT The aim of the paper is to report on the demand and readiness of municipalities to plan and implement a municipal-wide monitoring and evaluation system. The case study approach and a mixed method methodology was used to collect data through questionnaires and interviews. The results indicated that despite many municipalities possessing the necessary resources, only a small proportion of the municipalities are ready to implement a monitoring and evaluation system. Key stakeholders in planning and implementation were councillors and local communities, while an effective information system, a formal policy and dedicated staff with specific skills are required for planning and implementing a monitoring and evaluation system. The study recommends that a participatory organisational self-assessment be undertaken to establish the extent of readiness and demand for M&E. This paper is important to practitioners, policymakers and evaluators as monitoring and evaluation demand and readiness could enhance the outcomes of the developmental interventions.

INTRODUCTION

Citizens around the world are demanding better and more services from government to maintain or improve their quality of livelihood. This requires government to allocate more resources and to develop institutional capacity (De Coning and Rabie 2014) to deliver additional services, while being straddled with high levels of poverty and unemployment, poor economic growth, demand for free higher education and widespread corruption in the public sector. Despite these challenges, it is worth noting that the current government has expanded the basic service delivery of water, electricity and housing to a large portion of the previously disadvantaged black population (De Visser 2009). According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2009), effective M&E planning is critical for the clear articulation of the intended results, to judge if the work is progressing successfully and to ensure future efforts may be improved. Phillips et al. (2014) suggest that greater accountability could be achieved when the M&E system is linked to planning and budgeting. According to the Presidency (2014), the demand for performance monitoring and evaluation

is due to its contribution in enhancing cooperative governance and local developmental outcomes. Basheka and Byamugisha (2015), Labuschagne (2013) and Rossignoli et al. (2015), argue there is an increased demand for M&E throughout the developed and developing world, even though the legal and institutional frameworks for practising M&E are still weak. Kembo and Chapman (2016) in their study of evaluating public works programmes' confirmed that the weakness in the monitoring and evaluation office has resulted in inadequate tracking of the programmes outputs and outcomes. This weakness could be attributed to the lack of understanding of M&E by staff and not conducting an assessment for the specific demand to the readiness of municipalities to implement a monitoring and evaluation system.

Objectives

The overall aim of the study was to evaluate the demand and readiness for M&E in local municipalities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The objectives of the study are to evaluate the current readiness of municipalities to plan and implement a M&E; to determine the

requirements for planning and implementing a M&E system in municipalities; and to identify the stakeholders creating the need for implementing a M&E system in municipalities.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Drivers for Change in Local Government

Davies et al. (2006) note that public pressure on governments to provide accountability has become stronger in the past three decades due to demands for better, more efficient and cost-effective services. In South Africa, the most significant driver of change is the increased representation of the opposition parties in the 2016 local government elections where the ruling African National Congress political party lost its majority representation. In addition, the increased civil unrests, regular media reports of poor service delivery performance, corrupt officials and political appointments where the incumbent is not qualified and experienced has led to poor performance monitoring and evaluation. This has pressurised government to improve its reporting service delivery achievements to the public.

Despite legislation providing guidelines on the values, structures and systems to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local government, Pieterse (2002) comments that the situation is aggravated due to the different policies across government creating a fragmented planning framework and interdepartmental rivalry resulting in institutional conflict and poor service delivery. It seems legislative compliance in itself cannot guarantee service delivery satisfaction to the citizens, thus requiring improved communication via a participative monitoring and evaluation system. Another factor could also be related to the poor performance management systems in municipalities currently not providing the anticipated improvement in service delivery. Once again, in order to improve the functioning of local municipalities, national government implemented Project Consolidate, the Local Government Turnaround Strategy and the Batho Pele initiatives to emphasise institutional and quality customer engagement. These initiatives did not fully realise the desired outcome as accurate information for monitoring and evaluation prior to the implementation was not available.

Readiness Assessments for Planning and Implementing M&E Systems in Municipalities

Monitoring and evaluation, as a management tool, could assist the municipalities to track their progress on the achievement of their policies, programmes or projects to improve accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency leading to good governance. This view has also been articulated by the Minister of Performance, Monitoring and Evaluation in his budget speech where he reported that the state can only be successful if there is an efficient M&E system to monitor the quality and standard of the services provided to the people. According to Phillips (2012) good co-operative and corporate governance could be achieved via an outcomes approach to budgeting that entails the allocation of resources to the line departments and holding the department accountable for service delivery to improve corporate governance. This implies that the municipality should assess its readiness for implementing a monitoring and evaluation system.

In a similar vein, De Coning and Rabie (2014) and Kusek and Rist (2001) add that the first step to building a performance-based M&E system is to conduct a readiness assessment. This entails ascertaining the available capacities and the government's commitment to building a M&E system, presence of champions, ownership of the system, constraints and resistance to the system to support the formulation of the organisations' objectives by considering the organisations' current available resources, strengths and constraints. Pasenan and Shaxson (2016) concur with the above view and suggest that the purpose and scope of the M&E intervention needs to be clarified as it would impact on the time and resources available. Organisational assessments could further highlight different key performance areas in the municipalities and provide information to the donors and other stakeholders of the organisational capacity building and the sequencing of activities that forms the basis of an action plan to move forward (Kusek and Rist 2004). In their study of local development, Rossignoli et al. (2015) found that the M&E system enhanced the quality of projects and was of strategic importance for development co-operation and learning.

To address the above issues, self-assessment could be undertaken by the local municipalities to identify the depth, focus and costs of the M&E system itself (Lusthaus et al. 1999) to indicate the readiness of the municipality for the planning and implementation of an M&E system. In this regard it is important to identify the scope of the M&E system, users of the results and the format of the report required by the users, and achieve consensus and clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. Failure to address the above issues prior to institutionalisation of the M&E system could lead to poor outputs and outcomes and increased tension between the municipality and the communities it serves. More importantly the credibility of the M&E systems outcomes could be diminished.

Institutionalisation of M&E Systems

De Coning and Rabie (2014) describe the institutionalisation of M&E systems as elaborate and complex while Kusek and Rist (2004) assert that building and sustaining M&E systems is primarily a political process and less of a technical intervention. This implies that co-operative governance between the three spheres of government has to be both effective and efficient. Therefore, institutionalisation of a sustainable M&E system requires that it is an integral part of the organisation's strategic and operational functions, it is considered a specialist support function and the oversight function should be hierarchical (Ackron 2008). Simister (2009) provides the following suggestions for a successful M&E system, namely, senior management commitment and political will is required, the system should be sustainable and not create unrealistic expectations, manage resistance to change by employees and design the system fully before capacitating the participants. The approach that "one size fits all" would not produce the maximum institutional value from the M&E system. A balance must be achieved between the imposition of M&E policies, procedures and practices and allow for local level decision-making in response to their own circumstances. Therefore, the above issues should be adequately addressed if the municipality first establishes the extent to which it can support the planning, implementation, operations and risk management prior to institutionalising the

M&E system and its readiness to use the information emanating from the M&E system.

Methodology

The pragmatism research paradigm has influenced the study as the real-world issues of evaluating the need and demand for M&E have been identified and selected for investigation. The rationale for using this paradigm is embedded in the mixed method approach, since using the quantitative and qualitative separately would not have yielded a complete picture of the phenomena being investigated. Therefore the study used the case study approach and concurrent mixed method design that incorporated both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Primary data was collected by mailing the questionnaire to all the municipal managers in KZN and by conducting semi-structured interviews with municipal employees involved in performance management functions. Secondary data was sourced from books, journals, internet, legislation, government reports, policy documents and newspaper articles. The KZN province has one metropolitan region, 50 local municipalities and ten district municipalities. The sample included the 50 Category B municipalities, ten Category C district municipalities one Category A metropole.

The raw data from the collected questionnaires was coded and entered into the SPSS software programme in a compatible format. Data from the structured interview were coded and captured, thereafter a content analysis was conducted for each question and captured in a grid format. The data collected from the interviews was analysed with the PASW Statistics version 20.0 and presented in the form of graphs and tables. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated in the discussion of results and for triangulation purposes. South Africa has nine provinces and the study is limited only to the local municipalities in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Requirements for Planning and Implementing a Monitoring and Evaluation System in Municipalities

All the factors have been ranked as very important, namely, Reliability of information (96%),

Information system (92%), Facilities (80%), M&E policy (96%), Statistical skills (83%), Ownership of the system (96%), M&E specialists (92%) and M&E champion (92%). Statistical skills received a lower rating (83%) either due to the lack of use of statistics in performance measurement or there is limited awareness of the use of statistical techniques in M&E. The possible reason for the lowest rating for facilities could be due to the readily available office space in state facilities being allocated to M&E staff. Interviewees stated that M&E experts, champions, resources, capacity development, organisational culture, compliance with legislation, buy-in from both the political and administrative leaders and an integrative information system needs to be assessed for the M&E readiness of the municipality. The M&E expert is required to provide the technical and statistical knowledge, while the M&E champion needs to drive the M&E process in the municipality.

The quantitative data supports the findings emanating from the interviews as it also states the requirements for planning and implementing an M&E system as expert skills, capacity building, champions and an integrated information system. However, McCarthy (2000) warns that despite the municipalities possessing the necessary requirements, there is a lack of commitment to use M&E information by staff. The above findings are also supported by the Presidency's (2014) report on the M&E challenges in South Africa, namely, M&E is seen as a policing and controlling function, the focus is on compliance rather than on learning, leadership does not fully understand the benefits of M&E, leaders do not encourage champions, poor quality of data and information system and lack of a uniform policy. In addition, Labuschagne (2013) further reports that in the absence of an integrated approach to monitor and evaluate local development, policy development and analysis would not be supported by good governance and learning from the intervention is not fully utilised. In their study of women's experiences relating to strengthening evaluation systems, Merkle (2016) confirms that institutional systems, financial resources, evaluation capacity building, technical support and supportive senior management are required for evaluations to be successful.

Kusek and Rist (2004) suggest the six critical components of sustaining an M&E system are demand for the system, clear roles and respon-

sibilities, trustworthy and credible information, accountability, capacity and provision of incentives. In a similar vein, Goldman et al. (2014) submit that a good governance system could enhance the effectiveness of the M&E system resulting in improved outcomes and impacts. It is therefore evident from the above discussion that good governance systems, information systems and evaluation capacity development are critical for the planning and implementation of M&E systems in local municipalities.

Current Readiness of Municipalities to Plan and Implement a Monitoring and Evaluation System

Results from the questionnaire revealed that 36 percent of the respondents indicated that the current readiness for the planning and implementation of an M&E system was good and 28 percent indicated that the current readiness is poor. Two thirds of the municipalities could provide the required resources and approximately 60 percent of the municipalities currently possess the required resources (Govender 2011). However, the low percentage (36%) of municipalities that are ready for planning and implementing an M&E system could be attributed to the lack of M&E expertise and capacity in the smaller municipalities.

The majority of the respondents interviewed highlighted the main challenges in planning and implementing an M&E system as the lack of human resources, lack of funding and the demand by the Auditor-General's office, Treasury and Provincial Government for the same information. In this regard different templates and frameworks were submitted requesting the same information leading to the perception that M&E is exclusively about reporting and compliance. The interviewees further indicated that organisational systems and structures, capacity, community participation and co-operative governance pose challenges for the planning and implementation of an M&E system. Difficulty is experienced in implementing the current organisational systems due to the large number of vacant critical posts and there is also no clear understanding of performance management, monitoring and evaluation. Therefore councillors, administrators and the public have to be capacitated to understand M&E and their respective roles in service delivery.

Van Heerden (2009) argues that although the constitutional mandates place an obligation on administrators to perform their tasks in a particular manner, administrators do not have the requisite knowledge to comply with these obligations, thus resulting in poor levels of professionalism in the public sector. Kusek and Rist (2001) correctly highlighted the challenges that a developing country is likely to experience when planning and implementing an M&E system, namely, the lack of agreement on sector-wide outcomes, lack of accurate and reliable base line data, poor administrative and financial systems and departments preferring to work independently. In addition, Khan (1998) asserts that M&E systems are not easy to implement and sustain, partly due to the political leadership not being fully aware of the benefits of M&E.

This implies that the lack of knowledge, poor information systems, and ineffective co-operative governance could have contributed to the low levels of readiness in municipalities despite the availability of the necessary resources.

Stakeholders Creating the Need for Implementing a Monitoring and Evaluation System in Municipalities

Results from the questionnaire highlight that there is total agreement that the following stakeholders are responsible for creating the need for an M&E system, namely, Councillors (100%), Provincial and National Government (100%) and Communities (96%). The remaining factors are also important, but to a slightly smaller extent, namely, business communities (88%), political parties (76%) and donors (76%). The lower percentages could be attributed to the business communities that are currently not fully engaged in the municipal planning process. In a similar vein, donors contribute a very small percentage of the municipality's revenue base and do not have the influence to direct municipal planning and performance. While the opposition political parties did not have sufficient representation to make significant changes in most municipalities prior to the 2016 municipal elections, they have currently gained significant representation in many municipalities, which could result in creating a greater need for M&E. All the respondents have indicated an overwhelming demand for M&E systems for ensuring compliance with

National and Provincial Governments' requests for information.

According to Porter and Goldman (2013) where decision-makers require evidence from M&E systems to assist them in making choices, the demand for M&E increases. However, malicious compliance emanating from the National and Provincial Governments, Treasury and the Auditor-General's office on purely financial issues reduces the learning opportunities. In an attempt to overcome these challenges, Sefala (2009) proposes that accountability should be based on the overall concept of government to include political representation, political structures and the interactive processes of civil society. It is noteworthy to acknowledge that local government in South Africa has adequate political representation and political structures such as councillors and ward committees in communities. However, it has not been successful in effectively engaging the local communities as evidenced by the frequent civic protests around the country.

In addition, the Government Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWMES) was implemented to integrate information needed for evidence based programme and policy analysis across the three spheres of government. However, the GWMES has yet to be fully implemented due to delays in setting uniform standards, inadequate resource allocation to the work plans and the fact that the departmental task teams stopped meeting for a while thus the full value of the GWMES was not achieved (Engela and Ajam 2010). Garley et al. (2016), in their study to evaluate malaria control programmes, found that the inability of country-wide information systems to produce timely and quality data adversely affect the different stakeholders' understanding of the programme implementation status and the outcomes. Therefore, both national and provincial governments, as key stakeholders, need to ensure that the government-wide monitoring and evaluation system is effective and fully operational to increase the demand for municipal M&E systems that feed the information into the provincial and national M&E systems.

CONCLUSION

Municipalities in the KwaZulu-Natal province are experiencing increased demands from communities for more and better quality service-

es notwithstanding its leadership, capacity, financial and governance constraints. The study highlighted that despite many municipalities possessing the resources to implement M&E systems, few municipalities are actually ready for institutionalisation of M&E systems. In light of these challenges municipalities need to undertake a self-assessment for the demand and readiness to implement an effective M&E system. Important institutional factors required for the planning and implementation for the M&E system include political and administrative leadership, organisational structure and culture, policies and procedures and resource availability. The stakeholders that include councillors, communities, businesses, political parties and donors who create a need for M&E systems in local government, need to be capacitated in the value of M&E. All stakeholders should work towards good governance by adopting a participatory M&E approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to ensure a sustainable M&E system is developed and operated. Firstly, the municipality has to undertake a self-assessment to gauge its extent of readiness and demand for institutionalising M&E systems. Key issues to be considered include resource availability, commitment by all stakeholders, capacity development for M&E skills and accountability processes. Secondly, to reduce the tensions between the various stakeholders, M&E should be developed in a participatory manner and be aligned with outcomes and impacts rather than outputs of the municipalities' integrated development plans. The core business processes should be both effective and efficient allowing for collaboration and co-ordination amongst key stakeholders, in particular, the different stakeholders' perspectives should be considered when developing performance indicators. Thirdly, the focus of the current M&E activities is compliance-driven rather than on learning. All stakeholders should be capacitated on the value of M&E and the principles of outcomes-based M&E systems. Finally, national and provincial Governments should also introduce incentives for the implementation of a successful M&E system that is jointly supported by both the administrative and political leadership to develop a performance culture

within a learning organisation. The paper further proposes future research should include a province-wide study to ascertain the details of the resources available at each municipality for the planning and implementation of an M&E system, to enable a customised action plan to be developed for the introduction of the participative M&E system in each municipality.

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Paper received for publication on October 2016
Paper accepted for publication on December 2016