



**TWENDE MBELE**

**POLICY BRIEF**

# **GETTING EVIDENCE QUICKER: THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAPID EVALUATION IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

**FEBRUARY 2021**

[www.twendembele.org](http://www.twendembele.org)

## INTRODUCTION

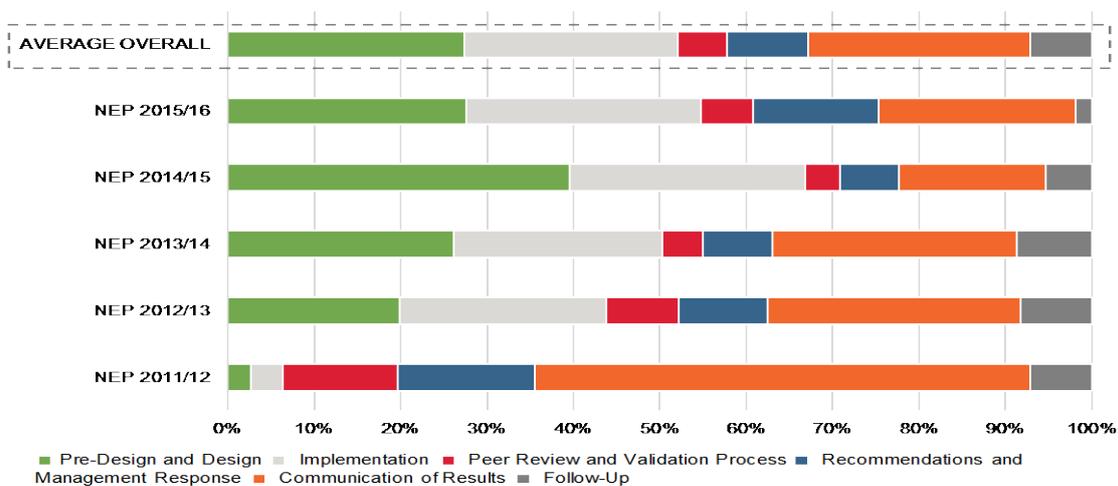
In a recent research study by Twende Mbele to assess the state of M&E culture in five participating governments, a question regarding the '[timeliness of] information provided to decision-makers' was asked to more than 462 managers. On average 61% of respondents felt that M&E evidence was often used to support policy-making and implementation. And 60% of respondents indicated that evaluation reports were shared. As far as decision-making goes, the respondents indicated that decisions are often taken without proper diagnosis of the problem- around 41 – 44% indicated this happens often and 50% of respondents indicated that diagnosis of problems to inform planning happens rarely.

This suggests that there is a problem with key evidence being available when needed to make decisions. According to one respondent from Benin, "The information gets to us but not on time and most times it is not clear. The information is not usually used to make decisions - not used to get the desired results". This clear need to get information more rapidly for decision-making (especially from evaluations) has led the Twende Mbele partnership to begin an initiative to look at rapid evaluations to plug this gap.

### TIME LAGS IN PRACTICE

A closer look at the government procurement system in South Africa shows that in many instances, the delays to evaluations lie in the time spent on activities ancillary to the evaluation such as the design and procurement phases. In Benin for example, the average time of an evaluation is 6-8 weeks, but there is a lag between receiving the results and the ability of staff to get findings into the right hands. In this respect, rapid evaluations in the public sector, need to streamline the necessary systems required to do an evaluation and to ensure the results are validated and used in a timelier manner.

**FIGURE 1: OVERVIEW OF TIME SPENT ON THE EVALUATION, BY ACTIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA**



Source: DPME, (2018) p16

### WHAT IS MEANT BY RAPID EVALUATIONS?

Rapid evaluations are intended to reduce the costs of evaluation projects and the time they take (DPME, 2020). This is an evaluation which can produce a result that can feed into policy and practice quickly, but yet is sufficiently robust to provide good guidance for decision-making.

It addresses the need to quickly assess policy/programme/strategy/function delivery, and establish the main performance data, with main recommendations for improvements (Hercules, 2019). They help us to understand and learn from what works, what doesn't, when and for whom.

Specific examples of possible rapid evaluation methodologies are: Evaluative reviews (may take 6 weeks), meta-evaluation analysis, traditional literature review (1 week to 2 months), quick scoping review (1-2 weeks to 2 months), review of reviews (often quicker than other types of full systematic review), and evaluative workshops (can range from a 2 hour meeting to a 2 day workshop).

It is also an important tool for accountability, helping departments and entities to demonstrate uptake, and that the work as policy/programme/project/strategy/service delivery managers is of high quality and useful. Rapid evaluations are the latest addition to the national evaluation system in many governments, and can be done internally by officials, and/or involve procurement of service providers.

To ensure that rapid evaluations do not become less credible, sound rapid evaluation design should include (Hercules, 2019):

1. Use a logic model Theory of change
2. Identify delivery mechanics, components. Select most important
3. Use evaluation lenses: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability
4. Structured data review and analysis

*“Typically rapid evaluations have a more limited set of evaluation questions in comparison to bigger evaluations.”*  
– Dr Ian Goldman (2020)

### ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

The most common reasons for a rapid approach may be responding to an unplanned senior management request or demand for urgent information, where a critical decision needs to be made on a programme or intervention and up to date diagnosis. And also for an unstable and changing context where a significant delay in the production of evaluation will impact decision making.

Advantages of rapid evaluation	Disadvantages
Time from commissioning to report with recommendations is shorter, so can be more timely, especially for emerging priorities which could not be planned for	Less time on the process with stakeholders which can reduce ownership, as well as feedback to improve quality
Easier to undertake rapid evaluations with internal people as the time commitment is less  If conducted internally no supply chain process which speeds up the process.	Less time on data collection, reducing robustness and ability to draw inferences on wider application – so generally less suitable for more than small or electronic surveys  Needs internal people to allocate dedicated time  Needs sufficient evaluation/research capacity internally  If undertaken internally can be less objective, or more easily dismissed by senior management  Quality can also be compromised if internal capacity (for analysis, report-writing, etc.) is weak.
Lower cost as they are quicker, but also if they use internal people	Can feel rushed, and stakeholders feel they have not been consulted
Possibly more flexibility to use innovative methods, as less constrained by generalisability	Can be less time for learning, as methods and tools have to be applied quickly and correctly. Little time to learn new approaches.
	Can be reduction in quality, as fewer quality control measures, analysis may have to be happening during data collection etc.

*Adapted from DPME Rapid Evaluation Guideline, 2020*

In general, a challenge is that rapid evaluations require more skilled people than do less pressured evaluations. This can be a problem to conduct them internally.

### WHICH SITUATIONS SUGGEST RAPID EVALUATIONS ARE NEEDED

Rapid evaluations can also be distinguished in terms of their intended purpose, for example, being conducted in real-time, or alongside larger evaluations, to support innovation, development and implementation (Ellins, undated).

Type of evaluation	Situation favours	Example
Rigorous major evaluation	Where you need to be very sure that the picture is correct: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where the programme or policy is very large and you need a very clear picture of benefits and how it is working;</li> <li>• Where the implications of the policy/ programme is critical and will affect peoples lives and communities at large;</li> <li>• Where much is at stake, or there is a lot of contention about the programme or policy so it is key that the result can't be challenged.</li> </ul>	>R500 million programme  For example the Child Support Grant, where its impact is contested
	Where you can anticipate and plan for the decision points by scheduling the evaluation well in time	Planning for an evaluation to report 4 years in from a programme start prior to decisions on a next phase
Rapid evaluation	Where realtime feedback is needed	In a newly unfolding emergency situation e.g. floods
	Where you have to get the results in 2-3 months	In a relatively stable emergency situation e.g. migration
	Where the primary purpose is formative to feed-in to ongoing policy and planning processes	Mid-term review of an implementation programme
	For organizational learning and problem solving	A problem has emerged – how do we deal with it?
	Where the evaluation budget is very limited	Got 0-R400 000 for an evaluation
	Where focusing on narrower topics and/or specific geographical areas	Specific areas targeted so participatory work in that area will be relevant

*Adapted from DPME Rapid Evaluation Guideline (2020)*

*“To make a difference, a rapid evaluation needs to be both strategic and of reasonably high quality”*

- Mr Antonio Hercules

## WORK IN PROGRESS

### TWENDE MBELE COUNTRIES

In 2019 Twende Mbele designed a Rapid Evaluation Toolkit. The toolkit provides a framework to think about rapid evaluations, and provides example questions, indicators and tools to do rapid evaluations. The toolkit is intended for use by officials in evaluations, research and program delivery working in all spheres of government.

### SOUTH AFRICA

In South Africa the Department of Planning Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) introduced a Rapid Evaluation Guideline in May 2020. The Guideline is an introduction to doing rapid evaluations, either conducted internally or externally. The first part provides an overview of what rapid evaluation is and when to select it. And the second part uses the structure of the DPME guideline on terms of reference and introduces particular aspects in relation to rapid evaluation.

The guideline aims to specifically provide guidance for implementing rapid evaluations in a government context. The guideline has been developed collaboratively between the DPME and Twende Mbele, and adapted for the Western Cape Department of the Premier (DoTP). The guideline is designed to assist government departments and entities to plan and undertake rapid evaluations, either alone, facilitated by experienced external evaluators, or by outsourcing them to service providers.

### BENIN

Benin adapted the South African Rapid Evaluation Guideline to its context, creating coherence with its existing national guidelines. This was followed by a workshop in June 2020 where fifteen National Evaluation System (NES) actors were trained on how to conduct a rapid evaluation. The training aimed to develop the capacities of these actors on this new form of evaluation which can be useful in the event of an emergency, or as part of a preliminary analysis to help determine priorities, identify emerging problems and trends, and generating evidence that will enable better decision-making and support the adjustment of interventions. To put all this work into practice, the Bureau of Evaluation of Public Policy and Analysis of Government Action (BEPPAAG) is undertaking rapid evaluation: of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the informal sector and also on the Agriculture Resource Allocation Mechanism for Communes, piloted by the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries.

*“Rapid Evaluations serves as an important source of evidence for timely decision making and, it is an equally important conduit for skills and knowledge transfer, and it contributes to the strengthening of M&E culture across government programmes.” – Mr Kwabena Agyei Boakye (2020)*

## GHANA

In addition, Ghana's former Ministry of Monitoring & Evaluation conducted their first rapid evaluation with IDInsight in 2019. This was a rapid evaluation of the 1Village 1Dam Project (1V1D). The evaluation assessed as objectively and systematically as possible the progress of implementation, emerging outcomes and potential impacts of the One Village One Dam project. The assessment also documented implementation challenges and opportunities for accelerating implementation of the project.

In 2020, with the help of Twende Mbele Ghana wrote and approved their rapid evaluation guidelines, and they have since received funding to conduct more rapid evaluations in that country.

## CONCLUSION...

Inevitably there is a trade-off for one to use rapid evaluation instead of more rigorous evaluation in the public sector. While there is potential for a greater use of findings when they are timelier, a longer evaluation allows for more data points, deeper investigation of the literature, greater confidence in the process of stakeholders involvement etc. Public sector officials need to ensure they are using the right methodology for the questions being asked, and to streamline the processes within government to facilitate shortened evaluations. Without the processes and quality work, decision makers may have less confidence in the findings such that they are ultimately not used.

## REFERENCES

- Antonio Hercules (2019) Rapid Evaluations Toolkit
- DPME (2020), Rapid Evaluation Guideline
- Jo Ellins (undated). Rapid Evaluations: What are they and why do them?  
<https://hsruk.org/sites/default/files/upload/5.%20Rapid%20Evaluations%20Jo%20Ellins.pdf>



## TWENDE MBELE

[www.twendembele.org](http://www.twendembele.org)

TWENDE MBELE is a multi-country peer-learning partnership centred on country government priorities for building national evaluation systems in an effort to improve government performance and accountability to citizens.

**Telephone:** +27 (0) 11 717 3453 | **Email:** [info@twendembele.org](mailto:info@twendembele.org)

The Oval Building, University of the Witwatersrand  
2 St David's Place, Parktown, Johannesburg  
Telephone: +27 11 717 3157; Fax: +27 86 765 5860



[@TwendeMnE](https://twitter.com/TwendeMnE)



<http://www.twendembele.org>