

## **Improving Social Development through Impact Evaluation: African Perspectives on Closing the Evaluation Gap**

A Consultation hosted by the Most Reverend Archbishop Ndungane, Founder of the African Monitor, and the Center for Global Development (CGD)

18-19 May 2006, Cape Town, South Africa

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### **Objectives**

This meeting on impact evaluation of social development programs was convened to review and consider endorsing the Evaluation Gap Working Group's Consultation Draft. Specific feedback was sought regarding the participants' views concerning:

- (a) the demand for rigorous impact evaluations;
- (b) the concept of an international, independent evaluation effort, supported with a combination of funding from private and public sources; and
- (c) the role of low- and middle-income countries in the proposed global impact evaluation council

### **Participants**

Ms. Grace Amurle, Chief Resource Officer, African Economic Research Consortium  
Mr. Douglas Barnett, Acting Director, Operations Evaluation Department, African Development Bank  
Mr. Warren Clark, Senior Advisor, Center for Global Justice and Reconciliation, Washington National Cathedral  
Mr. Andrew Donaldson, Deputy Director-General for Public Finance, National Treasury, South Africa  
Mr. Jon Donnelly, Journalist, Boston Globe in South Africa  
Mr. Leonard Njunge Kimani, Ag. Secretary, National Economic and Social Council, Kenya  
Mr. Urbanus Kioko, Professor of Economics, University of Nairobi  
Ms. Petrina Pakoe, HOPE Africa  
Dr. Oswald Mashindano, Senior Research Fellow, Economic & Social Research Foundation  
Prof. Di McIntyre, Associate Professor, Health Economics Unit, University of Cape Town  
Ms. Titise Make, Grants Manager, Southern Africa Trust  
Ms. Namhla Mniki, Project Manager, African Monitor  
Revd. Njongonkulu Ndungane, Archbishop of Cape Town, Founder, African Monitor  
Ms. Erin Raab, Meeting Organizer, Center for Global Development  
Dr. William D. Savedoff, Senior Consultant, Center for Global Development  
Mr. Njabulo Sithebe, Director, Department of Economic Development, Gauteng, South Africa  
Dr. Eliya Zulu, Deputy Director, African Population and Health Research Center

## Meeting Notes

The Most Reverend Archbishop Njongonkulu Ngundane welcomed participants to Cape Town and to the consultation. William D. Savedoff also welcomed participants on behalf of the Center for Global Development and presented the objectives and expectations for the meeting. Oswald Mashindano, Leonard Njunge Kimani, Andrew Donaldson, and Douglas Barnett made presentations on their experiences with evaluation and the opportunities and challenges facing their respective institutions. Savedoff made further presentations on the Evaluation Gap Consultation Draft, including reference to feedback from other consultations and revisions under consideration for the recommendations in the final report. The Most Reverend Archbishop Ngundane also spoke about African Monitor, a recently launched initiative.

Mr. Kimani described the how the National Economic and Social Council of Kenya has been established to link analysis into policymaking. It provides a forum for discussion between government, academia, civil society and the private sector. It also gathers, analyzes and compiles information; evaluates programs and activities; and has formal links to the preparation of cabinet papers for government.

Dr. Mashindano described how the use of evidence in policymaking has changed in Tanzania – from a period of central planning where information was sought but policymaking was mostly driven by ideology; to a period of reforms in which the impetus to study and evaluate programs was largely driven by outside funding agencies; to the current “PRSP era” in which domestic evidence building is more prominent. Still, there are difficulties in linking analysis to government due to weak access to policymakers. Furthermore, the research infrastructure remains highly constrained.

Mr. Barnett described on-going changes at the African Development Bank, with increasing engagement to become a results-based institution in line with commitments made at High level forums held in Rome and Paris on harmonization, alignment, and managing for results. He explained the different kinds of evaluation that are being conducted and how impact evaluations fit in towards the end of the logic chain(s) which underpin project or program designs and provide for results frameworks.

Mr. Barnett described a range of other initiatives to strengthen the evaluation system; highlighted the issue of independence which has recently occupied some evaluation departments of the multilateral development banks (members of the Evaluation Consultative Group; ECG); and noted that work groups have been set up by the OECD Development Assistance Committee Evaluation Network and the ECG to examine further issues related to impact evaluations. He indicated that some sort of impact evaluation network may possibly emerge from on-going examination of I.Es. He also suggested that the Evaluation Gap initiative might consider bringing country-level stakeholders together (government, donors, CSOs, etc.) to identify important studies at the country level as a means to mobilize funding in the place of, or in addition to, trying to pool funds at the global level.

Mr. Donaldson welcomed the initiative to improve impact evaluation but offered several cautionary notes. First, he noted that there are policies and programs that we already know

are effective and for which rigorous impact evaluation probably isn't necessary. Secondly, context and particularities matter a great deal, so attention needs to be paid before blindly generalizing from one situation to another – extending the medical metaphor, he suggested that in addition to “clinical trials,” we also need better “diagnosis.” Third, he recommended delinking assessments from specific projects or institutions – both because it would reduce resistance to doing the studies and because the comparative process engenders better understanding. Finally, he noted that the constraints on domestic research capacity make selectivity in choosing which programs to evaluate a high priority.

Archbishop Ndungane reaffirmed many of these themes and described why the African Monitor has been founded and how it will operate. He recognized the problems of capacity and resources, but noted that lack of political will and channels for hearing the voices of ordinary citizens are also at the root of limited accountability and information. African Monitor will be creating a “Togona” (meaning “House of Wisdom” in Mali) – convening prominent Africans who can be interlocutors with the highest levels of government – to link information gathering and accountability to action. African Monitor will also be building linkages to communities, civil society organizations, and particularly faith communities that are active across the continent, to gather information that can be used to monitor the use and impact of development aid and government programs.

Key points raised by participants during the ensuing discussion included:

There is a need for rigorous impact evaluation. Participants confirmed the need for more and better impact evaluations to be conducted. Some described instances in which evidence was simply lacking to guide policy, and talked about the need to experiment with new programs so as to combat dogmatic approaches and follow a spirit of pragmatism. To this end, disseminating and strengthening knowledge of the core practices of good evaluation is necessary (e.g. capacity building in M&E at country level). Selectivity in which programs are evaluated is also important – both to direct efforts toward issues that are of great importance to policy decisions and so as not to overload the limited capacity.

Relationship between Evidence and Policy. Participants also noted that evidence was not always sufficient and described the difficulties of getting policymakers to recognize the value and importance of information. Efforts to link evidence to policy more formally, through research council's, collaborations, and partnerships, were highlighted.

Capacity is a critical constraint. Perhaps the strongest message from the meeting was the limited capacity for conducting rigorous impact evaluations and the need to support both short term and long term initiatives to build capacity. Although partnerships with international research institutions are welcome, it is necessary for African researchers to be involved in the early phases of research – design and proposal writing – if real capacity building is to occur; otherwise, there is a risk that African researchers become mere data collectors or focus on the kinds of applied work in consultancies that do not contribute to advancing research. Several participants noted the high value of investing in panel surveys that facilitate all kinds of subsequent analysis and evaluations (e.g. the demographic surveillance surveys in Tanzania that made it possible to evaluate TEHIP and the current panel survey being conducted in Kenyan urban areas).

Reactions to the Evaluation Gap Consultation Draft. Participants were favorable to the report's analysis and its call for improving impact evaluation work. They offered a series of suggestions and qualifications for the draft's revisions. Some of those suggestions included reducing the apparent exclusive focus on random assignment methods; emphasizing the need for balanced and integrated evaluation responding to stakeholder needs so that impact evaluations are conducted alongside process and operational assessments; avoiding initiatives that would add burdens to African governments already dealing with a range of bilateral, multilateral, and other development agencies or CSOs; clarifying and improving the incentives for collaborating on a collective initiative; assuring that the initiative has credibility – requiring a strong emphasis on quality and at least some degree of independence through a diversified membership.

Credibility requires local ownership and leadership. Impact evaluations in Africa will have more credibility, relevance, and acceptance if they are led and owned by African researchers. Local ownership and leadership in impact evaluation work can assure better understanding of the context within which programs are developed and increase the likelihood that policymakers will see the studies as relevant to their own context.

The African Monitor initiative is important. Participants acknowledged the value of the African Monitor initiative for giving voice to Africans, creating a new channel for information to flow from communities into policy decisions, and advocating for the poor. Several participants noted complementarities between African Monitor and the Evaluation Gap initiative – though they rely on generating different kinds of information, they both seek to increase accountability by improving information, transparency, and feedback into policy. It was suggested that the two initiatives explore ways they can mutually reinforce each other.