

**Programme Evaluation in Nigeria:  
Challenges and Prospects.**

**By**

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## Abstract

*Programme evaluation in Nigeria is still at its infancy both as a discipline and as a profession. Although the concept of evaluation is established and regularly talked about, proper programme evaluation is rarely done and this makes it difficult to verify the real impact of a programme in terms of achievement.*

*Programme evaluation is usually viewed from two sides - evaluation by the programme sponsors [to assess the progress of programme and final achievement] and the personal self- assessment [by the individual community of their own progress]. Most evaluation activities in Nigeria emphasize only the first resulting in the need to justify to the sponsor of the programme that money has been well spent. Due to the problems of communication media, bureaucratic procedures and many aspects of daily life, the context of programme evaluation in Nigeria is demanding and complex. The capacity to analyse, deduce and understand different forms of data has become increasingly necessary. At the same time, there is the need to cultivate the modern attitudes of value, autonomy, flexibility and creativity in the solution of problems, as well as the capacity to search for alternatives and the skills demanded for teamwork and effective communication. Greater challenges are related to quality of evaluation, which includes tools, strategies and processes.*

*The paper highlights the existing patterns of evaluation used in Nigeria and the practical obstacles to appropriate programme evaluation in the country. It also stresses the challenges ahead for the Nigerian programme evaluator in the face of a changing world, in order to meet world standards. The paper finally looks at the prospects for the use of modern programme evaluation in achieving national and/or international goals of development.*

## **1.0 Introduction**

For the purpose of clarity, I choose to start the discussion by assuming that there are some key words that need to be explained so as to situate their subsequent use.

Firstly, programme evaluation has been chosen to mean, a systematic way of placing value on a programme aimed at improving the quality of the life of a people. It is assessing what has gone into a programme, what the results are and what can be learnt for results obtained.

Secondly, when the word 'challenges' features in the discussion, it means the problems, drawbacks and hindrances that test the strength and skill of a nation in a way that solutions may be provided.

Thirdly, it is also assumed that 'prospects' refers to imperatives for the way forward, persons, jobs, plans or anything that have good chance of success in the future.

Programme evaluation may be described as successful or unsuccessful depending on the outcome. Success is based on choice of staff and key evaluators, adequate resourcing and effective planning. No matter how good an evaluation may be in its design and development, it will fail if not properly implemented by the practitioner.

Programme evaluation is carried out for goal clarification, management need for efficiency and relevance in the programme at hand and in the design of future programmes, and the need to generate self-confidence among practitioners (Bown and Tomori, 1979).

In practical terms, programme evaluation is to assess and place value on, programme objectives and needs; programme input and process; availability and adequacy of resources (human and material), characteristics of participants, teaching and learning methodologies and programme

outcome and impact. How then can one ensure that an evaluation will be successful? Rubin (1995) provides these pointers that are stated below.

- *Be realistic about evaluation, recognize that it is a political process in which different views of development, hidden agendas, and unequal power relationships operate.*
- *Be clear about the purpose of a particular exercise and the key stakeholders involved.*
- *Negotiate priorities, and be clear about objectives; a single exercise cannot answer every question.*
- *Be clear about what evaluation can and cannot do. Do not use it for the wrong purposes. Evaluation is not the same as decision-making.*
- *Plan evaluation activity as an integral part of project work, so that projects and programmes are designed with evaluation in mind. Discussing and planning for evaluation at an early stage ensures that people expect it to happen, and so feel less threatened by it when it does happen.*
- *Be clear about what people's responsibilities are in different evaluation exercises, so that they know what is expected of them.*
- *Choose an approach and methods appropriate to the type of work being evaluated and the questions being asked.*
- *Involve people, particularly those who will use the information, from the outset, so they 'own' the process, and will make use of the findings.*
- *Be prepared to adapt and refine plans so that evaluation can be carried out at an appropriate time.*
- *Encourage feelings of respect and trust among all involved.*

With the hindsight of these, let us examine the practice and state of evaluation in Nigeria.

## **2.0 Programme Evaluation in Nigeria.**

The National Manpower Board (2002) in Nigeria notes that one of the major constraints militating against rapid national growth and development is inadequate supply of skilled and well-trained people. This has led to increase in a number of training institutions. But in the area of evaluation, not much appears to have been done. The consequence of this is that there is no clear evaluation policy at the present time. Programme evaluation is left to the whims and caprices of management, leaders of groups, donor agencies, programme financiers; and few qualified practitioners. These result in poor evaluation culture and excessive emphasis on quantitative evaluations.

Observations show that most of what is done as regards programme evaluation provides both qualitative and quantitative data through the use of a variety of methods. However, there are more quantitative evaluations done through quantitative indicators, which offer data on quantified effects and impact. Below are samples of indicators covered in most evaluations in general terms.

- Number of schools and or literacy centers.
- Number of people made literate.
- Number of boreholes and bridges constructed.
- Number of qualified instructors, extension and welfare workers.
- Number of bags of fertilizers distributed.

It is generally believed that these indicators are inadequate for most programme evaluations in Nigeria. This is because the provision of physical materials does not necessarily mean enhanced social life for the people. Also, absolute numbers as index of success may be meaningless unless,

related to a percentage or ratio of a required, or ideal number. Again, the quality of indicators chosen is very important.

These issues and more are captured in the works of Obashoro [1995], Zubairu (1999), Odunuga (2002) and, Oladapo [2002].

For example, Oladapo (2002] in *'An Evaluation of Onigbinde Village Community Development Programme'* identified the following indicators as necessary for programme success.

- Number of projects/programmes.
- Types of projects – How many are functioning?
- Sources of funding and contribution of government.
- Number of participants – male and female.
- Level of participation, motivation for participation and obstacles to effective participation.
- Problems, needs and suggestions for improvement.

These show that to this evaluator, issues of type and number of projects, and the number of male and female participation are paramount issues for consideration.

Odunuga (2002) in *'An Evaluation of Programme Objectives, Vocational Training Needs and Participation Rates of Adults in Oru Refugee camp'* used the following indicators in his programme evaluation.

- Age range of refugees, their countries and educational qualifications.
- Vocational trainings available.
- Number of participants in the various vocational trainings.
- Number of teachers/trainers.
- Objectives of vocational training and training techniques.
- Adequacy of training in meeting needs of participants.
- Checklist of materials and vocations available.

- Have training objectives been achieved?
- Kinds of outside/foreign support [if any].
- How are programmes monitored and how are they evaluated?
- Level of commitment to programme.
- Attitude of people and government to projects.

This appears to be a more detailed use of indicators of success. It is evident that apart from the quantitative variables addressed, commitment to programme, level of achievement of objectives and internal monitoring and evaluation system in place are also regarded as necessary.

In the work of Zubairu [1999] *'Maintenance of Government Office Building in Nigeria: A Post-Occupancy Approach'* below are the indicators chosen by the author in her work.

- Number of buildings in secretariat.
- Number of floors for each building.
- Age of secretariat complex.
- Are the access roads in good condition?
- Are the lawns and flowers well kept?
- Are there cracks in the fence?
- Does the fence need re-painting?
- Are there leaking problems?
- What types of finishes are used in entrances, stairs, corridors, toilets and lobbies. .
- Any defective pipes, wiring, lights, lifts, switches and sockets?
- Is there a maintenance logbook?
- Quality of structure, electrical, mechanical, architectural design.
- How often are the floors cleaned and the building maintained?
- How much is the annual maintenance budget?
- What are the major causes of maintenance problems?
- Number of staff involved in carrying out maintenance and cleaning duties.

Again, one would notice that quantitative indicators have taken the most important place in this work. It appears that evaluation stresses the structural, electrical, mechanical and architectural conditions of government office buildings as the most viable issues for adequate evaluation.

Finally, in the work by Obashoro (1995) on *'An Evaluation of French Language Programmes for Adults in Private Institutions in Nigeria'* the following indicators were meant to adequately evaluate French Language programmes for adults in private institutions in Nigeria.

- Sources of funds for financing programmes.
- Number of participants.
- Number of programmes offered and length of course.
- Teaching methods used.
- Types of teaching aids available and their adequacies.
- Educational qualifications of teachers and years of experience.
- Number of teachers in the centre.
- Problems encountered.
- Solutions proffered.

This work lays emphasis on the physical elements of French Language programme offerings in private institutions but fails to draw attention to the effect of these elements on the quality of teaching and learning that goes on in the centres studied.

### **3.0 Problems as Challenges.**

Based on the Nigerian experience, a number of problems and shortcomings have been identified. There is no doubt that these problems are great challenges to us in Nigeria. Nigeria as a developing economy shares a lot in common with the world's developing economies in terms of programme evaluation problems. These can be viewed and grouped under the following broad headings.

- General problems.
- Problems at government level.
- Problems at community level.
- Problems at NGO level.

### **General problems**

In general terms, hindrances to adequate programme evaluation are:

- Finance.
- Unclear goals and objectives of programmes.
- Hidden and varying interests of those involved.
- Biases and prejudices of those involved.
- Programme politics and fear of organisers.
- Inadequacy of resources – human and material.
- Inadequacy of time and training.
- Poor evaluation culture.
- Misconceptions and undue emphasis on some aspects.
- Bureaucracy and feeling of insecurity.
- Concentration on quantitative data.
- Absence of collaborations.
- Absence of follow-up evaluations.

### **Government level problems**

On the side of government, observations reveal the following.

- Lack of capacity in terms of knowledge, skills, finance, policy and system.
- Inadequate evaluation methodology and attitude characterized by top-down approach of governance and communication, fault-finding, punishment, sanctions and corruption.

- Lack of transparency epitomized by acts of withholding data and evident lack of trust.
- Threat to government.
- Feeling of being in power against that of responsibility.
- Insufficient supply of evaluation materials.
- Thinking that evaluation is not important.
- Difficult balance between partnership and pressure.

### **Community level problems**

The community level problems hinge around

- Inadequate participation by certain members of the community – women, disabled, aged.
- Cultural and religious barriers.
- Conflicts between local evaluation methods and formal methods.
- General resistance to change.
- Lack of consensus on indicators.
- Resource constraints such as time, experts and money.
- No clear understanding of evaluation benefits.
- Illiteracy.
- Translating concepts to local languages.
- Group syndrome.
- Lack of feedback from community.
- Lack of self-evaluation skills.

### **Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) level problems**

At the NGO level shortfall are experienced as follows:

- Inadequate human resources that leads to hiring consultants.
- Limited participation by other stakeholders.
- Accountability of NGO to donors not the communities.

- Mistrust by communities of NGO activities.
- NGO leaders top-down approach.
- No system or limited system in place.
- No time to reflect – urgency is the word.
- Lack of focus.

With these highlighted problems, does programme evaluation in Nigeria have any prospects?

#### **4.0 Prospects**

Evaluators in Nigeria need to see the practice of better evaluation as a “gradual reform rather than frantic revolution ... must take charge, take risks and remain ahead of the curve” (Picciotto 2002). To achieve these, the following imperatives are necessary.

Nigerian evaluators need exposure to the best models and instruments for programme evaluation, which are relevant to their peculiar situation and demands. They need evaluation bodies that would cover latest trends in the studies of evaluation that may not be easily accessed by individuals. This demands that more Nigerian evaluators should belong to established regional and international evaluation bodies. This will ensure exposure to current and proven trends in evaluation. Evaluation should have a central place in the national development plan and it should show people how it can be used to enhance the quality of organisational programmes for national development .

It should empower individuals to become evaluators so that they can appreciate the art of evaluation, decision making as a result of evaluation data, information search, storage, retrieval and utilisation with a view to enriching their capacity for programme evaluation.

Nigeria needs trustworthy, reliable and hardworking evaluators who will use both quantitative and qualitative instruments, who understand what evaluation really is, and who will address the problems of evaluation with particular reference to conditions in Nigeria in the face of global development.

Currently, there is no evaluation policy in Nigeria. But I strongly believe that there should be a state policy on evaluation. This will provide a framework for planning and a template for evaluation; serve as a vehicle for making intentions known to the public and offer a base for staff training.

It appears to me that Nigerians prefer to work individually rather than collectively or as a team. Nigeria needs 'collaborative evaluation or participatory evaluation' using the terms of O'Sullivan and D' Agostino (2002). This should involve programme staff and all stakeholders in the process of evaluation. It is believed that such collaborations will, strengthen the practice and empower participants; stimulate joint efforts; ensure minimal fund contribution and help maximize the use of limited funds, especially where finances are scarce. It will enhance quality of information gathered, ensure easy access to information, encourage staff cooperation and increase usability of results (O'Sullivan and D'Agostino 2002).

There is no doubt that the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond demand sound methodologies and skills for individuals, practitioners and organisations to cope with its complexities. It will demand of practitioners in Nigeria competence, efficiency, accuracy and effectiveness. We need to acquire knowledge and information which are the currencies for national and international development and useful tools for improving national economies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is pertinent to ask the following important question, viz, how do the challenges and prospects of programme evaluation in Nigeria relate generally to national, regional and international development?

While I salute the organisers of this conference for their wonderful effort at bringing together evaluation experts, researchers and practitioners from all over the world, I will like to add that international development would demand of evaluators a system of collaborations or networks. This will expose the different efforts being made by our various evaluation experts.

Also we need collaboration with other experts in economics, sociology, psychology and other fields in order to translate the quantitative results to qualitative assessment. Most of our national budgets especially in Nigeria are more in the quantitative than in the qualitative arena. These evaluations should not be cases for the 'showpiece', but in fact, a translation of the life of the people in quantifiable, practical and real benefits. The next indices should show in the following areas – health status, feeding or nutrition rates, housing and transportation patterns.

Much of the interest generated around programme evaluation in Nigeria have to do with the need to re-focus analyses on the realities of our country and to commit ourselves to the global reform necessary in programme evaluation. We, however, need support to be innovative. It is my hope and wish that participation in this conference will usher us into an era where strategies that practitioners, experts and researchers here present and elsewhere have developed will assist us to improve the evaluation culture in Nigeria so that Nigerian evaluators will be able to contribute positively to global development.

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