

DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF A COMPREHENSIVE MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIAL SECURITY AGENCY (SASSA): CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This paper provides the background to the monitoring and evaluation efforts and activities within the South African Social security context. Specific focus will be placed on the need for a results based Monitoring and evaluation systems which the agency has already adopted and finalized the development of the framework and the implementation plan currently being implemented. An integrated-result based Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Social Security is the first in a series of tools developed by the Monitoring and Evaluation Department within the South African Social Security Agency. The framework is a package of building blocks intended to foster and support a growing monitoring and evaluation culture within the Agency.

The development and implementation of SASSSA result based model for Monitoring and evaluation takes place within the context of a national government wide Monitoring and evaluation framework. An essential part of the work carried out by SASSA M&E efforts is measuring the results and outcomes of its programmes. In many cases government programmes are only evaluated on their activities. However, citizens increasingly demand to see that their taxes have been utilised to properly address problems and issues. If projects and programmes were based on results-based management principles, the evaluation of those projects and programmes will also be results-driven (Bruning & Ofir, 2005:1).

The focus of monitoring and evaluation social security is strategically linked to the objective of ensuring that provision of comprehensive social security services against vulnerability and poverty is done within the constitutional and legislative mandate of the South African Social Security Agency. Through this approach the agency will be able to assess whether it has actually achieved what it had initially set out to do. Following a results-based evaluation approach will require governments, to move beyond their reporting on inputs, activities and outputs, and also include outcomes and impact (Kusek & Rist 2002:1).

2 PERSPECTIVE FOR M&E IN SOUTH AFRICAN

The September 2005 Proposal and Implementation Plan for a Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWM&ES) defines monitoring as “a continuous managerial function

that aims to provide managers, decision-makers and main stakeholders with regular feedback and early indications of progress or lack thereof in the achievement of intended results and the attainment of goals and objectives”(2005: 1).

The constitutional foundational value of accountability (2005: 6) and the requirements of the Public Finance Management Act 1 of 1999, as well as the implementation of the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) and the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) have identified the need for governmental activities and spending to be aligned with defined objectives. A key strategic challenge is the need to increase the effectiveness of the public service in order to enable government to achieve its desired outcomes and strategic objectives. Whilst the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) on one hand determines government priorities for each five year period, the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) on the other hand determines government priorities for each three year period, which, in turn, informs plans, programmes and projects of all national government departments, provincial departments and public entities, including SASSA.

2.1 Information systems for M&E

It has been important for SASA M&E Department to design a centralized M&E Information system from the perspective of what information is needed. The approach has been “Systems are designed ‘backwards’” – starting with what information is needed, by whom and how frequently and working back to what data needs to be collected. This was done through the Stakeholder Information Needs Analysis survey.

It is the intention to introduce an automated M&E System in a phased implementation format. This will ensure that migration from paper-based to electronic system is well managed and informed by business processes. However, the system will be subject to continuous enhancements based on paradigm shifts in policy implementation and priorities.

Within an Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System, the dissemination of evaluation findings through the website, publications, newsletters, annual reviews and conversations with the partners within an M&E network forms a crucial component. Whilst information is only disseminated after a thorough review and assessment of Monitoring Plans and Multi-Year Evaluation Plans has been done, the dissemination is clearly informed by both the Monitoring and Evaluation system. Information dissemination within the monitoring system is one part of the integrated system. For example, the data collection processes, the development and/or review of objective indicators, the development of self-assessment tools and conducting of continuous surveys are all captured in monthly, quarterly, bi-annual and annual report formats.

All these aspects in turn form a repository of information within the desired Management Information System.

What is crucial to point out is that information dissemination is not a sterile one-way process. Rather, the communication process is interrogative and mutually inter-dependent. Therefore, monthly or annual reports are not necessarily ends in themselves but these are continuously informed and or amended by new policy and legislation. A typical example is the implementation of Regulation 10.6 as an amendment to the Social Assistance Act, 2004 which aims to extend the grant to people with alternative Identification documents. It is therefore crucial that information about the number of beneficiaries taking up the grant be adequately captured and continuously disseminated to inform future policy decisions and continuous improvement in the implementation of the programme.

2.2 Measures for Data collection and reporting on identified matrix of indicators

The GWM&E system is based on, amongst others, a comparative overview of the United States Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (which focuses on strategic plans, performance plans and performance reports), as well as of the Australian and New Zealand M&E systems. It was found that, in order to establish a platform for the GWM&E, the system must be both prescriptive about information to be submitted and accommodating with regard to how information was to be collected.

Within the South African context, the significant importance of the development of performance indicators have been placed specifically within the Proposal and Implementation Plan for a Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System as well as in the Draft National Guiding Principles & Standards for Monitoring and Evaluation of public policies and programmes in South Africa. These frameworks however, have limited mention on placing these indicators within a results-chain.

The department Monitoring and Evaluation within SASSA is responsible for the overall M&E system information management and maintenance. Within its system the department has ensured the linkages between a number of performance and impact indicators identified and the results chain with regard to programme milestones and targets. In this case, the matrix of indicators was developed and approved. This matrix includes aspects such as preliminary baselines and targets, critical assumptions, standards and indicators. Each indicator was also provided with a detailed definition (e.g. technical elements of the indicator's statement), including a unit of measurement. In addition, the data sources as well as the methods of data collection, the frequency and schedule of data collection, and the responsibilities for acquiring

data as well as plans for data analysis, reporting, review and use, and, finally, plans for communicating were also included

2.3 SASSA Multiyear Evaluation Plan

Subsequent to the adoption of the M&E Framework in 2007, SASSA has put a strong emphasis on the development of both Performance Monitoring Plan and the Multi-year Evaluation Plan containing, amongst others, the plan for data collection, the relevant indicators, and information dissemination strategy for all monitoring and evaluation reports.

2.3.1 Scope of SASSA Evaluations

Alignment between SASSA multiyear evaluation plan has been informed by a presidential directive that the existing government service delivery programmes must be assessed to determine the impact of such programmes on the lives of the poor people. The plan covers the period from 2008 up to 2011 and it will be annually reviewed. It will involve any activity that affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency, which will result in positive outcomes and impacts for the Agency. The period of the plan will adhere to priorities of the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) as stated in the strategic plan. The evaluation programmes covers all social assistance grant types offered by SASSA.

The programmes concentrates on the process, outcomes and impact based evaluation of all grants types. The process based evaluation includes all service delivery, implementation and support mechanisms to facilitate application until payment of all social assistance grant types. The following are identified process based evaluation for the period 2008 up to 2011.

- The effectiveness of an Integrated Community Registration Outreach Programme,
- Effectiveness of disability grant assessment models and tools,
- Phase in and the phase out of payment tender (implementation challenges and constraints),
- Efficiency of grants administration processes, constrains and challenges (The implementation of IGAP/MIS pilot projects), and
- Evaluating the effectiveness in development and implementation of standardised social relief of distress (process and integration into MIS in all regions).

2.3.2 Evaluation Approaches

Evaluations within SASSA focuses on the assessment of all the programmes in order to determine the impact of programmes and services on beneficiaries; to quantify the effectiveness of the Social Security interventions and to determine the best practice models of

process. Various evaluation designs are applied on impact evaluation projects, programme and process evaluations. This is intended to point out strengths and weaknesses of the social assistance programme, which will help to improve the programme design. In addition, evaluation provides much needed evidence on the potential administrative challenges on the disbursement of grants.

In terms of the 2006 approach (which differs in a number of respects from the above-mentioned 2005 perspective), evaluations, which should always address the general public interest, are to be guided by the six principles for evaluation. Programme evaluation (2006: 31) focuses on the collection of information “about a programme or some aspect of a programme in order to make necessary decisions about the programme”. Three major types of programme evaluation have been identified (2006: 34 – 37):

- Goals-based evaluation (determine whether a programme has achieved/is achieving its predetermined objectives)
- Process-based evaluation (gaining an understanding of how a programme really works)
- Outcomes-based evaluation (identifying benefits to beneficiaries/clients).

2.4 Maintaining and Sustaining SASSA’s M&E system

Ultimately, it is the demand for accountability and transparency that creates a sustainable system for M&E. The following aspects are highlighted as areas that will promote SASSA’s M&E system:

- 2.4.1 Champion who can lead the advocacy for, development of and sustainability of M&E system;
- 2.4.2 An environment that is in a state of readiness in terms of incentives and demands for designing and building a results-based M&E system;
- 2.4.3 Roles and responsibilities and existing structures for assessing performance of SASSA with clear lines of authority. This has more implications for change management and decentralisation of M&E responsibilities. There is also a need for a strong stakeholder participation and consultative processes that ensures that citizens actively holding government accountable;
- 2.4.4 Capacity development requirements for M&E system, for example technical and data management capacity that co-ordinates M&E efforts within national, district and local, subject and area expertise, data processing and statistical expertise (in relation to both supply and demand side of M&E). This also calls for the substantial investment in the engineering for M&E in terms of skills and expertise and requisite knowledge to hone the politics of monitoring and evaluation. Under-engineering the system has a potential of undermining M&E initiatives;

- 2.4.5 Implementation of results based model requires substantial consideration be given to matters of budgeting and the allocation of resources. At least 5-10 % budget for the institutionalization of M&E and a formalised link with other international, regional and national departments, appropriate line ministries, NGOs, or research institutions to enhance and align operations and efforts;
- 2.4.6 Establishment of multi-sectoral working groups with the various departments, agencies and sectors to provide consensus on various aspects of M&E design and implementation;
- 2.4.7 Knowledge management to ensure that lessons is shared with other projects, programmes and policies, across government, NGO, donor sectors.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Whilst there is a clear distinction between monitoring plans and a multi-year evaluation plan, both system talks of data collection and the utilization of primary or secondary data, which, is central to a result based Monitoring and Evaluation System. The implementation of a multi year evaluation Plan is informed by budget allocation. For SASSA to sustain evaluation, management has to ensure that evaluation forms part of the planning process including budget and MTEF. Evaluation projects are expensive; hence a need for earmarked funding for the identified projects is a necessity.

The implementation of multi-year evaluation plan is possible only with the buy-in from all management levels within the agency and various key stakeholders. More workshops are therefore required in order to encourage various institutions to focus their efforts in the identified areas.

4 REFERENCES

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