
PUBLIC POLICY EVALUATION IN MALAWI – SUBSTANTIVE OR PROCEDURAL?

Lloyd George Banda – ma-dev-12-20@cc.ac.mw

+265991 493 052

Master of Arts [Development Studies] Student

Department of Political Science and Administrative Studies

University of Malawi, Chancellor College

Abstract

Malawi desire to be a middle-income country by 2063 as envisioned in the Vision 2063. To achieve this status, there is need for public services that are fit for purpose, results oriented and high performing to facilitate a positive transformation and modernization of the economy. Pertinent to the agenda would be successful public policy evaluation to ensure that government institutions, programmes and projects are well structured into process-results-feedback approach. This article sought to analyse the effectiveness of current Malawi's public sector evaluation policies. Empirical literature revealed that Malawi's Performance Management System (PMS) has failed to address its objectives. Very few public sectors managed to attempt the system, such as the ministry education, but found it hard to effectively implement the policy largely due lack of knowledge among supervisors. This article, therefore, recommends that each public sector institution should be responsible at the expense of its managers to identify policy evaluation systems that are compatible with the professional qualification of the majority of its workers.

Keywords: *Malawi, PMS, Evaluation, Process-results-feedback*

Introduction

Evaluation in the field of public policy is defined as an analytical tool and procedure meant to do two things. First, evaluation research which as an analytical tool involves investigating a policy program to obtain all information pertinent to the assessment of its performance, both process and result; second, evaluation as a phase of the policy cycle more generally refers to the reporting of such information back to the policy-making process (Fischer, 2007; Wollmann, 2005). In other words, evaluation is a tool designed to facilitate and improve the decision-making process where policies are concerned.

In an effort to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of services to the citizens, many governments of the world are adopting new reforms in the civil service. Some of the reforms include developing a performance management system (hereafter referred to as Public policy evaluation) which is a significant step to improve the work performance and productivity of civil servants (Kalowafumbi, 2013).

The local, municipal, or federal governments are among the economic agents that more often uses public policy evaluation in their delivery of public goods and services such as construction of roads, hospitals, stadiums, street rights, street cleaning, sewage and trash disposals, water, education, criminal justice, electricity among others. Mansouri (2015) argued that the use of evaluation in such public projects acts as a way of raising awareness among people of what the public authorities are doing. Deductively, public policy evaluation is vital to restoring people's faith in political action.

Experience around the world has demonstrated that generating and using information on the performance of service providers by both government and non-governmental actors can lead to substantial enhancement of public transparency and accountability which in turn fosters adherence to higher quality standards in public service delivery (Hughes, et al, 2001). However, policy evaluation which in this paper will be referred to as the 'process-results-feedback' approach needs to be closely analyzed, both theoretically and practically. This paper seeks to excavate the successes of the process-results-feedback approach in the public domain while not shunning away from assessing empirics in determining whether or not it is just a rubberstamp in public service delivery.

Public Policy Evaluation: A Global Perspective

Mansouri (2015) described public policy evaluation as an initiative that involves performing an assessment of public activities in relation to a series of criteria and is intended to simulate, anticipate and measure the direct and indirect effects of public policies. A report (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2020) stressed that policy evaluation contributes fundamentally to sound public governance. It can help governments improve the design and interpretation of public policies that can, in turn, lead to prosperity for their country and well-being for its citizens. Most importantly, policy evaluation contributes to promoting public accountability, learning and increased public sector effectiveness through improved decision-making.

Policy evaluation is a very broad field of study that has a long history of existence. It is an issue that has transhistorically been attracting increasing levels of interest across the globe. The UN, evaluation managers and users from all over the world, declared 2015 the International Year of Evaluation, and is popularly dubbed as EvalYear.

The OECD (2020) report provides a broad analysis for over 42 countries on the institutionalization of policy evaluation, its quality and use. This systemic perspective helps to give room for a full discussion of how evaluation can contribute to the policy cycle as well as the tools that rely upon evaluation, such as budgeting and regulation. It is argued that a sound institutional set-up backed by the government would help align isolated and unplanned evaluation efforts into more formal and systematic approaches. Promoting both better quality and use can have a greater impact in ensuring that evaluation fully achieves its purpose.

Following from the 2015 EvalYear, many countries adopted and embedded policy evaluations in their written laws of the land. Developing a legal framework for policy evaluation backed by the constitution on its own shows of strong commitment on the matter. There are many questions that can be asked from the emergency, spread and advocacy of policy evaluation across the world. For example, how has policy evaluation emerged as one of the global issues? Yet the world has many social, political and economic pathogens such as pandemics, terrorisms, recessions, fiscal deficits to mention but a few, all of which would be collectively dealt with strong international conventions.

One would think that the international organizations should have prioritized the social, political and economic evils that hinder development. Mere convections on policy evaluation have obviously made developing countries fork out huge sums of money just to make their presidents, managers and other users of evaluation attend various international evaluation meetings as well as the process of mending their constitutions to include policy evaluation that meet international standards. Is policy evaluation necessary for sound budgetary and regulation consideration? Is it a diversion from pertinent development issues affecting human lives?

According to the report (EvalPartners, 2015), the aim of designating 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation is to advocate and promote evaluation and evidence-based policy making at international, regional, national and local levels. Governments, international partners and civil society need to know how policies and programs shape the lives of people today and in future

generations. The argument here is that an efficient and effective process-result-feedback approach will help public and private sector agencies to implement meaningful and yielding projects. Evaluation involves designing project plans before execution, anticipating results and how to deal with unanticipated results. It also involves forecasting potential feedback from people. This implies that this process-result-feedback approach is very vital to the success of public service delivery.

Policy evaluation, at this juncture, can be seen not as a means to an end in itself. Rather it is a means to development goals. It is adopted and administered to foster development projects pertinent to human lives including delivery of public goods and services. There are many market problems associated with the provision of public goods and services. It is important to note that public goods and services cannot be offered by the private enterprise. Public goods and services have a zero-price effect.

According to Robbins (2005), the zero-price effect is a phenomenon whereby the demand for a good, service, or commodity is significantly greater at a price of exactly zero compared to a price even slightly greater than zero. This means private sector individuals and firms cannot provide public services due to zero likelihood of making profit. In other words, public services provision results into the free rider problem. This is because it is impossible to exclude those who cannot pay from using the services. As a result, the whole burden of public service provision is shouldered by governments.

Therefore, 2015 EvalYear provided a global dialogue among regional and national evaluation actors, evaluation offices of International Organizations, including UN agencies and the World Bank's IEG, OECD/DAC and developing countries, private foundations and other key stakeholders. The aim of the dialogue was to advocate and promote evaluation and evidence-based policy making at international, regional, national and local levels (EvalPartners, 2015). As such, the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) (2017-2020), adopted by General Assembly resolution 71/243, calls upon the UN development system to further "support the building, development and strengthening of national capacities to support development results at the country level and to promote national ownership and leadership, in line with national development policies, plans and priorities." This for example, includes public policy evaluation in public service delivery (UNDG – UNDAF, 2009).

Public Policy Evaluation in Malawi

Reports (macrotrend, 2015; World Bank) shows that Malawi is one of the poorest countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with only a GNI per capita of 380 US dollars in 2019. As per GNI ranking, Malawi sits 43rd out of 46 Sub-Saharan African Countries. Malawi has all common features of the thirty-four countries that are classified as poorest or in fair terms least developed countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. One common feature has been receiving huge chunks of financial donations to aid public service delivery. A lot remains to be desired in the public service delivery in Malawi. The use of public funds from all sources of government revenue including donations in public service delivery remains questionable.

In quest for public policy evaluation, the Malawi Government introduced the Performance Management System in 2008 in an effort to enhance efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in the delivery of public services. However, since its introduction there have been indications that the system is encountering a number of challenges which are derailing and obstructing its implementation. Munyanya and Farhat (2020), stressed that the performance Management system was meant to be used as a tool to communicate the goals and organizational objectives of its employees, motivate its employees to achieve organizational objectives and track the performance of each employee as an individual or a member of the team to achieve the ultimate goal of the organization.

A study conducted by Munyala (2012) which focused on the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MoEST), revealed that by 2013, the system had not been implemented despite being introduced in 2008. The performance management involves management of performance at both the individual and the organizational levels, but the study observed that the big challenge in making the system more effective is at the individual level where little progress can be traced. For example, many civil servants under MoEST filled the Agreement Forms on Performance Management System in 2010 but no follow up by management since then. This just implies that delivery of public education services remains unevaluated and unmonitored in Malawi.

Chisambula (2015) also conducted a study on Malawi's introduced Management Performance System. The study find out that the performance management system in public institutions does not provide feedback to the officers, and that the majority of the supervisors lacks knowledge and skills to implement the performance management system in public institutions, furthermore, it was

noted that the public instructions were not using the results of performance management system in making administrative decisions, the study observed that public institutions had no policy on the management of perception towards performance management system. The study established that the psychological contract was also at sometimes being violated. All these negatively affected the morale of the public officers as individuals and organizations as a whole.

Though the Management Performance System was adopted as means to increase public policy evaluation, it has been seen to lack a means of providing feedback to public service officials and even the process itself has been whacky. The process of execution of projects in various ministries and departments in Malawi has not been effectively monitored and evaluated. Small projects like the construction of a two-laned and 15 meters long Mudi bridge was awarded in 2008 but was completed in 2020, despite being in the itinerant main trading city of Blantyre. What is more disappointing is that many projects have been documented as completed and were paid to contractors but up to now there is nothing on the actual ground. This is common for projects in rural areas. For example, the other half of item number three of the contracts which was awarded to Mpukuto Civil Engineering in 2008 under procurement number 49D/BR/NR/NB/08 remains undone (Road Authority, 2008).

The project involved the construction of Kawiya Bridge at Chintheche on M1 road in Nkhata-Bay. The other part involved the construction Musawa School road leading to a typical rural area which mainly supplies food to Chintheche and Nkhata-Bay district. This is enough evidence to conclude that only those projects which are in the front stage are hastened for snapshots leaving rural projects. This makes the rural-urban bias theory holds for Malawi. Lack of public policy evaluation for public service delivery especially in rural areas is doing Malawi more harm than good. For example, 82.89% of the total population of Malawi live in rural areas (World Bank).

Corruption is one of the social pathogens that poses a serious challenge in the development of Malawi. The country suffers from various types of corruption – from high level political corruption to petty bribery that impedes service delivery and patronage and nepotism that exacerbates inequality and poverty in Malawi society. Corruption is seen to be particularly severe in the police, registry and permit services, customs, and the judiciary. There are also reports of widespread corruption and extortion by public officials in procurement (Nawazi and Hodess, 2012). Procurement and logistics department is one of the crucial departments of all government agencies

in public service delivery. As such, lack of proper checks of the process-result-feedback in this department has and will continue letting the outflow of government funds without tangible public services.

Efforts to Promote Public Policy Evaluation in Malawi

There remains a lot to be desired for Malawi to achieve middle income country status. It is recognized by the state (Office of the President and Cabinet, 2018) that to achieve such a status, there is need for a public service that is fit for purpose, results oriented and high performing to facilitate positive transformation and modernization of the economy. Since independence in 1994, the republic of Malawi has been implementing public sector reforms aimed at improving public sector governance, efficiency and effectiveness that are crucial for delivery of quality services to citizens, for realizing national development goals and for making Malawi globally competitive. About five political, legal and administrative reforms had been executed during the democratic period between 1994 to 2014. These includes; the development of new constitution, public service management act, public procurement act and public service management act.

Despite all these public policy acts, public service delivery has remained poor during the entire democratic era of Malawi. In 2015, the public sector reforms were relaunched under the presidency of Arthur Peter Mutharika in quest to deal with weaknesses of the previous reforms. The paper work of the Public Sector Reforms Policy Framework provides a framework that will guide formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all reforms in the public sector. It was argued in the report (OPC, 2018) that these reforms will help to enhance trust and confidence in the public service delivery and governance as well as to improve service delivery to all parts of Malawi. However, it remains a question largely unanswered whether Malawians still have trust in public service delivery with every political party in power not escaping corruption scandals in one or more of its agencies as funds meant for public services end up in the bank accounts of public officials and political gurus.

Besides the Malawi National Public Sector Reforms policy (2018 – 2022) stands the Malawi National Public Sector Reforms (2018 – 2022). While the former emphasizes on public policy monitoring and evaluation of all reforms, the later delve into management of the public service to effectively deliver public goods and services and facilitate development inline with the National development agenda as provided in the national vision and Malawi Growth Development Strategy

(OPC, 2018). All these documents were produced the same year overlapping each other in their strategies. One would ask as to why are our public policies very excellent on paper. As a country, we are too procedural while public policies are not substantive on the ground.

Challenges faced in Malawi's Public Service Delivery

Mabomba (2012) conducted a research to examine Malawi's administrative reform and its impact on service delivery. The study excavated several negative impacts of the reforms on service delivery since there was no record of changes in the delivery of public services. The study revealed that Malawi's civil service suffer from unprofessionalism, inefficiency, corruption, weak public support for reform implementation, lack of political commitment, and lack of ownership of reforms. All these problems unveil the existence of a gap between rhetoric and reality of civil service reform programs in Malawi.

In similar terms, Kalowafumbi (2013) conducted a research to examine the implementation challenges to performance management system (PMS) in Malawi's the civil service. Similar to public policy evaluation as a process-result-feedback approach, PMS is a process that begins by translating overall institutional objectives into clear individual objectives that will be set as targets for individual employees on a quarterly or annual basis. The performance target of individual employees also sets the agenda for supervisors and individual public sector employees regarding the monitoring and reviewing of performance (Amos *et al.* 2008). This was a good approach by the government of Malawi to track the performance of civil servants to ensure efficient and effective public service delivery to the citizens. Key challenges to the implementation of PMS were inadequate consultation with main stakeholders who are workers themselves and a lack of training on the part of employees including the supervisory officers.

Conclusion

Malawi has been excellent in initiating various policy acts aimed at improving public service delivery. Documents are in place which outline the aims and objectives of policies. However, empirical literature shows that there is little done on the actual ground. Policy evaluations are hampered by corruption, lack of political will as well as commitment on the part of civil servant who are at the far end of the continuum of service delivery. In this regard, this paper concludes that policy evaluations in Malawi are staged, theatrical and procedural with a clear absence of

substantivity in operations. It is therefore suggested that each sector or ministry should be responsible for its own policy evaluations but adopting a system that will be largely welcome by civil servants. This can be done by adopting a system that can be handled by the majority of the dominant profession career in the sector as training workers for a management system proves to be costly.

References

- Amos, T.L., Ristow, A., Ristow, L. & Pearse, N.J. (2008) *Human Resource Management*, 3rd Ed., Cape Town: Juta& Co Ltd.
- Chisambula, F (2015). *The Impact of Performance Management System on Motivation in Public Sector in Malawi: A case of Human Rights Commission*. Masters Thesis. Dublin Business School. Dublin.
- Fischer, F., Miller, G.J., & Sidney, M.S. (Eds.). (2007). *Handbook of Public Policy Analysis: Theory, Politics, and Methods (1st ed.)*. Routledge. Pp. 393 – 400.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315093192>
- Huhs, T., Scott, K., & Maassen, P. (2001), *Improving Public Service Delivery: Guidance for developing OGP commitment*. Open Government Partnership. Pp. 2 – 7
- Kalowafumbi, F.T (2013). *Implementation Challenges to Performance Management System (PMS) in Malawi's Civil Service: Case of Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MoEST)*. Masters Thesis. University of Fort Hare, Alice, Eastern Cape.
- Macrotrends (2015). *Malawi GNI Per Capita 1962 – 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/MWI/malawi/gni-per-capita#:~:text=Malawi%20gni%20per%20capita%20for,a%202.86%25%20decline%20from%202015>. [10 April 2021]
- Monsouri-Guilani, N. (2015). *Promoting a culture of public policy evaluation*. <https://www.lecese.fr/sites/default/files/pdf/>
- Munyanya, A & Farhat, Z (2020). *An Assessment of Performance Contracting in the Malawi Civil Service: A Case Study of Government Headquarters*. International Journal Advanced Research. Vol. 8, Issue 5. Pp. 523 – 534

- Nawazi, F & Hodess, R (2012). *Overview of corruption and anti-corruption in Malawi*. U4 Export Answer. [online]. Accessed from: https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/329_Overview-of_corruption_and_anti-corruption_in_Malawi.pdf [17 April 2021]
- Office of the President and Cabinet (2018). *Malawi National Public Sector Reforms Policy (2018 – 2022)*. National Planning Commission (NPC) Publications.
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020). *Improving Governance with Policy Evaluation: Lessons from Country Experiences*. Retrieved from: <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/89b1577d-en...> [10 April 2021]
- Robbins, D (ed). (2005). *Handbook of Public Sector Economics*. Boca Raton: CRC Press. Retrieved from: http://www.untag-smd.ac.id/files/Perpustakaan_Digital_2/PUBLIC%20POLICY%20 [10 April 2021]
- The world Bank Data (2021) *GNI per Capita, PPP (current international \$) – Sub-Saharan Africa*. Retrieved from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=ZG&most_recent_value_desc=true [10 April 2021]
- United Nations Development Group (2009). *Capacity Development: UDAF Companion Guidance*. Retrieved from <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion...> [10 April 2021]
- Wollmann , H. (2005). *Evaluation and Evaluation Research*. Conferencia importada en la UAM el 3 de junio de 2005. <http://www.uam.es/centros/derecho/cpolitica/papers.htm>