

## NATIONAL PLANING PROCESSES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

*AfCoP Secretariat*



Knowledge  
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### SYNOPSIS

National development planning is a need and a priority in Africa to achieve sustainable development and structural transformation. The AfCoP discussion on national planning and accountability has helped to highlight the numerous challenges that African countries face, despite the long history of development planning in Africa, going back to the 1960s. Nevertheless, it also pointed out the lessons learned and the capacity needs for effective national planning. Engaged leadership, effective institutions (including an efficient Central Planning Agency), and enhanced citizen's participation (without forgetting the gender dimension of it) are the main recommendations drawn from the AfCoP exchanges.

### Introduction

Under the auspices of the Africa for Results Initiative (Afrik4R), the African Community of Practice (AfCoP) on Managing for Development Results (MfDR) held an online discussion on “National Planning Processes and Accountability” from January 20<sup>th</sup> to February 2014 on the English platform and from January 6<sup>th</sup> to January 24<sup>th</sup> 2014 on the French platform. The purpose of this online discussion was to shed light on MfDR practices and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of existing national planning strategies. The specific points to investigate were divided into two main streams.

For the **planning process**, the focus was on:

- The lessons learned and experiences on the extent to which national planning processes are inclusive, consultative and regionally focused.
- The adequacy of institutional arrangements for national planning and implementation including budgeting.
- The challenges encountered (e.g. data collection, use and dissemination).

For **accountability for development results**, the interest was on:

- The extent to which accountability measures are built into the national plans and the best practices available for knowledge exchange.
- The extent to which accountability measures are articulated with clarity.
- The extent to which all development players are included in the accountability arrangements.
- Lessons learned and good practices on mutual accountability planning and implementation.

### African countries need national planning strategies for development results

The history of development planning in Africa goes back to early post-Independence years and has gone through different phases and strategies over time. Since the beginning of the new millennium, African countries have progressively turned to more comprehensive long-term development vision and

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planning frameworks. These plans are not limited to poverty reduction anymore, but aim at including social development, structural transformation, sustainable economic growth and job creation.

Compared to the plans developed in the 1960s, the public sector is not the unique/major driver of these plans, but they include also the private sector, as well as a variety of stakeholders, such as civil society organizations and development partners. Although a stronger ownership exists among African stakeholders nowadays and these processes try to be more consultative and participatory, many challenges remain: planning frameworks have to be improved in Africa in order to translate development aspirations and priorities into development results.

### **National development planning in Africa: current challenges**

Development planning in Africa faces two main sets of challenges: political and institutional.

The political challenge is mainly linked to leadership and to the overall weak commitment of political leaders to development planning. Real and strong commitment should inspire a clear vision of the changes expected from the strategy: the outputs, outcomes and impacts should be explicit and the priorities ranked and agreed upon by the majority.

This vision has to inspire the national development policy: the necessary framework for development planning has not only to exist, but should be known by all the stakeholders involved. National development plans are often not effectively implemented: as the scope and implementation modalities are always complex and not well thought through, there is the need therefore to make them simple but rigorous. The planned policies and interventions need to be evaluated and revised or refined at agreed intervals to ensure that they remain relevant by adapting to changes in the external conditions or to unexpected risks impacting on the national scenario.

From an institutional point of view, African countries need to create or strengthen institutions and agencies, in charge of the formulation and revision of national development plans to ensure that they are fully equipped and capacitated to support the national planning and evaluation process. The capacity transformation of these institutions and agencies must be aligned to the broader strategy to motivate all the key players along the strategic planning value chain to promote effective implementation coordination among the entities.

Coordination of action among stakeholders remains problematic. Development strategies are often fragmented, lacking effective coordination between key stakeholders (such as between ministries of planning and the ministries or agencies in charge of development planning). Ensuring harmonized collaboration would significantly improve the overall efficiency of development strategies, improving resource allocation, while better linking the planning cycles to the budget available for every phase, for an effective implementation of the national development plan.

### **Promoting accountability for national development planning**

Current national planning approaches rely on a top-down structure in which a small group of highly skilled individuals design a comprehensive strategy used by the government to guide future policies. Little room is left for innovative ideas. New planning frameworks are needed to secure accountability, enhance innovation, ensure that unconventional ideas receive some attention and experiment relevant suggestions. There is a need for alternative models to address the limits of current planning approaches (i.e. low capacity of implementation, limited political will and restricted participation of civil society).

To be accountable, governments need to involve citizens at every different stage of the planning process, from the definition of the strategy to the

evaluation of its results. Nevertheless, consultative approaches do not have to be confused with participatory processes: consultation provides opportunities for citizens to share their perspectives, but it does not give them any active and direct role in the design and implementation of strategic policies. Active participation of citizens at every step implies a shift from accountability from the supply side (on the state side) to accountability on the demand side (promoting citizen watchdogs to hold states accountable).

Accountability applies also to budget: mutual accountability of donors and grant recipients/beneficiaries ensures that resources are used judiciously to achieve the intended benefits within a reasonable budget. Without mutual accountability, African countries cannot optimize the benefits of their development outcomes.

### Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and accountability for results

M&E of national plans and accountability for results also remain a challenge, especially when resources are scarce. The institutional design remains weak, technical skills are too limited, and recommendations fail to be implemented.

There is no doubt that M&E is crucial for national planning and accountability at least in theory, practically most of the national development plans do not effectively link planning and evaluation. The existing gap between planning, implementation and national M&E systems in Africa, poses a serious tread to effective implementation and achievement of development results at national level. This is due to the fact that evaluation results of previous phases of the national strategy are not systematically integrated into the succeeding phase. Most often, results from previously strategies are treated as standalone occurrences without the effort or possibility to clearly trace how the achievements and lessons learned from the evaluation can inform and enhance the design and implementation of new ones.

### Capacity needs for development planning and accountability

Many capacity gaps can be found at different levels for development planning and accountability purposes. Only a few of them are highlighted below, focusing on states/public sectors capacity gaps.

- i. **State capacities to effectively design, implement and monitor planning frameworks:** structural transformation and sustainable economic growth should clearly and effectively be the key priorities of development planning strategies.
- ii. **Administrative capacities of African states, limiting the implementation of plans:** civil servants have to be constantly retrained to leverage their skills and capabilities according to the changing development priorities and to familiarize them with new planning techniques and methodologies.
- iii. **Planning capacities can be enhanced by peer-learning mechanisms and experience sharing:** to this extent, the AfCoP platform serves as a repository of research, but allows also development planners to exchange ideas and experience related to all aspects of planning.
- iv. **Country's absorption capacity for available resources:** it is linked to weak systems; strategies to enhance countries absorption capacities of resources have to be integrated in national planning.
- v. **Statistical capacities:** the effectiveness of national planning systems relies largely on the quality and availability of data; in fact, data inform the setting of priorities and the tracking of performance. In African countries, the multiplicity of data-producing institutions, their lack of capacities and resources render difficult the harmonization and coordination of data handling.
- vi. **Capacities for gender planning and budgeting:** research in this domain could help have a better understanding of the relations between women's needs and the conditions allowing empowering them; gender-based resource allocation could certainly help to this extent.

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- vii. **E-government capacities** could help African states to fix some of the gaps of their public administrations, achieving what previous reforms of the public sector have failed to achieve; for planning and accountability purposes, this could help agencies and processes to be more efficient.

### Conclusion

To achieve sustainable economic growth and successful structural transformation, African countries need to continue to plan their national development. If several challenges remain in the area of development planning, opportunities for a better design, implementation and monitoring of national development strategies are also arising, with prudent decision and increased policy dialogue.

If development planning is an unquestionable need for African countries, the exercise may take very different forms: the degree of comprehensiveness, the duration and detail may vary greatly and accordingly opinions about what is a good development plan vary greatly among experts and stakeholders. Some of them even call for sector- and/or context-specific plans as more relevant and appropriate in a fast changing world. Others advise to harmonize national planning strategies to better federate partners and relevant stakeholders; the

implementation of a communication strategy would in this case disseminate the common framework to all the stakeholders involved in the implementation of development interventions.

Besides the different views, some common points emerged about development planning. The Central Planning Agency and its effectiveness for the formulation and revision of the national plan, for recommending policies, for reporting and evaluating the implementation plan and for technical assistance are unanimously recognized.

The design and implementation of inclusive and participatory planning strategies, including the active participation of citizens is also crucial. Governments need to show that the direct participation of citizens along the entire planning process is both wanted and valued. Planning authorities should investigate possible ways to design collaborative structures making such participation both feasible and relevant. If the gender dimension of this participation is given the needed attention, this could also be a pragmatic step forward for women empowerment in African countries.



This knowledge series is intended to summarize good practices and key policy findings on managing for development results. The views expressed in the notes are those of the authors. Notes are widely disseminated and are available on the website of the Africa for Results initiative (AfriK4R), at: [www.afrik4r.org/page/resources](http://www.afrik4r.org/page/resources)