

National Evaluation Policy Narratives: The Happening of Kenya's National Evaluation Policy

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ABSTRACT

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Despite the significance of National Evaluation Policies (NEPs) for good governance, there is limited understanding of how these policies are shaped or formed. Additionally, existing literature lacks a nuanced exploration of how NEP subgroups influence evaluation policy processes in sub-Saharan countries like Kenya. This dissertation identifies and explains the processes and dynamics of establishing national evaluation policies. Such policies strengthen and structure national evaluation capacities (NECs), including improving evaluation utilization and ensuring the transferability of these capacities. Specifically, as a case study, this research focuses on Kenya's NEP process and generates knowledge and insights on its response to increasing democratic and accountability space in the country. This study acknowledges donor agencies' history and extensive role in advancing program evaluation in Africa and affirms their central role in the evaluation policy formation process. It employs the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and Chirau et al.'s (2020) National Evaluation System Framing to identify relevant policy subgroups for NPF's meso-level coding and analysis. This qualitative study analyzed data from key informant interviews, existing documents, and grey literature using established NPF codebooks. The analysis generated data points that helped identify and characterize the components of the NPF, including the policy setting, plot, characters (heroes, villains, and victims), the moral of the story, and the narrative strategies employed to sway opinions. Three main subgroup themes emerged from the analysis. First, the findings affirm that donor agencies remain dominant in Kenya's national evaluation capabilities, forming a coalition with the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (MED), the policy custodians in government. These two subgroups operated in unison and proposed provisions for MED's semi-autonomy while advocating for the policy's approval, making them the willing coalition. However, shadowy government bureaucracy resisted the coalition's plans, making the policy narrative unfavorable to them. Second, this villainy was shared, albeit to a lesser extent, by the voluntary organizations for professional evaluators (VOPEs), whose disorganization and leadership challenges caused confusion and discord among evaluators, diminishing their agency. Finally, the devil shift narrative strategy employed by MED and the evaluators suggests parliament's slackened evaluation efforts. Their role is understood; however, Kenya's parliament lacked sufficient capacity to engage in the policy process, except for one critical instance when they compelled a response from the Executive, hastening the policy's approval process. Overall, there was inadequate capacity within both the executive and parliament to support the policy process, leading to the study's key finding that evaluation capacity should precede national evaluation policy processes and not the reverse. NEPs cannot help when structures for supporting or implementing the NEP are nonexistent. Future research on national evaluation capacity should further investigate the role of government bureaucracy in advancing program evaluation and explore ways to engage them more effectively in national evaluation policy processes. The changing aid environment and the implications of Africa's overreliance on donor support for program evaluation can also be explored.

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General Audience Abstract

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In 2022, Kenya's Cabinet approved a National Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) policy to help institutionalize and strengthen evaluation capacity in the country. This study investigated the processes leading up to the policy's approval and the stakeholder narratives that enhanced or impeded the policy process. The study further considers stakeholder interests and how they influenced the process. The study employed a Public Policy research framework that analyzes stakeholder-level narratives. This was used together with a Research on Evaluation framing that indicated that a national evaluation system in Africa comprises an enabling environment, which in this dissertation is represented by donor agencies, the government-wide M&E structure that is represented by the M&E Directorate (MED) in Kenya, parliament, and evaluator associations. The study findings show that there is still an overreliance on donor agencies, and the changing aid structures pose significant challenges. Secondly, there was a general view that despite the policy being approved, it failed to incorporate key issues as proposed by donors and MED, making key stakeholders lose interest in its implementation. Finally, the donors and MED formed an alliance that helped advance this policy and are considered its heroes. However, further analysis of the items funded by the donors exposes the government's lack of capacity and will to advance evaluation in Kenya. Government austerity measures that eliminated evaluation budgets in government further prove that program evaluation is not a priority in the public sector, leaving it as a preserve of donor agencies. Parliament and evaluation associations are key in this policy process, but have less agency or interest in leading discourses to salvage Kenya's national evaluation capacity.

DEDICATION

I remember and honor my late grandmothers, Isabella Yoya Mise (Abella) and Priscila Ogada Agutu (Nyogugu), and hopefully inspire my son D. Tom Ouma and his cousins, Jnr, Abuto, Diyu, Esther, GG, Jemo, Jay, Jamal, Sanaa, Skai, Cassel, Gee, Zuri, Nyang'wono, and Robert, with the message that they can be anything they want in this world, provided we all remain committed to worthy causes.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Problem Statement.....	5
Narrative policy framework expectations/theoretical propositions.....	8
Research questions.....	10
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
Evaluation Policy Concepts and Trends.....	13
The Essence of Evaluation Policy.....	16
Evaluation policy taxonomies.....	19
National Evaluation System Framing.....	22
National Evaluation Policy.....	28
Donor influence on evaluation practice and national evaluation policies.....	35
Evaluation Policy Research in Africa.....	37
Evaluation practice in Kenya.....	39
National Evaluation Policy and Good Governance.....	44
Theoretical Framework.....	47
Conceptual framework.....	57
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY.....	60
Research design.....	60

Study’s onto-epistemic framing	61
Case study misconceptions and myths	62
Why a case study?	63
A case for the pragmatic paradigm	64
Research methods.....	68
Research participant recruitment.....	71
Data collection and transcription.....	73
Coding and data analysis.....	73
Study area and research approvals	75
General ethical principles and considerations	75
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS	77
Data insights	78
RQ1: How did the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy come to be?	81
RQ 1.1: What is the role of international forces in Kenya’s M&E policy agenda-setting?	89
RQ 1.2: What narratives did the M&E policy sub-groups drive in Kenya’s evaluation policy agenda?.....	101
RQ 2. What shadow interests influence the policy subgroups’ narratives?	122
RQ 2.1: What policy subgroup goals are at cross-purpose with the overarching evaluation agenda?.....	130
RQ 2.2 In what ways, if at all, is Kenya’s national evaluation policy important to the policy subgroups?.....	148
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	156
Summary	156
RQ1. How did the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy come to be?	161
RQ 2. What shadow interests influence the policy subgroups’ narratives?	170
Recommendations and Conclusion	174

REFERENCES	177
APPENDICES	194
Appendix I – Research timeline	194
Appendix II – NPF codebook.....	195
Appendix III – Data collection tools	196
Appendix IV – Virginia Tech IRB Approval (IRB 24-105)	199
Appendix V – Egerton University ISERC Approval (EUISERC/APP/340/2024)	200
Appendix VI – NACOSTI Research License	201

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: National Evaluation Capacity Conference Highlights	29
Table 2: The Kenya national evaluation policy evolution summary	42
Table 3: Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) assumptions and implications for study	52
Table 4: The Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy Development Process and available Documents	69
Table 5: Some key informants and relevance to the study	72
Table 6: Relevant files for document analysis.....	78
Table 7: Kenya’s evaluation policy process donors	90

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation investigates the dynamics of Kenya's national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy processes and their potential impacts on evaluation capacity building and utilization. The study seeks to explain how national evaluation policy happens by analyzing the policy subsystem dynamics that facilitate or impede national evaluation policy design and use. Likewise, this research assesses stakeholder shadow interests and power plays among policy actors and highlights conflicts arising from divergent interests and agendas. The hoped-for utility of this study is an enhanced capacity to conduct and utilize evaluations for better decision-making and responsiveness to Africa's development needs. Further, a robust national evaluation policy (NEP) can potentially strengthen the national evaluation ecosystem and facilitate its integration into public policy learning and decision-making structures.

The demand for stronger and more effective national evaluation systems is on the rise in Africa (Makadzange, 2022; Porter & Goldman, 2013). This rising demand responds to the increasing need for evidence-based decision making, accountability, and learning, specifically in governments (Fraser & Morkel, 2020). As such, African governments increasingly employ monitoring and evaluation for good governance, responsive leadership, and inclusivity even in the wake of public sector reforms (Kanyamuna et al., 2020) and to address the "ever-rising expectation from ordinary citizens" (Makadzange, 2022, p. 1). Further emphasis is placed on stronger and resilient national M&E systems that help inform policy and development outcomes (Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP, 2022). The strengthened systems ideally and ultimately lead to better governance, accountability, evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and stakeholder empowerment (Chirau et al., 2022; Dlakavu et al., 2021).

A national evaluation system (NES) is a structure “that defines the commissioning, undertaking, and use of evaluations and provides guidance around institutional arrangements” (Chirau et al., 2020, p. 2). Chirau further classifies NES components into (i) government-wide evaluation systems with the national evaluation policy (NEP) and the M&E Directorate (MED) at its core, (ii) the legislature, (iii) voluntary organizations for professional evaluators (VOPEs) and civil society organizations, and (iv) an enabling environment facilitated by donor organizations, given their dominance within the evaluation space in Africa. The NEPs formalize and institutionalize NESs, making them integral in whole-government evaluation systems. NEP’s prominence in NES is confirmed by the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) report that emphasized that NEPs provide an “overall framework and direction for NES” (Independent Evaluation Office of UNDP, 2022, p. 38). However, the report adds that the NEP alone is insufficient for evaluation utilization, capacity, and institutionalization. Instead, the system, as classified by Chirau, should work harmoniously for better national outcomes. A good governance framework necessitates institutionalizing and building resilient evaluation systems at national and devolved government units, non-profit organizations, and foundations (Hart & Mark, 2022).

Studying and generating knowledge on NEPs enhances the understanding of NES. This study focused on the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, 2022, which was promulgated to address Kenya’s weak or non-existent evaluation systems. Specifically, the policy is meant to (i) establish a legal framework for effective M&E operationalization, (ii) establish an M&E culture to inform policy decision-making processes, (iii) coordinate and structure M&E functions and reporting in the country, (iv) enhance institutional and technical M&E capacity, and (v) increase evaluation utilization in Kenya (Government of Kenya, 2022).

The policy instrument aims to create an "enabling framework for coordination, implementation, and management of the M&E function in the public sector to facilitate the achievement of the Country's development agenda" (p. 8). The policy's expected outcome is a national evaluation system integrated and aligned with public-policy decision-making systems for sustainability, concurrence, and harmony in decision-making and learning.

The intended research outcome is enhanced evaluative thinking, to promote national program evaluation culture, to build evaluation capacity and utilize the evaluation outcomes, facilitate evidence-based policy decision-making, and enhance transparency and response to public needs. Research on the NEP highlights its political and structural features such as the policy's technical feasibility, anticipated future constraints, value acceptability, policy compatibility, political agenda and public good, implications of personnel turnover and regime change, organized political forces, and the policy's jurisdiction (Birkland, 2019 & Liu et al., 2010).

This research provides insights into the policy's technical feasibility and the extent to which it meets its objectives. Based on Trochim's (2009) classifications, an evaluation policy is technically feasible when it (a) is an effective communication tool, (b) is a tool for transparency and democratic governance, (c) enhances evaluation utilization, (d) is a source of learning, and (f) guides evaluation methodology and governance frame. Other classifications mentioned by other scholars include the policy's technical capacity to (g) connect various evaluation elements in a systems approach (Dillman & Christie, 2017), (h) plan future evaluation strategies (Stern, 2009), (i) provide a legal reference, and (j) utilize evaluation at leadership and strategic levels (Kinarsky & Christie, 2022a).

This study also assessed the possibilities of the policy's failure in the future. Some policy failures can be circumstantial and not tied to the policy design and structure. Future constraints are probably due to changes in political leadership, governance style, and policy direction (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1983). Other constraints include fiscal restrictions and the ideological nature of its intended users (Ringquist, 1993). Kenya's National Evaluation Policy, like other public policies, face anticipated and unanticipated future constraints, such as a lack of adoption due to weak legislative support (Dlakavu et al., 2021; Dlakavu & Hoffmann, 2023) and inadequate capacity to utilize and implement the evaluation policy (Al Hudib & Cousins, 2022).

Policy instruments now address emerging social justice and critical agendas that capture cross-cutting issues such as gender disparities, climate change, poverty, persistent hunger, and skewed wealth distribution (Blaser Mapitsa et al., 2020; Gullickson & Hannum, 2019). For example, based on the Kenya Constitution 2010, the policy could address social gaps like the unfair wealth distribution in Kenya and other social ills like tribalism and corruption, while remaining compatible with other good governance and accountability policy instruments.

Policy compatibility attributes determine how NEPs align with existing policy frameworks. These policies should be consistent with national constitutions and other enacted laws. Since NEPs should be an all-encompassing endeavor (Dlakavu & Hoffmann, 2023), this research addresses the relationship between evaluators and other subgroups, like parliament. A strong evaluation system ensures all actors—specifically the government agency in charge of implementing the policy, the parliament, professional evaluators, and supporting civil society groups—collaborate and create an enabling environment where evaluation capacity building (ECB) and evaluation utilization thrive.

Chirau et al. (2020) confirm that the desire for accountability and performance management has prompted many African countries to institutionalize program monitoring and evaluation through policy. This research analyzes the policy's setting within the Kenyan context and explores whether the policy received political support for probable success. Personnel turnovers instigated by regime changes or government reorganizations affect policy implementation and continuity. Such political moves could erode or catalyze the policy process by impacting organizational memory and policy agenda-setting momentum. A change in leadership can create new evaluation champions to catalyze growth and organizational learning. The policy got approved at the end of Uhuru's government, leaving the responsibility for its implementation to the Ruto administration. This research highlights the transition process and assesses the current government's evaluation interests.

Strong opposition and parliament can advocate policy prioritization through representation and oversight mandates. However, policies like the NEPs do not attract political attention due to their focus and scope. The NEP may lack sufficient political capital to garner parliament's attention, which limits parliamentarians' contributions to the policy process. Organized civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, such as voluntary organizations of professional evaluators (VOPEs), also exert pressure and influence policy direction. Such organized groups call for responsive and accountable governments, prompting an agenda on evaluation policy (Dlakavu et al., 2021).

Problem Statement

African governments and their development partners implement programs that offer services to the people and help ameliorate persistent challenges such as hunger, droughts, famine, human rights abuses, and inadequate access to water, electricity, and education

(Lomeña-Gelis, 2013; Makadzange, 2022; Masvaure et al., 2020). Program evaluation has become common in Africa and globally to meet accountability and programmatic improvement needs. However, at the national level, evaluation systems tend to be weak or non-existent. Integral to the NES is the NEP, which institutionalizes and formalizes the NES. Further, the NEP provides guidelines for collaboration and coordination between government levels, evaluation practitioners, and development partners such as donor organizations. However, little is known about the stakeholder (policy subgroup) intrigues and emerging narratives on national evaluation policy processes.

Studying national evaluation policies in Africa creates knowledge and facilitates designing helpful evaluation policies (Chirau et al., 2021; Leeuw & Furubo, 2008). Such efforts should be intrinsic and African-led instead of mere compliance with donor conditions (L. Khumalo et al., 2021; S. L. Khumalo, 2022; Tarsilla, 2014). Further, research is needed to determine how much donor agencies influence the policy process and whether their M&E agendas align with national evaluation interests (Cloete, 2016). Additionally, potential conflicts and shadow interests among different policy subgroups in the evaluation ecosystem compound this challenge.

Since very little has been studied on Kenya's national evaluation policy, an African NEP and NES context presents a broader view and helps contextualize Kenya's case. Despite the continent's cultural and geographic diversities, the M&E and governance structures are relatable. A continental focus in defining the research problem helps cover scarce research in country-specific evaluation policy contexts.

Donor organizations dominate program evaluation and policy processes in Africa (Kosheleva & Segone, 2013). Additionally, there are mismatches between the demand and

supply for evaluation, and inadequate evaluation capacity (Masilo & Ntwanano, 2021; Porter & Goldman, 2013). There is an increasing demand for evidence-based decision-making and performance-based management, even though government-instigated evaluations (unlike donor-driven) are not widespread (Goldman et al., 2018; Porter & Goldman, 2013). These gaps confirm the African government's low capacity to commission and use evaluation outcomes. Decrying the donor influence at the expense of country-led evaluation needs, Porter and Goldman (2013) noted that "monitoring information is all that is available through government systems, and so there is a danger of monitoring masquerading as evaluation" (p. 8). However, there is a continuous gradual shift towards a balance between monitoring and evaluation (Chirau et al., 2020).

Cloete (2016) confirms that non-African actors commission and fund most African evaluations. These actors provide funds for evaluation capacity building, institutionalization, and utilization. Therefore, policy misalignment with local needs is likely due to external influence. Further, donor agencies' domination obscures the government's role, limiting their stakes and innate interests. Nevertheless, according to Cloete, African evaluators are now rising through their VOPEs to introduce change. This research considered the role of VOPEs in the policy process, and for Kenya's case, dispels Cloete's claims.

For contextualization, the following issues define Africa's salient evaluation policy concerns:

Donor and multilateral agencies' influence. Donor organizations, particularly in Africa, have considerable influence in monitoring and evaluation (Blaser Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018). These often non-African organizations commission, fund, frame, and disseminate monitoring

and evaluation on the continent (Cloete, 2016; Goldman et al., 2018). In this case, these agencies obscure government contributions to policy processes and take up their role and agency.

Low investment and inadequate infrastructure. The United Nations Development Program (2019) outlines the need for enhanced investment in evaluation. Increased investment opportunities enhance the evaluation policy agenda-setting, implementation, and capacity building. Still, African governments are progressively investing in M&E practice and infrastructure (Chirau et al., 2020). Emerging national evaluation policy issues require more financial and infrastructural commitment for timely policy formulation and adoption.

Inadequate evaluation capacity. Inadequate capacity is partly due to insufficient funding that affects the national M&E system (Makadzange, 2022). Technical capacity affects the evaluation supply side, limiting evaluators' capabilities to contribute to the policy agenda. Additionally, ill-equipped evaluators may fail to offer actionable recommendations to stakeholders, prompting a policy intervention. On the demand side, institutional incapacitation arises from weak organizational culture or lack of policy.

Overreliance on monitoring. The African evaluation space leans towards accountability, gathering quantifiable monitoring data, and evidence-based management (Chirau et al., 2020). This creates an overreliance on monitoring at the expense of evaluation. Furthermore, Africa's evaluation landscape is gradually evolving, with considerable pressure to track performance and present results that meet voters' and donors' expectations (Blaser Mapitsa et al., 2020).

Narrative policy framework expectations/theoretical propositions

This study uses the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) for its analytical and theoretical structure. As an explorative and interpretative study, the focus was on expectations/propositions and not hypotheses. These expectations and propositions informed the study's research questions

and units of analysis. To analyze the emerging NEP narratives, the study explores belief systems to draw meaning and develop knowledge from different policy subgroups.

Social science research is interested in sense-making and interpretations of socially constructed realities that differ from one scenario to another. Nevertheless, the concepts of public policy research remain the same and replicable in diverse research contexts of public policy and national evaluation capacities. This study explores diverse NES subgroups within the NPF claims. O'Bryan et al. (2014) posits that the NPF has three central claims; first, the claim of social construction which helps categorize diverse policy subgroups with different interests and definition of policy problems; second claim is that public policy processes are grounded in narratives; and the third claim is that narratives can be studied empirically.

The first assumption is that all national evaluation policy subgroups (evaluation organizations, the legislature, the M&E Directorate, and donor organizations) participated in the Kenya National M&E Policy formulation and supported its adoption. This proposition arises from the intended gains of a national evaluation policy such as guiding practice and establishing structures for improved evaluation outcomes. For instance, VOPEs often play an important role in guiding practice through capacity building, ethical practice guidelines, professional development, research and knowledge generation, and advocacy. However, unions might view the NEP as an additional layer of compliance requirement that burdens employees, hence resisting the policy.

Secondly, the process might be a top-down model that limits consultations and stakeholder engagement. In such a case, VOPEs are less involved in the policy process, leaving only government bureaucrats to play a critical role. Other policy subgroups, such as the legislature and other government bureaucrats, could not have sufficient capacity to understand

the policy's essence or participate in its implementation. Civil, advocacy, and donor organizations may also have varying interests that influence the emerging policy narratives.

An empirical study to determine and classify the policy subgroups in terms of the narrative policy framework components and assumptions can help inform future national evaluation processes. This can potentially improve the policy uptake and implementation success rates. The subgroup classifications helped generate specific and specialized recommendations that inform capacity-building and awareness creation strategies. The study highlights the need for increased engagement on this policy, placing it on the path for successful implementation. The assumption is that heightened engagement will help depart from policies promulgated as formalities. Without empirical research, national evaluation ecosystems and development programs in Africa may continue to face governance, learning, and accountability challenges. Further, development partners would still design misfitting programs that do not meet Africa and its people's needs and cultural aspirations. Against this backdrop, investigating the national evaluation policy happenings and stakeholder dynamics is justified.

Research questions

The overall purpose of this study was to describe how Kenya's national evaluation policy process occurred and the potential effects on national evaluation capacities. The study first identified the policy sub-groups responsible for developing and promulgating Kenya's NEP to achieve this goal. The study focuses on international assistance and donors who support NEP programs. Secondly, the study investigated policy subgroup interests and dynamics and whether the NEP considered their views. The specific research questions (RQs) are listed below:

RQ1. How did the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy come to be?

1. What is the role of international forces in Kenya's M&E policy agenda-setting?

2. What narratives did the M&E policy sub-groups drive in Kenya's evaluation policy agenda?

RQ2. What shadow interests influence the policy subgroups' narratives?

1. What policy subgroup goals are at cross-purpose with the overarching evaluation agenda?
2. In what ways, if at all, is Kenya's national evaluation policy important to the policy subgroups?

Reflexivity Statement

I am an evaluator, and an international development practitioner interested in educational programming, community-engaged higher education, public policy, and food systems. Although I am a Kenyan and have a vantage point over this study's insights, I acknowledge that this breeds bias, which might inadvertently misrepresent divergent views. I also acknowledge that this, being a non-experimental study, has representation limitations. I attempted to gain deeper insights, especially from evaluators and Kenya's M&E Directorate (MED) narratives. Therefore, this narrative might represent partial views and leave out parliament and government bureaucrats' views. The MED-evaluators' narratives provide insights into the workings of parliament and the government bureaucracy concerning this policy.

My interest in country-level evaluation systems started around 2017, when I was the Project Manager of a World Bank initiative in Eastern and Southern Africa. This regional program had evaluation components, but I could see among my colleagues then that the continent faced evaluation supply and demand challenges. This program was hosted in over 24 universities as centers of excellence in diverse disciplines such as agriculture, health, mathematics, and others. The universities could not use the evaluation recommendations, which

impeded the use of evidence in decision-making. Having worked for this World Bank initiative and on other donor-sponsored programs, I acknowledge that this might influence my views in favor of donor agencies. I have been a direct beneficiary of such programs, including in my early stages of life when my family received relief food from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). However, this study follows the leads presented by the data and provides insights into Kenya's NEP process.

While designing this study, I optimistically believed that the national evaluation policy was good, and this belief informed my research methodology and analysis. This optimistic assumption influenced my research framing and maybe subconsciously impeded my ability to ask critical questions about the policy's existence. The research findings presented the reverse, indicating potential self-correcting measures.

In sum, and as noted in other sections of this study, research on evaluation in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is a work in progress, and there are emerging efforts fronted by leading continental voices to address this concern. Of note, however, is the central role international assistance programming plays in framing and guiding research on evaluation in LMICs. Donor agencies provide an enabling environment, and the current US-led international development restructuring makes this study timely and critical, especially in Africa, where most evaluation programs are donor-funded. Besides this introduction chapter, this dissertation also contains Chapter Two, which focuses on the literature review and the theoretical framework, Chapter Three, which translates the framework into my research methodology, Chapter Four, which highlights my research findings, and Chapter Five, which summarizes my research into discussions and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of Kenya's national evaluation policy processes and the evaluation policy subgroup narratives and interests that either impeded or facilitated the policy process. Evaluation is critical for proper government functioning and accountability (American Evaluation Association Policy Taskforce, 2022); it encompasses systematic analyses to determine the worth, value, and effectiveness of a program or activity (Deutsch & Malmborg, 1982; Mertens & Wilson, 2018). However, evaluation policy is essential to meet evaluation's structural, institutional, capacity, and utilization goals. This chapter highlights evaluation institutionalization trends and their impact on capacity and utilization in governments, particularly in Africa. It also includes different NES framings, including Chirau et al. (2021), which, together with Jones and McBeth's (2010) narrative policy framework (NPF), provides the study's conceptual and theoretical frameworks, respectively. Other important global, continental, and Kenyan contexts help situate the history of national evaluation capacities (NECs) and how this study fits within their contexts.

Evaluation Policy Concepts and Trends

Structured academic discourse on evaluation policy commenced around the 2008 Annual American Evaluation Association (AEA) Conference. During this period, Mark et al. (2009) emphasized the need to focus on policy, adding that "there has been a paucity of past work done explicitly on evaluation policy" (p. 9). The AEA also established the Evaluation Policy Task Force (EPTF), whose mandate focused on evaluation policies and their impact on substantive policy, federal evaluation policies, and targeted legislative and executive policies (Cooksy et al., 2009; Mark et al., 2009). However, there is not much research output on evaluation policy despite Trochim's clarion call for evaluators to treat evaluation policy more seriously and

enhance research on the topic. In this plea, Trochim (2009) called for empirical research on evaluation policy, saying, "we need to develop taxonomies and corresponding audit methodologies that are better than the ones suggested here, and these need to be informed by systematic research" (p. 28).

Defining evaluation policy

Trochim (2009), in his foundation paper at the 2008 Annual Conference of the American Evaluation Association (AEA), defined evaluation policy as "any rule or principle that a group or organization uses to guide its decisions and actions when doing evaluation" (p. 16). Building off Trochim's definition, Chirau et al. (2021) define evaluation policy as "a systematic and institutionalized M&E framework in several interdependent organizational entities to inform decision-making and secure oversight functions" (p. 3). On the other hand, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) emphasizes the need for legislation, recognition, and documentation in their definition (United Nations Development Program, 2015). Unlike Trochim (2009), who argues that evaluation policy can either be explicit or implicit, adding that most evaluation policies are implicit and unwritten, I argue favorably for a more structured, formal, explicit, and written evaluation policy. This concurs with Christie and Lemire (2019), who stated that "for an evaluation policy to be a policy, it needs to be formal, explicit, and written" (p. 506). The argument for explicit evaluation policies is further emphasized by Kinarsky and Christie (2022), who define evaluation policy as "any written document that details an organization's rules and principles for evaluation practice, regardless of whether policy implementation is encouraged or enforced" (p. 177).

Since national evaluation ecosystems are transdisciplinary in nature, my arguments borrow from political science where policy is defined as "a statement by government of what it

intends to do, such as a law, regulation, ruling, decision, order, or a combination of these” (Birkland, 2019, p. 33). National governments’ policy processes are transdisciplinary and dynamic; hence, there is a need to consider existing knowledge in other applicable disciplines such as political science (Ndaguba & Ijeoma, 2017). Reviewing and researching public policy helps provide insights into the policy formulation, implementation, and analysis processes. Further, comprehensive policy research ensures a detailed understanding of its formulation and implementation strategies (Al Hudib & Cousins, 2022) and the coalition of actors that facilitate or impede enhanced national evaluation capacities. Furthermore, evaluation policy is still in formative stages and is likely to borrow from other well-developed fields such as political science and governance.

Evaluation policy remains less developed, with relatively few publications on this topic (Kinarsky & Christie, 2021) compared to other evaluation topics such as evaluation capacity building and utilization-focused evaluation. Available studies range from evaluation policy in specific jurisdictions such as in the Netherlands (Leeuw, 2009), evaluation policy in the European Commission (Højlund, 2015), evaluation theories and evaluation policy implementation (Alkin & Christie, 2019; Christie & Fierro, 2012; Christie & Lemire, 2019; Kinarsky & Christie, 2021), evaluation policy’s influence on organizational capacity building (Al Hudib & Cousins, 2021; Al Hudib & Cousins, 2020), and region-specific discourses such as African national evaluation capacities aimed at promoting evaluation systems and practice in Africa (Chirau et al., 2021; Fraser & Morkel, 2020).

There is growing acceptance of evaluation in organizations due to the increased focus on evaluation capacity building and use (Masvaure & Fish, 2022; Morkel & Ramasobana, 2017; Porter & Goldman, 2013). Subsequently, there is a need for more focus on evaluation policy,

leading to enhanced use and practice (Mark & Hart, 2022). For instance, in the face of accountability, misappropriation of public funds, lack of proper evidence for effective decision-making, ineffective institutions, and donor influence (Blaser Mapitsa & Chirau, 2019; Chirau et al., 2021; Masvaure et al., 2020), accountability-learning conundrum (Christie & Fierro, 2012), and cultural and geographical impacts (Al Hudib & Cousins, 2020; Vo & Christie, 2015) that affect regions such as Africa. Continued work on evaluation policy builds off Trochim's (2009) work that introduced evaluation policy taxonomies and provided the platform for enhanced discourses on evaluation policy and its importance.

Trochim lists eight evaluation policy taxonomies (evaluation goals, participation, capacity building, management, roles, process and methods, use, and meta-evaluation) when illustrating the relationship between substantive policy and evaluation policy. Although a more systems-based approach, where different mental models are interlinked (De Souza, 2022), would help enhance evaluation policy understanding and definition, Trochim's (2009) foundation paper presented thought-provoking insights that helped build further knowledge on evaluation policy.

The Essence of Evaluation Policy

Evaluation Policy as a Communication Tool

A written evaluation policy is a communication tool for sharing information with stakeholders. Additionally, it is reference material for evaluators, program managers, and organizational and government agency leaders to ensure continuous action and adherence to accountability or learning objectives as stated in the policy (Amisi, 2015; Goldman et al., 2015). National evaluation policies emphasize the aspirations and needs of the public by highlighting the policy goals and communicating them among stakeholders for consistency and social good (Hart & Mark, 2022).

Evaluation policy enhances transparency and democratic governance

Policy formulation processes require stakeholder engagement and participation (Birkland, 2019), including diverse perspectives, transparency, and civic engagement. Transparency and democracy might enhance inclusivity and participation in policy processes, increasing the chances of successful implementation (Dahler-Larsen & Boodhoo, 2019; Goldman et al., 2015). Further, an evaluation policy is a tool for dialogue (Marra, 2021), bringing together evaluation stakeholders with diverse perspectives to discuss and agree on trade-offs. Such dialogues and tradeoffs limit the occurrences of domineering stakeholders and instead promote dialogue. Additionally, diversity of perspectives also brings heterogeneity in policies, hence designing innovative means to meet stakeholder interests (Masvaure et al., 2020; Taket & White, 1997). Finally, evaluation policies are often public documents anyone can access, providing room for feedback, contribution, or criticism.

Evaluation Policy Enhances Practice

Evaluation policies help coordinate evaluation initiatives (Marra, 2021). As such, the policy stipulates the role of each stakeholder and how they interrelate. Further, policy provides guidelines on how evaluation is funded and how the capacity to use and do evaluation is built (Dahler-Larsen, 2023). Secondly, evaluation policy facilitates the collaboration between different organizational leadership levels (Al Hudib & Cousins, 2022). For instance, when implementing and disseminating evaluation findings, and for proper utilization, different stakeholders collaborate and influence the evaluation findings based on their level of influence. Third, evaluation policy provides implementation guidelines, such as for evaluation design (Hart & Mark, 2022) and dissemination strategies. A comprehensive evaluation policy also provides

guidelines for evaluation utilization, which helps put evaluation recommendations into use for organizational learning and growth (Chirau et al., 2021).

Source of Learning

Evaluation policies provide opportunities for feedback and learning. Trochim (2009) articulates that we can archive evaluation policies for future reference and corrective measures as needed by writing down evaluation policies. Further, Trochim adds that through a series of evaluation policies, we can classify them to discern which options between policy sets work better under different circumstances. I could draw connections between evaluation theory and practice by studying evaluation policies. This can help identify discrepancies and instigate evaluation capacity building to align supply and demand. Stern (2009) additionally cautions against using evaluation policies as management and compliance tools at the expense of organizational learning and growth.

Evaluation Policy Guides Evaluation Methodology and Epistemology

Trochim (2009) argues that evaluation policy determines an entity's methodological and epistemic inclinations. Evaluation processes and methods are key to Trochim's evaluation policy taxonomy. When included in evaluation policy, this component determines the appropriate methodology for evaluation in different organizations. For instance, an organization might prefer randomized control trials (RCTs) over non-experimental systematic inquiry methods. However, recent studies agree that evaluation methodology is contextual, purposeful, and not necessarily policy-guided (Blaser Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018; Dillman & Christie, 2017; Hart & Mark, 2022; Marra, 2021).

Policy connects different evaluation elements in a systems approach

Dillman and Christie (2017) connect evaluation policy and Cabrera et al.'s (2008) systems thinking approach to solving complex and multi-faceted issues. National evaluation policies are promulgated for the public good to solve problems and to transfer the people's popular will into practice. Through a multi-solution approach, systems thinking helps streamline and institutionalize evaluation practice in government agencies (Gates, 2016; Gates et al., 2022).

Evaluation policy provides legal and political grounds of reference

Kinarsky and Christie (2022) concur that effective evaluation policies emerge from evaluation practice and government agencies guiding evaluation practice institutionally. As such, clear evaluation policies are important in government processes due to potential litigation. Further, written evaluation policies are admissible in law courts as legal documents, providing credible evidence in a legal conflict.

Evaluation policy taxonomies

Evaluation Policy Characterization

Trochim (2009) and the American Evaluation Association (2022) have developed evaluation policy components. Kinarsky and Christie (2022) term both Trochim's evaluation policy wheel and AEA Evaluation Policy Task Force recommendations as taxonomies of evaluation policy. The AEA Evaluation Policy Task Force first highlighted its evaluation policy components in 2007, with Trochim giving further insights two years later in 2009. The AEA still enumerates the seven evaluation policy components it proposed in 2007 (American Evaluation Association, 2022). These components include (1) evaluation definition, (2) requirements of evaluation, (3) evaluation methods, (4) human resources regarding evaluation, (5) evaluation budgets, (6) evaluation implementation, and (7) evaluation ethics.

Trochim (2007), on the other hand, identified eight components of the evaluation policy wheel. These include (1) evaluation goals, (2) participation, (3) capacity building, (4) management, (5) roles, (6) process and methods, (7) use, and (8) meta-evaluation (evaluation of evaluation). However, Kinarsky and Christie (2022, p. 178) criticize the evaluation policy taxonomies, stating that “neither of these taxonomies was empirically derived, which is the preferred process for developing a framework.” After an empirical study, Kinarsky and Christie proposed 11 new evaluation policy taxonomies. Kinarsky and Christie's evaluation policy framework merges Trochim and AEA’s taxonomies with slight modifications.

Evaluation policy components: a Kinarsky and Christie (2022) revised taxonomy

According to Kinarsky and Christie (2022), the revised evaluation policy taxonomy contains the following: (1) *Background* comprises the policy history, motivation, and definition of evaluation. The background helps to contextualize the policy in an organizational culture and processes, including the hurdles experienced to arrive at the policy. It represents the organizational culture and history for learning and helps determine organizational governance and leadership framing. For instance, in governments, governance frames include performance- or results-based management, among others. (2) *Goals, purpose*, desired organizational outcomes, and why evaluation is essential. Policy goals address problems and should be the reason for evaluation policy formulation. The policy instrument should clearly state the problem and why stakeholders should care. Defining a policy problem is the first step to designing relevant solutions to address the problem. Further, stakeholder participation should be used to define the problem and set policy goals. (3) *Management* involves resource allocation and priorities, evaluation scheduling (including timelines), and necessity, which encompasses preference, requirements, and circumstances. (4) *Participation and roles* that highlight those

involved in evaluation and their responsibilities. For example, there might be guidelines on internal versus external evaluation. Further, the policy might indicate to what extent organizational staff can be involved in an external evaluation. (5) *Design and methods* that detail the applicable evaluation type (formative, summative, impact, or outcome evaluation) and evaluation design and methodology. (6) *Evaluation use* is an essential policy component because it determines the action taken regarding evaluation recommendations. The policy recommends guidelines during evaluation design to promote utilization and provides internal and external utilization guidelines. (7) *Capacity building* for both internal and external stakeholders to utilize and conduct evaluation. The policy should guide filling capacity gaps and resource allocation. There should be room for self-studies and capacity needs assessments to determine skill gaps. The organization's top leadership ensures sustainability and a conducive environment for capacity building and evaluation utilization. (8) *Meta-evaluation* provides for determining the quality of evaluations. It is an evaluation of evaluation, which also provides recommendations for improvement and organizational learning on how to conduct and utilize evaluations. (9) *Avoid*, which is a policy component on what should be avoided when conducting evaluations. These are undesired outcomes that result from an evaluation and should be avoided. (10) *Example*, which uses illustrations of anecdotes to further explain practices and principles. (11) *Ethics*, which are ethical issues in evaluation and the codes of conduct that guide the implementation and evaluation use.

One gap in the revised Kinasky and Christie (2022) taxonomy is the failure to include “dissemination” as a component. Dissemination is an essential part of evaluation that completes an evaluation loop. It helps evaluate suppliers and users to be accountable to stakeholders while receiving direct feedback. This also adds to the failure of the taxonomy to highlight the “desired

evaluation outputs” as an important evaluation policy component. Evaluation outputs might include an evaluation report and to whom it should be addressed. Other outputs could be a policy brief, an executive summary, or a press release. Evaluation policy could also include evaluation ethics and data protection guidelines. For NEPs, the instruments could highlight how different parts of an evaluation ecosystem interlink to create a national evaluation system.

National Evaluation System Framing

National evaluation policies (NEPs) are critical to national whole-system evaluation initiatives. However, evaluation policies cannot operate in isolation, but in unison with other evaluative activities that comprise national evaluation systems (NES) (Chapman et al., 2021); hence, NEPs operate within NESs. Although NES might be complete without NEP (National Evaluation Conference, 2022), NEPs still play an important role in formalizing and institutionalizing NESs. The following illustrates different NES framings, the NES evolution process, and its implications on NEP.

The Leeuw and Furubo (2008) framing

Leeuw and Furubo illustrate the evolving nature of government evaluations. They assert that evaluation’s rapid development has prompted the development of evaluation systems. In their framing, they cautioned against routinizing evaluation systems, which limit learning and increase the predictability of evaluation outcomes. Leeuw and Furubo (2008) further add that predictability “makes it less possible to ‘speak truth to power’” (p.167). Leeuw and Furubo answered questions on the set of evaluation activities that make up a system, the detectability of systems, the characteristics of evaluation systems, and why evaluation systems are important. They specifically identified four criteria for identifying evaluation systems:

Criterion 1: a distinctive epistemological perspective.

In this criterion, Leeuw and Furubo argue that to detect an evaluation system, one must understand the underlying epistemology (form of knowledge). Onto-epistemological perspectives have geo-cultural insights that lead to shared knowledge and understanding. However, due to international organization influence in Kenya and, by extension, Africa, it is difficult to determine the prevailing epistemology in the region (Fouksman, 2017) A critical question is how a distinctive epistemology would be identified if the prevailing form of knowledge is influenced externally. With the recent changes in international assistance programming, President Trump's sudden policy shifts could lead to knowledge gaps in the short term.

Criterion 2: organizational responsibility.

This framing argues that for a set of evaluation activities to qualify as a system, then they should be carried out by organizations or institutions instead of individuals. This is a helpful criterion for NES and NEP studies because governments are comprised of institutions. For instance, Kenya's Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (MED) manages program evaluation in Kenya. Other important agencies include the legislature, higher education institutions, voluntary organizations for professional evaluators (VOPEs), civil society organizations, and donor organizations.

Criterion 3: permanence.

Leeuw and Furubo propose better engagements that are pre-planned. In this criterion, evaluation activities surpass an individual or a few individuals who control evaluation activities on a short-term basis but promote permanent characteristics such as prior planned activities and events, relationships with other organizations and institutions such as the media, structured

relationships with other government organs for the case of NES, among others. However, this criterion falls short of highlighting how this permanence is achieved. Talking of permanence is one thing, and actualizing the aspirations is another. The NEPs could be a means to achieve this permanence as they provide guidelines and references on how evaluation is carried out in government.

Criterion 4: a focus on evaluation utilization. This criterion requires that evaluation activities be intrinsically linked to evaluation utilization. Therefore, an evaluation system should be able to influence policy decision-making and bring about change through learning and adjustment. One shortfall, however, is the missing evaluation capacity building (ECB) link. ECB is essential, specifically in Africa, where there is an imbalance between the supply of evaluations and demand. Both supply and demand face capacity and competency challenges that an evaluation system should address.

Critique. Although this framing mentions permanence as an important criterion, it fails to discuss how that might be achieved. In the case of countries, NEPs play an important role in institutionalizing program evaluation and making it part of ongoing national discourses. Additionally, it discusses the need for an epistemic alignment despite the dominance of Western knowledge and the role of international/donor organizations in advancing other forms of knowledge in Africa. Finally, an evaluation system should have an inbuilt evaluation capacity building (ECB) mechanism (Norton et al., 2016). For instance, in Kenya and Africa, there is a need for heightened ECB strategies to review and, in some cases, undo prevailing epistemologies and usher in better program evaluation practices.

The Højlund (2014) Framing

The framing is hinged on the role of institutions and organizations in determining and advancing evaluation utilization. Højlund further adds that evaluation systems can influence evaluation practice positively or negatively, like limiting the direct influence of evaluators on policy decision-makers and withdrawing evaluators' agency and ability to speak truth to power, as also alluded to by Leeuw and Furubo (2008). Nevertheless, besides emphasizing evaluation utilization at organizational levels, the Højlund framing is somewhat similar (save for minor modifications and rewording) to Leeuw and Furubo's framing. Højlund discusses four elements that constitute an evaluation system as discussed below.

First, the framing emphasizes the need for shared understanding and evaluation objectives. Højlund adds that the shared understanding element includes understanding how the evaluation objectives are met. Possible examples for meeting evaluation objectives include evaluation financing and evaluation capacity building. Secondly, Højlund adds that evaluation systems are institutionalized formally in a separate unit that is in "charge of planning, tendering, implementing, quality-checking, and following up on evaluations" (p. 430). This element relates to Leeuw and Furubo's criterion that an evaluation system is organizational instead of individual. The modification is that Højlund defines this element as a formal recognition. This adds to the previous critique that addressed the need for an evaluation policy for formal institutionalization. The third element is on permanence, which relates previous evaluation undertakings to future ones. Permanence is a standard criterion for both framings as it relates to continuity and systematic operations. Like Leeuw and Furubo, this framing does not provide means to achieve permanence, hence the need for a NEP.

Finally, Højlund proposes that evaluation should be a system that can fit within other cycles of organizational activities, such as budget cycles, policy design and analyses, and auditing processes.

Chirau et al. (2020) Framing

This framing targets the African context and departs from the previous Eurocentric framings. This framework places NEP at the system's center, terming it as the means for institutionalizing and formalizing the national evaluation system (NES). Chirau et al propose a stakeholder-based NES framework highlighting each stakeholder's anchor role in the system. The framing's focus on stakeholders is helpful for this study as it aligns with the study's Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). The meso-level of the NPF focuses on policy sub-groups, just as Chirau's NES framework also focuses on stakeholders. Even though the Makadzange (2022) framework came after this, most domains in the Makadzange analogy fit within the four key dimensions of the Chirau framing, making it suitable for policy subgroup type of studies, as illustrated through the dimensions below.

Government-wide monitoring and evaluation system.

This dimension focuses on national evaluation policy that helps coordinate government M&E functions and structure civil society and other stakeholder engagements (Tirivanhu & Jansen Van Rensburg, 2018). Other features of this dimension include M&E units in ministries, public engagement and dissemination efforts, strategies for evaluation utilization, and government ministries' evaluation capacities (Cloete, 2009). These responsibilities fall within the mandates of monitoring and evaluation directorates (Chirau et al., 2022).

Parliament's functioning.

This dimension is measured by determining the extent to which parliament uses evaluation findings for oversight, parliamentarians' capacity to understand and create awareness of national evaluation initiatives, and resource allocation for evaluation (Khumalo et al., 2021). In Kenya, Parliament has three primary responsibilities: representation, oversight, and legislation (Government of Kenya, 2010). The constitution gives it an independent mandate to oversee the executive and support programs that benefit its constituents.

Professionalization of evaluation.

This dimension addresses evaluators' competencies and their abilities to supply M&E expertise. Are the evaluators members of VOPEs? How active are they in national evaluation discourses? How do they work with or gain from institutions of higher learning that generate new evaluation knowledge through research? VOPEs also have agency potential and can facilitate civic engagement through partnerships with other civil society and community-based organizations.

Enabling environment.

A strong national evaluation system is effective where the rule of law exists and the safety of evaluators and other stakeholders is assured. An enabling environment also enhances public participation and upholds human rights. It is proven by the presence of political goodwill and support, and by civil society organizations playing a role in advancing the people's aspirations.

The Makadzange (2022) framing

Makadzange's framing discussed institutionalizing NES in Zimbabwe and Botswana. Same as Chirau et al.'s (2020) framing, Makadzange departs from Højlund (2014) and Leeuw

and Furubo (2008), whose focus is Eurocentric. Makadzange’s focus on Africa is important for this study as it helps highlight specific African concerns that are overlooked in other research jurisdictions. In their framing, Makadzange begins by situating the system in government processes and structures; hence, an effective NES must have active government involvement. A NES’s primary purpose is to unite different government units and stakeholders to help the government discharge its evaluation functions and needs. The success of this framing depends on program evaluation’s regularity and permanence, formality and systematicity, and enhanced framework for realizing evaluation’s potential in government. The Makadzange NES framing borrows from Chirau et al. (2020) with modifications.

National Evaluation Policy

The 2015 National Evaluation Capacities Conference in Bangkok defined NEP as “a legislation of recognized policy that serves as a basis for evaluation across government agencies” (United Nations Development Program, 2015, p. 83). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) further emphasizes the need to recognize only documented or written policies as NEPs. This condition concurs with the earlier position that NEPs must be written and documented to qualify as national policies.

In collaboration with other actors and governments, the UNDP has led initiatives to promote national evaluation capacities to meet their development agendas and aspirations, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This section further contextualizes different international, continental, and national (Kenyan) evaluation policy agendas and initiatives.

The Global National Evaluation Policy and Agenda 2030 Initiatives

The United Nations Development Program National Evaluation Capacities highlights.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and its partners, including national governments, have organized national evaluation capacities conventions every other year. The first convention was held in 2009 in Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco, and the most recent in 2024 in Beijing, China. Table 1 below highlights key convention outcomes and their implications for national evaluation policy.

Table 1

National Evaluation Capacity Conference Highlights

National Evaluation Capacities Conference	Key evaluation policy highlights	Notable excerpts
NEC 2009 (Casablanca)	Call for national coordination and enhanced institutional capacities	“There are also opportunities to reinforce institutional capacities to develop evaluation policy and evaluation coordination at the national level.”
NEC 2011 (Johannesburg)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A growing expectation for countries to develop national evaluation systems - Highlights the key characteristics of an effective evaluation system 	<p>(p. 8) “The expectations are growing for countries to develop national evaluation systems.”</p> <p>(p.99 - 100) “Promotes good governance, helps design effective and efficient public policies, must have legal and political support of the state, an effective system should be impartially governed without interference from political interests, helps build local capacity and limits overreliance in international operatives”</p>
NEC 2013 (Sao Paulo)	Emphasizes the need for national evaluation policies, identifying political champions, and enhanced parliament engagement.	<p>(p. 123) “There is a need for national evaluation policies in the region to promote the use of evaluation in development interventions in the public and private sectors. Promote regional political champions to work with other stakeholders in taking forward policy development dialogues.”</p> <p>(p. 140) “The absence of clear-cut evaluation policies and periodic M&E plans correlated with inconsistencies in conducting and using evaluations.”</p>

<p>NEC 2015 (Bangkok)</p>	<p>- Highlights the global NEP statuses and the varying levels of evaluation policy structures in different countries</p> <p>The Bangkok convention also defined NEPs and illustrated the NEP development process, which focused on identifying champions within governments to help with policy processes.</p> <p>- The convention also discussed NEP's benefits while asking critical questions about its essence.</p>	<p>(p. 60) “In almost all countries, international donor pressure and requirements for evaluation have facilitated the creation of a minimum structure (e.g., Afghanistan, Ethiopia).”</p> <p>(p. 88) “A good NEP should support strategic planning and implementation of programs and should ensure better programming through knowledge gained from evaluation. In effect that is the purpose of evaluation. An NEP can promote gender and equity by requiring gender and equity responsiveness in programs and evaluations.”</p>
<p>NEC 2017 (Istanbul)</p>	<p>- Calls for using evaluation theory to inform evaluation policy and standards.</p> <p>- Highlights inadequate national capacities despite push for NEPs.</p> <p>- NEC 2017 highlighted the equality gaps in NEPs.</p> <p>- Highlights factors influencing the effective development of NEPs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Political will for change ● Existing M&E systems and frameworks ● Visionary leadership and championship ● Enabling environment 	<p>(p. 42) “Evaluation policies, mandates, competency frameworks, standards and procedures should be updated to respond to new expectations and to ensure the integration of new evaluation approaches, questions and values into evaluation plans, terms of reference and methodologies.”</p> <p>(p. 160) “From a gender-equality perspective, even in countries that have well-developed national evaluation policies and systems, it has been shown that these often neglect a direct reference to gender equality and women’s empowerment.”</p>
<p>NEC 2019 (Hurghada)</p>	<p>- NEPs strengthen NESs</p>	<p>(p. 10) “To ensure institutional capacity, national evaluation policies are important for outlining rationale, purpose, principles, definitions, roles, responsibilities and resources.”</p>

NEC 2022 (Turin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlighted the need for political will to implement NEPs. - Weak culture of evaluation remains an impediment to policy usefulness. - There is no single path to a national evaluation policy. 	(p. 38) “Fostering a culture of evaluation, financing for evaluations and building capacity to commission, conduct and use evaluations are fundamental components of a national evaluation policy.”
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Global evaluation agenda highlights and Declarations.

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution (A/RES/69/237).

This initiative focused on building capacity to evaluate development activities at the country level. Endorsed in December 2014, this was the first ever unitary UN General Assembly resolution on national evaluation capacities (Rugg, 2016). Subsequently, the Assembly acknowledged and declared 2015 as the International Year of Evaluation. This resolution resulted in increased focus on the role of evaluation in governments and the resulting interest in evaluating SDGs. Structured discourses on national evaluation systems and policies emerged following this declaration. Due to the increased demand for program evaluation, countries sought to strengthen their evaluation capacities and design structures for evaluation institutionalization. Rugg further highlights that with support from the UN Evaluation Group (UNEG), the Assembly committed to providing technical support to build evaluation capacities in member states. The overall objective was to prevent importing expertise at the expense of local professionals.

The Global Evaluation Agenda 2016 – 2020 (EvalAgenda2020).

The EvalAgenda2020 highlights the importance of program evaluation in the context of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The agenda further highlights the evaluation’s role in SDG service delivery and meeting the UN’s development agenda. EvalAgenda2020 emphasizes the need to set national evaluation priorities through evaluation capacity building, evaluation

financing, and potential for evaluation institutionalization. Additionally, establishing national evaluation policies and systems is a critical EvalAgenda2020's action point. Establishing NEPs and NESs form part of a 10-point national evaluation action plan (Lucks & Alugampitiya, 2016). According to the EvalAgenda2020, other national evaluation action points include awareness creation, comprehensive stakeholder consultations, organizing national conferences and conventions, enhanced government participation in evaluation, enhanced representation in global evaluation networks, strengthening public officers' evaluation capacity, enhanced evaluation utilization for evidence-based decision making, establishing national evaluation guidelines and ethics, and advocating for proper evaluation financing through budgetary allocations in government. These action points respond to and help strengthen The Global Evaluation Agenda 2016 – 2020 priority areas that include “(1) the enabling environment for evaluation, (2) institutional capacities, (3) individual capacities for evaluation, and (4) interlinkages among these first three dimensions” (Lucks & Alugampitiya, 2016, p. 20).

Evaluation for Agenda 2030: Providing Evidence on Progress and Sustainability.

According to van den Berg et al. (2017), the Evaluation for Agenda 2030 provides solutions for evaluating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Evaluating Agenda 2030 focuses on meeting development needs through the SDGs, like the Bangkok Declaration on National Evaluation Capacity and the EvalAgenda2020 sentiments discussed above. Other than crosscutting phenomena like inclusive societies, climate change, and advocacy, the Evaluation for Agenda 2030 emphasizes an onto-epistemic shift from donor-centered evaluation to country-specific monitoring and evaluation capabilities. This led to the emergence of national evaluation systems and policies' discourses. Regarding national evaluation policies, the Evaluation for Agenda 2030 calls for (i) an increased role of parliaments in collaboratively promoting national

evaluation policies and systems. Parliaments can demand higher quality evaluations to ensure accountability and representation. They can also formulate laws that promote evaluation capacity building and utilization. (ii) The Evaluation for Agenda 2030 also encourages designing national evaluation policies that help institutionalize evaluation recognition, resource allocation, and evaluation utilization. (iii) Finally, the Agenda highlights the increased demand for evidence-based decision making and easier coordination at the national level through partnerships between the public sector, private sector, and international development partners.

Sustainable Development Goals and Evaluation Policy Intersection.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) paradigmatically focused on program monitoring through simplistic and homogenous approaches that lowered program evaluation quality. While highlighting MDG evaluation approaches, Chouinard and Hopson (2016, p. 1) assert that “failing to view development from a complex systems perspective leads to weaknesses in national development planning and evaluation systems.” This led to skewed outcomes that emphasized program quantitative outcomes instead of program worthiness and impact (Rugg, 2016). However, following the launch of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), subsequent declaration of the year 2015 as the international year of evaluation, and the UN General Assembly resolution on evaluation capacity building and utilization; more discourse national evaluation capacities is evident (Kosheleva & Segone, 2013; Tarsilla, 2014).

Further, through research and collaboration, evaluation quality has increased over time. However, there is a need to establish written evaluation policies, increase budget allocations, and enhance evaluation capacity building (Rugg, 2016). National development agendas (for example, SDGs and Kenya’s Vision 2030 or Big4 Agenda) require country-level evaluation consensus

meetings and stakeholder consultations to guide national initiatives and build local evaluation capacities. National evaluation policies help institutionalize SDG and development evaluation plans and strengthen the system through set guidelines.

However, for better evaluation outcomes, national evaluation policies should be Values and Theory-grounded (Christie & Lemire, 2019). Chouinard and Hopson (2016) add that national evaluation policies and systems should consider cultural complexities and the wicked nature of developmental problems to fit the Agenda 2030 (SDG) needs. In their view, national evaluation policies should consider diverse perspectives within multicultural purviews and a paradigmatic shift towards adaptive management, evaluative thinking, and evaluation capacity building.

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and International Development Evaluation Implications.

Sustainable development goals provide implementation and design frameworks for international development and donor programs in countries. In March 2005, the Declaration on Aid Effectiveness was passed to “harmonize and align aid delivery” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, p.1). This declaration emphasized the need for stronger national structures to capture the diverse development needs, align aid with county needs and priorities, enhance donor and government agencies’ accountability to parliaments and the people, align donor agencies policies (including evaluation policy) to country priorities and eliminate duplication of roles, and establish measures to monitoring performance of widely accepted and tentatively best practices (African Development Bank, 2011, OECD, 2005; Wood et al., 2011). At the time of this declaration, the prevailing development agenda was the MDGs. As highlighted above, the paradigmatic and epistemic framing around MDGs encouraged program

monitoring, not evaluation. The focus on indicators and matrices possibly led to shallow program assessments as these could not provide deeper insights into the programs (Chirau et al., 2021).

This Declaration provides grounds for program evaluation in donor organizations. In Africa, donor organization influence is evident in evaluation funding and practice (Chirau et al., 2022; Fraser & Morkel, 2020; Porter & Goldman, 2013). Donor organizations help to finance, build capacity, and implement evaluation initiatives. They implement several programs within Kenyan communities, all of which are evaluated. Further, they directly and indirectly influence Africa's national evaluation policies.

Donor influence on evaluation practice and national evaluation policies

Africa still faces evaluation capacity and utilization gaps. As such, there is a low evaluation demand and supply, particularly in government (Goldman et al., 2018), prompting donor organizations to fill these gaps. With continued donor presence in Africa, donor organizations will still significantly influence evaluation practice and structure in Africa (Blaser Mapitsa & Chirau, 2019; Chirau et al., 2020; Goldman et al., 2018; Porter & Goldman, 2013). However, Goldman et al. (2018) confirm an increasing local government influence and interest in establishing centralized country-led national evaluation systems. In their illustration, Goldman and colleagues outline government-led program evaluation initiatives in Benin, South Africa, and Uganda. They indicate the importance of centralized evaluation units and how national evaluation policies help institutionalize and strengthen African evaluation practice. Of importance in these government-led evaluation systems is the need for stronger stakeholders and diverse evaluation policy subgroup perspectives (Chirau et al., 2020). Chirau further includes establishing national evaluation systems that utilize available resources and capacities to advance Africa's national program evaluation.

Due to financial and capacity gaps, African governments still depend, albeit to a lesser extent (Goldman et al., 2018), on international organizations and donors to establish their national evaluation systems. Akanpabadaï Akanbang et al. (2016) confirm that in Africa, evaluation was mostly externally funded with a focus on end-term evaluations. Akanpabadaï Akanbang further addresses the misconception that the purpose for mid-term evaluations is only to determine project viability and earmarking for possible termination. Such misconceptions and foreign influence percolate into the national evaluation agenda, subsequently influencing the national evaluation policy structure. The need for evaluation capacity building and evaluation utilization is a common phenomenon mentioned across the board. However, little is done to engrave such development in policy and improve evaluation practice on the continent.

Governments should strive to draw value from evaluation capacity building (ECB) (Preskill & Boyle, 2008) to improve the status of program evaluation in Africa. International organizations have invested in evaluation capacity building in Africa, although Masvaure and Fish (2022) consider the efforts ad hoc and nonsystematic. Tarsilla (2014) adds that donor investment in evaluation capacity building has not yielded fruit. Tarsilla further asserts that the focus has been on short-term training that is not intentional and institutionalized to promote evaluation utilization and the overall quality of program evaluation.

While donors play a vital role in advancing program evaluation in Africa, African governments could improve their evaluation stakes to advance better service delivery and good governance. Additionally, donors helped establish most African national evaluation systems (NESs) (Tarsilla, 2014), but African governments increasingly drive the systems. However, evaluation capacity gaps are evident, which limit evaluation quality and utilization. This influences policy decision-making and effective stakeholder engagement. Like Tarsilla (2014),

emerging research on national evaluation systems and policies must advance harmony between donor organizations and African institutions.

Evaluation capacity enhancement is vital for collaboration and learning between donor organizations and African institutions (Morkel & Ramasobana, 2017). ECB can be the next frontier for collaboration, and it could encompass African perspectives, including the use of made in Africa methodologies (Omosa et al., 2021) and mutual respect. Specifically, the role of tertiary education institutions that offer evaluation programs should be incorporated in emerging discourses in ECB and its national evaluation system implications (Marjanovic et al., 2017). Deliberate research initiatives on the continent will help produce knowledge on program evaluation and inform policy (Chouinard & Cousins, 2013). Partnership also plays a vital role in bringing together higher education institutions, the government, donor organizations, and civil society institutions to improve engagement structures and customize national evaluation policies suitable for respective African countries (Tirivanhu et al., 2018).

Knowledge, evaluation expertise, and technical standards influence the structure and quality of public policies (Cabane & Tanchou, 2016), including national evaluation policies. However, international organizations still control and influence the available knowledge and influence its use (Masvaure & Fish, 2022). This influence is catalyzed by the donor organizations' investment and the conditions that accompany their funding (S. L. Khumalo, 2022). As mentioned before, donor organizations finance and facilitate NEPs, replacing national governments that should have higher stakes in similar programs (Marcondes, 2016).

Evaluation Policy Research in Africa

In Africa, essential evaluation policy aspects and considerations include donor organizations' domination and influence. Additionally, there is a mismatch between the demand

and supply for evaluation, inadequate evaluation capacity, and monitoring masquerading as evaluation. Governance framing influences the demand for evidence-based decision making and performance-based management, although government-instigated evaluations (unlike donor-driven) are not widespread (Goldman et al., 2018; Porter & Goldman, 2013). African governments increasingly employ monitoring and evaluation to promote good governance, responsive leadership, inclusivity, and generally addressing stakeholder needs in the wake of public sector reforms and “ever rising expectations from ordinary citizens” (Kanyamuna et al., 2020; Makadzange, 2022, p. 1). The need for accountability has also prompted African governments to formulate evidence-based policies and utilize evaluation outcomes to budget and design programs or review public policies (Chirau et al., 2020).

Porter and Goldman (2013) determined that monitoring is very dominant in all six African countries (Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Benin, Senegal, and South Africa) under their consideration. The study determined that these were the leading African countries in institutionalizing monitoring and evaluation at the time. This position was confirmed by Abrahams (2015), who stated that the South African government emphasized monitoring. Decrying the donor influence at the expense of country-led evaluation needs, Porter and Goldman (2013, p. 8) noted that “monitoring information is all that is available through government systems, and so there is a danger of ‘monitoring masquerading as evaluation’.” Surprisingly, however, nearly ten years later, leading African countries in monitoring and evaluation practice still focus more on monitoring at the expense of evaluation despite having formal national evaluation policies. Chirau et al. (2020) argue that despite the imbalance, existing NEPs influence a gradual shift towards evaluation. Existing African NEPs are still in

their infancy; hence, it is a good time to introduce epistemic changes and possibly strike a balance between monitoring and evaluation.

As indicated before, research on evaluation policy is still in the formative stage and receives less attention among evaluators and researchers (Hart & Mark, 2022; Trochim, 2009). Mark and Hart (2022, p. 116) add that “the relative inattention to evaluation policy is unfortunate and perhaps surprising” despite a shifting focus towards the role of evaluation in informed decision making. Some African governments such as South Africa, Uganda, Benin, Senegal, Kenya, and Ghana have a somewhat structured and institutionalized evaluation system with others such as Tanzania, Madagascar, Lesotho, Zambia, and Namibia are fast developing and structuring their evaluation systems (Chirau et al., 2022; Porter & Goldman, 2013). The institutionalization efforts notwithstanding, Africa's systematization and institutionalization rates are “progressing relatively slowly” (Chirau et al., 2021, p. 1). Further, other challenges include inadequate technical capacity, inadequate funding, limited evaluation utilization, inadequate capacity to make follow-ups, overreliance on monitoring, and limited evaluative thinking still bedevil evaluation practice (Chirau et al., 2022). With the rise of evaluation institutionalization in Africa, more research and structured discourses on national evaluation policies and systems emerge.

Evaluation practice in Kenya

Like many other developing countries, Kenya experienced heightened monitoring and evaluation efforts with the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) in the early 2000s (Holvoet & Dewachter, 2013). The focus then was to enhance government accountability and track development progress. Other interests included enhanced evidence-based decision-making and result-oriented development. The World Bank and other donor

agencies' roles helped advance program evaluation, causing donor organization dominance in the country's evaluation practice (Nyaga Karani, 2014). The donors also fail to align their evaluation approaches with other donor agencies and with country development and evaluation frameworks. This is partly because of increasing accountability and cost justification interests in the donors' home countries (Holvoet & Dewachter, 2013). The continued dominance negatively impacts the national evaluation capacity, inhibiting the maturation, sustainable growth, and strengthening of evaluation systems.

To address the over-reliance on donor organizations, there is an increased effort to strengthen national evaluation capacities in Africa (Chirau et al., 2022), including Kenya. Some countries have designed national evaluation policies to institutionalize and formalize their evaluation systems and help guide their evaluation practice. Donor overreliance arises from weak national evaluation, and Kenya is among African countries without functioning evaluation systems despite recently approving its evaluation policy (Goldman et al., 2023). Others include the Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, and Ghana, unlike Uganda, Benin, and South Africa, which have functioning national evaluation systems.

Like in many other developing countries, monitoring is dominant in Kenya. Nyaga Karani (2014) confirms this by adding that evaluation in Kenya is more on outputs versus outcomes at the expense of impacts and organizational learning. This evaluation practice gap is exacerbated by Kenya's inadequate capacity to supply and use evaluation (Kamau, 2015). The capacity challenges are because there are few professionals trained academically as evaluators, leaving those trained experientially on the job (Kithinji, 2019). These capacity challenges are compounded by a relatively small number of Kenyan universities that offer evaluation programs (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015). The few that do also focus more on monitoring at the expense

of evaluation, hence skewed outcomes (Holvoet, 2011). Inadequate research and curriculum development funding further deepens this challenge. Kenyan universities could lead efforts to build evaluation capacity in the country through collaborative research and training (Basheka et al., 2016) and nurture young and emerging Kenyan evaluators to advance evaluation practice and elevate local voices, methodologies, and perspectives. Strong research recommendations will help advance practice in the country and inform related policies.

New knowledge may enhance evaluation utilization as the research outcomes help address actual needs among evaluation users. Quality research on program evaluation in Kenya is rare, and due to a lack of structure, evaluation in Kenya is fragmented and uncoordinated. Most public agencies do not have centralized evaluation initiatives. Even those with pockets of evaluation do not have sufficient capacity to utilize the evaluation recommendations or synthesize and collate the evaluation results for meaningful use (Karani, 2014). The disintegration impedes the usefulness of evaluation in policy decision-making. Further, due to non-existent structures, individual evaluations might fail to inform national policy due to inadequate capacity and lack of viability.

Evolution of National Evaluation Policy in Kenya

The Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy of 2022 has undergone a series of metamorphoses from the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2000, the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS) in 2003, the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES), the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy in 2012, and finally the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy in 2022 (Government of Kenya, 2022). This section summarizes the NEP chronology, highlighting its main features and possible gaps (see Table 2 below).

The policy document analysis summarized below adds to how NEP happens and policy promulgation, reviews, and adoption dynamics. The table highlights the different policy instrument features and draws comparisons with the current policy. The policy instruments align with Africa’s evaluation practice characterization and features. For instance, the role of international organizations such as the World Bank and the UNDP is evident through the policy cycles. Further, there is an overreliance on monitoring at the expense of evaluation, which cuts across all the policies, with incessant calls for evaluation utilization and capacity building. The weak link between the national evaluation ecosystem and parliament is also evident in the policies. Table 2 below summarizes these policies and, based on initial literature analysis, highlights their gaps.

Table 2

The Kenya National Evaluation Policy Evolution Summary

The national evaluation policy	Key features	Policy strengths	Policy gaps
The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), 2000	This was a World Bank/IMF initiative to summarize and assess the poverty situation in Kenya and other heavily indebted and poor countries.	This policy is the beginning of structured and well-defined evaluation in Kenya, forming the foundation for evaluation practice in Kenya.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. This was a top-down strategy where the World Bank played a central role in its adoption. ii. This strategy aligns with the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and only provides guidelines for monitoring for accountability.
The Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment	Like its predecessor, this strategy was also championed by the World Bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The strategy is an improvement from the PRSP as it incorporates monitoring and evaluation. 	This strategy was monitoring-for-accountability-inclined and not institutional learning and evidence-based decision-making.

Creation
(ERS), 2003

- ii. This policy enhanced the Kenyan government's role and helped set up a monitoring and evaluation unit.
- iii. The policy also introduced the need for better training to improve M&E quality in Kenya.

National
Integrated
Monitoring
and
Evaluation
System
(NIMES),
2004

Kenya's NIMES aligns with the country's development strategy, Vision 2030. In NIMES and subsequent evaluation policies, Kenya's Government played a more central role despite continued donor support and involvement.

NIMES proposed enhanced evaluation institutionalization in Kenya. The policy proposed a coordinated, whole-government evaluation system. The policy also proposed an enhanced stakeholder role and participation in the country's M&E agenda.

The overreliance on monitoring at the expense of evaluation is evident in the NIMES.

The policy's focus was on establishing structures to meet targets, with little regard for other social nuances and institutional learning.

The whole-government evaluation approach lacked a central national evaluation policy to guide its implementation.

The National
Monitoring &
Evaluation
Policy, 2012

This policy was designed to guide NIMES implementation.

This policy seemed progressive as it highlighted the important role of parliament in promoting evaluation practice in Kenya. The policy proposed an Act of Parliament to strengthen Kenya's Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (MED) and allocate sufficient resources to it.

Like its predecessors, this policy was accountability-oriented at the expense of organizational learning and growth.

Although the policy proposed an act of parliament to support the MED, this has not happened to date, weakening evaluation coordination and resource allocation.

The Kenya National Evaluation Policy, 2022	<p>Like its predecessors, there was significant participation from international organizations (UNDP, UNICEF, World Bank, UNFPA, and Embassy of Sweden). The policy focus was results-based management, transparency, accountability, and efficiency.</p>	Policy incorporates its evaluation to gauge implementation success.	<p>Policy downplays the role of parliament, unlike its predecessor. Like others, the policy concerns malicious compliance (M&E as a compliance and accountability tool).</p>
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National Evaluation Policy and Good Governance

Good governance is one of the three modern state pillars: democracy, the rule of law, and good governance (Addink, 2019). However, upholding good governance is not an exclusive preserve for the executive (Graham et al., 2003). Instead, governance is "a process whereby societies or organizations make important decisions, determine whom they involve in the process, and how they render an account (p. 1). It encompasses the interaction between the government and other social organizations, including those in program evaluation, such as civil and advocacy groups, VOPEs, and the media. Altogether, the government, the social organizations, and the citizens form a governance system that limits the government's sole responsibility to solve policy problems. All national evaluation policy players are responsible for good governance, albeit with different measures and influences. Graham adds that good governance defines "who gets power, how decisions are taken, and how accountability is rendered" (p. 1). Apart from the players' influence and size, their roles overlap with the capabilities to cross-influence other players. The players' effect is contextual, and the governance

system and players' features might change, depending on the country's governance framing, leading to reframed influence and power re-distribution (Graham et al., 2003; Parkhurst, 2017).

NES stakeholders can also be policy subgroups within a governance system. For instance, evaluation policy literature mentions the evaluators, through their VOPEs, civil society organizations (CSOs) championing accountability and transparency, the legislature, and the government as key actors (Chirau et al., 2021). Furthermore, good governance encourages citizen participation in governance. In a democracy, direct citizen participation is imperative because of the people's sovereign power.

Good governance principles and national evaluation policy implications

Kenya's constitution and universal laws and treaties from the United Nations provide the basis for discussing these sound governance principles. While Kenya's constitution is the supreme law of the land, the country still abides by the international statutes of good governance. Therefore, the national evaluation policy must be in tandem with the country's constitution, international law, and guidelines. Graham et al. (2013) synthesize five principles of good governance drawn from the United Nations Development Program. Read together with Addink (2019), these principles potentially influence Kenya's national evaluation policy as follows:

Principle of Participation and Inclusion.

This principle relates to the legitimacy and voice of citizens in policy and evaluation processes. Citizens should have a voice through their representatives and directly influence policy implementation. Inclusion enhances policy acceptance and adoption. Further, through participation, skeptical and unsupportive government agency heads might embrace evaluation practices and institutionalization initiatives. Participation also presents opportunities for capacity building and diverse perspectives.

Principle of strategic vision and direction.

Good governance principles place the onus on those in leadership and strategic positions to support and champion policy implementation. However, there is a need for awareness creation to build their capacity and gain their support. First, the agency heads and government officials ought to understand the policy's necessity and not view it as another layer of scrutiny and bureaucracy that would expose their activities. They could embrace evaluation practice and policy championship and promote evaluation to improve service delivery, accountability, and learning. Strategic vision also helps to build a culture of evaluation and evaluative thinking in government.

Principle of responsiveness, effectiveness, and efficiency.

This principle helps meet the policy timelines and deliverables. Further, efforts must be made to ensure the prudent use of resources during policy implementation. The policy also has provisions for ensuring effectiveness and efficiency in government service delivery, and hence, it is evaluated and implemented based on its capacity to meet this goal.

Principle of accountability.

Accountability is a primary NEP goal. It ensures transparent and accurate reporting for public knowledge and holds the government to account. Due to governance gaps, Kenya and many other governments still face challenges. To implement the NEP, its response to accountability is a critical consideration. Further, the policy should ensure unimpeded information, data, and evidence flow to support policy decision-making and for transparency.

Equity and the rule of law.

Policy is evaluated on its ability to address social justice and the unfair distribution of wealth and development projects. Further, the policy anchors on its aspirations to inculcate

evaluation utilizations and follow-ups. The policy should focus on underserved communities in Kenya and the evaluator's deliberate efforts to bring forth their plights through their evaluation reports.

Good governance provides a platform for the implementation of policies and the evaluation of national and international treaties. Based on the structure of Kenya's NEP, there is a high likelihood of a centralized top-down implementation approach. This may limit the realization of sound governance principles, as the policy is out of reach and has limited avenues for feedback. Ideally, a bottom-up approach is best suited for good governance, as it highlights the dynamics of local implementation without dominance (Birkland, 2019). The backward mapping approach is optimal for policy decentralization, which may work better in Kenya's devolved dispensation.

Theoretical Framework

The Narrative Policy Framework

This study proposes Jones and McBeth's (2010) narrative policy framework (NPF) as the most suitable model to study the NEP formulation and decision-making process. This framework begins with the assumption that people are generally storytellers and that policy processes comprise narratives that transcend diverse knowledge frames and policy research approaches. Contrary to bounded rationality and market rationality models (Birkland, 2019), the NPF highlights the social nuances of policy processes since everyone has their own unique story and employs a detailed analysis level that “examines how narratives impact individual attitudes and hence aggregate public opinion” (Jones & McBeth, 2010, p. 329). Stones (2002) supports Birkland's assertions that market rationality models fail to represent messy political realities expounded through narratives. Stones argues for narratives, claiming that:

... policy problems usually have narrative structure; that is, they are stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end, involving some change or transformation. They have heroes and villains and innocent victims, and they pit the forces of evil against the forces of good. (Stones, 2002, p. 138)

The Narrative Policy Framework addresses some challenges posed by other public policy frameworks, such as the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). For instance, Birkland (2019) and Howlett and Giest (2015) deconstruct the assumption that the government is only reactive and responds when there is a window of opportunity or in the event of a focusing event. This argument does not stand when the government anticipates a problem and proposes a policy to address the problem ahead of time. Further, emerging theories such as the NPF focus on traditionally understudied policy subgroups (Eissler et al., 2014) and propose inclusive research inquiry and methodologies (Shanahan et al., 2018a).

Although this study aligns with postpositivist and qualitative researchers such as Stone and others, both postpositivist and positivists agree that the NPF comprises four key elements: (i) the setting/context that provide the roots of a policy agenda and the institutional/national domains for policy deliberation; (ii) the plot which provides the chronology of events and highlights the relationship between the characters and the setting; (iii) the characters who can be heroes (policy champions and fixers of a policy issue), villains (causers of the policy problems), and victims (those affected if the policy issue is unresolved); and (iv) the moral of the story that promotes a particular policy solution (Birkland, 2019; Jones & McBeth, 2010, p. 340). This study discusses the NPF elements and their implications in Kenya's national evaluation policy formulation and decision-making processes. The assertions here are conceptual (based on

previous studies in Africa), and this empirical study helps understand and categorize these NPF elements.

Setting.

Policy setting illustrates the history of the policy and its development, including the national governance framing. The policy has local and international contexts that highlight lessons from other countries while strengthening its mechanisms to respond to governance needs. Kenya's governance framing is results and performance-based. This governance principle has forced Kenya and many African countries to consider monitoring and evaluation to be accountable and gather quantifiable monitoring data while also emphasizing the need for organizational learning through evaluation (Chirau et al., 2020). As such, African governments are under considerable pressure to track performance and present results to meet voters' expectations. The NEP helps to situate people's aspirations through an institutionalized accountability and transparency mechanism.

Characters.

NPF has three sets of characters (heroes, villains, and victims). The character types have distinct roles in the policy process, and their narratives help define the policy issue and develop solutions to these problems. However, this study critiques this NPF subcomponent because humans are dynamic and prone to change and shift positions. Besides simplified character categorization, the framework does not highlight the probable relationship between the different character sets. These are fundamental considerations that help explain the policy formulation process. To address this challenge, the study characterizes the interactions between diverse NEP subgroups in Kenya (the VOPEs, the legislature, the M&E Directorate, and donor agencies). The

NPF provides a structure to understand the NEP policy process, as illustrated using the assumptions below:

The heroes in the NEP policy process could be the organized professionals who have advocated for policy institutionalization in Kenya for a while now. Organized VOPEs can be a voice of reason to push for policy change in a country. For example, the American Evaluators Association played an integral role in the United States' Evidence Act 2018 and in informing policy direction for the Department of Education's evaluation methodologies. Other heroes include the institutions of higher learning that lead research and evaluation, policy, and capacity-building programs. Through their VOPEs, evaluators can heighten their sensitization and work with other partners to improve policy decision-making and have their rightful place at the policy table.

The villains in this context could be government bureaucrats, whom we call unwilling villains because they sit on their potential to be heroes and policy champions. Arguably, villainism is due to their limited evaluation capacity, which impedes their contribution and participation in the policy process. Some government officials could also misconstrue the evaluation policy as another layer of compliance that adds to their responsibilities and increases their expectations to deliver their services. Change is challenging for the government since most officials might prefer the status quo. Agency and government parastatal heads might similarly impede policy implementation and frustrate efforts to realize the policy's intended outcomes.

Parliamentarians still have an active role in the success of any public policy. They represent the people and provide oversight over the executive. Even if the evaluation policy is not legislated (a common scenario), the parliament's voice positions the policy for successful implementation. Legislators and agency heads might be unwilling villains due to inadequate

capacity and a lack of proper sensitization. The study further assesses MED's capacity to run a national campaign to promote the policy.

The victims are those affected by the policy issue if it remains unresolved. In Kenya, citizens are the biggest victims of an unresolved policy issue. The policy will improve governance and ensure the proper use of resources and organizational learning. If these policy objectives are unmet, citizens lose a means to hold the government accountable.

Plot.

In a narrative, the Plot chronologically highlights the relationship between characters and settings. It shapes the beginning, climax, and end of a story. The Plot assigns Characters roles and links them to the Setting (Shanahan et al., 2011). In evaluation policy, the plot connects the characters (evaluators, agency heads, legislators, and donors) and the setting (need for accountability and learning). The plot also creates an interaction between different characters in the narrative. For example, when donor organizations provide technical and financial support to VOPEs to run their advocacy and capacity-building programs. Most African VOPEs receive support from international donor organizations that fund their programs and conventions. For complete independence, the VOPEs should recruit more members and identify alternative funding streams for sustainability and power.

Moral of the story.

The moral of the story is the policy solution proposed by a narrative, which is evaluation, advancement, and use in Africa. Based on the NEP success in South Africa, Benin, and Uganda, other countries such as Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, and others now follow suit (Chirau et al., 2021). However, despite the growing number of formal national evaluation policies adopted, the number is still small. The policy-making process is a rigorous, consultative, and public

participatory process that helps the government identify gaps in policy. Chirau et al. add that "in Africa, National Evaluation Policies (NEPs) are regarded as important for the building of coherence and capacity across public sector evaluation systems, and also as the source of evaluative evidence for decision making" (p. 2).

National evaluation policies are public policies and hence qualify for use with public policy frameworks. The NPF is a public policy framework that, among other features, determines the coalition's workings in the national evaluation capacity and system processes. Further, the policy's assumptions fit the dynamics of national policy processes and the interactions between different actors, yielding diverse policy outcomes.

The NPF theoretical framework consists of guiding assumptions, which help determine whether the framework is suitable for a particular study. Table 3 below highlights the intersections between the NPF assumptions and the study features that fit these assumptions. Jones (2018) asserts that a departure from the framework assumptions introduces fundamental flaws in a study.

Table 3

Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) assumptions and implications for the study

NPF Assumptions	Corresponding research assumptions
Social construction	This study assumes that national evaluation policies supersede cost-benefit and economic frameworks and incorporates social dynamics that characterize human diversity. Kenya's national evaluation policy addresses diverse perspectives and value systems, making NPF a recommended framework.
Bounded relativity (Narrative contents)	In this assumption, NPF uses belief systems and strategies to construct meanings through narratives. Value-based orientations and onto-epistemic inclinations create belief and strategy systems within theoretical frameworks that define studies. For this study, the guiding assumption is that policy subgroup interests and agendas are bound to good governance and accountability-based policy reality.

Generalizable structural elements (Narrative form/structure)	<p>NPF elements are categorized into the plot, the setting, the characters, and the moral of the story. For instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Kenya’s National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy 2022 is set in an evidence- and performance-based governance framework that forces African governments to consider monitoring and evaluation to fill the governance gap. (ii) The characters are policy actors who affect or are affected by policy. Characters are categorized into victims, heroes, and villains. This study assumed that the heroes are the M&E practitioners in Kenya, the victims are the people of Kenya affected if evaluation efforts do not meet their needs, and the government is the villain in this policy process. (iii) The plot chronologically highlights the relationship between the characters and their settings. I assume that Kenya’s evaluation landscape is monitoring-aligned and donor-influenced. I also assume that foreign pressure or recommendation to have a policy was made despite the limited capacity to implement the policy. (iv) The moral of the story is to enhance evaluation capacity, practice, and utilization in Kenya.
Three interacting levels of analysis	<p>NPF assumes three levels of policy analysis: micro (individual), meso (coalitions and policy subgroups), and macro (cultural and institutional level). This study proposes the meso level of analysis given the policy subgroup interests. Specifically, the study considers the evaluation practitioners’ narratives versus the MED-Donors coalition narratives. Other policy subgroups outside the scope of this study include the legislature and senior government bureaucracy.</p>
Homo narrans (story telling) model of the individual	<p>NPF assumes that people are natural storytellers and prefer to communicate in storylines. This study uses storytelling approaches to collect and analyze data. Often, stories have characters, beginnings, climaxes, twists, and endings.</p>

Source: derived from Shanahan et al. (2018)

Policy subsystems level of analysis

Given the temporal and fiscal constraints, this study uses the meso level of analysis for feasibility and practicability. The NPF has three levels of analysis: the micro, meso, and macro levels, all of which determine the scope of a study. The meso level of analysis focuses on policy subsystems or policy actors in groups, coalitions, or organizations (Jones, 2018; Shanahan et al.,

2011, 2018b). The study focuses on how national evaluation policy subsystems construct and diffuse narratives that impact policy processes and outcomes. However, the micro level focuses on individuals and how narratives influence their policy decision-making, while the macro level focuses on how policy transcends institutions, cultural and societal norms (Shanahan et al., 2018b).

In this study, the main level of analysis was the meso level (policy and evaluation subgroups) and its implications for the national evaluation capacity (macro level). This transitory aspect of the study confirms the relationships between the different levels of analysis and that they are not meant to operate in isolation. The policy subgroups in Kenya's National evaluation policy space include the professional evaluators through their VOPEs, the civil and donor organizations that influence monitoring and evaluation practice in Africa, Kenya's Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (MED) situated in the National Treasury and Planning, the State Department for Planning, and the legislature.

The NPF meso-level policy subgroup level of analysis aligns with Chirau et al.'s (2020) NES framing. In this framing, Chirau defines NES as a “system that defines the commissioning, undertaking, and use of evaluations and provides guidance around institutional arrangements” (p.2). Their focus on NEP stakeholders places the NEPs at the center of NES. It identifies four NES components: the legislature, VOPEs, MED, and an enabling environment for a complete system, defined below:

The national evaluation policy.

This is an integral NES component that formalizes and institutionalizes the NES. NEP provides the basis for implementing whole-government monitoring and evaluation in Africa. Chirau et al. (2021, p. 3) define NEP as “a systematic and institutionalized M&E framework in

several interdependent organizational entities with the purpose of informing decision-making and securing oversight functions.” Kenya’s Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (MED) represents the government-wide evaluation system in this study. MED is the most suitable unit of analysis as it is the NEP custodian. It is the government unit responsible for the policy implementation.

Legislature.

Parliaments play an important role in making laws and representing the people. Legislature also keeps the executive in check and can advocate for policy directions that could favor the people. A strong presence and participation of legislatures in evaluation means an increased national attention on important matters affecting the people. Most parliaments can summon the executive to appear before a committee to answer questions related to service delivery and informed decision-making. They can help strengthen follow-ups and evaluation utilization to effect change. However, lawmakers first require enhanced capacity to discern between monitoring and evaluation. Africa being overly reliant on monitoring at the expense of evaluation means some lawmakers probably confuse these terms or take them to mean the same thing. Further, the capacity for evaluation utilization is also important to hold government agencies accountable for using evaluation recommendations. Finally, legislators can formulate laws that entrench evaluation use in government and subsequently build the national evaluation capacity and culture.

Voluntary organizations for professional evaluators (VOPEs).

VOPEs comprise technical and policy advocacy individuals who professionalize evaluation. Organized VOPEs can be a voice of reason to push for policy change in a country. Evaluators strengthen the NES by supplying evaluation skills and enhancing evaluators’ capacity to advocate for stronger and responsive NESs. African universities offer evaluation programs

and focus more on monitoring at the expense of evaluation. Evaluators through their VOPEs should heighten their sensitization and work with other partners to promote evaluation capacity building and utilization. However, it is helpful to note that most African VOPEs receive support from donor organizations, which fund their programs and conventions.

Enabling environment.

An enabling environment for evaluation ensures safety and adherence to the rule of law for all. Adherence to the rule of law and safety enhances public participation in evaluation and promotes human rights. Further, it inculcates the culture of participatory evaluation and the free will to provide genuine feedback for program improvement. An enabling environment provides room to execute the social justice agenda through evaluation. Further, it encourages public participation in national evaluation policy processes and ensures all actors and civil society organizations get heard and represented.

Model specificity

Defining policy narrative.

To qualify as a policy narrative, the policy in question must meet the Shanahan et al. (2018) criteria, which states that a study qualifies for the NPF when it has at least one character and refers to a particular policy in question, in this case, the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, 2022.

The narrative form/structure.

Shanahan et al. (2018, p. 335), while emphasizing the need for defining narrative form and structure, said, “defining the narrative components of a policy narrative is absolutely essential” in Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) research. As discussed previously, the narrative characters (heroes, villains, and victims), the narrative plot, the narrative setting, and the

narrative's moral of the story form the NPF structure. Therefore, this structure should be evident for a study to qualify for NPF.

Policy narrative content.

To qualify for NPF, the contents of a policy narrative must depict a distinct belief system and narrative strategies. Belief systems are a set of values that guide individuals, coalitions, and societies (Shanahan et al., 2018). The value systems help the study understand the coalitions' interpretation and diffusion of the policy content. The study discerns the coalitions' "operating belief systems" and how they affect the policy debate (p. 336). On the other hand, narrative strategies comprise the scope of conflict, causal mechanism, or devil-angel shift. The causal mechanism is the ideal strategy for the study as it highlights strategic relationships between characters. Further, the study categorizes villainism into intentional, inadvertent, mechanical, or accidental villainization, a suitable framing for this study's assumed villain (the parliament).

Conceptual framework

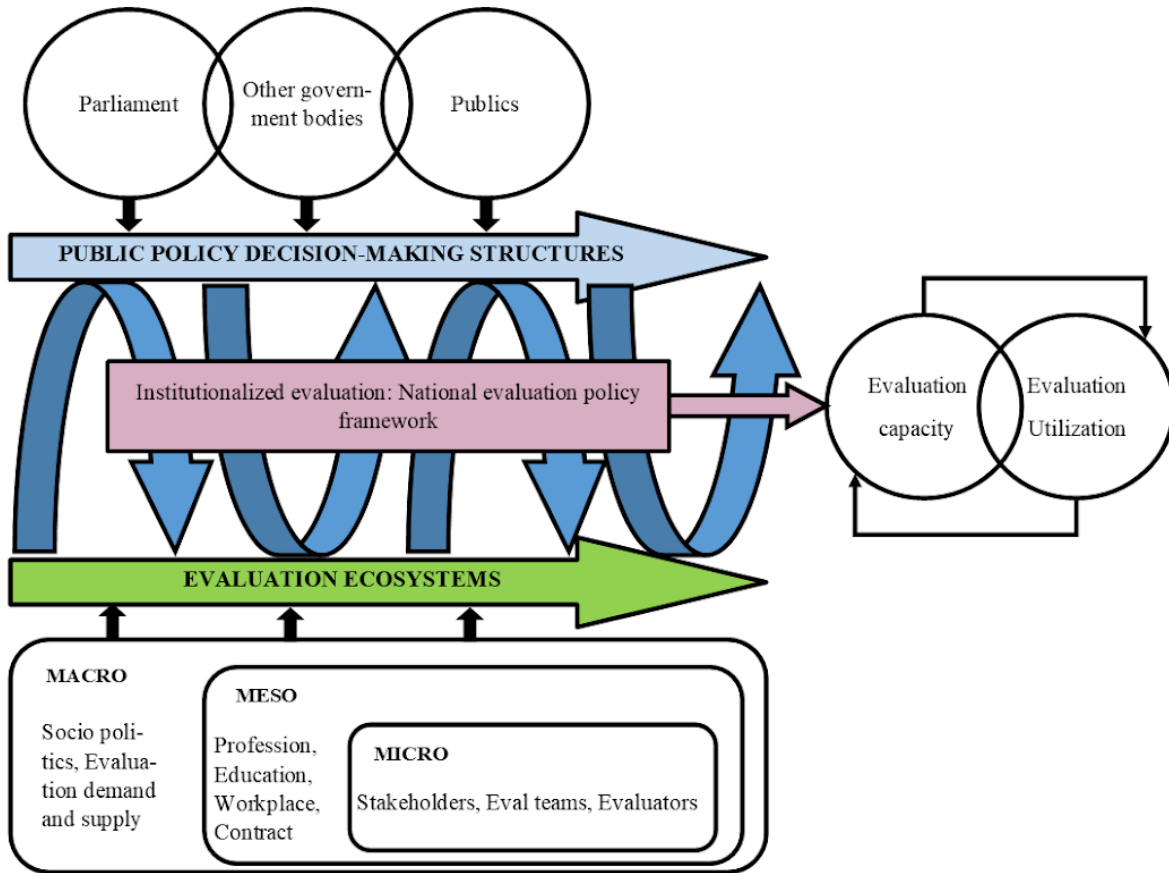
The conceptual framework of this study, illustrated in Figure 1 below, depicts the central role NEP plays in institutionalizing evaluation. The NPF theoretical framework guides this study and conceptualizes a three-tier (micro, meso, and macro) evaluation ecosystem. Although the study's unit of analysis is the meso-level, the study conceptualizes that there are interactions between the different levels and that various components in lower levels merge to form or influence other levels (Gates et al., 2022).

The study conceptualizes a mutually beneficial relationship between the evaluation ecosystem and the public policy decision-making structures through the NEP. The NEP is central to building a multidirectional relationship between the evaluation systems and the policy decision-making structures. The policy provides avenues for coordinating program evaluation in

the country. The overall outcome is enhanced national evaluation capacity and increased demand, supply, and use of evaluation in the country.

Figure 1

Conceptual framework



Source: author's conceptualization; inspired by Trochim (2009) and Gates et al. (2022)

In this chapter, I summarized and analyzed existing literature on NEP. Building on concept definitions, I provided global, regional, and country contexts about the state and history of national evaluation capacities. The chapter explained the international conventions and programs that promote NEP establishment as a tool for better governance and evidence-based decision-making. It also discusses the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that guide the

study. I used the NPF and Chirau's NES Framing to identify policy subgroups and how they inform the research methodology.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research design

The overall research design is a meso-level non-experimental case study proposed by Shanahan et al. (2018b). The meso-level unit of analysis focuses on the policy subgroups, which align with Chirau et al.'s (2020) NES framing that focused on national evaluation stakeholders. The study focuses on both the narrative form and narrative content to discern and define both form (narrative elements – characters, plot, setting, and moral of story) and content (what the narrative is about – belief systems and narrative strategies) (Shanahan et al., 2018b) which together define Kenya's national evaluation policy (NEP) realities.

To qualify as a narrative policy framework study, the form and content must (i) encompass at least one character together with the setting, plot, and moral of the story and (ii) mention the public policy under consideration (Shanahan et al., 2018b). Given the scope and viability of this study, the characters are the evaluation professionals represented by the Evaluation Society of Kenya, the government-wide evaluation initiatives represented by Kenya's Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, the legislature represented by the Finance and National Planning Committee, and the civil society and donor organizations represented by the National Council of NGOs. The policy under consideration is the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, 2022.

The non-experimental case study approach helped collect detailed and diverse data to understand the NEP and its implications better. Furthermore, since the policy was recently promulgated, an experimental approach is not ideal for gaining deep insights into the policy dynamics. Furthermore, research generalizability and replication are not this study's main goals but to describe Kenya's national evaluation policy process and the relationship between different

national evaluation policy sub-groups and their contributions to strengthening Kenya's national evaluation capacity.

Study's onto-epistemic framing

This national evaluation policy research employs a transdisciplinary framework with Kenya's case as the subject for collecting and analyzing empirical evidence. The study integrates public policy concepts and theories in program evaluation. Specifically, the study employs the Jones and McBeth (2010) Narrative Policy Framework as the theoretical framework and Chirau et al.'s (2020) evaluation-aligned conceptual framework. The study uses a pragmatic interpretative paradigm and case study research methodology to define the conceptual and methodological approaches (Goldkuhl, 2012). A case study is an interpretative approach and is part of three other interpretative methodologies: ethnographies, phenomenology, and hermeneutics; together with Creswell and Poth's (2018) narrative research and grounded theory studies as other interpretative research paradigms.

Case studies are an "in-depth study of events or processes over a prolonged period" (Scotland, 2012, p. 12). Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 153) on the other hand define case studies as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information and reports a case description and case themes." Further, Creswell and Poth identify key case study characteristics, highlighting this methodology as (a) having a specific issue (case) to be studied, (b) definable and bounded by specific parameters, (c) a means to an in-depth understanding of a research problem, (d) involving key case themes that help define different research findings, and (e) asserting overall meanings or drawing conclusions to build patterns or research occurrence explanations.

For this study, the case is Kenya's National Evaluation Policy, 2022, a recently promulgated NEP that will guide Kenya's national evaluation capacity. The policy recommendations apply to government agencies and could also guide private practice. The national evaluation policy actualizes and institutionalizes a NES that encompasses administering the NEP through the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate of Kenya, Kenya's legislature (the National Assembly and the Senate), voluntary organizations of professional evaluators (VOPEs), and an enabling environment for M&E growth in the country as championed by donor agencies. NEP provides the basis for whole-government monitoring and evaluation implementation in Africa (Chirau et al., 2020).

Case study misconceptions and myths

Case studies, like other research methodologies, face misconceptions. In dominant positivist and postpositivist epistemologies, interpretative (qualitative) research methodologies face a backlash with doubts about their capabilities to inform policy. Case studies have unjustifiably acquired a reputation for being a semi-anecdotal investigation of the small details of individual circumstances, research incapable of generating significant empirical or theoretical advances in knowledge. It is argued that the case study is, at best, a preliminary step that generates hypotheses to be used in "more reliable" methods such as standardized questionnaires or statistical data (Leo, 2009, p.2). First, this study dispels the myth of causality, which could lead to reductionist and simplistic outcomes. As such, case studies are not successionist-dependent since social groups are dynamic, nuanced, and complex. Further, Scott (2014) argues that causation is not observable and only "successive occurrences" are observable (p. 34). These occurrences are attributable to various causal relations that cannot be singled out in social settings.

Secondly, case studies help achieve emancipatory, collaborative, and participatory research (Fawcett & Hearn, 2004). This enhances practical political solutions for policy problems and helps create a connection between lived experiences and research. Like action research, case studies are context-specific and help solve a specific problem affecting a particular community. Therefore, replication and transferability are not their leading priority. Finally, this study deconstructs the argument that case studies are mere stories giving preliminary outcomes that precede an actual study. Instead, this study assumes that stories and narratives matter to social groups as they tell their story in their own words. Narratives also enhance participation and empower social groups to use their voices. The case study also increases chances for reflexivity and critical consciousness, leading to transformative research outcomes.

Why a case study?

Leo (2009) asserts that upon promulgation, public policies come with their justifications regardless of whether they are research or theory-based. Leo adds that case studies are a good way to test whether the policies meet their aspirations (reasons for which the policies were designed). Further, a series of case studies can help develop a theory on a phenomenon. Social research through case studies introduces the human dynamics that contextualize and localize knowledge generation. Human dynamics cause social nuances and complexities, limiting the scope of one-size-fits-all logical positivist methodologies.

Further claims that qualitative research is a mere "unsystematic" story that is "ill-founded and self-serving" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 62). These exclusionist views could stifle the voices of fellow researchers and the communities they work with. Social research should strive for "external credibility" (p. 67) and validity that meets the people's policy aspirations. Important questions, such as to what extent local onto-epistemologies are included in knowledge generation

and whether research or policy outputs include co-created recommendations and knowledge, are crucial.

Emancipating dominant epistemologies requires a concerted effort that accounts for dynamism and existing knowledge (Tafesse et al., 2020). To address these challenges, this study employs a meso/subgroup level of analysis through stakeholders (social groups) and further recommends social groups' interdependency and social pressure through learning together. The study's guiding principle is that researchers and policymakers should acknowledge existing knowledge frames and incorporate knowledge built on scientific insights and partnerships (Tafesse et al., 2020).

Pertinent concerns arise over who determines what is best, for whom, and in which context. Take, for instance, a policy instrument in Nigeria that would not necessarily work in Kenya. Similarly, what works on other continents might not work for Africa. Other pertinent questions include the scope and dynamism of what is best, leading to knowledge democracy. Knowledge democratization shuns finality (best practices) and challenges top-down knowledge generation and dissemination models. Instead, this study's approach is "tentative best judgment" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 11), which acknowledges the need to recognize and incorporate local perspectives in research. Tentative best judgment eliminates finality and provides room for new knowledge, emergence, and the possibilities of pragmatism.

A case for the pragmatic paradigm

Birkland (2019) confirms that, against common misconception, the government is not a "single-minded monolith that is completely accountable only to itself and pursues its ends" (p. 239). Instead, the government has legislative interests, executive interests, government agency interests, and government bureaucrat interests, among others. Kenya subscribes to the division of

power through three arms of government and places substantial power in the legislature and independent commissions. Such measures improve the government's accountability, making pragmatic worldviews practical to suit different government needs and agendas. The pragmatic worldview features discussed below help justify this research paradigm.

Greenwood and Levin (2007) highlight three generic pragmatic worldview features that apply in "most situations" (p. 134). These characteristics include (i) establishing a setting for dialogues and shared learning; (ii) knowledge co-creation through sharing experiences and local perspectives leading to new knowledge; (iii) multi-method inquiry techniques since pragmatism involves using different yet appropriate means together to arrive at a desired outcome; including different theories or mixed research methodologies. Creswell and Poth (2018) add that pragmatist: (i) focus on the problem being addressed and not the methodology, (ii) have freedom of methodology and technique choices, depending on the truth and adding reality to action, and (iii) consider both the means and end to addressing a research or policy problem.

John Dewey and Deweyan Worldview

John Dewey is among the leading pragmatic philosophers. Others include William James, George Herbert Mead, Arthur F. Bentley, Charles Sanders Peirce, Kurt Lewin, Stephen Toulmin, Bjorn Gustavsen, and, recently, Michael Quinn Patton (Mertens & Wilson, 2018; Greenwood & Levin, 2007). The Deweyan pragmatic worldview is about drawing meaning from reality through connections with daily occurrences in one's community. Dewey's philosophy anchors on democratizing the publics (Maiguashca & Marchetti, 2013), which ties in with good governance and policy implementation. According to Graham et al. (2003), good governance anchors on five pragmatic principles, (a) the principle of participation and inclusion, (b) the principle of strategic vision and direction, (c) the principle of responsiveness and effectiveness, (d) the principle of

accountability, and (e) the principle of equity and the rule of law. These principles and John Dewey's principles of democracy align, as illustrated below.

Drawing from Greenwood and Levin (2007), this study summarizes the specific features of the Deweyan pragmatic worldview and their implications for this study. First, Greenwood and Levin state that the Deweyan pragmatic worldview is action-oriented. Therefore, the pragmatic paradigm is not all about theory but how it connects to action. This view is suitable for policy studies because it explains the workings of policy processes, including policy implementation strategies and approaches. This is practical research as it studies Kenya's new NEP and its implications for the new government.

Secondly, there is an integral connection to egalitarianism. Dewey believed strongly in democracy to achieve self-rule and improve social programs. He also believed in collective action despite diverse perspectives, while encouraging various levels of society to participate in the policy process, designed to address policy problems. According to Dewey, the public's shared interests in a problem help them work together to design a policy solution.

Third, Dewey saw similarities between democratic societies and knowledge democracy. In this comparison, Dewey postulates that social groups will do the best with available materials and resources to address a problem at that time, and "the solutions achieved were only the best possible ones at that moment with the materials at hand, hence the denomination of his philosophy as pragmatism" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 61).

Fourth, the Deweyan paradigm champions realistic political engagements. Dewey understood the bureaucracy in government and the reality of a ruling class that drives the policy agenda. He likened this to the disconnect between research and reality. Greenwood and Levin (2007) record that Dewey acknowledged this disconnect, claiming that "conventional social

science was radically opposed to his action orientation because it had come to separate thought from action and, thus, created social researchers who offered no threat to existing power arrangements" (p. 61).

In summary, the pragmatic paradigm emphasizes the process more than the outcome. Key features in the Deweyan worldview include the relationship between knowledge and action, diverse communities versus democracy, and contemporary science's role in influencing policy. The emphasis on process rather than outcomes informs this proposal's qualitative methodology, which helps capture details of a process and the lessons drawn from a policy process through a case study.

Given policy dynamics and reality, the pragmatic worldview helps account for government agencies' bureaucracy, stakeholders' (including foreign government) interests, and competing public interests. At the national (macro) level, a pragmatic approach helps gain initial insights into the policy process before specific research questions that address nuanced policy implementation, analysis, and evaluation take effect. Government work requires clarity to present universal policy guidelines. The policy implementation phase, however, provides room for adjustments to address issues of power, dominance, and marginalization.

Critique

Social systems, such as government workings, are not perfect. Dewey called for democracy but failed to discuss the flaws of winner-takes-all in democracy. The winner takes it all, irrespective of whether it is slim or a supermajority, does not mean that the majority is right. However, Dewey addresses this concern by providing a way out. The assertion that pragmatism focuses on the process instead of the outcome helps highlight the need to strengthen the process that leads to a democratic outcome. For example, in an election, the process leading up to the

election is as important as the election outcome. A flawed process leads to contested outcomes despite the results. Secondly, pragmatism is not futuristic as it considers what happens at any given time and is not anticipatory. This flaw limits its ability to help plan. Fortunately, the pragmatic temporal ‘best possible solutions’ align with the previous assertions around ‘best practice’ and ‘technology transfer’. These flaws are addressed by Mezirow's (1994) tentative best judgment that confirms Dewey's assertion that research is a work in progress and new knowledge emerges every day, and that research or proposed policy solutions that help work through problems, terming terminal resolutions unrealistic despite the incremental gain (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

Research methods

Based on the research questions and the study's onto-epistemic framing, this study employed interviews and content analysis. Interviews help to gain deeper insights into the policy processes from different actors representing the four policy subgroups. One-on-one interviews addressed the schedules of diverse civil society organization leaders and non-governmental organization representatives. Although content analysis is a widely accepted methodology in NPF, this study used semi-structured interviews as the primary data source, with policy documents being secondary.

Content analysis is a key NPF research method (McBeth et al., 2005; Shanahan et al., 2018b). Narratives are presented as content in documents, videos, speeches, and social media postings. Analyzing this content outlines the narrative strategies and beliefs that present the policy realities. For the study's feasibility, the policy documents and speeches are a key source of narrative data. The criteria for selecting a file for content analysis were that it is publicly available, has the NEP as the subject matter, and contains at least one character as required in

NPF (Smith-Walter et al., 2016). Kenya’s MED shared the necessary documentation to help with the content analysis. However, before gaining access, I sought all the necessary approvals. For instance, as government documents, the MED needed permission from the principal secretary in charge of the State Department for Economic Planning, Mr. James Muhati. The PS is the accounting authority in charge of the relevant State Department where MED is situated.

After the Virginia Tech IRB approval, I also sought consent from the Kenya side and procured a research permit from Kenya’s National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI). After the approvals, I wrote an official request to access these government records, which was granted. Provisionally, MED confirmed the availability of the following documents for content analysis.

Table 4

The Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy Development Process and available Documents

SNO.	Period	Process and available documentation
1.	-	Draft M&E Policy and Bill prepared by Individual Consultants with support from UNDP.
2.	18 th to 29 th March, 2019	Draft Kenya M&E Policy and Bill First National Stakeholder Consultative Forum at Great Rift Valley Golf and Country Club at Naivasha.
3.	25 th -27 th September 2017	Review of the Draft Kenya M&E Policy and Bill by Heads of Departments from the State Department for Planning at Naivasha.
4.	10 th to 16 th November 2019	Stakeholder finalization forum of the Kenya M&E Policy and Bill at Naivasha.
5.	26 th November 2019	Submission of the Draft M&E Policy, M&E Bill, and Cabinet memo to the Principal Secretary for onward transmission to the National Development Implementation Technical Committee.
6.	11 th December 2019	PS-Planning forwards the Draft M&E Policy, M&E Bill, and Cabinet memo to the National Development Implementation Technical Committee (NDITC).

SNO.	Period	Process and available documentation
7.	25 th and 27 th February 2020	The documents were discussed by the NDITC Subcommittee on Policy and Programmes on 25 February 2020 and subsequently by the full NDITC meeting on 27 February 2020, and they were referred to the NDITC legal subcommittee.
8.	3 rd March 2020	The NDITC Legal Subcommittee discussed the documents on March 3, 2020, and provided comments/directives to the State Department for Planning.
9.	6 th March 2020	The M&E Directorate submitted the revised draft of the M&E Policy and Cabinet memo to the PS Planning, incorporating the comments/directives from NDITC.
10.	10 th June 2020	The M&E Directorate resubmitted the revised draft of the M&E Policy and Cabinet memo to PS Planning, incorporating the comments from the Economic Planning Advisor and Director, ISTI.
11.	12 th June 2020	PS Planning resubmitted the Kenya National Draft M&E Policy and Cabinet memo to the National Development Implementation Technical Committee (NDITC).
12.	23 rd November 2020	PS Planning writes to the Chair-NDITC to fast-track the National M&E Policy and request the Chair to re-submit the National Draft M&E Policy to the Policy and Programmes subcommittee for further deliberations.
13.	21 st January 2021	The revised cabinet memorandum of the Kenya National M&E Policy is submitted to the principal secretary for onward transmission and signature to the cabinet secretary.
14.	28 th January 2021	Economic Planning Secretary provides comments and a few amendments to the Revised Cabinet Memorandum of the Kenya National M&E Policy.
15.	8 th February 2021	MED resubmits the Revised Cabinet Memorandum of the Kenya National M&E Policy, incorporating the Economic Planning Secretary's comments/amendments. The policy is provided with comments and a few amendments.
16.	16 th February 2021	PS Planning forwards the Revised Cabinet Memorandum of the Kenya National M&E Policy to the Cabinet Secretary for approval of the Policy and onward transmission to the Attorney General before presentation to Cabinet.
17.	22 nd February 2021	Attorney General acknowledges receipt of letter from the Cabinet Secretary for National Treasury and Planning. However, the letter had not enclosed the Kenya National M&E Policy

SNO.	Period	Process and available documentation
18.	24 th February 2021	The Cabinet Secretary for National Treasury and Planning forwards a copy of the Kenya National M&E Policy to the Attorney General for review and endorsement before presentation to the Cabinet.
19.	12 th May 2022	The Kenya National M&E Policy was presented to Cabinet by the Cabinet Secretary vide Cab Memo CAB (21)29 and jointly submitted by the Attorney General. The Policy is discussed and approved by the Cabinet.
20.	17 th August 2022	MED requests the Head of Legal Unit to assist in the gazettelement of the Kenya National M&E Policy.
21.	18 th August 2022	PS-Planning transmits the Cabinet Decision to the Cabinet Secretary for National Treasury and Planning and requests the signing of the Foreword for the Kenya National M&E Policy.
22.	19 th August 2022	The head of the Legal Unit responds to the MED request and advises that the Policy should be submitted to Parliament (National and Senate) for consideration as a Sessional Paper before it is Gazetted.

Source: Resource provided by the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate

To support available documents in MED, I sought additional and publicly available resources that enhanced the scope and depth of the content analysis. Information from Twende Mbele and CLEAR AA centers provided additional information for analysis.

Research participant recruitment

This research targeted 20 key informants for primary data, although I managed to engage 15. I made initial contact with the MED leadership, and buy-in was facilitated. The Director assured me of MED's support for this research and agreed to facilitate contacts with at least one key informant per policy subgroup. After initial contacts per subsystem, I employed a snowballing technique to set up interviews with the four remaining participants until a response saturation was reached. Each virtual key informant interview lasted at least 60 minutes.

For eligibility, the participants were required to (1) be a member of a policy subsystem, (2) be champions of evaluation practice in Kenya, and (3) be aware of the existence of the new M&E policy under study. The participants' consent to participate and record the sessions was sought, with options to withdraw the consent at any time being highlighted. Table 5 below shows an indicative list of key informants interviewed:

Table 5

Some key informants and their relevance to the study

Key informant (KI)	Affiliation	Relevance to study
KI1	Government of Kenya	This informant is the key to successful policy implementation in government and approves spending.
KI2	MED	This informant is in MED's leadership. They facilitated the policy processes and convened forums to discuss its contents and approvals.
KI3	MED	This individual oversaw MED during the policy design and approval process.
KI4	MED	He is the national evaluation policy vision bearer and set the stage for Kenya's NEP.
KI5	MED	This individual is directly responsible for the policy implementation.
KI6	VOPE	This VOPE representative took part in the policy process and would recommend other key informants from ESK
KI7	VOPE	This individual represents alternative views and recommended other key informants from MEPAK
KI8	UNDP	The UNDP funded most of the evaluation policy processes.
KI9	UNDP	Supports the UNDP's National Evaluation Capacity initiatives.

Data collection and transcription

I carried out the data collection virtually to cut interview costs and cover many participants within the short time available. I used Zoom and sought consent to use Zoom's record functions. Zoom automatically transcribed the data, which was helpful in producing the first transcription drafts. The transcriptions were then revised and shared with the participants for concurrence. Since the data was collected with me in the US and the key informants in Kenya, all 15 interviews were carried out virtually, eliminating the use of commercial transcription software. Zoom's automatic transcriptions were sufficient. I read through the transcription while listening to the audio on two different iterations. The data was then shared with the participants for concurrence. I used the Virginia Tech OneDrive to keep the data and the transcriptions in safe custody.

Data was recorded and stored in the Virginia Tech cloud system. I then coded these transcripts for emerging themes based on the NPF codebook. Human coding is preferred due to the dynamics of policy studies and the proposed Atlas.ti, but it was not necessary. Further, since English is the official language in Kenya and the language of instruction in schools, the study assumed that all the research participants would have English-speaking capabilities, making it easy for automatic transcriptions and eliminating the need for translation.

Coding and data analysis

Data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and merged with those from available policy documents, blogs, and memos. The study uses paragraphs as the units of data coding instead of document-level coding. Smith-Walter et al. (2016) assert that paragraph-level coding generates "more reliable results than those that generally emerge when coding at document level" (p. 1064).

Paragraphs from different documents and transcriptions were disaggregated, and the total number of paragraphs was determined before coding commenced. The NPF codebook (See Appendix II derived from O’Bryan et al., [2014] and Shanahan et al., [2018b]) was customized (after piloting) to suit the Kenya NEP study. The following steps were followed in this study:

First, based on evaluation theories and concepts, each paragraph was deductively characterized for relevance to NEP and evaluation theories. This generated overall data points relevant to the study. A color code was assigned to the data points and revised for better understanding and familiarity. This data classification was done in two iterations, marking them as different concepts under consideration.

Second, after the deductive phase, each paragraph was coded binarily to determine whether it met the principal condition (whether the paragraph has at least one character) for NPF (Shanahan et al., 2018b; Smith-Walter et al., 2016). Paragraphs that met these conditions were considered in the third coding phase.

Third, key NPF elements were identified and coded based on the NPF codebook. Each paragraph from the second step above was reviewed and assigned appropriate codes. The codes included “**SETTING**”, “**MORAL OF THE STORY**”, “**CHARACTERS**”, “**PLOT**”, and “**NARRATIVE STRATEGY**”. These NPF elements provided the overall code categories and further analysis based on the research questions (RQs) generated RQ-specific themes, for example, the characters were further coded into heroes, villains, and victims. The code frequencies helped determine their respective villainy, heroism, and victimhood extents.

Even though automated coding is easier and faster, the dynamics of meso-level NPF coding require human cognitive abilities for sound judgment (Shanahan et al., 2018b). Given the

dynamics of policy processes and the essence of narrative frameworks, where semantics sometimes determines a character's villain or heroic tendencies, human coding was used.

Study area and research approvals

This study was primarily conducted in Nairobi, Kenya, and consisted of evaluation practice and evaluation policy champions. Kenya recognizes other ethics committee approvals, so an approval from Virginia Tech's IRB holds weight. The National Commission for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI) (2021, p. 24) guides the ethical conduct of biomedical research involving human participants in Kenya. A Virginia Tech IRB approval is recognized in Kenya.

The Virginia Tech-approved protocol was submitted to a local Institutional Ethics Research Committee (IERC) for approval for research clearance. Due to the long-standing and formal partnership that Virginia Tech has with Egerton University in Kenya, I used Egerton's IERC for approval. Additionally, I am an Egerton University alumnus familiar with the process. The submitted research protocol and Virginia Tech IRB approval were reviewed based on cultural appropriateness and suitability for local contexts, and research purposes were considered. After approval by Egerton's IERC, I procured a research permit from NACOSTI authorizing the work (see appendices for the relevant approvals).

General ethical principles and considerations

I informed the participants that their responses would be recorded for transcription. Although my default setting was anonymity, I sought consent to include identifiers or record the response as anonymous. I informed the participants of all their rights, including their right to change their minds and withdraw from the study at any time, without repercussion. I shared the draft transcriptions for concurrence and agreed to share the study findings after the dissertation

defense. However, although this is a low-risk study, its guiding principles include: (1) Respect for persons which encompasses considerations for their autonomy, vulnerability, and privacy and confidentiality; (2) Beneficence and acting in the research participants' best interests and those of their organizations; (3) Justice and fairness by presenting a platform for all policy subsystems to present their views; and (4) Compensating the research participants for their time and participation in the research using funds from the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education (ALCE) at Virginia Tech summer research fellowship grant that I was awarded.

I upheld confidentiality and sought consent at every stage. Continuous consultations helped enhance the participants' confidence and trust in the process. I empowered the participants to choose the questions they were comfortable answering or withdraw their consent at will. The participants were free to participate, decline, or even withdraw mid-course. Secondly, the nature of this study is not intrusive and only covers general issues affecting evaluation practice nationally. I continuously checked the participants' comfort during the interview and reassured them that the process was approved by Egerton University and Virginia Tech's IRB boards. I also presented the research permit from NACOSTI as evidence for approval and compliance. I also used my official vt.edu email for all correspondence to boost confidence and copied my research Advisor on all communications for their information and concurrence. I also presented a consent form and shared it with the participants for transparency.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

As a reminder, this study aims to investigate the dynamics of Kenya's national evaluation policy processes and the national evaluation policy subgroup narratives and strategies leading up to the promulgation of the Kenya National M&E Policy, 2022. This study explains how national evaluation policy happens and analyzes how policy subsystem dynamics facilitate or inhibit national evaluation policy processes. This qualitative study provides insights into national evaluation policy processes, with evaluation capacity, evaluation utilization, and evaluation championship outcomes in government. The study is in tune with Kenya's Constitution 2010, which promotes good governance through accountability, enhanced human rights, participatory governance, enhanced public participation, and shared prosperity among Kenyans and their partners (Government of Kenya, 2010).

Anchoring on donor influence on Africa's evaluation landscape, this study uses the Jones and McBeth (2010) Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) to investigate policy subgroups influencing the national evaluation policy process. These policy subgroups align with Chirau and others' (2021) national evaluation framing that proposes a stakeholder-based national evaluation system. The policy subgroups formed a central part of this study as they guided the selection of the study participants. Content analysis was also done to ensure sufficient coverage and scope of the study. According to Chirau, the national evaluation system policy subgroups include the legislature, government-wide evaluation structures operationalized by the M&E Directorate (MED) representing the executive arm of government, an enabling environment operationalized by the donor organizations, and the voluntary organization of professional evaluators (VOPEs).

Data insights

This study proposed at most 20 key informants (five per policy sub-group) and at least 22 documents for content analysis. Realistically, and upon reaching saturation, only 15 key informant interviews were carried out, and a total of 45 documents and blogs totaling 988 pages were reviewed. Of the 15 key informants, representatives from VOPEs were the majority. A total of 6 key informants from the VOPEs participated in the study. However, many government and donor organization informants refrained from participating, citing a lack of authority or mandate to speak for their entities. Other key informants included 5 MED participants, some of whom have already moved to other government departments or entirely out of the civil service. These individuals guided and advanced the country's policy approval processes. Donor agencies and parliament had two key informants each.

Based on my informants' schedules and the culture in these organizations, I faced significant challenges in scheduling interviews, particularly with parliament and the government bureaucracy. This challenge altered the narrative, departing from the proposed scope. Due to scheduling challenges, these findings are from the MED-donors-practitioners' narrative without government bureaucracy and parliament input. For confidentiality, all identifiers are expunged from these findings.

Table 6 below shows a list of analyzed documents, which, together with the transcribed key informant interviews, generated data points that helped determine the character classification as per NPF.

Table 6

Relevant files for document analysis

Document title	Origin	Year published	Relevance
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African Monitoring and Evaluation Systems Workshop Report Kenya:	CLEAR Anglophone Africa	2013	Highlights the Executive's villainy and lack of championship.
Parliamentary Institutions and Implications for Evidence Use	CLEAR Anglophone Africa	2022	a) Highlighted Kenyan parliament's lack of intrinsic interest in national evaluation capacities. b) Highlights the irony of an underfunded parliament, yet they are responsible for budget-making.
Progress Index for Monitoring & Evaluation	CLEAR Anglophone Africa	2017	Faults VOPEs for lack of professionalization with low recruitment rates.
Tracking M&E Developments in Anglophone Africa	CLEAR Anglophone Africa	2018	a) Vilifies the Executive as it shows Kenya's drastic M&E financing decline. b) Ranking 3 rd after South Africa and Uganda, the report highlights the Kenyan parliament's research and structural potential to advance the policy.
Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in Five African Countries	CLEAR Anglophone Africa	2019	Excerpt highlights Kenya's evaluation capacity challenges and challenges the VOPEs to step up.
CLEAR AA Annual Report	CLEAR Anglophone Africa	2018	The excerpt highlights the lack of proper coordination between parliament and MED.
Diagnostic Report: Status of the National Evaluation System in Kenya	CLEAR Anglophone Africa	2019	a) Excerpt highlights the delay in policy approval, faulting the Executive for lethargy. b) Excerpt highlights the limited engagement of civil society organizations and weak consultation structures during the policy process. c) Highlights the unsuccessful plans to make MED a semi-independent entity. d) Report highlights the enhanced role of foreign experts in a Kenyan process, claiming a lack of capacity.
Professional Associations in the M&E Sector	CLEAR Anglophone Africa		Kenyan VOPEs' inadequate capacity to advocate

Final Report: Kenya Gender Responsiveness Diagnostic Study	Government of Kenya (GoK) and Twende Mbele	2019	a) The report highlights the delay in policy approval and vilifies the Executive. b) The report mentions parallel public relations units, such as the Presidential Delivery Unit, that only focus on communicating positive outcomes. c) The report also highlights Kenya's lack of capacity to evaluate and review the policy, even if passed. d) Excerpt vilifies the Executive for limiting funding and withdrawing their political will.
Strategy for Institutionalizing Monitoring and Evaluative Evidence Use across National and Sub-national Public Institutions	Twende Mbele	2024	The report details vague language used in the policy to circumvent the M&E financing proposal.
Blogpost – EvalPartners Innovation Challenge Project	International Org for Cooperation in Eval (IOCE)	2019	a) Report highlights MED's appeal to parliament to introduce a private member M&E bill. b) Report faults the draft policy for missing key cross-cutting social issues like gender responsiveness and non-discrimination.
Email update		2024	The email highlighted the need to convert the policy into a bill.
Request for Gazette Notice for Kenya National M&E Policy	M&E Directorate	2022	In this excerpt, MED heroically tries to have the policy gazetted. The State Counsel advised MED to table the policy in parliament, which they have not done to date.
Comments on a Cabinet Memo on the Kenya National M&E Policy	Office of the Economic Planning Secretary (EPS)	-	The EPS advised the Cabinet Secretary to consider asking the Cabinet to approve funds to implement the policy.
Fast-tracking of the Kenya National M&E Policy	Office of the Principal Secretary (PS)	2020	The PS asks colleague PS to help fast-track the policy through various cabinet sub-committees.

Stakeholders' workshop for finalizing the national M&E policy and M&E bill	M&E Directorate	2019	a) The structure of the stakeholder workshops shows a less extensive process and probably one done as a formality. b) The excerpt also shows UNDP's commitment to meeting accommodation and transportation costs.
Review of Draft Kenya M&E Policy	M&E Directorate	2019	Directorate heads are invited towards the end of the process, limiting their contribution and ownership.
Request for Gazette Notice for Kenya National M&E Policy	Office of the State Counsel	2022	The State Counsel responds to MED, suggesting that the policy should first be discussed in parliament as a sessional paper before gazettelement. This has not happened to date.

Overall, the data showed a sense of skepticism and resistance, not hope and widespread support as highlighted in my reflexivity statement. The data points to possible failures in implementing the policy, with the MED-Donors-Practitioners' narrative blaming the senior government bureaucrats and parliamentarians for the policy's failure. Given that this narrative was mainly theirs, they portrayed themselves as narrative heroes, with the parliament and government bureaucracy sharing the blame. The data did not point to strong victimhood, suggesting this policy's centric approach. The practitioners and the people, both of whom would benefit from the policy, were barely mentioned. The narrative largely revolved around the government bureaucracy as the villain, followed by the VOPEs, which were considered weak. On the other hand, the donors-MED coalition was considered a hero in the policy process. The following sections explain the findings related to the research questions (RQs).

RQ1: How did the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy come to be?

This overarching research objective was to define how national evaluation policies happen and their implications for national evaluation capacities. Donor agencies play an

important role in these processes through technical and financial support, which is why RQ1.1 addresses the role of international organizations in influencing Kenya's national evaluation policy agenda. The second part of the research question considers the role all policy sub-groups play and their narratives in the policy process.

Kenya's evaluation policy context: Policy Setting

To better understand the role of donor agencies and other policy subgroups in this policy process, the study used the NPF “**setting**” code to help characterize Kenya's national M&E policy agenda. “Setting” is a core NPF element because it provides the basis and background for the policy issue (Jones & Radaelli, 2015). Jones and Radaelli further add that NPF settings provide for “low-contestation facts that are generally agreed upon by actors in the policy area [...] and elements of the environment in which the policy exists” (p. 3). The setting code provides the history of M&E in Kenya, the legal and constitutional issues, temporal aspects, and the role different regimes played when championing, or not, for a better M&E environment.

Generally, there is a growing concern about the state of M&E in Kenya. Stakeholders are concerned that the country is clawing back on its gains and has lost sight of its leadership in governance and accountability on the continent. Heightened M&E initiatives started in Kenya around the early 2000s when the World Bank introduced the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). This strategy paper was a top-down World Bank initiative that gave conditions to low-income countries to align with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. This plan was quickly succeeded by the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation (ERS), also by the World Bank. Both initiatives focused on accountability and tracking development while giving conditional grants for M&E compliance. Decrying the state of M&E in the country, a leading VOPE voice with continental influence and network reminds us of

Kenya's role in building other countries' capacity. In other words, the official said that if Kenya continues the same trajectory, it could champion continental M&E efforts.

We were really competing with other nations. In fact, if I remember very well, that when Kenya started, and they were the leading, they were the starters of the M&E week, and everybody was like, oh, what a good initiative. All other countries started coming to benchmark in Kenya. [...] It was quite unique. It was quite a unique initiative, which unfortunately now has died again because we've not had an M&E week in the last two years. – a VOPE leader.

Kenya's M&E policy's history is incomplete without the central role the late President Mwai Kibaki's regime played. It was generally agreed, across all policy sub-groups, that the Kibaki regime championed and provided incentives for developing the M&E policy, especially during his second coalition government term. While giving credit to the then Office of the Prime Minister, one VOPE leader asserts that M&E was most active "when domiciled in the Office of the Prime Minister." At the time, the apex power echelons had better coordination and championship. There was goodwill during Kibaki's time, and the participants agreed that he had a clearer vision regarding M&E's contribution towards economic development. To illustrate this goodwill, an informant attributed the creation of the M&E Directorate (MED) to Kibaki's regime.

For Kibaki, I can tell you that is when the M&E, you remember I told you, it used to be a paragraph. It became a chapter, it became a unit, it became a department. It had now started threatening people. Now people are saying that this thing is going to take 2% of the total budget, people are threatened. – former MED official.

Subsequent regimes have not favored M&E advancement in the country, though the policy was approved at the end of Uhuru's term. There has been a persistent decline in the demand and supply of evaluation, both attributed to declining evaluation capacity in the country. Further, the last two regimes have increasingly deprived MED of funding and continually crippled its operations through pointless staff transfers. For instance, a VOPE Leader asserts that "the last four or so years, Kenya's MED has had nearly five leadership changes. Well, Machuka retired, and then came Ratemo, Kiboi, and some lady, Grace, who was there very briefly. Kiboi returned to MED's helm. How can the department grow with this kind of interference?"

President Ruto's regime has been in power for nearly three years now. Unfortunately, there is little to show for the policy's implementation or advancement. The findings show a lack of M&E support, leaving only government-controlled campaign entities like the Presidential Delivery Unit (PDU) working parallel to MED. One VOPE leader feared that with dwindling government interest, the practice is as good as dead in the current regime.

The national government's goodwill that existed over ten years ago is not there anymore. At that point, M&E was kicking. It was up and standing and we could resonate with the robust M&E systems that existed. Then they kind of fainted in the last ten years. So as much as we wanted to associate growth with the National Integrated M&E System (NIMES) that were working, there was still not a very high level of government engagement, and especially goodwill. But in the last two years, it is actually dead. – VOPE leader.

The government's lack of interest and goodwill is evident in the recently suspended M&E financing. These government austerity measures directly impede the functions of MED and position the M&E policy for failure. A former MED official, while comparing MED's

previous budget to its current state, illustrates the directorate's declining state and further exposes the government's priorities:

The funding level for monitoring and evaluation has declined significantly. Five years ago, we were able to have a budget equivalent to half a billion Kenya Shillings. But if you go to the same budget today for monitoring and evaluation, it's headed to zero. In fact, they are even removing it, so you can only imagine how do you have capacity minus budget? – former MED official.

Constitutionally, Kenya is well placed to advance program evaluation. The country has a constitution that promotes accountability and good governance (Government of Kenya, 2010). Provisions that promote public participation in public programs are core to Kenya's constitution. This legal backing paves the way for the M&E policy, guarding it against annulment arising from constitutional incompatibilities and inconsistencies. This constitutional backing also promotes policy sustainability and applicability in service delivery, including in devolved county governments, as highlighted by a VOPE leader below.

We have our Kenya Vision 2030 projects and even the flagship projects, which are supposed to be governed through the laid mandate within the Constitution. The purpose of the policy is to try to unpack things that give us integrity, transparency, you know, and participation, community participation, you know, we needed a policy that reinforce so that people are held responsible and understand when they are implementing projects, and especially now that the flagship projects are at the national level and the county level. – VOPE leader

Implications of the “setting” for the M&E policy

Although the M&E Policy was promoted as a compliance and management tool for good governance, the findings show that some subgroups’ underlying interests were to facilitate MED’s autonomy, increase MED’s funding, and legislate an M&E bill. As discussed in this dissertation’s subsequent sections, the policy did not achieve these interests. This twist placed the policy on the wrong path of rushed approval, declining interest among the key policy proponents, and significant challenges in its full implementation. The policy was at a disadvantaged position right from the outset. A former MED official asserted that Kenya is also known for designing relatable policies and strategies but fails to implement them, saying, “Kenya is very nice in planning, but very poor in implementation.” While further confirming Kenya’s position as a regional thought leader on governance and public service delivery, the official added that, “countries that picked Kenya's planning processes went very far ahead in terms of development.”

A VOPE leader candidly asked for the policy's “trashing” as it was donor-centric and did not adequately meet the needs and aspirations of a developing African country. The idea that the policy was Eurocentric with few African perspectives did not sit well with this individual, who further claimed that those taking part in the process probably copied and pasted sections of the policy instrument.

You decolonize the aspects, the perspective, because we still use the Eurocentric perspectives instead of basing our perspectives on Afrocentric perspectives. Because of that, we have not indigenized our ways. We still have the pre-colonial era mindset. You just trash that thing. There's nothing like that. Even if you look at it, even the people who sat there were simply cutting and pasting. – VOPE leader

Inadequate evaluation capacity, especially in government, further exacerbated these epistemic gaps. These capacity challenges caused misconceptions and confusion within the government, with many asking what the policy was meant to achieve. Many feared what the policy would do to them if passed. Others felt the policy added another layer of scrutiny and that it served the same purpose as audit functions. A former MED official was concerned that many people did not understand what the policy was meant to achieve due to inadequate capacity and weak evaluation culture in Kenya. He claimed that “people were fearing what is this M&E policy. Is it a policing tool? Is it an audit tool? What is it?”

While expressing confidence in the essence and significance of the policy, a different VOPE leader indicated that he wished the policy would help strengthen VOPEs and professionalize evaluation in Kenya. To him, “evaluation practice is an accidental place to be in professionally. ... even within the government, you find most of the people are either project planners or economists, but with evaluation responsibilities. How would these people implement a policy for a field they know so little about?” The inadequate capacity in government, coupled with weak and unprofessional evaluation associations, impeded enhanced stakeholder engagement, except with UN-based agencies like the UNDP, which funded most programs related to the policy. Inadequate stakeholder engagement also affected the role of parliament in the process. Although parliament helped push for the policy’s approval in the cabinet, as discussed later in these findings, the policy has not been tabled in parliament for discussion and approval as a sessional paper. One donor representative expressed frustration with the stakeholder engagement, citing the need for enhanced parliament involvement in the process:

I just mentioned that we would go to the meetings and with all the stakeholders, you think you are on the same page, and that the document would pass through. Then you

realize that it's not even been tabled for discussion by parliament despite the fact that you'd have been with parliamentarians. – Donor agency representative

Another donor organization representative with extensive government and donor agency work underscored the challenges of parliament involvement. He said that sessional papers are more binding.

By and large, we managed to have the policy approved by the cabinet, but to me, a strong policy is a sessional paper, which is approved by the National Assembly. The policy is still binding, but not a strong sessional paper. A sessional paper is endorsed by Parliament and it belongs, like a legislation kind of, but this one is just like a guideline by the executive, but had it reached parliament and then be voted and approved, then it will be like a serious policy. – Donor agency representative

Academia did not participate fully in the process either, casting doubt on the policy's technical viability and whether it captured new knowledge emanating from heightened research on evaluation. The discussion section of this dissertation critiques the role of academia in this process and propels the role of research on evaluation in NEC. The training and research gaps affected the professional association activities and programs and negatively impacted national evaluation capacity. Leadership challenges in a leading evaluation association in Kenya were extensively mentioned as a potential risk to the policy's success. While the weak VOPE system in Kenya will be highlighted extensively in other sections of this dissertation, this policy setting generally highlights the frail condition of VOPEs in Kenya and why they could be a weak link in the M&E policy narrative.

RQ 1.1: What is the role of international forces in Kenya’s M&E policy agenda-setting?

Donor agencies play an integral part in advancing program evaluation in Africa (Akanpabadaï Akanbang et al., 2016) Kenya included. Although Africans had their way of evaluating and reporting their social activities, contemporary program evaluation initiatives, as currently practiced, were introduced by donor agencies (Chilisa, 2017). As discussed in the setting, the inception and advancement of evaluation initiatives were pegged to conditional grants, especially by the World Bank during the poverty reduction and economic recovery strategies of the early 2000s.

This research question addresses the overall role of donor and international entities in forming and guiding the national evaluation policy agenda. Further analyses and discussions in subsequent sections discuss donor agencies as a character (villain, hero, or victim) in the NPF policy subgrouping. This section only addresses the role of donor entities with respect to the policy setting because without donor support, the policy process would not have kicked off, as confirmed by a former MED official who said that “the Ministry of Planning was coordinating it but the stakeholders who were involved were obviously the development partners, specifically UNICEF gave us funds. They gave us money to start it off.”

Most donor organizations that supported Kenya’s National M&E Policy are United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF), among others, as highlighted by a renowned national and regional VOPE leader and a leading voice:

Kenya’s evaluation policy process was heavily dependent on the UN agencies’ funding. I also did mention to you the role that the UNDP played. Especially the linkages between

the VOPEs, in this case, Kenya, the Kenyan Government, ESK [*Evaluation Society of Kenya*] and working with the United Nations System. – a VOPE leader.

Table 7 below details donor agencies' role in the evaluation policy process and data excerpts. The number of UN agencies supporting this process confirms the assertion by a VOPE leader that UN bodies played an integral role in the process. Bilateral aid agencies like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), UK Aid Direct (UKAID), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) also supported the policy process, confirming developed countries' role in building Kenya's national evaluation capacity.

Table 7:

Donor agencies supporting Kenya's evaluation policy process

Donor agency	Role	Brief data excerpt
UNICEF	Provided funding to start the policy process	UNICEF gave us funds. They gave us money to start off.
UNICEF	Supported M&E curriculum development	In terms of developing the M & E curriculum for the universities in Kenya, that one it's UNICEF.
UNICEF	Provided training on M&E policy	There is training, that know UNICEF is supporting.
AfDB (African Development Bank)	Supported Twende Mbele initiative	Partners who are supporting this initiative include the AfDB
Twende Mbele initiative	Offered financial support to develop M&E	...and we have the Twende Mbele, everybody comes in with their support
CLEAR AA	Supported Twende Mbele initiative	... in the use of monitoring and evaluation in the public sector.
CLEAR AA	Supported the development of the policy	we got we got support from [...] CLEAR in development of the policy
UNFPA	Offered guidelines in conducting evaluations	They were supporting us to develop the norms and standards of undertaking the monitoring

UNFPA	Offered technical and financial support during M&E policy development	We should acknowledge that UNFPA supported us with the consultants, technical and financial support
World Bank	Financial Support	When you talk about development partners here, World Bank, it is one of them
UNDP	Finalization of the policy	They were also interested in the finalization of the policy
UNDP	Offered technical support	So UNDP found a consultant for us that would transform this policy provisions into a bill
USAID	Training, sensitizing and strengthening capacity	USAID provided support for strengthening capacity, training our people [...] and even sensitizing politicians
SIDA	Support capacity building project	SIDA provided support for enhancing the national integrated M&E and operation system
UN Women	Offered technical support	Therefore, they also provided us with technical support
IDEAS	Supported the development of the policy	We got support from IDEAS in development of the policy
UKAID	Funded recruitment of M&E	We also had UKAID that was funding a lot of good governance.
IPAR	Operated as a private think tank for UNICEF in M&E curriculum development	IPAR was a think tank that provided insights into M&E curriculum development
IOCE	Offered financial support to enhance evaluation practice	We received funding, which was called the innovation funding from IOCE for policy onboarding.

Further analysis of the donor agency code shows three key funding items. The donor agencies mainly financed (1) policy process logistics, (2) capacity building and training, and (3) technical and advisory support.

Policy process logistics

This study shows that policy process logistics is key for government initiatives. The logistics included expenditures for hotel procurement, stakeholder engagement, transportation

logistics, participant per diems, lodging, meals, and incidentals. The process also involved hiring consultants to help facilitate the policy process and funding continental or regional thinktanks like the Twende Mbele Initiative to support the policy process through country peer learning exercises. However, there is little evidence of government contributions and ownership. Further, the stakeholder engagement strategies seemed shallow and were meant only to check boxes and justify expenditure.

For example, the international agencies, especially the UNDP and UNFPA, consistently funded Kenya's M&E policy logistics. "UNFPA worked together with other UN agencies in terms of supporting the development of the National M&E Policy," said a donor organization representative. These sentiments are backed by documented records from the M&E Directorate (MED) confirming UNDP's support for the policy process. In one document, MED says, "The National Treasury and Planning, State Department for Planning through the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (MED) with support from UNDP drafted the Kenya M&E Policy and Bill to guide and strengthen the implementation of the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (NIMES)." The express mention of UNDP in government official documents indicates their involvement and the government's acknowledgement of the support. This participant emphasizes UN agencies' consistent support despite changes in political regimes and delays in the policy approval process.

...we are among the partners who, over the years, may not have had a lot of money, but we have been consistent. We have been with MED on an annual basis since we started our partnership, and this was ongoing during the formulation of this policy. – Donor agency official.

Logistics, lodging, transportation, and per diems are major cost items for donor organizations. Although the abuse of per diems and off-station work is discussed in detail later, concerns about the possibility of individuals participating in programs just because of the promise of per diems were expressed. One VOPE leader underscores this point by pointing out that the government “simply wanted the money to implement programs, but they were never keen about making use of proper monitoring and evaluation to show for the effects that come from such programs.”

The government’s investment and commitment in this process cast doubt on the amount of stake they had in the policy. Instead, they partnered with the UNDP to finance stakeholders’ accommodation and transportation expenses, as shown in many records where MED recognized UNDP’s support for this policy process. For instance, on a set of instructions to stakeholders, MED indicated that “UNDP will meet the costs of the officers’ accommodation and transportation. For clarification, please contact MED.” This statement shows serious concerns about the government’s investment in this process. What else does the government contribute to the policy process besides offering clarifications?

Second, donor agencies financed continental initiatives such as Twende Mbele and the Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results - Anglophone Africa (CLEAR-AA). Twende Mbele was extensively involved in the policy development process. These entities receive funding from donor agencies to implement programs in Africa, including Kenya. However, as discussed in the policy’s setting, Kenya’s continental standing is in jeopardy, including its standing within the African Evaluation Association (AfREA).

Twende Mbele, of course, in Kiswahili, means that we are going forward, but this is a peer learning partnership of African governments who are interested in the use of

monitoring and evaluation in the public sector. There were several governments which are participating here, of which one of them is Kenya, South Africa, Ghana, Benin, Uganda and Niger. Partners who are supporting this initiative include the African Development Bank (AfDB) and CLEAR Anglophone Africa. – former MED official.

This official's position was supported by a VOPE leader, who was concerned about Kenya's autonomy in the process and their ability to lead their own efforts, devoid of UNDP or Twende Mbele's direct influence. The VOPE leader added that these continental initiatives left out local evaluators and sometimes engaged Kenya's parliament without local VOPE participation. However, despite this being a genuine concern, a counterargument would be that the Kenyan VOPE environment is disorganized and has self-serving interests that impede the collective good and representation. She ascertained that the M&E Policy process was being led from outside and that the individuals with the money determine the direction programs go.

Yeah. It's unfortunate in Kenya we don't have so much independence to lead very good initiatives like this. Without a donor or funder coming in, then we are really stuck. This was one thing also that happened to this policy. I remember very well the funding, or rather let me just call it the support, was coming from, one, the international community, for example, the UNDP, and also I remember very well the Twende Mbele was quite deep in this because there are some activities that we could go even to do with parliament and unfortunately, we meet and find that the parliamentarians have gone to Naivasha with Twende Mbele so we're left out. All I'm saying is that it was being led from outside. At least the person who has money, or the organization that has money, was calling the shots. I would say that without fear of any contradiction. – VOPE leader.

Third, donor agencies hired consultants to provide technical assistance for the policy process. Except for one, most research participants did not clarify the nature of contractual agreements between the consultants, the government, and the donor agencies. One donor representative attempted to explain the process, saying, “UNDP was responsible for paying the fee for the consultant, of course, the ministry procured, we paid the consultant.” For this case, the donor agency distanced itself from the procurement process and enabled the government to search for the individual who carried out the task.

On several occasions, the research participants mentioned that the government sought UNDP’s support to help turn the M&E Policy into a draft bill. For instance, a representative who is affiliated with one of the UN agencies that supported the policy process said, “We were called upon to support the development of the national monitoring and evaluation bill and the policy.” While crediting the UNFPA, a former MED official added, “UNFPA actually came and supported us with the consultant who came up with the M&E Bill.” Another MED official confirmed the UNDP’s central role in this process, saying they “found a consultant for us that would transform this policy into a bill.”

Fourth, the donor agencies funded stakeholder engagement exercises. This role is closely linked to policy logistics, such as hotel procurement, participants’ lodging, and transportation. The logistics expenses were incurred to facilitate stakeholder engagement activities that the donor agencies funded. For instance, UNDP “facilitated stakeholder engagements at the national level, expatriates, leadership, and county governments.” Incorporating county governments in stakeholder engagement is crucial since Kenya has 47 devolved government units with key devolved functions such as health and agriculture. Focusing on the national government alone would be detrimental to advancing program evaluation in the country or even operationalizing

the M&E Policy. A current senior official at MED indicated the need for strengthening evaluation capacities in county governments and helping them develop their county M&E policies:

Of course, from our development partners, UN, we are working on strengthening and helping, for example, counties have county M&E policies. This one is embedding M&D from that grass root level. We have, for example, support from USAID to bring in a top evaluation expert to build capacity. – MED official.

As mentioned earlier, these meetings took place off-station. This is a likely phenomenon, especially when working with the government, where government officials prefer working off-station to earn per diem. Naivasha, Kisumu, and Mombasa are popular destination cities for government workshops, and in this case, these stakeholder engagements were funded by donor organizations. A former MED official highlighted how UNICEF facilitated stakeholder engagements in earlier policy stages.

It was just like, we want to meet with stakeholders, and we feel like we can meet with these stakeholders in Naivasha. Then you might find that point in time, maybe we plan to write a concept like, or we want to do this, then they come and support it. Because even the first engagement was with UNICEF, and UNICEF was very supportive. – former MED official

Stakeholder engagement is an integral part of a policy process because it incorporates ideas from different actors. Stakeholder engagement aligns with Kenya's constitution and public policy expectations if done correctly. Broad consultations are vital in democracies, prompting the public and other actors like civil society organizations to participate and help improve a policy instrument. For this research, there was barely any evidence of proper stakeholder engagement.

Nothing in the data indicates a structured engagement and modalities for collecting views or submitting memoranda. The document analysis shows potential stakeholder engagement gaps, with the frequent phrase “attend and participate”. Three documents indicated MED’s requests for stakeholders to attend and participate in workshops during the policy development stages. The documents do not expound what ‘participation’ entails, nor provide details of the preparation a stakeholder would have to make before the stakeholder engagement exercise. Without these preparations, these efforts are in futility because there is a risk of misappropriating substantial donor funds on ill-prepared individuals. For instance, in a notice to heads of departments in the State Department for Planning, MED informed the individuals of the policy development plans and invited them to attend and participate in a two-day workshop. Of note, the contents of this notice (see excerpt below) prove that the heads of department were involved relatively late in the process and probably did not interact sufficiently with the policy, limiting their contributions.

Towards the end, the draft policy has been developed through a very consultative process which included various stakeholders MED has organized a two (2) day workshop in Naivasha from 25th - 27th September 2019 to take the Heads of Departments through the Policy for wider ownership by the State Department for Planning. Please attend the workshop, MED will meet the DSA for nominated officers and conference costs.

Other MED records also portray the same picture as above, directly naming UNDP as the donor organization supporting the stakeholder engagement exercise. For instance, one file says stakeholders were invited “to attend and participate in the workshop. UNDP will meet the cost of accommodation and transport. For any clarification, please contact MED.” An ideal condition would be for MED or the donor agencies to adequately prepare the stakeholders and present deliverables and expectations before an engagement workshop. As shown in the findings, there is

no evidence of such efforts, which confirms the fears that such engagements were carried out as formalities and that there was a pre-determined outcome. In this case, although MED facilitated the process, it received funds from donor agencies, making them equally responsible. A structured model for a well-facilitated stakeholder engagement with “... innovation and creativity... as groups work together” is ideal (Otieno et al., 2023, p. 09).

Capacity building and training

During this policy process, some donor programs facilitated training and capacity building. Some highlighted activities included evaluation streamlining and professionalization programs, curriculum and training manual development, evaluation policy advocacy, and government sensitization and capacity building. These findings illustrate donor organizations’ involvement in shaping evaluation knowledge in Kenya and, probably, inadvertently, tailoring the policy only to suit their needs. Further, these findings also align with Morkel and Ramasobana's (2017) claim that training is only a small component of evaluation capacity building and that there are still glaring gaps in Africa’s evaluation capacity building initiatives. For example, a VOPE leader and a voice in Kenya’s evaluation landscape decried donor agencies’ piecemeal approach to evaluation capacity development and its implications on the evaluation policy implementation. The leader said:

Kenya is one of those countries that does not have the rigor that we want to see. Why is that? One, because, like I said before, the development and capacity building of professionals in this field have been mainly driven by donors. That speaks of the philosophical approach that they take and even the rules that they take and the fact that, they are not promoting an academic approach to evaluations in this case, but they are mainstreaming their practices out of convenience to see that the project runs in the way

that would enable reporting to work for them. That gives you a piecemeal approach to capacity building in this field. – VOPE Leader.

In support of Kenya’s M&E Policy and to contribute to program evaluation advancement in general, donor agencies initiated some form of capacity development in the government. Donor agencies fill these needs with the government cutting down its spending and “freezing capacity building efforts,” as one VOPE leader said. Although this leaves questions on the extent to which donor agencies can intervene and support what government programs and responsibilities should be, Kenya’s national and county governments seem to depend mainly on donor support for evaluation capacity development. A MED official highlighted ongoing collaboration with UN agencies and the USAID, who are “working on strengthening capacity and helping, for example, counties have County M&E Policies and better evaluation capabilities.” He also emphasized the need for evaluation capacity development at the grassroots level and better cooperation between donors and government agencies such as the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics.

Part of capacity development efforts in government include peer learning opportunities such as the M&E Week. Nearly all the key informants expressed frustration that Kenya has not run their M&E weeks for two consecutive years. MED organized this event to discuss the state of M&E in the country and advocate for the M&E policy approval. The event provided avenues for disseminating government programs and briefing different evaluation stakeholders on the status of the policy and plans for its implementation. Donors mainly funded this event, and the fact that it has not happened for two years now suggests a declining status of M&E in the country and an evaluation policy flop. A leading voice in VOPEs confirms this by saying, "The government sits central at the M&E Week." He adds that “MED mostly brought in policy and

logistics direction while donors had to take up funding, had to take up capacity building, and all those kinds of programs.”

The donors also supported evaluation streamlining and professionalization. Donor agencies, especially the UN bodies, sponsored curriculum development in universities and helped advance the incorporation of M&E professionalization provisions in the M&E Policy. The aim was to have a better organized profession of recognized, qualified individuals. UNICEF funded several M&E professionalization and university curriculum programs. These efforts also include accreditation aspirations as claimed by a VOPE leader, who hopes for a situation where “with the professionalization of evaluation practice, ... [there will be] a body that is going to accredit evaluators.”

The UNDP and UNICEF supported the development of training manuals and M&E curriculum with the Kenya School of Government and universities, respectively. While emphasizing UNICEF's role in universities, a MED official added, “In terms of developing the M&E curriculum for the universities in Kenya, that one is UNICEF. You cannot take it from them.” UNICEF’s role was confirmed by a VOPE leader who actively participated in the M&E curriculum development initiatives, paving the way for better M&E Policy implementation.

I can draw this way back to 2013, I think it must have been 2013, 2012, 2013, when UNICEF Kenya wanted to help universities in Kenya come up with a policy. Not a policy, but a curriculum on monitoring and evaluation. ... We had the University of Nairobi, we had Maseno University being part of that program, we have Daystar University, and we also have African Nazarene University among the universities that were in this pilot program. – VOPE Leader.

Unfortunately, the overreliance on donor funding poses a challenge when those funds are withdrawn. There is evidence of a decline in operations at MED and the Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK) due to reduced donor funding. A former Med official at some point said, “On a normal day, you would find about six donors queuing to see me, bringing in money. ... But now if you go to the same office [MED], you think the office is closed.” He attributes this decline to a lack of ideas, saying, “It is not the money that is missing, but the ideas that can actually drive the attraction of money that are lacking.” In the wake of geopolitical shifts and rising nationalist politics in developed countries, there is a high likelihood that more funding streams will dry up, as a leading evaluation voice in Kenya alluded to below:

Eventually, the funding dwindled, and UNICEF withdrew. Part of that could be maybe internal challenges that UNICEF and other UN agencies are facing. ... what member states also channel to the UN is not that promising. There must be a bit of cutback in funding, and they have to prioritize. I know that that's one of the things that affected the relationship between UNICEF and ESK. They went on funding, but in very marginal or minute proportions, and perhaps the last that they funded was the launch of the national M&E professionalization workshop that was held in 2022, as well. I attended that. Then what happens when the funding withdraws? – VOPE leader

RQ 1.2: What narratives did the M&E policy sub-groups drive in Kenya’s evaluation policy agenda?

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) has five key elements: the setting, the plot, the characters, the narrative strategy, and the moral of the story. RQ1.2 focuses on the NPF characters, which are further subdivided into heroes, villains, and victims. There was pessimism, and the government bureaucracy took most of the blame.

They were accused of impeding the policy process and exhibited villainous tendencies. The high occurrence of villains in the data indicates policy resistance and a lack of widespread support. The villainy code was the strongest, with the most data points. This negatively impacts the policy because it generally indicates limited support and championship, as illustrated in the subsequent subgroup narratives.

According to Chirau's conceptualization, a national evaluation system consists of four key meso-level/stakeholder groups. First, the government-wide M&E initiatives as facilitated and coordinated by the Kenya's M&E Directorate (MED), second, the donor agencies given that Africa's M&E space is heavily influenced by donor agencies and their contribution in this process cannot be overlooked, third, the M&E practitioners through their VOPEs, and fourth, the legislature that helps make laws and oversight the executive on behalf of the people. This study notes that MED, despite being a critical component of these sub-groups, operates within the structure and confines of the executive. A MED director does not have a final say and still reports to many other layers of command, such as the Economic Planning Secretary, the Principal Secretary, the Cabinet Secretary, and the Presidency. As such, although MED is also part of the executive, its narrative departed from the rest. They were viewed as heroes in a pessimistic executive.

The Donors-MED heroic coalition

The M&E Directorate and donor agencies were the greatest champions and facilitators of this policy process. Without their joint effort and collaboration, probably Kenya would not have a National M&E Policy. Donor agencies were the main heroes in this narrative. As discussed in RQ1.1, donor agencies were integral to this process because they consistently provided financial and technical support. Kenya owes its national M&E policy nearly entirely to the donor

agencies' financial support and the commitment of the MED officials. Donors and MED worked collaboratively to support their stakeholder engagement activities, consultant procurement, and actual policy development. As a former MED official puts it, "Yeah.... The Ministry of Planning was coordinating it." He then quickly adds that the coordination was facilitated through donor funds. "But the stakeholders involved were obviously the development partners, specifically, UNICEF gave us funds."

MED's heroic narrative

This policy sub-group attained Hero status because of its policy process coordination, championship, and facilitation. Some key informants agree that MED had dedicated individuals with a shared vision during this process, seeing the Kenya National M&E Policy through. First MED offered coordination support for the policy process. By coordinating the policy process and working with different stakeholders, they helped minimize the extent to which conflicting interests could impede the policy process. Government is often assumed to be a neutral arbiter, without profiteering interests. By coordinating this process, MED heeded its responsibility for policy formulation and advanced the national M&E policy agenda. While addressing whether there were competing interests in the policy process, a former MED official affirmed that although there could have been some instances of competing interests, the government being central to this process helped neutralize competition and provided a somewhat fair chance for other stakeholders to participate in this process as well:

You know, the beauty about the competing interests in this scenario is that it is neutralized because the coordinating arm is the government. So when the government is the coordinating arm, then nobody else becomes a competitor. Otherwise, if it was organizational based, then that would have been an issue. You know, people would

always like to criticize each other. The government is a neutral ground, and they give an even ground for every player. – Former MED official.

MED was also central to coordinating stakeholder engagement forums. Although this study shows inadequate evidence to show the depth and substance of these meetings, MED still played an instrumental role in convening meetings and corresponding with stakeholders. As discussed previously, they did this with support from donor agencies, especially the UN-based agencies such as UNDP. During the content analysis, MED contacts stakeholders, asking them to attend stakeholder engagement workshops. For example, in a notice to State Counsel and other policy actors, MED coordinated the policy finalization and harmonization.

The Directorate has organized for a workshop for the finalization and harmonization of the Draft National M&E Bill and Policy in Naivasha from 10th to 16th November 2019. ... you are invited to attend and participate in the workshop. UNDP will meet the cost of your accommodation and transport.

Similar examples were noted across several documents in the content analysis, portraying MED's coordination ability and effort. The Directorate's commitment to this course is evident, and their support helped advance stakeholder engagements, leading to the policy's approval by the Cabinet. However, for the stakeholder engagement, critical questions such as the quality of the stakeholder engagement, the criteria for selecting the stakeholders, and whether important voices were represented in these forums still linger. These efforts could easily be futile if the stakeholder engagement exercises are carried out as formalities and to meet donor or constitutional requirements, such as public participation.

The second heroic act by the Directorate was policy championing. Buy-in and support from the then Principal Secretary for the State Department and Planning, Saitoti Torome, helped

facilitate the process. Cooperation between the Directorate and the State Department's top leadership was essential for this process to advance. A former MED official argues that "if the top leadership does not appreciate it [the policy], then they will not support the people who work under them." He then added that "we [MED] received considerable support from the PS [Principal Secretary]. You remember former PS Saitoti? I think he is the one who helped us make a lot of good progress with the policy."

This study further finds that for a national evaluation policy to work; the championship starts from within the agency that houses the evaluation policy. For Kenya, "the process first had champions in MED itself, because I think MED allowed this to happen and move forward," said a VOPE practitioner. These sentiments were confirmed by a donor organization representative who, when speaking to the donors-MED heroic alliance, acknowledged the Directorate's championship. Her narrative below shows the donor agencies' confidence in the Directorate and explains the reason behind their consistent support.

MED itself is a champion or is the champion in this policy. Nevertheless, even with that, there has been commitment in the department by the people who are there. The other one just affects their capacity in that they could do more if the department were bigger in terms of the number of technical officers who also have experience in M&E. – Donor organization representative.

The Directorate also needed support from the devolved government units (County Governments) and VOPEs to effectively champion and coordinate the evaluation policy. The county governments helped decentralize policy and customized the National M&E Policy to meet their county needs. Some counties have since approved their respective County M&E Policies, although, at the national level, the extent of policy implementation, which has been

nearly three years since their approval, is questionable. A former MED official accounts for MED's vision for policy decentralization at the time. MED aspired to have customized county M&E policies to address diverse county government needs and ensure that independent counties work with their county assemblies to approve and adopt M&E policies. A mid-level MED official confirmed this narrative by asserting that "currently there could be about 40 county M&E policies." The MED official, however, laid fears on the "level of implementation of these policies," adding that different counties have different capacities and that M&E championship in counties also depends on the County Executive's goodwill.

Maybe again, counties you know counties, we told them, now we have got the national policy, you have to cascade it. You know cascading into the counties, now you are saying that when you come from this county, you understand the dynamics there. Come up with the policy, which can be able to assist you also to undertake this M&E function. - former MED official

Corresponding donor agencies' heroic narrative

The extensive role of donor agencies was described in detail under RQ1.1. For the sake of this narrative, the focus is on the coalition that the donor agencies created with MED to facilitate the policy process. The data paints a picture of over-reliance on donor funding for this policy process, without which the national M&E policy process might have stalled. This is confirmed by a leading M&E voice in Kenya who claimed that "Kenya's evaluation policy process was heavily dependent on the UN agencies' funding," raising questions on the amount of stakes Kenya's government had in this process or even if they owned the process in the first place.

Generally, all the policy subgroups did not seem to mind donor agency support. One former MED official said, “Those agencies have been holding our hands for the last 14 years. ... they were there for us until the final step.” This shows the close relationship and confidence donor organizations had in MED. On the face of it, both subgroups seemed to have a shared vision that would advance M&E institutionalization in government.

Despite some challenges, such as some VOPE groups feeling left out, the donor agencies enjoyed widespread goodwill in their involvement in the policy process. There was a repeated mention of UN agencies such as the UNDP, UNICEF, and UNFPA as the leading contributors to this M&E policy process. They were invested in the process and hoped for its success, including seeking consultants to support the policy process and supporting its conversion to a bill, as explained by a MED official, below:

So largely, the other partners had played their role a lot, and then at that point, UNDP came with that. They were also interested in the finalization of the policy so that they could bring in somebody, a consultant to do the drafting of the bill together with us, of course, and then have a memo that would submit that bill and draft bill and the policy to [the] cabinet for approval. – MED official

The donor agencies were also proposed to help convene a national discourse to help revive Kenya’s ailing VOPE space. In subsequent sections, details of the issues bedeviling Kenya’s VOPE and how this impedes the policy process are reported. However, individual VOPE members' confidence in donor agencies to trust their ability to convene a policy discourse is notable. Probably this is because of their commitment to the cause and ability to make follow-ups, unlike the government’s inefficiency and lack of interest in initiatives that do not benefit individual officials directly. An evaluation practitioner, while expressing concerns over the

policy's potential flop, proposed that unless the donor agencies help convene a policy discourse, all efforts to implement the policy might be futile:

So, for the evaluation policy I feel to pick up and really be brought back and be dusted, the donor community needs to reconvene this. For me, I think this can be a very good case study of why good policy instruments fail because the end is as important as the process. – Evaluation practitioner and former VOPE official.

The Executive and VOPE are independent villains

Although the Executive is too large to be considered a policy sub-group in this study, it still largely influenced the policy process and its implementation. They influenced this process because the M&E Directorate is within the Executive, specifically the State Department of Planning within the National Treasury. A State Department's accounting officer is a Principal Secretary who reports to a Cabinet Secretary who then reports to Cabinet sub-committees or the whole Cabinet, headed by the President. Further, the state department has many other directorates and senior bureaucrats with considerable power and influence. They dictate the directions policies take and often also have the confidence of the appointing authorities. These factors explain why the executive is extensively mentioned in the narrative despite not being an exclusive NPF policy sub-group.

Although the Executive (the Presidency and Senior government bureaucrats, excluding MED) was viewed to a larger extent as the policy impeder, VOPEs also had their fair share of blame. However, it is important to note that, unlike the MED-donors' heroic coalition, the executive and VOPEs do not have a coalition in this policy process. Gray and Jones (2016) define evil villains (The Executive) as those who cause intentional harm, while uncaring villains

(VOPEs) cause mechanical harm. Due to a lack of access or points of interaction, these villains operate independently based on their environments and needs.

The Executive - Evil villains (intentional harm)

The Executive, excluding MED, was depicted as the evil villains who caused intentional harm to the policy process. Due to their significant power in government policy processes, the Executive did not form coalitions or alliances to harm the policy process. Instead, like their counterparts, the VOPEs, they worked independently to suit their needs. Since the scope of the study did not encompass engaging the larger Executive, these villainy accounts are from other policy sub-groups. The executive caused harm to this policy process in the following ways:

Staffing challenges and turnover disruptions at MED.

Some participants felt that the Executive oversaw MED's dismemberment and increased staffing challenges arising from unnecessary transfers. The high turnovers and personnel disruptions were also experienced at the Principal Secretary (PS) and Cabinet Secretary (CS) levels. The implications of this high turnover rate, including at the CS and PS levels, are that the policy process is disrupted and that probable policy champions are moved to other offices, as explained by a former MED official below:

You know the Ministry of planning was the one coordinating it [the National M&E Policy], we used to have high rate of turnover, particularly at the PS and CS level.... A policy instrument cannot be there if there is a vacuum or if there is no push from the cabinet level. So, for each time we made some progress, we found that a CS or a PS had been removed, and we had to start all over again with the new individual.

These regime changes and reshuffles seemed to have heavier implications on MED, probably the main reason for their push for autonomy, an enhanced budget, and the policy's

conversion to a bill. The CSs and PSs often serve at the President's pleasure and lack tenure security. They are political appointees who vacate offices upon completing the sitting President's term and could easily be sacrificed for political expediency.

Not that there was no support, the support was there. It's only that today you have talked to Dickson, who is the principal secretary, who is now pushing this particular agenda.

Then next Friday there's a new list where Dickson has been moved to agriculture, and now you get somebody else who comes in. Those are the dynamics that change this.

The indiscriminate reshuffles at the CS and PS levels are coupled with inconsistent appointments and high turnover at MED. This encompassed appointing unqualified individuals with a limited understanding of what M&E roles entail. The appointments pointed out the epistemic gaps that structurally favor monitoring at the expense of evaluation, although both are important for sustained economic and welfare growth. The framing of M&E in Kenya's government is wrong. One former VOPE official says, "I think M&E is narrowly defined in government to mean economics. You know, and you will get most of the professionals who are doing M&E, who are the economists or those related to such issues." It was interesting to learn that several MED officials belonged to the Economics Society of Kenya and not the Evaluation-affiliated VOPEs such as the Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK), the Monitoring and Evaluation Professionals Association of Kenya (MEPAK), or the African Gender Development Evaluators' Network (AGDEN). While decrying the implications of such disruptions, an emerging evaluator added that MED officials "are economists, they have been in planning, but all of a sudden, because of these changes, they removed the guys with the passion, the understanding, they are taken."

The challenge these professional misfits present is a punctured and demoralized workforce with inadequate capacity to influence policy or position the M&E Policy for success. This ruins the passion for advancing program evaluation in government, leaving room for donor organizations to come in and support a program that otherwise should be initiated and implemented by the government. An evaluation practitioner observed this by saying, “I’ve seen the government fail time and time again. *Imefail. Inaweka watu wenye* [It has failed. They are appointing people who] are not professional in that line and they are not passionate about that. Even the senior leadership of the day is not passionate about M&E.”

The Executive also oversaw high turnover rates at MED, creating disruptions and impeding timely policy approval. For instance, within a span of about five years, MED has had “nearly five different Directors.” Said a former MED official. This individual added, “I did not participate in the finalization of the policy because that is when I got transferred.” Another evaluation practitioner, while confirming the Executive’s villainy, added that “the government is not supportive of evaluations at all. If capacities are not being built and there is no secretariat to champion it, then that means there's nobody being held accountable in terms of the policy’s implementation. ...They keep changing MED Directors too, which brings instability.”

Indiscriminate transfers within the Executive create disruptions by moving M&E officials from MED to other irrelevant agencies. This erodes institutional memory and impedes the policy process. These moves leave other policy sub-groups wondering whether the government considers the Directorate’s best interests or if such moves are structurally designed to disrupt MED’s undertakings and weaken the institution intentionally. This villainy was also noted by a major donor agency representative who said, “If you wake up one day and transfer almost everybody, and then bring in another set of people, then you see their capacity gaps that become

an issue.” This representative added, “It would be great to see a stable M&E Department that does not have the staff attrition we occasionally see. So that we have skilled M&E personnel who are well motivated and are ready to serve and can continue to do so.”

Political interference.

Sometimes, evaluation is misconstrued to mean auditing with fault-finding intentions. As Porter and Goldman (2013) noted, “monitoring information is all that is available through government systems, and so there is a danger of ‘monitoring masquerading as evaluation’” (p.8). Since monitoring and progress tracking data are most common in African governments, the executive interferes with this process to give the impression of a performing government. “The only challenge that we are facing now in the past two regimes is [that] the [evaluation] mandate being shared now by very many players,” said a MED official, who added that this “interference started during the Uhuru regime that was facing intense political pressure and established an entity called the PDU [Presidential Delivery Unit].” This entity ran national campaigns showcasing government successes.

So, despite there being a government department in the State Department of Planning, despite everything pointing to being the unit to undertake monitoring and evaluation, you continue to see a proliferation of other government offices then doing monitoring and evaluation. (former MED official).

This concern was raised by other former and current MED officials who claim that the Ruto regime is not any different now that the President created a cabinet-level Deputy Chief of Staff in charge of Performance and Delivery Management. These interferences come at the expense of strengthening and financing MED. The Executive’s focus shifts to these public relations and communication entities that focus entirely on government successes without

presenting challenges faced or lessons learnt when implementing the programs. Although the evaluation policy was approved at the end of Uhuru's regime, Ruto weakened evaluation even further and ignored the policy. The Kibaki government received accolades for the efforts it put in place to advance good governance in the country. At the time, MED was well financed and without interference. A MED official confirmed that "the Kibaki regime, of course, wanted to see delivery of results and without interference. The last two regimes want the public to see results."

The Executive moved its focus away from MED and its programs, leaving one to wonder why they approved an M&E policy that they seemingly did not need and had no plans to implement. They have continuously defunded MED and are not interested in strengthening the entity and positioning it to implement the policy. A document analysis comparing CLEAR-AA 2017 and 2018 national M&E progress index reports shows a sharp decline in Kenya's M&E budgetary allocation. The files show that in 2017, Kenya allocated roughly USD 600,000 for M&E and barely anything in 2018. In June 2024, President Ruto cut the entire M&E budget after the policy was approved, which points to the systemic challenges the process faced and poses a significant threat to the policy's implementation. The prevailing narrative is that nothing has been done about this policy for nearly 3 years since its approval. A former MED official highlighted the Executive's accurate view of evaluation in government, saying, "The government said they don't need M&E, that they are a waste of funds. That's why they cut the entire budget for M&E, so you know what that means: the M&E Policy is dead and cannot be implemented. So why did we go through all that trouble to get it approved?" An evaluation practitioner also raised similar concerns and doubted whether the government is interested in implementing the policy:

Recently, after the flop of the finance bill, the government cut back on funding that goes to M&E in the public sector by 100%. That means nothing is happening on the policy.... You cannot recruit new M&E officers or even build capacities. That big challenge has made that policy nothing more than just a paper sitting somewhere in a file. In my view, the government needs to be serious about this and go back to the policy, read it, and understand its provisions. They do not even seem to know what it entails. (Evaluation practitioner).

Some evaluation practitioners and leading voices in Kenya have lost hope in the Executive's ability to salvage the policy and position it for success. Like others, one researcher and evaluation practitioner added, "We do not have the M&E money in Kenya. In short, we do not have a policy." The researcher then added that the policy is facing challenges because the "government does not want Clause 10, on accountability, responsibility, and governing with integrity." Things are not any different with the county governments either. The national government proposes policy and sets the tone for action in the counties. An emerging evaluator said, "In the counties, *hakuna mtu ameingia anafanya kitu* [none of those in office are doing anything] because, one, there is no money to implement cascaded policies. Everyone is quiet, waiting for donor funding." Many practitioners are hoping for "... a situation where we are going to have these M&E functions well established in the ministries and funded domestically, not like the [budget] cuts we are having now," said another practitioner and leading VOPE enthusiast.

Low policy uptake and lack of prioritization.

Generally, the Executive lacked interest in this policy, leading to its slow update. Kenya did not prioritize the policy, and as mentioned previously, seemed to approve the policy as a formality and to check a box. This lack of policy prioritization lowered the need for policy

championship and further stifled the M&E environment in the country, and delayed its approval and tabling in parliament. A document analysis shows various reports confirming delayed policy approval at the time. Even though the policy was later approved in 2022, these records confirm a delayed process, probably due to the Executive's lack of policy prioritization and support. The following report excerpts prove the Executive's sluggish response:

Although an M&E policy was developed in 2012, it is still awaiting approval from the cabinet, despite being approved by the treasury for budgetary purposes. The policy is expected to be approved by cabinet this year [2019], however, the MED has identified the need to sensitize the new ministers in the new cabinet, Members of Parliament (MPs), and CSOs on the policy prior to its approval. – CLEAR AA 2019 Diagnostic Report on current state of NES in Kenya

A draft national monitoring and evaluation policy has been in existence and limited circulation since 2012 and in the public domain since 2016; but it is still awaiting cabinet approval as well as passage by parliament. – Twende Mbele Diagnostic study NIMES' gender responsiveness

However, the policy commitment to evaluation at this level is weak because the M&E policy has not been approved or legislated. - Twende Mbele Diagnostic study NIMES' gender responsiveness

The poor performance in Kenya for this component reflects the reality that the 'NEP has not been reviewed since it was created' and the 'NEP has not undergone evaluation or assessment since it was created' because the draft national M&E policy has not been approved. - Twende Mbele Diagnostic study NIMES' gender responsiveness

The Executive plays a central role in a national M&E policy process. Their support and championship assure safe passage and potential success of a policy; failure to which there will be policy delays and a lack of prioritization. “The government. The buck stops with them, and they are the weak link followed by the VOPEs,” asserted an evaluation practitioner, adding that the “government of the day sets the tone” for evaluation policy success.

The success of a national evaluation policy requires enhanced commitment and championship right from the top. The Executive has little indication of interest, championship, or commitment. Since the policy’s approval, the government has not exuded confidence, which also affects the commitment and interest of other sub-groups. As mentioned before, the government sets the tone and provides guidance. One VOPE member ascertained that “when the government is not supportive of the evaluation policy, if capacities to implement the policy are not being built, and if there is no secretariat to champion its implementation, then technically Kenya has no policy.” This frustration was shared by another practitioner who added that Kenya “has a policy, but not many people know what is in the policy.” Unfortunately, according to this practitioner, “even the government itself, ... where the policy is supposed to be deeply entrenched, I do not think they know what is in that policy.”

These challenges have impeded the Executive’s ability to table the policy in parliament, making it weak and without parliament’s approval.

It passed through the Cabinet, but did not pass through Parliament, remember. It has never been presented in Parliament. Remember, the Cabinet is just a group of people who are politicians. If a whole CS [Cabinet Secretary] can cancel M&E and say there's no money for M&E, Dickson, what are you talking about, policy? We don't have a policy. It doesn't work in Kenya. ... In a nutshell, the policy is there, but only on paper. It's not

even complete. We are redoing it. Just know we don't have a policy. (evaluation practitioner).

Seemingly, the Executive also ignored the advice from the State Counsel, who recommended that before the policy is gazetted, it must first be tabled in parliament as a sessional paper. Due to the lack of prioritization, as stated above, this has never taken place, confirming the government's complacency and lethargy narrative.

We note that gazettelement should be preceded by tabling of the Policy before Parliament (National Assembly and Senate) for consultation as a sessional paper, with a reference number assigned by the National Assembly, that is to be gazette. (State Counsel's advice to MED)

By and large, we managed to have the policy approved by the Cabinet, but to me, a strong policy is a sessional paper, which is approved by the National Assembly. It is still binding, but not as strong as a sessional paper. A sessional paper is endorsed by Parliament, and it is like a legislation kind of, but this one is just like a guideline by the executive, but had it reached parliament and then be voted and approved, then it will be like a serious policy. (Donor agency representative).

Bureaucrats' discomfort with policy provisions.

The bureaucrat and technocrat tendencies also aggravated the Executive's villainy narrative. They were unhappy with the policy provisions that the MED-Donors' alliance wanted. MED and Donors shadow interests were three: (1) to have a "semi-autonomous government agency, but some quarters were not comfortable about it," confessed a former MED official, (2) to be allocated "about 1% development budget, but they changed and called it 'adequate funds.' You know 'adequate' is not defined," claimed another former MED official, and (3) use the

evaluation policy process to pass an M&E bill, with a sitting MED official saying, “we were saying the policy, and the bill have to go together... because if we don’t have a bill, then the policy will not have teeth.” Unfortunately for the heroes, all three crucial shadow interests flopped, and the rest of the policy process remained a formality given the time they had invested in the process. This has caused significant challenges to the policy and its influence, leading to rising frustration, especially among evaluation practitioners, who claim the policy is just on paper, as previously illustrated.

Government bureaucrats and technocrats killed the spirit of Kenya’s M&E policy. Seemingly, the actual reason for its proposition was either expunged or watered down. The process remained a formality without commitment and the helpful contribution of other policy subgroups. Coupled with VOPE challenges and villainy, the policy process was completed but without critical provisions.

Someone whispered to us that people are not comfortable with the department [MED] being transformed into a semi-autonomous government agency. ... Number two, he also whispered to us saying the figure which you have quoted there is shouting. Meaning that people are really threatened that the M&E Directorate is going to take a lot of resources and grow to become a monster. (Former MED official)

You know, now people were fighting it. People in government were fighting it because they didn’t want MED to be a semi-autonomous government agency. The proposed budget allocation, again they thought it was massive. (Former MED official)

There was competition between different Directorates in the State Department, a case akin to sibling rivalry. They felt an empowered MED would mean higher packages and resource re-allocation from their departments. This narrative stood, confirming the contempt with which

M&E is treated in Kenya. A sitting MED official confirmed, saying, " Now, the other wing of government would see these MED officers who want to delink themselves, and even have provisions for higher packages, you get, so these proposals were being fought."

To address these needs and approve the policy, these contentious provisions had to be expunged or watered down. A MED official lamented, saying, "So then we realized that the proposal was being fought from within, such that at a certain point, for the policy to move, we realized that they needed to be removed." There was also the use of ambiguous language, like the word 'adequate' to define the proportion of M&E budget instead of a definitive percentage. "We were also saying meetings at the Treasury level and in the Counties should be quarterly to report on the progress, but they were now calling it 'regular meetings', which is also subjective," added a former MED official. A similar concern was reported in Twende Mbele's 2024 report on Strategy for Institutionalizing M&E Evidence Use across National and Sub-national Public Institutions:

The M&E Policy lacks direct language, i.e., mentioning that "sufficient resources" should be allocated to M&E activities in not direct enough. The Policy should have expressed the minimum threshold of "sufficient resources" by mentioning, for example, that 10% of programme budget should be allocated to monitoring activities and evaluations. (Twende Mbele Report)

Of note in this bureaucrats' villainy narrative is that the donor agencies and MED maintain their coalition. Donors also complained about bureaucrats' interference with the policy process. However, unlike MED, one donor representative added a rider that the bureaucrats' actions might be justifiable given the fiscal challenges Kenya was facing and that adding another semi-autonomous agency means one more parastatal and the taxpayers' expense. This new

narrative angle is important, but immaterial for the purpose and scope of this study. This dissertation focuses on the policy process and activities that occurred leading up to its approval. The bureaucrats' policy decision-making process is not under consideration. The donors' views are expressed below, and notice these donor agencies take ownership of the process, even using the article 'we':

So the only obstacle or the only challenge I met and I saw in MED was internal challenges or internal issues within the State Department of Planning and within the government itself. There was that, you know, for us, we wanted something as an autonomous agency. (Donor representative)

MED sought some autonomous status.... and this may not have flown very well. Being in M&E, I can say that it is not always that people are happy when they are made to account in every way. ... In terms of advancing with the policy. In fact, I dare say that in the end quite a number of aspects that we had advocated for in the initial draft had to be taken out for it to pass; like the establishment of MED semiautonomous institution that would hold the MDFAs accountable for what they were doing or need to do. (Donor representative)

Within the State Department MED is just one of the departments because there were so many others. There is another one called ICT on infrastructure, there's one for ECDC, Economic Development something. There was another one for macro and international relations, and the leader, the chief, the senior most civil servant then was the Economic Planning Secretary who was not for the idea that MED to have its own bill or act established by an act of parliament and pull away and be a SAGA, Semi-Autonomous Government Agencies. (Donor representative)

VOPEs – the uncaring villains

The VOPEs were also mentioned, albeit to a much lesser extent, as villains who, according to Gray and Jones (2016), cause mechanical harm to policy processes. VOPEs play an integral role in national evaluation policy processes and hence deserve a mention and possible lessons. The central narrative that makes VOPEs villains is the extent of their disorganization and leadership wrangles witnessed over the past few years. This has implications for (1) VOPE membership and member participation and (2) member representation and advocacy. As alluded to before, the VOPEs and the Executive did not have an alliance or competing interests. In fact, most individual practitioners supported the policy process and hoped for its success.

The legislature is not a villain or a hero in this policy narrative and is not widely mentioned in either category. This indicates their limited contribution to this policy process despite their important role. Further, the policy has not been tabled in parliament, making many parliamentarians know little about the policy, save for those who show individual initiatives. Parliament's championship initiatives are mostly just individual efforts pushed by members of parliament. Dr. Makali Mulu, Member of Parliament for Kitui Central, appeared in the narrative as an outstanding champion for the policy and M&E practice. As per the narrative, parliament helped break the policy approval gridlock when Dr. Mulu sought clarification from the Cabinet Secretary (CS) to explain why the policy's approval by the Cabinet was delayed. This oversight role prompted action from the CS, who pushed for action from his colleagues.

In all the policy melee, the immediate victims are individual M&E practitioners who had hoped for better M&E policy frameworks in the country. This victimhood further advances to the people of Kenya, who will suffer the consequences of government programs that have not been evaluated due to weakened national evaluation systems. There is little evidence of enhanced

public participation or even a call for memoranda from the public or enhanced civil society representation during the policy processes. This limited the policy's reach and ability to engage in its dissemination. Therefore, there is a need to lobby parliament and other public offices to consider proactive approaches to advancing evaluation in the country and revamping the national evaluation policy process.

RQ 2. What shadow interests influence the policy subgroups' narratives?

Due to the gaps in stakeholder engagement, the policy process did not engage evaluation practitioners extensively through their VOPEs and parliament. "The process became a government-driven process rather than a national process," decried a practitioner, leaving critical actors out of the process or without extensive engagement. Therefore, the data did not show any narrative to suggest parliament or VOPE's shadow interests in this policy process. On the other hand, the executive (Including MED) and donors had shadow interests in the policy process, as highlighted below, and the implications of these interests are reported subsequently.

When the government took this up, it became more of a government-driven process rather than a national process. What do I mean by this? When the government created the M&E directorate, then the directorate mainly focused on government institutions, which at that time did not have much experience. Most of them could not even define what evaluation is or what M&E is. But those were the only audience of what the M&E directorate was doing. (evaluation practitioner)

The Executive's shadow interests

Fundraising.

Kenya's government did not invest sufficiently in this policy process. Instead, the donor organizations allied with the M&E Directorate and advanced the policy's prospects. Probably,

the government saw an opportunity to fundraise and meet its budget gaps. This made the government give concessions to enable support from the donor agencies, and with that goes their agency and stakes. In her narrative, an evaluation practitioner called this out, emphasizing that “the process was being led from outside.” She then claimed that “the person with the money, or the organization that has the money, was calling the shots.” Further, donor-funded initiatives such as this policy process have other incentives, like out-of-station workshops, which help government officials break their office monotony and earn per diems.

Much as government was absorbing money from foreign donors, they simply wanted the money to implement programs, but they were never keen about making use of proper monitoring and evaluation to show for the effects that come from such programs.

(Leading evaluation voice)

This fundraising interest was further confirmed by the donor agencies themselves, who realized that the government was in this for the money and not much about substantively bringing change to the M&E structure. Probably, this is among the reasons why the narratives later showed a decline in donor funding and signs of donor fatigue. One VOPE member confirmed that donor agencies “went on funding but in very marginal or minute proportions and perhaps the last that they funded was the launch of the national M&E professionalization workshop in 2022.” The year 2022 also marks the end of the most heightened M&E initiatives in the country. Once the M&E policy was approved, many national programs stalled, including the annual M&E weeks that nearly all participants narrated as a favourable initiative that helped practitioners share knowledge and have a collective voice to influence government programs.

We realized that much as we had our own objective, government just needed the money to have that policy, but they were not so much buying on. Of course, not everyone, but I

could just read that they really wanted to have money so that at least they could run because we were not supporting only the bill alone, we used to support even workshops counties on CIDP, preparation, indicator handbook, all forty-seven counties. (Donor representative)

At the time of this policy process, the government gave the impression that donor funds were readily available and that at a given time, there would be “six donors queuing to see me, bringing money... they were queuing to come and tell me we have money here and we want to be associated with you.” Said a former MED official. The government met its funding objective at the expense of advancing program evaluation in the country.

Averting accountability.

Due to misconceptions and inadequate capacity, government officials view program evaluation as an audit. For example, there was a narrative that the Executive slashed M&E funding in government because they do not see a difference between M&E and financial audits done by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG), which is a constitutional office. Many bureaucrats felt overwhelmed working with the constitutional fiscal management offices like the OAG and the Controller of Budget’s office. Adding another layer of financial scrutiny would be strenuous. One MED official added, “if you meet someone and someone asks, why do you need another auditor?... You do not need M&E if we have auditing. But you see, these are two different things.”

The government officials’ shadow interest was to limit MED’s capabilities and deprive them of the capacity to carry out independent evaluations. Instead, they created public relations and communications entities such as the Presidential Delivery Unit (PDU) that only communicated the government's positive progress. The PDU did not provide details about

government programs that were not meeting their expectations of even sharing lessons from their implementation for improvement. To the government bureaucrats, a powerful MED would add a layer of scrutiny and push for effective program implementation and accountability. The lack of support for a well-funded semi-autonomous MED cost the country a strong and implementable M&E policy with widespread national support.

The most important thing is to sensitize the high level official and explain what evaluation is. What is the difference between evaluation and audit? The main purpose of evaluation is learning and improving decision-making and is not bringing sanctions or putting someone in jail because he doesn't perform well. (NEP Expert)

The donors-MED coalition shadow interests

Donor agencies and MED had the same agenda and shadow interests in this policy. The only distinction between them is that one provided funding while the other executed the plans. MED seemed like an appendage to donor organizations, with limited independence. Given their shared interests, the donor agencies and MED had an alliance that positioned them as the narrative's heroes, as reported previously. Although MED is part of the executive branch, it seemed more aligned with donor agencies than other government departments. Other department heads and senior bureaucrats resisted MED's semi-autonomy, enhanced budget, and M&E legislation proposals. They did not seem to have sufficient understanding of the role MED played, and in some cases of "sibling rivalry", some department heads felt the M&E Directorate would grow bigger than their units.

Some records suggest the possibility of late engagement in the policy process. Senior heads of department were engaged towards the end of the policy process. No records show anything to the contrary. Although they are not directly responsible for MED, they have hidden

interests and significant influence within the government that cannot be overlooked. Probably that is why some of them lobbied against the passing of the policy, because they did not understand the policy's scope and purpose. In an invitation to other section heads to participate in the policy process, the timing confirms that the officials were engaged late in the process. Speculatively, MED's lack of timely sensitization further engendered their discomfort with the policy. The records stated: "MED has organized for a two (2) day workshop in Naivasha from 25th - 27th September 2019 to take the Heads of Departments through the Policy for wider ownership by the State Department for Planning."

Semi-autonomy and enhanced budget.

There was a heightened and deliberate push to advance MED's semi-autonomy and increased budget allocation. Although the overall interest was to approve the policy and help institutionalize evaluation in Kenya, the Directorate's semi-autonomy and increased budget allocation were their interests. Failure to realize these shadow interests seemed to have discouraged national evaluation policy sub-groups that had hoped for better support from within the government. Phrases related to the word 'autonomy' are mentioned 18 times in all the narratives. The shadow interest was vital in the policy process and received widespread support across different actors, except government bureaucrats, who did not favor MED's autonomy and strengthening. A donor agency representative aspires, below, that an autonomous MED with sufficient funds is arguably every subgroup's goal. Of note, however, is that the scope of this study did not anticipate a conversation with the bureaucrats to help understand the reasons behind their resistance.

Hopefully, one day we shall get to where we ought to be. Then the M&E policy can be updated to be strengthened to allow the autonomy of MED, the allocation of sufficient resources for them to be able to do what they need to do. (Donor representative)

M&E legislation.

Secondly, the MED-Donors alliance also sought to turn the policy into a bill. To them, the policy process allowed them to advance both initiatives concurrently. The narrative at the time is that the policy without a supporting policy would not be implementable. Many believed that a policy alone would be ignored due to a lack of sanctions or punishments that bills bring. A current MED official at the time said, “We were saying policy, and the bill has to go together. We can have an M&E policy. But if we don’t have a bill, it will not have teeth.” A donor representative, while addressing this shadow interest, also added that since “a policy is just a wish list while the bill is enforceable,” the senior government bureaucrats favored a safer option for the “fear of shooting themselves in the leg with this bill.”

The donors and MED’s shadow interest was to use the momentum built by the NEP policy process to help get a substantive bill approved by the Cabinet. However, like the semi-autonomy and budget needs, senior government bureaucrats and a Cabinet committee resisted this idea, leading to its abandonment.

Now, the Cabinet committee of legal affairs, ... when they looked at the bill, because you know for a bill to succeed, you must really have the carrot and the stick, I think when they read about the stick side, they were uncomfortable. Because they were saying “you want to jail a Cabinet Secretary for not performing.” Because you will have a target, you'll have a performance measure, and there'll be sanctions for not performing. So, I think they picked that more than the benefit of the bill. (MED official)

Plot – Connecting the narrative elements

According to NPF, the Plot connects all narrative elements by highlighting the relationship between characters within the policy's setting and stressing the agenda they push (Schlaufer et al., 2022). The central theme connecting the policy setting and the characters is that although there is a legally and geographically enabling environment for this policy's success, the Executive arm of Kenya's government impeded and watered down the evaluation policy provisions. All policy sub-groups converge on the fact that the Executive sets the tone for policy processes and their potential success. The tone set by Kenya's government is that which diminishes evaluation in the government, going by the massive budget cuts and lack of action on the policy since its approval.

The Executive continues to oversee MED's near obliteration through constant staff transfers within the Directorate. Cabinet and Principal Secretaries are not spared either, disrupting MED. A MED official added that at one point, "you have a current minister or a principal secretary who is there. Then in the next year, the principal secretary is gone." The Executive wielded disproportionately higher power than other characters in this policy process, and their bureaucratic processes delayed it. The policy underwent several committee deliberations before a watered-down policy was presented to the Cabinet for approval.

For us, it's just a matter of trying to collect information on what the existing policies are, review previous policies that are working in other countries, and see what can work for us, and develop the policies. We are just technical. Then these policies move now to higher leadership for uptake. But of course, before that, we also had to subject it to stakeholder validation, presented to practitioners, the private sector, the research

institution, donor organization to also help, and also parliament actually. We also at some point in time presented this to parliament. For us, we were just a technical wing.

A former MED official's quote above confirms that the bureaucrats seemed to have the final say on the policy direction. They wielded substantial power and could use it for M&E's best interest. Further, as highlighted in the quote, the bureaucrats could only hope that the technocrats carried out robust stakeholder engagement. The policy also had to be tabled before different types of committees, causing confusion. A MED official highlighted the disconnect between different committees, with many members lacking sufficient capacity to discern the role of program evaluation in government.

I think for monitoring; we really have to do a lot of capacity building. Because you know these committees, what you'll call the Matiang'i committee was a process that when you wanted a policy to be approved, you first went through a committee of PSs. If the committee of the PSs approve it, then it goes to the committee of the cabinet secretaries. A committee. Then when the committee approves it, then it goes to the full cabinet. So, you had to pass through these stages. (MED official)

Therefore, even if the committee said the policy is good, it was not talking to the committee on legal. So, there was that disconnect. So that's how sometimes policy and law can fail. When you've got two different committees, looking at the same time, same thing and not looking at it end to end. (MED official)

The narrative that other heads of departments within the State Department resisted the policy provisions that strengthened MED was confirmed by their late involvement and resulting lack of capacity. A MED official confirmed that "towards the end, we also had a heads of

department meeting where we also took them through.” A document analysis also confirms that the heads of department were involved in September 2019, after the policy process had been ongoing for many years before. These individuals also lacked the competence to contribute meaningfully to the policy, doubling down on a flawed stakeholder engagement strategy. A MED official confessed that “at some point, it was found out that some of them [heads of department within the ministry] did not even know the main content of the policy.” Engaging these critical stakeholders at the end of the process was a lapse on the MED-Donors’ alliance. That is probably why the initiatives faced resistance; other heads of department did not own the process and were consulted at the end, an indication of a process done as a formality. Although they are not directly responsible for MED, they, too, had hidden interests and influences that were erroneously overlooked.

RQ 2.1: What policy subgroup goals are at cross-purpose with the overarching evaluation agenda?

According to the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), different policy subgroups have interests that could conflict with the overall policy agenda. To realize their objectives, these subgroups intentionally use narrative strategies to influence, manipulate, or persuade other actors to support their cause.

Subgroup 1: MED’s policy approval agenda

The Directorate’s central interest was in getting the M&E policy approved. Previous analysis showed that although key policy provisions got expunged from the draft policy, MED still proceeded with its clamor for policy approval, probably now as a formality. The donors-MED coalition proposed to turn MED into a semi-autonomous government entity with a higher budget allocation. They also intended to turn the policy into a bill and presented a draft bill to the

government decision-making organs. All three crucial interests were dropped, leaving the policy without key tenets. Nevertheless, leading up to the approval of the revised and watered-down policy, MED employed diverse narrative strategies that favor their interests. The Directorate used three key strategies in somewhat equal proportions. The narrative strategies include (1) the use of doomsday scenario to illustrate that nothing will happen without the enforcement power of the policy and bill, (2) the use of metaphors and symbols to highlight the state of M&E in Kenya, and (3) the devil shift where MED downplayed its power and influence and blamed parliament.

MED's doomsday scenario – Only a bill can save Kenya's M&E.

MED believed that a policy and, by extension, the bill were necessary to sustain and maintain Kenya's strong M&E structures at the time. Their narrative was that the bill would ensure permanence and avert whimsical moves by the Presidency, which, based on previous findings, derails M&E efforts in the country. The Directorate added that an M&E bill would contain enforcement clauses that would force compliance from government officials who fear accountability and transparency.

Yeah. So, I was therefore saying that our monitoring and evaluation system was very, very, very strong. And therefore, what we required was a policy so that we don't lose it out. And in fact, make it a law because policies are also temporary in the sense that, you know, they only exist at the whim of the executive. But making it a law then makes it more permanent. (former MED official)

But we also feared coming up with a policy that cannot become law. You know, ... let me put it to you that monitoring and evaluation program is not popular. You know, monitoring and evaluation is a transparency and accountability tool. Many people don't like transparency. So, we say the only way people cannot kill it is to make it law so that

at least, even if they want to do anything about it, they know you can only amend it.
(former MED official)

Other sitting and former MED officials continued explaining how only a bill would force government offices to comply and submit their M&E reports. They gave the impression that if only Kenya had an M&E bill, all its M&E challenges would subside substantially. There is nothing to show that things would be different. One would wonder what difference the bill would bring if even the policy in its current form is not being implemented.

Because the idea that we had initially was to push the M&E policy to be an M&E Act so that we can have an independent M&E body, one that is backed by an Act. If you can have an act such that you know very well that, yes, we have an M&E body that is in charge of tracking the implementation of government programs, then each and every government institution is forced that by the end of, say 15th of July, should have submitted performance progress report.

There were calls to revive the bill as a private member's initiative, not from the executive. Intense lobbying is spearheaded by a former MED official using their networks to consult some MPs on whether they can sponsor a private members' bill on M&E. However, this leads to the question of whether Kenya has sufficient capacity to implement an M&E bill or whether building national capacity should be the clarion call at this moment. They propose using the opportunity to correct the vague and policy watering-down language introduced by government bureaucrats before the policy's approval.

And as we speak now, we're revising the same thing. Yes. We believe that we may be able to move forward so that the policy can be adopted. So, I'm happy that the policy is

ready. But now what's lacking is its actualization and making sure that it becomes an act of parliament. That's our next step. We're trying to push to make sure that the policy does not stay the way it is, but it becomes an act parliament. With the corrections that were left out in the policy, that ministry should be given 'adequate funds.' (former MED official)

A sitting MED official confirmed that there are “currently some parliamentarians very intent on having a private members’ motion to bring the M&E bill.” The official then named Dr. Makali Mulu, Member of Parliament for Kitui Central, as the leading proponent of this initiative. The official said, “Dr. Makali Mulu is in parliament. He is the one proposing to do a private members’ motion on the bill.” Dr. Mulu is a lone voice championing these efforts in parliament. He is the one who asked the Cabinet Secretary to clarify when the policy would be approved, prompting an expedited response from the Executive. He was also the chair of the Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-based Decision Making, an informal unit in parliament that championed M&E and evidence use in the public sector.

Also, the Research Office of Parliament, through this body, which was called the Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Decision Making in Kenya. We saw that through working with this Parliamentary Caucus on Evidence-Informed Decision Making, it could help push to see the demand for having this policy passed at the parliamentary level.

The overreliance on a single champion without building a greater pool of champions is risky. In a political office like that of an MP, an M&E champion can be voted out, leaving a void. A parliamentary staff member confirmed that the caucus faced challenges and did not pick up as envisioned. The officer added that the parliamentary group received support from Twende Mbele, further showing the extent of the government’s overreliance on external support. The

officer said, “I remember there was a time there was a caucus for monitoring and evaluation, but it didn't pick up very well. I think they were being supported by Twende Mbele.”

MED’s metaphors and symbols – we have a long way to go.

Gen-Z’s clamor for change.

In June 2024, Kenya witnessed a widespread clamor for change triggered by the unpopular Finance Bill, 2024. The Finance Bill 2023 also faced substantial resistance, but not as widespread as the one in 2024. The nationwide protests were led by Gen-Zs who were the face and organizers of what started as a spontaneous and uncoordinated clamor for change, forcing the government to listen and abandon the bill after parliament passed it. These demonstrations called for the government to change and improve its governance and accountability. A former MED official added that “these protests were warning shots to the government. A sign that all is not well with the country’s governance and that maybe strengthening M&E is one way of informing the people about government actions.”

A prominent figure during the protests, Morara Kebaso, moved around the country, documenting stalled projects and sharing short videos online. Young Kenyans' questioning of the value and worth of government programs proved that other oversight agencies faced capacity challenges, leading to the overall deterioration of Kenya’s governance.

Because the government said they don't need M&E, that they are a waste of funds, that's why they cut the entire budget for M&E. Then, later, when Morara decided to show how projects are stalled, they start mooring marketing units and start saying they're monitoring government projects. These Gen-Zs saved our country. We were headed the wrong way.

(former MED official)

The posture of that new administration was not one that is keen on accountability, as we have seen, things that have now culminated in the Gen Z protests in the country and all that. It's an administration that has had many questions lingering over its head because it's mainly driven by political interests rather than effectiveness of programs. (evaluation practitioner)

Unfortunately, instead of the government recognizing that it may have faced these governance headwinds because M&E was weak and non-functional in the country, they slashed the M&E budget as an austerity measure. A leading VOPE voice in the country complained that the protests were meant to help the country turn around and change direction. Instead, evaluation in government has been weakened further, with no efforts being made to strengthen even other accountability entities, such as the Office of the Auditor General. “After the demonstrations by the Gen Zs, the changes in government. One of the things was that the government cut, completely, 100% from the monitoring and evaluation function,” wondered the VOPE official.

President Mwai Kibaki is a symbol of M&E championship and effective governance.

As highlighted previously, the Kibaki government symbolizes M&E success in Kenya. This strategy is used to encourage action from subsequent regimes. If repeated, this narrative strategy might elicit a reaction from current regimes and encourage a response for the sake of their legacy. A former MED official working across Kibaki and Uhuru regimes confessed that “for Kibaki, a lot of good work was there, and we appreciated what was done under monitoring and evaluation.”

The M&E Week is a symbol of national pride.

The M&E Directorate organized annual conventions to assess Kenya's M&E progress among stakeholders. The meetings brought together different M&E stakeholders, such as

practitioners, parliamentarians, donor agencies, civil society organizations, representatives from the executive arm of government, international partners, and peer countries. The M&E weeks were meant to “report achievements and learn from other players,” said a former MED official.

Things could not go forward without first evaluating and monitoring and using the data. It was quite strong then. I don't know what happened later. It just became not so relevant again. But by then, it was quite strong. We were really competing with other nations. In fact, if I remember very well, that's when Kenya started, and they were the leading, they were the starters of the M&E week, and everybody was like, oh, what a good initiative. All other countries started coming to benchmark with Kenya. ... It was quite a unique initiative, which unfortunately now has died again because we've not had an M&E week in the last two years. (VOPE leader)

The complaint by the VOPE leader above and many others shows that the M&E week was popular and that many African countries, including those with strong evaluation systems, visited and benchmarked with Kenya. The event used to be largely successful and well attended, even with government officials. MED used the event to promote the success in other countries and manipulatively get Kenyan government officials interested in doing the same to match its peers. The event presented an opportunity to disseminate knowledge and track progress in the countries while catalyzing government action through success stories from other African countries.

There is a forum that we have always had called the National Monitoring and Evaluation Week, which we have used at least to share knowledge from within Kenya and outside Kenya. ... We normally invite decision makers from parliament, county assembly, cabinet, so when they are there, probably somebody from South Africa, or Zimbabwe, or

Ghana, is presenting how they evaluated a program and that influenced decisions at that high level, then we tell our guys, you see this is what we have been saying. (MED official)

The 'holding hands' metaphor.

While explaining the role of donor agencies in the policy process, MED narrated how much they rely on donor agencies for support. This confirms the extent of donor agency involvement in Kenya's M&E process and that MED did not have independence. The global aid environment is fast changing, and the implications of the US government halting its aid programs could set the trend for other developed countries. A former MED official confirmed that UN agencies supported their work and held MED's hand for over 14 years. The question is, for how long will MED want its hands held? The emerging narrative is that of an agency that cannot do anything without donor support. This is evident in the capacity gaps MED faces and the challenges donor-dependent VOPEs in Kenya currently face.

I want to appreciate that the support also came from our development partners. I have talked about the UN family, but specifically, I can talk about UNFPA, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities. Those agencies have been holding up our hands for the last 14-plus years. They supported us all through the consultations we were doing. They were there for us until the final step. (former MED official)

The roaches of dark metaphor.

MED also used a metaphor to highlight public servants' resistance to accountability, scrutiny, and transparency. The evaluation versus audit misconceptions further worsen civil servants' perception that M&E is an additional layer of scrutiny.

You know, as I mentioned at the beginning, monitoring and evaluation is not popular. People don't like to be tracked, particularly if they want to cut corners. If they want to cut corners, why should I then improve a system that can track me? So that's one challenge, that particularly here, you know, is like cockroaches that don't like light. (former MED official)

As much as the Auditor General is doing her work, I don't think people are comfortable because they already know they have misused resources. And therefore, they're not comfortable when the Auditor General comes in to say, I want to audit your work. So, they see monitoring and evaluation in the same light. (former MED official)

MED's Devil Shift – Ask the parliamentarians.

As noted earlier, apart from a few individual members like Hon. Dr. Makali Mulu, parliament did not have sufficient capacity or institutional willingness to engage in this policy process. Donors and MED bore most policy responsibilities, making them key actors in this policy process. MED's devil shift strategy downplayed their role in the policy process and blamed parliament for laxity and lack of goodwill. MED requires individual members in parliament to help turn the policy into a bill so "that it becomes an act of parliament." A MED official then added, "That is our next step. We're trying to push to make sure that the policy does not stay the way it is, but it becomes an act of parliament." Turning the policy into an Act of Parliament was of interest to MED to help enforce its provisions and ensure its permanence. On the other hand, Parliament did not consider the policy a pressing need. This speaks to possible discord within different arms of government and how this can derail a policy process.

The Directorate will need to go beyond mere calls for parliament to take up and help strengthen M&E in Kenya. Instead, the Directorate should provide deeper insights into their

actions to entice parliament and build its capacity. For instance, when MED noticed that parliament's research office has some influence on MPs and provides insights on governance and oversight issues, they may have enhanced their engagement with parliament's research office. They could also build relationships with academia and VOPEs to supply new knowledge from research on evaluation.

Therefore, I think now we need the parliamentarian to take it up. Say that we have got this policy. You know, even though they have a research department, this research department is not good enough. How can that research department work with the directorate, which is coordinating the M & E function in the government, so that they can assist in terms of feeding them with material so that they can make decisions in the National Assembly or the Senate? (MED official)

On justifying its devil shift strategy, MED explained that it was receiving considerable pressure from stakeholders about the policy's state. They used their social capital in parliament to manipulate a response from the Cabinet. The Directorate downplayed its influence and propped parliament as the entity with the capacity to elicit a quick response from the Executive.

People will see us as just a bunch of jokers. What we did was to say, now we want to use parliament. Let parliament use its powers. You see [Hon.] Makali was an economist like us. He was an employee of Planning. There are people he worked with who are still here. So, we used those people to reach out to him, so that he uses his committee in parliament to ask a parliamentary question, and say why has it taken long for the M&E policy to be approved by cabinet? (MED official)

Sub-group 2: The disjointed VOPE and diminishing hope for the policy

Leadership wrangles in VOPEs led to the withdrawal of members, donor agencies, and government support. These challenges further led to offshoot professional associations that could not match the capacity of the original VOPE activities in the country. Personal interests and a lack of vision stifled alternative views in Kenya's VOPE space, and authoritarianism and sectarianism emerged within the VOPE space, leading to deteriorating interests and a lack of trust. There was an overall view that a national evaluation system is as strong as the evaluation professionals are. The policy is meant for the evaluation professionals, and if the professionals either feel left out or are facing coordination challenges, then the policy would likely face implementation challenges. VOPE's narrative strategies project a feeling of dejection and hopelessness. Like MED, the VOPE subgroup uses (1) a doomsday scenario to paint a diminishing hope picture further worsened by a weak VOPE environment, (2) devil shift to cast blame on parliament, and (3) metaphors and symbols for a glimpse of hope.

VOPE's doomsday scenario – the admission of guilt.

Due to Kenya's frail VOPE environment, there was a widespread feeling of uncertainty. The evaluators doubt whether the policy will stand a chance in the current dysfunctional VOPE space, spelling doom for the policy process and its success. Admitting this is a serious problem, a leading evaluator in Kenya further illustrated how the national dysfunctionalities affect Kenya's continental standing.

Without VOPEs being active, there is a very dim chance of that policy succeeding, in the sense that there is no technical know-how to guide in its implementation. Secondly, the leading VOPE is now quite weak. When I went for the evaluation conference in Kigali in March, I came to learn that even the Kenya VOPE is not even up to date with its

subscription in the African Evaluation Association, and that's quite telling, when a national VOPE is not even a bona fide member of a regional evaluation association. If that continues, then its engagement and its role in ensuring effective implementation of the policy continues to be compromised. I don't know what can be done, but that's a serious problem. (a leading evaluator)

These VOPE challenges subsequently lead to weak M&E frameworks in the country and limit intellectual contributions at the detriment of M&E's national advancement. The VOPE subgroup feels that, coupled with the weak VOPE capacity, the lack of a proper framework led to misguided actions by the Executive, such as M&E budget cuts. "First, there are no VOPEs. No alternative voice. Then, the policy is weak, and no one cared to read and understand what it proposed. The government had a field day. Nobody could stop it, and the parliament was not there to help," lamented a VOPE leader.

Policy is quite important because it gives the country a framework for monitoring and evaluation, especially when it comes to the development agenda. But I would say if it was done in a sustainable way, even right now what's happening, like the monitoring and evaluation budget being removed in all the departments, would not have happened because we would have a framework very firm that even the president cannot just come and remove the monies or the budget of the M&E from the departments. But now there's nothing much to show how these policies contribute to strengthening M&E systems.

The current government does not inspire much confidence either. Three years into their term, they found that despite having just approved the policy, they had yet to take any substantial action to advance or strengthen it.

The main goal of that policy was to first bring in better coordination of programs within government and secondly ascertain that there is value for money in what is being implemented. But all these have not been dear to the current regime and so that stalls the implementation of the policy. (a leading evaluator)

VOPE's devil shift – the degenerated agency.

Like the M&E Directorate, VOPEs also seemed to downplay their influence and attempted to prop parliament as an alternative voice. To a lesser extent, though, the VOPEs also downplayed their power and shifted the blame to donors and external influence. VOPEs downplayed the power of their collective voice and let go of their agency. They blamed parliament and complained about being left out of the policy process, but did little to organize themselves to have a stronger voice. VOPEs let go of their agency and advocacy roles and waited for donor support to implement programs. One VOPE leader complained, "You see, our voices were not there, and at the same time, we could not fund ourselves." The VOPEs' overreliance on donor funding meant they could not have a voice of their own, and that if the donors withdrew their funding, there was little they could do to support the policy process. The VOPE leader added, "We were just telling people we also have a policy, but nobody was excited about it because people didn't get to know that it has happened."

VOPE's lack of agency and leadership challenges was noted by other policy subgroups who had hoped for better outcomes should the VOPEs engage constructively. A MED official, for example, commented that it reached a point where the Directorate preferred engaging individual members instead of the evaluation associations because of internal leadership struggles within Kenya's leading association. There were factions within the association, and a group wanted to hold onto its leadership at the detriment of its functionality and progress. A once

reputable and giant association is now a shell of its former self. The donor representatives shared these sentiments, saying their governance challenges make it difficult to work with them.

The challenge of the Kenyan evaluation society was the way the society was formed; it was more personal. Maybe they don't have a framework of how you can engage members appropriately because the leadership took it as a personal entity. Therefore, even up to today, they don't have a clear mechanism to articulate their issues. And therefore, we engaged the membership directly. ... But now they'll give us comments as individual members of the association because the association does not have that framework. Even today, if I wanted to invite the VOPE, I wouldn't know who to invite. (MED official)

The Kenyan evaluation VOPE is a group that ought to have done a lot better than has happened. Unfortunately, it's been marred by internal governance issues that have made it impossible for many to work with them. ... There's a lot more that can be done because then if it was functioning like other societies, then you really bring on board all the practitioners, you are a professional society, and in this case, on evaluation, then, be right, be accountable, be straight in terms of governance issues so that people are not questioning and they're able to enroll and register because then that way you bring in all the professional expertise, and people are willing to share their expertise, their skills to help the government get to the next level. (Donor representative)

Members of Kenya's evaluation associations, especially splinter groups, expressed concerns over the influence of external organizations in the policy process. They acknowledged that Kenyan VOPEs faced significant leadership challenges, but still shifted the blame to donors or foreign entities for taking leadership in the Kenyan process. The foreign entities probably took

leadership of the policy process because the VOPEs faced coordination challenges, leaving room for their involvement; the VOPEs lost their agency.

People were not so much carried along, so they don't understand what's in that policy, what the process was, who celebrated, and who was patted on the back after it came into place. They are like, okay, the policy is there, and how it came into place, we did not even know. That is one challenge of now the whole process being mostly led by outside, or whoever has the muscles, the money. (VOPE leader)

The VOPE leaders correctly noted a power imbalance and that donor agencies set the policy agenda. A VOPE leader confirmed donor organizations' power, saying, "Yes, in terms of power differentials, I would say that from the word go, the initial demand was being pushed from the donor community." They exonerated themselves from the process and urged parliament to regain its oversight power.

The initial push was from the donor community, but other than that, it now returns to the Kenyan Parliamentary scene. ... Kenyan politicians are mostly concerned with what brings immediate impact to the people that they serve. They're concerned with the votes. Yes. So, since they're concerned with the votes, anything that is not seen as adding number of votes directly is not seen as of interest to the politicians. (VOPE leader)

The VOPE policy subgroup aligned with MED's devil shift concerning parliament's potential role in the policy process. Throughout the entire process, parliament only played one prominent role towards the end when it sought answers from the Cabinet Secretary explaining why the policy approval was delayed.

Makali asked the question in parliament, and our minister was asked to go to parliament and respond. ... So, we accompanied the minister to parliament to help him answer the

question, yet we are the ones who instigated this, and he did not know. (former MED official)

However, before this single heroic act, parliament did not show interest in the process, prompting a devil's shift from the MED and VOPE policy subgroups. A VOPE leader complained, saying, "The funny thing is that it was revision after revision of this policy, but we were wondering what was happening at the parliament level. ... MED could not just pass it on their own without having to pass through parliament."

No one is talking despite the policy being a very big thing. We are here actually, we are going to the parliament to say *bwana chukueni hii kitu mu endorse* [folks take this thing and endorse it], say something as a parliament *bwana*. (VOPE member)

VOPE's metaphor/symbol – a shred of hope.

The VOPE subgroup used metaphors and symbols to describe the sorry state of program evaluation and the policy in the country before striking a conciliatory and optimistic tone. They feel the situation can be salvaged and that "all is not lost with regards to the policy and evaluation practice in Kenya", asserted a VOPE leader. The following metaphors and symbols describe VOPE's narrative strategy:

The Gen Z protests are a symbol of public discontent.

Across the diverse policy subgroup narratives, the Gen Z protest of June 2024 symbolized resistance and reminded Kenya's government that the people clamored and fought for a new constitution to enjoy some inalienable human rights, including the right to expression and fair representation. The protests were sparked by a contentious Finance Bill 2024, which followed another contentious one in 2023. The 2024 protests were bigger and deadlier, leading to the invasion of parliament because Kenyans viewed parliament as the weak link, always doing

the executive's bidding. This symbol of resistance by the people and calls for better governance is summarized by an evaluation practitioner who said, "The posture of that new administration was not one that is keen on accountability, as we have seen, things that have now culminated into the Gen Z protests in the country and all that."

The 'policy-on-paper' metaphor.

The VOPE subgroup used this metaphor to explain why they think the policy is just there as a formality without an implementation plan. This narrative aligns with previous findings that removed key policy provisions, such as MED's semi-autonomy and enhanced budget, diminished the desire to implement the policy. The policy process was flawed and did not meet the aspirations of nearly all the key policy subgroups. To whom, then, was the policy meant?

We don't have any VOPEs in Kenya. We must look for sound VOPEs, but we need to have an anchor. In a nutshell, the policy is there, but only in papers. It's not even complete. We are re-doing it. Just know we don't have a policy. (VOPE member and researcher)

Due to the budget cuts, you cannot hire M&E officers or build evaluation capacities. This has been a challenge that has made that policy be nothing more than just a paper that is sitting somewhere in the file. In my view, I think the government needs to be serious about this and just go back to that policy and get to read it and understand the policy. (VOPE member)

Baby and bathwater metaphor.

The VOPE sub-group used the 'baby and bathwater' metaphor to strike a conciliatory tone. One that encourages action and optimism, arguing that all is not lost, and that the policy's

course can be salvaged. However, the focus is still on donor communities to help convene and support such initiatives.

We fought but now we're here. There's a baby here and we should not throw it away with the bathwater. Let's talk together. How do we move this process forward. Perhaps that would be the donor community and almost working with, I would say, isolated but open-minded professionals in the field, and just discuss this. ... So, for the evaluation policy I feel to pick up and really be brought back and be dusted, the donor community needs to reconvene this. (Evaluation professional)

Standing on giants' shoulders.

This metaphor was used to describe the need for continued cooperation between different levels of evaluation professionals. The narrative advanced the need to build on what had been done and make progress on the policy. The VOPEs, for instance, played very active roles at the start of the policy process but faltered. Calls for reinvigorating the VOPEs' vibrance and participation in M&E activities in the country reverberated across all policy sub-groups. There were calls for departing from self-gratification and entitlement in VOPEs and instead allowing emerging professionals to lead them.

Each became, *hail unto me*, I need to appear in all documents, I need to be recognized in eternity. So, and yes, I think it's important to recognize the shoulders of giants who we stand on. I think it becomes self-limiting if that is driven by some kind of direct self-serving gain. (VOPE member)

RQ 2.2 In what ways, if at all, is Kenya’s national evaluation policy important to the policy subgroups?

“Moral of the story” is an NPF element that highlights the policy solution promoted by the narrative. The moral of the story code helped provide insights into why the Kenya National M&E Policy was important to different policy subgroups. The code analysis provides three main themes that represent the policy’s relevance to different subgroups. Presented in the frequency of their occurrence, the policy intended to (1) force MED’s budget expansion and semi-autonomy, (2) harmonize evaluation practice and ensure compliance, and (3) improve Kenya’s governance and regional standing.

Evaluation’s independence and permanence

The M&E Directorate and donors believed that the policy could be a means to achieve independence. A former MED official said, “We realized that the policy was the only way we could achieve most of our priorities and objectives.” The initial focus of the policy was to transform MED into a semi-autonomous agency for greater independence and to ensure permanence. However, this key policy solution was not achieved since these key provisions were resisted by government bureaucrats and expunged. The policy proposers lost the fight to include these provisions and saw the policy through without one of its key policy solutions. The Directorate remains a department within the State Department of Planning with the same reporting structures and less budget.

So, you see, people fear that monitoring and evaluation, we expose them. And therefore, if you fear that's why, in fact, we have always been proposing that monitoring and evaluation can be an independent organ so that they can be able to do their work independently. Initially, through the policy, we wanted to transform the Directorate,

which was coordinating the integrated M&E system, into a semi-autonomous government agency. Some quarters were not comfortable about it... the policy was now coming out strongly proposing a vote for M&E, making other departments jealous and afraid. (former MED official)

I was informed is that why the MED was really pushing for, as we call it, the 2022 policy, it's because it was coming with some independence, some budget, which would be allocated to M&E, which was around, I think, 2% or 1% of the GDP, which was quite a good amount of money to do programs and activities in terms of M&E by MED.

(VOPE leader)

M&E institutionalization.

For sustainable efforts and assured permanence, the policy was a step closer to an M&E bill. The MED-Donors alliance had submitted the draft M&E policy and a draft bill for consideration by the appropriate sub-committees. As highlighted earlier, the government did not adopt the entire evaluation bill, and the policy was revised to its current status. One VOPE leader regretted why Kenya did not take advantage of Kibaki's era to pass such a bill. She believed that the level of championship and support then would have worked in M&E's favor. "I would say at the time, M&E was quite strong. I wish we'd taken advantage of that and institutionalized it and made it sustainable, so that it cannot be touched," described the VOPE leader, with others emphasizing the need for independence and a strong national evaluation system.

If it monitors every development agenda, it must take place, whichever regime is there.

Evaluations must take place, even if it's what regime or who is leading, it cannot be touched. ... Institutionalization would be so critical, and it would play a great role in enhancing the national evaluation system at large. (MED official)

One assured way of institutionalizing M&E was through legislation. The narrative was to have the policy and the bill approved by the Cabinet concurrently. The policy was revised and approved, but the bill was not adopted. Although efforts are being made to revive the bill through private member initiatives, this institutionalization strategy failed.

Number one is to have a national act, an act of parliament. With an act of parliament, where it stipulates what is evaluation? Who should do evaluation? Who should report? What should the reports be? Just the way sometimes auditor general does some work.... We have an act of parliament stipulating that the government should have self-reflection, and the government should also understand that having an evaluation, a thorough evaluation that does not mislead, is good for development. (Donor representative)

The Policy and Bills aim to provide an enabling policy and legal framework for conducting monitoring and evaluation in the country to achieve the country's development goals. (government records)

Evaluation financing.

The policy was intended to provide a mechanism for assured evaluation financing. This was not achieved when the policy's language was changed from a definitive proportion to an ambiguous and undefined phrase. "You know, I was talking about 1% development budget, but they changed and called it 'adequate funds.' You know 'adequate' is not defined," a former MED official lamented. This situation was worsened by the June 2024 unrests where the government slashed M&E budget by 100%, crippling Kenya's M&E further.

Also, I think along the lines of sustainability of this policy as well as what do we call it?

The funding mechanisms for the evaluation function because this scare from the government of cutting the funding to the function by 100% should not be taken lightly

because it can even signal the end of evaluation function in Kenya, if we are not careful.

(VOPE leader)

M&E compliance and practice harmonization

Evaluation policy as a compliance tool.

The Kenya National M&E policy was proposed to force compliance and propose actions for non-compliance. Kenya's policy process was top-down, centric, using a forward mapping (Birkland, 2019) approach and depended entirely on the MED-donors' alliance to succeed. Given MED's limited capacity to champion the policy and bring all stakeholders on board, MED used the policy as a management and compliance tool, against Stern's (2009) warning.

You know, the law will compel people. Responsibilities will be passed on to people, and even someone can be jailed for not doing evaluation or for not releasing evaluation report or for not conducting it as opposed to the policy. Policy is just a wish list. You know, the law is enforceable.

The Directorate believed that "people's attitudes can only be changed through policies or through laws," claimed a former MED official. The official likened the concern with drivers saying, "if you allow people to be well behaved, even when they are drivers on the road, they will never do it." The policymakers intended to use fear to realize their evaluation advancement goals. Based on available data, this strategy failed when the government bureaucrats, out of fear, rejected the policy provisions that proposed punishments for non-compliance. Currently, the approved policy cannot sanction, limiting its purpose in this sense.

So, it might be the only way we can change people's attitudes towards taking monitoring and evaluation seriously. ... they fear the punitive measures the policies entail. ... So really the only way we can change people's behavior and attitudes is through policy

system that was meant to spearhead the implementation of the national development strategy. (Former MED official)

Evaluation policy as a coordination tool.

The policymakers viewed it as a management tool that would help them meet their harmonization and compliance interests. This was the moral of the story at the time of the policy process. However, the outcomes were different, dispelling the moral of the story and ultimately casting doubt on the policy's purpose. "So, we realized the policy was the only way we could achieve most of our priorities and objectives," said a former MED official. Going by the occurrences leading up to the policy's approval and implementation trends, there is limited hope for the intended 'priorities and objectives.'

As a management tool, the policy envisioned structured guidelines for conducting evaluations. It emphasized professional intentions to improve the quality of evaluations conducted. MED received support from donor agencies to support skill harmonization and recognition through the policy.

UNICEF also supported us, because now in the policy, we were saying that for us to operationalize the policy, we needed to come up with Kenya's evaluation guidelines. We need some guidelines so that when somebody is going to conduct an evaluation, you should conduct it in a structured manner. (former MED official)

A sitting MED official responding to their vision for the Directorate and the policy, they responded, calling for better outcomes from county governments. The Directorate's moral of the story is to use the policy to streamline national and county evaluation efforts.

I want to be reading evaluation reports from various ministries and counties as provided for in that policy, because the policy provides for development evaluation guidelines by my ministry, which have been done and validated and disseminated. (MED official)

The policy's bigger picture was to improve the evaluation culture in Kenya and promote evidence-based decision making and effective reporting. "Yes, from my perspective, I think the end goal of this policy was, one, trying to bring an evaluation culture in Kenya," said a VOPE leader who pegged their hope on the policy's ability to pull everyone along. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and the fractures between the policy subgroups further impede the policy's practicability.

No decision must be undertaken without evidence. Whichever level, whether you are at the leadership level within the department, within the National Assembly, the CS, any level, any decision should be based on what evidence, and that evidence should be generated from what evaluation.

Kenya's governance and regional standing

For a while, Kenya was a leading country in advancing program evaluation. This gave it a standing among its peer countries and a sense of pride and accomplishment. As discussed earlier, countries ahead of Kenya in advancing program evaluation, such as South Africa, benchmarked with Kenyans and developed national systems that are now stronger than Kenya's. "Kenya had made some strides and was ahead of the lot because of Kibaki's championship from 2008. Countries like Benin, Ghana, and South Africa all visited and learned from Kenya. See where they are now," lamented a former technical officer at MED.

They all learned from Kenya and left us behind. They picked up our ideas and went with them. ... South Africa went, passed their policy before us, which by the time we were

discussing this in Johannesburg, everything in Kenya was ready. But South Africa came, everything passed, and they went and established their M&E. Uganda also the same.

Benin of all the countries passed us. (former MED official)

The narrative was that Kenya has potential and could be a change agent in the region. Unfortunately, the country is not taking its rightful place, impeding its evaluation growth. Many also lamented the 2-year pause of the national M&E weeks, an initiative Kenya started and ended in its 10th iteration, with Uganda and Tanzania being in their 9th and 3rd iterations each. When asked whether Kenya has sufficient capacity to implement the policy successfully, nearly all research participants responded affirmatively. This is why no one was against having the policy or even the bill. Both received cross-cutting support from all subgroups, indicating their commitment to having these structures in place. Unfortunately, little evidence shows the country's preparedness to implement the policy successfully, let alone the bill.

We have the capacity. We have the capability of having a law in Kenya that really ensures that M&E goes on. Like South Africa, just allow me to say that the M&E system in South Africa, or the government itself is advised by the M&E professionals in South Africa. We were that close to being the same. We have the capability of having that.

(VOPE leader)

The pressure to have an M&E policy and be like other countries grew, prompting Kenya to have one, too. This push came with increasing calls for a Made in Africa evaluation methodology that promoted a decolonization approach. Some research participants felt Kenya had missed a chance to incorporate a pan-African view into the policy.

The aspect is to decolonize, to look at everything with that decolonized lens. You are looking for evaluations in Kenya, please decolonize your thinking. These evaluations are

not being done in America. ... Then you will also look at evaluation policies that are done. Like you can start with the one from South Africa, where now they are indigenizing the South African government to start thinking South African. Look at evaluation policy for Uganda. ... They have a very nice policy. (evaluation practitioner)

The policy also intended to address governance and accountability issues that now seem elusive due to inadequate capacity. “You know the immediate drive here was enhancing accountability,” said a donor representative. The research participants were concerned about Kenya’s governance gaps and hoped the evaluation policy would help institute systems for strengthening governance in the country. “Kenya is doing poorly as far as governance is concerned, and this is the trend in Africa. ... Accountability has gone down, unless we have a serious institutionalized approach that is also well-funded, then things might work,” asserted an evaluation practitioner. Further document analysis also shows that the policy did not address cross-cutting issues that are pertinent to Kenya, for example, gender disparities that, according to a blog post by EvalPartners, following a gender-responsive and equity-focused evidence generation and utilization workshop.

Empowerment, Participation, Inclusion, Non-discrimination, Accountability and Sustainability. She stressed the need to include gender and power analysis; understand local laws; identify and address relevant duty bearers; engage, involve and strengthen/educate the rights-holders or claimholders. (EvalPartners’ blogpost)

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

Kenya's evaluation policy interests seemed to have ended with the Cabinet approval and signing by then Cabinet Secretary in charge of the National Treasury, Ukur Yattani. There is no indication of a sustained discourse over the policy or even plans for its implementation.

Although this study focused on the policy process and not policy implementation, insights into its future helped to understand the policy process narratives better. These insights helped uncover the underlying interests in the policy, all of which were expunged from the policy, defeating the purpose of its existence. The need to be like its peers and maintain its regional standing propelled its ultimate approval without substantive provisions of interest to the MED-donors coalition.

This discussion section begins by substantiating the significant influence of donor organizations in Kenya's, and by extension, African evaluation systems. The research findings highlight the extent to which the donors set the evaluation agenda and financed its formulation. In Kenya's case, for instance, the donors, the majority of whom were United Nations agencies, allied with MED to guide this policy process, leaving out critical stakeholders like the evaluation stakeholders, senior government bureaucrats who determine the fate of such policies and have significant influence over their implementation, and parliament. Throughout the narratives, MED is portrayed alongside donor agencies for nearly all its activities, including procuring venues for stakeholder meetings and procuring consultants to help with the policy processes and lobbying for its adoption at higher policymaking structures. However, although donor agencies have significant power in government processes, they did not see through some policy provisions that interested their coalition. Like MED, the donors were helpless and could not influence the creation of a semi-autonomous MED, increased budgetary allocation as a proportion of the development budget, and the passage of an evaluation bill.

The three issues above (semi-autonomy, proportional budget, and legislation agenda) were MED and donors' main interests, and with their defeat, the interest and enthusiasm in the policy subsided significantly. These were their core interests, which unfortunately did not get support from senior government bureaucrats. Sometimes, policy actors have hidden interests, some of which, when defeated, dampen their policy championship, posing a substantial risk and possible failure. The role of these shadowy senior government officials must be considered when building national evaluation capacities. The findings show that a government-wide national evaluation agenda could be spearheaded by the Cabinet Secretary or a higher office in the Presidency, like the Prime Cabinet Secretary or the Deputy President. In Kenya, MED seemingly detached itself from other government officers and only engaged them towards the end of the process, further discrediting their stakeholder engagement strategies. Many argued that having MED and the office of the Auditor General amounts to duplication of roles. I agree with the narrative that these functions are distinct and serve different purposes. My findings align with Naidoo (2020), who proposes better cooperation and coordination between these important oversight and accountability units.

Limited cooperation between departments within the State Department for Economic Planning and a lack of buy-in from senior bureaucrats like the Economic Planning Secretary created tensions between the M&E Directorate and others who feuded over a strong and empowered MED. They were concerned that a strong, well-resourced MED would mean fewer resources for their units and a decline in relevance. Power play was also evident, pitting MED against other directorates, confirming another layer of internal influence atop donors' external influence. Intra-governmental competition is a source of competing interests, and in Kenya's case, it impeded the evaluation policy agenda.

Policy subgroup narratives confirm parliament's influence and power. However, they played a minimal role in the process, casting doubt on their role in the national evaluation system as proposed by Chirau et al. (2021). The study emphasizes the role of parliament in the process, and evidence shows a devil shift towards its direction. For instance, MED downplayed its role in the process and hoped parliament would use its constitutional mandate to facilitate the policy process. Ideally, parliament should be integral in this process, but this was not the case in Kenya's policy process, except in one instance when a parliamentarian, Dr. Makali Mulu, used parliament's oversight powers to force action from the executive. This was a one-time act, meaning evaluative thinking and the evaluation culture are still poorly structured within parliament. Although championships are vital in the evaluation policy process, they should not come at the expense of institutions. This will help avert overreliance on a lone champion like Dr. Makali Mulu, who could even consider vying for higher offices like Governor or being voted out entirely.

Proper public and stakeholder engagement was inadequate in the policy process. There seemed to be some form of stakeholder engagement that did not appear substantive enough to capture the public's views or even for evaluation practitioners in Kenya. This being a national policy would have necessitated an extensive stakeholder engagement process that acknowledges that the government serves the people's interests. The process was a government rather than a national initiative and excluded voices outside government structures. For instance, the voluntary organization for professional evaluators (VOPEs), civil society organizations (CSOs), or community-based organizations (CBOs) did not fully participate in the process. Although Makadzange (2022) confirms that a national evaluation system is mainly linked to existing government structures, including a network of departments responsible for program evaluation,

and a platform for data utilization and dissemination, governments must still engage other stakeholders as envisaged in Kenya's constitution. Courts have nullified many government policies because they failed to meet the expected public participation threshold. If this policy were challenged in court, MED would not easily substantiate its stakeholder engagement strategy.

The stakeholder engagement challenge worsens further because Kenyan evaluation associations face leadership and coordination challenges. Adding financial challenges and inadequate human capacity, Dlakavu et al. (2021) confirm these gaps while Masvaure et al. (2020) aspire for strong VOPEs "for the benefit of society at large" (p.3). VOPEs help supply the required skill and expertise to help generate knowledge and introduce innovative, tested approaches to evaluation processes (Lomeña-Gelis, 2013). They work collaboratively with researchers and institutions of higher learning to train new evaluators and actualize evaluation policy provisions. A vital part is their advocacy role, where evaluators in the country can come together to champion a cause. They can use their numbers as a social movement to advance program evaluation and to propel the evaluation policy agenda. Disruptions are vital in policy processes as they help shift focus to issues that concern citizens, and VOPEs, CSOs, or CBOs can expound on this. Overall, these VOPE efforts help to strengthen national evaluation systems and make them truly national initiatives, not just government efforts.

This study highlights the challenges Kenyan VOPEs face, key among them being leadership squabbles and tyranny. A leading VOPE in Kenya initially enjoyed a cordial working relationship with the government and received funding from donor entities to implement its programs. The association enjoyed evaluators' goodwill and grew in membership until it started facing challenges with its leadership. Different factions emerged within the association, with

some groups opting to stay in leadership and treat the association as a personal entity for their own gains. These challenges caused splinter groups to form, although the challenges seem to persist. Many evaluators also got discouraged and opted not to join associations. Remaining members became less active and halted their membership subscriptions, depriving the VOPEs of needed financing. Funding challenges at the VOPEs weakened them further and made them nearly entirely dependent on donor funding, without which they would fail to implement any programs.

The evaluation associations do not bear constitutional or direct responsibility to facilitate the national evaluation policy. The government, primarily through MED, bears this responsibility. The government sets the tone for evaluation policy championship in the country, and its indifference negatively impacts other policy subgroups, including VOPEs. The decline in donor funding and its implications for VOPE operations also show the challenges of donor overreliance.

A key contribution of this study is (1) to expose the weak oversight role of parliament in the national evaluation system. They face capacity challenges and other competing interests that subordinate evaluation policy in comparison to other pieces of legislation. The executive's lethargy also limits their contribution to the policy process. For instance, nearly three years into the policy's implementation phase, MED has yet to table the policy as a sessional paper for discussion in parliament. Passing the policy through parliament gives it more gravitas, having been passed by the people's representatives. (2) The study underscores the power of the non-elected shadowy government bureaucrats who obscured MED's access to higher offices for lobbying and annihilated the policy by expunging key provisions that propelled its design. (3) Lack of capacity in government is an existential threat to evaluation practice. Government

officials confuse evaluation and audit, making evaluation the first casualty in austerity measures. Lack of capacity also affects leaders' capacity to champion the evaluation cause. A detailed discussion of these findings and the research questions is presented in subsequent sections.

RQ1. How did the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy come to be?

Overview

Generally, there are structures and systems to advance program evaluation in Kenya. If fully implemented, the country's Constitution 2010 is viewed as a progressive law promoting good governance and accountability. The constitution provides a solid basis for a responsive evaluation policy design. However, having just the law without the goodwill and capacity to implement this law is an effort in futility. For instance, the findings show that the Kibaki government did well in advancing program evaluation in the country. Most progress in evaluation practice is attributed to his government, especially during the Grand Coalition Government that made his political rival Raila Odinga the Prime Minister. Program evaluation was directly under Odinga's watch, and this helped facilitate policy adoption. This confirms the significant role of high-level policy championship that is currently lacking in the government of Kenya. At the time, evaluation was thriving, and Kenya quickly realized its development agenda. Although international and multi-lateral agencies such as the World Bank pressured the government, there seemed to be an innate interest in the government to advance program evaluation. Donor support was largely complimentary, unlike now, when nearly all activities related to the evaluation policy were donor-hinged. In fact, there had to be a strong MED-donors coalition for the policy to succeed.

Despite the policy approval, evidence shows a reversal of gains made during Kibaki's time. Their government was visionary and set goals such as Vision 2030, which guided

government programs. Aligning their evaluation agenda to the national development agenda helped propel the country forward, including aligning government bureaucracy towards a common goal. This sense of championship is missing in this government, or the agenda has shifted. National development strategies keep changing after every election cycle, making it difficult to maintain momentum. Kibaki's government came up with the Vision 2030, an agenda intended to continue well after his term in office. The momentum was lost when Uhuru became president, and according to the data, it worsened during Ruto's term. The focus on Vision 2030 was lost, and instead, Uhuru and Ruto created the Big 4 (manufacturing, food and nutrition, universal health, and affordable housing) and the Bottom-up Economic Transformation Agenda (BETA), respectively. Although both programs support the country's long-term plans like Vision 2030, both governments have failed to explain the strategies they will implement to ensure this is realized. This research attributes this challenge and many others to weak national evaluation structures.

As highlighted earlier in the discussions, the MED-donors alliance had envisioned a semi-autonomous Directorate with sufficient funding. They proceeded to envision the passage of a bill that would help institutionalize evaluation in government. These seemed like the main reasons behind the policy proposals, without which the policy remained a shell of its former self. The interest in the policy dissipated, and the approval became a mere formality. Towards the end, the process was rushed and approved during the last months of Uhuru's government. The policy has not kicked off, three years after its approval, with most stakeholders interviewed considering it dead.

The overall goal was to pass the bill and have the autonomy to force evaluation compliance in public service. The essence of compliance is to have control (Porter & Goldman,

2013) over actions by civil servants instead of organizational growth and learning. This mindset borders fiducial audit (Müller-Clemm & Barnes, 1997), an old practice that has impeded constructive evaluation engagement. MED officials decried the executives' misconception of evaluation throughout this research and said they confused evaluation with audit. This is true, but MED's insistence on having the bill to ensure better control and to punish non-compliance probably discouraged support and grew the Executive's villainy towards the policy. Marra (2021, p. 485) explains better that "a compliance mentality undermines the capacity for evaluation to enhance learning and results accountability."

This mentality and lack of capacity at MED could also be attributed to the Directorate's staffing challenges. The staffing challenges arise from the Executive's inability to attract and retain evaluation professionals, leading to high turnovers at MED, with most officials being economists with a compliance mentality. The groupthink behavioral heuristics by Marra (2021) explain why the officers at MED align more with other economists and not evaluators. Several MED officials confessed that they are members of Kenya's economic professional associations and not evaluation associations, their challenges notwithstanding.

An engraved compliance mentality affects the entire government-wide evaluation structure. On one end, MED pushes for stringent laws to force compliance from government ministries and agencies. On the other hand, the government bureaucrats view evaluation as another fault-finding initiative that could lead to criminal culpability and judicial processes. For fear of their reputation, they immediately block any plans they fear will expose their dealings. This government conundrum exposed the inadequate capacity and the lack of systems to implement the policy, even if it got approved. Questions emerge about why the government rushed the policy, knowing its capacity challenges. How would the policy work if the Presidency

does not support its championship? There was no need to approve a policy without implementation structures. My findings show that for better evaluation policy success and relevance, the capacity ought to precede the policy, unlike in Kenya's case, where the policy preceded evaluation capacity, posing significant challenges for its survival.

The government sets the tone for championing and facilitating the evaluation policy process. They are its biggest proponents and, in this case, were at the center of its facilitation. Questions about how the process would progress smoothly with the government's inadequate capacity ensue. This suggests the need for enhanced capacity before attempting to have the policy. Although when asked whether Kenya has sufficient capacity to meet the demands of a national policy or bill, many responded affirmatively, their subsequent responses showed otherwise. Kenya seems to have evaluation capacity challenges, further worsened by a disorganized VOPE and aloof academia. Together, these affected MED's stakeholder engagement capabilities and ended up with a policy no one was interested in.

Aid restructuring and implications on evaluation financing

Evaluation in Africa, including Kenya, is heavily dependent on aid. Donor agencies' involvement in this process was integral to its success, and without their financing, most activities would have stalled. The donor agencies paid consultants, procured meeting venues, facilitated stakeholder engagement, and provided technical support for the policy process. The donors, mostly UN agencies, allied with MED and appeared to speak the same language. However, over time, it becomes more difficult to ascertain the government's true intentions when easy money is available. At some point in the narrative, the donor agencies felt that the government was only interested in the money and cared less about the policy. The resulting outcome is a government that is overly reliant on the donors, making both parties overbearing,

increased per diem abuse, inhibitive costs for ordinary people when donors fund high-end hotel engagements, and overall decline in financing from rich countries.

Per diem abuse.

Donor-sponsored programs come with a notion of free money, limiting prudence and fiscal responsibility in government. The culture of per diem abuse is widespread in low-income countries where the promise to pay is used to influence action (Erasmus et al., 2018; Morris & Ismail, 2024; Samb et al., 2020) For instance, Samb et al. (2020) report that nearly one-third of Tanzania's national budget is spent on per diems. Morris and Ismail (2024) align with my research findings, stating that "civil servants and staff who work for international non-governmental organizations will only attend training workshops or undertake development work if they are given a per diem as an incentive" (p.2). The promise of per diem sometimes drives the pressure to attract funding from donor agencies. The document analysis confirmed that the promise of a per diem was highlighted in notices to attend the stakeholder engagement workshops because, without the incentive, many officers would not see the need to attend. This culture has further percolated even in communities, impeding development work. Per diem obscures the core business of a stakeholder engagement with senior officers jostling for space to travel while making the least contributions.

Inhibitive costs for ordinary citizens.

Donor funding gave the government incentives to organize meetings at venues that are outside the reach of ordinary citizens or evaluation practitioners. The scramble for per diems and off-station engagements in sometimes high-end hotels edges out important groups that would strengthen the policy's reach and impact. Local evaluators would not meet the prohibitive costs of attending the meetings if donor organizations finance a stakeholder engagement at a hotel in

the coastal city of Mombasa or the lake city of Kisumu. In the long run, this overreliance on donor support weakens State accountability (Samb et al., 2020) as it provides convenient options for a small section of policy actors. The notion that stakeholder engagements must be held in high-end hotels, not public spaces, is misleading. It seems as if it is a form of per diem abuse or resource misappropriation that civil servants employ to change their working environment while earning a per diem. Although part of this problem is caused by low income levels (Morris & Ismail, 2024), to the point that civil servants use meetings such as these to help meet their recreational needs. Constant donor financing has exacerbated the vice.

A changing aid environment.

Recently, rich countries have been limiting their aid to low and middle-income countries. A nationalist narrative is sweeping Europe and North America, the most prominent financiers of development work. This poses a threat to donor financing and international development entirely. Most USAID projects were recently stopped following President Trump's budget cuts, anti-climate change, anti-diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and America First agenda. These uncertainties make over-reliance on donor support untenable and risky. Governments in these countries must now take responsibility and advance their national agendas. This increases their stakes in national development and improves their innate interests in national programs. In Kenya's evaluation policy, the government was not fully invested in the process. This explains why donor agencies could fill the void, form an alliance with the Directorate, and technically lead the entire process. The repercussions of excess donor involvement in national processes include low levels of championship and an endless cycle of seeking donor support and losing our dignity and sovereignty.

Policy's leading actors

Given the history of aid in Africa, it is not a surprise that donor agencies were a key factor in this policy process. The prevailing narrative is that donors were the primary heroes in this policy process, followed by Kenya's M&E Directorate. The MED-donors' alliance means that both actors share responsibilities and act in one accord. Their talking points seemed the same, and the donor agencies led the process, confirming Kenya's overreliance on donor support for their national M&E system, as postulated by Abrahams (2015), Dlakavu et al. (2021), and Rugg (2016) all of whom called for country-led initiatives instead of excessive influence from unsustainable donor funding. The narrative policy framework classifies coalitions into heroes, villains, or victims to better describe the leading policy actors.

A heroic coalition of convenience.

Data shows that donors are the primary heroes in Kenya's policy process. United Nations agencies were the main financiers of the policy process and supported MED throughout the policy process. The Directorate officials at one point admitted to being hand-held by the donors for decades, casting doubt on whether they want to break free and learn to operate on their own without donors' support. They also seem to envision their continued participation in the national evaluation processes with MED and evaluation practitioners asking for the donor's involvement in convening a national discourse on revitalizing evaluation in Kenya. Although there is a dire need for a national conversation on Kenya's derailed course, my position is that the government must better chart this course without delegating its responsibility to donor agencies. With this, the government takes ownership of the process and possibly makes it a national discourse that brings together national evaluation subgroups, including donor agencies.

Donor agencies formed a coalition with MED to champion the policy, making them the heroic characters. However, the data analysis showed they had common and divergent interests in this process, making it a coalition of convenience. Their shared interests were to have a semi-autonomous MED, an enhanced budget, and an approved M&E bill. However, their divergent underlying interests were to fundraise for the government and check a funding and activity box for the donors. Despite being the narrative heroes, these interests cast doubt on the coalition's sincere and innate interests.

The ignorant villains.

The government bureaucracy is by far the greatest villain in this policy narrative. The government seemed to be split between MED and the higher-ranking bureaucrats. This signifies a leadership and championship gap in government. MED has limited capacity to inform a definitive policy direction because reporting channels derailed the policy process and altered its original purpose. I consider the government bureaucracy ignorant because of its limited evaluation capacity. They have a skewed and limited understanding of evaluation and the policy's purpose. Some felt threatened by a powerful MED, which would mean fewer resources for other departments, and some also feared the repercussions of stringent evaluation laws. This compliance attitude drove fear among the bureaucrats and impeded the policy process.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider, in future studies, the counter-response of the bureaucrats. The scope of this research did not cover the bureaucrats outside MED, although their narrative might point to a balancing act within government. When the government must derail a policy proposal for the greater good, for example, a semi-autonomous MED could have higher budgetary implications or political backlash with accusations of a bloated government. Probably the policy timing was not ideal, and maybe the 'ignorant' villains understood better that

capacity should precede the policy and that the country still lacked structures to implement an M&E bill.

The VOPEs shared this ignorant villain trait, although to a much lesser extent. However, it is important to note that most blame was on the VOPE leaders and not much on the ordinary VOPE members, save for their complacency and slow action. The VOPE leaders, on the other hand, were outright villains whose desire to stay in power and harass dissidents caused discontentment. Weak VOPE systems inhibit practitioner engagement and diminish their agency. There is a need for a VOPE re-awakening in Kenya. The leadership squabbles erode other actors' confidence in professional evaluators' capability to organize themselves and act professionally while championing better governance and responsive programs in Kenya.

VOPEs are integral in strengthening program evaluation in the country and better engagement with academia to supply higher-quality professionals and to advance skills retooling to meet emerging needs. Kenya's research on evaluation capacity is also low, and little knowledge of Kenya's evaluation landscape is available. This calls for retrospection and enhanced cooperation between academia and VOPEs. Regarding the national policy process, the VOPEs cannot have the level of responsibility as the government. They are not directly responsible and do not have the resources and state apparatus of the government. There ought to be better cooperation between MED and VOPEs, and the once-flourishing relationship should be repaired to benefit evaluation practice in the country.

RQ 2. What shadow interests influence the policy subgroups' narratives?

Overview

The M&E Directorate and donors advanced the primary shadow interests in this policy process. They were the main actors in the policy narratives and had the most at stake. The donor agencies provided the financial and technical resources employed in the policy process, wielding substantial power and decision-making capabilities. Donor agencies aligning their funding with the national development agenda does not negate the threat of them manipulating the process to suit their goals. Their claim that the decision-making processes are a preserve of national government officials does not give absolute confidence that the decision-making process is devoid of external influence.

As such, MED depended entirely on donor agencies to survive the policy process. Otherwise, the process would have faced challenges and possibly stalled. An important question arises about whether the donors are real heroes or villains in the policy process. The overall aim is to make the government independent, have autonomy over its decision-making, and have higher stakes in the public process. However, as it stands now, this does not seem tenable given the history of aid on the continent. African governments have been forced to consider alternatives following the cancellation of aid programs by the United States, the most prominent financier of international development. These moves also affected African program evaluation because most evaluation processes are donor-sponsored. Further study on the implications of declining aid on program evaluation should be considered, and strategies taken by low- and middle-income countries to adjust to the new norm.

Primarily, the donors-MED alliance wanted a semi-autonomous agency, backed by a bill and an enhanced budget. This did not happen because (1) the motive did not align with senior

government bureaucrats' interests, hence resistance, and (2) there is a widespread lack of capacity in government, causing misconceptions, and a weak VOPE environment only worsens the already dire situation. Lack of advanced research by universities and invigorated training at universities deepens Kenya's woes further. The continued donor funding was fueled by the government's high appetite for aid at the expense of setting structures for long-term capacity. The promise of available funds prevented MED from having better institutions to enhance the policy's impact. Instead, the findings show that they were interested in subsequent funding opportunities. On the other hand, donors desired to check a box and include Kenya among countries with evaluation policies, even if the policy is just on paper, as some research participants reported.

The power of government bureaucracy

This research confirms Potter and Shipan's (2019) claim that government bureaucracy plays the most active role in policymaking, even though constitutions barely mention it. Government bureaucrats have significant power in the policy process since they act on behalf of elected officials. They have the power to facilitate or hinder a policy agenda. Sometimes, the bureaucracy is characterized by infighting and unit rivalry, which limits evaluation utilization (Picciotto, 2016). Kenya's national evaluation policy process was characterized by infighting and competing interests within the bureaucracy. As highlighted earlier, department heads saw a strong MED as a challenge to their power and influence within the civil service. They persuaded senior bureaucrats to stall MED's plans for semi-autonomy out of ulterior motives. The bureaucracy sometimes also serves the interest of elected individuals and follows the tone set by the elected individuals (Potter & Shipan, 2019). The findings show an unfavorable trend

regarding transparency and accountability interests in Uhuru and Ruto's governments. The bureaucrats aligned with the tone set by the elected governments and lost the policy's utility.

The "success for evaluation in government depends as much on the political context," asserted (Chelimsky, 2009, p. 51). This aligns with the research findings that Kenya's evaluation policy process is derailed because either the Presidency does not favor the policy, or they have set a tone that impedes the evaluation policy agenda. Presidency is central to the success of policymaking within an agency, and a disfavored position limits the bureaucracy's scope of engagement.

The study findings align with Picciotto (2016), who cautions against dehumanizing the bureaucracy without a holistic view. They add that bureaucracy is sometimes considered derogatory and can dehumanize those in similar positions, while the environment could not favor a different outcome. The narrative in this study is that the senior government bureaucrats were the villains in this policy process. However, a critical view shows that their action reflects the governance tone set by the Presidency, coupled with their limited capacity in program evaluation. Throughout, they seemed to misconstrue evaluation to mean audit and wondered why Kenya needed a semi-autonomous MED when the constitution already provides for an independent Auditor General. Further, policy making is a balancing act, and at the big picture level, they can compare evaluations to prioritize other national interests. For instance, Kenya's Constitution 2010 brought a bloated government, leading to a high wage bill and increasing national debt. Adding another semi-autonomous state agency in charge of evaluation would probably work against their austerity plans.

A non-existent national evaluation agenda

Kenya lacks a national evaluation agenda and coordination. The policy's framers depended almost entirely on it to help fix nearly all the challenges Kenya faced in advancing evaluation in the country. These plans faltered when the policy's key provisions failed, exposing the country's compromised evaluation framework. This confirms the pitfall of depending entirely on a policy instrument to solve structural, fundamental, or epistemic gaps that require deeper introspection and broader stakeholder engagement.

Kenya needs to rebuild its evaluation structure from the grassroots and depart from its top-down, forward-mapping policy approach. Given that Kenya is devolved, this centric approach limits the country's capacity to decentralize policy. A national evaluation agenda requires active county governments' participation for a more comprehensive national evaluation capacity. Kenya needs strong systems and structures to build capacity even at the county level to facilitate championship and capacity building.

Comprehensive outcomes require extensive stakeholder engagement, which captures the realities and aspirations of the people of Kenya. A key part that was missed in Kenya's evaluation process was the involvement of ordinary citizens. There is a need to devise innovative and cost-effective strategies to collect as many views as possible and incorporate them into a national program evaluation strategy. The strategy can outline the country's vision for revitalizing program evaluation, after which a better policy can be proposed. Once Kenya has built its capacity and laid structures and infrastructure for evaluation research, professionalization, and utilization, suggestions to pass an evaluation bill can be considered. Currently, Kenya's capacity is weak and might not sustain an evaluation bill.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Kenya has no use for a national evaluation policy that serves no purpose. The pride that Kenya also has a national evaluation policy when the evaluation capacity is probably at its lowest is pointless. Instead, it gives an impression of an additional layer of regulation that causes resistance to the policy by a leadership whose evaluation capacity is at an all-time low. The research findings show that the policy remained a shell after its key provisions were expunged.

The presidency is key to the evaluation policy championships and helps set the tone for the policy's success. The Uhuru and Ruto governments are a departure from their predecessor, President Kibaki, whose government championed evaluation. Kibaki's success shows that proper leadership is key to a policy's success. A policy alone cannot fix a broken evaluation system; hence, capacity is needed to precede policy. The proponents wrongly assume that the policy forces compliance even after evidence showed inadequacy and a lack of understanding. Strengthening national evaluation capacities requires pulling together and engaging all actors better with a genuine interest to incorporate their views.

Kenya's process showed a tokenistic approach that engaged key stakeholders at the end of the process. Local evaluators were left out, and their absence negatively influenced the policy's acceptance and implementation potential. There is a need for a national discourse to return Kenya on course, or better still, hold a conversation on whether a fast-changing world still favors program evaluation as a practice. Evaluation faces substantial threats, with the practice being less prioritized and defunded. Kenya must discuss the role of parliament in this process and create an environment that enables the revamping of evaluation professional associations. These professionalization efforts should align with research and higher education integration in the evaluation practice, revamping plans and strategies. This must be a national agenda and not a

government-alone exercise. All policy subgroups should be allowed to participate without the MED-donors' alliance completely dominating the exercise and limiting the role of other actors.

As a recommendation for future studies, (1) there is a need to better understand the relationship between M&E directorates and the government-wide bureaucracy and whether these evaluation units in government align with the bureaucracies. For instance, the case in Kenya showed a more prominent and influential bureaucracy that can be highlighted more in national evaluation systems. Their support is critical for evaluation policy agenda-setting and championship. (2) There is a need to study the relationship between evaluation policy for compliance versus evaluation policy as a learning tool in a setting with weak governance structures. The focus could be to develop a solution that works for such settings, for example, in Africa, without entirely faulting a policy's compliance capabilities. A blend of compliance and learning might work better than one against the other. (3) There is also a need for further inquiry on the state and future of M&E in Africa, given the aid disruptions spearheaded by the United States. The overreliance on donor funding for evaluation advancement in Africa is not tenable, and the African government must propose country-led efforts to champion and execute evaluation initiatives from its financing. The United States provides significant financing for international initiatives, including incorporating evaluation and learning in all its donor-funded programs. With the US's changing foreign policy and aid restructuring, there is a likelihood of a significant disruption and shift in evaluation, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. There is a need for a better understanding and investigations into the implications of President Trump's leadership.

I invite further research on the implications of aid restructuring on program evaluation in low and middle-income countries. A prompt on the countries' overreliance on aid and their

persistent lack of capacity could provide context and help champion a mindset shift, especially in government. Additionally, to enhance the sample and collect more diverse perspectives, future research could consider the role of government bureaucracies in advancing NEP. An isolated focus on evaluation directorates in government without contextualizing their place within the broader government could limit the scope of research. Finally, I call for more research on evaluation, especially in Africa, to help advance knowledge on program evaluation. This builds universities' capacity to offer evaluation programs and strengthens the national VOPEs while advancing evaluation use and capacity building.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I – Research timeline

Research activities	Proposed timeline													
	11/ 23	12/ 23	01/ 24	02/ 24	03/ 24	04/ 24	05/ 24	06/ 24	07/ 24	08/ 24	09/ 24	10/ 24	11/ 24	12/ 24
Literature review	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Proposal writing and approval	■	■	■											
IRB approval				■										
Research piloting					■									
Data collection							■	■						
Data cleaning & transcription								■						
Data coding									■					
Data analysis									■					
Dissertation writing									■	■	■			
Conference dissemination												■		
Draft manuscript preparation													■	■

Appendix II – NPF codebook

Identity/policy narrative number	For identity when coding multiple files. Includes the official title or name of the file. Other details include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - date of narrative - narrative author/initiator and who invited key stakeholders/experts? - file type (eg press release, YouTube video, minutes, newsletters, editorials, speeches etc)
Main discourse	What theme/issues does the policy narrative address?
Type	What is the nature of the policy narrative? Is it formal? Were minutes taken?
Key stakeholders/experts	Who provided testimonies, feedback, or petitions on the policy narratives?
Policy concern	What is the policy problem that the narrative addresses?
Terms of reference	What term/phrases are used to describe the narrative subject matter? E.g., “evaluation institutionalization”
Self-identity	How do the narrative authors/initiators define their own role?
Forms and nature of evidence	What evidence does the narrative provide?
Characters	Who are the key players in the policy narrative?
Causal plot	What is the narrative angle depicted by the policy narrative?
Heroes versus villains	Which characters are positively depicted, and which ones are negatively depicted?
Metaphors/symbols	What and how are they used to define or frame policy problems and highlight proposed solutions?
Conflict	What contrasting or conflicting opinions arise?
Policy appropriateness/justification criteria	How does the policy narrative justify the policy problem, what is the supporting evidence, and what is the prioritization criteria?
Doomsday scenario	How are ‘doomsday’ narratives used to sway policy support? What disaster would emerge if the policy were to fail?
Tensions and drama	What dramatic language got deployed in the policy narratives?
Devil shift	Does policy initiators/narrators downplay their power and overstate the power of opposing coalitions to shift blame?
Conclusion	How is the policy narrative summarized?

Source: derived from O’Bryan et al. (2014) and Shanahan et al. (2018b)

Appendix III – Data collection tools

A. Apriori proposition table

Research questions	Key propositions and supporting literature	Interview questions
RQ1. How did the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy come to be?		
RQ1.1. What is the role of international forces in Kenya’s M&E policy agenda-setting	Donor and international partner organizations played a central role in Kenya’s M&E policy agenda-setting (Blaser Mapitsa & Chirau, 2019; Goldman et al., 2018, 2019).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What was your specific role in Kenya’s NEP? Give a brief overview of your contributions 2. Which stakeholders took part in the policy process? What was their role? 3. What power dynamics played out in the policy processes? 4. To what extent, if at all any, did donor organizations influence the evaluation policy processes? 5. What strategies have Kenya put in place to advance county-led national evaluation capacities?
RQ1.2. What narratives did the M&E policy sub-groups drive in Kenya’s evaluation policy agenda?	All policy sub-groups supported and participated in the M&E policy process despite diverse levels of involvement. This diverse engagement suggests a top-down policy implementation model (Birkland, 2019).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. To what extent did you participate in Kenya’s NEP? 7. How might the NEP enhance or limit your role in Kenya’s national evaluation capacity? 8. How did you learn about Kenya’s NEP? 9. Which partnership avenues did your organization explore to strengthen Kenya’s national evaluation capacity?
RQ2. What shadow interests influence the policy subgroups’ narratives?		
RQ2.1. What policy subgroup goals are at cross-purpose with the overarching evaluation agenda?	Policy sub-groups did not have any shadow interests and all support stronger national evaluation capacities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 10. What is your leading evaluation institutionalization interest? 11. How does your organization benefit from NEP? 12. In your opinion, and in this regard, are there competing

		interests from other organizations?
RQ2.2. In what ways, if at all, is Kenya’s national evaluation policy important to the policy subgroups?	The policy sub-groups have resonating policy components making the instrument helpful.	13. What do you make of Kenya’s NEP status? How might the policy advance your organization’s interest? 14. What would you like to see 5 years from now? 15. Do you view your contribution as significant? Would you need further support to do better? Elaborate.

B. Proposed data collection guide

Data collection activities and preparations

The stages for data collection activities and preparations below are derived from Creswell and Poth (2017):

1. Define the research purpose and choose the research approach.
2. Identify the individuals and sites to carry out the research. This includes defining the policy sub-groups involved in the research.
3. Outline the access and rapport building strategies when working with these groups.
4. Identify the forms of data to collect. For this case, interviews will be used extensively, hence described in detail in subsequent sections.
5. Highlight the data collection and recording methods
6. Outline possible data collection challenges or issues
7. Identify appropriate and safe data storage methods

Pre-interview questions

1. Introductions: spend some time introducing myself to the interviewee while asking them to do the same.
2. Outline the purpose of the study and seek verbal consent from the respondents.
3. In the spirit of ethical research, outline any possible risks of participation and any reciprocal benefits to the respondents.
 - What are the data collection methods? Are there any recordings?
 - How will the data be used and stored?
 - Does the respondent require anonymity?
4. Identify and outline the specific role of the respondent. Ask their specific role [from their perspective] to help inform the subsequent actions.
5. Once the respondent category is determined, the interviewees are notified of the sections of the interview and interview approach.

Interview questions

Section one: Background and experience

1. What is your current position or role in your organization? How long have you served in these positions?
2. Please give me a brief overview of what your job entails.
3. What are you excited about the most about your job? What is your motivation to report each day to your organization for work?
4. What led you to this role? What did you do before your current placement?

Section two: Content/practice questions

1. What was your specific role in Kenya's NEP? Give a brief overview of your contributions
2. Which stakeholders took part in the policy process? What was their role?
3. What power dynamics played out in the policy processes?
4. To what extent, if at all any, did donor organizations influence the evaluation policy processes?
5. What strategies have Kenya put in place to advance county-led national evaluation capacities?
6. To what extent did you participate in Kenya's NEP?
7. How might the NEP enhance or limit your role in Kenya's national evaluation capacity?
8. How did you learn about Kenya's NEP?
9. Which partnership avenues did your organization explore to strengthen Kenya's national evaluation capacity?
10. What is your leading evaluation institutionalization interest?
11. How does your organization benefit from NEP?
12. In your opinion, and in this regard, are there competing interests from other organizations?

Section three: Reflections and lessons

1. What are the lessons for enhancing national evaluation capacities?
2. What do you make of Kenya's NEP status? How might the policy advance your organization's interest?
3. What would you like to see 5 years from now?
4. Do you view your contribution as significant? Would you need further support to do better? Elaborate.

Appendix IV – Virginia Tech IRB Approval (IRB 24-105)



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 23, 2024
TO: Thomas Greig Archibald, Dickson Ouma Otieno
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: National Evaluation Policy Narratives: The Happening of Kenya’s National Evaluation Policy
IRB NUMBER: 24-105

Effective April 11, 2024, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **April 11, 2024**

Appendix V – Egerton University ISERC Approval (EUISERC/APP/340/2024)

EGERTON

TEL: (051) 2217808
FAX: 051-2217942



UNIVERSITY

P. O. BOX 536
EGERTON

**EGERTON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND ETHICS REVIEW
COMMITTEE**

EU/RE/DIR/009

Approval No. EUISERC/APP/340/2024

11th June 2024

Dickson Ouma Otiano
Address: 526 Prices Fork Road, Blacksburg, VA 24060-3322
Telephone: +1 540-231-9665
E-mail: tgarch@vt.edu

Dear Dickson,

RE: ETHICAL APPROVAL: NATIONAL EVALUATION POLICY NARRATIVES: THE HAPPENING OF KENYA'S NATIONAL EVALUATION POLICY

This is to inform you that the *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee* has reviewed and approved your above research proposal. Your application approval number is **EUISERC/APP/340/2024**. The approval period is **11th June 2024 – 12th June 2025**

This approval is subject to compliance with the following requirements:

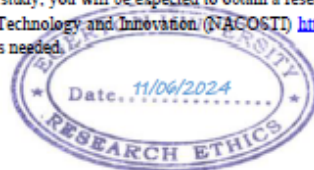
- i. Only approved documents including (informed consents, study instruments, MTA) will be used.
- ii. All changes including (amendments, deviations, and violations) are submitted for review and approval by *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee*.
- iii. Death and life-threatening problems and serious adverse events or unexpected adverse events whether related or unrelated to the study must be reported to *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee* within 72 hours of notification.
- iv. Any changes, anticipated or otherwise that may increase the risks or affect safety or welfare of study participants and others or affect the integrity of the research must be reported to *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee* within 72 hours.
- v. Clearance for Material Transfer of biological specimens must be obtained from relevant institutions.
- vi. Submission of a request for renewal of approval at least 60 days prior to expiry of the approval period. Attach a comprehensive progress report to support the renewal.

"Transforming Lives through Quality Education"

- vii. Submission of an executive summary report within 90 days upon completion of the study to *Egerton University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee*.

Prior to commencing your study, you will be expected to obtain a research license from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) <https://oris.nacosti.go.ke> and also obtain other clearances needed.

Yours sincerely,



Prof. Raphael M. Ngure

**CHAIRMAN, EGERTON UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND ETHICS
REVIEW CTTEE**


RMN/BK/

Appendix VI – NACOSTI Research License

Republic of Kenya
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Ref No: **846887**

RESEARCH LICENSE




This is to Certify that Mr. Dickson Otieno of Virginia Tech, has been licensed to conduct research as per the provision of the Science, Technology and Innovation Act, 2013 (Rev.2014) in Nairobi on the topic: National Evaluation Policy Narratives: The Happening of Kenya's National Evaluation Policy for the period ending : 04/July/2025.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/24/37188**

Applicant Identification Number: **846887**

Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

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