Kenya: Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK)
A Case Study of the Evolution of the Evaluation Society of Kenya
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Background
The driving force for ESK is the need to provide professional M&E input into Kenya’s
development agenda through multi-stakeholder collaborations. Accordingly, in recognition of
the important role that evaluation professional bodies may play in development, the absence
of a vibrant professional evaluation organisation in the country was a strategic opportunity
which ESK seized to fill the existing gap. It is also reinforced by a changing landscape in the
country with a new constitutional dispensation where the combination of an informed, active
citizenry and vibrant media are keeping the government awake in meeting very high
expectations, including the observance and practice of transparency, accountability and
effectiveness in service delivery. Further, globally there is a growing recognition that national
capacity development for monitoring and evaluation systems (including those of professional
organisations) is an essential part of the broader support to policy reform and to promoting
national ownership of evidence-based decision-making aimed at enhancing development at
all spheres of life. Towards this end, support for nurturing the professional growth and
contribution of its members to the evaluation profession as a whole is central to ESK’s
objectives. Outlined below is a chronology of the slow and sure evolution of ESK.

Initial efforts for a vibrant Evaluation Body focused on revamping and strengthening the
dormant Kenya Evaluation Association (KEA), formed in 1999 and which hosted the first
African Evaluation Association (AfEA) conference. The efforts were a follow-up action on
the recommendations of a meeting held by African representatives at the 2008 International
Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) in Canada, which the current Chair of
ESK, Jennifer Mutua, attended. At the time, she had been seconded by UNPD/UNV to
provide technical support to the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System
(NIMES). The discussions centred on putting evaluation practice on the continent’s national
agenda with a special focus on the contributions of evaluation professional associations.
Significantly, during the discussions it was noted that the status of the associations on the
continent ranged from being weak, dormant or non-existent. Accordingly, there was
consensus that since there is no “one fits all” approach to vibrant associations, each country
would approach things differently - based on the local context. This should however be
informed by the results of a rigorous internal assessment before any model (professional,
incorporated bodies, etc.) is adopted.

Subsequently, and based on these recommendations, Jennifer Mutua, with the support
of the NIMES and a team of M&E practitioners came together to provide a way forward in
operationalizing a vibrant evaluation professional body. Due diligence through an informal
internal assessment of whether or not a professional evaluation association existed was
conducted. The findings revealed that indeed, there existed KEA. However, it was noted that
KEA was dormant. The idea of revamping the dormant KEA was therefore, mooted
consultatively as one of the next steps forward. Accordingly, an audience was sought with
Karen Odhiambo (KEA chair) and Samuel Wachira (KEA vice chair), who agreed
to join the team mentioned above.

The other step forward agreed upon and which was followed through, was the
mobilization of other M&E practitioners to join the initiative. An old contact list of KEA former
members together with other innovative ways such as identifying M&E focal persons in
organizations was used to target and invite potential members to meetings. The response
was good, albeit with some emails bouncing. Regular meetings for reviving KEA then began

1Julius Nyangaga (ILRI); James Mwanzia (Government’s NIMES); Samuel Norgah (Plan International); Dr. Florence
Etta (consultant); Daudi Sumba (African Wild Life Foundation); Makali Mulu (independent consultant); Rose
Muchiri (UNDP); Jan Reilaender (UNICEF); Steve Mogere (JICA); Rekha Shori (consultant); Charles Warria
(IIRR); Peter Kimani (University)
in earnest with an average attendance of between 25 to 35 members. At the initial meeting, an interim steering committee was identified and endorsed by the members to spearhead the process of revamping KEA. The Monitoring& Evaluation Directorate (MED), Ministry of State for Planning, National Development and Vision 2030 which operationalizes the NIMES through strategic partnership arrangements with KEA, agreed to provide space for its meetings. This it was agreed would continue until KEA was able to become financially stable.

Another activity that was used to mobilise support for revamping KEA centred on participation in the “Local Country Action” component of the 2009 International Development Evaluation Associations’ (IDEAS) conference, in South Africa. The purpose of this initiative was to consultatively, through focus group discussions, examine the local situation with regard to evaluation capacity. The specific objective was to come up with ideas for “Local Actions” that may contribute to improving capabilities for evaluation of development activities in the country. The areas of focus on this were grouped as follows: “Identify local strengths relevant to evaluation; Identify local barriers to evaluation capacity building and their causes; Discuss how to improve evaluation capacity; Make suggestions for local actions to build evaluation capacity”. This culminated in a report based on Kenya’s local evaluation situation, whose findings were presented in the conference show-casing the NIMES and its newly found KEA partnership. The findings also served from then on to inform the way forward in efforts towards operationalizing a vibrant professional association.

However it is significant to note that, due to unforeseen challenges and after many failed attempts to salvage this, the efforts for reviving KEA became untenable (recorded in minutes of stakeholder meetings). Consequently, in a meeting held by M&E practitioners that included the attendance of the then AfrEA President, Dr. Florence Etta, on 18th June 2010, participants decided to form a new national evaluation body that would serve a local network's interests. They endorsed the formation of the Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK). In September 2010 ESK applied to the Registrar of Societies for official registration as a Society. This was officially granted and registered in July 2011 (File No 58739).

As part of the efforts for operationalizing ESK, a constitution and strategic plan were recently developed and ratified consultatively by members. UNICEF and DFID provided technical input into the constitution and strategic plan respectively. It is envisaged that this will now inform the next steps forward in taking ESK to the next level of implementing the strategic plan. In particular this will play a crucial role in guiding the process of providing a united voice by its members into the country’s development discourse. Towards this end, as an immediate step forward a draft Annual Work Plan (AWP) has been drawn from the strategic plan. The AWP is being developed consultatively with input and comments from committee members and later the wider ESK membership. In the meantime, quarterly meetings are held for the wider ESK group with an average attendance of between 15-25 members.

Further, the network has two on-line interaction spaces – an e-platform and a website (www.esk.co.ke). The e-platform was established through the support of the professional partners in ODI (in Britain). It is very interactive and members are able to communicate with one another, receive information on job and vacancy announcements and other relevant information (some of which is available in the AfrEA, IPDET, IDEAS and AGDEN among other international listservs). The ESK website is being finalised with content.

Regionally and globally ESK is slowly and surely gaining recognition. ESK is a member of AfrEA and made a presentation during the 2012 conference in Accra, Ghana. Also its current Chair, Jennifer Mutua, is serving at the AfrEA Board as a representative of Eastern Africa. ESK is also in the IOCE data base and is participating in this global initiative by EvalPartners. A presentation by ESK was also one of the panel discussions made at the 2010 IDEAS conference in Jordan.

**Collaboration with government**

ESK has continued to receive strong support from the NIMES (Kenya’s National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System). This November, ESK organised a very successful high
visibility launch. The event was organised jointly with the Ministry of Planning through the Monitoring & Evaluation Directorate (MED) within a three-day inaugural national M&E week that is earmarked to be held annually. ESK’s launch was on day one. UNICEF Kenya contributed substantially to the funding of the launch.

ESK in partnership with MED and other Development Partners used this platform to contribute towards the enhancement of the culture and demand for M&E in the country (which is relatively weak currently). It also provided an opportunity to raise the visibility of ESK and the NIMES as instruments for tracking and communicating development results as well as the sharing of experiences and learnings to encourage the culture of dialogue. The theme and agenda of the launch focused on ESK’s objectives, strategies and the benefits of having a vibrant professional evaluation society in the country and the role it will play.

Participants were drawn from the national and sub-national levels including CSOs, Government, UN Agencies, Academia and Research institutions among others. The media covered the event. Key note addresses were made by the assistant Minister for planning, UNICEF’s Country Director and DFID’s high-level representative from the UK Evaluation office. Other speeches were made by MED, a representative from UNDP and the ESK chair. During the event, the UN Women also conducted a workshop on “Evaluation from a Gender Equality and Human Rights Perspective”. The universities also made a presentation on an initiative for developing an M&E curricula that is being supported by MED and UNICEF.

In addition, the National M&E week also included the official launch of a Capacity Development Programme for the NIMES supported by SIDA. Other presentations during the M&E week were made by representatives from the World Bank, Kenya Community of Practice on Managing for Development Results (KCoP-MfDR). Workshops were also conducted by AGDEN and the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IRR) among others. The 3-day event provided a platform for a membership recruitment drive for ESK.

Further, in 2010 ESK successfully co-hosted a half-day session with MED to discuss various issues related to M&E in the country. Presentations were made by MED, various universities and ESK on how to collaboratively support the evaluation processes and services for effective development. It was also attended by representatives from UNDP and the World Bank among others. The Society is now in the process of formalizing its relationship with the MED, through an MOU. More ESK/government engagements and collaborations are planned for the future.

Strategy and implementation
Since the initial efforts as outlined above began in late 2008, the operationalization of ESK has come a long way; a process that was sometimes characterised by unexpected challenges. It is also worth noting that the focus was mostly on operational issues in order to set a solid foundation for achieving our overall goal, “Sustainable and quality monitoring and evaluation practice for improving development policies, programs and projects”. Towards this end, the milestones of developing and ratifying a constitution and strategic plan coupled with a formally elected Executive Committee, are some of the steps that ESK has taken to strengthen its own institutional capacity to be able to deliver on the goal. For example, the constitution guided the electoral process and also informed the formulation of the strategic plan.

ESK is now ready to move to the implementation of its strategic plan through a multi-stakeholder approach. This will include collaborations with the government’s NIMES, and development partners such as UNICEF, UNDP and DFID among others. On the conceptual framework for national evaluation capacity development outlined in the book Moving from policies to results by developing national capacities for country-led M&E systems, ESK’s strategic objectives and strategies for achieving the identified issues are respectively outlined below.

Strategic Objectives and Key Issues to Address
To advance the profession and practice of M&E in Kenya:
1. To collaborate and foster understanding with M&E training institutions in order to improve the quality of education and/or capacity building of related professionals;
2. To collaborate with similar societies, organisations and allied professionals and establishments within and outside Kenya in the application of M&E;
3. To grow the membership of ESK across Kenya and raise the profile of evaluation in Kenya.
4. To support the development of M&E capacity in Kenya:
5. To support the development of M&E programs and educational curriculums that ensure content is adequate to cover intellectual, ethical and professional standards, principles, and practices and meet national, regional and international research and development needs;
6. To promote and publicize appropriate M&E training programs, tools and methodologies;
7. To support participation of interested trainers and trainees in M&E capacity development programs.
8. To support the application of effective M&E in the national development agenda:
9. To promote the role of M&E practitioners as integral members of the country’s development sector;
10. To support the dissemination of evaluation and research findings which have bearing on the national development agenda (Vision 2030).
11. To measure ESK’s effectiveness and progress towards the achievement of the above goal and strategic objectives an M&E framework that includes a set of verifiable indicators is part of the strategic plan.

Strategies
To achieve our goal, we have agreed on a set of strategies and three cross cutting themes. We believe that the synergies among these strategies and themes will provide an enabling framework for the implementation of our strategic plan and that is indeed in line with the three identified issues by EvalPartners.

Partnerships and collaboration: Working in partnerships and alliances is a growing trend in the way effective organisations operate. In light of this, ESK will identify and form collaborations with relevant stakeholders including the government, academia, development partners, civil society and M&E practitioners. Towards this end, for example, ESK has forged a strategic partnership with the NIMES, which has been up to now at the level of operations as the Society gets on its feet. In forging this partnership, we recognise the window of opportunity this provides us with to engage and support the Government. Moreover, now that ESK is in the process of moving to the next level as mentioned above, it is planned and expected that this will now include professional technical M&E input in the tracking of development. The NIMES tracks and provides feedback on the implementation of development policies, programs and projects that are outlined in the country’s Medium Term Plan of the Economic Blue Print - the Vision 2030.

Recognising the diversity and richness of our membership, we will also draw on the strength of our members in the implementation of this strategy. We will develop thematic and other groups within ESK to facilitate our engagement with topical issues and stakeholders. We will also extend and strengthen our networking and seek collaboration with other evaluation associations specifically, national associations in Africa, AfrEA and global evaluation associations such as IOCE and EvalPartners. Overall, our search for partnership will be guided by the principles of transparency, complementarity, and mutual respect and shared interest. We would ensure that we adhere to the tenets of the Paris Declaration with respect to our level of collaboration.

Upholding evaluation standards: ESK will work to support and grow the establishment of a credible database of professional evaluators and support the development of guiding evaluation tools and processes whose level of quality will be at par with those set by the
wider professional field (IDEAS, AfrEA, IOCE, etc.) for solidly defendable results but sensitive to the national and regional contexts of resource and capacity availability.

**Advocacy and lobbying:** We recognize the fact that advocacy and lobbying have critical roles to play in the implementation of any strategy. ESK will engage in non-confrontational evidence-based advocacy with the relevant state actors to champion our cause. We will engage in effective lobbying, especially our ‘position’ on issues related to development in general. We will always engage in dialogue with relevant stakeholders on themes of national and professional interest.

**Engaging mainstream media:** The use of media will be an integral part of our strategy over the next three years. Recognizing that we need a medium to communicate our analysis and findings, we will work closely with independent media houses both locally and internationally. In engaging with the media, we will ensure that their reportage on our press releases is unbiased and factual. Wherever possible, the leadership of ESK will sign off reports before they are published by the press.

**Engaging social media and ICTs:** The use of social media in development engagement has become a necessary tool especially when engaging with the youth. The effectiveness of social media and the number of people who socialize on media makes it an important tool in today’s development. ESK will integrate elements of social media on our website ([www.esk.co.ke](http://www.esk.co.ke)) and will also make our presence felt on sites like Facebook and Twitter. With the increasing number of mobile phone ownership in Kenya, the use of this technology will not only enhance our communication but will also increase our reach.

**Capacity development:** One of the challenges facing development actors (including government) is the weak capacity in the use of evaluation findings and the general lack of evaluation professionals. This is the direct result of inadequate resources and the lack of clear accountabilities and knowledge within those organizations. In response to this challenge, ESK will support the development of staff capacity in the management of evaluation processes and findings. We will do this through short courses and tailor-made hands-on training by our members. This approach will help to promote the use of M&E information and results both within government and NGOs, thereby inculcating the habit of M&E culture and practice.

**Organizational development:** In order to sustainably implement our strategic plan, we will put in place systems and structures that will support the implementation and facilitation of various aspects of the strategy. We will put in place a robust M&E system to promote transparency and accountability and also setup work streams in ESK around our core activities.

**Cross cutting themes:** In addition to the key strategies outlined above, we will also incorporate some cross-cutting themes which in our view will facilitate the effective implementation of our strategic plan. The key themes are: gender, equity and climate change. We also recognise the importance of diversity and resilience as important themes in our operations. In all our analysis we will ensure that data and information is disaggregated by gender and other socio-economic parameters. In our practice, we will ensure that there are systems in place to ensure and support gender equality.

Whether by design or by accident, most development interventions tend to pay lip service to addressing and targeting the most vulnerable in our societies. The midterm review of the MDGs highlighted the issue of exclusion as one of the major threats to the achievement of the MDGs. We would therefore ensure that deliberate efforts are made during our analysis to assess whether the most vulnerable in our societies are targeted and included in government development efforts.
We are aware that individuals have rights which need to be protected and respected; we will therefore be circumspect in the analysis and presentation of our findings to ensure that the dignities of people are respected.

**Learning and reflection**

ESK will promote a culture of learning and reflection on the results of its own activities as well as the results of studies undertaken by the Society and other similar evaluation outfits globally. This will be a key component of our planned activities with state and non-state actors as well as with development partners. ESK will identify opportunities to share M&E findings in various development areas cited above with concerned parties and the general public using various communication platforms (media, ICTs, social media, conferences, workshops, and meetings) in order to foster an environment of improved levels of accountability, transparency and commitment for stated goals and objectives of development actors.

**Bottlenecks/challenges:** Three key challenges/bottlenecks that hampered our VOPE’s capacity to contribute to the above strategy:

- Weak institutional capacity and budgetary constraints: As outlined above ESK initially had of necessity to focus on operational issues to bring the Society on its feet as opposed to the technical implementation of the strategic plan.
- Time constraints: The absence of a secretariat to do some of the basic office administrative duties. The committee members are all very busy professionals and it was challenging for them as individuals and as a group to make necessary follow-ups.
- Competing responsibilities of members making it difficult to attend meetings in large numbers and other businesses of ESK regularly. A bigger number would bring in issues of economies of scale including ease in financing the organizations activities.

**Progress and results:**

- ESK is formally registered and enjoys the backing of M&E practitioners (more needs to be done though to mobilize more members).
- The government has provided support from inception to date.
- The ESK e-platform is very interactive with members receiving relevant information useful for their career growth such as training and job/consultancy opportunities.
- A constitution and strategic plan have been developed and ratified through a consultative process. One and 3 year draft work plans are currently under consultative preparations.
- A credible electoral process has been conducted and a new committee endorsed by members.
- Some other development partners are showing interest in potential collaborations.
- ESK is slowly and surely gaining regional and global recognition e.g. through being a member of AfrEA and IOCE and the opportunity to participate in this EvalPartners initiative; made presentations in the 2009 (under KEA) and 2010 IDEAS conferences.
- Very strong bond between members will lead to a stronger organization in future.
- A website that is still under construction but being finalised.

**Key enabling factors:**

- A committed team of steering committee members;
- Support from the government’s NIMES which boosted our credibility. Also in providing a venue for our meetings as we do not have the resources yet to finance this;
- The absence of a vibrant professional evaluation body in the country. A positive response from M&E practitioners on the need to belong to a supporting and accessible vibrant professional evaluation organization.

**Innovations and lessons learned:**

- Mobilisation of M&E practitioners who supported the initiative from the start;
Commitment by steering committee members very critical to successful operationalization;

Backings by the government from the onset is important to build credibility of the Society;

Involving the members through wide consultations and using instant communication channels (e.g. the e-platform) to keep them updated e.g. in the development of a constitution and strategic plan for ownership and goodwill;

There is a need to now involve other development stakeholders especially for the effective implementation of the strategic plan.

Next steps:

Addressing the enabling environment

We recognise that in order to be able to effectively provide professional input into the NIMES, the support and collaborations of other development stakeholders is crucial. Some development partners are showing interest in potential collaborations. UNICEF, DFID and UNDP are some of these. For example UNDP has pledged to support us through the joint UNDP/MED work plan for 2013.All these will be followed up. Specifically the following is planned towards contributing to effective application of M&E in national development:

- Establishment of sector-specific (e.g. education, gender, agriculture, climate change etc.) thematic working groups for members to join and contribute accordingly. This may include the preparation and presentation of M&E positional papers on topical issues including the national budget and food security.
- Providing professional input into the development of the draft national M&E policy and its related legal framework.
- ESK members’ involvement in the NIMES key stakeholders’ committees, e.g. the National Steering Committee (NSC), Technical Oversight Committee and the Technical Advisory Groups (TAGs);
- Organize round table discussions and policy dialogue with government technocrats and other policy makers (parliament, cabinet, members of parliament);
- Participate in some sector-specific evaluations jointly with government ministries and prepare and operationalize a communication strategy for the dissemination of the evaluation and research findings;
- Organize/promote/participate in sensitization forums on M&E in collaboration with the government and other relevant stakeholders;
- Engaging the mainstream media, social media and ICTs. This is especially crucial now with the new constitutional dispensation in the country where the citizens are increasingly getting empowered to participate in the development discourse. In particular the use of social media in development engagement has become a necessary tool especially when engaging with the youth.

Strengthen ESK’s own institutional capacities

The efforts of ESK building its institutional capacities has included mobilisation of M&E practitioners to support the building of a vibrant professional evaluation body. The response to a large extent has been positive. Additionally, the consultative development and ratification of the constitution and strategic plan is a build-up to this. The independent electoral process and its endorsement by members has been yet another milestone. The constitution informed the formulation of the strategic plan as well as the electoral process. All these are seen as an integral part of the process of strengthening of ESK’s institutional capacities.

With a new leadership team in place, it is expected that the implementation of the strategic plan through annual work plans and partnership building for a multi-stakeholder approach will provide an opportunity for the Society to further strengthen its institutional capacities. For instance, partnerships with the academia (among other development
partners) in order to promote the translation of theory into practice is one of the planned areas of strategic focus in strengthening the Society’s institutional linkages.

We recognise that resource mobilisation is crucial to ESK’s sustainability. Some of the plans around this include raising funds from membership fees through a rigorous recruitment drive that includes demonstrating to members the added value of being in ESK. For example, their participation in the planned sector-specific thematic working group will be something to highlight as adding value to strengthening their individual capacities through peer learning and experience sharing as well as being able to contribute towards Kenya’s development. It is also planned that other means of resource mobilisation such as through M&E workshops will be explored and executed.

The Society will also support the consultative development of guiding evaluation tools including professional M&E standards and processes whose level of quality will be at par with those set by the wider professional field (IDEAS, AfrEA, IOCE, etc.) for solidly defendable results but sensitive to the national and regional contexts of resource and capacity availability.

In all these, it is recognised that peer learning and experience sharing from other national evaluation professional associations as well as like-minded regional and international organisations on how to strengthen institutional capacities in line with emerging global trends is crucial. The selection of ESK to participate in the EvalPartners global forum is one such golden opportunity.

What EKS will do to strengthen the capacities of individual evaluators:

ESK’s e-platform is very interactive and members are able to communicate with one another, receive information on job and vacancy announcements and other relevant information. Most of the relevant information shared in the AfrEA, IPDET, IDEAS, AGDEN and other global listservs on evaluation international trainings, consultancies, webinars and conferences are forwarded to the ESK members. Members have been able to apply and participate in all these and thereby contributing to their individual capacity building.

Among the planned priorities in the implementation of the ESK’s strategic plan is the development of an easily referenced database of individuals, organizations and institutions involved in M&E within the country and even the East African region. This is to support stakeholders and partners who wish to get a one-stop reference point on where they can access such services. Later systems to screen and vouch for quality of M&E service may be added but this will require wide consultations and the development of a widely acceptable process and product.

One of the challenges facing development actors (including government) is the weak capacity in the use of evaluation findings and the general lack of evaluation professionals. This is the direct result of inadequate resources and the lack of clear accountabilities and knowledge within those organizations. In response to this challenge, ESK will support the development of members’ capacity in the management of evaluation processes and findings. We will do this through short courses and tailor-made hands-on training for our members. This approach will help to promote the use of M&E information and results both within government and NGOs, thereby inculcating the habit of M&E culture and practice. Moreover, it is also expected that through individual participation in the sector-specific thematic working groups planned by ESK for its members, this will provide an opportunity for peer learning and experience sharing and, thereby, contribute towards the strengthening of capacities at that level.