

Speech by Hon. Jeff Radebe, Minister in the Presidency, responsible for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation during the Launch of International Year of Evaluation, Wits University, Johannesburg, 19 March 2015

Programme Director, Professor Richard Levin, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning.

Let me start by thanking the organisers of this event, the South African Monitoring and Evaluation Association (SAMEA), my department: the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), the Public Service Commission (PSC), the Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results (CLEAR) and the University of Witwatersrand (Wits).

As you all know, South Africa has adopted the National Development Plan and Vision 2030, which serves as a blueprint of the country towards the eradication of the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Key to the success of this NDP will be the partnerships between government, private sector and civil society – working together towards common objectives.

I am therefore delighted that key organisations from various sectors of our society have recognised a need to collaborate in organising today's event and planning for the entire International Year of Evaluation project in South Africa. Critically, such collaboration will contribute immensely to developing evaluation capacity in our country and assist in institutionalising the discipline in various sectors of society.

Our late national icon, the father of our nation and the first President of democratic South Africa, isithwalandwe Nelson Mandela, expressed the same sentiment on the importance of partnerships in society, during the opening of Dalindyebo Senior Secondary School, in Qunu on 14 August 1998, when he said, and I quote:

“Partnerships between government, the private sector and communities are critical in the development of our country. No sector on its own, least government, can succeed in ensuring that we do improve the quality of life of our people.”

I would also like to express my appreciation to the architects of the International Year of Evaluation concept, the international network, EvalPartners. Without their vision and foresight, we would not be here today. The letter and spirit of this campaign should continue post 2015. Indeed, as a country, we share the sentiment that evaluation has a central role in development.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This event is taking place so soon after the tragic and untimely death of the former Minister of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in the Presidency, Mr. Collins Chabane. As the first Minister of this portfolio, Minister Chabane steered the establishment of the performance monitoring and evaluation function in the Presidency, and developed systems and processes for monitoring the performance of government and the national evaluation system that we now have in place in South Africa.

As government and the country we were all shocked and saddened by his passing. Minister Chabane was very committed to improving the performance of government and the lives of all South Africans. He had a good understanding of how governments work and he had a keen interest in the mechanisms which could be put in place to make government more efficient and effective.

Thus when he became Minister of this portfolio he was interested in finding out about the performance monitoring and evaluation experiences of other countries and encouraged the officials in the department to do the same. He participated in some of the international study tours and encouraged and supported officials to design a national evaluation system for the South African government which would draw on the best international lessons and experience, and be tailored for the South African context.

Among other interventions which I will elaborate on in a moment, Minister Chabane ensured the approval of the national evaluation system through Cabinet, and guided the piloting and submission of the first evaluation reports through the Cabinet process. With determination and diplomacy, Minister Chabane championed the key principles of monitoring and evaluation, including strategic focus, rigorous and logical

planning, evidence-based policy making, transparency, accountability and continuous improvement. Largely through his efforts, South Africa has a national monitoring and evaluation that is supported, valued and used by Cabinet to change the lives of our people. .

Minister Chabane has left an indelible mark in government and the country at large. Ours is to take the baton forward and ensure that the key principles he espoused remain at centre stage. His untimely death is a huge loss to government and to the country. His family are in our thoughts and prayers during this very difficult time. May his soul rest in peace.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you all know, President Jacob Zuma's establishment of the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in 2009 sought to improve government performance and change the whole approach on how government works. The purpose was to ensure an outcome orientation within government rather than a focus on inputs, activities and outputs. Key for us was the need to focus on a limited number of priority outcomes that would meaningfully change the lives of our people. To achieve this, government committed itself to increasing the focus on measurable results and evidence base to inform policy decision-making and implementation. To realise this, we committed ourselves to improved coordination across different departments and spheres of government, efficient spending and performance and a culture of continuous improvement.

Since the establishment of the Department, good progress has been recorded, with performance agreements and sector plans for priority outcomes developed, and quarterly monitoring reports on progress towards the realisation of the outcomes provided to Cabinet. These reports, and other monitoring tools developed by my Department have served to provide the President and Cabinet the opportunity to assess progress, guide and ensure timely interventions where necessary.

Initially we targeted 12 outcomes but we have since included 2 additional outcomes, and we now have 14 outcomes, ranging from quality basic education, health, safety and security, employment, rural development to nation building and social cohesion.

Other critical systems developed by my department have been for monitoring of front-line services, and for management performance assessments government departments. Recently, we have introduced Operation Phakisa, an innovative approach aimed at improving planning, project management and implementation of priority government programmes more effectively. Through Operation Phakisa, we intend to implement critical development issues highlighted in the National Development Plan, faster and better and ensure quick results.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The National Evaluation Policy Framework (NEPF) was approved by Cabinet on 23 November 2011. The Framework draws from the experience of a number of countries, and in particular from study tours to Mexico, Colombia and United States that South Africa undertook over a period of time.

Key lessons from these study tours have been incorporated into our Policy Framework, taking into account the realities of our local context. I am pleased to inform you that our evaluation system is now recognised internationally and our Evaluation Policy Framework has even been translated into Russian for use in Kyrgystan! Partners are also in the process of translating the policy into brail to ensure that the blind population of our society also have access to it.

Our national icon, former President Nelson Mandela, also said:

“What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead.”

As Madiba has taught us, DPME is undertaking evaluations to make a difference in the lives of our people. As government, we are determined to achieve the following four primary purposes through evaluations:

1) To **improve performance** of government.

- 2) To improve **accountability**. We want to interrogate public spending and whether government spending is making a difference.
- 3) To **generate knowledge** of what works and what does not with regards to our public policies, or programmes, which allow government to build an evidence base for future policy development.
- 4) **To make decisions** on the **impact** of our programmes and policies and whether to continue or replace them.

From the inception of the evaluation system, our starting point was to improve the quality of evaluations in the country with the hope that quality evaluations would translate into utilisation of findings and, in the final analysis improvement in government performance.

As government, we have taken a strategic approach to focus on limited evaluations of priority policies/programmes/plans of government, linked to the 14 priority outcomes. Selection is made by a cross-government Evaluation Technical Working Group (ETWG) and the plan is approved by Cabinet.

So far, Cabinet has approved 4 national evaluation plans containing 49 evaluations since the approval of the National Evaluation Policy Framework in 2011. Out of these 49, 22 have been completed, 11 approved, and 6 of these served at Cabinet and they are already available on the departmental website. These evaluations cover around R50 billion of government expenditure. This year my department will be undertaking 10 priority evaluations in collaboration with custodian departments covering around a further R25 billion of government expenditure.

Our approach is that evaluation is not only something which happens at the end of a programme or policy, but as a series of activities at different stages of our management cycle, with the diagnostic evaluation before an intervention, design evaluation after the plan has been done, implementation evaluation during the implementation of the programme/policy and impact evaluation at the end or at key milestones of the policy/plan/ programme. We do not want to wait until it is too late.

Evaluations are already having an impact. A couple of weeks ago Cabinet approved a revised Policy on Early Childhood Development, based on the recommendations of the first evaluation on Early Childhood Development. Recently, the Business Process Services Scheme has been re-launched based on the results of the evaluation undertaken by my department in collaboration with the Department of Trade and Industry. The Department of Basic Education is revisiting its support to Grade R based on the conclusions that the quality of Grade R provision was limiting its impact. Admittedly, some departments have been slower at implementing the recommendations and that is something we will work on in this year.

As government we have embarked on several key initiatives to support the wider evaluation system, so that all departments and provinces undertake quality evaluations and implement the recommendations. Let me single out some of these key initiatives:

- 1) We have **trained senior management teams of departments on the importance of evidence**, including M&E evidence, with 9 DGs and over 70 DDGs and Chief Directors participating so far. Two more courses are planned this year. This is important for senior management to continuously see the importance of using evidence
- 2) **4 evaluation courses** have been developed and **over 800** government staff have been **trained** so far
- 3) **18 evaluation guidelines** have been **developed** on various components of the evaluation system and these are available on DPME's website
- 4) We have developed **standards for evaluations and competences** for government officials, which we have consulted on widely across South Africa. These are benchmarks for performance and they have been embedded in various components of the evaluation system. To ensure objectivity and independence of the evaluation process, evaluations are undertaken by a **panel of evaluation experts** most of whom are experienced academics from our universities.
- 5) Evaluations are **peer reviewed** by a panel of experts to ensure that the end product is of acceptable quality.

- 6) Evaluations are a **partnership** between my department and the custodian departments that are being evaluated and **steering committees** are established as collaborative mechanisms. My department is **co-funding evaluations**, but we have also been benefitting from the generous support of our donors. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank all our donors, especially the Department for International Development (DIFID) for their continued support since the establishment of the national evaluation system in 2011.
- 7) Post-evaluation, the relevant department is expected to provide a **management response** to the recommendations indicating whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations and if it disagrees, strong reasons for disagreement must be provided.
- 8) A critical component of our evaluation system is the **improvement plan**. Post-evaluation, departments supported by my officials and other relevant stakeholders, are required to develop an **improvement plan**. An improvement plan outlines strategies for improvement, based on recommendations by an independent evaluator and specifies outputs, activities, time frames and responsible individuals. We expect departments to report on progress every six months for a period of two years.
- 9) We have created an **Evaluation Repository** consisting of over 100 government evaluations quality assessed by independent quality assessors. For the first time, the public now has access to a broad spectrum of evaluations in government.
- 10) This year we have **commissioned a Feasibility Study on the Professionalisation of Evaluation** in South Africa in partnership with SAMEA. The findings of the study will guide us as a country on the best route that we should follow in professionalising evaluation and it will provide a roadmap to professionalising evaluation
- 11) On 6 August 2014 Cabinet approved a memorandum on **programme planning**. We are seeking to **improve the design and quality of government implementation programmes** and to ensure that they are evaluable. We are also in the process of commissioning an **audit of programmes**, which will assess how many programmes there are in a number of departments, and the state of those programmes.

12) As you know, we have recently incorporated the planning function in our portfolio and this year we will be **evaluating the departmental strategic planning** and annual performance planning system of government.

These are but some of our initiatives to improve the quality of evaluations in the county and to promote the use of evidence from evaluations.

Programme Director, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have worked closely with other stakeholders in and outside government to make the evaluation system a success and build wider ownership. At the provincial level, my officials are working closely with all nine provinces providing technical support and helping to develop Provincial Evaluation Plans linked to provincial priority interventions. It gives me great pleasure to inform you that Gauteng, Western Cape, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape are already implementing approved Provincial Evaluation Plans and, Free State, North West, KZN, Limpopo and Eastern Cape are finalising their plans.

We have worked extensively with SAMEA as the broader representative of the Monitoring and Evaluation community, from consultation during the development of the National Evaluation Policy Framework, the development of standards and competencies, capacity development and professionalisation, and the biannual SAMEA Conferences. We acknowledge the critical role that SAMEA has made in bringing evaluation onto the map in South Africa. We have a standing committee of officials from DPME and SAMEA to look at issues of common interest. We have invested time and funds to help ensure that SAMEA plays its rightful role as effectively as possible.

We also recognise the importance of other stakeholders in the evaluation system: the universities who build the skills base and undertake some of the evaluations; the professional evaluators who undertake the evaluations; Parliament who can use evaluations as part of their oversight function; the think tanks which use evaluation results; and of course the public who can access the evaluations as they are made public and use them for increasing the accountability of government. Although a lot has been achieved, we still have a lot of work to improve the lives of our people.

South Africa joins the rest of the international community in celebrating the International Year of Evaluation. We have learnt from international partners such as Mexico and Colombia and are currently working with partners in Africa to create a regional M&E partnership, Twende Mbele, working particularly closely with Uganda and Benin. It is important for us to play a responsible role internationally, and I note the messages of support which come from some of our partners.

I fervently hope that the International Year of Evaluation campaign will mobilise millions of our people around the globe to promote the use of evidence derived from evaluations to improve how governments work, and its impact on citizens and so contribute towards eradication of the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

With these few words, I hereby launch the International Year of Evaluation in South Africa.

I thank you