South Africa Introduces Performance Monitoring, Aims to Better Deliver Basic Services

Context

Fifteen years into majority rule, South Africans were not content with the pace of reforms. Millions had gained access to electricity, housing, clean water, and primary education, but the population also had grown by millions. The incumbent president was voted out of power, and the new president was met by more demonstrations in the first three months than in the prior year.

President Jacob Zuma created the Ministry of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation in the Office of the President and appointed an effective Department of Public Works director as its minister. To develop a system for monitoring and improving government performance, the new minister tapped a Johannesburg city manager who had introduced private sector business principles in government and a monitoring and evaluation specialist who had helped develop the Treasury’s Program Performance Information System and a governmentwide monitoring and evaluation framework.

Although the 2009 election signaled a government shift toward expanding basic services to the poor, the influence over and the gatekeepers of government policy were not clear. The dominant political party largely responsible for propelling Zuma to the presidency (African National Congress) drove policy. But the realities of an economic recession and deficits brought development priorities into the cabinet, led by two powerful ministers (finance and planning) (IDASA 2009). The new ministry had neither legislative standing nor a clear mandate.

Development Challenge

The challenge for the government of South Africa was to introduce data-based, measurable outcomes in policy planning, monitoring, and evaluation to better deliver basic services.

Intervention

Adhering to the five priority areas of the Zuma administration and the African National Congress election manifesto (crime, education, health care, job creation, and rural development), the Ministry of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation organized the 34 ministries around 12 policy outcomes. The two principal actors assessed what was already in place, researched potential models abroad (identifying the U.K. Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit, for public services), and set specific delivery targets to annually assess ministers and departments.

The introduction of “measurability” required departments to prioritize activities and to meet external outcomes—streamlining duplication and eliminating gaps. Departments jointly developed plans starting with one of the 12 outcomes and worked backward to identify factors that best measured outcome, to determine actions needed to produce the desired outcome, and to harness inputs for the actions.
Delivery Challenges

This delivery note analyzes key implementation challenges and examines how they were overcome.

- **Roles and responsibilities.** Three agencies with established accountability mechanisms lacked the power to enforce or remediate outcomes. First, the well-respected Public Service Commission evaluated ministers’ performance based on nine criteria, but it could not hold ministers accountable or enforce recommendations. Second, the Department of Public Service and Administration required civil service managers to sign performance agreements but lacked authority to remove poor performers. Further, high turnover and vacancy rates among managers offset the intended effect. And third, the Treasury’s Program Performance Information System required ministries to report data linking financial inputs and outputs to the Treasury. But lack of oversight meant the Treasury could only confront ministries in Parliament, not hold them accountable or enforce remedial activities.

- **Voice and accountability.** In the transition from largely president-led policies under apartheid to majority rule, all 34 ministries were allowed to set their own priorities and action plans. With this decentralization, strategic planning became nearly impossible, outcomes did not increase, and organizational silos arose.

- **Intergovernmental and Intragovernmental relations.** Ministers with overlapping responsibilities were supposed to jointly plan and implement policies, forming a “cluster” system. Well-intended meetings did not produce counterpart initiatives.

Addressing Delivery Challenges

The following steps were undertaken to mitigate the delivery challenges related to **roles and responsibilities**:

- In a first attempt to identify performance indicators, the principal actors held workshops for and asked department heads to provide 20–30 indicators. The department heads, for lack of mandate, did not cooperate. The actors alone developed a process to identify indicators for the 12 outcomes.  
  - Low-key consultations with domestic and international experts identified specific drivers.  
  - Three or four primary factors that determine success were extrapolated from international studies and South African experiences for each finding.  
  - A consultant company reviewed the findings and improved the presentation by adding comparator countries (Brazil and Malaysia) and by framing the data more rigorously.  
  - Within one year, the cabinet approved the “outcomes approach” system.

The following steps were undertaken to mitigate the delivery challenges related to **voice and accountability**:

- The Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation was created to support the ministers and administer the "outcomes approach" system. The deputy director of the Department of Public Works became the department’s director general, supported by the two principals.  
  - Performance agreements ranging from four to eight pages were drafted for all 34 ministers, detailing primary outputs and specific targets for each output.  
  - The president directly negotiated performance agreements and annual reviews, and the ministers reserved the discretion to publicly disclose or withhold results.  
  - Although uptake was mixed, data accrued by the engaged ministries created a baseline for monitoring government performance and achieving results.

The following steps were undertaken to mitigate the delivery challenges related to **intergovernmental and intragovernmental relations**:

- Performance agreements also designated the coordinating ministers to 12 outcome forums. The forums convened “delivery partners,” including provincial office representatives, relevant offices and ministries, civil society organizations, and a sector expert paid to facilitate the process.  
  - A common understanding of the desired outcome and the required outputs was first negotiated.  
  - Members were divided into teams to develop implementation plans and work schedules for each output.  
  - Individual implementation plans were compiled into a delivery agreement and were sent to the technical implementation forum (senior officials below the ministerial level for all participating agencies).
Delivery partners were responsible for implementing and managing the identified activities and for regularly reporting to the technical implementation forum.

Technical implementation forums filed joint reports every other month on progress against the delivery agreement with the executive implementation committee (chaired by the coordinating minister).

An executive implementation forum adopted, adapted, and made its own recommendations and sent them to the cabinet for approval.

In eight months, 12 delivery agreements specified inputs, outputs, activities, and implementation timetables. “Measurability” was popularized, and achievement shifted to collective action.

The “outcomes approach” system, dependent on executive political will, lost force as the president moved toward reelection.

Endnote
1. This section largely draws from Friedman (2011).

References
