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Government of Sierra Leone National Evaluation Guidelines

March 2026



National evaluation guidelines brief

1. Introduction: A Moment for Strategic Leadership

Sierra Leone stands at a defining moment in its development trajectory. As the Government moves forward with the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024–2030), the demand for evidence that is credible, timely, and relevant has never been greater. The effectiveness of national planning, budgeting, and service delivery depends not only on political commitments but on the capacity of institutions to generate reliable information, learn from experience, and adjust programmes in a manner that improves outcomes for the population. Evaluation is the mechanism through which countries strengthen transparency, safeguard public investments, and ensure that development interventions meaningfully improve people's lives.

The National Evaluation Guidelines (2025) therefore represent more than a technical manual. They are a national governance instrument designed to strengthen accountability systems, enhance public sector performance, and institutionalize a culture of learning across Government. This policy brief calls on policymakers—across MDAs, Local Councils, Parliament, Cabinet, and oversight institutions—to fully embrace these guidelines, recognize their strategic importance, and lead their implementation as a matter of national priority. The success of Sierra Leone's development agenda will depend on how effectively government institutions adopt evaluation as a central pillar of decision-making.

2. Why Evaluation Matters for National Development

Evaluation plays a transformative role in modern governance. In countries that have institutionalized evaluation—including South Africa, Uganda, Ghana, and Rwanda—governments have used evidence to improve programme effectiveness, eliminate waste, strengthen citizen trust, and accelerate development gains. Sierra Leone has the opportunity to join this growing group of nations that view evaluation as essential to effective governance.

Through systematic evaluation, policymakers gain visibility into what interventions are working, which communities are being reached, and where bottlenecks need to be addressed. Evaluation allows government to determine whether laws, policies, and programmes are meeting the needs of citizens, particularly those who are marginalized or underserved. It supports public finance efficiency by highlighting where resources can

be reallocated, where interventions are underperforming, and where funding should be increased based on proven impact.

Evaluation also strengthens democratic accountability. Sierra Leoneans increasingly demand transparency and want assurance that public resources are generating tangible results. By making performance more measurable and accessible, evaluation helps rebuild trust in public institutions and reinforces the social contract. Moreover, evaluation is central to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and meeting regional commitments, including African Peer Review Mechanism assessments and SDG Voluntary National Reviews. Without systematic evaluation, reporting remains descriptive; with it, government can credibly demonstrate progress and areas needing policy attention.

Ultimately, evaluation enables the Government to navigate complex policy challenges with clarity and precision. It reduces dependence on assumptions, mitigates the risks of ineffective expenditure, and provides the evidence required for strategic reforms. For Sierra Leone, a strong evaluation system is therefore not optional—it is essential for delivering national development outcomes.

3. The National Evaluation Guidelines: A Governance Framework for Performance and Accountability

The National Evaluation Guidelines are designed to modernize Sierra Leone's public sector by introducing a unified, nationally owned framework for planning, managing, conducting, and using evaluations. They give practical effect to the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (2021) and align the country with global and regional standards, including the OECD-DAC criteria, UNEG norms, UNICEF and AU guidelines, and African Evaluation principles.

Under the Guidelines, evaluation becomes an integrated component of the policy cycle rather than an afterthought. They establish consistent procedures that all MDAs and Local Councils must follow and provide clarity on the steps required to ensure evaluations are credible, objective, ethical, and relevant. Importantly, they also identify the conditions under which evaluations should be prioritized, ensuring that evaluations are conducted where national learning and accountability needs are greatest.

The Guidelines also embed strong quality assurance mechanisms to ensure methodological rigour, impartiality, and eth-

ical integrity. They define the standards that evaluation reports must meet and introduce independent quality assessment procedures that strengthen the credibility of the evidence produced. By doing so, they help protect government against weak or unreliable evaluations and promote evaluations that genuinely support decision-making.

Crucially, the Guidelines elevate national ownership. They ensure that evaluation processes reflect Sierra Leone's development priorities and empower national institutions—rather than external actors—to drive evaluation agendas, oversee evaluators, and use findings for policy and planning. This is essential for strengthening sovereignty over knowledge production and ensuring that evaluations contribute to sustainable institutional development.

4. Planning for Evaluation: The Role of the National Evaluation Plan

One of the most transformative elements of the Guidelines is the introduction of the **National Evaluation Plan (NEP)**. The NEP consolidates priority evaluations across government into a multi-year roadmap aligned with the national development agenda. It ensures that evaluations are strategically selected based on need, relevance, and expected utility rather than ad hoc impulses or donor priorities.

The NEP brings discipline, coherence, and predictability to evaluation. It forces MDAs and Local Councils to think proactively about which interventions require evaluation and how the resulting evidence will inform future decisions. It also compels institutions to allocate budgets, define responsibilities, and prepare logistics well in advance. Policymakers must champion the NEP, as its success depends on leadership commitment, adequate resourcing, and consistent follow-through by responsible institutions.

Evaluation planning also involves undertaking evaluability assessments to determine whether interventions are ready for evaluation. These assessments help ensure that public funds are not wasted on evaluations that cannot produce credible or useful findings because of poor design or weak data systems. They also guide remedial actions—such as strengthening monitoring systems or clarifying programme logic—to prepare interventions for successful evaluation.

With a functioning NEP system, Sierra Leone will be able to sequence evaluations more strategically, minimize duplication, and ensure that evaluation findings become integral inputs to Cabinet reviews, budget decisions, and sectoral planning. This is essential for creating an administration that learns continuously and adapts based on evidence.

5. A Structured, Transparent, and Accountable Evaluation Process

The Guidelines outline a 14-step evaluation process organized into three phases: pre-evaluation, implementation, and post-evaluation. This structure establishes discipline, transparency, and predictability. It clarifies what must happen, who must be involved, and what standards must be met at each step.

The pre-evaluation phase emphasizes planning, stakeholder engagement, and the establishment of clear evaluation purposes and questions. It ensures that evaluations are designed for use, not simply for compliance. The implementation phase focuses on data collection, analysis, and ensuring adherence to ethical and methodological standards. The post-evaluation phase reinforces the requirement to prepare a **Management Response**, outlining how each recommendation will be acted upon, by whom, and within what timeframe. This mechanism is vital for closing the accountability loop and ensuring evaluation findings lead to real improvements.

The Guidelines recognize that evaluations should not sit on shelves. They must inform reforms, scale-ups, budget allocations, and strategic policy adjustments. The process therefore culminates in mandatory dissemination and publication, promoting transparency and facilitating broader public learning.

6. Institutional Roles: A System of Shared Responsibility

A strong national evaluation system depends on institutions fulfilling distinct roles in a coordinated manner. The Guidelines clarify the responsibilities of all key actors.

NaMEA serves as the **national custodian** of evaluation, responsible for standard-setting, technical oversight, capacity-building, and coordination of the NEP. MDAs and Local Councils act as **commissioning authorities**, responsible for managing evaluations, ensuring quality, providing data and logistical support, and implementing recommendations.

Evaluation Managers are central to the process, acting as the bridge between evaluators, technical working groups, and institutional leadership. The Evaluation Technical Working Group offers methodological and oversight support, ensuring that evaluations adhere to standards and respond to national priorities. Parliament plays a critical role in oversight and ensuring that evaluation findings are integrated into legislation, budgets, and development debates. Development partners support national processes but align themselves with government-led frameworks.

This coordinated architecture strengthens institutional accountability and ensures that evaluation evidence flows upwards into national decision-making processes.

7. Quality, Ethics, and Credibility: Ensuring Trustworthy Evidence

The Guidelines introduce some of Sierra Leone's strongest quality assurance and ethical safeguards to date. Evaluations must meet clear standards of credibility, impartiality, methodological rigour, clarity, and policy relevance. The Guidelines also require independent quality assessment—an essential step to ensure that evaluation reports used for decision-making meet national and international standards.

Ethics is treated as a core element. Evaluators must uphold confidentiality, informed consent, cultural respect, and protection of vulnerable groups. The Guidelines introduce specific provisions for child-sensitive evaluation, recognizing Sierra Leone's obligations under the CRC and ACRWC. This ensures that evaluations involving children are safe, voluntary, and aligned with global child protection norms.

Such safeguards build confidence among policymakers and the public that evaluation findings can be trusted and used to guide major decisions.

8. A Call to Policymakers: What Must Be Done

For evaluation to fulfil its potential, policymakers must lead from the front. The adoption of the Guidelines is the first step, but implementation requires sustained political will. Policymakers must ensure that evaluation is fully integrated into planning, programming, and budgeting cycles. They must insist that evaluation plans are developed, funded, and executed, and demand management responses for every evaluation. They must also create an enabling environment for transparency by supporting the publication and dissemination of evaluation reports.

Critically, policymakers must act on evaluation findings. Evidence must guide programme redesigns, scale-ups, discontinuation of ineffective interventions, and budget reallocations. Evaluation cannot improve national development unless its findings are used to shape concrete decisions.

The National Evaluation Guidelines (2025) provide Sierra Leone with a powerful tool for strengthening governance, improving public service delivery, and ensuring that national development efforts translate into tangible progress for citizens. They set the foundation for a more accountable, transparent, and results-oriented public sector.

Their successful implementation will depend on leaders who value evidence, champion accountability, and demand excellence from public institutions. Policymakers are therefore called upon to embrace these guidelines as a national instrument for reform—one that will help Sierra Leone accelerate development outcomes, strengthen public trust, and build a government that learns, adapts, and delivers for its people.



Ensuring Value for Money, Transparency
and Accountability for Development
Results and Better Service Delivery.

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