FINAL APPROVED

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY RESEARCH AND EVALUATION STRATEGY

2020/21-2024/25

DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT AND RESEARCH

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

26 WELLIGHTON ROAD

PARKTOWN, 2193

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DMR – Research and Evaluation Strategy 2nd Draft Vr 1 – 07-2020

Introduction

The National Development Agency (NDA) is a section 3A statutory organisation, which was established by the National Development Agency Act (Act No. 108 of 1998) in November 1998. The NDA is a public entity listed under schedule 3A of the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA), reports to the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa through the Minister for Social Development. The Primary mandate is: To contribute towards the eradication of poverty and its causes by granting funds to civil society organisations for the purposes of:

- Carrying out projects or programmes aimed at meeting development needs of poor communities; and
- Strengthening the institutional capacity of other civil society organisations involved in direct service provision to poor communities.

Whilst its Secondary mandate is: to promote:

- Consultation, dialogue and sharing of development experience between civil society organizations and relevant organs of state;
- debate development policy; and
- Undertake research and publications aimed at providing the basis for development policy.

The mid-term research strategy for the NDA, provides an overarching framework and specific areas of research and focus to implement the secondary mandate of the NDA. This strategy provides a focused research approach and priority areas that enables the Agency to respond effectively to its secondary mandate. The strategy suggests a series of research and evaluation strategic studies areas over a period of three years towards meeting research and evaluation outputs goals. However, it should be noted that the strategy is a dynamic tool that would need adaptation to changes in the socio-economic environments impacting of development policy in South Africa.

In relation to the secondary mandate of the NDA, the conducted research and evaluation studies are used as an engagement tool between organs of state, civil society and the private sectors on debates to improve and enhance South African development policy land scape. In addition, the outputs will be used to inform program planning, implementation and management of NDA development Programs. The research and evaluation approaches and methodologies must be sound and credible for all the role players in the development policy discourse to rely on them in making policy decisions.

The National Development Agency research and evaluation strategy document outlines the strategic approach towards conducting studies produced by the NDA for purposes of informing, sharing of information and promoting debates amongst those key stakeholders

in development policy. The strategy provides a medium term view of research and evaluation areas that are key in the current development policy discourse. The aim is to build a body of knowledge and information that is reliable, useful and accurate for policy makers, managers and implementers to make informed choices on options that can produce effectiveness in the application of development policy. The research and evaluation outputs will be in the form of publications (policy papers, research & evaluation reports, Best practices, Case studies, etc).

Objective

The primary objective of the strategy is to provide strategic approach in conducting research and evaluations studies by the NDA for purposes of generating information that can be used for policy formulation, programme planning and management.

Rationale

For the NDA to full fill its mandate, it must undertake action research and impact evaluative studies that will be used to inform Program planning, implementation and management of NDA CSOs development Programs. In addition, it must promote and inform national development policy debates and engagements with the CSOs sector and state organs on issues relating to development and poverty alleviation in general. For this goal to be fully met and have meaningful impact, the Agency must produce publications and create dissemination platforms to deploy its research and evaluation materials to a wider audience using all possible available dissemination platforms within and outside the Agency.

The National Development Agency has never produced a common document that guides the research and monitoring and evaluation functions on prioritising and focusing it work to address needs for the Agency and the stakeholders in general.

The Development Management and Research Directorate has also taken note of the July 2019 state of the nation address (SONA) address by the President, Honourable Cyril Ramaphosa announcement of the seven key priorities for Government. This provided the basis for three priority research themes that will lead the research of the NDA during the period 2019-2022: (1) Economic transformation and job creation, (2) Education, skills and health, and (3) A capable, ethical and developmental state. The document summarizes the research and evaluations intended to be undertaken over the next 3 years by the division.

The strategic objective for this approach is to: provide empirical information from research and evaluation studies to inform national development policy formulation, debates and engagements between the CSO, public and private sectors for purposes of improving how national development discourse is designed for the country. It also allows the civil society

sector in South Africa to be recognised and seen as key players in all developmental efforts by the state and its social partners.

Background on Research and Evaluation Strategy

The NDA recognizes that establishing itself as a thought leader, research output quantity on its own is not enough. The organisations will need to publish research that influence both development policy and practice. This will require to a large degree contribution of evidence based new knowledge from its research and evaluative work.

Research and evaluation studies can seem intimidating at first, and can be the most difficult part of an assignment for practitioners for these professions. In each case, the process will be slightly different, but there are a few basic steps that can be applied to most topics. The purpose of research and evaluation studies is to inform action. Thus, these studies should seek to contextualize its findings within the larger body of knowledge. Research and evaluations must always be of high quality in order to produce knowledge that is applicable outside of the research setting. Furthermore, the results of the studies may have implications for policy and future programmes implementation. One problem that often plagues progress in outcomes and outputs of studies is the slow translation of these into practice. Often, a disconnect exists between those who conduct studies and those who are positioned to implement the findings and recommendations. The underlying problem is that "the production of evidence is organised institutionally with highly centralised mechanisms, whereas the application of that science is highly decentralised. This social distance prevails because researchers and evaluators are more oriented to the audiences of their profession for which they publish than to the needs of practitioners, policy makers, or the local public."

Thus, as researchers and evaluators, it is imperative to take steps to overcome this barrier. Publishing studies may be one initial step to make studies known to the lager community. Other proactive measures to be taken is encouraging the uptake of evidence-based interventions. For example, you can present the findings at various platforms, such as conferences. Furthermore, you can send the results of your study to local officials, policy-makers, and community leaders. These initiatives may not necessarily promote uptake.

Well-conducted research and evaluations are vital to the success of developing responsive policies and development programmes. Not only does research and evaluations form the foundation of program development and policies all over the world, but it can also be translated into effective developmental programmes for supporting communities and the population. Research and evaluations draws power from the fact that they are empirical: rather than merely theorising about what *might* be effective or what *could* work, researchers and evaluators go out into the field and design studies that

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give policymakers hard data on which they can base their decisions. Furthermore, good research utilises methodologies that can be replicated, produces results that are examinable by peers, and creates knowledge that can be applied to real-world situations. Researchers and evaluators work as a team to enhance our knowledge of how to best address the world's problems.

Ultimately, the key to a successful research and evaluation projects lies in iteration: the process of returning again and again to the research questions, methods, and data, which leads to new ideas, revisions and improvements. It is easy to think of research as a step-by-step process, but it is important to be flexible and open to change. Oftentimes, by discussing the research or evaluation project with advisers and peers, one will find that new research questions need to be added, variables need to be omitted, and other changes need to be made. As a proposed study is examined and re-examined from different perspectives, it may begin to transform and take a different shape. This is to be expected and is a component of a good research study. In addition, it is important to examine study methods and data from different viewpoints to ensure a comprehensive approach to the research question. In conclusion, there is no one formula for developing a successful study, but it is important to realize that the research and evaluation process are cyclical and iterative.

The strategy adopted by the NDA research and evaluation studies will apply simple steps to follow from the initiation of a research or evaluation study to final production of the research outcome. There are skills that researchers and evaluators need to produce sound studies understanding that research is not a rigid process; many times it is more effective to move fluidly between steps required to conduct these studies. We have adopted Booth et al (2008) the craft of research model. This approach creates a solid foundation for defining research and evaluation studies that have implications for policy makers, managers and programme implementers.

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Figure 1: Research Process

(Adapted from: Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G. & Williams, J. M. (2008). *The Craft of Research* (3rd ed.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 51-65.)

Developing research and evaluation topics

Research and evaluation studies starts with a foundation of background knowledge and research on a particular topic. This process on its own is a research effort as it requires narrowing down the topic into key terms and concepts. Before beginning searching for areas of research or evaluation, it helps to have a broad understanding of the research needs areas in an institution environment which may benefit understanding or appetite for the institution role-players and stakeholders to see value in the research or evaluation to be conducted. It is important to identify research or evaluation topic that is relevant to the institution and its stakeholders, not just one that researchers and evaluators think they will be able to find a lot of information on. The information is out there on every topic within the operations of the institution or the mandate of the institution (the trick is finding the right documentation and publications that addresses that topical area) so researchers and evaluators needs to have the tools and skills to find the information within and outside the institution.

Once researchers and evaluators have identified a topical area, it's time to evaluate what they need to know about it in order to gather information that provide a rationale for the research or evaluation to be conducted. These are some suggested questions researchers and evaluators to ask themselves to have a rationale a rational approach to the area of research or evaluation:

- What are the main concepts of this topical area that may provide clarity of intentions and purpose?

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- What are the issues surrounding this topical that require new information or evidence, how will this fit in the needs of the institution research and evaluation requirements and mandate?
- What are some key drivers of the institution and its stakeholders that require information and evidence in order to improve or enhance their approaches to their programmes?

This line of researchers and evaluators enquiry would provide a better context to address relevant topical areas that implementers and managers are able to see value from the outputs of the studies. It also increases chances for managers and implementers to participate in the research itself, without influencing the outcomes or contaminating the process of research.

Both research and evaluation follows some line or systematic methods of enquiry. For credibility and reliability of the outcomes of such studies you have to consider formulating a consequence-based question, when grappling with finding useful topical areas, such as "What are the consequences of X on Y?" Some example are listed below:

- What are the consequences of high unemployment vs. economic growth on a developmental state?
- What are the consequences of teaching pre-school children emotional and social intelligence on their ability to display acceptable social behavior as adults?
- What are the consequences of introducing vocational training at basic education levels on the quality of technical skills sets to match the needs of the economy?

In each of the consequence-based line of inquiry there will be pros and cons arguments on materials available to researchers to review. This provide a strong foundation to design the study and inform the line of enquiry of the study to be conducted. Remember researchers and evaluators are not in the business of validating popular opinions of the target audiences but to present facts and new evidence that will promote thinking and action. Research and evaluation studies that does not trigger debates, thinking and action is not a useful research or evaluation product.

The background information gathered during this process provide a solid foundation to formulate the research approach, including the methods and types of tools to use for the study. There are fundamentals that researchers and evaluators must always keep in mind for the research outputs to be useful and informative for the target audiences. The first part is to ensure there is a direct link between the topic of the study vs. issues to be addressed by the study (line of enquiry of the study) vs what the information or evidence will be used to achieve (application of the study results and findings). The table below provide the thought process that teams of researchers may need to apply in order to test

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if the study is fit for purpose and will have the desired impact on their audiences. If you can fill out this table, you most likely have an appropriate topic with enough direction to perform some great study and fit for the purpose.

1) **We are conducting the study** _____ (**topic**)

2) **because we want to find out** _____(**issue/question**)

3) **in order to** _____ (**application** - So What? - Project/Audience/Purpose driven)

Examples:

We are conducting the study on **social and emotional learning outcomes for children 2-4 years** (topic) because we want to find out **if children who are taught social and emotional intelligence behaves better than those not taught** (issue/question) in order to **convince the department of basic education to introduce social and emotional learning teaching materials and methods at pre-school** (application - *audience*).

This type of an approach for producing study results and recommendations is more important if the study outputs are to be used to inform policy, programming and development interventions. For the National Development Agency, it becomes a requirement that studies are conducted to produce actions by policy makers, managers and implementers of programmes.

The Process for research and evaluation studies

The National Development Agency is not an academic or a research institution of government, therefor its strategy cannot be structured to portray a perspective of research institutions, that is the first acknowledgement. The second element, is that the Research & Monitoring & Evaluation Units are not structured and resourced to carry out studies of national representativity, therefor it needs to partner with research institutions to produce such research outcomes. The research and evaluation process start with interpretation of the NDA Act secondary mandate where in Section 3 (2) (b) states: "*Undertake research and publications aimed at providing the basis for development policy.*" The phrase "undertake" means "*commit oneself to this responsibility or to take responsibility for and begin doing (research)*". The mandate, therefore, expects the Agency to commit and take responsibility that research in conducted with the purpose of publishing the study outputs and informing development policy. The strategy process therefore outlines how the Agency is expected to fulfil this mandate requirement.

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There are critical steps that are required to be taken to ensure that studies products are relevant, technically sound, useful or implementable, and are accessible to various audiences of the Agency. These steps are defined as:

Building consensus – This step is the first one to ensure that studies undertaken by the Agency has been widely consulted with critical and relevant stakeholders both internally and externally. Consensus building at the beginning of any study process create a sense of ownership of the and association for all who participate and benefit from the outputs of the study. Studies that have been identified through this process would have a better chance of being utilised and accepted by users of the information.

Figure 2: Process for initiating and producing effective studies outputs
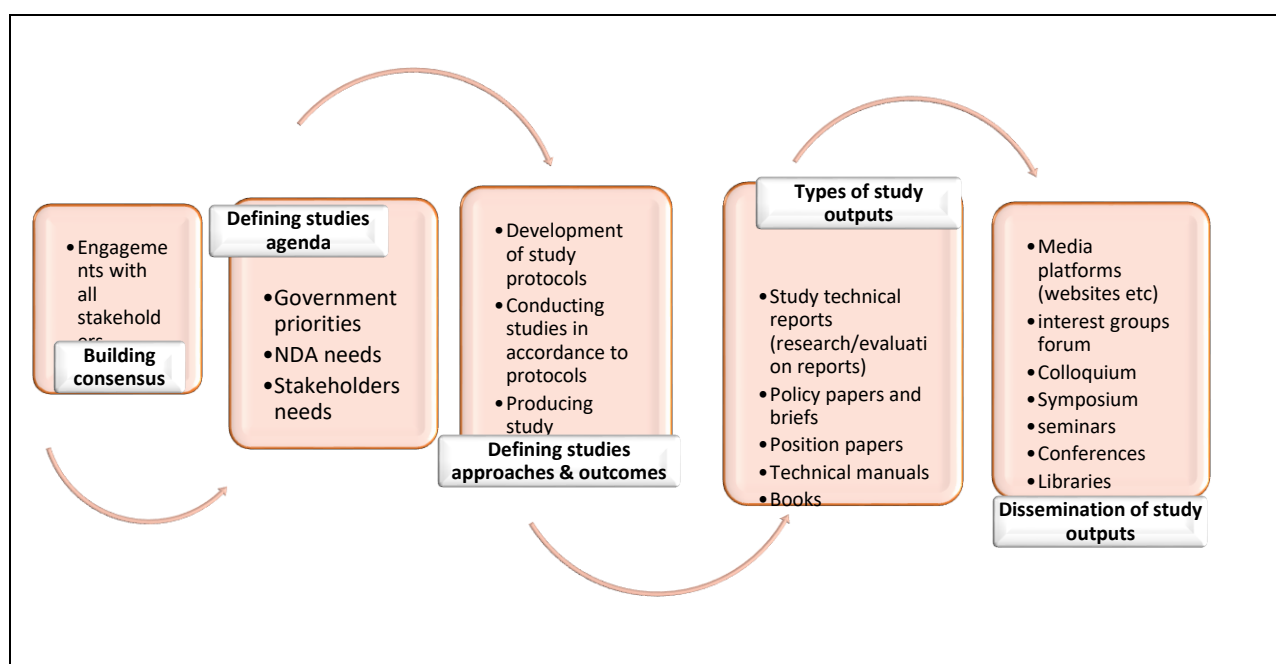
Defining studies agenda - The process of defining studies agenda requires an interactive process between many players. This step requires a review of government policies and documents on priorities relating to the mandate of the NDA. It also requires a consultation process within the Agency to establish needs for information and evidence to improve its operations and programmes. In the process of consultation, priorities within the Agency need to be agreed upon. In addition to the consultation process, it requires review of programmes documentation and report which will enable the researchers and evaluators to determine the level of need and the appetite from internal staff to use the results and recommendations of the studies. The third layer of consultation and review of available information, is the stakeholders of the Agency. These includes the civil society sector, the private sector and organs of state. The result of this process is the development of a short to medium term agenda for the Agency

which will guide research areas and topics that can be undertaken over an MTEF period.

- **Defining studies approaches and outcomes** – all studies undertaken by the Agency must be guided by a research protocol or proposal. These documents define the study area to be undertaken and provide a rationale for conducting the study, it defines the methodology to be used in accordance with research standards and ethics, it outlines the questions to be answered by the study, the use and usefulness of the study results and recommendations, the budget required to conduct the study and timeframes of the study. This can be referred as a study plan, with detailed information, including the types of tools to be used to collect information. This document provide certainty that a specific study will be undertaken. NDA studies can be insourced (conducted by internal staff only), or outsourced (taken by outside research or evaluation institutions) or partnerships (undertaken by internal staff and outside institution using the partnership model). All these approached have their own advantages and disadvantages. When a decision on which route to take is based on a number of factors the NDA research and evaluation assessment on the pros and cons.

- **Types of studies outputs** – outputs of applied research can produce different outputs packaged for specific needs identified during the consultation process. Given the mandate of the NDA on research, the studies outputs can be a combination of many useful and user-friendly packaged information. The packaging is also informed by the type(s) of audiences the study seeks to address. The NDA research studies can produce one or some combinations of the following:

- **Study technical report** – these are usually technical in nature and provide detailed account of the how the study was conducted, what methods were used, what tools were used detailed findings and discussions of the results and recommendations. These documents are usually long and complete.

- **Policy papers and brief** – these are shorter versions and summaries of a study. They are useful for policy makers and implementers as they deal with results and their implications.

- **Position papers** – these are outputs that uses research results to take a position on an issue. They are usually used for debates and taking decisions on policy issues backed by credible and evidence based research or evaluation information.

- ***Technical manuals*** – these are tools that can be generated from a research or evaluation undertaken to improve or promote good practice. They are usually useful to guide implementation and introducing standards for performing certain function. These tools are evidence based generated from studies conducted in that area or function.

- ***Books*** – books are better source for documentation and sharing information even with the public. Research based books are even used by academic institutions for students to learn new methods, different concepts application and understanding how research informs implementation.

Dissemination of study outputs -   the aim of the Agency's research and evaluation agenda is to provide a range of evidence and information that can stimulate debates, engagements and sharing of ideas that can improve policy formulation, programme planning, implementation and monitoring. The reports produced during these process are means to an end. They (reports) are inputs towards achieving an overall goal of a NDA research and evaluation process. The NDA will use various available platforms to disseminate and engage on its reports findings and recommendations. These platforms will include any of the following as official form of dissemination:

- ***Media platforms*** – in the age of digital and social media, these platforms are easy accessible, wide distribution and on time. However, they require an active and smart approach on the Agency's communications and marketing strategy. In addition, they require people who can simply complex content into simple nuggets of easy consumable information on technical topics. Research and evaluation outputs will be distributed in all the formal NDA media channels, including the websites (internal & external), social media platforms, magazine and news publications, electronic media houses including radio and television. For the NDA research and evaluation to effectively use these platforms, the Agency will need to reform its current communication and marketing function, including the approach towards using these available platforms to allow debates and engagements through these channels.

- ***Interest groups forum*** – these platforms are excellent for engagement and enhancing research and evaluation recommendations. Given the limitations in conducting research, you would need to subject findings and recommendations to the people who will be affected by the research outputs. These component can also be used as part of the research methodology to allow the findings and recommendations to take into consideration the thinking and experiences of interest groups in the research or evaluation subject area. Engagements with

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interest groups are a key component of the NDA research and evaluation strategy.

- ***Colloquium and symposium*** – these are usually technical platforms that debates the science and the complexities of a discipline area. They seek to understand how best a problem can be approached and solved using accurate and technical information. It allows a wide range of technical expertise to be in one room and analyses complex problems and proposes solution(s) that can be adapted to different environments. The secondary mandate of the NDA which require the Agency to undertake research that informs development policy, it's a very complex undertaking that cannot be achieved by conducting the research. It needs a range of technical experts to technically assess the problem and match the research findings and its accuracy in providing pointers to solutions of a range of development issues. These issues in a basket can from a very wide range of developmental challenges to respond to the problem. For example, developmental policy on poverty reduction or inequalities, is complex and has a range of developmental issues- raging from human resource capabilities (skills), access to economic activities (employment & entrepreneurship), education (levels of education), infrastructure (the ability to move around, communicate and access to markets), development environment (government policies, systems and process functionality) etc. These are complex phenomenon that can never be tackled by any Agency or government department. It requires a range of experts to deal with all the pieces that makes up the puzzle.

- ***Seminars and conferences*** – these platforms are used to present new evidence and information, not only from the NDA but the entire development sector. These platforms provide a better structure to share lessons, debate long term approaches towards solving a range of problems facing society, learn new ways of doing things and network with others is solving problems. They are a key in keeping engaged on developmental issues and policies. These forums can be designed not to scientific or technical to allow a wide range of participation. It allows you to configure them for a mixed audience who can all benefit from them at the same time allow engagements on specific issues that affect a wider community. It is however, important to keep these structures engaged, having sporadic conferences and seminars, does not sustain engagements, we would need to have well structures, predictable and organized conferences and conferences to sustain debates and sharing of information on development policy. For these structures to remain relevant, new information and evidence needs to be produced on regular basis from all sectors of the development policy spectrum, thus NDA must always thrive towards producing new body of knowledge on

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annual basis to have effective and engaged seminars and conferences.

- *Libraries and archives* – these platforms have been in existence for centuries, they have however transformed with time. These platforms they now run on high technology search engines, they provide a wealth of information, accessible anywhere in the world instantly. Libraries are not physical space with hard copies of paper, but open space with electronic information that crosses all borders. They are useful to disseminate information to a very large audience requiring information for different reason. As part of the NDA disseminating strategy is to make sure that all information and evidence produced through its research and evaluation process will made available to these technology search platforms for use by the public.

Implementation of the Strategy

The NDA research strategy is the overarching document for conducting research and evaluations by the relevant responsible units of the Development Management and Research Division. The Research and M&E Units on annual basis will develop an annual research agenda and implementation plan that details activities and outputs in line with the NDA 5-year strategy and Annual Performance Plan (APP).

The Agenda and plan will provide the basis for conducting specific research and evaluation topics that are linked to the NDA and government annual priorities in accordance to the government focus for the year. The implementation requires staff in these Units to define areas of research and evaluation based on a consultative process with NDA and key stakeholders in the public, civil society and private sector on knowledge and information required to influence policy and practice.

For the strategy to be fully realised, the Units will produce define areas of research and evaluation for the year, process to be followed to conduct the studies, outputs to be produced through the studies, usage of these studies and resources required to implement the research and evaluation plan. The research and evaluation agenda and plan does not replace the annual operational plan for these units but guide the development of each unit plans for the year. The detailed agenda and plan is critical to keep the NDA focused on its mandate and the fulfilment of the NDA overall strategy in responding to the secondary mandate.

Risks management and mitigation

Every strategy and programme has inherent risks. The Research and evaluation strategy has risks that would need the Agency to mitigate in order to produce research outputs that are useful, reliable and have impact on the outcomes needed to be achieved. The following are key strategic risks and controls that have been developed to ensure that the implementation of the strategy is successful and it means its goals and objectives.

Table 1: Risks Management Plan

Strategic Objectives	Risk Description	IR Rating	Control Improvement Plan(s)	RR Rating
To provide empirical information from research and evaluation studies to inform national development policy formulation, debates and engagements between the CSO, public and private sectors.	Lack of research strategy and Agenda to guide development research & evaluations	(red)	-Produce research strategy through a consultative process with stakeholders (internal & external) -Define the types of research and evaluation outputs to produce by the Agency -Produce annual implementation plans of the strategy	(yellow)
	Not playing a strategic role in facilitating engagements and debates between state, Civil Society and private sectors on development policy	(red)	-Define engagements and debates platforms by all stakeholders (state, civil society and private sectors) on development policy -Identify key actors on development policy across all sectors to participate in the development policy discourse	(yellow)
	Not producing accurate, valid and useful evidence and information from its research and evaluations	(red)	-Define and identify research partners to assist the Agency in undertaking research and evaluation projects -Identify skills required by the Agency to undertake credible research and evaluation projects that produces credible and reliable information and evidence for policy engagements	(yellow)

Budget allocation for research and evaluation

Table 2: Research and Evaluation budget 2020/21 – 2022/23

RSEARCH COST DESCRIPTION	2020/21 (R)	2021/22 (R)	2022/23 (R)
Monitoring cost	60,600	63,630	66,812
Evaluation studies	517,233	1,050,000	1,102,500
Research studies	920,596	1,680,000	1,764,000
Knowledge Management	191,791	371,175	389,734
Policy dialogues & engagement	208,582	371,175	389,734
TOTAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION COST	**1,898,748**	**3,535,980**	**3,712,779**

The National Development Agency research and evaluation function is allocated funding in the MTEF plan approved by government. However, the 2020/21 budget was adjusted from original R3,367,600 down to R1,898,748 due to reprioritisation in response to COVID-19 pandemic, the outer years budget was not affected by the adjustments. The level of funding is the lowest compared to the primary mandate funding and the support cost.

The budget allocated in the table exclude staff, administrative and support cost. The total budget allocation for this function is less than 5% of the programmes cost excluding personnel and running cost of the Agency. This then requires the Agency to be very strategic in the implementation of research plans and projects to get best value for money and produce quality outcomes. The strategy is leveraging technical (skills resources) and infrastructure that exist in other government Research Agencies and Academic Institutions that are keen to partner with the NDA in undertaking research that informs development policy. These partnerships reduce the cost at the same time produce credible research outputs and provide platforms that have a wider access to stakeholders of the Agency.