Financing the Results Architecture: An Afrocentric Proposition for Sustainable Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in African Public Sectors

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ABSTRACT

Background: Across Africa, governments have institutionalised monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) within results-based budgeting reforms, yet financing of the evidence infrastructure remains implicit, fragmented and vulnerable, and the concepts linking financing, results architecture and Afrocentricity remain under-specified. **Objectives:** This paper defines and interconnects these concepts, diagnoses why MEL financing fails to keep pace with MEL institutionalisation in African public sectors, and proposes the THETA Framework (Transformative, Harmonised, Evidence-linked, Traceable and Accountable financing) as a complementary Afrocentric financing architecture. **Method:** A qualitative comparative documentary and case-study analysis, reported with a transparent search and screening protocol and a theory-derived coding framework, synthesised policy, budget and evaluation evidence from seven African countries and three cross-continental exemplars. **Results:** African MEL systems display strong institutional anchors but weak financing visibility: expenditure is dispersed, evaluation is structurally underfunded, donor financing fragments architectures, and budgets finance activities rather than credible evidence, with systematic variation across legal traditions and fiscal contexts. Chile, the Republic of Korea and the United States demonstrate that evaluation–budget integration, statutory anchoring with quality control, and legislated evidence infrastructure correct these deficits. The conceptual framework links four financing functions (visibility, protection, integration, accountability) to evidence quality, use and institutional learning, and the discussion explicitly separates evidence-supported findings from normative propositions. **Conclusion:** Sustainable MEL requires deliberately financing the national results architecture through THETA's five pillars and six mechanisms, sequenced across five phases. **Contribution:** The paper offers a defined, testable conceptual framework connecting financing, results architecture, Afrocentricity and sustainable MEL; comparative empirical evidence with contextual variation; and a normative financing architecture with specific implications for policymakers, institutions and future research.

Keywords: MEL financing, results architecture, Afrocentric evaluation, public financial management, THETA Framework

INTRODUCTION

Public-sector reform depends not only on the capacity to formulate policy and allocate resources, but on the capacity to establish whether those resources produce meaningful results. Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is therefore no longer a technical reporting appendage; it is a core component of public governance, accountability and allocative decision-making [17; 33]. Results-based reforms, notably programme-based budgeting (PBB) and performance budgeting more broadly, were adopted precisely to connect expenditure to outcomes [25]. Across Africa this reform wave has been extensive: PBB has been rolled out with multilateral support in several countries, including Zimbabwe from 2014 [39]; national MEL policies and systems have

been legislated or institutionalised from Benin and Uganda to Kenya and South Africa [15; 29]; and continental architecture such as the African Union's Agenda 2063 monitoring and evaluation framework links national, regional and continental reporting [4].

Yet a quiet deficit runs through these reforms. A government can institutionalise MEL without adequately financing MEL. Where MEL costs are embedded implicitly within programme allocations, they compete with implementation for scarce resources, become invisible in budget classifications, and are the first casualty of fiscal pressure precisely when evidence is most needed. The problem confronting African public sectors is therefore not principally the absence of MEL systems, but the absence of a coherent, visible, protected and results-oriented national MEL financing architecture.

Existing scholarship has addressed this gap only partially. Much of the literature treats MEL as an apolitical technical function [17; 37]; country studies remain isolated; and the financing of evaluation, as distinct from the design of evaluation systems, is under-theorised. Recent work on the politics of MEL confirms that evaluation systems are shaped by power and incentive structures rather than technical design alone [24], while decolonial critiques show that imported, donor-financed architectures can reproduce upward accountability even where national systems exist [14; 21]. Afrocentric critiques, including the Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) discourse, further note that dominant financing models privilege donor compliance over citizen-relevant evidence [2; 21]. This paper responds by asking: what financing architecture would allow African public sectors to see, protect, coordinate, execute and account for the resources devoted to evidence?

Three policy positions compete in this debate. The technocratic position holds that better classifications and statistical capacity alone will surface MEL costs [25; 33]. The fiscal-austerity position treats MEL as a discretionary overhead to be trimmed when revenue contracts [25]. The institutional position assumes that mandates and policies, once legislated, will attract resources automatically [15; 29]. This paper contests all three: without a deliberate financing architecture, classification remains invisible in practice, austerity silently starves evidence, and legislated mandates remain unfunded as the persistence of evaluation gaps in otherwise well-designed systems such as Kenya's and Ghana's demonstrates [22; 29]. The financing question is therefore not administrative but political: it determines whose evidence counts and which results survive budget negotiation [18; 32].

The aim is to develop a generalisable, Afrocentric financing framework for national MEL, grounded in an explicit conceptual framework that defines and interconnects MEL financing, results architecture, Afrocentricity and sustainable MEL. The specific objectives are:

1. To diagnose why MEL financing remains invisible and vulnerable within results-based budgeting in African public sectors;
2. To compare financing practice across seven African MEL systems, acknowledging contextual variation;
3. To extract transferable design principles from three successful cross-continental case studies; and
4. To propose and operationalise the THETA Framework as a complementary national financing architecture, distinguishing evidence-supported findings from normative propositions.

The paper's contribution is fourfold: it supplies a defined, testable conceptual framework; it reframes MEL as public results infrastructure; it provides comparative financing evidence with explicit contextual variation; and it offers treasuries, national MEL units and development partners a sequenced, politically realistic reform pathway.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: a literature review situates MEL financing within performance-budgeting, political-economy and Afrocentric evaluation scholarship; a conceptual framework section defines the core constructs and specifies the analytical model and propositions; the methodology details the comparative documentary design with a transparent search protocol and coding framework; the results present African financing patterns, contextual variation and cross-continental lessons; the THETA Framework section elaborates the proposed architecture; the implementation section sequences reform and specifies

governance and measurement; the discussion separates empirical findings from normative propositions and tests the framework against alternative explanations; and the conclusion states the principal contribution, limitations and actor-specific implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical literature

Performance-budgeting theory provides the first anchor: OECD analyses show that linking expenditure to results requires credible performance information, yet such information is itself a public good that budgets rarely price [25]. The political economy of evaluation explains why: evidence production is contested because it allocates blame and credit, so actors rationally underfund or capture it [20; 21]; recent scholarship on the politics of MEL extends this insight to African public sectors, showing that MEL systems are shaped by the interests of the actors who finance, produce and use evidence [24]. Afrocentric evaluation theory adds a normative corrective, insisting that financing models privilege citizen-relevant evidence and downward accountability rather than donor compliance [2; 21], while Ubuntu's trusteeship ethic frames public resources including resources for evidence, as held in trust for communities [18; 32]. Expenditure-tracking and budget-tagging literature, developed chiefly for climate finance, demonstrates that classification reforms can render previously invisible spending auditable [34]. Together, these streams predict that MEL financing failures are structural rather than accidental.

Empirical literature

African evidence shows institutionalisation without financed evaluation: South Africa's National Evaluation System expanded demand faster than funded capacity [9; 13], and decolonial analyses caution that even well-institutionalised systems can drift toward technocratic compliance when financing and epistemic ownership remain external [14]; Uganda's Government Evaluation Facility proved the value of a central evaluation fund but exposed donor-dependence risk [15; 28]; Benin's system relied on reformist political sponsorship [15]; Kenya's national system, despite early institutionalisation, shows uneven operationalisation at county level [29; 36]; Ghana embedded MEL costs invisibly within planning budgets [22]; and Rwanda's centrally financed imihigo evaluations demonstrate that protected evaluation financing is feasible on the continent [19; 23]. The Gambia's EU–UNDP certification programme further shows that pooled, locally owned capacity building can coordinate fragmented actors [10]. Cross-continental evidence identifies success conditions: Chile houses evaluation inside its budget directorate so findings enter allocation decisions formally [5; 16]; Korea anchors the performance–budget link in statute with meta-evaluation quality control [30; 40]; and the United States legislates evaluation ownership, learning agendas and protected capacity [35]. Program-for-results experience further shows that results-linked financing sharpens incentives only where verification is independent [38].

Synthesis and research gap

Theoretically, performance-budgeting and political-economy streams explain why evidence is underfunded, and Afrocentric theory supplies the normative direction of reform; empirically, African and cross-continental cases identify success conditions but remain siloed by country or instrument, and none defines or tests the financing–architecture–Afrocentricity nexus. No study has synthesised these strands into a coherent national financing architecture that simultaneously secures visibility, protection, integration and accountability for MEL expenditure in African public sectors. This paper fills that gap with an explicit conceptual framework and the THETA architecture derived from it.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Defining the core concepts

To anchor the analysis, the four core constructs are defined precisely and operationalised (Table 1): MEL financing as the resource base of the evidence function; the results architecture as the institutional and informational "hardware" of results-based governance; Afrocentricity as an epistemic and accountability orientation; and sustainable MEL as the emergent property of financial predictability, ownership, insulation

and learning.

Table 1: Core concepts, working definitions, theoretical lineage and operationalisation

Construct	Working definition	Theoretical lineage	Operationalisation in this study
MEL financing	Public and partner resources allocated, released and spent to produce, verify and use evidence (monitoring, evaluation, verification, data systems, citizen evidence, learning)	Performance budgeting [25]; political economy of evaluation [20; 21]	Tagged expenditure; allocation, release and execution data; government share of financing
Results architecture	Integrated legal, institutional and informational infrastructure connecting priorities, plans, budgets, implementation, measurement and reporting (PBB, IRBM, national MEL systems, data systems)	Results-based management [17; 37]; Agenda 2063 M&E [4]	Presence/quality of PBB, MEL policy, data systems, reporting chains
Afrocentricity	Orientation rooting evaluation in African priorities, epistemologies and knowledge systems; citizens as knowledge producers; downward accountability; contextual flexibility	MAE [2; 21]; Ubuntu ethics [18; 32]	Citizen evidence windows; co-production safeguards; local ownership of financing
Sustainable MEL	MEL that is financially predictable and protected, institutionally owned, politically insulated and learning-capable beyond donor or electoral cycles	Evaluation institutionalisation [13; 15]; decolonial critique [14]	Financing visibility, protection, integration and accountability indicators (Table 8)

The analytical model and propositions

The framework posits that financing is the sustaining condition of the results architecture: without visible and protected financing, the architecture degrades to compliance ritual. Afrocentricity enters as both design constraint and legitimacy source highlighting that citizen-generated evidence and trusteeship ethics widen the evidence base and deepen accountability [18; 32]. Sustainable MEL is the emergent outcome when four financing functions perform: **visibility** (tagging and reporting), **protection** (ring-fencing and autonomy), **integration** (harmonised calendars and pooled financing) and **accountability** (evidence use, learning and citizen feedback). The model yields four testable propositions: P1: visibility is a necessary condition for protection (what cannot be seen cannot be defended); P2: protection without integration reproduces fragmentation; P3: integration without accountability yields compliance without learning; P4: Afrocentric accountability strengthens evidence legitimacy and use, and thereby institutional performance and learning. These are propositions to be tested, not findings; Figure 1 depicts the model.

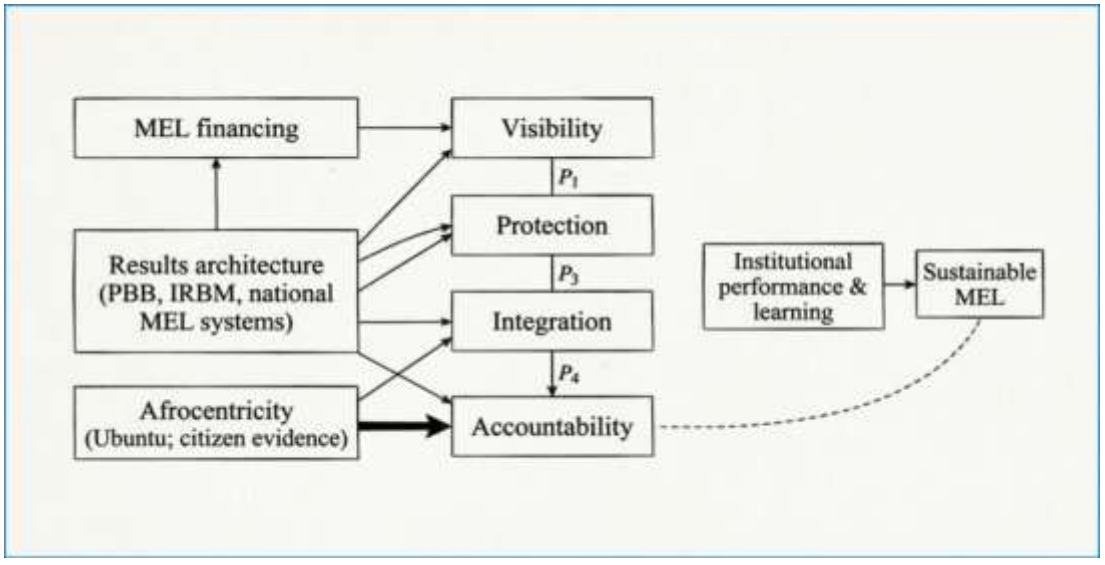


Figure 1: Conceptual framework linking MEL financing and the results architecture through THETA's four financing functions (visibility, protection, integration, accountability), with Afrocentricity conditioning

accountability and evidence legitimacy, producing evidence quality and use, institutional performance and learning, and sustainable MEL as the emergent outcome; propositions P1–P4 label the functional linkages.

RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN

Research design and paradigm

The study employed a qualitative comparative documentary analysis with structured cross-case comparison, situated within an interpretivist–critical paradigm that treats budgeting as a political practice rather than a neutral technical act [6; 8; 41]. Documentary analysis suits phenomena that are fiscally technical and politically sensitive, and where primary budget data are unevenly public across jurisdictions [6].

Setting and case selection

Seven African cases (South Africa, Uganda, Benin, Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, Zimbabwe) and three cross-continental exemplars (Chile, Republic of Korea, United States) were purposively selected for theoretical, not statistical, relevance: the African set maximises variation in financing instruments, legal traditions (Anglophone and Francophone) and fiscal contexts across East, West, Southern and Francophone Africa, while the cross-continental set comprises systems internationally recognised for embedding evaluation within budgetary or statutory performance architecture [5; 35; 40; 41]. The Gambia and sub-national Kenya were included as illustrative cases for contextual variation and capacity-building dynamics [10; 36].

Search protocol, screening and corpus

Documents were retrieved from Scopus, Google Scholar and Web of Science, plus institutional repositories (World Bank Open Knowledge, OECD iLibrary, UNDP evaluation registry, national treasury and prime-ministerial portals) using the string ("monitoring AND evaluation" OR "M&E" OR MEL) AND (financ* OR budget* OR "public financial management") AND ("results-based" OR "performance budgeting") AND (Africa OR [country name]), limited to English, 2004–2026. Three-stage screening (title, abstract, full text) with author-consensus resolution yielded the corpus summarised in Table 2; sampling was treated as saturated when successive documents yielded no new financing mechanism [6; 8].

Table 2: Screening flow and documentary corpus composition (authors' records; counts to be confirmed at submission)

Stage / source	Records	Included
Records identified (databases and repositories)	148	—
Duplicates removed / title-screened	96 screened	—
Abstract- and full-text screened	61	—
Included corpus	—	47
— Peer-reviewed articles	—	15
— Institutional and evaluation reports	—	15
— Policy and budget documents	—	14
— Academic theses	—	3

Coding and analytical framework

Each included document was entered into an extraction matrix capturing country, financing instrument, legal anchor, financing channel, safeguard and residual gap, constituting the audit trail [6]. Coding followed a hybrid deductive–inductive scheme in which the four theoretical streams generated deductive codes and unanticipated mechanisms (for example strategic underfunding) generated inductive codes, analysed through Braun and

Clarke's six-phase thematic framework with active search for disconfirming cases [7; 8; 11]. Table 3 illustrates the coding logic.

Table 3: Deductive–inductive coding framework (illustrative codes)

Theoretical stream	Deductive code	Illustrative data
Performance budgeting [25]	Invisible performance information	MEL costs dispersed across economic classifications [22; 29]
Political economy of evaluation [20; 21; 24]	Capture of evidence functions	Executive influence on case selection; selective reporting [15; 29]
Afrocentric/MAE [2; 21; 32]	Excluded citizen evidence	Upward-accountable donor reporting [20; 10]
Budget tagging [34]	(Inductive) financing visibility	Climate-tagging analogy; expenditure statements [34]

Rigour, positionality and ethical considerations

Credibility was established through triangulation across policy, budget and scholarly sources; transferability through thick institutional description; dependability through the extraction matrix, coded schema and consensus screening; and confirmability through declared positionality both authors are MEL and public finance practitioners within an African anti-corruption institution, a position granting interpretive access but requiring disciplined critical distance and the declared political neutrality of this study [8; 11]. As the study analysed only publicly available documents, no human subjects were involved and institutional ethical review was not required; no confidential or classified material was used.

RESULTS

MEL financing across Africa: institutional anchors and persistent deficits

Africa's MEL institutionalisation is genuine and varied. South Africa's National Evaluation Policy Framework, approved by Cabinet in 2011, created a National Evaluation System coordinated by the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation, with a cabinet-approved evaluation work plan [9; 13]. Uganda institutionalised MEL through its National Policy on Public Sector Monitoring and Evaluation and, in 2013, established the Government Evaluation Facility (GEF) within the Office of the Prime Minister - a virtual fund with a rolling national evaluation agenda that finances priority evaluations across ministries [15; 28]. Benin began building a national evaluation system from 2007 around a ministry-level evaluation mandate, becoming a Francophone African pioneer [15]. Kenya's National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System, operating since 2004, was later consolidated through the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy of 2022 [29]. Rwanda embedded results culture through imihigo performance contracts (from 2006) and the 2015 Result-Based Performance Management Policy, with annual imihigo evaluations financed and published centrally [19; 23]. Ghana's National Development Planning Commission issued a national MEL manual and sector guidelines anchoring MEL in the development planning system [22]. Zimbabwe adopted PBB from 2014, coupled it with an Integrated Results-Based Management (IRBM) architecture, and positioned national MEL within the Office of the President and Cabinet [27; 31; 39].

Despite these anchors, five financing deficits recur. First, MEL competes with implementation: under fiscal pressure, programme managers rationally protect visible delivery inputs over evidence production. Second, evaluation is structurally vulnerable: rigorous evaluation requires specialist design, sampling and follow-up that individual ministry budgets rarely sustain, creating an evaluation gap except where central facilities such as Uganda's GEF exist [15]. Third, expenditure fragmentation means MEL spending is untraceable as a national aggregate in budget classifications. Fourth, donor dependence fragments the architecture: project-specific indicators, systems and reporting requirements produce sophisticated project MEL alongside weak

national systems, and externally co-financed facilities face sustainability risk. Fifth, activity-based financing privileges compliance over evidence use. Table 4 summarises these patterns.

Table 4: Institutional anchors, financing instruments and residual financing gaps in seven African national MEL systems

Country	Institutional anchor	Principal financing instrument	Residual financing gap
South Africa	National Evaluation System; NEPF 2011 [9; 13]	Central MTEF allocation to DPME plus departmental budgets	Evaluation demand exceeds funded capacity; departmental MEL uneven
Uganda	National Policy on Public Sector MEL; OPM MEL department [28]	Government Evaluation Facility: virtual fund and rolling evaluation agenda [15]	Partial donor co-financing; sustainability risk
Benin	National evaluation system with lead-agency mandate from 2007 [15]	Central evaluation unit commissions priority evaluations	Reliance on reformist political sponsorship
Kenya	NIMES (2004); National MEL Policy (2022) [29]	MEL costs embedded in MDA and county programme budgets	No visible national MEL financing envelope; uneven county operationalisation [36]
Rwanda	RBM Policy (2015); imihigo contracts (2006) [19]	Centrally financed annual imihigo evaluations [23]	Emphasis on compliance ranking over learning
Ghana	NDPC national MEL manual and sector guidelines [22]	MEL financed through planning budgets and projects	Project-dependent financing; weak data systems
Zimbabwe	PBB from 2014; IRBM; national MEL in OPC [27; 31; 39]	MEL embedded in programme structures under RBB guidelines	MEL invisible in budget classification; evaluation underfunded

Contextual variation across African cases

The deficits are universal, but their configuration varies systematically with legal tradition, fiscal space and political settlement, which qualifies any uniform prescription. In Francophone Benin, a ministerial evaluation mandate produced early centralisation but tied system vitality to reformist sponsorship [15]. In Anglophone statutory systems (South Africa, Kenya), strong legal anchors coexist with financing invisibility because MEL costs ride inside programme votes [9; 29], and in Kenya's devolved setting county-level operationalisation remains uneven despite national policy [36]. In Rwanda, a performance-contract culture enabled centrally financed, published evaluations, but prioritises compliance ranking over learning [19; 23]. In Uganda, a donor-co-financed virtual fund solved the evaluation gap while creating sustainability risk [15; 28]. In Ghana, planning-anchored MEL secured mandate but not dedicated finance [22]. In Zimbabwe, PBB embedded MEL in programme structures without classification visibility [31; 39]. The Gambia illustrates that small states can substitute pooled partner financing for absent domestic capacity when ownership is local [10]. These variations confirm that THETA's functions (visibility, protection, integration, accountability) must be sequenced to context, even where its principles are general.

Lessons from three cross-continental case studies

Chile: embedding evaluation in the budget directorate. Chile's Budget Directorate (DIPRES) has operated a programme evaluation system since 1997, beginning with the Evaluación de Programas Gubernamentales and expanding to impact and design evaluations [16]. Because evaluation sits inside the institution that prepares the budget, findings enter budget negotiations formally rather than optionally, and spending reviews extend the same logic to expenditure reallocation [5]. The transferable lesson is institutional placement: traceability and

budget linkage are achieved when the evidence function and the allocation function share one institutional home and one calendar.

Republic of Korea: statutory performance management with quality control. Korea's Framework Act on Government Performance Evaluation (2006), reinforced by performance-budgeting provisions in public finance law, requires ministries to submit performance plans and performance reports alongside budget requests to the National Assembly [30; 40]. Equally important, Korea developed meta-evaluation and quality-assurance mechanisms so that performance information entering budget debates is credible. The transferable lessons are statutory anchoring of the performance–budget link, parliamentary visibility of performance information, and independent quality verification to prevent gaming.

United States: legislating the evidence infrastructure. The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 obliges federal agencies to appoint evaluation officers, publish multi-year learning agendas and annual evaluation plans, and maintain evaluation capacity and policies [35]. The Act treats evidence-building as standing infrastructure with named ownership and planned financing, while programme-level results-linked financing operates separately from the protected evaluation function. The transferable lessons are: mandate the evidence infrastructure in law; name its owners; plan its questions in advance; and separate evaluation financing from performance incentives that could corrupt evidence.

Synthesis. Three design principles emerge: (i) make MEL expenditure visible through classification and reporting; (ii) centralise financing of strategic evaluation while decentralising routine monitoring; and (iii) protect evaluation independence from the programmes it assesses. Table 5 consolidates the cases.

Table 5: Cross-continental case studies and transferable lessons for financing national MEL architectures in Africa

Case (continent)	Core financing and institutional mechanism	Transferable lesson for Africa
Chile (South America)	DIPRES programme evaluation system (from 1997) feeding annual budget negotiation and spending reviews [5; 16]	House evidence generation where budgets are prepared; give findings a formal seat in allocation decisions
Republic of Korea (Asia)	Framework Act on Government Performance Evaluation (2006); performance plans and reports tabled with the budget; meta-evaluation quality control [30; 40]	Anchor the performance–budget link in statute; verify performance information independently
United States (North America)	Evidence Act (2018): evaluation officers, learning agendas, annual evaluation plans, protected agency evaluation capacity [35]	Legislate evidence infrastructure with named ownership and planned financing; shield evaluation from programme incentives

THE THETA FRAMEWORK: A COMPLEMENTARY FINANCING ARCHITECTURE

Conceptual foundation

The THETA Framework: Transformative, Harmonised, Evidence-linked, Traceable and Accountable financing; is the operational expression of the conceptual framework: it supplies the financing functions (visibility, protection, integration, accountability) that sustain the results architecture, with Afrocentricity embedded as the accountability condition. Its proposition is simple: PBB finances programmes; IRBM manages results; MEL produces evidence; THETA finances the evidence infrastructure that allows the entire system to learn. The Greek letter Theta (Θ) symbolises the design: the outer circle is the national results ecosystem (government, citizens, parliament, partners), and the central bar is evidence crossing the system,

resources flow into programmes, but evidence must flow back to influence decisions (Figure 2).

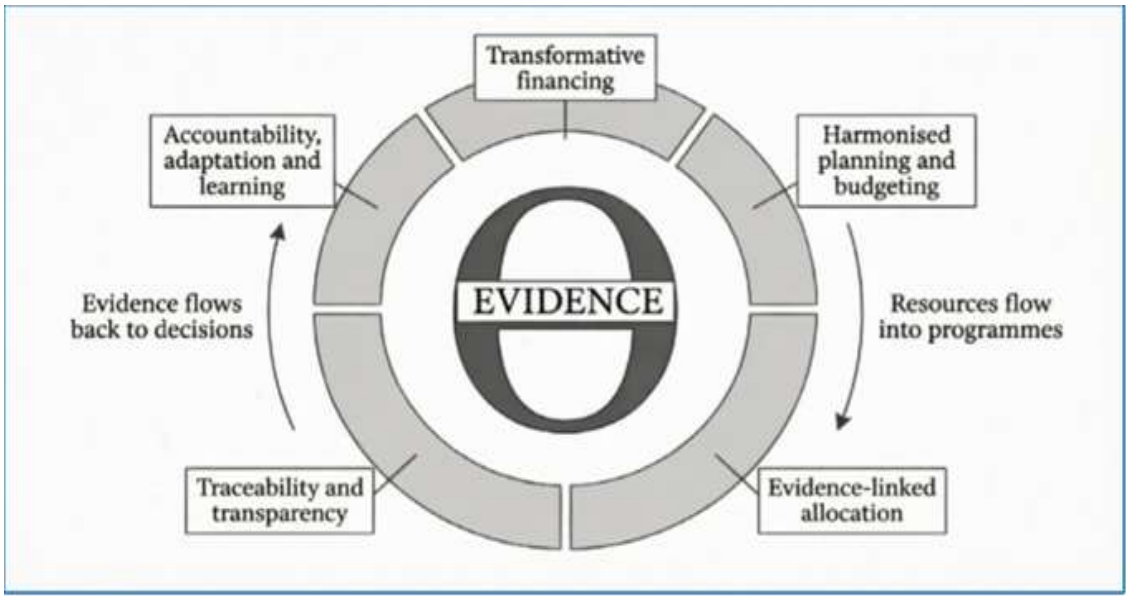


Figure 2: The THETA Framework conceptualised as the Greek letter Theta (Θ): the outer ring represents the national results ecosystem and the five financing pillars, while the central bar represents evidence flowing back through the budget cycle to influence allocation decisions.

Transformative financing

MEL must be reclassified from administrative overhead to public results infrastructure, financed with the same deliberateness as statistics, roads or financial management systems. Transformative financing has three dimensions: protect core MEL financing within every ministry programme; finance system transformation (digital MEL infrastructure, interoperability, analytics, capacity) centrally; and finance strategic evidence that no single ministry can afford.

Harmonised planning and budgeting

MEL financing must follow the same calendar as programmes: national priorities → strategic plan → annual plan → costed results framework → MEL plan → MEL budget → implementation → monitoring → evaluation → learning → budget revision. Each annual plan should carry an explicit MEL financing schedule specifying, per major programme: indicator, baseline, target, data source, collection frequency, responsible institution, monitoring cost, evaluation requirement and cost, verification mechanism, citizen-feedback mechanism and learning activity [37].

Evidence-linked allocation

Budget decisions should progressively be informed by evidence, without mechanical punishment of underperformance, since weak results may reflect design flaws, inadequate funding or external shocks rather than managerial failure. The intended loop is: budget → implementation → evidence → review → decision → revised budget. Evidence should inform, not automate, allocation.

Traceability and transparency

Treasuries should introduce a MEL budget classification or tag within the public financial management system, analogous to climate budget tagging used to track climate expenditure [34]. Tag categories may include routine monitoring, evaluation, data collection, data-quality assurance, independent verification, citizen-based monitoring, impact assessment, digital MEL systems, learning and capacity development. Tagging enables an annual national MEL expenditure statement reporting allocation, release, expenditure, execution rate, outputs, quality, utilisation and attributable improvements; the point at which MEL financing becomes auditable.

Accountability, adaptation and learning

Financing must cover the use of evidence: management reviews, dissemination, learning forums, policy dialogue and follow-up of recommendations. Every major evaluation should require a management response matrix recording finding, recommendation, response, responsible institution, deadline, budget implication and status, converting evaluation from report production into a management instrument.

Core financing mechanisms

THETA operationalises its pillars through five mutually reinforcing mechanisms plus one cross-cutting evidence stream, summarised in Table 6 and located within the national architecture in Figure 3. Ring-fenced MDA allocations guarantee minimum visible MEL financing, costed from evidence needs rather than arbitrary percentages. A National Evaluation Fund finances strategic, cross-sector and impact evaluations on a rolling agenda — a model already demonstrated by Uganda's GEF [15]. MEL performance compacts bind ministries to annual evidence commitments aligned to strategic plans and budgets. Selective results-linked financing may sharpen allocative efficiency for suitable programmes, consistent with program-for-results experience [38], but MEL financing itself must remain protected to avoid target manipulation, indicator gaming and suppression of negative findings. Pooled development-partner financing should replace parallel project systems with harmonised contribution to the national architecture, as The Gambia's coordinated programme illustrates [10]. Cross-cutting all mechanisms, a citizen evidence window finances scorecards, social audits, community monitoring and beneficiary feedback, recognising citizens as legitimate producers of evidence in line with African evaluation principles and the accountability literature [1; 12; 20].

Table 6: THETA financing mechanisms, purposes, instruments and safeguards for African public sectors

Mechanism	Purpose	Instrument	Safeguard
1. Ring-fenced MDA MEL allocation	Guarantee minimum visible MEL financing in every programme	Costed MEL schedule within programme budget templates	Costed from evidence needs; published in national estimates
2. National Evaluation Fund	Finance strategic and cross-sector evaluations	Centrally coordinated fund with rolling national evaluation agenda (Uganda GEF model) [15]	Independent evaluation steering committee; public agenda
3. MEL performance compacts	Bind MDAs to annual evidence commitments	Compact specifying indicators, data, verification, learning actions	Compacts audited and reported to parliament
4. Selective results-linked financing	Sharpen allocative efficiency	Small independently verified results tranche for suitable programmes [38]	MEL financing itself protected; verification mandatory
5. Pooled partner financing	Reduce donor fragmentation	Multi-partner fund aligned to national MEL plan [10]	Use of national systems; government co-chair; sunset clauses
6. Citizen evidence window (cross-cutting)	Finance citizen-generated evidence	Scorecards, social audits, community validation, feedback systems [12; 20]	Published management responses to citizen findings

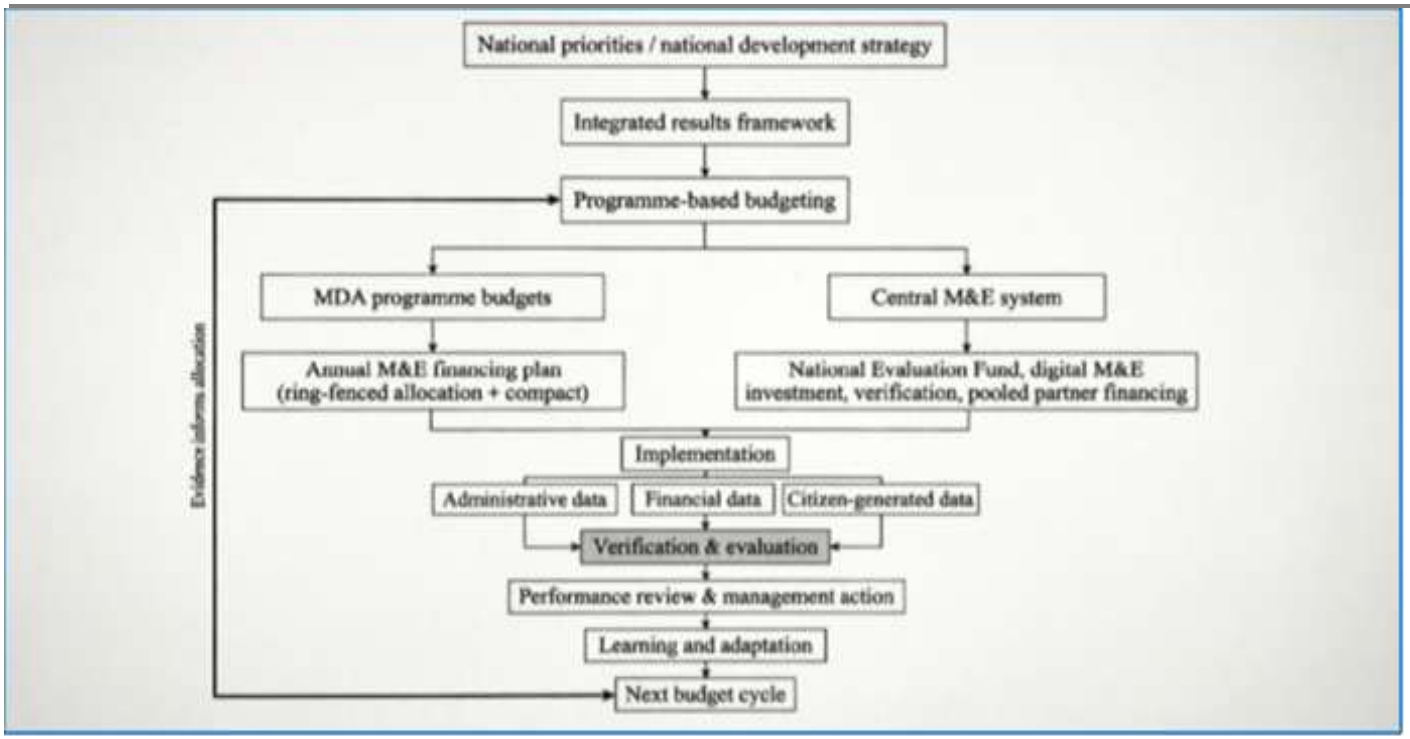


Figure 3: Proposed national MEL financing architecture under THETA, showing the flow from national priorities through programme-based budgeting to dual financing channels (MDA programme MEL and central MEL systems), convergence of administrative, financial and citizen-generated data into verification and evaluation, and the feedback of evidence into management action and the next budget cycle.

An Afrocentric financing ethic

The citizen evidence window is not an add-on but the framework's Afrocentric core. Ubuntu's relational ethic holds that public resources are held in trust for communities and future generations, so accountability is collective rather than purely hierarchical [18; 32]. Administrative data may show a service delivered while citizens report it inaccessible, inadequate or exclusionary; financing both evidence streams produces a fuller account of public value [1; 2]. THETA thus extends MAE's insistence on contextual relevance, participation and African-led methodology into the domain of public finance [2; 21], answering decolonial critiques that locate the capture of evaluation in financing and epistemic dependence [14].

IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP, GOVERNANCE AND MEASUREMENT

Phased implementation

THETA should be sequenced rather than implemented as a single shock (Table 7; Figure 4). Phase I establishes visibility through tagging, a standard financing template and a national MEL expenditure baseline. Phase II establishes protection through minimum allocations and compacts. Phase III establishes integration through the National Evaluation Fund, independent verification, the citizen window and pooled partner financing. Phase IV builds intelligence through integrated digital MEL, analytics and geospatial monitoring. Phase V institutionalises adaptation, closing the loop from evidence to budget revision.

Table 7: Phased implementation roadmap for the THETA Framework in African public sectors

Phase	Period	Key instruments	Guiding question
I. Visibility	Year 1	MEL budget tag [34]; financing template; expenditure baseline	How much are we spending on MEL?
II. Protection	Years 1–2	Minimum MEL allocations; MEL performance compacts	Is MEL adequately financed?
III. Integration	Years 2–3	National Evaluation Fund; verification mechanism; citizen window; pooled financing	Are we financing the right evidence?

IV. Intelligence	Years 3–5	Digital MEL systems; integrated administrative, financial and citizen data; analytics	Can government anticipate performance risks?
V. Adaptation	Year 5+	Institutionalised evidence-linked budget revision	Are decisions improving outcomes?

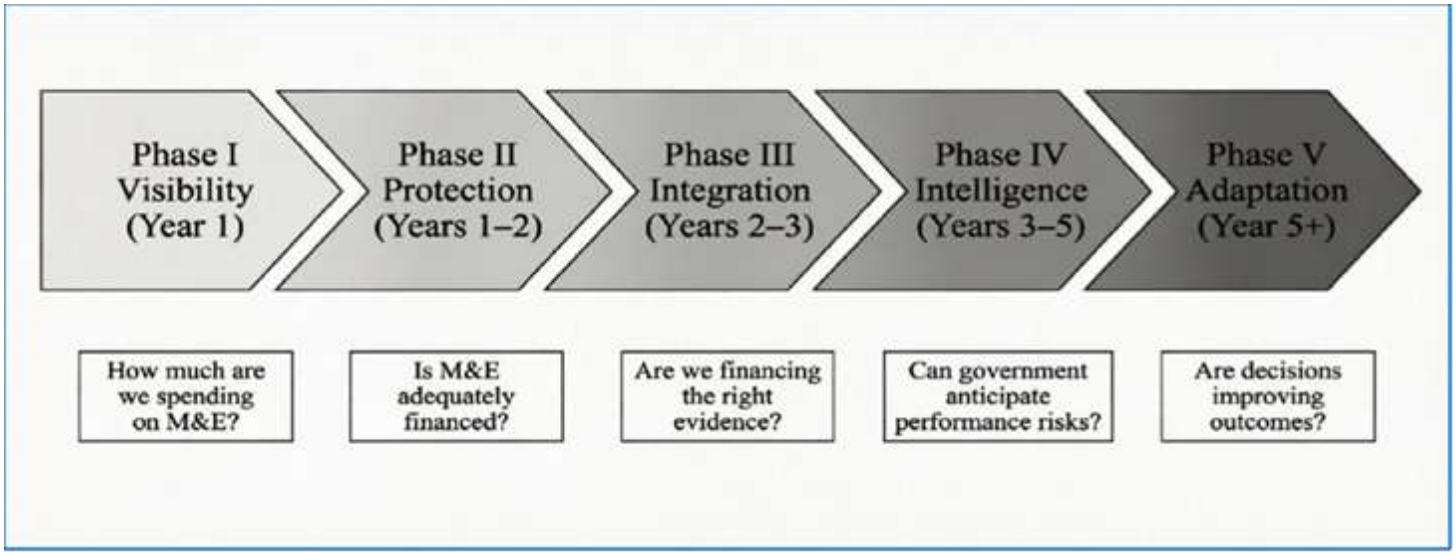


Figure 4: Five-phase THETA implementation roadmap (Visibility, Protection, Integration, Intelligence, Adaptation), showing the sequential introduction of financing instruments and the guiding question addressed at each phase.

Governance arrangements

Responsibilities must be differentiated. The national MEL unit (located in the presidency, prime minister's office or cabinet, as in Zimbabwe, Uganda and South Africa) sets policy, standards, the national evaluation agenda and learning systems [13; 27; 28]. The ministry of finance owns the financing architecture: classification, tagging, ceilings, expenditure reporting and PBB integration [31]. MDAs remain responsible for programme MEL, data generation, routine monitoring and management responses. Parliament uses MEL evidence for budget scrutiny and oversight; citizens contribute experiential evidence; and development partners align to national systems and pooled mechanisms.

Measuring THETA itself

A financing reform must itself be monitored. Table 8 proposes a compact indicator set spanning visibility, adequacy, execution, evaluation coverage, independence, data quality, citizen voice, learning, adaptation, results and sustainability; the operational measures of the framework's four functions and of sustainable MEL as defined in Table 1. The ultimate test is not how much MEL money was spent, but how much better public decisions became because MEL was financed and used.

Table 8: Proposed indicator framework for assessing THETA Framework implementation

Dimension	Indicator
Financing visibility	Percentage of MEL expenditure identifiable through budget tagging
Financing adequacy	Percentage of programmes meeting minimum MEL financing requirement
Execution	MEL budget execution rate
Evaluation coverage	Percentage of priority programmes evaluated on schedule
Independence	Percentage of strategic evaluations independently commissioned or verified
Data quality	Percentage of priority indicators passing data-quality assessment
Citizen voice	Percentage of priority programmes incorporating citizen-generated evidence

Learning	Percentage of evaluations with documented management responses
Adaptation	Percentage of evaluation recommendations implemented
Sustainability	Government share of total national MEL financing

DISCUSSION

Empirical findings and normative propositions

To meet the requirement that normative claims be distinguished from evidence-supported findings, Table 9 separates the study's empirical findings (F1–F5), its testable propositions (P1–P4), and its normative architecture (THETA), each with its evidentiary basis.

Table 9: Separation of empirical findings, testable propositions and normative propositions

Item	Status	Basis
F1: MEL financing invisible; aggregation failure prevents protection	Empirical finding	Seven-country corpus [9; 13; 15; 22; 28; 29]
F2: Evaluation gap except where central funds exist	Empirical finding	Uganda GEF, Rwanda imihigo vs Kenya/Ghana gaps [15; 19; 23; 28]
F3: Donor fragmentation and upward accountability	Empirical finding	[20; 10]; decolonial critique [14]
F4: Budgets finance activities, not evidence	Empirical finding	Performance-budgeting public-goods logic [25; 26]
F5: Deficits vary by legal tradition, fiscal space, settlement	Empirical finding	Contextual-variation analysis; [36]
P1–P4: Functional sequencing of visibility → protection → integration → accountability	Testable propositions	Conceptual framework (Figure 4); to be tested empirically
THETA pillars and mechanisms	Normative propositions	Grounded in F1–F5 and cross-continental design principles [5; 16; 30; 35; 40]

Synthesis of findings against objectives

In relation to the first objective, MEL financing remains invisible and vulnerable because costs embedded implicitly within programme lines compete with implementation, escape classification and are first cut under fiscal pressure, an aggregation failure that prevents protection, comparison or improvement [25; 31], with configuration varying by context (F5). The second objective's comparison across seven African systems confirmed strong institutional anchors coexisting with weak financing visibility, donor fragmentation and activity-based budgeting [9; 13; 15; 22; 28; 29]. The third objective yielded three transferable design principles from Chile, Korea and the United States: house evidence where budgets are prepared; anchor the performance–budget link in statute with independent quality verification; and legislate protected evidence infrastructure with named ownership [5; 16; 30; 35; 40]. The fourth objective is answered by THETA, which operationalises these principles through five pillars and six mechanisms [34; 38].

Theorising the financing gap

The findings extend performance-budgeting theory by pricing the public good it assumes: credible performance information [25]. They also extend the political economy of evaluation from the use of evidence to the financing of evidence, identifying budget classification and allocation as the sites where accountability is silently won or lost [20; 21; 24]. The four-layer accountability model (financial, performance, evidence, learning) further specifies why activity-based financing produces compliance without learning [26; 33].

Engaging alternative explanations and counter-evidence

Three rival positions warrant engagement. First, the 'simply increase budgets' critique ignores constrained

fiscal space; THETA answers by sequencing visibility first, so protection debates proceed on audited evidence rather than advocacy [34]. Second, the 'performance-based financing will fix MEL' position risks perverse incentives; program-for-results experience shows verification independence is the binding condition, which is why THETA protects MEL financing while permitting only selective, independently verified results-linkage for programmes [38]. Third, sceptics may note that tagging imposes administrative burden; climate budget-tagging practice demonstrates that phased, category-limited tagging is administratively viable and progressively automatable [34]. Positive counter-cases; Uganda's GEF, Rwanda's imihigo financing and The Gambia's pooled programme; do not refute the thesis but confirm it: where central financing, local ownership and political sponsorship exist, evaluation flourishes; where they lapse, it stagnates [10; 15; 19; 23; 28].

Strengths and limitations

The study's strength lies in its ten-jurisdiction comparative scope, transparent protocol and triangulation across policy, budget and scholarly sources [8; 41]. Limitations include reliance on secondary sources; screening counts that should be confirmed against author records; unquantified national MEL expenditure magnitudes pending tagging baselines; and the propositional status of P1–P4 and THETA's mechanisms, which require piloting and empirical validation. Future research should quantify tagged MEL expenditure, evaluate early adopters and test citizen evidence windows' effect on allocative decisions.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Each proposition below is derived from a specific finding and theoretical anchor rather than from generic good practice, as consolidated in Table 10.

Table 10: Grounding matrix linking policy propositions to findings and theoretical anchors

Proposition	Grounding finding	Theoretical anchor
1. Classify MEL as results infrastructure	MEL invisible in budget classification (F1)	Performance-budgeting public-goods logic [25]
2. Retain PBB, add explicit MEL financing	Institutional anchors without financing envelopes (F1, F5)	Institutional anchoring evidence [15; 29]
3. Costed MEL component in every programme	Competition with implementation (F1, F2)	Political economy of evaluation [20; 21]
4. National Evaluation Fund	Evaluation gap except where central funds exist (F2)	Centralised strategic financing evidence [15; 28]
5. MEL expenditure tag	Aggregation failure; tagging renders spending auditable (F1)	Expenditure-tracking/budget-tagging literature [34]
6. Finance citizen-generated evidence	Citizen evidence excluded from upward-accountable systems (F3)	MAE and Ubuntu ethics [2; 18; 32]
7. Protect MEL financing from performance incentives	Perverse-incentive risk in results-linked financing (F4)	Verification-independence condition [38]

1. MEL should be classified in public financial management as results infrastructure, not administrative overhead.

2. PBB should remain the primary budgeting architecture, complemented by explicit MEL financing mechanisms.

3. Every major government programme should carry a visible, costed MEL financing component.

4. Strategic evaluations should be financed through a centrally coordinated National Evaluation Fund modelled on Uganda's GEF [15].

5. Treasuries should introduce a MEL expenditure classification or tag to establish national visibility, drawing on budget-tagging practice [34].

6. Citizen-generated evidence should be recognised and financed as part of the national results system [12].

7. MEL financing must be protected from performance-based incentives that could corrupt evidence, while selective results-linked financing may apply to programmes under independent verification [38].

Together these shift the policy question from "does government have a MEL system?" to "does government have the financial architecture to make its MEL system credible, sustainable and useful?"

CONCLUSION

This paper set out to define and interconnect the concepts of MEL financing, results architecture, Afrocentricity and sustainable MEL, and to build from them a financing architecture for African public sectors. Its principal contribution is threefold. Conceptually, it offers a defined, testable framework in which financing performs four functions: visibility, protection, integration and accountability, that sustain the results architecture, with Afrocentricity as the accountability condition and sustainable MEL as the emergent outcome, expressed through four falsifiable propositions (P1–P4). Empirically, it demonstrates across seven African systems that institutional anchors coexist with financing invisibility, evaluation gaps, donor fragmentation and activity-based budgeting, with systematic contextual variation by legal tradition, fiscal space and political settlement, and extracts three durable design principles from Chile, the Republic of Korea and the United States. Normatively, it translates these into the THETA Framework: five pillars and six mechanisms sequenced across five phases, while explicitly labelling its normative status.

Limitations are acknowledged: secondary documentary evidence, unquantified expenditure magnitudes pending tagging baselines, and propositions requiring empirical validation. For policymakers, the implications are specific: legislate MEL budget tagging and annual expenditure statements; ring-fence programme MEL allocations; and establish a National Evaluation Fund with independent steering. For public-sector institutions, the implications are to adopt costed MEL financing schedules, performance compacts reported to parliament, and financed citizen evidence windows with published management responses. For future research, the agenda is to quantify tagged MEL expenditure, test propositions P1–P4 in early-adopter states, evaluate National Evaluation Funds against the Uganda and Rwanda models, and measure whether citizen evidence windows alter allocative decisions. Financing the results architecture is how African public sectors move from results-based budgets to genuinely results-financed states.

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DECLARATION OF POLITICAL NEUTRALITY AND RESEARCH PURPOSE

The authors declare that this research is conducted in a strictly politically neutral and non-partisan capacity, with no affiliation to or endorsement of any government, political party or ideology. The study is undertaken solely for educational, scholarly and policy-informative purposes, to contribute evidence-based insights for policy reform, strategic institutional review and the strengthening of effective public institutions across Africa.

Competing interests

The authors declare no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author contributions

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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