

MONITORING AND EVALUATION CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN TANZANIA

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Abstract

This paper examines key challenges of monitoring and evaluation in development projects in Tanzania. Descriptive analysis is employed to exploration of primary data collected from 57 specialists and practitioners with considerable experience in project and programme management in Tanzania. A structured questionnaire was administered to collect study data online in February 2018. Accordingly, study results show that majority (80%) report lack of personel with requisite knowledge, skills and experience in monitoring and evaluation is the top challenge. Further, other key challenges include budget constraints to undertake monitoring and evaluation activities; challenges related to reliability of M&E data and absence of frameworks such as policies, startegies, and manuals providing strategic guidance of M&E operations.

Keywords:

Monitoring;
Evaluation;
Challenges;
Projects.

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1. Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has garnered sizable attention in development projects and programmes for the last two decades. Notably, at global level, there is unfolding series of developments addressing monitoring and evaluation in the light of development aid effectiveness including the Paris Declaration in 2005, the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation in 2011. These aspects of monitoring and evaluation underscore performance of global initiatives and commitments such as Millennium Development Goals “MDGs” and Sustainable Development Goals “SDGs”. For example, to strengthen and professionalise the evaluation function in the UN system, the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) in 2005 adopted a comprehensive set of norms and standards for evaluation in the UN, which seek to facilitate system-wide cooperation in evaluation. The norms are intended to ensure that all UN evaluation units follow agreed basic principles. The evaluation norms for the UN system includes (i) Impartiality- absence of bias in due process, methodological rigour, consideration and presentation of achievements and challenges; (ii) Independence pertains both to the location of the evaluation function independent from management, and to the independence of the evaluators; (iii) Evaluability- improving the ability to evaluate by building an evaluation plan during the planning stages; (iv) Quality- Employ quality-oriented design, planning and implementation processes; evaluation reports must present in a complete and balanced way the evidence, findings, conclusions and recommendations; (v) Competencies -required evaluation skills must be present in the organisations; (vi) Transparency and consultation involving major stakeholders at all stages of evaluation improves credibility and quality, facilitates consensus building and ownership of findings, conclusions and recommendations; (vii) Ethics - evaluators must have personal and professional integrity, respect the rights of individuals and institutions to provide information in confidence; (viii) Follow-up - systematic implementation of evaluation recommendations once these have been agreed to by the management and/or governing bodies; (ix) Contribution to knowledge building- Evaluation findings and lessons should be available to target audiences in a user-friendly format (UNEG, 2005).

According to Ogbiti (2016) the importance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has been increasingly realised in development cooperation in recent years. As such, there are national,

sub-regional, regional, continental and global organizations focusing on monitoring and evaluation. This trend has coincided with the recognition that much of aid has been ineffective. In many cases, development projects have done what they were set out to do, but with little or no impact on the bigger picture. This situation could be seen as a parallel to the old joke about the operation having been successful but the patient dying: the project was a success but no improvement in the country's development situation could be detected. Partly, this case may be a result of the fact that projects as isolated interventions have not been significant enough. Another part of the reason may be that they have not been sufficiently tied to a country's strategies and policies. In both cases, sustainability of results has been lacking. These unfortunate realisations have put the development partners to demonstrate that the cooperation does indeed make a difference. Consequently, there has been a marked shift in M&E from monitoring inputs and outputs of individual interventions, to assessing the results and impacts of projects and programmes, and their contributions to larger outcomes (ASARECA, 2010; IFAD, 2002; UNDP, 2002; IFRC, 2011; WB 2010).

Many governments of developing countries including Tanzania are challenged to respond to the urgency of citizens needs and to be more accountable to them. As such, public put governments under sort of pressure to show that they are providing good value for money and results. Few decades ago many governments in developing world, on top of development aid, have been allocating significant budgetary resources and efforts to accelerate development, reduce poverty, ensure equality and improve social living standards and quality of life of the people. With fast tracking of public investment programmes, a number of countries have been able to maintain its average annual economic growth rate. However, these countries experience challenges in translating economic growth momentum into poverty reduction rendering into situation of microeconomic and macroeconomic mismatch. Therefore, this situation calls for a need to strengthen the planning, monitoring and evaluation systems of governments to focus on delivering of outcomes and impacts beyond the traditional output focus.

Managing for Development Results (MfDR) concept has been adopted in many developing countries. The MfDR concept strongly emphasizes that shared vision, clear goals and measurement of results would lead to a better future. MfDR is a change management process that

emphasizes a shift in focus from inputs, activities and outputs to outcomes and impacts. There is a growing international consensus that Managing for Development Results is an essential aspect of good governance to improve development efficiency and effectiveness, transparency, accountability and informed decision-making. In the recent past, Globally monitoring and evaluation expanded and diversified in many contexts with many uses such as decision-making, organizational learning, knowledge base, program improvement, policy development, impact/outcome assessment, improved service delivery, accountability, performance audit, empowerment and even transformation. A monitoring and evaluation system with such multiple stakeholder tends to be complicated and challenging. However, a good Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system should go beyond institutional boundaries to cover national, sectoral, program and project level to ensure results orientation. The MfDR process typically involves several phases such as articulating and agreeing on objectives; selecting Key Performance indicators (KPIs); setting targets; monitoring performance and analyzing and reporting on results against targets and facilitating management to take timely corrective actions. At the planning stage the results oriented country owned National Development Plan and Sectoral Plans ought to be aligned with Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and the use of Performance Budget instead of line item budget has been increasingly practiced.

Virtually, all projects in development sector are carved into results based management currently. Results chain is typically built on specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound “SMART” indicators of outputs, outcomes, and impact well-articulated into intervention logic “logical framework and theory of change”. This development therefore calls for a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system capable of generating rigorous data and information needed to report on progress against baseline.

As such M&E is not immune to challenges given complexities underlying environment of which most of the development projects and programmes operate (Acevedo, Rivera, Lima, and Hwang, 2010). M&E plays overarching role in managing projects and programmes whereby in most cases high expectations is overstressing M&E domain. Therefore this paper aims to contribute to knowledge of challenges of operational monitoring and evaluation drawing on empirical challenges in development projects and programmes in Tanzania.

2. Research Method

This paper presents cross-sectional data collected through structured online questionnaire involving 57 experienced specialists and professionals in projects and programmes domain. The questionnaire was self-administered from 1st to 9th February 2018. The researcher took a conservative approach by including filter questions to screen respondents who had worked for projects and programmes in Tanzania and faced a minimum of five challenges related to monitoring and evaluation. Respondents include project specialists in government projects, non-government projects, donor funded projects, non donor funded projects, public projects, community projects, private projects, livelihood projects, civil works projects etc. Further, the respondents include members of Tanzania Evaluation Association (TanEA) being an organisation for monitoring and evaluation professionals and practitioners in Tanzania. Respondents were selected randomly from researcher's database of 300 project specialists based on practical experience in projects and programmes in Tanzania irrespective of nationalities, gender and age since these criteria had trivial value addition to the research. Mixed methods approach in monitoring and evaluation is crucial in generating reliable data and information (Adato, 2011; Bamberger, Rao, and Woolcock, 2010; Dereje, 2015).

Given that the researcher had professional and work related connections to majority of the respondents in development projects; therefore researcher's name was withheld from communications in order to lessen possible influence and bias in responses which is a common phenomenon in most of online surveys. In addition, the researcher used blind-questionnaire which did not disclose respondent's identities thus avoiding possible collaborations and team work by respondents. To maximize response rate and completeness, the questionnaire had limited questions (five) with a strict focus on challenges in monitoring and evaluation. The key questions in the questionnaire were: (i) what type of projects or/ and programmes that the respondent had worked for? ; (ii) what are the aspects of monitoring and evaluation that are missing in the respondent's current or/and previous projects and programmes?; (iii) what are monitoring and evaluation challenges in the respondent's current or/and previous projects and programmes?; (iv) What are critical monitoring and evaluation challenges in the respondent's current or/and previous projects and programmes?; and (v) what is respondent's job experience, job level, and education?

The questionnaire was limited to monitoring and evaluation challenges faced by respondents within a period of ten years. This was to ensure that responses reflect contemporary challenges in monitoring and evaluation in Tanzania. Therefore, given the methodological approach, the research data and underlying results from analysis is deemed credible and good enough presenting the challenges in monitoring and evaluation in projects and programmes in Tanzania.

3. Results and Analysis

The study on challenges of monitoring and evaluation in projects and programmes in Tanzania reveals striking results. This section therefore presents research results starting with profile of respondents to the study questionnaire. Profile of respondents provides an overview description of those who were the source of information thus playing validation role of the findings. Further the section presents results on salient aspects to do with challenges of monitoring and evaluation.

Respondent's profile: Table 1 presents results on types of projects and programmes which respondents had worked for. Majority (91%) of the respondents had experience working with donor funded projects and programmes in government and non-governmental organisations. This results therefore shows that the respondents had varsity experience in established projects and programmes with key aspects such as administration, finance, procurement, operations and monitoring and evaluation.

Further, Table 2 shows that 77% of the respondents had over five years working experience in projects and programmes meaning that the respondents had enough skills and exposure to projects environment in Tanzania to be able to understand challenges of monitoring and evaluation. Also many respondents had held senior positions and job levels e.g. officer, head, manager, and director in projects and programmes. Therefore by virtue of job levels the respondents had a direct engagement in monitoring and evaluation activities during implementation of their respective projects and programmes. Nearly all respondents (96%) were university graduates reflecting senior job level results held in projects. Given higher education level the respondents are deemed knowledgeable enough to understand challenges of monitoring and evaluation in development projects and programs. Therefore, given strong profile of respondents the study findings are credible and good enough to draw up inferences on challenges

of monitoring and evaluation in development projects and programmes in Tanzania and other developing countries with more or less similar circumstance.

Table 1: Types of projects and programmes of respondents

Respondents projects and programmes experience	Response
Donor funded projects /programmes	91.23%
Non donor funded projects/programmes	7.02%
Government projects/programmes	54.39%
Non government projects/programmes	66.67%

Table 2: Respondents experience, education and job level

Description	Response
Respondents with less than five years experience in projects and programmes	22.81%
Respondents with more than five years experience in projects and programmes	77.19%
Respondents with experience in M&E related functions and activities	56.14%
Respondents with college/university degree i.e. Bachelor, Masters, PhD	96.49%
Respondents in support staff job level	14.04%
Respondents in senior job level e.g. Officer, Head, Manager, Director	70.18%

Monitoring and evaluation system like any other domain it is made of components, subcomponents, tools and other aspects. A robust M&E system is ought to be backed with key ingredients that support effective and efficient running of any M&E system. Typical key aspects in monitoring and evaluation system include: Monitoring and evaluation policy, guideline, and manual; dedicated monitoring and evaluation office or unit or department; dedicated monitoring and evaluation staff and personnel; monitoring and evaluation plan; project work plan or implementation; monitoring and evaluation budget; project logical framework (logframe); project theory of change; impact studies (baseline, midline, endline); project reviews e.g. annual

review, mid-term review, end-term review; progress and operational reporting; and results reporting.

Accordingly, the study results show that policies, strategies, guidelines and manuals are the most monitoring and evaluation related tools missing in many projects and programmes. Majority of the respondents (77%) report that these tools were missing in their projects and programmes. Therefore given overarching role of policies, strategies, guidelines in provision of strategic direction while conducting monitoring and evaluation activities it is hereby recommended for projects and programmes to put in place these tools in order to foster effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation performance. Of the other key M&E aspects reported as missing in projects and programmes they include dedicated M&E office (57%); dedicated M&E staff (47%); monitoring and evaluation plan (56%); monitoring and evaluation budget (66%); impact studies (54%); and M&E reporting (44%).

Surprising results on missing aspects of monitoring and evaluation in projects and programs suggest that monitoring and evaluation is practically contributing little to the management and coordination of projects and programmes. Given steering and controlling role of monitoring and evaluation therefore this situation poses the risk of underperformance by projects and programmes attributable to the missing key aspects expected to catalyze effective and efficient monitoring and evaluation. It is hereby recommended that development sector needs to bolster monitoring and evaluation in development projects and programmes for best results achieving goals and impact of interventions.

Table 3: An outline of M&E aspects missing in projects

Missing M&E aspects in respondents projects and programmes	Response
M&E policy / guideline / manual	77.19%
Dedicated M&E Unit/Department	57.89%
Dedicated M&E Staff/Personnel	47.37%
M&E Plan	56.14%
Project Work/implementation Plan & Budget	21.05%

M&E budget	66.67%
Project Logical Framework (Logframe)	15.79%
Project Theory of Change	52.63%
Impact Studies (Baseline, Midline, Endline)	54.39%
Project Reviews e.g. Annual Review, Mid-Term Review, End-term review	35.09%
Progress/operational reporting	24.56%
Results reporting	43.86%

In addition study results reveals important bottlenecks crippling monitoring and evaluation in many development projects and programmes. Outlining crucial constraints in monitoring and evaluation in projects and programmes the study respondents report key challenges of monitoring and evaluation in varying degrees. At 80%, staffing issues related to lack of personnel, less skills, poor knowledge and experience, lack of motivation is the top challenge in monitoring and evaluation pointed. However, other key challenges include absence or poor monitoring and evaluation policies, guidelines, and operating manuals. Also monitoring and evaluation data is another challenge highlighted by respondents. As such most of M&E data is not adequate, not accurate, not timely, data presented in wrong format and not accessible. Financing monitoring and evaluation activities is problem in most development projects and programmes meaning that monitoring and evaluation suffers financial constraint as in some cases there is no budget allocation for M&E or small budget allocation or there is delayed budget disbursement to fund M&E activities. Poor tools including data collection tools; poor M&E plan, poor database systems generally they affect monitoring and evaluation in projects and programmes.

The study results also shows that monitoring and evaluation role is not considered important in project management rather it is viewed as ad-hoc or/and ad-on activity of auditing and policing manner. The study results show that monitoring and evaluation suffers from multiplicity reporting and analysis on top of myriad reporting templates and formats. There is hassle and pressures around monitoring and evaluation domain attributable to extensive and intensive duties and tasks in performing monitoring and evaluation role such as massive M&E data gathering, analysis, verification and management. Results shows that monitoring and evaluation

is moulded in complex designs and approaches and logic such as logical framework and theory of change. Other challenges underscored by the study include lack of baseline data; double counting error; lack of target data; attribution challenge; weak impact studies; lack of feedback, lack of dissemination of results through workshops and meetings. M&E seems to exclude participation of key partners such as beneficiaries and wide range of key stakeholders from public and private sectors.

Table 4: Monitoring and Evaluation challenges

Monitoring and Evaluation challenges	Response
Lack or poor M&E policy, guideline, manual	66.67%
No enough M&E staff; M&E staff have less skills; M&E staff lack motivation	80.70%
M&E data not adequate, data not accurate, data not on time/delays, data in wrong format, data not accessible	56.14%
No M&E budget; not enough budget; delayed funding	68.42%
Poor data collection tools, poor M&E plan, poor database systems	63.16%
M&E role is considered not important; M&E viewed as ad-hock activity, auditing and policing	57.89%
Multiple reporting and analysis; multiple templates and formats; difficulties managing massive M&E data; extensive M&E missions; large geographical coverage, miscommunication and infrastructure constraints; complex M&E approaches; too much work and pressure	54.39%
M&E missing in the project design; complex project logic (project indicators not SMART; poor logframe or theory of change)	42.11%
Lack of baseline data; double counting error; lack of target data; attribution challenge; weak impact studies	50.88%
No feedback, no dissemination of results, inadequate workshops and meetings of beneficiaries and other key stakeholders from public and private sectors	56.14%

The study presents monitoring and evaluation challenges into six categories by grouping related challenges. These categories are: Resources category- category consists of challenges related to human resources, financial resources and some tools that are needed to perform monitoring and evaluation roles. Technical category- involves monitoring and challenges related to knowledge, skills, and technology required to undertake monitoring and evaluation functions. Formulation and design category- comprises challenges emanating from design and formulation of projects and programmes. Coordination and management category - comprises of monitoring and challenges caused by gaps in project coordination and management aspects. Frameworks category - refers to monitoring and challenges caused by factors related to policies, strategies, regulations, institutions. Infrastructure category - refers to the challenges related to various utilities such as information and communication systems including mobility of monitoring and evaluation staff conducting verification and validation activities.

Of the challenges of monitoring and evaluation as presented in table 5: resources, technical, and design are top categories of challenges reported critical in monitoring and evaluation. This means that monitoring and evaluation is constrained by resources in terms of personnel, budget and tools. Also there is knowledge and skills gaps in personnel undertaking monitoring and evaluation functions in development projects and programmes. Formulation and design gaps in development projects and programmes contributes to challenges underlying monitoring and evaluation activities. However, frameworks and infrastructures seem to be least challenges affecting monitoring and evaluation.

Table 5: M&E challenges ranking

Categories of M&E challenges	Scoring						Rank
	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Resources (human, financial, tools) related challenges	35.09%	12.28%	21.05%	8.77%	8.77%	14.04%	1
Technical (knowledge, skills, technology) related	19.30%	35.09%	17.54%	8.77%	10.53%	8.77%	2

challenges							
Formulation/ design related challenges	10.53%	15.79%	21.05%	22.81%	17.54%	12.28%	3
Coordination and management related challenges	8.77%	7.02%	17.54%	28.07%	24.56%	14.04%	4
Frameworks (policies, strategies, manual) related challenges	21.05%	19.30%	8.77%	15.79%	29.82%	5.26%	5
Infrastructure related challenges	5.26%	10.53%	14.04%	15.79%	8.77%	45.61%	6

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has underscored challenges in monitoring and evaluation in development projects and programmes in Tanzania. The results is useful to a range of stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation domain including project design and formulation; project coordination and management; monitoring and evaluation practitioners; Researchers and academicians in monitoring and evaluation. Addressing challenges underscored in this study is crucial for effective and efficient functioning of monitoring and evaluation systems. An effective M&E system ought to fulfil following overarching role of enhancing, steering and controlling project implementation; accountability, value for money (VfM) and contributing to learning in terms of knowledge management documenting best practices, lessons learned, innovations, success stories, synergies and vertical and horizontal linkages “cross-fertilization”.

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Abbreviations

ASARECA	The Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
GAP	Good Agronomic Practices
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
MfDR	Managing for Development Results
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
PHM	Post Harvest Management
SMART	specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound indicators
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
VfM	Value for Money
WB	The World Bank

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