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**Effects of M & E Planning Process on Performance of County Government Funded
Water Projects in Kisii County, Kenya**

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Abstract

Purpose: Project Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a critical component of the project management phase, which if not properly handled, may lead to project failure. Currently, Kenya faces transitional challenges from a centralized state to devolved governance system. This has prefigured both challenges and opportunities. The decentralized form of governance has exerted pressure on especially the performance of government water departments in funded water projects in counties. Despite this need most county governments initiate water projects without putting into consideration the importance of having effective M&E frameworks. One aspect that has not been given much consideration is effective implementation of M&E systems as advised by M & E experts. The aim of the study was to analyze the effect of M & E Planning process on performance of county government funded water projects in Kisii County

Methodology: The study will adopt a descriptive survey design. The study target population includes 201 county water staff managing 90 water projects across the county. The census method was used to research the 201 staff involved in water projects. The primary data was collected by use of questionnaires and Key Informant interviews. Quantitative data was analyzed by employing descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, and the results were presented by tables and figures. Whereas, qualitative data was done through narrative analysis and presented in form of verbatim and narrations.

Findings: M&E planning enables the construction of a logical framework that acts as a roadmap guiding the project's progress and allowing the stakeholders to understand the relationships between different project elements. The positive effect of M&E planning on project implementation affirms the pivotal role of this planning process in guiding and optimizing the execution of water-funded projects in Kisii County.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: This study was anchored in the program theory. Project managers and policymakers should emphasize the importance of these planning components, recognizing them as integral drivers of project success. Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives focusing on these planning aspects can further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of M&E planning practices.

Keywords: *Project Monitoring and Evaluation, Planning Process, Performance, County Government Funded Water Projects*

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) has become a necessity for governments, development and humanitarian organizations, since they enhance the quality of project management. M&E has been defined by (International Labour organization (ILO)) to mean the functions that allow policymaking institutions, Project/programme and portfolio managers to make an assessment on how interventions evolve over a period of time (monitoring); the effectiveness of an implemented project or programme and whether there exists gaps between the planned and achieved results (evaluation); and whether the changes in well-being are due to the programme and to the programme alone (impact evaluation).

In this study, the researcher adopts the (UNDP, 2009) definition of monitoring which states that it is a continuous process by which project stakeholders obtain regular feedback on project progress towards achieving project goals and objectives. Evaluation is defined by (UNDP, 2009) as a rigorous and independent assessment of ongoing or completed projects with the aim of determining the extent to which stated objectives have been achieved and their contributing to decision making. Results Based Monitoring and Evaluation according to (IFRC(International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, 2011) enables projects to track project implementation progress,helps demonstrate that financial, technological and human resources are being used effectively and efficiently towards achieving project objectives.

In China, evaluation has a long history, dating back four thousand years where it was used to assess public programs. Countries such as Brazil have stressed a whole-of-government approach to the setting of program objectives and the creation of a system of performance indicators. Others such as Colombia have combined this with an agenda of rigorous impact evaluations. The government of Lebanon put in place a Monitoring and evaluation system in the public administration sphere that capacity builds on an Internal M&E system conducted by an external institution referred to as the Central Inspection Board (Government of Lebanon, 2019). The Internal M&E system is based on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and sub KPIs.

It is well noted that the entry of M&E into most African countries has been largely through donor programs and accompanied by ingress of theories and methodologies that are largely northern in origin (Magambo & Wilson & Oyangi et al. 2021). In Ghana, Damoah (2015) has categorized project failures into three categories with the third category concentrating on public or government sector projects. He noted that the high rate of failure and lack of common benefits of public projects was due to exaggerated costs. He suggested that post-delivery monitoring be done in tandem with evaluation of project completion time and project cost.

In South Africa for instance, the presidency put in place the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (GWM&EPF) with the aim of developing policy documents that in turn gave direction, vision and strategies for M&E (Hlatshwayo & Govender, 2015). (Caitlin & Linda, 2018) reveal that in Johannesburg-South Africa a Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results-AA was established with the aim of establishing the status of M&E practices and implementation in the Southern African country. The purpose was to understand the various factors that shape M&E practices and to provide recommendations towards addressing some of the challenges in the city.

Just like the rest of the world, Projects implemented in the African continent are often behind schedule and above budget, but their failure rate is over 50% (Ika & Jan, 2014). Khan (2013) noted that projects frequently fail to achieve the desired objectives as a result of ineffective

M&E designs. In Sudan for instance, Sabbil & Haroun (2015) posits that in spite of the broader cognizance that projects are geared towards promotion of way of life and improvement of standards of living, there is a continued trend of dismal performance of projects undertaken by county Governments. He noted that the success or failure of a project is dependent on how sustainable M&E frameworks are.

The government of Kenya according to (National Council for Law Reports, 2010) is mandated by the Kenyan Constitution in schedule four to ensure that M&E mechanisms are an integral part of the development and execution of government policies, projects and programmes so as to ensure there is transparency and accountability. As a result, the government of Kenya in the year 2004 as reported by (Senelwa, 2021) developed a government-wide M&E reporting system known as the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES) and County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (CIMES) framework at national and county government levels respectively. Subsequently the M&E directorate was established (Senelwa, 2021) and its mandate was to track implementation of the Indicators of the Medium –Term plans of the Kenyan Vision 2030.

There seems to be consensus across the project management field of study in the statement that monitoring and evaluation is a major contributor to successful project implementation. To crown it all (PMBOK® Guide, 2021), continually stresses the importance of monitoring and evaluation in achieving project implementation success. Hwang and Lim (2013) studied projects performance in relation to its M&E practices, fund management, activity scheduling and quality performance; however, they did not look into its effectiveness.

Ballard (2016) notes that monitoring and evaluation helps program implementers make informed decisions regarding program operations, service delivery and program effectiveness and using objective evidence. Similarly, the probability of implementing a project successfully can be enhanced by constantly monitoring the progress of the project (Papke-Shields, Beise,, & Quan, 2010).

Monitoring and Evaluation Functions

Performance of water projects implemented either by county or national governments, NGOs, SBOs etc is highly influenced by the approaches used during all stages of the project life cycle. Some of the critical factors that are pre-requisites for success in performance of water projects include Monitoring and Evaluation planning , Training of Monitoring and Evaluation participants, Stakeholder analysis and involvement and lastly adequate Resource allocation to Monitoring and Evaluation activities.

In order to meet project goals and objectives there is need to put benchmarks in place and have them routinely measured, monitored and evaluated throughout the project cycle as this highly contributes to project success. Failure to monitor projects directly influences and contributes to their failure. (WellAware, 2023) Reports that only about less than 5% of completed projects are monitored after they are handed over to the beneficiaries with 95% being abandoned after completion. This therefore justifies the need for monitoring of water projects throughout the cycle and after completion. This is in tandem with a Performance Report of Kenya’s Water Services Sector – 2020/21 by the Water Services Regulatory Board(WASREB) which highlighted the need for performance monitoring and reporting of utilities to aid in ensuring that they are on track to achieve their set goals.

(WellAware, 2023) in its report on the challenges and successes of implementing clean water projects in East Africa opined that for Water, Sanitation and Health (WASH) projects to be

feasible, there is need to have adequate finances and human resources and also Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks be put in place. A study carried out in Enugu state Nigeria by (Chukwuma, 2016) concluded that participation by host communities in the rural water supply projects was crucial for the success of the projects. (WellAware, 2023)

Un-Water Global Analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking water reported that only 75% of countries are on track to achieve their national drinking water targets as agreed by all UN member states under SDG number 6. Consequently more than 75% of the counties face challenges of insufficient financial resources to implement their water projects (GLAAS, 2022) thus affecting performance of the water projects.

Statement of the Problem

Project M & E is a critical component of the project management phase, that if not properly handled, may lead to project failure. Globally, progressive projects pivot their success on routine and continuous process of data gathering to measure extends of performance and achievement against set goals. Currently, Kenya faces transitional challenges from a centralized state to devolved governance system. This has prefigured both challenges and opportunities. The decentralized form of governance has exerted pressure on especially the performance of government water departments. Therefore, this calls for effective monitoring and evaluation systems. Though M & E practices implementation have substantial cost, time as well as human resource implications, they are significant for successful projects and should not be overlooked at the beginning of the process (Khan, 2013). Counties and government ministries have an established M&E system of reporting that helps to keep projects on track and assists in reporting within the departments and agencies. However, monitoring and evaluation reports generated are not used to guide policy makers and other relevant stakeholders (Senelwa, 2021). Similarly, National and county Governments according to (Senelwa, 2021) do not have adequate capacity to monitor and evaluate their own projects due to inadequate human and financial resources. The government of Tanzania has been experiencing challenges in implementation of their water projects. Despite most of the projects being implemented at community level failing to meet expectations, Participatory M&E is still critical at the infancy stages of projects (Mgoba & Kabote, 2020).

There are several empirical studies that have been undertaken focusing on implementation of water funded projects. However, few of them focus on water projects that are being implemented by the County Governments with the bulk of research focusing on water projects implemented by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and National Government agencies mostly through Constituency Development funds among other funds. For instance a study conducted by (Cleophas et al, 2017) sought to find out the Effect of Contractor Capacity and Monitoring and Evaluation on Completion of Water Projects among Water Services Boards in Kenya. Another study conducted in Marsabit County on Monitoring and Evaluation practices on performance of water projects focused on 14 projects being implemented by the national government within the county (Roba & Odollo, 2022). Another study conducted in Machakos County focused on Project Monitoring and Evaluation Practices on Performance of Water and Sanitation Projects (WASH) funded by the National Government (Waweru & Dr Kimathi, 2022).

None of these studies have specifically touched on the influence of M&E on water projects funded by the now devolved system of county Governments and most specifically in Kisii County, hence the need for the researcher to conduct this study to help bridge the knowledge

gap. In view of the aforementioned, this study therefore seeks to assess the M & E function on implementation of county government funded water projects in Kisii County. The study will particularly focus on planning, stakeholder involvement, M & E Training and resource allocation for M & E Implementation.

The Program Theory

Bickman (2011) developed the Program theory that contains a group of statements that describe a certain program. According to Sedani & Sechrest (2013) the program theory gives details on why, how, and under what conditions the program effects occur, predict the outcomes of the program, and specify the requirements necessary to bring about the desired program effects. Over the years, the program theory has been used to guide evaluation; it highlights the potential of the program to address challenges by addressing the needs in the need assessment (Seith & Philippines, 2012). Further it offers techniques to establish areas of impact in evaluation.

The Program Theory steer an evaluation through the identification of key elements that affects projects and articulates ways in which the identified elements will associate with each other (Donaldson & Lipsey, 2014). Data collection plans are then made within the framework in order to measure the extent and nature of each element's occurrence. Once collected, the data are analyzed within the framework. First, data that have been collected by different methods or from different sources on the same program element are triangulated (Donaldson & Lipsey, 2014).

Another early proponent theory, Weiss (1972) recommended using path diagrams to model the sequences of steps between a programs' intervention and the desired outcomes. This kind of casual model helps the evaluator identify the variable to include in the evaluation, discover where in the chain of events the sequence breaks down, and stay attuned to changes in program implementation that may affect the pattern depicted in the model.

Program theory is thus defined in evaluation practice today as the construction of a plausible and sensible model of how a program is supposed to work (Pilcher, 2012) or a set of propositions regarding what goes on in the black box during the transformation on input to output, that is, how a bad situation is transformed into a better one through treatment inputs. It is also looked at as the process through which program components are presumed to affect outcomes. Rossi (2004) cited by Pilcher (2012) describes program theory as consisting of the organizational plan which deals with how to garner, configure, and deploy resources, and how to organize program activities so that the intended service system is developed and maintained. The theory also deals with the service utilization plan which looks at how the intended target population receives the intended amount of the intended intervention through interaction with the programs service delivery system. Finally, it looks at how the intended intervention for the specified target population brings about the desired social benefits (impacts) Rogers, as cited by Patton (2008) identifies advantages of the theory-based framework to monitoring and evaluation to include being able to attribute projects outcomes to specific projects or activities and identify unanticipated and undesired program or project consequences. Therefore, theory-based evaluations enable the evaluator to tell why and how the program is working.

Implementation of Water Funded projects

Ogolla, & Noronge, (2016) conducted a study on determinants of effective monitoring and evaluation of government funded water projects in Kenya: A Case of Nairobi County. To establish the influence of managerial skills on effective monitoring and evaluation of government funded water projects in Kenya, was one of the objectives to be investigated in

this study; and Monitoring and evaluation planning was one of the elements in managerial skills. The findings from the study revealed that the managerial skills such as leadership, controlling and organizing skills influenced effective monitoring and evaluation of government funded water projects in the county. The findings of this study failed to bring out the exact effect of monitoring and evaluation planning process on implementation of county government funded water projects.

Nyamongo (2017) in his study on factors influencing monitoring and evaluation implementation on water projects in Kenya; a case of non-governmental organization water projects in Kajiado County. Though some of the literature in this study highlighted how M&E planning has influenced the implementation of water projects the findings of the study this study did not highlight effect of monitoring and evaluation planning process on implementation of water projects.

According to Interact (2017) Project implementation consists of carrying out the activities with the aim of delivering the outputs and monitoring progress compared to the work plan. Monitoring can be defined as control of the project implementation in order to keep the project on track and achieve the end results of the project. To implement a project means to carry out activities proposed in the application form with the aim to achieve project objectives and deliver results and outputs. Its success depends on many internal and external factors. Some of the most important ones are a very well-organized project team and effective monitoring of project progress and related expenditures. According to Njama,(2015) overall management has to be taken over by the lead partner and project manager, who is often employed or engaged by the lead partner.

The project management has to have an efficient management system and always has to be flexible to current needs and changed situations, as the project is rarely implemented exactly according to the initial plan. Nevertheless, the partnership should aim to deliver quality results and outputs. Quality means meeting expectations described in the application and those agreed within the partnership.

Monitoring and evaluation are thinly distinct elements within the project management cycle but are highly dependent and mutually of significant importance to project sustainability (UNDP, 2016). Monitoring is the process through which the essential aspects of project implementation such as reporting, usage of funds, record keeping and review of the project outcomes are routinely tracked with an aim of ensuring the project is being implemented as per the plan (Mackay, (2017). Monitoring is undertaken on a continuous base to act as an internal driver of efficiency within the organization's project implementation processes and its main agenda is to develop a control mechanism for projects (Crawford and Bryce, 2013). Evaluation is a definite and systematic approach geared towards reviewing an ongoing project to ensure that it meets the goals or objectives.

Evaluation is a definite and systematic approach geared towards reviewing an ongoing project to ensure that it meets the goals or objectives that were fundamental to its undertaking (Uitto, 2014). Monitoring and evaluation should offer comprehensive and relevant data that will support decision making (Jody and Ray, 2016). Project evaluation serves various purposes; first, to inform decisions for project improvement by providing relevant information for decision making concerning setting priorities, guiding resource allocation, facilitating modification and refinement of project structures and activities and signaling need for additional personnel (Mulwa, 2018). Secondly, evaluation provides a process of learning. By

learning from the past, one is able to improve the future. Further, evaluation helps project managers to develop new skills, open up to the capacity of constructive self-criticism, to objectivity and to improve on future planning as a result.

Through evaluations the organization in extension conducts a SWOT analysis since the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges of the projects are taking. Evaluation creates future benchmarks to guide evaluations of other projects. It also helps in creating a knowledge bank for management which is an ideal trend in contemporary world where organizations are leaning towards knowledge management in project management (Calder, 2013). Lastly through evaluations, project managers are able to access how projects fared in terms of meeting the budgetary limits as well as in terms of efficiency (Spaulding, 2014). A monitoring and evaluation system is a component designed to screen, track and make a comparison of the project outcomes against the stated or planned targets (SAMDI, 2017). It is a comprehensive undertaking that offers guidance in the screening and tracking of an ongoing project, recording data and systematically evaluating the data for comparison purposes in line with the project's set goals and objectives (Kerzner, 2013). M & E system is an integral system of reflection.

According to an IFAD (2015) annual report on results and impact, on M & E practices include: human capacity, baseline surveys usage. Moreover, the most frequent criticism of M & E systems in IFAD projects relates to the type of information included in the system. In Pakistan IFAD Country Programme Evaluation, cases were reported of contradictory logical frameworks combined with arbitrary and irrelevant indicators while in Belize, two different logical frameworks were generated which increased confusion and complexity. The Ethiopia IFAD Country Programme Evaluation found that project appraisal documents made limited provision for systematic baseline and subsequent beneficiaries surveys. For example, in one project in Ethiopia, the baseline survey was carried out 2-3 years after projects start-up. In IFAD report it was reported that human capacity contributed much in measuring project progress and evaluating outcome achievement. In a research report of an Australian NGO carried out by Spooner and Dermott (2018), staff alluded that analysis was done by the program managers, who had limited time to carry out analysis of data. Some of the staff said that though they are required to collect and analyze data, they had inadequate skill to carry out the work. Finally, some staff said that there was no communication or feedback system between the M & E staff and the management.

Loo (2002) identified the following areas for improvement in project management practices for developing countries namely: technical areas, improve scope management, improve budget management, implement standard project management practices, integrate project control measure, organizational learning, project reviews and audits, effective resource planning, training for managers and staff, empowering teams and effective planning.

A key capacity of planning for Monitoring and evaluation is to assess costs, staffing, and distinctive resources required for Monitoring and evaluation work. It is basic for M & E aces to state something with respect to M & E spending requirement at the initial stages of an intervention so that funds are conveyed especially to M & E and are available to realize key Monitoring and evaluation endeavors (Chaplowe, 2018). Kohli & Chitkara, (2018) contends that anticipating M&E ought to be done at the purpose of undertaking arranging and usage organize, yet a couple of different researchers fight that M&E ought to be done after the achievement of the planning period of a project yet before the design or intervention stages (Nyonjeet al. 2012).

Phiri (2015) additionally analyzed effect of (M & E) on project performance at African Virtual College (AVU). M&E empowers track the level to which extend performance at any given time and offers inspirations to a watched project status. In this investigation M & E was described in terms of the following activities: Monitoring and evaluation planning, M & E staff training, baseline studies and data frameworks while project performance was considered as the level of target accomplishment. The targets of the study included setting up how M&E designs affect performance of project; to evaluate the impact of M & E planning on performance of project; to decide how baseline surveys impact performance of a project; and decide the effect of data systems on performance of a project.

The findings of the examination showed that exercises like M & E planning which are done before project intervention. Appropriate performance indicators are identified and an information accumulation plan is contrived. How information would be examined to indicate project performance is likewise planned under M & E. Along these lines every vital measure to guarantee project performance is improved, are dealt with under M&E planning. Critically, the investigation intensively focused on virtual universities in Kenya but it could be prudent to expand the research by examining the influence of M&E planning in other areas like Non-governmental and County government's projects.

Ndege (2016) investigated influence of monitoring and evaluation tools on performance of women empowerment projects in Chagamwe constituency, Mombasa County. The study was based on five research objective: Examine the extent to which the use of a budget influences the performance of women empowerment projects, establish the extent to which the use of a strategic plan influences the performance of women empowerment project, determine the influence of stakeholder analysis on performance of women empowerment projects, assess the extent to which the use of a logical framework influences performance of women empowerment projects, determine the extent to which the use of an indicator matrix influences the performance of women empowerment projects. The study applied descriptive research design and used disproportionate stratified random sample to select the sample. It was found out that M & E budget is important in realizing the goals and performance of M&E and generally the project in general. The study was very elaborate on looking at monitoring and evaluation budget in relation to CDF funding in Chagamwe, but budget is just one of the many elements of Monitoring and Evaluation planning. In addition, it may be that other women empowerment projects in other parts of the country experience different or similar challenges.

Wausi (2016) completed study on the influence of monitoring and evaluation strategies on internet banking performance with reference to benchmarking, monitoring and evaluation, planning, budgeting and piloting. This study used an exploratory and descriptive survey research design the study found out that competitive benchmarking helped improve firm's products, services or work processes to enhance its competitive strategy and performance. The study found out that monitoring and evaluation planning ought to be a vital element of any planned ICT program and also ought to be taken into account during the planning stage, before a project begins. The study also found out that budgeting assisted in decision-making and facilitated more efficient allocation of resources for project implementation and performance. Among the objectives of the study monitoring and evaluation planning came out clearly on the ICT integration in banking were key components of planning need to be put in place right from the start of project. Whereas the investigations only examined M&E planning in internet banking projects and its performance, it opens an area of research in other sectors of economy and how proper M&E planning can boost projects performance.

Effective project management contribute towards the performance of the company in the long run, attaining competitive advantages; enhancing the status of the company; increasing market share; along with attaining specified revenues as well as profits (Al-Tmeemy, 2016). Performance of projects is quantified and appraised using many performance metrics that could be linked to several aspects to include time, client endorsement and changes, the performance of the firm, cost, health and safety, along with quality (Cheungetal, 2017).

Monitoring and Evaluation practices ensures that the project/program results at the levels of impact, outcome, output, process along with input can be quantified so as to offer a framework for accountability and in assisting in making informed decision at program and policy levels. International Fund for Agricultural Development- IFAD (2018) sees monitoring and evaluation practices as part of design programmes as it ensures that there is logical reporting; the process that interconnects results and demonstration accountability, it quantifies efficiency and effectiveness, guarantees effective resource distribution, stimulates learning that is continuous along with enhancing better decision making (Uitto, 2017). Though monitoring and evaluation practices implementation have substantial cost, time as well as human resource implications, they are very vital for successful projects and should not be overlooked at the beginning of the process (Khan,2016).

It is then important to ensure that the management along with the donor agencies apprehend and are overly focused to these overheads and are committed to implement the recommendations arising from monitoring and evaluation (Dyason, 2019). Those involved in the process understand the importance of evaluation (Chaplowe & Cousins, 2020). It is important that the project implementers recognize the methods and the thinking that is based on monitoring and evaluation techniques used (Ober, 2012). It is equally essential that the implementers of the program accept responsibility for the used processes, are dedicated to them, and feel vested to convince other stakeholders of their support along with their benefits in the long run. Monitoring and evaluation practices is not a practice that can be safely left to consultants from the ‘head office’ (Ober, 2018), as several stakeholders as possible should be involved both in implementing and steering the monitoring and evaluation. The requirement is that there should be notable effort at an initiative’s inception in the course of identifying who the main target groups was during implementation, and understanding the anticipated outcomes that are desired for each group. Besides that, apart from improving quality as well as the likelihood of sustainability, this method creates awareness and also helps in building capacity (Khan, 2017).

Proper M & E planning and information collection about a situation has been collected at the beginning of the project, and then one has baseline data (Hogger et al. 2018). In a baseline survey, values for the identified performance indicators are collected as well. The baseline survey, which aims at collecting baseline data about a situation, is an early element in the monitoring and evaluation plan whose information is used to systematically assess the circumstances in which the project commences (Frankel & Gage, 2017). Focusing on how project performance can be influenced by M &E, particularly by the baseline survey, a number of authors on M&E have given an account about the importance of baseline surveys.

A study conducted by Mackay & World Bank (2017) in Washington, indicated that monitoring and evaluation planning was critical in enhancing better project performance on government projects. The focus of this study was on the government projects that are majorly sponsored by World Bank. The study sought to determine how better performance can be arrived at through monitoring and evaluation of projects. This study employed the use of descriptive statistics

with the findings being that a majority of the respondents indicated that there was lack of monitoring and evaluation practices in the various projects which they formed part of.

On the other hand, a study by Muhammad (2016) on project performance, with the variables, Project Planning, Implementation and Controlling Processes in Malaysia College of Computer Sciences and Information, Aljouf University, noted project management offers an organization with control tools that be advance its capability of planning, implementing, and controlling its project activities. The study was to identify those project performance enhancements through planning, implementation and monitoring processes. Planning, execution, control, and thesis of project performance explored; the findings showed project-planning processes contribute to the project performance (Muhammad, 2016).

A study that was conducted by Singh, Chandurkar and Dutt, (2017) highlighted that monitoring and evaluation was the major driving factor in development projects. The objective of this study was to determine the effect of monitoring and evaluation on development projects. However, the recommendation that was given in this study was that the management should provide full support and should fully engage themselves in the monitoring and evaluation process as this will help them in coming up with sound and well-informed decisions (Chandurkar and Dutt, 2017).

A well-functioning M & E system is a critical part of good project/programme management and accountability. Timely and reliable M&E planning provides information to support project/programme implementation with accurate, evidence-based reporting that informs management and decision-making to guide and improve project/program performance (Muhammad, 2016). It also contributes to organizational learning and knowledge sharing by reflecting upon and sharing experiences and lessons so that we can gain in the full benefit from what we do and how we do it. M & E planning helps in upholding accountability and compliance by demonstrating whether or not our work has been carried out as agreed and in compliance with established standards and with any other donor requirements. It provides opportunities for stakeholder feedback, especially beneficiaries, to provide input into and perceptions of our work, modeling openness to criticism, and willingness to learn from experiences and to adapt to changing needs lastly it promotes and celebrate our work by highlighting our accomplishments and achievements, building morale and contributing to resource mobilization (Singh, Chandurkar and Dutt, 2017).

Research gaps

Evidence from literature point out that in Sub-Saharan Africa substantial M&E achievements on the ground are rare (Mackay, 2017; UNICEF, 2019). Most studies done in Kenya focus on specific projects or specific areas and therefore makes it difficult to generalize to large organizations' projects and this study attempts to fill the gap. The four independent variables had high propensity of influencing implementation of WASH projects in UNICEF in Kenya. It is not clear how the planning influences implementation in Kisii County

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was used because it enables the researcher to generalize the findings to a larger population. The study target population according to (Kisii County Government, 2018) Annual Development plan includes 201 respondents drawn from the Ministry of water both at the county and at the sub-counties spread across the 90 Water Projects. Other key players involved in Monitoring and Evaluation of water projects include Water Resource and Management Authority (WARMA), Monitoring and Evaluation

department under the Economic Planning Section, Gusii Water and Sanitation Company (GWASCO), Lake Victoria South Water Services and Water Resource Users Association. Probability sampling technique was used to select the respondents. Census was used to select all 200 respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, Observation as well as secondary published data. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0. The results were presented by tables and figures.

RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

M&E Planning Function

The study sought the opinion of the respondents on the various aspects of M&E planning function in relation to implementation of county government funded water projects. The respondents were required to rate each statement on M&E planning function in their institution using a 5 point likert scale where a rate of 5 represented, Strongly Agree and 1 represented Strongly Disagree. The first objective of the study was to assess the influence of M&E Planning Function on implementation of county government funded water projects. The findings presented in Table 6 indicate how the respondents responded to the statements. Similarly, the study used percentages, mean, maximum and minimum values and standard deviation to describe the data obtained from the respondents. The mean provided the average response while standard deviation provided the deviation of response from the mean. The higher the standard deviation, the higher the variation of responses across the respondents. A mean of above of 3.5 pointed out that majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement while below a mean of 3.5 and below indicated a disagreement with the statement.

Table 1: M&E Planning Function

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Min	Max	M	SD
Identifies the focal problem and the need for the project	15.3%	18.8%	4.1%	34.7%	27.1%	1	5	3.39	1.444
Identifies Monitoring and Evaluation questions.	3.5%	7.6%	14.1%	47.1%	27.6%	1	5	3.88	1.016
Defines roles and responsibilities in the M & E Exercise.	9.4%	21.8%	3.5%	38.2%	27.1%	1	5	3.52	1.342
Has a specific budget allocated for the M & E activities	34.1%	27.1%	6.5%	17.1%	15.3%	1	5	2.52	1.484
Defines an M & E Logical Framework	17.6%	12.9%	5.9%	22.9%	40.6%	1	5	3.56	1.546
Defines appropriate process, outcome and impact indicators.	45.3%	36.5%	2.4%	9.4%	6.5%	1	5	1.95	1.201
Has a mechanism for project data management and reporting	10.0%	12.9%	3.5%	35.9%	37.6%	1	5	3.78	1.339
Reviews the M&E work plan before using it.	8.2%	11.8%	6.5%	33.5%	40.0%	1	5	3.85	1.290

Where: SA=Strongly Agree, A= Agree, N=Neutral, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree.

From the analysis of Table 1 majority (34.7%) of the respondents agreed to the statement that the county government identifies the focal problem and the need for the project. 27.1% strongly agreed with the statement while 4.1% gave neutral responses. 18.8% disagreed with the

statement while only 15.3% strongly disagreed. This was indicated by the mean score of 3.39 and with a standard deviation of 1.444 to mean that on average most respondents agreed with the statement. On the question that the county government identifies Monitoring and Evaluation questions, 47.1% agreed with the statement while only 27.6% strongly agreed; 14.1% gave a neutral response while 7.6% disagreed with the statement as indicated by the mean score of 3.88 and a standard deviation of 1.016. The respondents were also asked whether the county government defines roles and responsibilities in the M & E exercise, 38.2% and 27.1% of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed with the statement respectively. 3.5% gave a neutral response while only 21.8% disagreed with the statement as indicated by the mean score of 3.52 and a standard deviation of 1.342.

The respondents were also asked whether the county government has allocated a specific budget for the M & E activities and they responded as follows; majority as represented by 17.1% agreed with statement while 15.3% strongly agreed. 6.5% gave neutral responses while only 27.1% disagreed as indicated by the mean score of 2.52 and a standard deviation of 1.484. On the statement that it defines an M & E logical framework, 22.9% agreed, 40.6% strongly agreed, 5.9% were neutral while 12.9% disagreed and 17.6% strongly disagreed as indicated by the mean score of 3.56 and a standard deviation of 1.546.

The researcher also wanted to find out whether the county government defines appropriate process, outcome and impact indicators. 9.4% of respondent agreed with the statement while 6.5% strongly agreed, 2.4% neither agreed nor disagreed while 36.5% and 45.3% respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. There was an overall mean score of 1.95 and a standard deviation of 1.201.

The researcher also asked the respondents whether the county government has a mechanism for project data management and reporting, 35.9% agreed, 37.6% strongly agreed, while 3.5% were neutral and 12.9% disagreed as indicated by the mean score of 3.78 and a standard deviation of 1.339. On the question whether the county government reviews the M&E work plan before use, 33.5% of respondent were in agreement while 40.0% strongly agreed. 6.5% neither agreed nor disagreed, 11.8% disagreed while 8.2% strongly disagreed with the statement. There was an overall mean score of 3.85 and a standard deviation of 1.290.

An overall mean of above of 3.3 pointed out that majority of the respondents agreed on statements representing M&E planning function. This implies that planning function identifies focal problem and the need for the project, Monitoring and Evaluation questions, defines roles and responsibilities in the M & E Exercise and Logical Framework. It also defines appropriate process, outcome and impact indicators, Reviews the M&E work plan before using and mechanism for project data management and reporting. This finding agrees with Hogger et al. (2018) that proper M & E planning and information collection about a situation has been collected at the beginning of the project, and then one has baseline data. Further concurs with Frankel & Gage (2017) that baseline survey, which aims at collecting baseline data about a situation, is an early element in the monitoring and evaluation plan whose information is used to systematically assess the circumstances in which the project commences. Focusing on how project performance can be influenced by M & E, particularly by the baseline survey, a number of authors on M&E have given an account about the importance of baseline surveys. Further agrees with Mackay & World Bank (2017) that monitoring and evaluation planning was critical in enhancing better project performance on government projects. On the other hand, a study by Muhammad (2016) concurs when the findings showed project-planning processes contribute to the project performance (Muhammad, 2016).

These finds are supported by the Program Theory which deals with the service utilization plan which looks at how the intended target population receives the intended amount of the intended intervention through interaction with the programs service delivery system.

Implementation of Water Funded projects

The study sought the opinion of the respondents on the various aspects of implementation of county government water funded projects. The respondents were required to rate each statement that match the application of implementation of county government water funded projects using 5 points likert scale were a rate of 5 represented, Strongly Agree and 1 represented Strongly Disagree as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Implementation of Water Funded Projects

	SD	D	N	A	SA	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
All stakeholders are involved in M&E implementation	8.8%	11.8%	7.6%	34.7%	37.1%	1	5	3.79	1.296
Ex-ante evaluation (Needs assessment) is conducted.	5.3%	5.9%	9.4%	44.7%	34.7%	1	5	3.98	1.077
Ex-post (end evaluation is done)	12.9%	9.4%	7.6%	35.3%	34.7%	1	5	3.69	1.372
Project outcomes and outputs are properly documented.	14.7%	8.2%	12.4%	32.4%	32.4%	1	5	3.59	1.395
The project team meets schedule requirements in terms of milestones, deadlines and assignees.	38.2%	35.9%	11.8%	4.7%	9.4%	1	5	2.11	1.238
The project team reviews client satisfaction through feedback for future projects.	24.7%	42.4%	8.8%	14.1%	10.0%	1	5	2.42	1.277
The project team uses the right M&E tools	14.7%	8.2%	12.4%	32.4%	32.4%	1	5	3.59	1.395

The study sought to find out whether the county government involves all listed stakeholders in M&E activities. Majority (34.7%) of respondents agreed, 37.1% strongly agreed, while 7.6% were neutral and 11.8% disagreed. There was an overall mean score of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 1.296.

The researcher also asked the respondents to give their opinion as to whether the county government conducted ex-ante evaluation (Needs assessment) before M&E activities commence. 44.7% agreed, 34.7% strongly agreed, 9.4% were neutral, while 5.9% disagreed with the statement. There was an overall mean score of 3.98 and a standard deviation of 1.077. On the opinion that Ex-post (end evaluation is done), 35.3% agreed, 34.7% strongly agreed, 7.6% were neutral, while 9.4% disagreed with the statement as indicated by the mean score of 3.69 and a standard deviation of 1.372.

On the statement that project outcomes and outputs are properly documented, 32.4% agreed, 32.4% strongly agreed, while 12.4% were neutral and 8.2% disagreed with the statement as

indicated by the mean score of 3.59 and a standard deviation of 1.395. On the statement that project team meets schedule requirements in terms of milestones and deadlines; 4.7% agreed, 9.4% strongly agreed, while 11.8% were neutral and 35.9% disagreed as indicated by the mean score of 2.11 and a standard deviation of 1.238. On the statement that project team reviews client satisfaction through feedback for future projects, 14.1% agreed, 10% strongly agreed, 8.8% were neutral while 42.4% disagreed and 24.7% strongly disagreed as indicated by the mean score of 2.42 and a standard deviation of 1.277. From the findings 32.4% of respondent agreed, 32.4% strongly agreed, 12.4% neither agreed nor disagreed and 8.2% disagreed on the statement that project team uses the right M&E tools as indicated by the mean score of 3.59 and a standard deviation of 1.395.

An overall mean of above of 3.31 pointed out that majority of the respondents agreed on statements representing implementation of water funded projects. This indicated that the county government made sure that all stakeholders were involved in the M&E implementation, ex-ante evaluation (Needs assessment) was conducted and ex-post (end evaluation was done). Project outcomes and outputs were properly documented. The project team meets schedule requirements in terms of milestones and deadlines, reviews client satisfaction through feedback for future projects as the team uses the right M&E tools. This agrees with Muhammad (2016) that project performance enhancements occur through planning, implementation and monitoring processes. Planning, execution, control, and proposal of project performance explored. The findings showed project-planning processes contribute to the project performance.

Effect of M&E Planning on Implementation of Water Projects

The study sought to analyze the effect of M&E planning process on implementation of county government funded water projects in Kisii County. Prior to analyzing the effects, a descriptive analysis conducted to examine the state of M&E planning for water projects in Kisii county revealed that most of the practices under the M&E planning function were being adhered to. However, budgeting for M&E activities and defining appropriate outcomes and impact indicators appeared to be given minimal interest going by the disagreements among the respondents.

The regression results indicated that M&E planning practices had a positive and significant effect on implementation of county government funded water projects in Kisii County ($\beta=0.218$, $t=3.131$, $p<0.05$). The standardized regression coefficient of 0.218 confirmed that increasing M&E planning initiatives by 1 percentage point would result in a 21.8 percentage point's increase in water project implementation. The descriptive and regression findings under objective 1 confirmed that Kisii County pursues the required M&E planning practices and this is having a positive impact on implementation of county funded water projects. Indeed proper M&E planning has been seen as a precursor to project implementation (Hogger et al., 2018; Frankel & Gage, 2017). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that M&E planning was critical to enhancing the performance of government projects and other projects in general (Mackay & World Bank, 2017; Muhammad, 2016).

The regression results showing that M&E planning had a positive and significant effect on water project implementation confirmed that M&E planning practices such as identification of the focal problem, defining roles and responsibilities, designing a logical M& E framework, putting in place mechanisms for data management and reporting, and renewing the M&E work plan are vital to eventual implementation of water projects. Such a finding showing that M&E

planning in the context of funded water projects affected their implementation positively adds to existing knowledge, albeit from a county government perspectives. For instance, it has been demonstrated that M&E planning that encompasses timeliness, progress tracking, periodic reporting, and mid-term evaluation positively and significantly impacted project outcome effectiveness in the context of mariculture projects in the Kenya Coast (Odhiambo et al., 2020). Similarly, existing research has shown that strategic planning for M&E had a positive and significant effect on the effectiveness of practices used in project management, as well as on implementation of government projects in the context of Machakos County Government (Musau & Kirui, 2018).

From the Kenyan context, M&E project planning has also been positively and significantly associated with project completion for government housing project in Makueni County (Muthini & Nyang'au, 2022); and project implementation in ACTED Kenya, (Ngigi, 2020). The positive and significant effect of M&E project planning has also been documented in NGOs in Rwanda (Hubert & Mulyungi, 2018). Therefore by finding that M&E project planning affected implementation of funded water projects in Kisii County positively and significantly, this research underscored the importance of planning as an M&E function that can be applied in any context.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The study analyzed the M & E Planning process's effects on implementing county government-funded water projects in Kisii County, Kenya. This objective was addressed using descriptive and inferential analysis. Through respondents' opinions and subsequent regression analysis, it was revealed that M&E planning practices exhibited a significant influence on project implementation. The descriptive findings highlighted that most respondents agreed with various aspects of M&E planning, including identifying project needs, formulating M&E questions, and defining roles and responsibilities. The reported mean scores consistently indicated a favorable stance on M&E planning. The regression analysis strengthened these observations by confirming a positive and meaningful relationship between effective M&E planning and successful project implementation. This convergence of findings underscores the pivotal role of meticulous M&E planning in enhancing the execution and outcomes of county government-funded water projects within Kisii County.

Conclusion

Effective planning within the context of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) constitutes a foundational element that profoundly impacts the success of projects, especially county government-funded water projects in Kisii County, as revealed by the study's findings. This planning process encompasses several critical components that synergistically contribute to project success. Meticulous identification and definition of the core issues, challenges, and objectives a water project aims to address gives stakeholders a clear understanding of the project's purpose and scope. M&E planning enables the construction of a logical framework that acts as a roadmap guiding the project's progress and allowing the stakeholders to understand the relationships between different project elements. The positive effect of M&E planning on project implementation affirms the pivotal role of this planning process in guiding and optimizing the execution of water-funded projects in Kisii County.

Implications to Theory

This research discourse echoes program theories, infusing them with enriched insights. It highlights that a series of well-conceived planning practices form the foundation upon which successful project outcomes harmoniously resonate. By fortifying the pivotal role played by comprehensive planning, the study emerges as an architect of refined program theories, offering clear evidence of how well-connected planning steps work together with the details of project work to create a successful project outcome. These findings ultimately illuminate the pathway toward realizing desired project outcomes, further solidifying the symbiotic relationship between meticulous planning and successful project implementation under Monitoring and Evaluation.

The study's implications for program theory highlight the pivotal role of effective planning within Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) as a driver of project success, emphasizing meticulous problem identification, logical framework development, indicator design, and stakeholder engagement planning. In the theory of change framework, the research substantiates the transformative impact of stakeholder involvement on project outcomes, bridging theory with practical insights through better decision-making, adaptive management, and enhanced effectiveness. From the stakeholder theory perspective, the study showcases how skilled M&E professionals as key stakeholders contribute to project excellence while reinforcing the significance of resource allocation stakeholders in driving project efficacy by ensuring adequate allocation across budgets, infrastructure, and human resources. Overall, the study's contributions enrich these theoretical frameworks by offering practical evidence and nuanced perspectives on the interconnectedness of planning, stakeholder involvement, training, and resource allocation with successful project implementation.

Implications to Practice

The study's implications for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and project implementation reveal interconnected factors underpinning successful county government-funded water projects in Kisii County. At the heart of this intricate web lies effective M&E planning, a foundational element that shapes project trajectories. The research sheds light on how meticulous problem identification, logical framework development, indicator design, and stakeholder engagement planning collectively form the bedrock of project success. This planning process transcends mere procedural steps, revealing itself as a pivotal driver that guides and optimizes the execution of water projects. Stakeholders' clear understanding of core issues, objectives, and relationships between project elements is achieved through M&E planning, culminating in a roadmap that aligns all stakeholders towards achieving project outcomes.

Recommendations for Practice

Effective M&E planning is crucial for successfully implementing county government-funded water projects in Kisii County. Comprehensive M&E planning guides project execution, ensuring alignment with objectives and enhancing project outcomes. Project managers and policymakers should emphasize the importance of these planning components, recognizing them as integral drivers of project success. Furthermore, capacity-building initiatives focusing on these planning aspects can further enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of M&E planning practices.

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