

# INFLUENCE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION STAFF COMPETENCY ON PERFORMANCE OF COMMUNITY WATER PROJECTS IN MANDERA COUNTY, KENYA

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**Abstract:** On a global level, project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are of paramount importance as many government funds are allocated to organisations to carry out various water projects. Good practice calls for project monitoring and control, as well as transparency, responsibility for resource allocation, and an impact on good project performance. This also calls monitoring and evaluation systems to systematically collect and analyze project information and compare project results, information with project objectives. Monitoring and evaluation is a critical part of project success, there are variety reasons for monitoring that are, to identify resources consumed, to gather information, to support stakeholders and to provide possible solutions to problems detected during program implementations managerial skills for effective decision making and training of staff handling the project, equitable distribution during budgetary allocation that will enforce resource mobilization and community participation. This however is lacking in most community water project in Mandera County in Kenya. This study sought to investigate the influence of monitoring and evaluation staff competency on performance of community water projects in Mandera County, Kenya. A descriptive design was adopted for data collection and analysis. The target population for the study comprised of 14 project managers and 319 staff of the 14 community water projects in Mandera County. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling was used to select 110 respondents. Primary data collection was done using a structured questionnaire. Prior to the main study, a pilot test was carried out in 3 water projects in Wajir County and involved 11 participants. Refinement of the questionnaire was done to ensure validity and reliability. Data analysis used both descriptive and inferential techniques. The study found a significant influence between M& E staff competency and project performance. The study concluded that one of the most common tasks of a Project M&E Officer is to develop the monitoring and evaluation skills of project personnel and partners. The study recommended that the project managers should develop M&E competency profile for the project positions by categorizing the project staff into managers, specialists and implementers.

**Keywords:** Monitoring and Evaluation Staff Capacity, Project Performance.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Performance of water projects has been at the top of the list due to fewer projects being completed, which means the implementation costs are not commensurate with the benefits (UNDP, 2009). Different initiatives around the world have tried to tackle the increasing water crisis, poor public sector services and project performance issues. Participation in

community projects, stakeholder involvement, and budgetary allocation are some of the major subscriptions (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). In sub-Saharan Africa, however, the community management model has not produced the desired outcomes. The water sector has gone through a number of changes over the last 10 years with the aim of increasing project sustainability.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were established by the United Nations (UN) in 2000. The UN identified water supply sanitation (WSS) projects as a way to meet its social development goals. According to the 2009 Millennium Development Goal (MDG) report, the world is on track to achieve the safe water goal, but the report also warned that 884m people around the world still rely on untreated water sources for their daily needs, with 84% (746m) of these people living in rural (UNDP, 2009). According to a 2012 report by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), 19 percent of the people living in Sub-Saharan African rural areas still use surface water.

In Ghana, the government attempted to address the implementation of water projects by establishing a local sanitation facility in a decentralized system where communities drilled wells and installed hand pumps; however, water pumps often failed, forcing communities to rely on traditional water sources (Carter, 2009).

Locally, there are 680 community water projects in Kenya that supply water to more than 740,000 homes across the country. Unfortunately, most of these projects are inactive due to inadequate management and poor upkeep (Achieno & Mwangangi, 2018). According to Kanda, Muchelule and Mamadi (2016), without proper monitoring and evaluation, it's hard to know if the project's goals are being met, what remedial actions need to be taken to ensure the goals are met, and whether the initiatives are contributing to human growth. Monitoring and evaluation is an ongoing procedure that puts in place systematic collection of data. It aims at collecting, analyzing, and using the collected information to make management control and therefore settle on the best decision that is aimed at the project performance.

Monitoring as is a task that is undertaken to track the progress of a program. Evaluation is structured and prejudice gauging of a project. For any organizational projects be it governmental, non-governmental, or international to perform, it is very important that Monitoring and evaluation is included to see through the fact that all the programs that are carried out within the organization are transparent and aimed at meeting the objectives of the firm (Hasan, Nahiduzzaman & Aldosary, 2018).

There are various programs and activities that can be monitored within an organization and these are inclusive of but not limited to, physical activities, financial activities, and performance of programs and level of staff competency. According to Crawford, and Bryce (2003) and Shapiro (2016) Monitoring and evaluation enhances clarity of results, therefore it is evident that globally organizations are appreciating the importance of M & E to identify the resources they consume, to gather information in relation to the management control and decision making, to support stakeholders in project just to mention but a few, however much, most of the organizations are not readily willing to devote funds to see through M & E systems activities.

The deliverability of a project is determined by the project performance. The project performance is determined by the quality performance of the project within the timeframe and budget. These measures gather data on inputs, project performance and efficiency. As a result, project performance is assessed based on budget allocated, time spent, quality and whether it meets user requirements. According to Ibrahim (2022), good project performance is attained when parties set targets individually or together. In addition, completing the project on time and on budget is essential for the project's success. Project quality is achieved by ensuring better relationships between stakeholders.

Monitoring and evaluation as a significant tool in project performance, has been in existence since time immemorial, the only difference is that in the primeval times, it was not considered as a vital tool in performance of projects, but over the recent past, the significance has steadily grown into being accredited for its vibrant nature in aiding in meeting various projects objectives (Sulemana, Musah & Simon, 2018). Currently the intention for M & E systems as a controlling tool to prove performance has developed with expectations to showcase accountability. However much most of the institutions have recognized the importance of M & E. According to (Jackson, 2019), it still reported that the current monitoring and evaluation systems are deemed to be weak and this has been linked to major activities that are unaccountability. However much it may be significant that monitoring and evaluation has been credited for its vital aid in project performance, it still has been noted that in most of the smoldering countries, monitoring and evaluation is yet to pick up and in particular African countries, Kenya inclusive (Venkatachalam, Marshall, Ojiako, & Chanshi, 2020).

According to Kamau and Mohamed (2015), M & E has recently come into view as a prerequisite for project performance. Best practices necessitate project monitoring and evaluation for control, including transparency, responsibility for resource allocation, and the effect on successful project execution and organizational development. This also necessitates managerial skills for effective decision making and training of project staff, equitable distribution during budgetary allocation, which will enforce resource mobilization, and community participation (Papa, 2016). This, however, is lacking in the majority of community water projects in Kenya's Mandera County.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

All over the world, public-private partnerships (PPPs) have varying levels of success (see Kerzner (2017)). In Kenya, several projects funded under the National Development and Cooperation Fund (NG-CDF) experience delays, cost overruns and quality problems (Malala, Ndolo, & Njagi, 2015). Despite Mandera County's commitment to community water projects, there are still numerous projects whose performance has suffered (Kala, 2020). There are dozens of issues that affect the quality of the projects that have already been created. According to Moi (2021) 40% of projects funded through the NG-CDF in Kenya have not been completed within time and budget. For example, the research shows that 56% of water projects in the North Sub County of Mandera have been delayed. The results also show poor trends for the water projects funded by the National Water Development Fund (NG-CDF), with the completion rate being around 44%. Therefore, there is need for the county government to critically assess their performance and make valuable decisions regarding success of their projects.

According to Kamau and Mohamed (2015), M & E has recently come into view as a prerequisite for project performance. Best practices necessitate project monitoring and evaluation for control, including transparency, responsibility for resource allocation, and the effect on successful project execution and organizational development. It also requires management skills to make informed decisions and train project personnel, fair allocation of funds to ensure resource mobilization and community involvement (Papa, 2016). This, however, is lacking in the majority of community water projects in Kenya's Mandera County. Water project performance could be due to financial management, governance, community involvement and project management. However, having a good understanding of how M&E systems impact project performance has the potential to positively impact the performance of community water projects within Mandera County.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Literature Review

Goldratt's (1984) theory of constraints is based on the idea that each system has a limit or bottleneck that limits its performance. The goal of this theory is to identify and control this constraint and to measure performance with implemented improvements (Meyer, 2015). One of the most common references to the theory of constraints is the old saying, 'A chain is only as good as its weakest link.' This is because the process of identifying a weak link within a chain is analogous to identifying a bottleneck within a system. In order to repair a chain, the links of the chain are pulled to find the weakest link, which is then replaced and the pulling continues until the chain is secure. This process is repeated until the weakest link in the chain is traced and replaced, ending up with a strong chain. Using the theory of constraints in this study, the project is continuously reviewed and monitored for the biggest constraint or bottleneck which are then addressed and performance tested. This is done one by one until the performance of the project is optimal and no restrictions are in place to impede the project. The theory of constraints therefore underlines the importance of having project M & E team who are competent enough to track and fix the project bottlenecks to amplify performance.

### Empirical Literature Review

In order to achieve M & E full potential, project staff should be of high experience on matters concerning M & E and should also keep up with emerging issues. Human resource is the main factor that is directly linked to the production of results in any organization. For someone to be hired as an M & E officer they should be able to provide proof of their qualification in terms of background of their education and past experiences, they newly graduates should be trained so that they match the skills of the already existing staff. Level of staff competency directly affects the performance of monitoring and evaluation systems.

Njuguna (2016) study sought to identifying factors affecting the performance of NGO Monitoring and Evaluation System in Murang'a County, Kenya. The method used in the study was a descriptive research design. The study included 12 projects, 86 mechatronics employees and 12 project managers. The researchers collected data using questionnaires that contained

both closed and open-ended items. Research shows that budget allocation, stakeholder involvement, level of training and strength of M&E teams have a significant impact on M&E performance. The hypothesis of this study is that the M&E system will perform satisfactorily as long as the intensity of M&E is standard, staff are well trained, stakeholders are engaged and budget is allocated, ignoring other factors such as tools and methods for M&E. This study assesses monitoring and evaluation systems performance at Manderu County. It evaluates the tools & methods used in M & E, level of staff competency, managements influence and allocation of funds for M & E.

Kaberia and Mburugu (2019) investigate the impact of staff capacity monitoring and evaluation on the performance of faith-based projects in North Meru, Meru County, Kenya. The Theory of Change served as the overarching framework in this process. Data from 47 faith-based organizations in Meru North were collected using a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. Steering committees, resource managers, team leaders, and program committee members comprised a sample of 186 respondents out of 347 respondents who made up the survey's target group. Questionnaires were used as tools for data collection. The study found that technical experts were hired to manage relevant project areas, project staff were trained to have the necessary skills to conduct M&E, and staff knowledge and skills enabled them to participate effectively in monitoring and evaluation.

Chege and Bowa (2020) sought to identify linkages between monitoring and evaluation and program performance in Kenya, focusing on NGOs implementing education programs in Nairobi County. The study used descriptive research methods including key informant interviews and questionnaires, two methods of data collection. The study population consisted of 156 officers who were in charge of carrying out education initiatives in Nairobi County; 112 of them were sampled for the study, and information was obtained from 90 of them via questionnaires, yielding an 80.4% response rate. Also, utilizing an interviewing guide, five important informants were questioned. The findings demonstrated that an effective predictor of project success was the M&E team's strength. However, the study was limited to education projects and not community water projects with different dynamics.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive design was adopted for data collection and analysis. The target population for the study comprised of 14 project managers and 319 staff of the 14 community water projects in Manderu County. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling was used to select 110 respondents. A structured questionnaire was employed to collect primary data. Prior to the main study, a pilot test was carried out in 3 water projects in Wajir County and involved 11 participants. Refinement of the questionnaire was done to ensure validity and reliability. Data analysis used both descriptive and inferential techniques.

### 4. FINDINGS

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics results of M&E staff competency.

**Table 1: M&E Staff Competency**

Statements	M	SD
The monitoring and evaluation staff is actively involved in its obligations.	3.99	1.196
The monitoring and evaluation staff has skills and required capacity to analyze data.	4.56	0.841
The monitoring and evaluation staff has adequate teamwork.	4.51	0.591
The monitoring and evaluation staff strength has an influence on the performance of the M & E system.	4.15	0.834

The results presented in Table 4.4 show that the respondents strongly agreed on the statement that; the monitoring and evaluation staff has skills and required capacity to analyze data and that the monitoring and evaluation staff has adequate teamwork as shown by mean score of 4.56 and 4.51 respectively and standard deviation of 0.841 and 0.591 respectively. The findings are in line with Njuguna's (2016) study which aimed to identify factors affecting the performance of NGO monitoring and evaluation systems in Murang'a County, Kenya. Research shows that budget allocation, stakeholder involvement, level of training and strength of M&E teams have a significant impact on M&E performance.

The results presented in Table 4.4 also show that the respondents agreed on the statements that; the monitoring and evaluation staff strength has an influence on the performance of the M & E system and that the monitoring and evaluation

staff is actively involved in its obligations as shown by mean score of 4.15 and 3.99 respectively and standard deviation of 0.834 and 1.196 respectively. The findings are consistent with Kaberia and Mburugu (2019), who investigated the impact of monitoring and evaluation of staff capacity on the performance of faith-based organization-funded projects in Meru North, Meru County, Kenya. The study found that technical experts were hired to manage relevant project areas, project staff were trained to have the necessary skills to conduct M&E, and staff knowledge and skills enabled them to participate in effective project monitoring and evaluation.

### Results of Regression Analysis

**Table 2: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.869 <sup>a</sup>	.755	.744	.630

The results in Table 2 show that M&E staff competence explained 0.744 (74.4%) of the performance of the Community Water Supply Project in Mandela County, Kenya, expressed as adjusted R-squared values. Therefore, it means that other factors that were not investigated in this study contributed 0.256 (25.6%) to project performance.

**Table 3: Coefficients**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.731	0.130		5.623	.000
	M&E staff competency	0.746	0.249	1.639	2.996	.000

The results in Table 3 show that when M&E staff competency is held at constant, the performance of community water projects in Mandera County, Kenya would be at 0.731. The results also show that, when M&E staff competency is increased by one unit the project performance would be increased by a factor of 0.746(74.6%).

The final regression equation is described as follows:

Project performance = 0.731 + 0.746 (M&E staff competency).

The results in Table 4.11 also indicate that the M&E staff competency had a positive significant influence on the performance of community water projects in Mandera County, Kenya as indicated by beta value of 1.639 and a significance value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that building capacity of project staff and partners on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a common role for Project M&E Officers. For project staff to succeed in the assigned roles, you need to support them get skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. A competency-based approach to M&E capacity building requires the organizational management to identify the strengths, and the performance needs of project staff before training. In addition, the management needs to monitor progress of project staff toward the development of the desired skills, knowledge, and attitudes.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommended that the project managers should develop M&E competency profile for the project positions by categorizing the project staff into managers, specialists and implementers. Conduct a competency assessment so as to promote individual self-reflection and responsibility for the individual's development. Develop an M&E capacity building plan which builds on the findings of the competency assessments. Implement the M&E capacity building plan by making sure that there is a good understanding of their competency gaps and match them to job roles and performance expectations.

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