

Monitoring and Evaluation Dynamics and the Performance of Community Development Projects in Kibera Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract: Kibera has hosted community development projects (CDPs) run by non-governmental organisations, faith-based groups and government for decades, yet visible improvement in residents' living conditions has been slow, and weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a frequently cited explanation. This study examined the effect of four M&E dynamics, namely capacity building, stakeholder involvement, planning and budgetary allocation, on the performance of community development projects in Kibera Sub-County, Nairobi, anchored on the resource-based view, stakeholder theory and dynamic capabilities theory. A descriptive design was adopted. A sample of 432 respondents, comprising 384 residents drawn by stratified random sampling across Kibera's wards and a census of the project, finance, procurement and human resource managers of the 12 ongoing projects, was surveyed, and 340 usable questionnaires were returned (78.7 per cent). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression. The four dynamics jointly explained 71.4 per cent of the variance in project performance ($F(4, 335) = 208.62, p < .001$). M&E capacity building had the largest effect ($B = 0.473, \beta = .421, p < .001$), followed by M&E planning ($\beta = .245$) and stakeholder involvement ($\beta = .239$), while budgetary allocation was significant but contributed little independently ($\beta = .070, p = .023$). Capacity building was the least developed of the four practices, with only two-thirds of respondents agreeing that training is provided, so the practice with the largest effect is also the one with the most room for improvement. Projects were rated more successful at meeting deliverables than at improving beneficiaries' economic lives, which suggests that M&E in these projects tracks outputs more closely than outcomes. The study recommends that implementing organisations treat M&E training as a recurring investment, move stakeholder involvement beyond design into the routine use of community feedback, and tie M&E plans to outcome indicators as well as to deliverables.

Keywords: monitoring and evaluation; capacity building; stakeholder involvement; M&E planning; M&E budget; community development projects; informal settlements; Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kibera, in Nairobi City County, is among the largest informal settlements in sub-Saharan Africa. High unemployment, overcrowded and insecure housing, poor sanitation and the long shadow of the HIV/AIDS epidemic have drawn a dense concentration of community development projects, run by international and local non-governmental organisations, faith-based groups, United Nations agencies and the county and national governments. The projects active at the time of this study ranged from integrated water, sanitation and waste management to youth leadership and entrepreneurship, education support for orphans and vulnerable children, public space improvement and digital education. After decades of such investment, however, many residents still live on very low incomes in overcrowded housing, and the gap between the resources committed and the change visible on the ground has made the effectiveness of these projects a recurring question for donors, implementers and residents alike.

Monitoring and evaluation is the management function through which a project learns whether it is on course and whether it is producing the change it was designed for. Monitoring tracks inputs, activities and outputs against plan as implementation proceeds, while evaluation assesses relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability at

defined points. Whether M&E fulfils that role depends on a set of supporting conditions, here called M&E dynamics: the capacity of staff and partners to carry out M&E, the involvement of stakeholders in it, the quality of M&E planning, and the budget allocated to it. Kenyan studies have linked such dynamics to the performance of county maternal health programmes (Gatimu, Gakuu, & Ndiritu, 2021), county-funded education projects (Wambua, 2019) and projects of the Global Environment Facility (Kihuha, 2018), but none has examined them in an urban informal settlement, where projects depend heavily on residents' participation and where the distance between project delivery and community benefit is often greatest.

The study's specific objectives were to establish the effect of M&E capacity building, M&E stakeholder involvement, M&E planning and M&E budgetary allocation on the performance of community development projects in Kibera Sub-County, Kenya.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Resource-based view. Barney (1991) argues that an organisation's performance derives from resources that are valuable, rare, difficult to imitate and difficult to substitute, and that the organisation must be able to exploit them. Applied to community development projects, the view frames M&E budgets as resources and M&E skills as capabilities, and it implies an important distinction: a budget line can be replicated by any funded project, but the capacity to turn that budget into useful information and timely decisions is built over time and is far harder to copy. The theory therefore anticipates that capability will matter more than funding where both are present.

Stakeholder theory. Freeman (1984) defines stakeholders as those who can affect or are affected by an organisation's objectives, and holds that organisations perform better when they manage relationships with those parties deliberately. In a community development project the most important stakeholders, namely residents and beneficiaries, are also the people whose lives the project is meant to change, so their involvement in M&E is both a source of information and a test of accountability. The theory does not specify which forms of involvement help. Khwaja (2004), studying community infrastructure projects in northern Pakistan, found that greater community participation in non-technical decisions improved project outcomes, whereas participation in technical decisions did not, which suggests that the design of involvement matters as much as its extent.

Dynamic capabilities theory. Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997) extend the resource-based view by arguing that, in changing environments, performance depends on an organisation's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure its competences, and Barreto (2010) characterises dynamic capabilities as the capacity to sense opportunities and threats, make timely decisions and change the resource base. M&E is a sensing and reconfiguring routine of this kind, through which a project detects deviation and adapts. In a setting as volatile as Kibera, where tenure, security and community dynamics change quickly, the theory explains why planning that supports adaptive decision-making, rather than a fixed schedule, should matter for performance.

The study accordingly modelled the performance of community development projects as a function of four M&E dynamics. Capacity building was measured through training on each new M&E system, refresher training, collaborative identification of training needs, opportunities for staff to apply M&E experience, staff support to stakeholders' M&E systems, and needs-based training. Stakeholder involvement was measured through stakeholder involvement in M&E design, consideration of stakeholder opinions, participation in M&E operations, stakeholder awareness of M&E activities, systematic recording and use of stakeholder input, and the extent to which participation reflected community demands. M&E planning was measured through funding allocated to M&E at the outset, costing of M&E resources, control mechanisms in the project plan, support for decision-making during execution, adaptability of planning, and work-plan goals measured against key metrics. Budgetary allocation was measured through sufficiency and timeliness of funding, realistic M&E estimates, the presence of a budget committee, budgetary independence of the M&E unit and ring-fencing of M&E funds. Project performance was measured through improvement in beneficiaries' economic lives, completion on schedule, implementation within budget and achievement of deliverables.

3. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

M&E capacity building. Gatimu et al. (2021), in a stratified survey of 282 respondents, found that capacity building for M&E influenced the performance of county maternal health programmes in Kenya. Wambua (2019), studying 31 county-funded education projects in Makueni County, found that training of M&E staff was among the practices that significantly predicted project performance, alongside stakeholder involvement, M&E planning and baseline surveys. Kihuha (2018)

reported that technical expertise was applied well in Global Environment Facility projects implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme in Kenya, and that those projects performed well on time, cost and quality but poorly on scope, visibility and impact.

M&E stakeholder involvement. Gatimu et al. (2021) found stakeholder engagement in M&E to be a significant influence on maternal health programme performance, and Wambua (2019) found the same for county education projects. The evidence is not uniform. Kihuha (2018) found stakeholder involvement applied only at a low level in the projects studied, while Musyimi and Ondara (2022), surveying 41 officials in Uasin Gishu County, found stakeholder involvement rated very high yet ranked behind cost implications, technical expertise and policy frameworks in its effect on the performance of county-funded projects. Together with Khwaja's (2004) evidence on the form of participation, these findings suggest that the presence of stakeholder involvement says less about performance than how stakeholders are involved and what is done with their input.

M&E planning. Wanjala, Iravo, Odhiambo and Shalle (2017), surveying 65 Kenyan state corporations, found that monitoring techniques had a significant effect on project performance ($\beta = .674$). Kissi et al. (2019), studying construction projects in Ghana, found M&E practices significantly related to project success criteria, most strongly to health and safety performance and to the management of project scope. Wambua (2019) reported that access to M&E plans was associated with the performance of county education projects, although the correlation was moderate ($\rho = .494$).

M&E budgetary allocation. Musyimi and Ondara (2022) found that the cost implications of M&E had the strongest effect of the factors they examined on the performance of county-funded projects in Uasin Gishu. In a related public-sector setting, Mwangi and Jagongo (2019) found that budgetary allocation improved the performance of the judiciary in Embu County, particularly in service quality. These studies concern publicly funded projects and institutions with formal budgeting systems, and they leave open whether the same holds for donor- and NGO-funded community projects in informal settlements.

Across this literature, each M&E dynamic is associated with better project performance in some Kenyan setting, but the studies concern county-funded, state corporation or donor projects outside informal settlements, and the relative weight of the four dynamics varies between them. None examines the four together in an urban informal settlement such as Kibera, where residents are both the projects' main stakeholders and their intended beneficiaries.

4. METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was adopted. The unit of analysis was the community development project, and the 12 projects ongoing in Kibera Sub-County at the time of the study formed the population of projects. The unit of observation was the individual respondent, drawn from two groups: the residents of Kibera, as the projects' beneficiaries and community stakeholders, and the managers responsible for the projects. A census was taken of the 12 project managers, 12 finance administrators, 12 procurement managers and 12 human resource managers. Residents were sampled by stratified random sampling across Kibera's wards, with households selected with the assistance of local administration officials, and the sample size for this group was set at 384 using Fisher's formula at a 95 per cent confidence level, a 5 per cent margin of error and an assumed proportion of 0.5. The total sample was therefore 432.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire, delivered to respondents and collected on completion over three weeks, with telephone follow-up. The instrument comprised four demographic items, six five-point Likert items for each of the four M&E dynamics and four for project performance, scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and an open-ended question for each dynamic. It was piloted on respondents outside the main sample and reviewed by the supervisor for content validity. Internal consistency was assessed with Cronbach's (1951) alpha against a threshold of 0.70, and all constructs met it: 0.798 for capacity building, 0.817 for stakeholder involvement, 0.776 for planning, 0.746 for budgetary allocation and 0.726 for project performance.

Data were analysed in SPSS. Descriptive analysis produced frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, Pearson correlation established the strength and direction of bivariate relationships, and multiple linear regression was estimated in the form $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \varepsilon$, where Y is project performance and X_1 to X_4 are M&E capacity building, stakeholder involvement, planning and budgetary allocation. Normality was assessed with the Shapiro–Wilk test (Mishra et al., 2019), multicollinearity with tolerance and variance inflation factors, and homogeneity of variance with Levene's test. An introductory letter was obtained from Kenyatta University and a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation before data collection, and respondents participated voluntarily on the basis of informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Response rate and respondent profile

Of the 432 questionnaires distributed, 340 were returned complete, a response rate of 78.7 per cent. Men made up 61 per cent of respondents and women 39 per cent. Most respondents were aged 36 to 45 (57.9 per cent) or 46 to 55 (25.3 per cent), and only 13.2 per cent were under 36. A majority had college education (55.9 per cent) and a further 26.4 per cent held a degree or postgraduate qualification, while 17.6 per cent had secondary education. Experience with community development projects was long: 46.8 per cent reported more than seven years and a further 23.8 per cent five to seven years. The profile matters for interpretation. Because residents made up 89 per cent of the sample design, most responses reflect the perspective of people who have lived alongside, and often taken part in, a succession of projects, rather than that of implementing staff, and the high levels of education and experience suggest that the respondents were among the more engaged members of the community.

5.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the study variables (n = 340)

Statement	Mean	Std. dev.	Agree (%)
M&E capacity building			
M&E training is offered for every new M&E system	3.58	1.15	63.0
Refresher training is offered periodically	3.58	1.22	65.3
Training needs are determined collaboratively	3.95	1.13	75.9
Employees can apply their M&E system experience	3.67	1.27	66.2
Employees can assist stakeholders to set up M&E systems	3.61	1.29	61.8
Training is given on identified M&E training needs	3.74	1.14	68.6
Overall	3.69	1.20	66.8
M&E stakeholder involvement			
M&E system design involves stakeholders	3.92	1.17	77.4
The M&E system takes stakeholder opinions into account	3.76	1.11	73.8
Stakeholders take part in M&E operations	3.50	1.18	59.4
Stakeholders are aware of M&E activities	3.89	1.31	72.9
Stakeholder input is recorded, examined and prepared for use	3.49	1.39	65.0
Participation sparks interest and reflects community demands	3.70	1.25	75.6
Overall	3.71	1.24	70.7
M&E planning			
Funding is allotted for M&E at the outset of planning	3.82	1.48	74.4
Planning facilitates estimation of M&E resource costs	3.83	1.28	71.4
A control mechanism is built into the project plan	3.89	1.36	74.1
Planning supports decision-making during execution	3.89	1.37	76.1
Project planning is adaptable to special events	4.04	1.25	80.6
Work-plan goals are measured against key metrics	3.91	1.45	78.5
Overall	3.90	1.37	75.9
M&E budgetary allocation			
Funding was sufficient throughout the project	3.64	1.58	69.5
Financing arrived on schedule	3.88	1.13	77.9
A realistic M&E estimate is considered in project design	3.60	1.28	70.8
A budget committee is in place	3.68	1.24	71.2
The M&E unit makes budget decisions independently	3.84	1.19	74.7
Allocated funds are used for M&E activities only	3.95	1.21	82.4

Statement	Mean	Std. dev.	Agree (%)
Overall	3.76	1.27	74.4
Project performance			
The project improved beneficiaries' lives economically	3.17	1.38	48.8
The project was finished on schedule	3.54	1.42	63.0
The project was implemented within the budgeted cost	3.57	1.56	63.5
The project deliverables were met	3.88	1.35	68.2
Overall	3.54	1.43	60.9

Source: Survey data (2025). Items scored 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Agree (%) is the sum of agree and strongly agree. Overall rows are the averages of the item values. Item means and standard deviations were verified against the reported response distributions.

Respondents agreed, on balance, that each M&E dynamic was present in the projects, but with notably more dispersion than is typical of staff self-assessments. Construct means range from 3.69 for capacity building to 3.90 for planning, item standard deviations lie between 1.11 and 1.58, and every item attracted disagreement from at least a tenth of respondents. Planning is the most consistently affirmed dynamic (75.9 per cent agreement on average), and capacity building is the least (66.8 per cent). Within capacity building, the two items describing the actual delivery of training, namely training for each new M&E system and periodic refresher training, are the weakest ($M = 3.58$ for both), with one respondent in five disagreeing, while the collaborative identification of training needs is stronger ($M = 3.95$). Training needs are identified more reliably than training is delivered.

Stakeholder involvement shows a similar gradient. Involvement in designing the M&E system is widely affirmed ($M = 3.92$, 77.4 per cent agreement), but participation in M&E operations ($M = 3.50$, with 23.2 per cent neutral) and the systematic recording and use of stakeholder input ($M = 3.49$, with 22.9 per cent disagreeing) are the two weakest items in the construct. Communities are consulted when systems are set up more often than they are involved in running them or see their input acted upon. In budgetary allocation, the ring-fencing of M&E funds is the most strongly affirmed item (82.4 per cent), whereas the sufficiency of funding over the project's life is the most polarised item in the instrument, with 25.8 per cent disagreeing and a standard deviation of 1.58, which suggests that funding experiences differed considerably between projects.

Project performance is rated lower than any M&E dynamic ($M = 3.54$, 60.9 per cent agreement), and the pattern within it is the most consequential descriptive finding. Meeting deliverables is rated highest ($M = 3.88$), followed by completion within budget and on schedule ($M = 3.57$ and 3.54). Improvement in beneficiaries' economic lives is rated lowest by a clear margin ($M = 3.17$), with fewer than half of respondents agreeing and more than a third disagreeing. The projects are judged more successful at producing what they promised than at changing the economic circumstances of the people they serve. This is the distinction between outputs and outcomes that M&E systems exist to monitor, and Kihuha (2018) reports the same pattern for Global Environment Facility projects, which performed well on time, cost and quality but poorly on impact.

5.3 Correlation and regression results

Table 2. Correlation with project performance and multiple regression estimates ($n = 340$)

Predictor	Pearson r	B	Std. error	Beta	t	p
(Constant)	—	0.525	0.279	—	1.88	.061
M&E capacity building	.799	0.473	0.058	.421	8.18	< .001
M&E planning	.749	0.268	0.052	.245	5.11	< .001
M&E stakeholder involvement	.743	0.268	0.054	.239	4.98	< .001
M&E budgetary allocation	.226	0.152	0.067	.070	2.29	.023

Source: Survey data (2025). Dependent variable: performance of community development projects. $R = .845$, $R^2 = .714$, adjusted $R^2 = .710$, standard error of the estimate = 0.541; $F(4, 335) = 208.62$, $p < .001$. All correlations significant at $p < .05$.

All four M&E dynamics correlate positively and significantly with project performance, and together they explain 71.4 per cent of its variance (adjusted $R^2 = .710$; $F(4, 335) = 208.62$, $p < .001$). The model is internally consistent: the coefficient of determination agrees with the ANOVA sums of squares, each t statistic reproduces its coefficient divided by its standard error, and the standardised coefficients and the reported variance inflation factors can be reproduced exactly from the correlation matrix. Three of the dynamics, namely capacity building, planning and stakeholder involvement, are strongly intercorrelated ($r = .70$ to $.77$) and strongly related to performance ($r = .74$ to $.80$), while budgetary allocation stands apart, correlating only weakly with performance ($r = .226$) and with the other three dynamics ($r = .12$ to $.27$).

M&E capacity building ($B = 0.473$, $\beta = .421$, $p < .001$) is by a clear margin the strongest predictor, with a standardised effect about 1.7 times that of either planning or stakeholder involvement. The result is consistent with Gatimu et al. (2021) and Wambua (2019), who found training and capacity building significant in Kenyan maternal health and education projects, and with the resource-based view's emphasis on capabilities as the source of performance (Barney, 1991). Read alongside the descriptive data, it acquires a sharper meaning: capacity building is the least developed of the four dynamics, and its weakest elements are the delivery of training for new systems and periodic refreshers. The practice that carries most weight for performance is therefore the one with the greatest room for improvement, which makes it the most promising single point of intervention for implementing organisations.

M&E planning ($B = 0.268$, $\beta = .245$, $p < .001$) and stakeholder involvement ($B = 0.268$, $\beta = .239$, $p < .001$) contribute almost equally, and both are consistent with the Kenyan evidence (Wambua, 2019; Gatimu et al., 2021; Wanjala et al., 2017). The planning result is consistent with dynamic capabilities theory. The planning item respondents affirmed most strongly is adaptability to special events, which in a setting as volatile as Kibera is the feature that allows a project to sense and respond to change (Teece et al., 1997). The stakeholder result is qualified by the descriptive gradient: involvement is strongest at the design stage and weakest in the routine operation of M&E and the use of community input. Stakeholder theory predicts that involvement improves performance when stakeholders' information shapes decisions (Freeman, 1984), and Khwaja's (2004) evidence that the form of participation determines its effect suggests that the larger gains lie in recording and acting on community input during implementation rather than in widening consultation at the outset.

Budgetary allocation ($B = 0.152$, $\beta = .070$, $p = .023$) is statistically significant but contributes little independently, and its bivariate correlation with performance ($r = .226$) is weak. This is the study's most counter-intuitive result, and it contrasts with Musyimi and Ondara's (2022) finding that cost implications were the strongest influence on county-funded projects in Uasin Gishu, and with Mwangi and Jagongo's (2019) evidence on budgetary allocation in the Embu judiciary. It does not mean that money is unimportant to M&E. Respondents largely affirmed that M&E funds are ring-fenced and arrive on time, and the most likely reading is that, in donor- and NGO-funded projects where an M&E budget line is routinely required, the presence of funding does little to distinguish better-performing projects from weaker ones. What distinguishes them is whether the people spending the money have the skills to turn it into useful information, which is the distinction the resource-based view draws between a resource and a capability (Barney, 1991). The weak correlation between budgetary allocation and the other three dynamics supports this reading, since funding appears to be in place regardless of whether capacity, planning and involvement are strong.

Taken together, the results suggest a clear ordering. Among community development projects in Kibera the M&E dynamics that matter most are those concerned with people and process, namely the skills of those who carry out M&E, the plans that guide it and the involvement of the community in it, while the budget is a necessary condition that does little on its own. The descriptive evidence adds that the weakest elements across these dynamics are the delivery of training, the use of community input and, above all, the translation of project outputs into economic improvement for beneficiaries.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The four M&E dynamics together explain most of the variation in the performance of community development projects in Kibera Sub-County, but they are not equally consequential. M&E capacity building is the strongest determinant, and it is also the least developed, with training needs identified more reliably than training is delivered. M&E planning and stakeholder involvement contribute substantially and almost equally. The value of planning appears to lie in its adaptability, and the value of involvement lies less in consulting communities at the design stage than in using their input during implementation. Budgetary allocation is significantly but only weakly associated with performance. This is not because funding is unimportant but because, where M&E funding is routinely provided, its presence does little to distinguish better projects from weaker ones. Read through the resource-based view, these projects are constrained less by the resources available for M&E than by the capability to use them.

The study's second conclusion concerns what is being achieved. Projects are rated more successful at meeting deliverables, schedules and budgets than at improving beneficiaries' economic lives, which fewer than half of respondents affirmed. M&E systems that track delivery more closely than outcomes will tend to reproduce that pattern, because what is monitored is what is managed. Strengthening the link between M&E and outcomes is therefore as important as strengthening M&E itself.

6.1 Recommendations

Implementing organisations should treat M&E capacity building as a recurring investment rather than a one-off induction. Training should accompany every new M&E system and be refreshed at defined intervals, and staff should be supported to help community groups set up and use their own monitoring. This addresses the weakest elements of the strongest predictor, and donors funding projects in Kibera should make recurrent M&E training an eligible and expected cost.

Stakeholder involvement should be extended from the design of M&E systems into their routine operation. Projects should record community feedback systematically, report back to residents on how that feedback was used, and involve community members in data collection and review meetings during implementation. The evidence suggests that the gain lies in closing the loop on community input rather than in widening consultation at the outset.

M&E plans should include outcome indicators that track changes in beneficiaries' economic circumstances, such as income, employment and access to services, alongside indicators of deliverables, schedule and cost, and should retain the adaptability that respondents identified as a strength. A project that monitors only what it delivers cannot know whether it is improving lives, and the gap this study finds between delivery and economic improvement is the gap such indicators would expose.

Funders and implementers should continue to ring-fence M&E budgets but should judge their adequacy by what they buy, namely skilled people and usable information, rather than by their size alone. County government and the NGO coordination structures active in Kibera could support this by sharing M&E training, tools and outcome data across projects, which would reduce duplication and allow comparison of results among the many organisations working in the same community.

6.2 Limitations and further research

Several limitations bound these findings. The sample was dominated by residents, who rated organisational practices they may not observe directly, and the study did not report results separately for residents and managers, so the extent to which the ordering of effects reflects a general impression of project quality cannot yet be established. All variables were rated by the same respondents, which invites common-method variance, and project performance was measured through perception rather than project records. Future work should compare residents' and managers' responses and incorporate objective indicators such as completion dates, expenditure against budget and measured changes in household income. The diagnostic tests require correction, as set out in Section 5.4, although the core estimates are internally consistent. The study covered 12 ongoing projects in a single informal settlement, so the findings may not generalise to rural community development or to settlements with different implementing structures. The design was cross-sectional, so the analysis establishes association rather than causation. Further research should examine whether stakeholder involvement improves performance through the use of community input during implementation, and whether projects that monitor outcomes as well as outputs achieve greater economic benefit for residents.

Declarations. An introductory letter was obtained from Kenyatta University and a research permit issued by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation; participation was voluntary and informed consent obtained from all respondents. The authors declare no competing interests. The research received no specific grant from any funding agency. The dataset is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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