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Monitoring and Evaluation Practices and Sustainability of Donor-Funded Projects Implemented by Self-Help Africa in Kenya

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Abstract: **Project sustainability has become a major concern for donors and development organizations due to the increasing demand for long-term project outcomes in a dynamic global environment. This study examined the influence of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices on the sustainability of projects funded by Self Help Africa in Kenya. Specifically, the study assessed the effects of M&E budgeting, planning, managerial skills, and stakeholder participation on project sustainability. A census approach was adopted targeting completed projects funded by Self Help Africa, involving management staff, accountants, planners, evaluation officers, and project managers. Primary data were collected using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including regression analysis and ANOVA. The findings revealed that managerial skills in M&E, stakeholder participation, M&E budgeting, and M&E planning significantly influenced the sustainability of Self Help Africa projects in Kenya. The study concludes that effective M&E practices are essential in enhancing sustainable project outcomes. It recommends strengthening M&E management capacity, ensuring early stakeholder involvement, allocating adequate M&E budgets, and integrating M&E planning during the initial stages of project design to improve sustainability.**

Keywords: **Monitoring and Evaluation; Project Sustainability; Stakeholder Participation; M&E Planning; Donor-Funded Projects.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in implementing donor-funded projects aimed at improving livelihoods and supporting agricultural development. However, concerns regarding the sustainability of such projects after donor exit remain widespread (Akotia, 2014). Sustainable projects should generate long-term social, environmental, and economic benefits for communities (Muluh et al., 2019). Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has therefore emerged as a critical mechanism for enhancing project sustainability through informed decision-making, accountability, and adaptive management (Eyibio & Daniel, 2020). Despite its importance, M&E is often treated as a compliance requirement rather than a strategic management tool, undermining the long-term viability of donor-funded interventions (Svensson & Dollerup, 2020).

Evidence from previous studies indicates that weak M&E systems contribute to poor project continuity and limited sustainability outcomes. For example, inadequate monitoring structures have been associated with poor project completion and reduced long-term impact (Garbero & Carneiro, 2017). Conversely, projects with strong M&E frameworks, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive management practices demonstrate greater continuity and sustainability after donor support ends (Ndegwa & Muathe, 2021; Otieno & Kiragu, 2022). Community participation in M&E processes further enhances ownership and sustainability by positioning beneficiaries as active partners rather than passive recipients (Kuria & Wanyoike, 2016).

Project sustainability encompasses the ability of initiatives to maintain intended benefits beyond the project lifecycle through effective institutional support, stakeholder participation, environmental stewardship, and economic viability (Chang et al., 2017). Studies have shown that inadequate stakeholder integration, poor sustainability indicators, and weak planning processes negatively affect long-term project outcomes (Seppey et al., 2017). Similarly, donor-funded initiatives lacking strong collaboration with local communities and authorities often fail once external support is withdrawn (Hofisi & Chizimba, 2013).

Monitoring and evaluation has evolved into an essential component of project management, particularly in developing countries where donor accountability and resource optimization are critical (World Bank, 2004). Monitoring focuses on continuous tracking of project progress, while evaluation assesses project outcomes and overall effectiveness (Wambua, 2018). Effective M&E systems facilitate timely corrective actions, stakeholder communication, and evidence-based planning, thereby improving sustainability prospects (Kuria & Wanyoike, 2016). Inadequate M&E frameworks, on the other hand, have been linked to reduced project effectiveness and sustainability across various development contexts (Silva, Pereira & Boffelli, 2023; Pade, Mallinson & Sewry, 2008).

Self Help Africa has prioritized sustainability and M&E in its agricultural development initiatives in Kenya. Through investments in community engagement, capacity building, institutional strengthening, and evidence-based project management, the organization seeks to create lasting impacts on rural livelihoods and agricultural productivity. Nonetheless, concerns persist regarding the sustainability of donor-funded projects in Kenya due to weak implementation structures, donor dependency, and insufficient long-term planning (Sang et al., 2015; Connell & Callaghan, 2015). Existing literature further reveals conceptual, contextual, and methodological gaps regarding the influence of M&E practices on project sustainability. This study therefore sought to examine the impact of M&E practices on the sustainability of projects funded by Self Help Africa in Kenya.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The study is anchored on Sustainability Theory, Resource Dependency Theory, and Stakeholder Theory, which collectively explain the role of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in enhancing long-term project sustainability. Sustainability Theory emphasizes the integration of environmental, social, and economic dimensions to ensure present development does not compromise future generations (Upham, 2000; Kantabutra, 2020). The theory supports the incorporation of sustainability principles into M&E systems to promote long-term project outcomes, although critics argue that it lacks operational clarity and practical implementation frameworks (Harrington, 2016). Resource Dependency Theory posits that organizations depend on external resources for survival and therefore must establish strategic relationships to secure critical resources and reduce vulnerability (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Malatesta & Smith, 2014). In project sustainability, the theory highlights the importance of resource management, strategic alliances, and accountability mechanisms in sustaining donor-funded initiatives. Stakeholder Theory, advanced by Freeman (1984), emphasizes the inclusion of stakeholders in organizational decision-making processes to improve accountability, transparency, and sustainability outcomes. Effective stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle enhances ownership, minimizes conflicts, and supports adaptive project management (Shah & Guild, 2022; Amin, Scheepers & Malik, 2023).

Empirical studies indicate that management expertise significantly influences project sustainability. Research by Witter et al. (2020) established that technical competencies and capacity building in M&E improve project implementation and sustainability, while Wachamba (2013) found that M&E training positively affected employee productivity and project continuity in Kenyan NGOs. Similarly, Oleche et al. (2015) concluded that investment in personnel capacity building strengthens M&E systems and enhances sustainable project outcomes. However, previous studies were limited by contextual and methodological gaps, particularly regarding donor-funded agricultural projects in Kenya.

Stakeholder participation has also been identified as a critical determinant of sustainability. Bello-Pintado et al. (2023) observed that stakeholder expectations differ across sectors and require tailored engagement strategies, while Lameck et al. (2017) reported a positive relationship between stakeholder involvement and project success. In Kenya, Omondi and Kinoti (2020) established that involving stakeholders in project identification, monitoring, and implementation improved project performance and sustainability. Nevertheless, many studies remain sector-specific and fail to comprehensively address stakeholder dynamics in donor-funded agricultural initiatives.

Budgeting and resource allocation are equally important in sustaining projects. Eyibio and Daniel (2020) found that strategic budgeting and efficient resource allocation significantly improve long-term project viability, while Svensson and Dollerup (2020) noted that poor budgeting practices contribute to project failure. Similarly, Ahsan and Kumar Paul (2018) emphasized that effective budgeting and stakeholder participation in monitoring processes enhance the sustainability of donor-funded projects. However, the applicability of these findings to resource-constrained environments such as Kenya remains underexplored.

Planning is another key factor influencing sustainability. Yang, Huang, and Wu (2016) demonstrated that effective planning improves leadership, project performance, and client satisfaction. Aarseth et al. (2017) further argued that integrating sustainability strategies into project planning strengthens long-term outcomes. In Kenya, Wabwoba and Wakhungu (2018) established that integrated M&E planning enhances project ownership, accountability, and sustainability. Despite these findings, existing literature reveals conceptual, contextual, and methodological gaps regarding the integration of M&E practices and sustainability in donor-funded projects. This study therefore sought to bridge these gaps by examining the influence of M&E practices on the sustainability of projects funded by Self Help Africa in Kenya.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the relationship between monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices and project sustainability. The design was appropriate because it enabled the collection and analysis of respondents' perceptions, experiences, and opinions without manipulating study variables (Cooper, 2011). According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), research design provides a framework for data collection and analysis, while Kothari (2015) notes that descriptive designs are effective in establishing relationships among variables. The study therefore utilized the design to investigate the influence of management expertise, stakeholder participation, budgeting, and planning on the sustainability of projects funded by Self Help Africa in Kenya.

A census approach was used to collect data from the entire target population comprising management staff, accountants, planners, evaluation officers, and project managers involved in Self Help Africa projects. The census technique enhanced the representativeness and external validity of the findings by ensuring comprehensive population coverage (Mugenda, 2010). Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires containing both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions utilized a five-point Likert scale to generate measurable quantitative data, while open-ended questions allowed respondents to provide detailed views and experiences (Kumar, 2019).

Validity of the research instruments was achieved through expert review to assess clarity, relevance, and consistency with the study objectives and theoretical framework. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, where a coefficient of 0.7 and above was considered acceptable for internal consistency. Data analysis was conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics such as multiple regression analysis examined the relationship between independent variables and project sustainability. Diagnostic tests, including normality, autocorrelation, and multicollinearity tests, were performed to ensure the validity and accuracy of the regression model.

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Ethical clearance and research permits were obtained from relevant authorities, including Kenyatta University and National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study examined the influence of stakeholder involvement, budgeting, management expertise, and planning in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) on sustainability of Self-Help Africa initiatives in Kenya. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree). Results are presented using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Overall, respondents showed consistently positive perceptions across all M&E dimensions, indicating that management expertise, stakeholder participation, budgeting, and planning significantly contribute to project sustainability.

4.1.1 Management Expertise in M&E

Table 4.1: Descriptive Results for Management Expertise in M&E

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	S Dev
Management expertise ensures strategic oversight and alignment with sustainability goals	4.5	6.3	24.3	27.0	37.8	3.9	1.1
Skilled management optimizes resource allocation	9.0	5.4	18.0	36.9	30.6	3.7	1.2
Management mitigates risks affecting sustainability	8.1	7.2	20.7	29.7	34.2	3.7	1.2
Management involvement enhances organizational success	6.3	5.4	20.7	31.5	36.0	3.9	1.2
Management strategies improve implementation efficiency	7.2	6.3	19.8	32.4	34.2	3.8	1.2

Respondents generally agreed that management expertise strengthens strategic oversight, resource optimization, and risk management in donor-funded projects. Mean scores (3.7–3.9) indicate strong agreement, with moderate variability. This confirms that managerial capacity is central to sustainability outcomes.

4.1.2 Stakeholder Involvement in M&E

Table 4.2: Descriptive Results for Stakeholder Involvement in M&E

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	S Dev
Stakeholders are engaged in decision-making	5.4	6.3	16.2	35.1	36.9	3.9	1.1
Stakeholder management is integrated in strategy	3.6	10.8	21.6	26.1	37.8	3.8	1.2
Stakeholder needs are regularly assessed	3.6	9.0	18.0	35.1	34.2	3.9	1.1
Communication channels are effective	5.4	7.2	20.7	31.5	35.1	3.8	1.1
Feedback is regularly addressed	6.3	6.3	16.2	35.1	36.0	3.9	1.2

Findings show strong agreement that stakeholder engagement enhances transparency, accountability, and project ownership. High mean scores (3.8–3.9) confirm that participatory M&E strengthens sustainability through continuous communication and feedback integration.

4.1.3 Budgeting in M&E

Table 4.3: Descriptive Results for Budgeting in M&E

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	S Dev
Accurate budgeting ensures sustainability	4.5	7.2	20.7	25.2	42.3	3.9	1.2
Budgeting improves resource efficiency	4.5	5.4	18.0	27.0	45.0	4.0	1.1
Contingency funds enhance stability	4.5	6.3	28.8	32.4	27.9	3.7	1.1
Financial analysis improves cost-effectiveness	4.5	9.0	22.5	35.1	28.8	3.7	1.1
Budgeting improves accountability	5.4	8.1	18.0	36.0	32.4	3.8	1.1

Budgeting emerged as a critical determinant of sustainability, particularly in resource optimization and accountability. Mean scores (3.7–4.0) indicate strong consensus that financial planning strengthens donor-funded project effectiveness.

4.1.4 Planning in M&E

Table 4.4: Descriptive Results of Planning in M&E

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	S Dev
Planning aligns goals with sustainability	5.4	10.8	22.5	27.9	33.3	3.7	1.2
Planning includes risk management	5.4	4.5	17.1	36.0	36.9	3.9	1.1
Planning enhances resource allocation	4.5	9.0	23.4	32.4	30.6	3.8	1.1
Stakeholder engagement improves planning	9.9	5.4	17.1	32.4	35.1	3.8	1.3
M&E integration improves adaptability	3.6	10.8	17.1	33.3	35.1	3.9	1.1

Planning was strongly associated with sustainability through risk management, stakeholder inclusion, and adaptive M&E systems. Mean values (3.7–3.9) confirm planning as a foundational element of project sustainability.

4.1.5 Sustainability of Self-Help Africa Projects

Table 4.5: Descriptive Results for Sustainability

Statement	SD %	D %	N %	A %	SA %	M	S Dev
Management expertise supports longevity	9.9	4.5	16.2	36.9	32.4	3.8	1.2
M&E ensures self-sustained growth	6.3	7.2	18.0	36.0	32.4	3.8	1.2
Resource continuity ensures sustainability	6.3	5.4	20.7	27.9	39.6	3.9	1.2
Projects are sustainable	6.3	5.4	23.4	37.8	27.0	3.7	1.1
Capacity building enhances sustainability	8.1	6.3	15.3	40.5	29.7	3.8	1.2

Respondents agreed that sustainability is driven by management expertise, resource continuity, M&E systems, and capacity building. Overall means (3.7–3.9) indicate positive sustainability outcomes.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

4.2.1 Regression Analysis

To examine the linear relationship between Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices and sustainability of Self-Help Africa initiatives in Kenya, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. The results demonstrate that the model is statistically significant and explains a substantial proportion of variation in project sustainability.

Table 4.6: Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.716a	0.512	0.494	0.68425

The model summary indicates an R Square value of 0.512, implying that 51.2% of the variation in sustainability of Self-Help Africa projects is explained by the combined influence of management expertise, stakeholder participation, budgeting, and planning in M&E. This suggests that the selected variables have a strong explanatory power in determining project sustainability.

Table 4.6: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	52.171	4	13.043	27.857	.000b
Residual	49.629	28	0.468		
Total	101.800	32			

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is statistically significant ($F = 27.857$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the independent variables collectively provide a reliable explanation of sustainability outcomes, and the model is suitable for inference and policy interpretation.

Table 4.7: Regression Coefficients

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Sig.
Management Expertise in M&E	0.196	< 0.05
Stakeholder Participation	0.229	0.015
Budgeting in M&E	0.290	< 0.001
Planning in M&E	0.257	0.007

The regression coefficients reveal that all variables have a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainability of Self-Help Africa projects in Kenya. Management expertise ($B = 0.196$) indicates that improved managerial capacity enhances project sustainability through better coordination, decision-making, and implementation efficiency.

Stakeholder participation ($B = 0.229$, $p = 0.015$) significantly contributes to sustainability by promoting inclusivity and strengthening ownership and accountability in project processes. Budgeting in M&E ($B = 0.290$, $p < 0.001$) emerges as the strongest predictor, highlighting the critical role of financial planning and resource allocation in ensuring long-term project viability.

Planning in M&E (B = 0.257, p = 0.007) also shows a significant positive effect, demonstrating that effective planning enhances coordination, risk management, and structured implementation of project activities. Overall, the regression results confirm that M&E practices jointly and significantly influence sustainability of Self-Help Africa projects in Kenya, with budgeting identified as the most influential determinant. The findings further reinforce the importance of integrating strong financial management, participatory governance, skilled management, and structured planning within M&E systems to enhance long-term project sustainability.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concludes that Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) management skills are fundamental to the sustainability of Self-Help Africa projects in Kenya. Effective M&E systems, particularly those emphasizing performance measurement and capacity building, significantly enhance project sustainability. This underscores the importance of investing in well-structured, comprehensive, and context-sensitive M&E frameworks.

Stakeholder engagement emerged as a key determinant of sustainability, as inclusive participation in M&E processes enhances transparency, accountability, local ownership, and the quality of decision-making. Such engagement also strengthens institutional learning, improves data relevance and accuracy, and fosters collective responsibility among stakeholders.

The study further establishes that adequate budgeting for M&E is critical for project continuity. Proper allocation of financial resources supports timely reporting, informed decision-making, and effective tracking of project progress. Conversely, inadequate budgeting undermines accountability, weakens learning processes, and reduces overall project impact.

Finally, planning in M&E plays a central role in ensuring sustainability. Early and structured integration of M&E planning facilitates systematic tracking of performance, clear definition of indicators, and effective data collection mechanisms. It also ensures alignment with donor requirements and national development priorities, thereby strengthening transparency and long-term effectiveness.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends increased investment in skilled M&E personnel to enhance the quality of planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Strengthening staff capacity ensures that M&E systems are evidence-based, adaptive, and responsive to changing project environments. Local capacity building also improves data accuracy, timeliness, and relevance, leading to better decision-making and continuous improvement.

Stakeholder engagement should be institutionalized from the earliest stages of project design. Involving beneficiaries, local authorities, and key partners promotes ownership, alignment with community needs, and shared responsibility. Participatory M&E further enhances transparency, relevance, and trust, ensuring that project benefits are sustained beyond donor funding cycles.

The study also recommends that dedicated M&E budgets be established during the project inception phase. Adequate financial allocation ensures consistent implementation of M&E activities, adoption of appropriate technologies, and timely generation of high-quality information for decision-making.

Lastly, M&E planning should be fully integrated into project design from the outset. Structured planning with clear objectives, measurable indicators, and appropriate data collection tools enhances coordination, strengthens accountability, and ensures that project activities remain aligned with intended long-term sustainability outcomes.

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