

Clarity of Findings and Utilization of Monitoring and Evaluation Results: The Case of Non-Governmental Organizations in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

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Abstract

Efforts to make development programs more effective have gone through a paradigm shift from process to results. Increased pressure on the development community and especially NGOs to account for resource use and demonstrate success has significantly increased the need for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). Despite heightened activities of NGOs, poverty levels have continued to rise and living standards continue to deteriorate. Expected results of various development initiatives have not been forthcoming. As one of the components of improved performance of NGOs, utilization of M&E results has been cited as wanting by many studies. Using the case of NGOs in Nairobi City, this study sought to establish the influence of clarity of findings on utilization of M&E results. To achieve this, a specific objective was evaluated, guided by a research question and hypothesis. The objective was: to examine how clarity of findings influences utilization of M&E results in NGOs in Nairobi City County. Multi-stage sampling technique was used whereby stratified random sampling was applied to obtain a sample of 284 NGOs from a target population of 979 NGOs. Two Program Directors, two Program Managers as well as two Project Coordinators were also randomly picked for the Key Informant Interviews. Structured questionnaire was used as the main tool to collect data. Interview guide was also used to collect information for triangulating the results. Quantitative data from the study respondents were analyzed through bivariate and multiple regression analyses while qualitative data were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis. Tests for statistical assumptions showed the variables' data was normally distributed and had no multicollinearity. Using F-tests, the hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance. Clarity of findings had a positive and significant influence on utilization of M&E results with regression coefficients of $R^2=0.041$; $F(cal)=8.758 > F(crit) 3.92$, $p=0.003 < 0.05$ and $\beta = 0.189$, $t=2.959$, $p = 0.003 < 0.05$. The study recommends NGO management boards to establish mechanisms to ensure reports are vetted by editorial boards before publication or sharing. Rigorous review of reports by professional and ordinary people should be encouraged to ensure clarity before presenting to users. M&E departments should come up with guidelines that standardize expectations regarding quality of reports for both internal and external evaluators and establish templates that ensure reports are within certain acceptable parameters in terms of content and size.

Keywords: Clarity of findings, M&E results, Utilization of M&E results

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I. Introduction

The last decade has been marked by concerted efforts to make development programs more effective. This has seen the development community shift focus from processes to results. The development community is increasingly coming under pressure to account for resource use and to demonstrate that their policies and actions are improving the lives of beneficiary groups. This has increased interest in the need to monitor and evaluate the outcomes and impact of all development programs both nationally and internationally (United Nations, 2012).

Monitoring is a non-stop function that makes use of systematic series of information on predetermined indicators to offer management and the principle stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention with warning signs of the extent of progress and fulfillment of targets and progress within the use of available finances (World Bank, 2011). Evaluation is a process that involves systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of project related data that can be used to understand how the project is functioning in relation to its objectives. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) need to be designed as an intertwined participatory exercise where all stakeholders are involved (Bamberger, 2012).

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Monitoring and Evaluation is a process that helps improve performance and achieve results. Its goal is to improve current and future management of outputs, outcomes and impact. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has evolved over time and has mirrored the paradigm shifts that have occurred in management of projects (Nyonje, Ndunge and Mulwa, 2012).

Utilization of M&E results has been cited as wanting in a number of studies. Monitoring & Evaluation has been considered as the weakest link, for all development projects funded by the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group. According to a report by Swedish International Development Agency, most stakeholders in the projects studied never saw the results of evaluations and that the few who did, found nothing very new or useful in them (Segone,2008). It has been noted that in the last decade, several billions of shillings had been spent on evaluations, yet a third of those studies were not worth their investment (in terms of utilization) and another third were of uneven quality (Quesnel and Quebec, 2010).

Clarity of findings plays an integral part on the use of M&E results. It is increasingly important that M&E is better understood, communicated in simplified language, and conducted in a coordinated and sustainable manner that generates information that can easily be used. (UNAIDS, 2010). Reports should not be written only for scientists, colleagues, promotion and tenure committees, or department chairs. They should be written as though one is talking to somebody who is not an expert in that area. If the article is made that simple and straightforward, readers will be able to understand what was done. If a lot of jargon is used, compound sentences, or obscure wording, only the writer and co-authors will actually know what is being said (PMC, 2014). Clarity is important while conveying complex ideas and concepts. A document is in simple language if its wording, structure, and layout are so clear that the target readers can effortlessly locate what they need, comprehend what they find, and be able to use that information. (Editage Insights, 2017)

According to UNDP (2002), utilization of results to enhance performance is the principle motivation behind setting up a Monitoring and Evaluation System. In this way, where there is no efficient utilization of results, the entire idea of Monitoring and Evaluation frameworks as "ground-breaking the board instruments" helping enhance execution is vanquished.

Clarity of findings has a bearing on utilization of M&E results. Ambiguous findings or methods of presentation may result in under-utilization of results since the users may not be sure of what exactly is expected of them with regard to utilization. It is therefore imperative that findings be clear and presented clearly so as to increase the chances of utilization, which in the long run culminate into progress towards meeting the particular NGO's goals. This emerging consensus on use of results comes against a backdrop of widespread displeasure with the performance of NGOs development programs in many countries today. Despite heightened activities by the NGOs, the poverty levels and living standards continue to worsen. Malnutrition and ill health cases increase by the day among other challenges. These situations show that the expected results of various development programs have not been forthcoming (Chesos,2010).

Programs with the appropriate technologies and sufficient funds still perform poorly (Kusek and Rist, 2004). Despite efforts through M&E to find out what can be corrected to reverse the trend, most NGOs rarely utilize results from these ventures. A study by Koffi-Tessio (2002) additionally suggests that M&E structures are not meeting their compulsory condition as decision-making tools; alternatively their activities are regarded as controlling through a bureaucratic management. M&E is likewise regarded as a donor rather than a management requirement (Shapiro, 2011).The deficient acquisition of the ideal M&E systems by NGOs is likewise attributed to the organizations overemphasis on the physical infrastructure in preference to methodological and conceptual training. The foregoing illustrates that the M&E structures are not performing satisfactorily. They are confronting adverse situations which can be contributing to their insufficiency and which require intervention (Koffi-Tessio, 2002).

With 18% and 22% of national and international NGOs in Kenya operating in Nairobi respectively, the utilization of M&E results in these NGOs in Nairobi County is in need of attention and improvement (National Survey of NGOs Report, 2009). Research also shows that the foundation for evaluation is being built in many developing countries. Consequently with the growing global movement to demonstrate accountability and tangible results, many developing countries will be expected to adopt results-based M&E systems in the future, due to the international donors focus on development impact (Kusek and Rist, 2004).

According to the NGOs Coordination Board, there have been about one hundred and fifty eight NGOs that have been deregistered in Nairobi County (NGOs Coordination Board, 2014). Almost 85% of these NGOs have worked for a long time without making any impact in relation to the objectives they were pursuing. The resources committed by these local NGOs to the various projects are enormous. However the performance of most of them in relation to the objectives for which they were initiated and their impact is negligible (NGOs Coordination Board, 2013).

Moreover, program evaluation results neither effectively inform government policy nor provide a communication means to the public and various stakeholders to whom they must account. This therefore calls for more concerted efforts from NGOs to ensure that through the utilization of M&E results, their performance in terms of achieving their objectives is significantly improved. Consistent utilization of evaluation results would thus help enhance the quality of these NGOs in ensuring that they deliver on their mandate. This utilization would ensure that lessons learned from previous periods of implementation are factored in new plans and hence improvement in

performance. A culture of utilization of M&E results in NGOs will ensure better management of resources and decreased cases of repeated mistakes.

Methodologically, nearly all research on utilization of M&E results in the past have applied one of the pure approaches – qualitative or quantitative; yet given its complexity, adaptable methods such as mixed-methods should be applied. It is against this background that this study was carried out to examine the influence of clarity of findings on utilization of M&E results in NGOs in Nairobi City County in Kenya. Clarity of findings was defined as how easy to understand the M&E results are and ensuring they are presented to audiences in an easy to understand way. M&E results were defined as outcomes of Monitoring & Evaluation exercises in NGOs that are usually communicated in the form of a report. Utilization of M&E results was defined as the action of making practical and effective use of M&E results to ensure that NGO objectives are realized. This ensures there is change in performance and learning in the NGO.

II. Methodology

The study applied a Cross-sectional survey research design on a stratified random sample, followed by a purposive sample of 284 NGOs. The target population of this study consisted of 979 NGOs operating in Nairobi City County (NGO Coordination Board, 2019). Program Directors, Program Managers and Project Coordinators in these NGOs were selected as informants to provide information for the study. Data was collected by questionnaires and interview guides and the response rate was 72.89%. The responses included opinions on the extent of agreement by informants with statements about the indicators of the variables in the study and measurements were made on a five-point Likert-scale which was anchored on measurements that ranged from very low score to very high score between 1 and 5. Where 1 =strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=strongly agree. The averages of the summed score per respondent also ranged from 1 to 5. In order to fulfill the equidistance assumption in the likert scale the distance between 1 and 5 was divided into 5. This resulted into 0.8 units. The equidistance of 0.8 was distributed across the likert scale resulting into the following intervals: 1.0<1.8, 1.8<2.6, 2.6<3.4, 3.4<4.2, 4.2<5.0. The decision rules was such that; 1<SD<1.8=Very Low/Strongly Disagree (SD); 1.8D<2.6=Low/Disagree (D); 2.6<N<3.4=Neutral (N); 3.4<A<4.2=High/Agree (A); and 4.2<SA<5.0=Very High/Strongly Agree (SA).

III. Analysis of Findings

The respondents were asked to provide answers on 5 Likert items in the questionnaire that were measured on a five point Likert scale, where 5= strongly agree, 4=agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = disagree and 1 = strongly disagree. Then mean of each item was computed to assess the extent to which respondents agreed with views expressed in the item after which the composite mean and standard deviation was computed to assess the extent to which respondents agreed with clarity of M&E findings.

Table 1: Clarity of Findings and Utilization of M&E Results

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	MN	STDV		
1 For our NGO methods of presentation of M&E reports are usually clear.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	11 (5.3%)	157 (75.8%)	39 (18.8%)	4.14	0.47364	
2 For our NGO M&E reports are usually clear.	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	17 (8.2%)	154 (74.4%)	36 (17.4%)	4.09	0.49881		
3 For our NGO M&E reports are usually specific on what needs to be done.	0 (0%)	14 (6.8%)	88 (42.5%)	84 (40.6%)	21 (10.1%)	3.54	0.76768		
4 For our NGO M&E reports specify which particular individuals are expected to perform particular tasks.	0 (0%)	2 (1.0%)	67 (32.4%)	111 (53.6%)	27 (13.0%)	3.79	0.67063		
5 For our NGO M&E reports are usually the right size in volume.	0 (0%)	1 (0.5%)	62 (30.0%)	126 (60.8%)	18 (8.7%)	3.78	0.59845		
Composite Mean and Standard Deviation								3.87	0.6018

Results in Table 1 demonstrate that in an assessment of whether methods of presentation of M&E reports were clear, majority of respondents agreed with the statement (M=4.14, SD=0.47). Respondents further agreed that their NGO M&E reports were usually clear (M=4.09, SD=0.50). Moreover, respondents were evenly distributed between being neutral and in agreement on whether the NGO M&E reports were usually specific on what needs to be done (M=3.54, SD=0.77). The study also sought to establish whether NGO M&E reports specified which particular individuals were expected to perform particular tasks. Respondents were more or less in agreement with the statement with more than half the respondents preferring to agree or strongly agree with the statement (M=3.79, SD=0.67). Related to whether NGO M&E reports were usually the right size in volume, results revealed that respondents were in agreement about NGO M&E reports usually being the right size in volume. (M=3.78, SD=0.60)

The means of the five items used to extract data on clarity of findings were aggregated and used to compute the composite mean and standard deviation. This indicated that generally respondents were in agreement with most of the items in the scale (M=3.87, SD=0.602).

The study validated the quantitative data by collecting qualitative data using Key Informant Interviews. Participants were in agreement that methods of presentation of M&E reports were usually clear and that M&E results in their NGOs were specific on action points. This view was captured from a program director and program manager who said

“.....M&E results in our NGO are generally usually clear ”

(Respondent, Program Director, Program Manager)

However, one respondent was categorical that M&E results *“.....were not clear and that there was need for improvement.”*

(Respondent, Project Coordinator)

Another respondent was ambivalent stating that M&E results were sometimes clear and other times unclear.

“.....sometimes they are clear. In fact we are able to know where we stand. Other times they are unclear since we do not know what criteria was used to come up with results.”

(Respondent, Project Coordinator)

According to Visser et.al (2014), organizations need to think about who will use the M&E processes and findings. In utilization - focused evaluation clarity about primary intended users is key. Organizations need to take it a bit further to also think about those that may be affected by the M&E processes and findings, either positively or negatively. Related to this thinking, respondents were asked whether M&E results in their NGOs were specific on action points.

The study captured a participant who retorted;

.....” the M&E results are usually specific. However, they are sometimes not conclusive.”

(Respondent, Program Director)

This shows that there was general feeling that M&E was usually specific but not necessarily conclusive.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficients for Clarity of Findings and Utilization of M&E Results

Variables	Utilization of M&E results	Clarity of Findings
Utilization of M&E results	Pearson Correlation	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	
	n	207
Clarity of Findings	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000
	n	207

The findings in Table 2 indicate that clarity of findings had a weak positive linear association with utilization of M&E results in Nairobi City County (r=0.309,p<0.05). This shows that there was a weak positive correlation between clarity of findings and utilization of M&E results.

The results of the quantitative data were further subjected to regression analysis for the purpose of testing the null hypothesis.

Hypothesis: H₀; Clarity of findings does not have a significant influence on utilization of M&E results in NGOs in Nairobi City County.

The results of the test are represented in table 3.

Table 3: Clarity of Findings and Utilization of M&E Results

Change Statistics									
Model	R	Adjusted R Square	Std Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df 2	Sig F	
1	0.202	0.041	0.036	0.39912	0.041	8.758	1	205	0.003

Predictors: (Constant), Clarity of Findings

Dependent Variable: Utilization of M&E Results

Table 3 shows that clarity of findings had a coefficient of determination $R^2 = 0.041$. This result means that clarity of findings accounted for 4.1% of the variation in the utilization of M&E results in NGOs in Nairobi City County. This implied that 4.1% of the change in utilization of M&E results could be explained by clarity of findings in that particular NGO. Table 4 below shows analysis of variance for clarity of findings and utilization of M&E results.

Table 4: ANOVA for Clarity of Findings and Utilization of M&E Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
1	Regression	1.395	1	1.395	8.758	0.003
	Residual	32.656	205	0.159		
	Total	34.051	206			

In Table 4, the F-calculated 8.758 was greater than F- critical 3.92 and p-value of $p=0.003$ was less than the significance level of $p=0.05$, showing that the model was a good fit for the data analyzed. This indicated that the model could be used to predict the influence of clarity of findings on utilization of M&E results in NGOs in Nairobi City County, Kenya. Coefficients of regression for the influence of clarity of findings on utilization of M&E results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Coefficients of Clarity of Findings and Utilization of M&E Results

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	T	Sig
	Coefficients		Coefficients		
	B	Std Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.438	0.231		14.909	0.000
Clarity of Findings	0.189	0.064	0.202	2.959	0.003

Dependent variable: Utilization of M&E results

Dependent variable: Utilization of M&E results

The hypothesis regression model was as below:

$$Y = 3.438 + 0.189X_1 + 0.231$$

Where: Y= Utilization of M&E results

X_1 = Clarity of findings

The results showed that clarity of findings had a significant positive influence on utilization of M&E results as shown by the regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.189$ ($t=2.959$, $p = 0.003 < 0.05$) in Table 5. The p-value ($p=0.003$) was less than the significance level of $p=0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis that clarity of findings does not have a significant influence on utilization of M&E results was rejected. The results in this study were consistent with those of Knox Clarke, P and J. Darcy (2014) who in an ALNAP/ODI study observed that there were six criteria to judge the quality of evidence that is generated and used in humanitarian action: accuracy, representativeness, relevance, attribution, generalizability and clarity around concepts and methods.

According to an IFAD (2008) annual report on results and impact, recurrent criticisms against M&E systems include limited scope, complexity, low data quality, inadequate resources, weak institutional capacity, lack of baseline surveys and lack of use. The complexity aspect of M&E systems points to the importance of clarity of findings in as far as utilization of M&E results is concerned.

Further, these findings were also consistent with those of Gamba, Okwadi and Birungi (2021) who set out to ascertain the decision factors affecting utilization of Monitoring and Evaluation findings in implementation of Malaria Control Programmes (MCPs) in Mukono district, Uganda. The study used a survey design in which questionnaires were administered to 120 employees from Monitoring and Evaluation departments of the six organizations that were implementing Malaria Control Programmes and 6 health facility administrators whose health facilities were benefiting from Malaria Control Programmes in Mukono District. The study established that communication of the Monitoring and Evaluation findings and timeliness were the implementation factors that significantly affected the utilization of Monitoring and Evaluation findings in implementation of MCPs, with significance values of $p = 0.008 < 0.05$ for communication and $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ for timelines.

Moreover, a study by Winiko, Mbugua and Kyalo (2018) on the role of dissemination of Monitoring and Evaluation results in the promotion of performance of the Digital Education Technology (DET) Project in Malawi, established that dissemination of Monitoring and Evaluation results had a moderate positive influence on performance of the DET project in Malawi. These findings were consistent with those of the current study that established the importance of clarity of findings in ensuring utilization of M&E results. The clarity as well as the mode of dissemination of findings have a bearing on whether or not the findings will be utilized.

IV. Discussions of Findings

The study found out that methods of presentation of M&E reports were usually clear. Further, M&E reports in NGO were usually clear. The study also established that to a large extent M&E reports were usually specific on what needed to be done and that M&E reports specified which particular individuals were expected to perform particular tasks. The Pearson correlation data between clarity of findings and utilization of M&E results showed a weak positive and statistically significant correlation ($r=0.379$; $p=0.000<0.05$). The model summary also indicated that 4.1% of the change in utilization of M&E results could be explained by clarity of findings in that particular NGO ($R^2 = 0.41$). From the Likert scale analysis, the study also demonstrated that clarity of findings was significant in explaining variations in utilization of M&E results ($M=3.87$, $SD=0.60$). The results showed that clarity of findings had a significant positive influence on utilization of M&E results as shown by the regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.189$ ($t=2.959$, $p =0.003<0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that clarity of findings does not have a significant influence on utilization of M&E results was rejected.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study demonstrated that clarity of findings significantly influenced utilization of M&E results. Presentation of M&E reports in terms of clarity, specificity and who needed to perform specific tasks influenced utilization of M&E results. This finding was important for the body of knowledge in this discipline since it encourages M&E practitioners to invest in the quality of reporting because the clarity of findings positively influenced utilization of M&E results.

The study has revealed that aspects of clarity of findings such as clarity of M&E reports are vital. NGOs should therefore establish mechanisms to ensure that reports are vetted by an editorial board with necessary knowledge and skills to ensure that they are clear before publishing or sharing with the relevant departments. Rigorous review of reports by professional and ordinary people will ensure clarity before presenting to users.

Similarly, specificity of reports in terms of what needs to be done and who needs to be tasked with the responsibility for implementation should be encouraged in NGOs. M&E departments should ensure they keep a record of each report in terms of what it recommends as well as who is tasked with the responsibility to ensure the recommendations are implemented.

It was also shown that, the volume of M&E reports foster utilization of M&E results. NGOs should therefore encourage M&E departments to come up with guidelines that standardize expectations regarding quality of reports for both internal and external evaluators. They should establish templates that ensure reports are within certain acceptable parameters in terms of content and size.

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