

MONITORING AND EVALUATION PRACTICES AND QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY IN MACHAKOS COUNTY GOVERNMENT, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem: Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a critical management function that enhances accountability, evidence-based decision-making, and organizational performance. Despite substantial fiscal transfers to Kenya's county governments since the introduction of devolution in 2013, the quality of public service delivery remains below expectations, partly due to weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation systems.

Purpose of the Study: This study examined the influence of monitoring and evaluation practices on quality service delivery in Machakos County Government. Specifically, the study assessed the effects of M&E training, M&E planning, stakeholder engagement, and M&E reporting on quality service delivery.

Research Methodology: The study was guided by Human Capital Theory, Stakeholder Theory, and Performance Theory and adopted a descriptive research design. A stratified random sample of 130 county officials was drawn from a target population of 143 employees involved in planning, monitoring, and reporting county development programmes. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered through Kobo Toolbox, achieving an 87% response rate (n = 113). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

Findings: The findings revealed that all four M&E practices had positive and statistically significant relationships with quality service delivery. Multiple regression analysis showed that M&E planning ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$) was the strongest predictor of quality service delivery, followed by M&E reporting ($\beta = 0.264$, $p < 0.001$), M&E training ($\beta = 0.218$, $p < 0.001$), and stakeholder engagement ($\beta = 0.195$, $p = 0.001$). The four variables jointly explained 72.6% of the variation in quality service delivery ($R^2 = 0.726$).

Conclusion: The study concludes that strengthening monitoring and evaluation practices, particularly planning and reporting, significantly improves service delivery in county governments.

Recommendation: The study recommends institutionalizing comprehensive M&E frameworks, investing in staff capacity development, strengthening stakeholder participation, and enhancing the use of M&E findings in planning, budgeting, and decision-making to improve public sector performance.

Keywords: *Monitoring, Evaluation Practices, Quality Service, Delivery, Machakos County Government*

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a systematic process of collecting and analysing information to assess the progress, performance, and impact of projects, programmes, and policies, thereby ensuring that objectives are achieved and resources are utilized efficiently (World Bank, 2022). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defines monitoring as the continuous tracking of progress against planned objectives, while evaluation assesses the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of interventions (OECD, 2021). Together, these processes generate evidence for informed decision-making, accountability, organizational learning, and continuous improvement. Globally, M&E has become an integral component of public sector governance, promoting transparency, accountability, and results-based management. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) recognized robust M&E systems as essential for planning, implementing, managing, and reporting development results. Empirical studies have shown that effective M&E practices improve organizational performance, strengthen accountability, and enhance service delivery (Shittu, 2023; Mohamoud, 2022).

In Kenya, M&E has been institutionalized through national development frameworks, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2000), the Economic Recovery Strategy (2003–2007), and Kenya Vision 2030, supported by the Constitution of Kenya (2010), the Public Finance Management Act Cap. 412A and the County Governments Act Cap. 265. The Government has further strengthened M&E through the establishment of the Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (MED), the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES), and the County Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (CIMES). Despite these institutional reforms and increased fiscal transfers to county governments following devolution in 2013, the quality of public service delivery remains below expectations due to weak planning, inadequate accountability, poor resource utilization, and ineffective implementation of M&E systems (Kipruto, 2020; World Bank, 2022). Previous studies have demonstrated that M&E capacity building, planning, and stakeholder engagement positively influence programme performance (Kamau, 2017; Mue, 2016; Ndothya & Chege, 2023). However, most of this evidence is drawn from non-governmental organizations, with limited empirical studies focusing on county governments. This study therefore examined the influence of monitoring and evaluation practices on quality service delivery in Machakos County Government, Kenya.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite significant investments and policy reforms under Kenya's devolved system of government, many county governments continue to experience challenges in delivering quality public services. Persistent issues such as bureaucratic processes, weak accountability mechanisms, corruption, inadequate resource utilization, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices have constrained service delivery and the realization of intended development outcomes (Hussein & Minja, 2019; Musyoka, 2022). Although county governments have received substantial financial resources since the introduction of devolution in 2013, many development projects continue to experience delays, cost overruns, and implementation inefficiencies, limiting their effectiveness.

Monitoring and evaluation is widely recognized as a critical management tool for strengthening accountability, improving resource utilization, and supporting evidence-based decision-making (World Health Organization, 2025). However, in many county governments, M&E systems remain weak and are often used primarily to meet compliance requirements rather than to promote organizational learning and improve performance. Consequently, opportunities to identify implementation challenges and enhance service delivery are frequently missed.

Previous studies have examined the influence of M&E practices on project performance in specific sectors, particularly health projects (Mokua, 2019; Kiplangat, 2021; Mohamud, 2022). While these studies provide useful insights, their findings are largely sector-specific and do not adequately explain how M&E practices influence overall service delivery across county government programmes. This study therefore sought to address this empirical gap by examining the influence of monitoring and evaluation practices on quality service delivery in Machakos County Government.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

General Objective

To determine the influence of Monitoring and Evaluation planning and reporting on quality service delivery in Machakos County Government.

Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the influence of Monitoring and Evaluation planning on quality service delivery in Machakos county government.

- ii. To assess the influence of Monitoring and Evaluation reporting on quality service delivery in Machakos county government.

LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORICAL REVIEW

Performance Theory

Performance Theory, developed by Richard Schechner in 1967, explains that performance is influenced by factors such as the environment, knowledge, skills, competence, and individual attributes (Mokua & Kimutai, 2019). The theory suggests that improved knowledge and competence enhance individuals' ability to achieve desired results, solve complex problems, and increase organizational efficiency while reducing costs and resource wastage (Omar & Inaba, 2020; Hussein & Minja, 2019). The theory emphasizes continuous learning and capacity development as key drivers of improved performance across different organizational contexts. It is relevant to this study because staff competence is essential for effective implementation of programmes and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems. Competent and skilled employees are better equipped to deliver quality services, make informed decisions, and improve service delivery performance in county governments.

Results-Based Management (RBM) Theory

Results-Based Management (RBM) Theory is a management approach that focuses on achieving measurable results through effective planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Unlike traditional management approaches that emphasize activities and inputs, RBM prioritizes outputs, outcomes, and impacts to ensure that programmes achieve their intended objectives (Waheed & Abbas, 2024). The theory promotes accountability, transparency, efficient resource utilization, and evidence-based decision-making by using performance information to improve organizational effectiveness (Head, 2016). RBM is particularly relevant to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) because it emphasizes the use of performance indicators, regular monitoring, and evaluation findings to assess progress and inform corrective actions. The continuous generation and use of performance data enable organizations to improve programme implementation, strengthen accountability, and enhance service delivery (Damiyano, 2025). This theory underpins the present study by explaining how effective M&E systems contribute to improved service delivery performance in county governments. Through systematic performance measurement and evidence-based decision-

making, M&E supports efficient resource allocation, continuous learning, and the achievement of organizational objectives.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

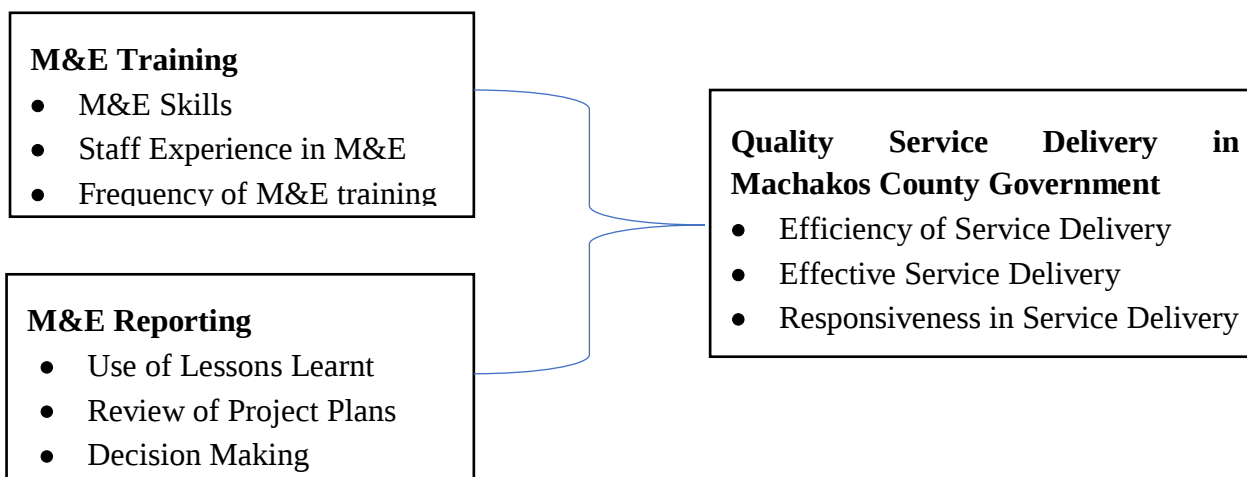


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

M&E Planning

M&E planning is a systematic approach used to measure and assess the performance and impact of programs, projects or policies. It involves setting up a framework that helps organisation track progress, assess outcomes and make informed decisions. According to Okafor (2021) in planning of the M&E practices, every aspects of the program that is required to be in place are covered in order to ensure early detection of issues/lapses as well as making informed decisions. Ngugi (2023) and Okafor (2021) are some of the scholars who have laid down important considerations for a M&E plan. These considerations include but not limited to M&E budgets to carry out M&E activities, setting targets and timeline consideration complete the M&E plan and give a better coverage in terms of providing oversight and giving direction to the project during implementation. It is important to note that the components of an M&E plan that affect the provision of high-quality services are crucial to the goals of this study. The M&E plan describes the long-term relationships between inputs, activities, outputs, and results while outlining the various underlying assumptions that the project's successes are reliant upon. A well-organized M&E plan is essential to any project or program's success. It enables organisations to systematically track progress, evaluate outcomes, and make informed decisions that enhance effectiveness and accountability.

M&E Reporting

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) reporting involves the systematic collection, analysis, and dissemination of performance information to assess project progress and outcomes. It promotes accountability, transparency, organizational learning, and evidence-based decision-making by ensuring that public resources are used effectively and intended results are achieved (Mokua & Kimutai, 2019; Nweke, 2021). Effective M&E reporting enables organizations to monitor implementation progress, improve service delivery, and identify areas requiring corrective action. However, weak reporting systems and poor documentation limit the use of M&E information for decision-making and programme improvement. Therefore, standardized reporting and strengthened M&E capacity are essential for enhancing organizational performance and achieving successful project outcomes (Hussein & Minja, 2019; Mohamud, 2022; Onyango, 2019).

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

M&E Planning

A monitoring and evaluation plan is a written document that provides a brief overview of the operation of the program's M&E system, according to Okafor (2021). The details of a program's monitoring, assessment, and reporting frequency should be included in the M&E plan (Cleland, 2017). World Health Organization (2019) further recounted M&E plan as a tool that defines the project indicators, expounds the data that is to be collected, the data collection methods, analysis and reporting. According to Okafor (2021) in the planning of the M&E activities, every aspect of the program that is required to be in place are covered in order to ensure early detection of issues/lapses as well as making informed decisions. A well-developed M&E plan serves as a roadmap, guiding stakeholders on what data to collect, how to collect and how to use it to inform decision-making and improve project performance.

M&E Reporting

Studies have shown that effective M&E reporting enhances project implementation and service delivery by providing timely and reliable information for decision-making. Hussein & Minja (2019) found that quality M&E reports improve project implementation and government performance, while Gogo and Wabala (2024) and Otieno & Njeri (2016) established that effective M&E reporting positively influences project performance, accountability, and stakeholder learning. However, there is limited evidence on how county governments utilize

M&E reports to improve service delivery, highlighting the need for further research in this area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design to examine the influence of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices on service delivery in Machakos County Government (Priya, 2021). The target population comprised 225 employees from six key county departments. Using Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 143 respondents was selected through stratified random sampling. Primary data were collected using self-administered structured questionnaires distributed electronically via the Kobo platform, while secondary data were obtained from relevant documents. The questionnaire included demographic information and Likert-scale items on M&E practices and service delivery. The collected data were coded, tabulated, and analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques (Mohajan, 2020; Yan & Williams, 2022).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Out of the 130 questionnaires administered, 113 were returned, yielding an 87% response rate. Since a response rate of 70% or above is considered adequate for generalization (Coppock, 2019), the achieved response rate was sufficient for the study.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

M&E Planning and Quality Service Delivery

The findings show a moderately positive perception of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) planning in Machakos County Government (Mean = 3.73, SD = 1.060). Respondents agreed that M&E planning aligns with service delivery goals, activities are well organized, and there is a clear M&E strategy. However, concerns were raised regarding inadequate resource allocation and the infrequent review of M&E plans. These findings support previous studies by Mue (2016), Okafor (2021), and Ndothya and Chege (2023), which found that effective M&E planning enhances project performance, facilitates informed decision-making, and improves service delivery.

Table 1: M&E Training and Quality Service Delivery

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. D
M&E activities are well-organized	4%	9%	14%	50%	23%	3.79	1.024
M&E planning aligns with service delivery goals	3%	7%	11%	55%	24%	3.90	0.947
There is a clear strategy for M&E activities	5%	10%	13%	48%	24%	3.76	1.085
M&E plans are reviewed and updated regularly	6%	11%	16%	46%	21%	3.65	1.112
Resources are adequately allocated for M&E activities	7%	12%	18%	44%	19%	3.56	1.134
Average						3.73	1.060

M&E Reporting and Quality Service Delivery

The timeliness, comprehensiveness, and accessibility of M&E reports would further strengthen service delivery in Machakos County Government.

Table 2: M&E Reporting and Quality Service Delivery

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. D
M&E reports are comprehensive	4%	10%	15%	49%	22%	3.75	1.045
M&E reports are timely	5%	11%	14%	48%	22%	3.71	1.083
M&E reports are used for decision-making	3%	7%	10%	54%	26%	3.93	0.936
M&E reports are accessible to all relevant stakeholders	6%	12%	17%	45%	20%	3.61	1.115
M&E reports are clear and easy to understand	4%	9%	13%	51%	23%	3.80	1.002
Average						3.76	1.036

The findings indicate a moderately positive perception of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) reporting in Machakos County Government (Mean = 3.76, SD = 1.036). Most respondents agreed that M&E reports are used for decision-making, are clear, and are comprehensive. However, lower ratings for report timeliness and stakeholder accessibility suggest areas requiring improvement. The highest-rated aspect was the use of M&E reports for decision-making (Mean = 3.93), highlighting their importance in supporting evidence-based management. In contrast, accessibility of reports to stakeholders received the lowest mean score (Mean = 3.61), indicating the need to strengthen report dissemination. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which emphasize that quality M&E reporting enhances accountability, transparency, knowledge sharing, informed decision-making, and project

performance (Hussein & Minja, 2019; Mokua & Kimutai, 2019; Shivachi, Nzulwa, & Kwen, 2019; Otieno & Njeri, 2016).

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.852a	0.726	0.716	0.192847

The R value of 0.852 indicates a strong positive relationship between the independent variables (M&E practices) and the dependent variable (quality service delivery). The R Square value of 0.726 suggests that approximately 72.6% of the variation in quality service delivery can be explained by the combined effect of M&E training, M&E planning, stakeholder engagement and M&E reporting.

Table 4: ANOVA Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.528	4	2.632	70.784	.000b
	Residual	4.015	108	0.037		
	Total	14.543	112			

The F-statistic of 70.784 and the corresponding p-value of 0.000 indicate that the regression model is statistically significant, meaning that all the independent variables (M&E training, M&E planning, stakeholder engagement and M&E reporting) significantly predict quality service delivery in Machakos County Government.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.546	0.195		2.800	0.006
	M&E Training	0.218	0.052	0.256	4.192	0.000
	M&E Planning	0.287	0.058	0.312	4.948	0.000
	Stakeholder Engagement	0.195	0.055	0.228	3.545	0.001
	M&E Reporting	0.264	0.061	0.289	4.328	0.000

The study established a significant positive relationship between M&E planning and quality service delivery ($r = 0.712$, $p < 0.001$). Regression results further showed that M&E planning significantly predicts quality service delivery ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$) and is the strongest contributor among the M&E practices examined. These findings support previous studies by Mue (2016) and Ndothya and Chege (2023), which emphasize that effective M&E planning enhances project performance and service delivery. The study established that M&E reporting has a significant positive influence on quality service delivery ($r = 0.729$, $p < 0.001$; $\beta = 0.264$, $p < 0.001$). The findings suggest that effective M&E reporting enhances accountability, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making, thereby improving service delivery. These results are consistent with Hussein & Minja (2019) and Otieno & Njeri (2016), who found that quality and timely M&E reporting contributes significantly to project and service delivery performance.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices significantly influence quality service delivery in Machakos County Government. Specifically, M&E planning emerged as the strongest predictor of service delivery, highlighting the importance of systematic planning, clear performance indicators, adequate resource allocation, and structured implementation frameworks. The study further established M&E reporting significantly improves service delivery by supporting evidence-based decision-making, transparency, and accountability through timely and comprehensive reporting. Overall, the study concludes that strengthening M&E training, planning, stakeholder engagement, and reporting as an integrated system is essential for improving service delivery in county governments. Collectively, these practices explain a substantial proportion of the variation in service delivery performance, underscoring the importance of robust M&E systems in enhancing public sector performance.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems through enhanced staff training, effective planning, stakeholder engagement, and timely reporting to improve service delivery. It also recommends that the national government and development partners support county governments by providing policy guidance, capacity building, and resources to promote effective M&E practices and evidence-based decision-making.

Future studies should examine additional factors that may influence service delivery, such as organizational culture, political environment, and resource availability. Researchers should also investigate the moderating effects of variables such as county size, revenue base, and governance structures on the relationship between M&E practices and service delivery. Further research should adopt longitudinal designs to assess the long-term impact of M&E practices and conduct comparative studies across different county governments to identify best practices and context-specific strategies for strengthening M&E systems and improving service delivery.

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