

INFLUENCE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION BUDGET ON PERFORMANCE OF HORTICULTURE PROJECTS IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Project performance is dependent on various factors including specific itemized budget for achieving set results. Allocation of resources for project implementation and monitoring is a political one and considered an accountability issue. Although it is appreciated that budget allocation is crucial in tracking performance, little is known as to what influence monitoring and evaluation budget has on performance of projects. This study sought to examine the influence of monitoring and evaluation budget on performance of horticulture projects in Nakuru County in Kenya. The study was anchored in pragmatism and utilized correlation and cross-sectional survey. Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis were employed. A structured questionnaire of Likert was the main tool for quantitative data. Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions were used to triangulate findings. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were generated from the descriptive data. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation

Coefficient(r) was computed. Findings showed that monitoring and evaluation budget was a major contribution to high performance of horticulture as shown by a correlation coefficient which was statistically significant. Monitoring and evaluation budget should be clearly delineated within the overall project budget to give the monitoring and evaluation function the due recognition it plays in contributing to high project performance.

Keywords: Monitoring, Evaluation, Budget, Performance, Projects

INTRODUCTION

Performance of many projects is to a large extent dependent on both financial and human related factors. More so achievement of project results depends on availability and utilization of such resources. Allocation of resources for monitoring and evaluation (M & E) in organizations is an accountability issue. Implementation of an effective M & E requires a participatory approach in budgetary planning, allocation and review (Khake&Worku, 2013). Equally important involving those tasked with the M & E function in budgeting promotes ownership and improves delivery of project results. Nevertheless, providing resources for M & E is a political process requiring the support of top management (Mavhiki, Nyamwanza&Dhoro, 2013). Despite this challenge in allocation of resources for monitoring and evaluation function, M & E is gaining traction and seen as a tool for strategic learning especially in project management. As such project leaders as well as project sponsors are setting aside financial resources for monitoring and evaluation. Though this is the case, the process is top down, creating a scenario seen as an afterthought by the management (Hastak, Gokhale & Safi, 2011).

Whereas the importance of itemized project budget is a necessity, the actual allocation and prioritization of monitoring and evaluation (M & E) budget to gauge performance of projects calls for more attention. Equally, and with adoption of results based M & E, tracking of project finances has gained a higher importance, even for farmer organization. Despite budget related performance based developments, projects are still characterized by poor performance of projects (Nzekwe, Oladejo&Emoh, 2015). Hence concerns have emerged whether allocation of M&E budget contributes to better project performance. Though there is increasing information on effects of cost related project implementation challenges and project failure is seen to persist (Naido, 2011; Ika, 2012; Okello & Mugambi, 2015). More so there appears to be limited empirical evidence as to what extent M & E budget related factors influence performance of projects.

Although, performance of projects has been a concern in project implementation for many years, assessment of project performance is based on traditional critical success factors using

the triple criteria of time, budget and quality (Styne,2014). Despite these set standards gauging performance, different projects are characterized by varying sizes and inherent complexities that provide an opportunity to assess unique individual projects using other criteria (Nzekwe et al., 2015). This has a bearing in assessing performance of projects since stakeholders interpret performance differently. Some researchers however argue that these criteria are too limited and therefore suggest alternatives, such as benefits for the stakeholder, project budgets and project results (Mavhiki, Kwandayi&Nyaboke, 2013; Styne, 2014)

From empirical literature reviewed, the influence of cumulative project budgets has been established in social development projects (Ifrah, Kerosi & Ondabu, 2015; Khake& Worku, 2013 & Ika, 2012). However, the influence of M & E budget on performance of horticulture projects supported through a farmers' federation has not been established. This study therefore sought to assess the influence of M & E budget, on performance of horticulture projects in Nakuru County.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Projects involve defined objectives that need to be achieved. Measures for performance of projects according to Ika (2012) include time, budget, safety, quality and overall client satisfaction. Despite this being the case, monitoring and evaluation in many of today's organizations is ad hoc, not aligned to strategy, and in most cases underfunded. These have been found to be true regardless of sector, type or size of projects (Okello &Mugambi 2015;Khake & Worku, 2013). Often, underfunding has led to monitoring and evaluation efforts being perceived as adding little value to organization decision makers (Kuwaviyah.2010).As such monitoring and evaluation efforts are perceived to be not worth their cost. Nevertheless, Mavhiki et al. (2013) argues that monitoring and evaluation as a tool for strategic learning is gaining traction in project management especially at strategic level for managing projects budgets. Importantly, M &E budget is considered as key indicator under results based management.

Despite management consideration for adoption of results based M&E, organizations implementing projects are doing it cautiously when it comes to resource allocation for M & E function (Bayraktar et al.,2011).Though concerns about the value of monitoring and evaluation continue, some organizations are increasing their investments in monitoring and evaluation as value addition function. This experimentation of new approaches is aimed at improving effectiveness and impact of M & E in achieving high level of project performance. In their study of factors affecting municipal service delivery, Khake&Worku (2012) argues that providing resources for implementation of M & E requires planning and consistent commitment by

management. Similarly, Guo & Neshkova (2013) study on citizen input on budgetary process established that citizen participation is positively correlated with higher organizational performance.

Where M & E is taken as performance accountability function for project managers the responsibility involves allocation of resources and finding value for those resources especially those allocated for monitoring and evaluation, (Mwangi, Nyang'wara & Kulet, 2015). Besides development of monitoring and evaluation plans, it would not be meaningful, effective and efficient if the required resources needed to transform its achievement into concrete and practical results are not available (Mavhiki et al., 2013). According to a report by IFAD (2013) allocation of financial resources to monitoring and evaluation involves budgetary planning, management and control of the same resources to achieve desired results. More so involving those tasked with M & E function in the budgeting process increases the chances of ownership (Ifrah, Kerosi & Ondabu, 2015). Equally important, when M & E staff or focal points are part of the budgeting process and understands the investment put into M & E, they are likely to work towards ensuring that M & E system is effective. Though, this is desirable, many organization budgeting and planning process is top down (Ijeoma, 2010). The meaningfulness and usability of monitoring and evaluation information has been limited because of its disconnection from strategic and organizational level decision making including finances and budgetary decisions (Kavuyah (2010). Moreover, monitoring and evaluation budgets are a mystery; there is rarely a dedicated organizational-level budget line item for monitoring, evaluation. Because of the limited or no allocation of resources for monitoring and evaluation, there are few processes, systems, and opportunities for learning from and about monitoring and evaluation. This limits the ability of organization to make sense of project monitoring and evaluation information /findings and to translate them into action and results including assessing how projects are performing (Agusti, 2012).

The decision to put in place monitoring and evaluation is political in nature, requiring top management support and resource commitment where the project budgets provide a clear and adequate for monitoring and evaluation activities. According to Kuwaviyah (2010) on relations between budgeting and performance, specific budget for priority items such as tracking budgets should be clearly delineated within the overall project budget. This will give the monitoring and evaluation function the due recognition it plays in project management. According to Yuni & Siti (2016) for successful implementation of budgets it is advisable to involve all human resources as this will increase accountability. More so because each will be responsible for ensuring that budgetary allocation under them are utilized well. This therefore calls for a more scientific decision making of allocating resources for M & E. One way is to involve those tasked with M &

E in budgeting process since they understand what is required to carry out a result based M & E function that helps determine the cost of best performing projects as suggested by (Kuwaviyah, 2010; Agusti, 2012; Yuni & Siti, 2016).

This study was guided by Theory of budgeting by Hirst (1987) and Contingency Theory. Theory of budgeting proposes that for organizations to perform better, an effective budgetary control is necessary as this will guide in establishing a system of efficient control and manage potential risks. As such budget becomes the foundation of reliable management process to guide any performance process including projects related performance measurement. Contingency Theory proposes that performance is a consequence of the fit between several factors: such as structure, people, technology, strategy, finances, budgets and culture (Islam & Hu, 2012). The Contingency Theory acknowledges that relationships that exist between any two or more variables are influenced by other variables. In this study M & E Budget variables namely budget allocation and budget review are contingent and influence project performance.

Overall, the two theories were preferred for this study because an understanding of Theory of Budgeting and Contingency Theory provides an enhanced appreciation of how each of the sub systems of an organization interconnects and interacts to achieve the set performance goals. Within the project environment there are those mandated with project development, allocation of M & E resources, selection and recruitment of M & E staff and tracking project implementation and performance. Consequently, understanding projects from contingency perspective help project leader's knowhow to plan better, how to obtain and allocate resource, as well as manage information generated from project implementation for decision making.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed mixed approach to carry out cross sectional, correlation and descriptive survey. The choice of mixed approach allowed for both descriptive and inferential methods in data collection, analysis and interpretation. The target population for this study was farmers groups implementing various projects supported by Kenya National Farmers Federation (KENAFF) in Nakuru County. Out of 45 groups, 28 purely implemented horticulture projects hence were purposively selected for the study. Focus on the 28 groups implementing projects was preferred because they were spread across 10 sub Counties out of a total of 12 sub Counties in Nakuru County hence had greater representation.

Sampling frame for groups implementing horticulture was the project register while the sampling frame for individual respondents from the specific groups was the membership register indicating the designation of each individual member. Out of a total of 28 groups, 15 projects

were clustered per the sub counties and wards. Proportionate sampling was used to get groups per cluster represented by Sub County as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Sample Size Determination

Name of Cluster	No of Groups	Sampled Groups
Kuresoi North	5	3
Molo	8	4
Nakuru Town East	2	1
Bahati	2	1
Nakuru Town West	2	1
Njoro	9	5
Total	28	15

Respondents were drawn from the sampled groups and at KENAFF secretariat including staff and management. As such respondents included group leaders who comprised the chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, vice secretary treasurer and four other committee members representing special interest. Focus on group leaders was because they have been trained by KENAFF in project management including monitoring and evaluation of projects. The second category of respondents was KENAFF staff supporting implementation of horticulture projects in Nakuru. While the third category included KENAFF top leadership that oversee the overall implementation of projects by the groups.

For individual respondents, purposive sampling was used to draw respondents from each of the sampled 15 farmer groups. The respondents from the groups were purposively selected according to their designation in the group, out of which five had to be elected officials comprising chairperson, vice chairperson, secretary, vice secretary, and treasurer and at least four member representatives of special interest groups. Each group has a leadership management team of nine who are also farmers in their own capacity. Hence from each group nine (9) respondents were drawn giving a total of 135 respondents from the 15 groups.

For triangulation purpose, respondents from KENAFF secretariat were sampled through stratified sampling and purposively sampling respectively. KENAFF staffs supporting horticulture projects were sampled at the different levels (stratum) including those at the secretariat and the county level. At the secretariat level, stratified sampling was done per department to purposively select managers and program officers supporting horticulture projects in Nakuru County. For the management, board members were purposively selected since they sit in the project management board and make decisions regarding project implementation, including allocation

of resources, monitoring and evaluating. A summary of respondents from KENAFF is summarized in the following Table 2.

Table 2: Sampling of Respondents

Category of respondents	Number of respondents
Group Respondents- nine respondents per group (15 * 9)	135
Top Management	
• Board including CEO	5
• Regional Back stopper	1
KENAFF Secretariat Implementing Team	
• Project coordinators	6
• M & E Project officers	2
• County Coordinator	1
• Project Managers	3
Total	154

The overall total respondents for this study was 154, comprising 135 drawn from the groups, 19 from KENAFF secretariat.

This being a mixed research the study used quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection. A likert scale Questionnaire was the main tool for quantitative data was used for farmers and KENAFF implementing team. Interview schedule was used for key informants drawn from KENAFF top management. Focused group discussions were used to gather information from farmers who did not participate in responding to the questionnaires.

To test construct validity, of the study operationalized the research variables and ensured that translation reflected the true meaning of the constructs. Reliability of instruments for this study was assured through methodological triangulation, which strengthened the study by combining methods. To ensure internal consistency Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient is determined. Creswell (2012) indicate that a reliable research instrument should have a composite Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient of at least 0.7 for all items under the study. Cronbach's Alpha for Performance of horticulture projects was 0.844 while that of M & E budget was 0.817 and was deemed adequate. Data analysis began by clean up, reduction and describing data sets. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were generated from the descriptive data. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient(r) was computed. Hypothesis was tested using correlation and regression analysis

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Data analysis began by clean up, reduction and describing data sets. Descriptive and inferential statistics of the influence of M & E budget on performance of horticulture projects was done. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were generated from the descriptive data. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient(r) was computed. Hypothesis was tested using correlation and regression analysis.

Descriptive Analysis of Project Performance

Questionnaires were used as the main tool for data collection. Out of the 154, a total of 150 were filled which was a return rate of (97.4%) which was adequate for the study. A response rate of 85% or more is desirable for social science research (Fan & Yan, 2010). The high responses rate was attributed to administration of the questionnaires at sites that were convenient to the respondents.

The indicators for performance of horticulture projects measured were; economic status of farmers, technical performance of projects and farmers satisfaction of products and services. Economic status was measured in terms of: source of income to farmers, improved opportunities for income generation for farmers, connection of farmers to markets, differences in lives of farmers, satisfactory of profits and creation of job opportunities to farmers. Technical performance of projects was based on: engagement of project leaders to successful project performance, contribution of skilled project leaders/managers to high project performance, quality of produce being improved by M&E, improvement of overall project performance due to provision of technical advisory. Farmers' satisfaction of products and services was based on: relevance of project products and services, positive impact of project products and services to beneficiaries, satisfaction and dissatisfaction of project products and services by majority of the farmers.

A look at the mean of the performance indicators revealed that respondents were of the view that technical performance was an important aspect of performance of horticulture projects in the County. This is according to the 5 point Likert scale indicator which produced a Mean of 3.801 and an SD of 0.849 for this category. This was followed by farmers' satisfaction of products and services which had a mean of 3.197 and an SD of 0.758, and finally economic status of farmers with a mean of 3.103 and a standard deviation of 0.874. Table 3 presents the views of respondents about the performance of horticulture projects supported in Nakuru County

Table 3: Performance of Horticulture Projects

Description	Mean	SD
Economic status of farmers	3.103	0.874
Technical Performance of projects	3.801	0.849
farmers satisfaction of products and service	3.197	0.758
Composite	3.197	0.758

According to Table 4 the means M &E budget allocation and Budget Review was 2.633 and 2.779 respectively, while the composite mean is 2.706. The means are approximately 3, which falls under Neutral according to Likert scale rating indicating that the respondents may not be involved in budget allocation and review processes. However, 43.3% of the respondents agreed that budget allocation was important for project performance in the County though not all the project members are involved in budget issues. Another 32.6% was of the view that budget review is necessary in project performance assessment.

Table 4. Descriptive analysis of M &E Budget

Description	Mean	SD
Budget Allocation	2.633	0.943
Budget Review	2.779	1.041
Composite	2.706	0.992

Similarly, responses from focused group discussions indicated that in most instances, only group leaders comprising chairperson, secretary and treasurer are involved in budget allocation as well as reviews. On the specific item of whether M &E budget was a priority, majority of the respondents to a large extent agreed it is of priority despite them not being involved in these processes. In another FGD, it was noted that at group level a specific M &E budget is planned for the monthly review meetings. From those interviewed; one board member pointed out that: *“At the secretariat level, budget is allocated for all M & E functions covering costs for M &E staff and for monitoring activities and evaluations. The M &E staff is assigned to specific groups implementing projects”*

Another board member noted that: *“Allocating M & E resources is considered a priority like any other, KENAFF projects are guided by a results framework with indicators and targets that guides implementation.... M &E staff is involved in budget allocation process as well as reviews since they understand better what is required to carry out M & E activities”*

On the same aspect of allocation of M &E budget another board member interviewed noted that:
" Initially we had a challenge of how to allocate M &E resources, this has improved since we adopted a result base M &E system, where there is a budget line for each activity, however we need to strengthen M &E at the group level so that more are involved... this way we will create a sustainability path for the projects we support".

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

Study hypothesis aimed at establishing whether monitoring and evaluation budget had a significant influence on performance of horticulture projects. Data analysis from Quantitative and qualitative data revealed a linear relationship between M &E budget and performance of horticulture projects. To assess the extent to which M &E budget predicted performance of horticulture project a linear regression was conducted using a regression model of the form:

$y = \beta_0 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$ was estimated, where:

y = Performance of horticulture projects

β_0 = Constant

β_3 = Beta coefficient

X_3 = Monitoring and evaluation budget variable

ε = Error term

Results as indicated in Table 5 show that the correlation coefficient (r) of 0.890 indicates M&E budget had a significant influence on performance of horticulture projects in Nakuru County. The coefficient of determination (adjusted R-squared) of 0.694 suggested that M&E budget explained 69.4% of performance of horticulture projects while 30.6% was explained by other factors other than M&E budget. The Durbin-Watson Statistic of 1.012 showed absence of autocorrelation as such indicating the model was statistically good for estimation.

Table 5. Regression Results of the Influence of M&E budget on Performance of Horticulture Projects

Model Summaries	R	R-Square	Adj. R-Square	Durbin Watson Statistic	Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error
	.890	.792	.694	1.012		
(Constant)					11.063	6.528
M&E Budget					.621	.184
F (1,145) = 11.433, p=0.000<0.05						

The F-ratio of 11.433 is statistically significant at 5% [$p=0.000<0.05$] implying M&E budget had a significant influence on performance of horticulture projects supported in Nakuru County.

DISCUSSIONS

These findings show that M &E budget has a significant influence and therefore facilitate the achievement of project performance. Both farmers and staff were of the view that M &E budget should be a priority like any other budget with a mean of 3; and that budget review should be participatory to make it more meaningful. The study findings agree with the views of Nyang'wara&Kulet (2015) who suggests that one of the key performance accountability for project managers is the extent to which they allocate resources for monitoring and evaluation. Besides, developing an M &E plan or system would not be meaningful and effective if the required resources to transform it into concrete and practical results are not availed (Mavhiki et al., 2013). Likewise, the study results support the views of Khake&Worku (2013) argue that allocation of financial resources for monitoring and evaluation involves not the process of allocation but also planning, management and control of the same resources to achieve the desired results.

From descriptive analysis, outcome for budget review process indicated both staff and farmers were neutral implying that they may not be participating in budget allocation review.

On the contrary, the study result disagrees with the reports by Okello &Mugambi (2015) who observed that M &E in organizations is an ad hoc and underfunded. Though concerns have been raised regarding the value for M & E, most organization including famer organizations like KENAFF are increasing their investment in monitoring and evaluation. Further, M &E budget need to be clearly delineated within the overall project budget to give the due recognition it requires. The current study findings show that M &E is given priority in budgeting and has contributed to great extent to performance of projects in Nakuru County.

This study established that budgeting process was top down, and only involved a few of the group officials hence affirming findings by Ijeoma, (2010) that in many organizations budgeting and planning process is top down. As such the meaningfulness and usability of monitoring and evaluation information has been limited because of its disconnection from strategy. Additionally, the study findings resonate with the observation of previous studies which indicate that budgeting process can sometimes be a mystery only known to a few (Bamberger et al 2012; Kuwaviyah, 2010;Mavhiki et al., 2013;Ifrah, Kerosi & Ondabu, 2015). However, study finding corroborate with other observation that involving those tasked in M & E function in budgeting process increases the chances of ownership as well as improved performance (Khake&Worku, 2013: Mavhiki et al., 2013: Yuni& Siti, 2016). From the focused group discussion, it was recommended that management need to embrace a participatory approach on issues of budgeting. These study findings views are in line with other study observations

which pointed out that the decision of putting in place M &E system is a political requiring top management support and resource commitment (IFAD, 2013; Nyang'wara&Kulet, 2015)

Overall the study revealed that there is a positive correlation between M &E budget and Performance of horticulture projects. This finding supports agrees with Guo&Neshkova (2013) conclusion that citizen input on budgetary process is positively correlated with higher organizational performance. The study finding confirms that there is a relationship between M &E Budget and performance of horticulture projects. M & E budget therefore positively influences performance of horticulture projects in Nakuru County

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the influence of M &E budget on performance of horticulture projects in Nakuru County. Indicators for the independent variable (M &E budget) and dependent variable (performance of horticulture projects) were developed and included in the research instruments. Descriptive analysis revealed that though respondents were not involved in budget allocation and review M & E budget had an influence on projects performance of horticulture projects. It can therefore be concluded that adopting a participatory budgeting process would improve project performance. Inferential statistics indicated that M &E budget had a strong influence on performance of horticulture projects. Overall conclusion deducted from the study is that M &E budget had a statistically significance on performance of horticulture projects in Nakuru county.

Implications

Understanding the influence of monitoring and evaluation budget and performance of projects will help organizations and government institutions plan better on how to improve project performance and better allocation of resources. Hence, organizations implementing project need to put M&E budget at the center of strategic decision making as this will improve achievement of project performance goals. It was also established from project stakeholders that though the agriculture function have been devolved from the national government to the 47 county governments, there is no clear strategy or policy on how M & E related function and specifically M& E budget are factored into county integrated development plans. This study therefore recommends that issues of project monitoring and evaluation be part of the county integrated development plans. Budget is allocated for carrying out monitoring and evaluation.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations encountered during research were during data collection. Despite the limitations the study was carried out successfully. Location and geographic distribution of the

groups covering some sub counties made it difficult to access. This was mitigated by hiring and training research assistants to help collect data in each sub county. Some of the farmer respondents did not understand the technical meaning of monitoring and evaluation. To address this challenge translation was done and research assistant administered the questionnaire in the language that the respondents understood. In some instances, individual respondents differed in their views posing a challenge in making generalization. In this case cross-sectional research design was used thus ensuring that respondents only participate once in the study.

Scope for Further Studies

Overall the study was scientifically designed and informed through careful literature and theoretical review. Literature reviewed has identified varied factors that influence performance of different projects. For instance, this study has interrogated the theoretical approaches of earlier studies and tested them empirically using opinions of farmers, project staff and management. It therefore provides an opportunity to use the same methodology to carry out studies in other sectors. Methodologically the use of mixed method approach in data collection that included questionnaire, key informant interview and focused group discussions provided a reach data that informed conclusions and recommendation. This proved that mixed method provides value addition in triangulation findings. The result of the study adds to the body of knowledge on M&E budget and performance of projects.

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