

Influence of Monitoring and Evaluation Planning on Implementation of The Somalia Regional Corridor Infrastructure Program in Puntland Somalia

Abdulahi Awil Abdislam *, Dr. NAOMI NDUTA NJOROGI (Ph.D.) **

*Student, Department of Social and Development Studies, School of Social Science, Mount Kenya University, Kenya.

** Monitoring and Evaluation Expert, Department of Social and Development Studies, School of Social Science, Mount Kenya University, Kenya.

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Abstract: The construction sector plays a pivotal role in national development and economic growth, with road infrastructure being a key driver of progress in many nations. In Somalia, poor infrastructure has posed a significant hindrance to economic development. This study focuses on the Somalia Regional Corridor Infrastructure Program in Puntland, aiming to explore the impact of Monitoring and Evaluation planning on its implementation. Drawing from the theories of change and effective project implementation, the study investigated the influence of M&E planning on the program's success. Employing a mixed-method approach, data was gathered through surveys and interviews from a sample of 121 individuals out of a target population of 164. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data from key informants were thematically analyzed. The study's findings underscore the critical role of M&E practices in shaping the successful execution of the Somalia Regional Corridor Infrastructure Program. Recommendations include integrating M&E planning throughout project phases, engaging local communities in project planning and monitoring, and establishing robust M&E mechanisms for community-driven road construction and rehabilitation initiatives, ultimately contributing to more effective and efficient project outcomes.

Keyword: *Monitoring and Evaluation practices, project planning and monitoring*

Introduction

The global construction industry, accounting for nearly 10% of the world's GDP, is expanding rapidly, guided by the imperative of economic development. Donors and international aid agencies have assumed a pivotal role in this sector, accentuating the need for robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. NGOs now face stringent requirements, such as the submission of performance management plans and M&E frameworks, to secure funding (Wayne, 2010). Concurrently, road construction emerges as a linchpin for economic growth, job creation, and wealth generation (World Bank, 2018). Efficient resource management and effective project oversight, facilitated by M&E practices, are imperative to harness the potential of road construction in driving economic development.

M&E's transformative influence is palpable in developed nations like Australia and the UK, where it has bolstered public sector efficiency and responsiveness (Cracknell, 2004). Key performance indicators (KPIs) have become indispensable in ensuring industry performance, quality, and safety in the construction sectors of these countries (AI Group, 2015). Meanwhile, African nations grapple with underdeveloped transportation infrastructure, underscoring the critical role of M&E in optimizing resource allocation (World Bank, 2013).

In Kenya, M&E has emerged as a catalyst for project success, notably in road construction projects managed by the Kenya National Highways Authority (KENHA) (Gitahi, 2015; Nene, 2015). Effective M&E planning has also left an indelible mark on the success of development projects (Kamau & Mohamed, 2015; Wachaiyu, 2016). Consequently, integrating M&E requirements into project budgets is considered prudent to ensure its seamless incorporation into the project management process.

Somalia, with its road infrastructure in disrepair, is undergoing a resurgence with the Somalia Regional Corridors Infrastructure Programme (SRCIP) funded by the African Development Bank (AfDB). This initiative aims to enhance transportation and connectivity, reinforcing the significance of effective M&E in driving development (Mohapatra & Chandrasekhar, 2012). Our research focuses on the impact of M&E techniques on the execution of the regional corridor infrastructure program for road rehabilitation in Puntland, Somalia. By addressing common implementation challenges encountered in community-based projects and road construction in developing nations, we aim to contribute to the effective use of M&E in transformative projects.

Literature Review

In Somalia, where a 22,000 km-long road network exists, only a small fraction of the main roads and secondary/rural roads are in good condition, while the majority are in poor to very poor condition. Initiatives to improve the nation's road system have been launched to address this issue (UN and World Bank, 2006). The Somalia Regional Corridors Infrastructure Programme (SRCIP) aims to sustain economic growth by enhancing transportation reliability and affordability. This program also seeks to improve connectivity, accessibility, and the movement of goods, people, and services, promoting social and economic development and national stability. It further intends to strengthen the management of road infrastructure at both national and regional levels (National Development Plan, 2017-19).

The SRCIP focuses on four priority roads for intervention, including BeledWeyne-Galkayo, Galkayo-Garowe, and Galkayo-Hoby. The investment in these roads is expected to benefit vulnerable and underprivileged populations by creating livelihood opportunities, facilitating trade, and reducing business costs, ultimately enhancing the competitiveness of Somali businesses (Sama-Lang & Zesung, 2016). Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices play a pivotal role in project success, with elements such as budget allocation and technical expertise significantly impacting project outcomes (Mwangi et al., 2015). Effective M&E can lead to improved project implementation and success (Kamau and Mohamed, 2015). Understanding the influence of specific M&E practices on the execution of the Somalia Regional Corridor Infrastructure Program in Puntland, Somalia, is a key focus of this research.

Monitoring and evaluation planning play a pivotal role in project management and their importance in ensuring project success has been widely recognized. The technical expertise of the M&E team and the allocation of budgetary resources have been identified as significant predictors of the effectiveness of M&E practices and their impact on project success (Mwangi et al., 2015). Furthermore, studies by Musomba et al. (2013) and Waithera & Wanyoike (2015) have highlighted the importance of ongoing staff training in M&E and the level of training received by M&E staff as strong correlates of project success. These findings underscore the critical role of M&E expertise and financial resources in achieving positive project outcomes.

The relationship between M&E as a management function and project success has been the subject of extensive research, yielding both commonalities and variations in findings. Research by Musomba et al. (2013) on constituency development fund projects in Kenya identified factors such as stakeholder participation, budget allocation, training intensity, and political influence as key determinants of effective M&E. Similarly, Kamau and Mohamed (2015) conducted a study in Kenya that examined the effectiveness of M&E functions in achieving project success. Their research emphasized the significance of factors such as the strength of the M&E team, efficient allocation of funds, the use of technology in M&E, stakeholder engagement, and the frequency of reporting M&E findings in driving project implementation success. These studies collectively highlight the importance of various M&E aspects in achieving positive project outcomes. The current study aims to investigate whether these M&E practices and their influence on project success are applicable in the context of the Somalia Regional Corridor Infrastructure Program for road rehabilitation in Puntland, Somalia, contributing to the growing body of knowledge on M&E in the field of project management.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) planning is a crucial aspect of project management that involves establishing guidelines and frameworks to guide M&E activities throughout a project's lifecycle. Scholars like Crawford and Bryce (2003) emphasize the importance of defining M&E activities, estimating the M&E budget, and identifying project stakeholders involved in the M&E process during the project's initial planning and design phases. Furthermore, Gyorkos (2003) advocates for the inclusion of a comprehensive M&E plan within the project plan, highlighting all essential M&E elements, from a scholarly perspective.

Effective M&E planning advocates for allocation of sufficient budgetary resources and human capital right from the project's inception, rather than treating them as additional costs. Kohli & Chitkara's study in 2008 found that M&E should be integrated into the project's planning and design stages along with other project components to ensure effective execution and mitigate risks that might hinder project

completion success. Research by Osterberg and Nilsson (2009) in the context of a donor-funded project in Pakistan highlighted the critical role of M&E in project performance. Their findings emphasized the need for thorough integration of M&E into project planning, design, budgeting, and implementation. This integration included clear institutional responsibilities and detailed descriptions of mitigation and monitoring measurement indicators, ultimately ensuring funding and oversight for the M&E plan. M&E planning essentially serves as a roadmap for achieving project goals, underlining the vital importance of proper planning for project success.

In conclusion, M&E planning, which involves budget allocation, resource planning, and stakeholder engagement, is a critical determinant of project success. Proper M&E planning enhances the effectiveness of project management and ensures that project goals are met. It also facilitates communication, advocacy, and a culture of M&E within organizations, as noted by Otter & Emmitt (2008). The allocation of resources and an indicative budget, as suggested by Sunjka & Jacob (2013), is essential for effective M&E planning. Managers play a pivotal role in implementing planned changes within organizations, with Nutt (2006) highlighting the importance of fostering environments that support these changes. Despite contextual differences, M&E remains a key predictor of project performance, as observed in various studies, making it a crucial aspect of project management in different contexts (Wegayehu, 2014; White, 2012).

Research Methodology

The goal of the study was to generate quantitative information on the influence of M&E planning on the implementation of the Somalia Regional Corridor Infrastructure Program for road rehabilitation in Somalia, using a cross-sectional descriptive survey to enable collection of information-rich data at a definite point in time. The qualitative information was obtained by use of interview guides from the key informants for more detailed information to supplement the quantitative data collected from the study sample by use of a questionnaire. The interview guides allowed the respondents much more time to express their experiences and feelings on this study variable. In addition, the researcher used some online surveys to acquire information from individuals directly implicated in the project and subsequently triangulated the findings of the individual interviews to enable cross-checking of certain information received and ascertained their importance to the study.

This study purposively targeted the Somalia regional corridor Infrastructure program as the study unit of analysis; the 164 staff involved in the implementation of the said program along with the project M&E team, project engineer, clerk of works from the ministries of work and of interior, project managers, contractor, project supervisors, community leaders, and donors funding the implementation of this project. According to the sample size Table created by Krejcie and Morgan in 1970, the sample size for this study was 121 program implementers, based on the 164-target population from the four projects under the infrastructure program for the Somalia regional corridor, which were sampled using probabilistic sampling design under quantitative study approach.

The rest of the target population, the key informants, from the other categories, were purposively selected to offer in-depth information on the implementation of the projects under this program and how they were monitored and evaluated for results. A systematic simple random sampling technique was used to sample the programme implementers included in the sample. A random starting point between 1 and 3 which was the study sampling interval was selected at an interval obtained from dividing the population elements by the sample subjects as advised by Mugenda and Mugenda, (2003).

Research Findings

The study sample was 142 respondents; 121 respondents were to answer the survey questionnaire questions and the interview questions will be answered by 20 important informants for information rich data. Not all the dispatched questionnaires were realized, 11 of them were spoilt and 22 were not returned. Table 4.1 displays the results.

Table 4.1: Questionnaire Return Rate

Response	Frequency	Percent
Filled questionnaire	88	72.7
Unreturned questionnaire	22	18.2
Spoilt questionnaire	11	9.1
Total	121	100

The data in Table 4.1 show that return rate was 73% since 27.3% were withheld. A proposed required minimum response rate for reliable survey results by (Holtom, Baruch, Aguinis and Ballinger, 2022) is above 68%. A high return rate rises confidence that the data obtained accurately represents the opinions of the respondents.

Influence of M&E planning on the implementation of SRCIP in Puntland, Somalia

Monitoring and evaluation planning construct was measured using eight statements. The study respondents responded to the questionnaire items along a Likert scale whereby a numerical scale of 1 to 5 was provided as 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. The analysis results are shown in Table 4.8.

Table 4.2: Influence of M&E Planning on the implementation of SRCIP in Puntland, Somalia

Statements	SD F (%)	D F (%)	N F (%)	A F (%)	SA F (%)	Mean	Std Deviation
1. M&E activities are among the SRCIP activities in the implementation plan	2 (2.0%)	8 (9.0%)	5 (6.0%)	49 (56.0%)	24 (27.0%)	3.32	1.056
2. The M&E persons are inadequate for the assignment	9 (10.0%)	12 (14.0%)	5 (6.0%)	34 (39.0%)	28 (32.0%)	3.29	1.289
3. The M&E tools used are appropriate for adequate quality data collection	8 (9.0%)	7 (7.0%)	6 (7.0%)	41 (47.0%)	25 (28.0%)	3.26	1.061
4. M&E activities are included in the implementation budget plan	16 (18.0%)	5 (6.0%)	7 (8.0%)	35 (40.0%)	25 (28.0%)	3.21	1.073
5. There are delays in monitoring program implementation progress	8 (9.0%)	12 (14.0%)	5 (6.0%)	41 (46.0%)	22 (25.0%)	3.32	1.308
6. M&E Budget spending is as outlined in the M&E plan	11 (13.0%)	15 (17.0%)	6 (7.0%)	23 (26.0%)	34 (39.0%)	2.88	0.931
7. M&E persons have M&E capacities for specified areas of specialization	13 (6.0%)	40 (28.0%)	2 (13.0%)	18 (24.0%)	17 (28.5%)	3.51	1.323
8. The M&E budget is separate from other program activities	17 (19.0%)	11 (13.0%)	23 (26.0%)	15 (17.0%)	22 (25.0%)	2.99	1.106
9. Funds to facilitate M&E are promptly provided	16 (18.0%)	20 (23.0%)	21 (24.0%)	13 (15.0%)	18 (21.0%)	3.03	1.079
Overall composite mean and SD						3.19	1.284

The analysis in the Table 4. 2 displays varied views of the respondents on the statements describing the M&E planning construct on the implementation of SRCIP. Majority of the respondents 73(83%) agreed that M&E activities are among the main SRCIP implementation activities considered in the implementation plan with a mean score 3.32 and a standard deviation of 1.056. the results ascertain that majority of the respondents were in agreement that M&E activities were considered as main activities in the implementation plan of SRCIP. A 6% of the respondents had nothing to say on the statement either to lack of interest or we were not knowledgeable on the M&E activities in place.

In relation to the adequacy of the M&E staff, the results showed a mean score of 3.29 and a standard deviation of 1.289. The findings revealed that the M&E persons were not adequate to effectively monitor the SRCIP implementation activities, with 62(71%) of the respondents supporting the statement. On the same theme, the study sought to establish the appropriateness of the data collection tools for quality data. A mean of 3.26 was realized with a standard deviation of 1.061. This is an indication that most of the respondents, 66 (75%) were in agreement that the tools used for data collection were standard and appropriate to offer quality data required for the study analysis. Additionally, the study investigated on whether the budget for M&E activities was included in the main program implementation budget. A mean score of 3.21 and a standard deviation of 1.073 were obtained. A suggestion that quite a good number of respondents 57(65%) felt that M&E activities were budgeted for in the main implementation plan. In the contrary, 26(30%) thought otherwise with only 6(7%) having no contribution to this statement.

On whether there have been delays in reporting M&E findings, majority 63 (71%) confirmed a delayed response with a mean score of 3.32 and standard deviation of 1.308. A mixed response of the respondents was realized on whether the M&E budget spending was in line with the outlined activities where a mean of 2.88 and standard deviation of 0.931 was obtained. There were 57(65%) respondents agreeing with the statement with 26(30%) disagreeing with the given statement of that construct. A relatively small number of respondents 6(7%) remained neutral to the statement for reasons not well identified. On M&E specialized capacities, mixed opinions were displayed with a mean 3.51 of and standard deviation of 1.323. There were those respondents who agreed with the statements while others disagreed. Those who remained neutral may probably have not been involved actively in the M&E activities.

The other measurement indicator for this variable was on the existence of a separate budget for M&E where a mean of 2.99 and a standard deviation of 1.106 were realized. There were so many respondents who remained neutral 23 (26%) indicating a likelihood of being not exposed to the financial matters of the program. The rest of the respondents, 37(42%) agreed with the statement with 28(32%) disagreeing to an almost equal measure. The study respondents were in different views on whether the money allocated for M&E activities were available on time. Some disagreed while other agreed with a mean of 3.03 and a standard deviation of 1.079.

The mean of the eight items used to gather data on M&E planning were aggregated and used to compute the composite mean that was 3.19 and a composite standard deviation of 1.284. There is a strong evidence that majority of the respondents supported most of the items in the scale. For data triangulation and validation, qualitative data were collected from the study Key Informants using the Interviews guides.

To increase the data quality and validity, the quantitative data were triangulated with the qualitative data gathered from the key informants. The views of the key informants on the influence of M&E planning in the implementation of the SRCIP were captured through the interview which were used to strengthen the primary quantitative data obtained from the SRCIP implementers. On the adequacy of M&E personnel, one of the key informants stated that:

'the M&E personnel is adequate for this program..... The M&E persons are very prompt to monitor the work executed using available appropriate data collection tool.... the data collected are doubtlessly of high quality... The same was supported by one of the project managers sentiment was captured as:...'the entire M&E activities including budget are well outlined in the main program implementation plan and the consultant persons are professionals and well experienced in monitoring similar other activities being implemented in Somalia.

Through his explanation, this project manager emphasized that *'since the M&E budget is already planned and set aside other project activities, there is no good reason to delay execution of any of the M&E activities.... monitoring data are promptly analyzed and the feedback given to the project managers for decision making on consultation with the project engineers.*

On the M&E expertise, one of the contractors stated that: *'the M&E personnel have constantly been monitoring most of the road construction projects within Somalia, directly funded by the government or externally through the government... the respondent added that: 'all the M&E activities on development projects, it is the government which ensures that all the supportive resources are availed to ensure quality project works and proper utilization of the government and community resources.'* This was confirmed from one of the M&E persons who echoed that:... *'we also evaluate our work as we monitor the M&E activities against the expected results'.*

Summary of the Findings

The study investigated on the M&E practices along with their influence on the implementation of the SRCIP in Puntland, Somalia. The study focussed on the program implementers including the management team for data source triangulation. The study engaged both male and female genders across age groups who were directly engaged in the program implementation.

In order to measure the extent of influence of M&E planning on the implementation of the SCRIP, the researcher applied the following measurement indicators; budget allocation, M&E team training and Scheduling of M&E activities. Various analyses were conducted whereby, descriptive analyzes showed mixed opinions from the study respondents who participated on the survey with a majority supporting the proposed variables' relationship and with a few on variance.

A small number of the respondents were non responsive to the questionnaire items, a likely possibility that they were not in direct involvement on planning for the M&E practices. The program implementers who were in agreement with the statements supporting the relationship of M&E planning and program implementation are likely those who were engaged in planning of the M&E activities.

The findings on this variable were that allocation of budget to the M&E practices, training of the M&E team along with scheduling of the M&E activities contributed positively to the successful implementation of the SCRIP in Puntland, Somalia. This indicates that when there is an adequate budget for M&E practices, and the M&E team are well skilled with proper scheduling of the M&E activities, M&E findings will be adequate and of quality to inform the program implementation decision makers, then the program implementation will be within the specifications in terms of time, cost and scope and end user's acceptance of the output. The conclusion is that planning for M&E in terms of budget allocation, training of the M&E personnel, and scheduling of M&E activities has a positive relationship with the implementation of road construction programs.

Recommendations

In light of the major findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- (i) Funds for carrying out M&E activities should be adequate, well budgeted and disbursed as planned.
- (ii) M&E planning should be improved to enhance performance of road construction and rehabilitation projects.
- (iii) A formal training program also can equip personnel with the knowledge of these methodologies and the skills required to apply these methods effectively.

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