Impact of Monitoring and Evaluation on the Sustainability and Efficiency of Smallholder Farming Projects: Insights from the Korosho ni Maisha Initiative in Kilifi County, Kenya

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Abstract

With a focus on the "Korosho ni Maisha Project in Matsangoni" in Kilifi County, Kenya, this study set out to examine what makes smallholder agricultural initiatives work. The main goals were to examine the following: (a) how the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy framework affected the Korosho ni Maisha Project's performance; (b) how financial backing affected the project's results; (c) how M&E data affected the project's sustainability; and (d) how M&E capacity development affected the project's performance. Several aspects of M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) were examined in the inquiry. incorporating the lens of Stakeholder Theory and Institutional Theory. These frameworks collectively provided a holistic understanding of the study's dynamics. The theoretical underpinning of Stakeholder Theory remained pivotal, emphasizing the significance of stakeholder involvement in shaping project outcomes. Drawing on Institutional Theory, the study sought to unravel how formal and informal rules and norms shaped the project's behavior and performance. The target population of the study consisted of 1,200 individuals, including smallholder farmers, Empowering Farmers Foundation officials, County Government officials, and other key stakeholders. The study aimed to collect quantitative data from 165 respondents. Disproportionate random sampling was used for the smallholder farmers and key stakeholders to ensure each group was well represented in the study. The research utilized rigorously tested questionnaires and interview schedules, refined through a pilot project in Mombasa County. In order to analyze the data in connection to the research variables, the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) played a crucial role. To summarize the data and comprehend the correlations between M&E methods and the efficacy of smallholder agricultural programs, descriptive statistics were used, including frequencies, percentages, averages, and standard deviations. This research aims to bolster the performance of smallholder farming projects by utilizing a comprehensive theoretical approach, improving monitoring and evaluation techniques, and adding useful understanding to policy suggestions. Research in Kilifi County indicated that the Korosho ni Maisha project benefited greatly from M&E procedures. A majority of participants were female farmers, and M&E policy frameworks, budgetary allocation, personnel capacity, and stakeholder participation were key factors influencing the project's success. The study concluded that a strong M&E policy framework, adequate budgetary support, and capacity development of M&E personnel are critical for improved project performance. While sustainability data plays a positive but modest role, its integration remains essential for long-term success. The study recommended strengthening the M&E policy framework, increasing budgetary allocation, incorporating sustainability data into planning, and enhancing M&E capacity development to ensure continued project success and sustainability.

Key Words: *Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), Smallholder Farming, Stakeholder Theory, Institutional Theory, Sustainability*

Introduction

Farming has been the most crucial activity in the world when it comes to producing food. There has been much debate on how to perform it in a manner that minimizes environmental harm due to its direct correlation with chemical use and forest clearance. The possible actions that may lead to sustainable behaviors have been a source of worry due to climate change (Silveira et al. 2018). This led to the creation of sustainable practice frameworks by the vast majority of companies globally. The need of monitoring and evaluation in tracking the progress of these commendable aims has been recognized (Silveira et al. 2018). The most effective way to track changes and progress on a project has long been thought to be monitoring and assessment. A project's success can be

measured against well-defined objectives with the help of a monitoring and evaluation plan. No matter if the capacities being developed are hard skills like motivation, self-assurance, or trust, or soft talents like creativity or leadership, it is important to think about who is being developed, why, and how. In 1998, the Operations Evaluation Department of the African Development Bank found that better governance was associated with efficient monitoring and evaluation (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 1997). Recent years have seen government initiatives play a pivotal role in providing services. In order to influence national and international policies and practices, project managers used sustainability criteria and indicators for monitoring. Uitto (2010) argues that monitoring is an important tool for strategic planning in non-governmental organizations projects and is critical for assessing the regional and sub-regional viability of local practices.

Sustainability in agribusiness initiatives refers to the ability to maintain the project's beneficial effects throughout time. This entails determining whether the plan is sound socially, environmentally, and economically. When it comes to agribusiness enterprises, the broad notion of sustainability encompasses economic, environmental, and social issues (Yami, et al. 2019). The ability of a farming enterprise to improve the local standard of living and encourage social inclusion is what we mean when we talk about social sustainability. This includes making sure that people from all walks of life in the community may participate in the project and that it aims to empower women and promote gender equality (Dong, Mitchell & Colquhoun, 2015). Another part of social sustainability is making sure the project backs indigenous peoples' rights and cultural preservation. To help preserve resources, provide food security, and alleviate poverty, Kilifi County must make sustainability a top priority in its agricultural operations (McCord et al. 2020). However, developing long-term viability in agricultural businesses isn't always easy and calls for a comprehensive plan. As per Zamlynskyi et al. (2023), it is imperative to incorporate all stakeholders in the design and implementation of the project, encourage collaborative decision-making, consistently oversee the program, and carry out assessments and investigations to ascertain the project's success and identify any shortcomings or omissions.

More than a dozen initiatives have been launched in the past twenty years with the goal of reviving the cashew nut industry in Kenya. Limitations in socioeconomic status, biology, and technology had hitherto plagued it. After falling from 38,000 MT in 1978 to 10,000 MT in 2017, Kenya's cashew sector was once a big player, which is why we use the word "revive" to describe it. To put it in perspective, in 1973 Tanzania produced 145,000 MT of cashews, but now the average yearly production is 300,000 MT. An expansive and innovative initiative in Kenya, the Korosho Ni Maisha project is being run by the Empowering Farmers Foundation. The name of the project is "Cashew is Life" in Kiswahili. The project's goal is to revitalize the cashew value chain in the country by helping 3,300 smallholder farmers grow productive cashew trees and, in turn, raise their household income in the coming years. By managing the cashew industry's involvement in regional and national development goals, the project aims to boost cashew farmers' income to a maximum of 2,250,000 Ksh (USD 14,000) per acre per harvest season. This will greatly increase their take-home pay.

The cashew sector could potentially make a comeback in coastal counties like Kilifi, Lamu, and Kwale, as well as in inland counties like Embu, Makueni, and Tharaka Nithi. A federal cashew census conducted in 2009 indicated that there are presently two million cashew trees across the country. A large number of them have died off as a result of logging, pests, diseases, old age, or insufficient management, as is evident from the extensive fieldwork we have conducted in recent years. With the help of modern agricultural technology, specialist agronomist expertise, and effective monitoring and assessment methods, these trees can be rejuvenated and their production performance increased.

Literature Review

Most experts in the area of project evaluation and monitoring agree that it should be ready shortly after project planning, while there are some who say it should be formed after planning but before design (Chaplowe & Scott, 2008). Whatever the case may be, most scholars agree that project evaluation details should be part of the policy frameworks (Bryman & Bell, 2011). In addition to outlining the goals and objectives, most plans detail how they will be met, how they will be put into practice, and what partnerships and alliances were crucial in getting them accomplished. This is an example of how assessment and monitoring plans consider all needs in order to swiftly ascertain success (or failure). The following elements of an M&E strategy are also crucial, according to the research: Because they influence the amount of time and money needed to finish the activity, Brignall & Modell (2010) describe these aspects as resources. Has the project the internal resources to complete the data analysis that is part of the assessment and monitoring activities that were assigned to it? Baron (2005) has discovered and considered other aspects. Can we carry out the recommended tasks? Will they be useful in the actual world? Is the allotted time realistic for carrying out the suggested measures? Does the proposed course of action provide any moral dilemmas or other challenges, and if so, what steps are being taken to resolve these issues? Is the research ethics committee reviewing the protocol?

All things considered; it is reasonable to say that M&E planning is finished up to the point where it manages the project's direction while it's being carried out. The conventional means of transferring technology may no longer be as important as other factors, such as building capability, when it comes to development programs. Traditional economic theory holds that enterprises are more likely

to locate in rural areas due to the abundance of cheap labor, less government oversight, and easy access to natural resources. The importance of stakeholders in shaping social and economic development has been stressed by many academics. Therefore, increasing capacity entails more than only bolstering human resources (UNESCO, 2010). Among the various ways in which support groups can benefit local organizations are by facilitating the acquisition of funding, the promotion of transparency and equality, and the development of relationships and networks. Additionally, they could help the government become more effective. The growth of social and institutional capabilities can also be aided by them.

All projects have well-defined objectives that must be fulfilled. Project performance indicators listed by Ika (2012) include time, money, safety, quality, and general client satisfaction. Regardless, many businesses today misalign their monitoring and evaluation efforts with their strategies, have insufficient resources, and conduct them on an as-needed basis. They have been proven to be accurate across all industries, project types, and sizes (Okello & Mugambi 2015; Khake & Worku 2013). Due to underfunding, decision-makers in organizations often view monitoring and evaluation operations as having limited value (Kuwaviyah, 2010). The result is a lack of faith in the usefulness of monitoring and evaluation efforts. The use of monitoring and evaluation is on the rise in project management, according to Mavhiki et al. (2013). This is particularly true for strategic budget management. According to results-based management, the M&E budget is a crucial indicator, so it is important.

Even if management is thinking about using results-based monitoring and evaluation, organizations are still being careful while implementing projects (Bayraktar et al., 2011). Some companies are looking to increase their value by investing more in monitoring and assessment, even though its efficacy is still up for debate. Improving the effectiveness and influence of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in attaining high levels of project performance is the goal of this experimental technique. The elements impacting the delivery of municipal services were studied by Khake and Worku (2012), who found that in order to allocate resources for monitoring and evaluation (M&E), management has to be ready and dedicated. Similarly, research by Guo and Neshkova (2013) found that when the public is more involved in the budgeting process, organizational performance improves.

Studies carried out in Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil have shown the crucial importance of M&E data in improving the sustainability of global agricultural initiatives. The significance of M&E data in improving project management, strengthening decision-making, and guaranteeing the sustainability of agricultural enterprises has been highlighted in this study. A notable study carried out in Argentina's agricultural sector by Enemark & Ahene (2003) identified a significant correlation between the sustainability of agricultural outputs and the demand for M&E data. This study highlighted the significance of utilizing M&E data to monitor project advancement, pinpoint deficiencies, and informing strategic decisions. It emphasized the necessity of establishing robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure that dependable data is accessible for informed decision-making.

Conversely, it is recognized that there is a deficiency in studies regarding the long-term effects of M&E data usage on sustainability, especially in the context of Sub-Saharan Africa. This requires undertaking more comprehensive investigations to evaluate the efficacy of different monitoring and evaluation methods in varied agricultural settings and address region-specific challenges. The study by Gorgens, Nkwazi, and Govindaraj (2005) in Kenya provided further insights, while Roberts's (2010) research validated the positive influence of M&E data demand on agricultural sustainability in the region. These studies reaffirmed how crucial M&E data is for monitoring development, evaluating effects, and adjusting project strategies to meet goals. Most people agree that efficient M&E procedures are essential to producing trustworthy data, which improves project management and decision-making.

Effective monitoring and evaluation require committed, qualified human resources even after obtaining adequate funding (Surran, Tunal, and Kath, 2003). According to Kihuha and Ngugi (2012), the achievement of reliable M&E results depends on having human capital with substantial experience, a job description that is well-defined and possesses the necessary skills, and continuous capacity building. Capacity development includes developing and implementing teaching and learning approaches to educate individuals, groups, and organizations about what constitutes an effective, pragmatic, and knowledgeable M&E practice (Surran, et al., 2003). Adams and Dickinson state that capacity building aims to increase planning, evaluation success rates, evaluative knowledge and skill access, development, and utilization, organizational learning culture promotion, and program and self-evaluation as a performance improvement strategy (2010). Poor project quality can result from a lack of proper training and understanding of measurement and evaluation (M&E). This includes design skills, especially in the areas of data collection, indicator setting, Log Frame design, and device design (Wanjiku, 2015). The M&E method is based on the idea that everyone has different abilities and that the best way to fill in any gaps is to implement structured capacity development programs (Ooko, Rambo, and Osogo, 2018).

Patients are able to more easily receive healthcare when human resource capacity and monitoring and assessment capacities are enhanced (Ooko et al., 2018). Similarly, Njeri and Omwenga (2019) looked at how sustainable initiatives were affected by human resource capacity for monitoring and evaluation. Data collected from 90 participants using structured questionnaires was analyzed using regression analysis in a case study on Kenya’s National Aids Control Council. Both inferential and descriptive statistics were part of the study. Human resource capability for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was found to have a significant association with

the project's sustainability, according to the results. However, it was also shown that firms continue to lack the human resource capabilities required for efficient M&E.

Methods

According to Edward Freeman's 1984 Stakeholder Theory, stakeholder participation influences project outcomes. Therefore, it is thought that if a stakeholder is involved in the project's process, it succeeds in achieving its objectives and be long-lasting. The Stakeholder Theory of corporate ethics and organizational management was first presented by R. Edward Freeman in 1984. It deals with morals and values in company management. Modeling and analyzing a company's stakeholder group, outlining and suggesting techniques for management to reflect those groups' interests, and offering a variety of case studies are all part of his highly renowned book Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach. It is becoming clearer that issues related to agriculture and the environment, such as land degradation and climate change, are interdependent and must be tackled simultaneously (Reed & Stringer 2016). In order to handle complicated and dynamic situations, it is essential to engage with numerous stakeholder agendas and public concerns, some of which may be at odds with one another. Some argue that more participatory approaches to farming and environmental concerns will lead to longer-term support for project goals and solutions from stakeholders and the public (Reed 2008).

The theory of stakeholder participation provides a framework for analyzing the complex relationships among project participants and how their participation affects the efficiency of smallholder agricultural projects like Kilifi County, Kenya's Korosho ni Maisha Project. The significance of including a variety of stakeholders in decision-making processes is emphasized by this theoretical viewpoint (Reed, 2008). According to Reed (2008), Stakeholder Participation Theory suggests that including a variety of stakeholders in the planning and decision-making stages of a project enhances its sustainability and success. The study addresses the goals of examining the impact of financial support, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policy framework on project performance by examining how the Korosho ni Maisha Project combines stakeholder perspectives.

Development projects and other organizations are subject to the rules, expectations, and laws of their broader institutional settings, according to institutional theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2014). Organizational legitimacy, according to this idea, depends on members' adherence to established norms and policies, which it recognizes as having an impact from outside influences. The Korosho ni Maisha Project operates within the institutional framework of smallholder farming initiatives in Kilifi County. Institutional pressures, whether from governmental policies, community expectations or donor requirements, influence how the project designs and implements its M&E practices. This institutional context becomes critical in understanding how M&E practices are shaped, adopted and adapted within the project.

Institutional norms related to accountability, transparency and project success play a significant role in shaping M&E practices. The project is likely to conform to established norms and expectations to gain legitimacy within the institutional environment (Scott, 2014). This conformity may manifest in the design of M&E policies, budget allocation and capacity development strategies. Legitimacy is a central concept in Institutional Theory, and smallholder farming projects often seek legitimacy through adherence to institutional norms (Suchman, 1995). The study may explore how the Korosho ni Maisha Project's M&E practices contribute to the project's legitimacy, garnering support from stakeholders, including farmers, policymakers and the international community. Organizations operating in the same institutional setting often homogenize in structure as time goes on, according to the isomorphism theory put out by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). In the context of smallholder farming projects, there might be a tendency for projects to adopt similar M&E practices due to institutional pressures, creating a degree of homogeneity in approaches. Understanding how institutional forces shape M&E practices is essential in assessing their impact on project performance. The study may investigate how alignment with institutional norms contributes to project success and sustainability, as well as how deviations may lead to challenges or conflicts within the institutional environment.

The research was conducted at Matsangoni Ward in Kilifi County, situated on the southeastern coast of Kenya. Kilifi County spanned approximately 12,609 square kilometers and was characterized by diverse ecosystems, including coastal areas, arable land, and rural communities. The choice of Kilifi County was strategic due to its prominence in smallholder farming, with the Korosho ni Maisha Project serving as a focal point for the study. Kilifi County offered a rich context for the research, representing the intersection of agricultural activity, community engagement, and developmental initiatives. The Korosho ni Maisha Project, operating within this area, provided a pertinent case study to explore the dynamics of Monitoring and Evaluation practices in smallholder farming projects. This research aimed to achieve its objectives through the concurrent triangulation model combined with a descriptive survey design. The target population comprised of smallholder farmers participating in the Korosho ni Maisha Project, program managers overseeing its implementation, Mibibo Farmers' Cooperative Society officials, government officials and other key stakeholders such as agricultural experts. A sample size of 150 cashew farmers and 15 key stakeholders is determined using disproportionate random sampling technique, ensuring both depth and breadth in the data collection process. The study used questionnaires, interview and document analysis. The analytical approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative data, aligning

with the multi-faceted nature of the research objectives. Descriptive statistics were applied using the SPSS software to the quantitative data collected via surveys. Qualitative data was analyzed using the NVivo application. Thematic coding was be used to qualitative data obtained from open-ended questionnaire questions and interviews.

Results

M&E Policy Framework and performance of Korosho ni Maisha Project

After calculating the mean and standard deviation of the responses, the following table displays the results. The findings show a high overall satisfaction with the utilization of M&E findings to adapt to changing circumstances, with a mean score of 4.61 and a standard deviation of 0.695. This indicates that the project is highly adaptable, responding effectively to challenges based on M&E feedback. This adaptability suggests a strong correlation between the M&E framework and the success of the project in achieving its objectives, as it ensures that the project remains relevant and responsive to external factors.

Additionally, the high mean score of 4.59 (SD = 0.741) for familiarity with the M&E policy framework demonstrates that most respondents are well-versed with the framework. This level of familiarity suggests that project staff are equipped with the necessary knowledge to apply M&E practices effectively, which enhances the overall project performance. The alignment between the M&E policy framework and the project's objectives is rated very positively, with a mean of 4.55 (SD = 0.584), reinforcing the idea that the M&E framework is in harmony with the project's goals. This alignment ensures that the monitoring and evaluation processes directly contribute to tracking progress towards the intended outcomes, which is critical for the success and sustainability of the project. The understanding of the M&E policy framework by the EFF staff is also rated highly (mean = 4.52, SD = 0.824), further suggesting that the staff are not only familiar with but also comprehend the framework in a way that supports project performance. This is crucial because an in-depth understanding among staff ensures proper implementation of M&E practices, leading to more accurate data collection and effective decision-making. However, the capturing of inputs, outputs, outcomes, and indicators in the M&E policy framework, while still positive, has a slightly lower mean of 4.40 (SD = 0.872), indicating that there may be some room for improvement in how comprehensively these elements are reflected in the framework. Clearer representation of these metrics can enhance the ability to monitor progress effectively and ensure that the project's performance is consistently aligned with its goals.

The communication of the M&E policy framework to all project participants and stakeholders received a mean score of 4.23 (SD = 0.716), indicating that while communication is strong, there is potential for further improvement to ensure complete clarity and alignment across all parties involved in the project. Effective communication of the M&E framework is vital to ensure that everyone involved understands their role and how their actions contribute to project success. Lastly, the relatively lower mean score of 4.00 (SD = 0.981) for adherence to the M&E policy framework suggests that while adherence is generally positive, there are some inconsistencies in how well participants follow the framework. Ensuring stricter adherence could further improve the project's performance, as consistency in applying M&E practices is key to achieving reliable results and outcomes. The analysis indicates that the M&E policy framework significantly influences the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project by ensuring adaptability, alignment with project objectives, and staff understanding. However, there is room for improvement in the comprehensiveness of indicators and adherence to the framework, which, if addressed, could further enhance the project's overall success.

Table 1:Descriptive Statistics for M&E Policy Framework

M&E Policy Framework	Mean	Std. Deviation
Korosho ni Maisha project utilizes M&E findings to adapt to changing circumstances or challenges	4.61	.695
I'm familiar with the M&E policy framework of the Korosho ni Maisha project	4.59	.741
The M&E policy framework and the project's objectives are well aligned	4.55	.584
The EFF staff understand the projects' M&E Policy framework	4.52	.824
The Korosho ni Maisha project inputs, outputs, outcomes and indicators, are well captured in the M&E Policy framework	4.40	.872
The M&E policy framework is well communicated to all project participants and stakeholders	4.23	.716
Project participants adhere to the M&E policy framework	4.00	.981

The M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) policy framework has significantly influenced the overall performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project in Kilifi County, Kenya. By establishing structured guidance for tracking project progress and outcomes, the M&E

framework has enhanced accountability and transparency among stakeholders. Regular data collection and clear performance indicators have facilitated informed decision-making and resource allocation, which are crucial for improving project outcomes. This structured approach has led to more effective engagement with farmers, increasing their knowledge and confidence in sustainable agricultural practices such as cashew farming and agroforestry, ultimately contributing to improved livelihoods and the project's objectives. Key aspects of the M&E policy framework that contribute most to the project's success include the regular monitoring of project activities, timely reporting, and feedback mechanisms. These elements ensure that stakeholders can continuously assess project performance and make necessary adjustments to stay on track. Also, the emphasis on clear indicators allows for better evaluation of both strengths and weaknesses within the project, enabling proactive management of challenges. This positive influence is particularly evident in the farmers' increased awareness of the importance of agroforestry and sustainable practices, highlighting the effectiveness of the M&E framework in achieving its goals.

Despite its benefits, consistent adherence to the M&E policy framework can be hindered by several factors. Resource constraints, such as inadequate funding and insufficient training, limit the capacity of stakeholders to engage fully with the M&E processes. Additionally, cultural barriers and the varying levels of understanding among farmers can affect the implementation of M&E activities, leading to inconsistencies. Issues such as laziness, ignorance, and a lack of motivation among some farmers further complicate the adherence to M&E practices, affecting the project's overall success. Addressing these challenges requires targeted capacity-building initiatives, improved stakeholder engagement strategies, and a commitment to fostering a culture of accountability and participation among all project participants. From the interview guide, the study gathered a range of comprehension from respondents regarding their familiarity with M&E practices, the adequacy of budgetary support, and the influence of these practices on project outcomes. Most respondents indicated a high level of familiarity with the M&E policy framework, which has significantly enhanced project performance. They noted that the framework provides structured oversight and measurable benchmarks that align with project objectives. Challenges identified included data overload and the need for specialized training to interpret complex metrics effectively. Specific examples, such as tracking cashew tree planting and cooperative performance, were cited as successful outcomes facilitated by M&E practices

Budgetary Allocation and Project Performance

The analysis of the budgetary allocation for Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities within the Korosho ni Maisha project in Kilifi County reveals significant comprehension into its influence on project performance. Respondents rated the importance of having an M&E budget between 10% and 15% of total project expenditure quite highly, with a mean score of 4.43. This indicates a strong consensus on the necessity of allocating adequate financial resources for M&E, suggesting that such a budgetary commitment is crucial for effective project monitoring and evaluation. A well-defined budget allocation allows for more systematic tracking of project goals, enhancing overall project performance. The perception that a lack of a clear budget for M&E adversely affects project performance is supported by a mean score of 4.33. This highlights the critical role that financial clarity plays in project execution. When stakeholders lack confidence in budgetary provisions, it can lead to uncertainties that may hinder effective monitoring, evaluation, and subsequent decision-making processes. The correlation between budgetary support for M&E activities and project performance is further illustrated by a mean score of 4.17, suggesting that when sufficient funds are allocated to M&E, there is a noticeable improvement in project outcomes. This correlation shows the importance of strategic financial planning and the direct impact it has on achieving project objectives. Despite the positive outlook on budgetary support, the satisfaction level with the allocation of financial resources for M&E activities received a relatively lower mean score of 3.33, indicating some dissatisfaction among respondents. This could point to perceived inadequacies in the financial resources allocated for M&E, potentially limiting the project's effectiveness in achieving its goals. Also, the transparency of the financial reporting process regarding the utilization of M&E budgetary support received a mean score of 4.02, which, although relatively positive, reflects some concerns about financial transparency that could affect stakeholder confidence in M&E processes. Addressing these issues through enhanced financial management practices and ensuring adequate budgetary support could significantly improve the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project and foster greater stakeholder engagement.

Table 2:Descriptive Statistics for Budgetary Allocation

Budgetary Allocation	Mean	Std. Deviation
M&E budget should be between 10% and 15% of project expenditure	4.43	.803
Lack of clear budget for M&E affects the performance of the project	4.33	.786
I have observed correlation between the availability of budgetary support for M&E activities and the project's performance	4.17	1.186
Financial reporting process regarding the utilization of budgetary support for M&E within the project is transparent	4.02	1.195

I'm satisfied with the allocation of financial resources for M&E activities within the project	3.33	1.385

The feedback provided by stakeholders on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities highlights critical areas where increased budgetary support can significantly enhance project outcomes, particularly for the Korosho ni Maisha project. Stakeholders emphasized the need for enhanced funding for capacity building and training, particularly for M&E staff and farmers. With increased resources, the project can implement advanced data collection tools and robust monitoring systems, which are essential for accurate data gathering and reporting. Additionally, many stakeholders noted that facilitating pest control and providing financial incentives to farmers would further support project goals. The emphasis on better financial management and transparency indicates that stakeholders are aware of the direct relationship between financial resources and project efficacy.

To enhance financial accountability, stakeholders suggested implementing transparent budgeting practices, conducting regular audits, and establishing clear financial guidelines. They stressed the importance of involving stakeholders in monitoring to build trust and ensure that resources are effectively utilized. Moreover, suggestions for better communication regarding expenditures and remaining budgets indicate a demand for increased transparency in financial dealings. By fostering openness and providing adequate allowances for those involved in M&E activities, the project can strengthen its financial accountability, ultimately leading to improved project performance and sustainability. Addressing these concerns is essential for the long-term success of the Korosho ni Maisha project in Kilifi County, as they directly correlate with stakeholder engagement and project impact. From the interview guide, regarding budgetary support, respondents generally viewed the financial backing for M&E activities as crucial to the project's success. Adequate funding has enabled comprehensive data collection, analysis, and timely field operations. Positive budgetary allocation, particularly for data collection tools and resources, has enhanced the accuracy of reports and supported decision-making processes. However, some respondents mentioned challenges, such as delays in resource distribution and the impact of underfunded M&E activities, which have sometimes led to incomplete assessments and delayed evaluations.

M&E Data on Project Performance and Sustainability

The analysis reveals a strong positive perception regarding the influence of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) data on the sustainability and performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project in Kilifi County. The mean score of 4.48 indicates that stakeholders recognize the vital role of M&E data in enabling the project to adapt and sustain itself over time. This suggests that the data collected is not merely a bureaucratic exercise; instead, it serves as a foundation for continuous improvement and responsiveness to the evolving needs of the project. Stakeholders noted that the use of M&E data significantly enhances their ability to make informed decisions, which is crucial for maintaining the project's relevance and effectiveness in achieving its objectives. The high mean scores across other statements indicate that M&E data is perceived as a key driver for decision-making within the project. A mean score of 4.35 for instances where M&E data directly influenced decisions shows the importance of evidence-based practices in project management. Additionally, with a mean of 4.17, stakeholders believe that the data gathered is adequate for analysis and feedback to all involved parties, ensuring transparency and accountability. The commitment to sharing analyzed data with all stakeholders, reflected in the mean score of 4.15, fosters an inclusive environment that promotes collaboration and trust. This comprehension emphasizes the integral role of M&E data in enhancing the sustainability and performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project, facilitating informed decision-making, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive management.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for M&E Data

M& E Data	Mean	Std. Deviation
The use of M&E data contributed to the project's ability to adapt and remain sustainable over time	4.48	.559
I have observed instances where M&E data directly influenced decision-making within the project	4.35	.781
M&E data is frequently used to make informed decisions about the project sustainability	4.34	.915
There is sufficient information to conduct analyses and provide feedback to all parties involved in the project.	4.17	.887
The data that has been collected and processed is communicated to all parties participating in the project.	4.15	.878

The comprehension gathered regarding the challenges and successes associated with the utilization of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) data for project sustainability show several key themes. Stakeholders have highlighted those challenges such as inadequate resources, data quality issues, and poor communication can hinder effective decision-making processes. The difficulties in integrating M&E findings into management practices were noted, which can limit the overall impact of the data collected. However, there are significant successes as well, particularly in enhanced accountability and improved decision-making processes based on data-driven comprehension. For instance, stakeholders pointed to instances where M&E data directly influenced strategic decisions, such as reallocating resources to high-impact initiatives that increased yield rates. Moreover, the responsiveness of key stakeholders, particularly the Empowering Farmers Foundation (EFF), emerged as a notable success factor. The EFF's proactive approach to using M&E data has resulted in timely interventions for farmers, such as pest control measures and the distribution of seedlings. Farmers reported instances where their concerns were promptly addressed, showcasing a collaborative environment that fosters project sustainability. This demonstrates the critical role that M&E data plays not only in informing decisions but also in promoting active engagement between farmers and project implementers. The utilization of M&E data is pivotal for driving continuous improvement and adapting project strategies to meet the evolving needs of stakeholders involved in the Korosho ni Maisha project. From the interview guide, the integration of M&E data into decision-making processes is vital for ensuring project sustainability. Respondents shared specific examples of how M&E data has influenced key decisions. For instance, in the Innocent Project in Matsangoni, M&E data helped adjust the distribution of cashew seedlings based on survival rates, ensuring a higher success rate. Similarly, M&E data facilitated the adoption of new cashew farming techniques such as polyclonal seeds and improved irrigation methods, which have enhanced crop resilience and productivity.

Capacity Development and Project Performance

According to the statistics, the Korosho ni Maisha project in Kilifi County, Kenya, benefited greatly from the capacity building in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) procedures. With mean scores above 4.4, participants expressed high satisfaction with the training and capacity development programs offered by the Effective Farmers Foundation (EFF). This reflects a significant acknowledgment of the effectiveness of these programs in enhancing M&E skills among project participants. The strong consensus that M&E capacity development fosters a culture of continuous learning further underscores its importance in promoting adaptive management and improving project outcomes. The findings suggest that the EFF's investment in M&E capacity development has a meaningful impact on the performance of the project, equipping participants with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement effective M&E practices, ultimately leading to better project results and sustainability.

Table 4:Descriptive Statistics for Capacity Development

Capacity Development	Mean	Std. Deviation
I have received training or capacity development in M&E practices related to the project	4.50	.660
The EFF M&E capacity development programs I have participated in are so effective	4.48	.559
M&E capacity development has contributed to a culture of continuous learning among project participants	4.47	.611

Based on the responses collected regarding the Korosho ni Maisha project and the influence of M&E capacity development, the following are key themes and suggestions for improvement, being responses from the open-ended questions for the questionnaire

Contribution of M&E Capacity Development

M&E capacity development has led to significant skills enhancement among respondents, particularly in data collection, analysis, and reporting, which in turn has improved their effective participation in the project. The training has also fostered accountability among stakeholders and facilitated learning from project impacts, enabling necessary adjustments for better outcomes. Additionally, farmers have reported that the increased knowledge and skills gained through this capacity development have empowered them, boosting their confidence in their farming practices, especially in cashew production.

Consistent with the aims of the study, the correlation analysis establishes strong links between different Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) procedures and the success of the Korosho ni Maisha project. Success for the Korosho ni Maisha initiative is positively correlated with the M&E policy framework ($r=0.774$, $p = 0.000$). This indicates that the existence of well-structured M&E policies significantly influences the success of the project. A well-defined policy framework helps in establishing clear guidelines for monitoring and evaluating project activities, leading to improved performance. Additionally, the M&E policy framework is highly correlated with M&E capacity development ($r = 0.693$, $p = 0.000$) and M&E budgetary support ($r = 0.753$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that when policies are strong, they positively affect the capacity-building efforts and the allocation of budgetary resources for M&E practices.

M&E budgetary support shows the strongest correlation with the performance of the project ($r = 0.899$, $p = 0.000$), underscoring that adequate financial support for M&E activities is critical for the project's success. The significant positive relationship between budgetary support and performance indicates that without sufficient funding, the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation practices diminishes, leading to lower project performance. Moreover, M&E budgetary support is highly correlated with M&E capacity development ($r = 0.842$, $p = 0.000$), reinforcing the idea that financial investment in M&E strengthens the capacity to execute these practices effectively.

While M&E data on project sustainability is positively correlated with project performance, the correlation is weaker compared to other M&E practices ($r = 0.229$, $p = 0.008$). This suggests that while data on sustainability plays a role in project performance, it is not as critical as other factors like budgetary support or capacity development. Also, M&E data on project sustainability shows no significant correlation with M&E capacity development ($r = 0.070$, $p = 0.424$) or M&E budgetary support ($r = 0.085$, $p = 0.333$), indicating that sustainability data functions more independently from these factors in this context.

M&E capacity development is also strongly correlated with the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project ($r = 0.839$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that enhancing the skills and knowledge required for effective monitoring and evaluation positively impacts project outcomes. This relationship highlights the importance of training and capacity-building initiatives in ensuring that M&E practices are effectively implemented. The strong correlations between M&E capacity development and both M&E budgetary support ($r = 0.842$, $p = 0.000$) and M&E policy framework ($r = 0.693$, $p = 0.000$) suggest that capacity development is closely tied to the availability of financial resources and the presence of robust policies.

According to the results of the correlation study, the three factors that affect the success of the Korosho ni Maisha project are as follows: M&E policy framework, M&E capacity development, and M&E financial assistance. While M&E data on project sustainability is important, its impact on project performance is relatively weaker. This indicates that for smallholder farming projects like Korosho ni Maisha, financial support and capacity-building efforts are key drivers of success, supported by clear policy frameworks. Data collection and sustainability comprehension, while valuable, have a more secondary role in influencing overall project performance.

Regression Analysis of the Study Variables

In order to find out if the link between the dependent variable (the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha Project) and the independent factors (the capacity development of monitoring and evaluation, data on the sustainability of the project, the framework for policy and funding for monitoring and evaluation), regression analysis was performed. Follow the sections below to see the tabulated and discussed results:

Multiple Regression Model Summary

The model explains 86.2% of the total variance in the Korosho ni Maisha project's performance, as shown in Table 4.11 with an Adjusted R-squared value of 0.862. This indicates that the model is unable to account for 13.8% of the overall variation in the Korosho ni Maisha project's performance. Table 4.11 below displays the outcomes for differences between the two sets of variables.

Table 5:Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.931[a]	.866	.862	.32567	1.770

a. Predictors: (Constant), M&E capacity development, M&E data on project sustainability, M&E policy framework, M&E budgetary support

b. Dependent Variable: Performance of Korosho ni Maisha Project

Analysis of the Variance of the Study Variables (ANOVA)

With positive residuals, we can infer that the study's dependent and independent variables were significantly related to one another. Capacity building for monitoring and evaluation, monitoring and evaluation data on the long-term viability of a project, M&E policy framework, M&E budgetary support affected performance of Korosho ni Maisha project significantly since $F_{critical}$ (4, 131) degrees of freedom is 2.44< $F_{calculated}$ 205.843 at 5% level of significance.

Table 6:Analysis of Variance

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	87.326	4	21.832	205.843	.000[b]
Residual	13.470	127	.106		
Total	100.796	131			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Korosho ni Maisha Project

b. Predictors: (Constant), M&E capacity development, M&E data on project sustainability, M&E policy framework, M&E budgetary support

4.6.3 Coefficients of the Regression Model

The study yielded the regression model's coefficient, which were then displayed. Here is the regression equation:

$$\mathbf{Y=0.016+0.169X_1+0.460X_2+0.118X_3+0.207X_4}.....\sum$$

Constant (0.016)

With all other factors held constant, the project's baseline performance (M&E policy framework, M&E budgetary support, M&E data on project sustainability, and M&E capacity development) are held at zero. In this case, the constant is 0.016, which suggests that if there were no contributions from the independent variables, the project's performance would remain minimal or nearly insignificant.

M&E Policy Framework (X_1)

The coefficient of 0.169 indicates that for every unit increase in the quality or presence of the M&E policy framework, the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project improves by 0.169 units, holding other factors constant. This shows that the policy framework plays a positive role in enhancing project performance, which aligns with the study's objective to investigate its influence.

M&E Budgetary Support (X_2)

With a coefficient of 0.460, the equation shows that a one-unit increase in M&E budgetary support leads to an improvement of 0.460 units in the project's performance, assuming other variables remain constant. This coefficient is the largest among the four predictors, suggesting that budgetary support for M&E activities has the most substantial influence on project performance, as was the focus of the second research objective.

M&E Data on Project Sustainability (X_3)

The coefficient of 0.118 implies that every unit increase in the use of M&E data related to project sustainability was enhance project performance by 0.118 units. Although this is a smaller contribution compared to the other variables, it is still statistically significant and demonstrates the importance of using sustainability data to guide project decisions, consistent with the third objective.

M&E Capacity Development (X_4)

The coefficient of 0.207 suggests that a one-unit improvement in M&E capacity development leads to an increase of 0.207 units in the performance of the project, controlling for other factors. This highlights the crucial role of building M&E personnel skills and capacities in ensuring the project's success, in line with the fourth objective. The regression equation effectively demonstrates the impact of each M&E factor on the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project. M&E budgetary support (X_2) has the most significant impact, followed by M&E capacity development (X_4), M&E policy framework (X_1), and M&E data on project sustainability (X_3). All variables contribute positively to the project's performance, and their statistically significant coefficients (p-values < 0.05) confirm their relevance in explaining the dependent variable. Thus, the study objectives are supported by the regression analysis, showing that each aspect of M&E significantly enhances the project's performance.

Table 4. 1 Coefficients of the Regression Model

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.016	.125		.131	.896
M&E policy framework(**X_1**)	.169	.050	.169	3.363	.001
M&E budgetary support(**X_2**)	.460	.056	.549	8.211	.000
M&E data on project sustainability(**X_3**)	.118	.027	.144	4.398	.000
M&E capacity development(**X_4**)	.207	.051	.249	4.076	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Korosho ni Maisha Project**(Y)**					

Discussion

The findings from the regression analysis of the Korosho ni Maisha Project support the principles of Stakeholder Participation Theory, highlighting how stakeholder engagement significantly impacts project performance. According to Edward Freeman's theory, involving stakeholders in decision-making processes enhances the likelihood of project success and sustainability. The regression results indicate that each independent variable—M&E policy framework, budgetary support, data on sustainability, and capacity development—has a statistically significant positive influence on project performance. This aligns with the theory's assertion that inclusive participation ensures that diverse stakeholder interests are addressed, which is crucial for achieving project objectives.

The study's results show the importance of engaging stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of the M&E policy framework. The positive coefficient of 0.169 for the M&E policy framework indicates that a well-structured policy, shaped by the input of stakeholders, can lead to improved project outcomes. This aligns with Reed's (2008) argument that involving stakeholders in policy development enhances relevance and effectiveness, thereby fostering an environment conducive to achieving project goals. The analysis of variance also reflects that the collective input from stakeholders significantly contributes to the overall success of the project, reinforcing the notion that stakeholder participation is fundamental to effective project management.

The findings emphasize the role of stakeholder involvement in budgetary support and capacity development. The largest coefficient (0.460) associated with M&E budgetary support suggests that financial decisions informed by stakeholder needs significantly enhance project performance. Involving stakeholders in budget allocation ensures that resources are directed toward areas of greatest need, promoting greater accountability and trust among participants. Similarly, the coefficient for M&E capacity development (0.207) highlights the importance of stakeholder input in identifying training needs and capacity gaps. By actively participating in

these processes, stakeholders are more likely to feel ownership of the project, leading to higher engagement and commitment to its success. The integration of Stakeholder Participation Theory into the analysis provides a robust framework for understanding how inclusive decision-making enhances the performance and sustainability of projects like Korosho ni Maisha.

The findings from the Korosho ni Maisha Project highlight the significant influence of Institutional Theory on the design and implementation of its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices. The regression analysis revealed that factors such as the M&E policy framework, budgetary support, and capacity development are pivotal for enhancing project performance, reflecting the project's alignment with prevailing institutional norms and expectations. These institutional pressures, originating from governmental policies, community expectations, and donor requirements, shape the project's M&E strategies, underscoring the importance of conformity to gain legitimacy within the institutional environment. The findings suggest that adherence to norms related to accountability and transparency in M&E practices not only enhances the project's legitimacy but also helps secure support from diverse stakeholders, including farmers, policymakers, and international partners.

Furthermore, the concept of isomorphism articulated by DiMaggio and Powell becomes particularly relevant when examining the homogeneity of M&E practices among smallholder farming projects. As the Korosho ni Maisha Project adapts its M&E strategies to align with institutional expectations, it may inadvertently mirror the practices of similar initiatives in Kilifi County. This structural similarity can lead to a shared understanding of best practices but may also pose challenges if deviations from established norms arise. Through incorporation of the Institutional Theory into the analysis, the study provides a framework for understanding how external institutional forces shape M&E practices and their impact on project performance. This perspective enriches the analysis by elucidating the complex interplay between formal and informal rules, norms, and expectations, thereby offering deeper comprehension into the factors influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of the Korosho ni Maisha Project.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study confirms that a well-established M&E policy framework significantly improves the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project. The positive correlation between the policy framework and project performance ($r = 0.774$, $p = 0.000$) demonstrates that having clear, structured guidelines for monitoring and evaluation is essential for project success. The regression analysis further supports this, showing that for every unit increase in the strength of the M&E policy framework, project performance improves by 0.169 units. Adequate financial support for M&E activities is identified as the most influential factor in driving project performance. With the strongest correlation ($r = 0.899$, $p = 0.000$) and the highest regression coefficient (0.460), it is evident that proper budgetary allocation is crucial for the effective implementation of M&E practices. The study concludes that without sufficient financial backing, M&E efforts are hindered, leading to diminished project performance. While M&E data on project sustainability has a significant positive effect on project performance ($r = 0.229$, $p = 0.008$), its impact is weaker compared to other M&E practices. The regression coefficient of 0.118 indicates that sustainability data, while valuable for guiding decisions and long-term planning, has a more modest role in directly influencing project outcomes. Nonetheless, the study concludes that integrating sustainability data into the M&E process contributes to the overall success of the project. With a regression coefficient of 0.207 and a correlation coefficient of 0.839 ($p = 0.000$), it is demonstrated that developing M&E capacity considerably improves project performance. Findings from the study highlight the need to invest in the professional development of monitoring and evaluation staff. Spending on capacity development guarantees better project outcomes by facilitating the successful implementation of M&E strategies.

To further enhance the performance of the Korosho ni Maisha project, it is recommended that the project management continue refining and strengthening the M&E policy framework. This can be done by developing clearer guidelines, establishing regular updates, and ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned with the framework. Training on how to use these policies effectively should also be prioritized, as the correlation between the M&E policy framework and project performance has proven to be significant. Given the critical role that budgetary support plays in the success of M&E activities, it is strongly recommended that more financial resources be allocated for M&E activities within the Korosho ni Maisha project. This would include funding for monitoring tools, technology, training programs, and personnel. Proper budgetary support ensures the smooth execution of M&E tasks, leading to more accurate evaluations and better project outcomes. While M&E data on project sustainability plays a relatively smaller role, its significance should not be overlooked. The project should ensure that sustainability data is incorporated into strategic decision-making processes. This would involve setting long-term sustainability goals, analyzing trends from sustainability data, and addressing challenges related to environmental and financial sustainability to secure the future success of the project. The study highlights the importance of M&E capacity development. It is recommended that the project management continues to invest in training and capacity-building programs for M&E personnel. By enhancing the skills and technical knowledge of those involved in M&E activities, the Korosho ni Maisha project benefited from more effective monitoring and evaluation processes, thereby improving overall project performance. This could include workshops, certification programs, and a knowledge-sharing initiative

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