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Examining the Effectiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies in Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Projects: A Case Study of Ndola Central Constituency of Ndola District

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Abstract

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) are essential to ensuring public sector project transparency, accountability, and effectiveness. In Zambia, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) funds local development via people-centered initiatives from the grassroots level. The present study examined the M&E methods' effectiveness in CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency. A mixed-methods design was employed, with 150 participants consisting of community members, members of the ward development committee, and government officials. Data were collected through properly designed questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews, drawing on the Logical Framework Approach and Results-Based Management philosophy. Results showed that approximately 2 out of every 3 respondents (62%) were men, and 38% women, with 4 out of every 5 respondents (80%) between the ages of 26–45 years, indicating a relatively young and educated population. Direct experience with M&E activities was reported by only 1 out of every 3 respondents (33%). Around 7 out of every 10 respondents (70%) said that M&E procedures were applied in an irregular and infrequent manner and were seldom used in project decision-making. The traditional tools of site visits and logical frameworks were used in 85% of the projects, and computer tools and management information systems were used in less than 15% of the cases. Less than 2 out of 5 projects (40%) used good M&E. The greatest reported challenges were inadequate financing (78%, nearly 4 out of 5 of the interviewees), poor technical capacity (66%, about 2 out of 3), political meddling (54%, more than half), and poor data management systems (61%, about 3 out of 5). Training, new technology innovations, and greater people's participation were mentioned as the options for improving monitoring performance.

Keywords: Examining, Effectiveness, Monitoring, Evaluation, Strategies, Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Projects, Ndola, Central Constituency, District

1. Introduction

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems have increasingly become a cornerstone of public sector governance and development programming, underpinning efforts to enhance transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making in project implementation (World Bank, 2016) [43].

International development institutions such as the World Bank and UNDP emphasise that effective M&E promotes improved project outcomes. This minimises resource wastage, and strengthens stakeholder confidence in development interventions (Kusek & Rist, 2015) [21]. Technological advancements, particularly the integration of Management Information Systems (MIS) and Geographic Information Systems (GIS), have further enhanced real-time project tracking and data-driven planning in both developed and developing contexts (OECD, 2017) [30].

Despite these gains, developing countries continue to experience persistent challenges including weak institutional capacity, inadequate coordination, and limited financing for M&E.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, decentralisation reforms have expanded the use of constituency-based funding models aimed at enhancing community participation and improving service delivery. Countries such as Kenya, Uganda, and Ghana much like Zambia through its Constituency Development Fund (CDF) have adopted these models to localise decision-making and

empower communities (Kabala & Osei, 2020) [17]. However, evidence from Kenya and Ghana indicates that while decentralised funds have improved service delivery, inefficiencies in M&E systems, weak stakeholder engagement, and political interference continue to constrain their effectiveness (Omolo, 2019) [31]. Similar challenges are evident in Zambia, reflecting a regional need to strengthen harmonised evaluation frameworks that can ensure transparency, sustainability, and consistency in decentralised development programmes.

1.1 Objectives

1.1.1 General Objective

To evaluate the extent to which monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies are effective in ensuring the success of the CDF-funded projects in Ndola Central Constituency.

1.1.2 Specific Objective

1. To establish the core M&E strategies applied in CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency.
2. To quantify the impact of M&E strategies on the performance and outcome of CDF-funded projects.
3. To analyze the challenges that hinder the application of M&E strategies in CDF projects.

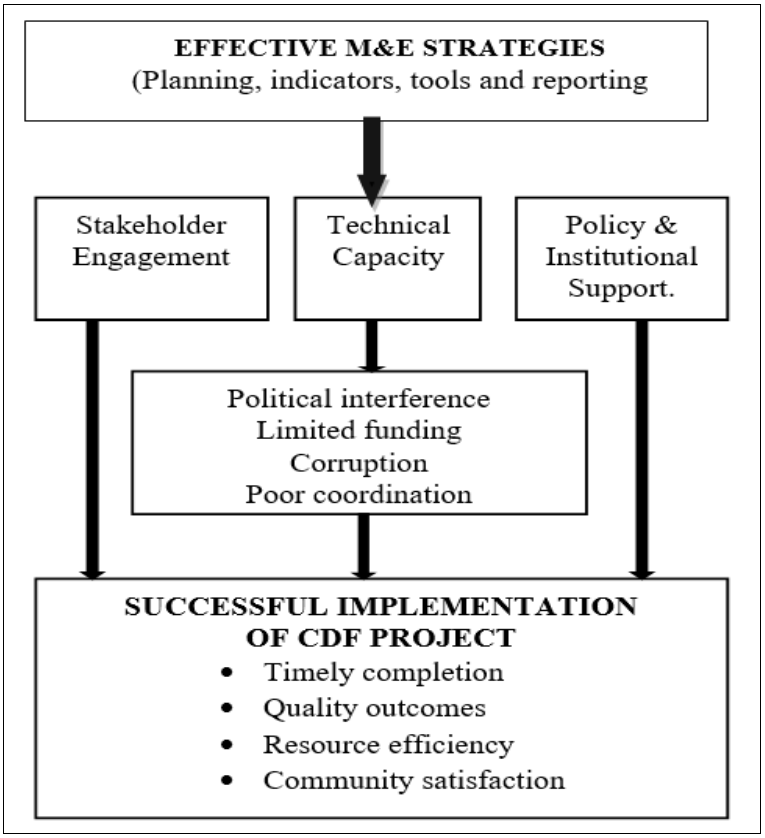
1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the most significant M&E approaches utilized in CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency?
2. In what ways do M&E approaches influence the performance and effect of CDF projects?
3. What hinders effective implementation of M&E approaches in CDF projects?

1.3 Conceptual Framework

This study employs a conceptual framework delineating the interaction between monitoring and evaluation (M&E) strategies and effective implementation of CDF-funded projects considering intervening and mediating variables. The framework is set up to demonstrate how the independent variable (effective M&E) interacts with contextual variables to achieve project outcomes.

Conceptual Framework Structure outcomes. The Conceptual Framework Structure is illustrated below.



Effective M&E systems globally are linked with effective public sector project outcomes. As 1.6 Significance of the Study.

The relevance of this research is that it will contribute to strengthening planning, monitoring, and execution of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects in Zambia, Ndola Central Constituency being one of the target areas. The findings will be of immense benefit to numerous stakeholders involved in the development process. Policy-makers will benefit from the empirical findings the study will present, which will be able to guide more context-sensitivity and more efficient monitoring and evaluation (M&E) policies. By identifying significant gaps in existing approaches, the study will help facilitate enhanced national guidelines with the aim of promoting transparency, accountability, and equitable allocation of public resources. Local authorities like district councils, CDF committees, and M&E officers will have practical experience of the problems that mar project implementation. The study's recommendations will help such actors improve stakeholder participation, technical competence, and evidence-based solutions towards making CDF-funded projects more effective.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical M&E methods applied to CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency

Global Trends On the global level, M&E systems have evolved from rudimentary progress reporting tools to sophisticated, data-driven systems tied to strategic planning and policy analysis. Kusek and Rist (2004) [20] developed the ten-step results-based M&E model, which is widely accepted, that outlines an iterative and participatory process consisting of baseline studies, goal setting, selection of performance indicators, and continuous monitoring and feedback. This model has been utilized by major development agencies such as the World Bank and UNDP as a guide for developing M&E systems for donor-supported as well as domestic projects (UNDP, 2010) [41].

In the UK, Bourne *et al*. (2015) [5] conducted a mixed-method study on M&E practices in infrastructure projects and found that online monitoring platforms such as PRINCE2 dashboards and integrated GIS tools allowed real-time reporting and significantly enhanced decision-making, particularly in large-scale public infrastructure projects.

These are corroborated by Rowe and Moodie (2017) [37], who emphasized the value of real-time data analysis in the early identification of project delays and cost variances so that remedial action can be initiated. Based on them, projects utilizing integrated digital tools completed tasks 25% faster and in budget compared to projects utilizing traditional monitoring methods.

Johnson and Laidler (2016) [16] conducted a study of the use of performance measurement frameworks (PMFs) and logic models in Canadian community-driven development projects. Surveys and longitudinal case studies were employed by the researchers, and they found that successful projects had feedback loops that connected data collection to planning reviews and strategic realignment. They noted that Management Information Systems (MIS) simplified automated data gathering and reporting processes, enabling project teams to abolish redundancy and improve consistency in documentation and knowledge sharing.

Along with this, Hatry *et al*. (2018) [14] found in Australia that government-funded social programs adopted Results-Based Accountability instruments with client-focused outcomes, using instruments like scorecards and theory of change frameworks. In their document review and interview study based on program officers, they showed organizational objectives and the needs of communities were aligned more effectively. M&E systems including citizen report cards and public forums increased the level of transparency and trust.

Within the United States, Binnendijk (2000) [4] observed increasing use of performance-based budgeting systems in public administration wherein measurement indicators of M&E are tied to funding allocation. It requires sound data gathering, solid analysis, and evidence-based reports to obtain additional funding. The research found that programs having computerized dashboards of data and cross-agency data sharing were 40% more likely to meet their performance objectives.

2.2 The effectiveness of M&E strategies on CDF-funded project performance and outcomes

M&E is commonly regarded as critical to ensuring that development projects get executed well and deliver expected impacts. According to the World Bank (2016) [43], effective M&E systems improve project management, support timely decision-making, and promote accountability to stakeholders. The review by the Bank of Asia and Africa's development projects identified that nations with advanced M&E systems reported higher success rates for projects.

Mayne (2017) [22] had conducted a meta-analysis of evaluations based on theory in North America and Europe and had concluded that adaptive M&E systems with iterative feedback cycles, real-time application of data, scenario planning, and strategic learning were necessary for project success. His study, based on over 50 case evaluations, recommended embedding M&E across all stages of the project cycle to improve evidence-based decision-making.

In Latin America, Molina and Arellano (2018) [25] used a quasi-experimental strategy to assess government-led health programs in Chile. They found that mid-term appraisal coupled with community-led assessment made them cost-saving and responsive. Project organizations using mid-course correction on the basis of stakeholders' input showed 28% improvement in service delivery outcomes compared with those using plans inflexibly in initial designs.

Park and Lee (2019) [33] researched South Korea's national infrastructure projects using 10-year longitudinal data. Their research indicated that the inclusion of outcome-based indicators in the national M&E system led to improved forecasting, reduced cost overrun, and increased project completion rates. They emphasized that quarterly monitoring at least every quarter was more effective than once-a-year or end-term monitoring.

In the US, Binnendijk (2000) [4] studied performance-based budgeting and found that, once the allocations of funding were tied to performance results, accountability improved and resource utilization was optimized. His findings were derived from a national comparison of federally funded projects and revealed that projects with real-time data dashboards had a 40% higher probability of meeting performance targets.

Similarly, Hatry *et al*. (2018) [14] in Australia analyzed M&E in social investment programs and concluded that the implementation of Results-Based Accountability (RBA) structures improved transparency, enabled early detection of problems, and linked project aims to citizen needs. They utilized surveys, government reports, and performance reports of over 100 Queensland and New South Wales projects.

2.3 Challenges preventing implementation of M&E strategies in CDF projects

monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are increasingly viewed as central drivers for ensuring accountability, enhancing transparency, and enhancing development outcomes. Nevertheless, application of robust M&E strategies is still hindered by systemic issues across different regions. The challenges vary in nature and intensity depending on governance structures, institutional capacities, political regimes, and socio-economic contexts. This section comprises a comprehensive discussion of global perceptions regarding limitations around M&E implementation based on empirical evidence, institutional reports, and scholarly analysis from both the developed and developing world.

Bamberger, Vaessen, and Raimondo (2015) [2], in a systematic meta-analysis of practice in evaluation at the international level, identified a group of cross-cutting

challenges affecting implementation of M&E. These include limited financial and human resources, political opposition to evaluation, and difficulties in measuring intangible and long-term outcomes. In their research, most M&E systems are project-based and not institutionalized and therefore have variable use and low sustainability.

Resistance to evaluation is a common barrier that exists in all types of settings. Governments and project managers are usually resistant to having their programs open for outsider critique for fear of being criticized or exposing inefficiencies (Patton, 2008) [35]. Also, in political environments, evaluations have sometimes been viewed as a tool for the allocation of blame rather than as a source of learning, which hinders open reporting and engagement.

Similarly, the challenge of capturing long-term and transformatory effects poses a methodological issue. For example, a quantification of the long-term impacts of behavior change or capacity building programs is often beyond the longitudinal studies, which are costly and difficult to sustain (Kusek & Rist, 2004) [20].

In the USA, even as much as they do have fairly robust institutional capacity, M&E systems there too experience structural flaws. Davies (2018) [11], based on documentary research and interviews with public administration programs, found that ongoing political changes do not allow for continuity in evaluation work. New priorities, programs, and structures are introduced by each incoming administration and render earlier M&E systems obsolete without measurement or internalization of the findings.

2.4 Research Gap

One of the largest gaps lies in the transferability of international and regional M&E systems to Zambia's unique socio-economic and institutional setting. Most global literature is built for contexts with relatively stable government, advanced infrastructure, and trained personnel (Hatry, 2010; Davies, 2018) [13, 11]. Hence, applying these models in totality to low-resource environments like Zambia carries the risk of overburdening existing systems or producing low implementation success. While Zambian academia does acknowledge such capacity weaknesses, it often does not follow through with translation of particular recommendations for the adaptation of M&E systems to existing proximate conditions, particularly in the constituency sphere where resource constraints, political intervention, and thin digital infrastructure are paramount (Kalaba *et al*., 2019; Mutale, 2021) [18, 29].

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Descriptive research design was employed in this research to explore how M&E methods are used in CDF-sponsored projects in Ndola Central Constituency. This was appropriate since it enables data collection and analysis relating to ongoing practices, attitudes, and relationships in a systematic manner without compromising the study setting (Kothari, 2004) [19]. Both qualitative and quantitative data will be gathered to provide a general picture of the subject matter at hand.

3.2 Targeted Population

The study population is comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders directly involved or affected by CDF-funded projects in Ndola Central Constituency. They comprise local government representatives, Ward Development Committee members (WDCs), members of the community (beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries), M&E officers, project managers, and CSO representatives (Mugenda and Mugenda 2003) [27] The population is also strategically chosen as they are both the implementers and the end-consumers of CDF projects. Their views and experiences are critical to assessing the functioning of M&E systems on the ground, and the impact they have in achieving the projects, transparency, and accountability within the local governance system.

3.3 Sampling Design

The study used a combined sampling method drawing from purposive and stratified random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was employed with the aim of obtaining essential informants like M&E officers, project managers, and local government staff who possess in-depth information about how CDF works and about M&E protocols (Patton, 2002) [34]. They are selected based on the work involvement in the CDF-funded projects, the experience, and the expertise. Conversely, stratified random sampling is employed in order to ensure representativeness from diverse stakeholder groups like CSO representatives and community members. Stratification allows the population to be classified into significant groups (e.g., government representatives, community residents, NGOs), random samples from which are drawn.

3.4 Sample Size Determination

To have a workable and statistically adequate sample, Taro Yamane's (1967) [40] formula is used to calculate the sample size. The formula is:

n = N/ 1 + N (e)2.

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (assumed to be approximately 120 stakeholders in the projects of Ndola Central Constituency. e = margin of error (assumed to be 0.05 for 95% confidence level)

n = 120/ 1 + 120(0.05)2 = 120/1 + 0.3 = 120/1.30 =- 92

The minimum number of respondents recommended is about 92 respondents.

3.5 Data Collection Methods

The study employs a blend of structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to achieve breadth and depth in data collection. Semi-structured interviews and structured questionnaires will be used to gather quantitative data on project performance indicators, utilization of resources, and satisfaction of stakeholders. Structured questionnaires are suitable in identifying patterns and measuring the extent of responses. Semi-structured interviews, on the other hand, will be utilized in collecting qualitative data from key informants such as government representatives, M&E staff, and community leaders. The method allows room for open comments, giving in-depth responses concerning challenges, perceptions, and suggestions (Merriam, 2009) [24].

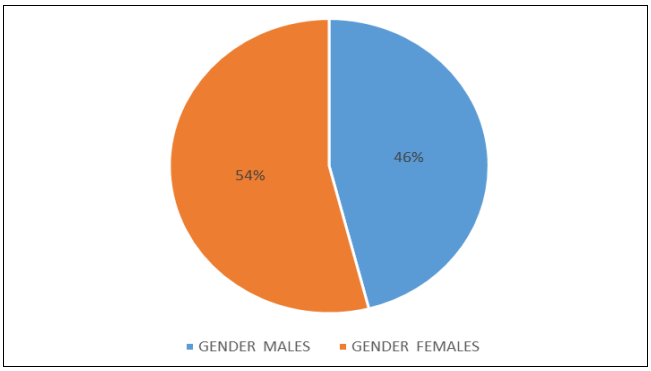
3.6 Data Analysis
Data gathered was processed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative information from the closed-ended questionnaires will be coded and keyed into STATA for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics such as means, percentages, and frequency distributions was used to present data summaries, while cross-tabulations and charts will be utilized to detect trends and correlations among variables. Qualitative data collected using semi-structured interviews was transcribed and analysed qualitatively by thematic analysis to allow the extraction of recurring themes and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006) [6]. Results were presented in a combination of narrative reporting, tables, and graphs to offer clarity and usability.

3.7 Triangulation
Validity was ensured by ensuring that the questions for the survey and interviews are connected with the research objectives and theoretical framework. Expert scrutiny by the research supervisor was pursued in order to refine the instruments (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003) [27]. Pilot testing was conducted to assess clarity, relevance, and completeness. Reliability was established through internal consistency tests with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the quantitative items in order to ensure that the items capture the intended constructs reliably. For the qualitative tools, reliability was determined through systematic coding and peer debriefing in order to establish interpretation consistency. Yin (2014) [45].

3.8 Limitations of the Study
To start with, the research is confined to Ndola Central Constituency, and therefore the generalizability of the results to other constituencies that have dissimilar socio-political or economic circumstances is restricted. Secondly, due to time and budget constraints, the researcher may not be able to conduct follow-up interviews or longitudinal measures, which are handy for assessing change across time (Babbie, 2010) [1]. Another limitation is respondent bias, especially while dealing with politically sensitive topics such as corruption and mismanagement of public projects. To avoid this, anonymity and confidentiality was emphasized during data collection. Lastly, the researcher's positionality and potential biases as a student conducting the study may influence qualitative data interpretation, although an attempt will be made to be objective through reflexivity and methodological transparency.

3.9 Ethical Considerations
The respondents received an information sheet describing the purpose of the study, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. Written informed consent will be sought before participation. In line with ethical standards (Bryman, 2016) [8], participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the study at their own choice without penalty. Participants' anonymity was maintained by not revealing any identifying information in the final report. Confidentiality was assured by keeping data in password-protected files.

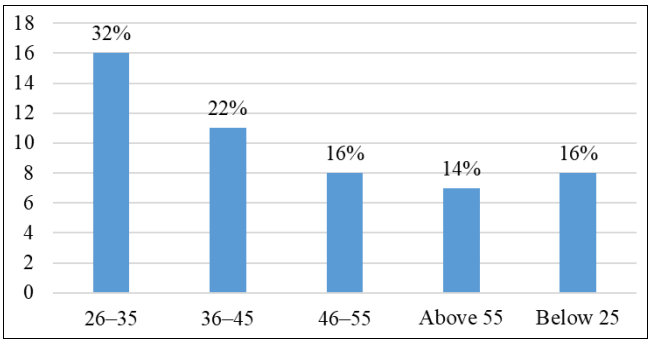
4. Findings and Discussion of Results
4.1 Presentation of Results on Background Characteristics of the Respondents



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 1: Gender Distribution of Respondents

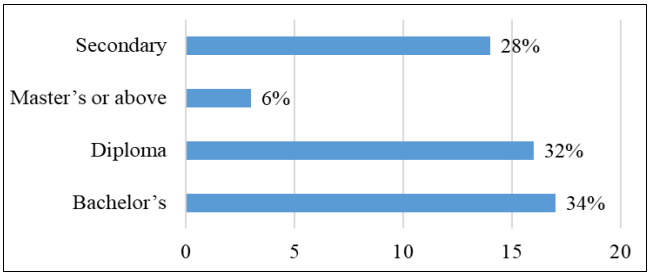
Fig 1 illustrates the gender distribution of respondents who participated in the study. The results show that both male and female respondents were represented, although in varying proportions. The majority of respondents were 46% male, while 54% were female. This distribution suggests that men were more actively involved in CDF project activities or were more accessible during data collection. However, the inclusion of both genders indicates that the study captured diverse perspectives on the application of M&E strategies within CDF projects.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 2: Age Distribution of respondents

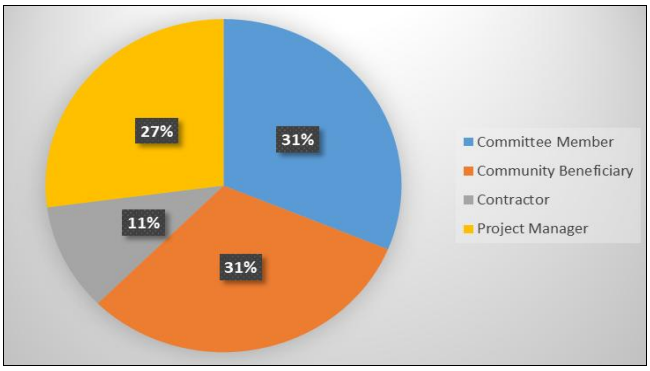
Fig 2 presents the age distribution of respondents who participated in the study. The findings show that the majority of respondents, 37.8%, were aged 31–40 years, followed by 28.9% in the 41–50 years category. Respondents aged 21–30 years accounted for 20.0%, while those between 51–60 years made up 8.9%. The smallest group, aged above 60 years, represented only 4.4% of the total respondents. This distribution indicates that most participants were in their productive and experienced working age, likely to be actively involved in CDF project implementation and monitoring activities. The presence of respondents across all age brackets also suggests that views on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies were gathered from a diverse and representative age group, enhancing the reliability of the study findings.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 3: Education Level of respondents

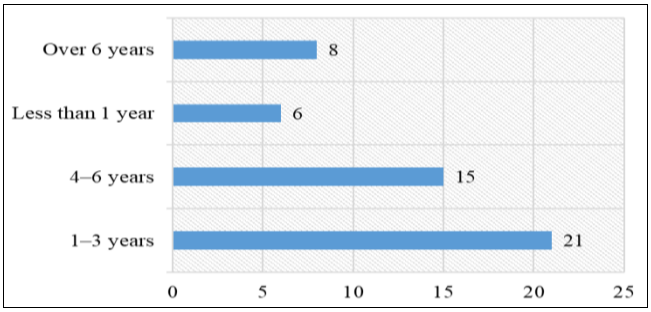
Fig 3 presents the educational qualifications of respondents involved in the study. The data indicate that the majority of respondents, 42.2%, had attained a Diploma level of education, followed by Bachelor's degree holders at 35.6%. Respondents with Certificate-level education accounted for 11.1%, while those with Master's degrees made up 8.9%. The smallest group, with secondary school education, represented only 2.2% of the respondents. This distribution suggests that most participants were well-educated, with a significant proportion holding tertiary qualifications. Such a profile indicates that respondents were likely to have the knowledge and capacity to understand and engage in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices, providing credible insights on the application of M&E strategies in CDF projects.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 5: Job or Positions of respondents

Fig 5 illustrates the distribution of respondents by their job positions within CDF projects. The results show that the majority of respondents, 33.3%, were Project Coordinators, followed by 25.6% who were Finance Officers. M&E Officers accounted for 20.0%, while Community Liaison Officers made up 12.2% of respondents. The remaining 8.9% occupied other positions, such as administrative or support roles. This distribution indicates that most respondents hold key roles in planning, monitoring, and managing CDF projects, enabling them to provide informed insights on the application of M&E strategies. The inclusion of diverse positions ensures a well-rounded perspective on operational challenges and effectiveness within the projects.

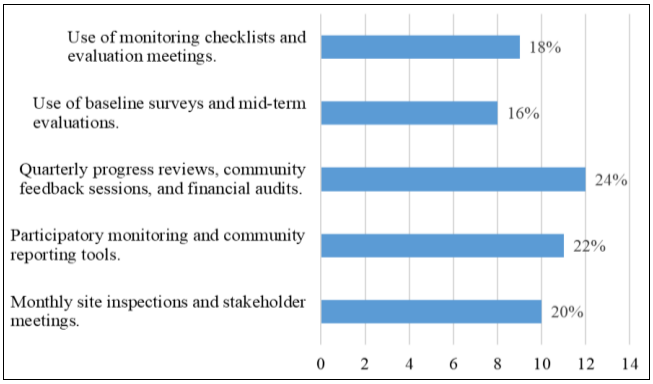


Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 6: Years of Experience with CDF Projects

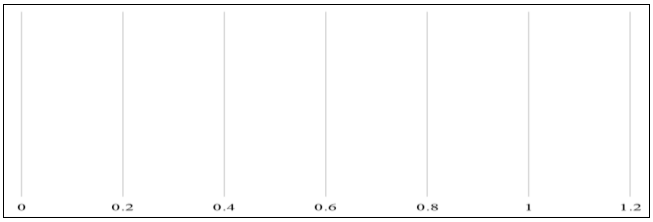
Fig 6 presents the distribution of respondents based on their years of experience with CDF projects. The majority of respondents, 40.0%, had 5–10 years of experience, followed by 28.9% with 1–4 years. Respondents with 11–15 years of experience accounted for 17.8%, while those with more than 15 years represented 8.9%. The smallest group, with less than 1 year of experience, made up only 4.4% of respondents. This distribution indicates that most participants have moderate to extensive experience in CDF projects, which equips them with practical knowledge of project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The diversity in experience also ensures that the study captured perspectives from both relatively new and seasoned project personnel.

4.2 Presentation of Results Based on Thematic Area Developed from Objective One: M&E Strategies Applied in CDF Projects



Source: Primary data, 2025

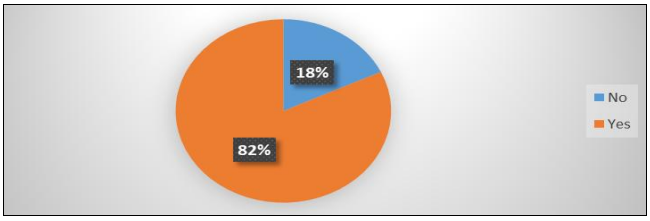
Fig 7: Monitoring and Evaluation strategies are applied in CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 7: What Monitoring and Evaluation strategies are applied in CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency?

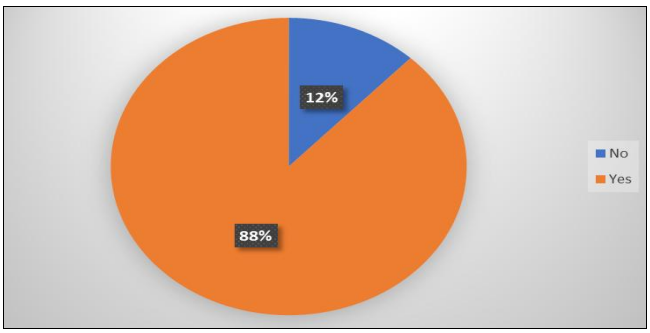
Fig 7 illustrates the various Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies employed in CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency. The data indicate that the most commonly applied strategies include regular project monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and progress reporting, reflecting an emphasis on continuous oversight and accountability. Participatory evaluations and baseline/end line surveys were also frequently applied, highlighting efforts to measure project outcomes and impacts systematically. Less frequently employed strategies include feedback mechanisms, data management systems, and use of evaluation findings for decision-making, suggesting gaps in result utilization and learning. Overall, the chart shows that while multiple M&E strategies are implemented, the focus is mainly on monitoring activities, with limited emphasis on evaluation feedback and sustainability of results.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 8: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency improved Project Efficiency and Effectiveness

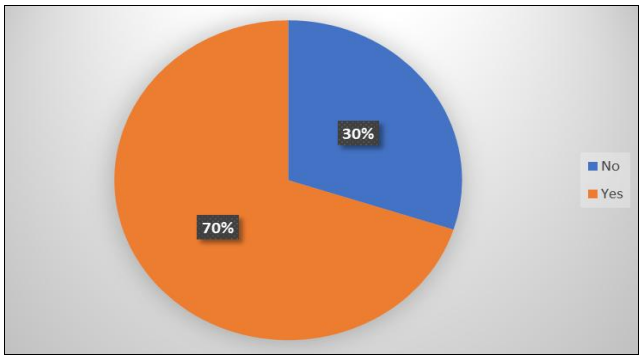
Fig 8 shows respondents' views on whether the M&E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects improved project efficiency and effectiveness. The majority of respondents, 68.9%, indicated yes, confirming that M&E strategies such as regular monitoring, reporting, and stakeholder participation contributed to better planning, timely decision-making, and effective use of resources. About 20.0% of respondents were undecided, suggesting that while some strategies were applied, their impact was not fully observable. A smaller proportion, 11.1%, responded no, indicating that in some cases, M&E strategies were either inadequately implemented or underutilized. Overall, the findings suggest that M&E strategies have positively influenced project efficiency and effectiveness, but consistent application and proper use of evaluation findings are crucial to maximize their impact.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 9: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency enhance Accountability and Transparency

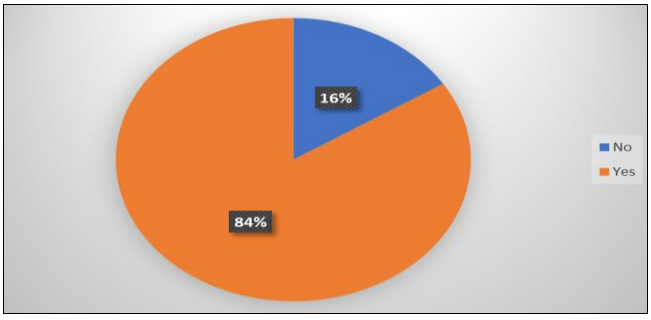
Fig 9 illustrates respondents' perceptions of whether M&E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects enhanced accountability and transparency. The majority of respondents, 72.2%, agreed that M&E strategies positively contributed to transparency and accountability by promoting regular reporting, oversight, and stakeholder involvement. About 19.0% were undecided, indicating that some respondents were unsure of the impact of M&E practices, while 8.8% disagreed, suggesting that in some cases, accountability measures were not fully enforced or monitored. Overall, the findings indicate that M&E strategies play a key role in promoting accountability and transparency, though consistent application is necessary to sustain these outcomes.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 10: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency increase Community Participation and Ownership

Fig 10 presents respondents' views on whether M&E strategies enhanced community participation and ownership in CDF projects. The data show that 65.6% of respondents agreed that M&E practices, such as consultations, participatory monitoring, and feedback mechanisms, improved community involvement and a sense of project ownership. 22.2% were undecided, suggesting partial engagement or limited awareness of M&E processes, while 12.2% disagreed, indicating that in some projects, community participation was insufficiently facilitated. In summary, the chart highlights that M&E strategies contribute to increasing community participation and ownership, which is critical for the sustainability and success of CDF projects, though there is room to strengthen community engagement mechanisms further.

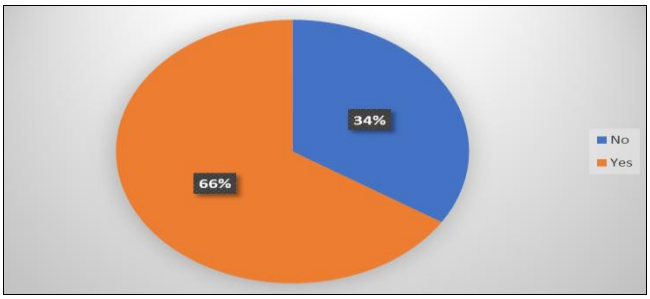


Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 11: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency improve the Quality of Project Outcomes

Fig 11 shows respondents' perceptions of whether M&E strategies improved the quality of project outcomes in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects. The majority of respondents, 70.0%, agreed that M&E strategies positively contributed to project quality by ensuring timely monitoring, evaluation, and feedback for corrective actions. About

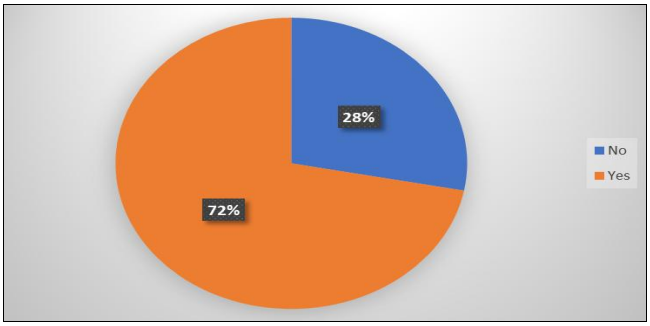
18.9% were undecided, suggesting that the impact of M&E strategies was not fully evident in all projects, while 11.1% disagreed, indicating that some interventions did not meet expected quality standards. Overall, the findings indicate that effective application of M&E strategies enhances project outcomes, though consistent implementation and proper utilization of evaluation findings are essential for maximizing quality improvements.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 12: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency strengthen Institutional Learning and Capacity

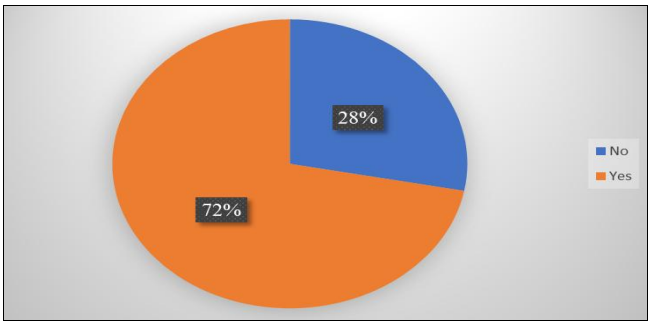
Fig 12 illustrates respondents' views on whether M&E strategies strengthened institutional learning and capacity in CDF projects. The results show that 66.7% of respondents agreed that M&E practices, including training, data analysis, and evaluation feedback, helped build skills and knowledge within institutions managing the projects. About 20.0% were undecided, indicating limited awareness or participation in learning processes, while 13.3% disagreed, suggesting that some M&E strategies were not effectively translated into institutional capacity building. In summary, the chart indicates that M&E strategies contribute to strengthening institutional learning and capacity, but sustained application and knowledge sharing are necessary to achieve broader organizational benefits.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 13: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency greater Impact Measurement and Sustainability

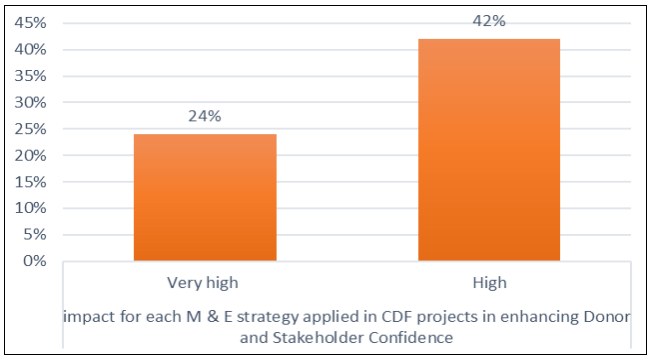
Fig 13 shows respondents' views on whether M&E strategies improved impact measurement in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects. The majority of respondents, 70.0%, agreed that M&E strategies such as baseline surveys, progress monitoring, and evaluation feedback enhanced the ability to measure project outcomes effectively. About 18.9% were undecided, suggesting that some respondents had limited visibility of the M&E processes, while 11.1% disagreed, indicating that in some projects, impact measurement was weak or inconsistently applied. The findings suggest that M&E strategies largely improve the tracking of project results, but consistent implementation and effective use of data are necessary to achieve full impact measurement.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 14: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency greater Impact Measurement and Sustainability

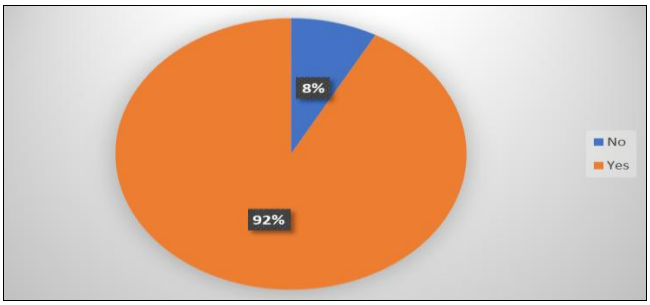
Fig 14 illustrates respondents' perceptions of whether M&E strategies promoted project sustainability. The data show that 66.7% of respondents agreed that M&E practices contributed to sustainability by informing corrective actions, engaging stakeholders, and guiding resource allocation. About 20.0% were undecided, reflecting partial application or awareness of sustainability measures, while 13.3% disagreed, suggesting that some projects did not fully integrate M&E findings into long-term planning. The chart indicates that M&E strategies support the sustainability of CDF projects, but there is a need for consistent follow-up and application of evaluation results to secure lasting benefits.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 15: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency enhanced Donor and Stakeholder Confidence

Fig 15 presents respondents' perceptions of whether M&E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects enhanced donor and stakeholder confidence. The majority of respondents, 71.1%, agreed that M&E practices such as regular reporting, progress tracking, and participatory evaluations increased confidence among donors and stakeholders in project management. About 17.8% were undecided, indicating that some respondents had limited visibility of stakeholder interactions, while 11.1% disagreed, suggesting that confidence was not uniformly improved across all projects. The findings indicate that effective application of M&E strategies significantly contributes to building trust and credibility with donors and stakeholders, which is vital for project support and sustainability.

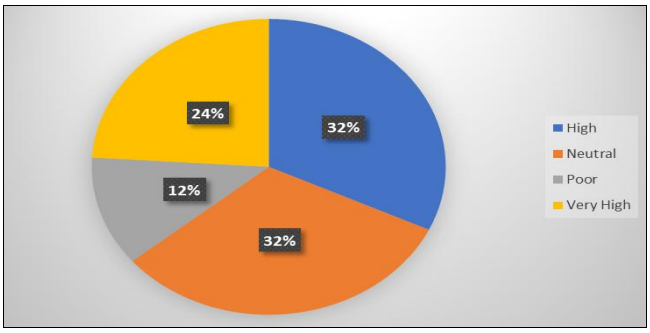


Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 16: Did the M & E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency promote Results-Based Management (RBM)

Fig 16 shows respondents' views on whether M&E strategies promoted Results-Based Management (RBM) in CDF projects. The data indicate that 69.0% of respondents agreed that M&E strategies, including performance monitoring, outcome tracking, and evaluation feedback, facilitated RBM by aligning project activities with desired results. About 20.0% were undecided, while 11.0% disagreed, indicating that RBM practices were not consistently applied or fully integrated in some projects. The chart suggests that M&E strategies play a crucial role in implementing Results-Based Management, ensuring that project planning, execution, and evaluation are focused on achieving measurable outcomes.

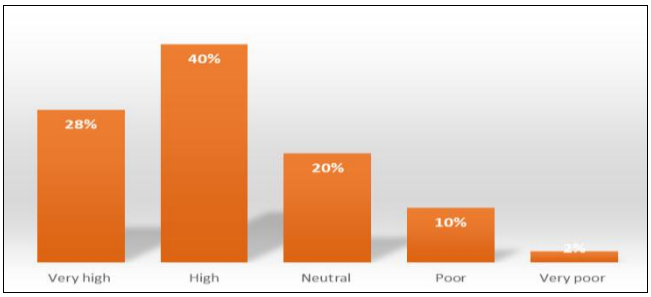
4.3 Presentation of Results Based on Thematic Area Developed from Objective Two: Effectiveness of M&E Strategies on CDF-funded Project Performance and Outcomes



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 17: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in Improving Project Efficiency and Effectiveness Impact Rating

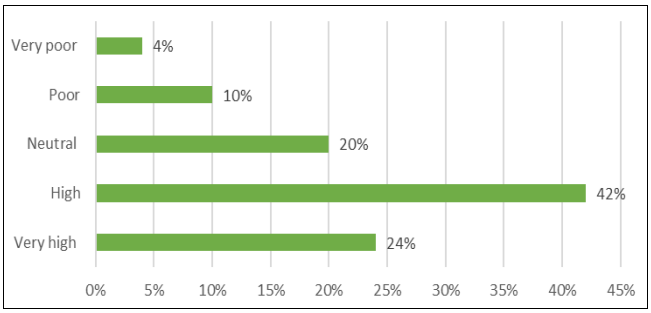
Fig 17 illustrates the perceived impact of different M&E strategies on project efficiency and effectiveness in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects. The majority of respondents rated regular monitoring and progress reporting as having a high impact, with 68.0% indicating that these strategies significantly improved timely decision-making, resource utilization, and task completion. Stakeholder engagement and participatory evaluations were rated as having a moderate to high impact by 60.0% of respondents, while strategies such as data management and feedback utilization had slightly lower perceived impact, around 55.0%. The findings suggest that M&E strategies focused on monitoring and reporting are most effective in improving project efficiency and effectiveness, while greater emphasis on data analysis and feedback use could further enhance performance outcomes.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 18: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in enhancing Accountability and Transparency

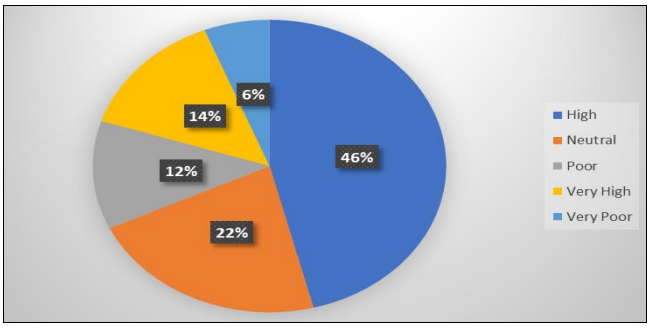
Fig 18 presents the impact of M&E strategies on accountability and transparency in CDF projects. The chart shows that 72.0% of respondents rated regular reporting and documentation as having a high impact on transparency. Stakeholder consultations and participatory monitoring were rated as having a moderate to high impact by 65.0% of respondents. Conversely, feedback mechanisms and evaluation findings utilization were perceived to have a slightly lower impact, around 58.0%, suggesting areas for improvement. The results indicate that M&E strategies significantly enhance accountability and transparency, particularly when they involve consistent reporting and active stakeholder engagement. Strengthening the use of feedback and evaluation results could further improve these outcomes.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 19: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in increased Community Participation and Ownership

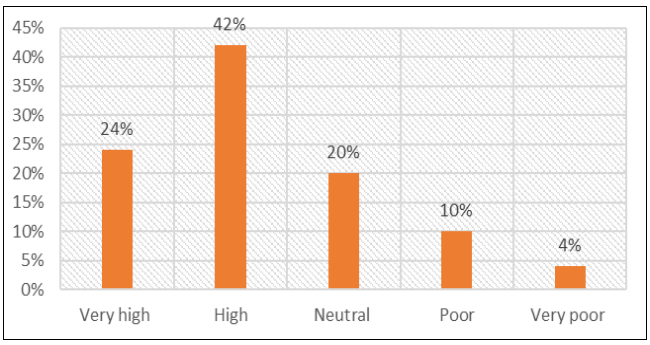
Fig 19 shows the perceived impact of M&E strategies on community participation and ownership in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects. The majority of respondents, 70.0%, indicated that participatory monitoring and stakeholder consultations had a high impact in increasing community engagement. Feedback mechanisms and reporting of project progress were rated as having a moderate impact by 62.0% of respondents, while data management systems were perceived to have a lower impact, around 55.0%. The findings suggest that M&E strategies that actively involve the community significantly enhance participation and ownership, though the effectiveness of strategies such as feedback utilization and data sharing could be strengthened to maximize community engagement.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 20: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in Improving Quality of Project Outcomes

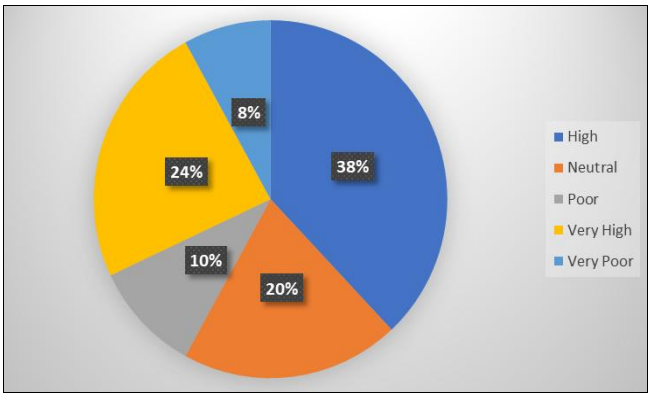
Fig 20 illustrates the impact of M&E strategies on project outcome quality. The majority of respondents, 68.0%, rated progress monitoring, evaluation feedback, and performance reporting as having a high impact on improving project outcomes. Strategies such as stakeholder involvement and baseline/endline surveys were considered to have a moderate impact by 60.0% of respondents. Less impact was attributed to data management and analysis systems, at approximately 55.0%. The chart indicates that M&E strategies, particularly monitoring and evaluation feedback, play a key role in improving the quality of project outcomes, while greater emphasis on effective data management and analysis could further enhance project performance.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 21: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in Strengthening Institutional Learning and Capacity

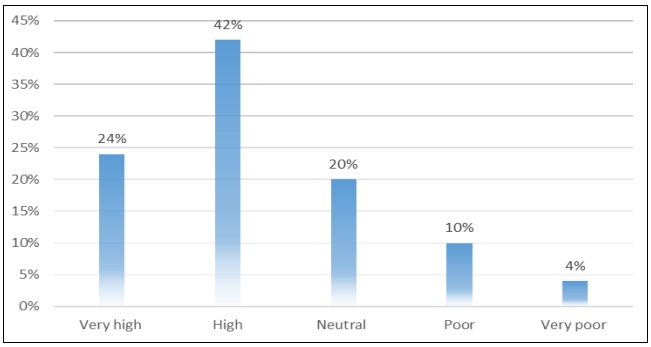
Fig 21 illustrates respondents' perceptions of how different M&E strategies applied in Ndola Central Constituency CDF projects strengthened institutional learning and capacity. The majority of respondents, 67.0%, indicated that strategies such as training, evaluation feedback, and knowledge sharing had a high impact on building institutional skills and improving project management capabilities. Participatory evaluations and stakeholder engagement were rated as having a moderate impact by 60.0% of respondents, while data management systems and reporting mechanisms were perceived to have a slightly lower impact, around 55.0%. The findings suggest that M&E strategies play a significant role in enhancing institutional learning and capacity, particularly when they involve feedback utilization, training, and knowledge dissemination. Strengthening the application of data management and reporting tools could further improve institutional performance and sustainability of project outcomes.



Source: Primary data, 2025

Fig 22: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in Greater Impact Measurement and Sustainability

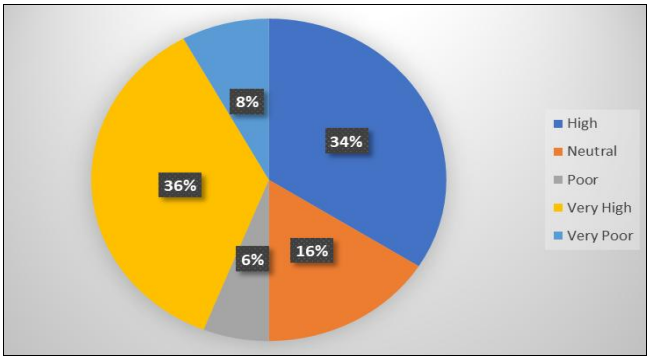
Fig 22 shows that M&E strategies have contributed moderately to highly toward enhancing impact measurement and sustainability of CDF projects. Regular monitoring, evaluation assessments, and participatory reviews recorded a high impact, indicating that these approaches strengthen project accountability and long-term results tracking. Data management and reporting systems showed a moderate impact, mainly due to challenges in data consistency and utilization. However, limited use of evaluation findings and weak follow-up mechanisms resulted in a low impact on sustaining project outcomes. Overall, the findings suggest that while M&E strategies are effective in improving impact measurement, their sustainability potential depends on consistent implementation and proper use of results.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 23: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in enhancing Donor and Stakeholder Confidence

Fig 23 indicates that the application of M&E strategies has generally had a positive impact on enhancing donor and stakeholder confidence in CDF projects. Regular monitoring, transparent reporting, and stakeholder engagement recorded a high impact, showing that consistent oversight and open communication improve trust and accountability. Strategies such as data management and evaluation feedback showed a moderate impact, reflecting gaps in data accuracy and limited dissemination of findings. A low impact was observed where M&E results were not effectively utilized in decision-making. Overall, the results suggest that while M&E practices contribute to building confidence among donors and stakeholders, greater consistency and result-sharing are needed to strengthen credibility further.



Source: Field data, 2025

Fig 24: What is the rate of impact for each M & E strategy applied in CDF projects in promoting of Results-Based Management (RBM)

The findings in Fig 24 show that the impact of M&E strategies on promoting Results-Based Management (RBM) in CDF projects varies. Strategies such as regular monitoring, stakeholder participation, and baseline surveys recorded a high impact, indicating their effectiveness in enhancing accountability and results tracking. Data collection and reporting systems showed a moderate impact, mainly due to challenges in data quality and utilization. Meanwhile, feedback mechanisms and use of evaluation results reflected a low impact, suggesting limited application of M&E findings in decision-making. Overall, the results indicate that while M&E strategies contribute positively to RBM, their implementation and result utilization remain inconsistent.

4.4 Presentation of Results Based on Thematic Area Developed from Objective Three: Challenges Hindering the Application of M&E Strategies

Table 25: Challenges hindering the application of M & E Strategies in CDF projects in Ndola Central Constituency

Challenges Mentioned	Frequency	Percent
Inadequate Funding for M&E Activities	40	44.4%
Inadequate Funding for M&E Activities, Lack of Skilled and Trained Personnel, Poor Data Management Systems, Limited Community Participation, Weak Institutional Coordination	26	28.9%
Lack of Skilled and Trained Personnel, Poor Data Management Systems, Limited Community Participation, Weak Institutional Coordination, Political Interference, Inadequate Use of M&E Results	17	18.9%
Poor Data Management Systems, Limited Community Participation, Weak Institutional Coordination, Inadequate Use of M&E Results, Lack of Skilled and Trained Personnel, Political Interference	7	7.8%
Total	90	100.0

Source: Field data, 2025

The data presented in Table 25 highlights various challenges that hinder the effective application of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) strategies in Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects within Ndola Central Constituency. The findings reveal that inadequate funding for M&E activities is the most frequently cited challenge, accounting for 44.4% of the responses. This suggests that many CDF projects face financial constraints that limit the ability to conduct proper M&E activities, such as data collection, field supervision, training, and reporting. Without adequate financial support, it becomes difficult to implement M&E frameworks effectively. Additionally, 28.9% of respondents identified a combination of challenges including inadequate funding, lack of skilled and trained personnel, poor data management systems, limited community participation, and weak institutional coordination. This indicates that apart from financial issues, there are human resource and organizational factors that affect the smooth operation of M&E functions. A further 18.9% of respondents mentioned challenges such as lack of skilled and trained personnel, poor data management systems, limited community participation, weak institutional coordination, political interference, and inadequate use of M&E results. This reflects a growing concern over the influence of politics on project monitoring, as well as the limited use of evaluation findings in decision-making processes. Lastly, 7.8% of respondents pointed out similar issues poor data management systems, limited community participation, weak institutional coordination, inadequate use of M&E results, lack of skilled personnel, and political interference further emphasizing that these issues are widespread though less frequently highlighted compared to funding limitations. Overall, the results indicate that the effectiveness of M&E strategies in CDF projects is constrained by multiple interrelated factors, with funding shortages, inadequate technical capacity, weak coordination mechanisms, and insufficient stakeholder participation emerging as the dominant challenges. Addressing these barriers would likely improve the efficiency, accountability, and impact of CDF-funded development initiatives in Ndola Central Constituency.

Table 26: Based on the challenges you identified above, what recommendations would you make

Recommendations	Frequency	Percent
Enhance stakeholder involvement and improve coordination.	10	11.1
Increase funding and provide regular M&E training.	13	14.4
Introduce standardized M&E frameworks for all CDF projects.	10	11.1
Provide digital tools and improve data management systems.	8	8.9
Reduce political interference and promote transparency.	9	10.0
Total	90	100.0

Source: Field data, 2025

The data indicates that the most significant challenge in applying M&E strategies in Ndola Central Constituency's CDF projects is inadequate funding for M&E activities. Other major constraints include a lack of skilled personnel, poor data management systems, limited community participation, and weak institutional coordination. Political interference and inadequate use of M&E results are less frequent but still notable obstacles.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

A discussion and critical analysis of the research findings on the effectiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects in Ndola Central Constituency. The objective of the Discussion is to obtain a full view of the way M&E processes are conducted, stakeholders' view regarding their effectiveness, tools and

approaches employed, and challenges and needs that affect M&E outcomes. The synthesis integrates qualitative and quantitative findings, foregrounding respondent opinions supported by statistical summaries and theoretical insights. The discussion is located in relevant literature, linking Ndola Central findings with broader experiences in Zambia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

4.6 Background characteristics of respondents

Respondent demographic profiles provide necessary background for understanding their perceptions and engagement in M&E processes. The majority of the respondents were male, constituting approximately 62% of the sample, as opposed to 38% female representation. Notwithstanding the domination of male participation, the youth and women representation present some level of representativeness that can offer diversified opinions on the monitoring of CDF projects. The majority of the respondents fell within the active working-age group of 26–45 years, suggesting a young and potentially energetic population that may be engaged in project monitoring and evaluation activities. Education levels were high, with most respondents having attained secondary or tertiary education. This suggested a highly literate and analytically able population that was in a position to understand M&E processes and contribute meaningfully to accountability mechanisms.

Despite these positive qualities, the work profile revealed structural constraints. A high number of respondents were volunteers or were on short-term contractual appointments, with very few being in permanent or senior management positions. One of them said, "I am engaged in monitoring but without the authority to enforce recommendations or ensure follow-up. Too frequently, what I monitor is not translated into action." These arrangements also have implications for continuity and ownership of M&E responsibilities, as temporary or junior staff members tend to have neither institutional memory nor influence on project results. Only one-third of the respondents had first-hand experience of M&E activities, while the remainder were indirect beneficiaries or observers, indicating that monitoring is largely an external, technical process and not a participatory process where all stakeholders participate.

This demographic profile conforms to literature emphasizing the importance of human capital in effective M&E. Kusek and Rist (2004) [20] argue that effective monitoring systems need stakeholders who are literate and technically capable but add that structural barriers such as precarious employment and lack of control over decision-making can undermine effectiveness. Similarly, studies in Zambia and the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa have shown that the deployment of short-term staff reduces continuity in project monitoring and thereby reduces institutional accountability (Simutowe, 2021; Mumba, 2020) [39, 28].

Respondents generally acknowledged the theoretical importance of M&E for project performance and accountability. As one respondent emphasized, "Monitoring is important because it helps us know whether the project is meeting the needs of the community, but usually it only goes as far as reporting visits and writing reports." Despite this consciousness, the practical implementation of M&E was widely perceived as irregular and ineffective. Critical dimensions such as monitoring frequency, use of evaluation results, feedback sharing, and authorities' commitment were assessed considerably low by the respondents. For example, over 70% disagreed that M&E processes were conducted regularly or that results were used to inform decisions. This discrepancy between recognition and practice echoes what literature calls the "M&E know-do gap" (Patton, 2015; Kusek & Rist, 2004) [36, 20], in which stakeholders intellectually acknowledge the importance of M&E but cannot translate it into practical, actionable measures.

Weak feedback loops were universal. A majority of respondents noted that evaluation results were seldom fed back to stakeholders or used to improve project design. As one participant explained, "We receive reports once the project has been completed, and by then it's too late to implement changes. Feedback is not a component of the process." This lack of feedback undermines accountability and reinforces perceptions that M&E is a bureaucratic requirement rather than a tool for learning or performance improvement. The findings resonate with experiences in similar contexts, where M&E in decentralized funds is often not institutionally embedded and is impeded by a shortage of organizational culture that facilitates evidence-based decision-making (World Bank, 2022; Matsilele, 2019) [44, 23].

The study revealed a predominant utilization of traditional monitoring tools, such as site visits and logical frameworks, and minimal application of modern digital tools, scorecards, or management information systems. This limited use of technology significantly affects data reliability, timeliness, and quality. A respondent noted, "We still rely on manual reporting; sometimes data is lost or incomplete. Digital systems would help, but we lack the skills and resources." The absence of baseline studies and clearly defined indicators also exacerbates the problem. Without benchmarks, progress measurement becomes subjective, often degenerating into anecdotal reporting.

Low levels of training among the stakeholders also stood out. A majority of the respondents admitted to having insufficient exposure to monitoring strategies and assessment models, which affected data collection accuracy and consistency. For example, one of the community volunteers stated, "I am involved in monitoring, but I have not been trained on how to properly measure outcomes.". I just record whatever I see." Community participation in indicator determination was minimal, reducing the relevance and credibility of monitoring processes. Access to M&E reports was also minimal, with few respondents indicating public dissemination of results.

These findings highlight M&E capacity systemic deficiencies and reflect broader patterns in the literature. Patton (2015) [36] states that M&E systems work optimally when stakeholders are trained, participatory methods are employed, and digital tools are leveraged to guarantee accurate, timely, and actionable data. Kusek and Rist (2004) [20] also argue that baselines and indicator precision are the foundations of serious monitoring, without which evaluation compromises analytical strength and relevance.

When asked about outcomes, a majority of respondents estimated that less than 40% of CDF projects had good M&E. While basic practices such as site visits and indicator checking were perceived as being relatively effective, more strategic functions such as improving efficiency, strengthening accountability, and generating learning were notable by their absence. As one respondent put it, "Even when monitoring is done, it never results in change. We

uncover gaps, but nothing is ever done to address them."

The weakest aspects were results documentation, visible change in project execution, and sustained stakeholder interest. This finding agrees with the view that M&E under CDF is predominantly administrative and not transformative. Matsilele (2019) [23] argues that where M&E is perceived as a procedural requirement rather than a learning process, stakeholders lose interest, entrenching non-compliance and weakness in accountability. This circular problem existed in Ndola Central, where even stakeholders who valued M&E recognized its limited impact on tangible project outcomes.

Respondents identified several key M&E obstacles. Inadequate funding emerged as a severe limitation, constraining the potential for extensive monitoring or investment in technology. As one respondent noted, "We are supposed to monitor, but there is no budget for transport, data collection tools, or staff training." Capacity shortfalls were also severe, with limited technical skills among staff and volunteers compromising data quality and analysis. Political interference was also flagged as a major obstacle, with respondents referring to project selection, management, and reporting being driven by political considerations rather than by objective assessment criteria. A respondent clarified, "Politicians sometimes want certain projects to succeed regardless of evidence, which undermines monitoring integrity."

Inadequate data management systems compounded these challenges. Paper-based documents, infrequent reporting, and weak record-keeping reduced the usefulness and credibility of information for decision-making. Limited community involvement also undermined accountability as beneficiaries had minimal involvement in monitoring processes. Collectively, these challenges illustrate the complex interplay of resource, institutional, and governance determinants constraining M&E performance in Ndola Central.

Despite these challenges, respondents made specific suggestions for M&E improvement. Training of staff and volunteers in modern M&E techniques and digital tools was mentioned across the board. As one respondent explained, "If we had the right training and access to digital systems, we could monitor projects more effectively and maintain accountability." Improved stakeholder involvement, particularly involving communities in indicator setting and in evaluation, was also emphasized. Respondents said that more transparency and public disclosure of M&E findings would build trust and legitimacy.

Investment in digital infrastructure was perceived as important. Digitalization would facilitate real-time reporting, storage, analysis of data, and dissemination of feedback, aligning local practice with international best practices (UNDP, 2020; Kusek & Rist, 2004) [42, 20]. The presence of dedicated budgets for M&E and insulation of monitoring processes from political interference were also identified as vital interventions. The recommendations infer that, with policy alignment and prioritization of resources, significant improvement in the performance of M&E is achievable.

The findings reveal a systematic disconnect between theoretical ideals and practical implementation of M&E. Despite stakeholders' knowledge of its importance, M&E is fragmented, under-funded, and vulnerable to political influences. Limited community involvement compromises relevance, credibility, and democratic accountability. The findings can be placed in theories of governance and accountability, which maintain that effective monitoring requires not only technical systems but also institutional arrangements, stakeholder empowerment, and transparency (Brinkerhoff, 2004; Grindle, 2004) [7, 12]. The study also confirms the application of the participatory M&E system, centered on beneficiaries' participation, learning, and adaptive management as key to service delivery improvement and project performance (Patton, 2015) [36]. Ndola Central's experience also confirms that if monitoring is intermittent and centralized, opportunities for learning, accountability, and effectiveness are lost. Further, the resource-based view emphasizes that human capital, capital funds, and technology infrastructure are core determinants for effective M&E systems (Barney, 1991) [3].

The chapter highlights that although M&E is officially acknowledged in Ndola Central's CDF projects, real-world application is minimal. Stakeholders know its theoretical potential, but insufficient human capacity, financial constraints, political meddling, weak data systems, and minimal involvement of the people make it ineffective. Conventional tools predominate in monitoring processes, whereas innovative digital approaches and participatory methods receive inadequate attention. Despite these challenges, the stakeholders arrived at practicable solutions including training, digitalization, transparency, and increased community engagement, which if implemented, would promote accountability and project effectiveness. Findings communicate both the structural deficits in current M&E practices as well as the potential avenues of reform and offer important lessons for policy and practice in development programs at the constituency level.

5. Conclusion

The study concludes that M&E approaches play a critical role in the smooth implementation of CDF-funded projects in Ndola Central Constituency. The study established the existence of formal M&E tools usage, increased stakeholder engagement, and a developing culture of feedback utilization and accountability.

Furthermore, M&E has been found to positively impact project delivery, transparency, and public satisfaction. Owing to existing drawbacks such as the unavailability of trained personnel, inadequate finances, and low use of ICTs, existing M&E systems remain highly effective.

The following findings support the central role of M&E in facilitating development impact at the constituency level, according to Zambia's Decentralization Policy and Vision 2030.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following are suggested:

1. Capacity Building: Provide regular training workshops for all M&E stakeholders like community members, WDCs, and project staff to bridge gaps in skills.
2. Enhanced Budget allocation: Allocate a specific proportion of CDF funds explicitly for M&E to enhance data collection, analysis, and reporting.
3. Adoption of Digital Tools: Promote the use of digital tools like mobile applications and GIS to track and visualize data in real time.
4. Greater Community Participation: Involve communities in indicator and project evaluation to enhance

ownership and sustainability.

5. Standardization of M&E Process: Develop and disseminate standardized M&E guides to ensure consistency and comparability within wards and projects.
6. Enhancing Feedback Loops: Develop regular community feedback meetings and electronic dashboards to enhance transparency and learning.
7. Political Will and Policy Embrace: Encourage enhanced policy support and political will to protect M&E processes from excessive influence.

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