

# Principles and Practice of Monitoring and Evaluation: A Paraphernalia for Effective Development

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## Abstract

This article discusses the principles and practice of monitoring and evaluation and emphasises that monitoring and evaluation (M and E) is paraphernalia for effective development. The discourse of monitoring and evaluation in development practice and theory has gained prominence over the years. It is uncontested that the purveyors of development are increasingly prioritising monitoring and evaluation as a platform for learning and accountability. This growing importance has been caused by the growing voice of the civil society's scrutiny on good governance, and a demand for efficient public administration. At the same time, a plethora of development funders demand that M and E be implemented as a platform for learning and accountability. Despite growing importance of M and E, there seems to be a lack of clarity on the principles of M and E. The article finds its value in locating how M and E, augmented by appropriate principles, leads to effective development. Underlined by qualitative data collection methods, the article discusses relevant principles such as learning, accountability, participatory approaches, quality assurance, and reporting in monitoring and evaluation.

**Keywords:** development; evaluation, monitoring; programmes; projects

## Introduction

“Good government is not a luxury—it is a vital necessity for development.”(Kusek and Rist 2004)

The article provides a discussion of the principles of monitoring and evaluation in the wake of a barrage of literature that tends to be unclear regarding the principles of monitoring and evaluation. The discourse of monitoring and evaluation in development practice and theory has gained prominence over the years. Amongst other reasons,



development practitioners are prioritising M and E as a platform for learning and accountability (Karani, Bichanga, and Kumau 2014). The civil society's scrutiny on good governance and calls for efficient administration have spurred the importance of M and E. In the Non-Governmental Organisations sector, monitoring and evaluation has been used to give direction to the implementation of activities. A number of scholars (see Kabonga 2016; Kessler and Tanburn 2014; Metzger and Guenther 2015; World Bank, 2010) have argued that development should be assessed on four significant fronts—that is effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. Thus, the article situates monitoring and evaluation as a tool to achieve efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. Guided by M and E development interventions must achieve the evaluative criteria of efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability. Investing in M and E is key to achieving the above measurements of development. Hitherto, more NGOs than governments in Africa seem to have embraced the practice of monitoring and evaluation. It is, therefore, not surprising that poor policy performance continues unabated in Africa. This is a clarion call for governments to commit resources to monitoring and evaluation as it is paraphernalia for effective development.

## **The Problem**

The discourse of M and E has gained prominence over the years. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been clear on their concern or need for efficient public administration that is underpinned by a robust M and E system. At the same time, development funders require M and E as a platform for learning and accountability. In spite of all this, there seems to be lack of clarity on principles of M and E. The literature is conspicuously silent on how M and E practice, augmented with right principles acts as paraphernalia for effective development. The significance of this article lies in the fact that it is clearly contributing to how the principles and practice of M and E lead to effective development. Thus, the aim of my research was to contribute to the literature on how the practice of M and E, intermixed with sound principles, results in effective development.

## **Conceptualising Monitoring and Evaluation**

A review of the literature shows that multifarious conceptualisations characterise the discourse of M and E. Although there are numerous definitions, scholars seem to converge on the idea that monitoring and evaluation is paraphernalia for effective development. Kariuki (2014) defines monitoring as a continuous assessment of the function of project activities in the context of implementation schedules and the use of project inputs. Valadez and Bamberger (2004) further add that monitoring is more of a programme activity, whose role is to determine whether project activities are implemented as planned. If, to the contrary, it determines the cause of the anomaly and what can be done to address the anomaly. Perhaps a more emphatic definition is that of the World Bank (2011), which states that monitoring is a continuous function that uses the systematic collection of data on specified indicators to provide for the management

and primary stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention, with indications of the extent of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds. The above definitions converge at a point where they see monitoring as a continuous function and more of a day-to-day work.

Having defined monitoring, it is also vital to allude to its typologies. Literature is replete with different conceptualisations on typologies of monitoring. This article, therefore, will not exhaust all typologies of monitoring. UNICEF (2003) highlights two types of monitoring—that is situation monitoring and performance monitoring. Situation monitoring measures change in a condition or set of conditions or the absence of change, while performance monitoring seeks to measure progress in achieving specific objectives about an implementation plan. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) (2011) focuses on different typologies of monitoring. IFRC guidelines on project or programme monitoring and evaluation identifies seven types of monitoring. These are results monitoring, process or activity monitoring, compliance monitoring, situation or context monitoring, beneficiary monitoring, financial monitoring, and organisational monitoring. Table 1 explains the types of monitoring briefly.

Having identified a number of monitoring types, it is also compelling to discuss the rationale behind conducting monitoring. Kariuki (2014) focuses on two primary reasons that makes monitoring necessary. Monitoring of projects or development interventions help to identify, at the earliest time, shortcomings with regard to achieving intended objectives (Kunwar and Nyandemo 2004). Again, monitoring is paraphernalia for rapid problem identification—the identified problems are then communicated to decision makers for remedial actions.

Different authors define evaluation differently. The concept defies easy definition. Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (1999) show that evaluation is the use of social research procedures and processes to systematically interrogate the effectiveness of social intervention programmes that are adapted to their political and organisational conditions. Dinnito and Due (1987) define evaluation as the assessment of the effectiveness of a programme in meeting its objectives, or the assessment of the relative effectiveness of two or more programmes in meeting common objectives. Evaluation seeks to answer the effectiveness, efficiency, impact, efficacy, relevance, and sustainability of a development intervention. United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) (2003) refers to the above as evaluation criteria. Often than not, evaluations are conducted by external evaluators or independent evaluators. This allows for more objectivity. Evaluation is usually conducted at the end or when developmental intervention is about to end. There are a number of reasons for conducting evaluation. Chief among them is that it allows results of evaluations to be consolidated and used to inform decision-makers of ways to improve the running of the project so that intended benefits accrue to the beneficiaries. It also shows the unintended consequences of the project outside what was planned.

**Table 1:** Types of monitoring

<i>Type of Monitoring</i>	<i>Explanation</i>
Results monitoring	Tracks effects and impacts.
Process (activity) monitoring	Tracks the use of inputs and resources, the progress of activities, and the delivery of outputs.
Compliance monitoring	Ensures compliance with donor regulations, expected results, grant, contract requirements, local government regulations, and ethical requirements.
Context(situation) monitoring	Tracks the setting in which the project or programme operates, especially as it affects the identified risks and assumptions, but also any unexpected considerations that may arise.
Beneficiary monitoring	Tracks beneficiary perceptions of a project or programme. This includes beneficiary satisfaction or complaints with the project or programme, including their participation, treatment, access to resources and their overall experience of change.
Financial monitoring	Accounts for costs by input and activity within predefined categories of expenditure. This is often conducted in conjunction with compliance and process monitoring.
Organisational monitoring	Tracks the sustainability, institutional development and capacity building in the project or programme and with its partners. This is often done in conjunction with the monitoring processes of the larger, implementing organisation.

Source: IFRC Guide (2011)

There are various types of evaluations. These evaluations can be categorised according to the timing of evaluation, according to who is conducting the evaluation, and according to the methodology or technicality (IFRC Guide 2011). Therefore, according to the timing of the evaluation, there is a formative evaluation, summative evaluation, mid-term evaluation, and final evaluation. Depending on who is conducting the evaluation, there is internal or self-evaluation, external or independent evaluation, participatory evaluation, and joint evaluation. On the contrary, according to technicality, there is a thematic evaluation, cluster/sector evaluation, and impact evaluation. The table below explains the various types of evaluations:

**Table 2:** Types of evaluation

<i>Evaluation according to timing</i>	<i>Evaluation according to who conducts the evaluation</i>	<i>Evaluation according to technicality or methodology</i>
<p><b>Formative evaluations</b> Take place during project implementation to improve performance and assess compliance.</p> <p><b>Summative evaluations</b> Takes place at the end of project/programme implementation to assess effectiveness and impact.</p> <p><b>Mid-term evaluations</b> Are formative in purpose and take place midway through implementation.</p> <p><b>Final evaluations</b> Are summative in purpose and are conducted (often externally) at the end of the project/programme implementation to assess how well the project/programme has achieved its intended objectives.</p> <p><b>Ex-post evaluations</b> Are conducted sometime after implementation to assess long-term impact and sustainability.</p>	<p><b>Internal or self-evaluations</b> Are conducted by those responsible for implementing a project/programme. They can be less expensive than external evaluations and help build staff capacity and ownership. However, they may lack credibility with individual stakeholders, such as donors, as they are perceived as more subjective (biased or one-sided). These tend to be focused on learning lessons rather than demonstrating accountability.</p> <p><b>External or independent evaluations</b> Are conducted by the evaluator(s) outside of the implementing team, lending them a degree of objectivity and often technical expertise. These tend to focus on accountability.</p> <p><b>Participatory evaluations</b> Are conducted with the beneficiaries and other key stakeholders, and can be empowering, building their capacity, ownership, and support.</p> <p><b>Joint evaluations</b> Are conducted collaboratively by more than one implementing partner, and can help build consensus at different levels, credibility, and joint support.</p>	<p><b>Real-time evaluations (RTEs)</b> are undertaken during project/programme implementation to provide immediate feedback for modifications to improve ongoing implementation. Emphasis is on immediate lesson learning over impact evaluation or accountability.</p> <p><b>Meta-evaluations</b> Are used to assess the evaluation process itself. Some key uses of meta-evaluations include: taking inventory of evaluations to inform the selection of future evaluations; combining evaluation results; checking compliance with evaluation policy and good practices; assessing how well evaluations are disseminated and utilised for organisational learning and change, etc.</p> <p><b>Thematic evaluations</b> Focus on one theme, such as gender or environment, typically across some projects, programmes or the whole organisation</p> <p><b>Cluster/sector evaluations</b> focus on a set of related activities, projects or programmes, typically across sites and implemented by multiple organisations (e.g. National Societies, the United Nations and NGOs).</p> <p><b>Impact evaluations</b> Focus on the effect of a project/programme, rather than on its management and delivery. Therefore, they typically occur after project/programme completion during a final evaluation or an ex-post evaluation. However, the impact may be measured during project/programme implementation during longer projects/programmes, and when feasible.</p>

Source: IFRC Guide 2011

The increasing need for monitoring and evaluation is underpinned by benefits that accrue from adopting the practice of monitoring and evaluation. While appreciating the benefits of the practice of monitoring and evaluation, the greatest misnomer that development practitioners make is taking monitoring and evaluation as a mistake-finding system. Essentially, the whole practice of monitoring and evaluation ought to be used to offer strategic decisions to programme and policy implementation.

It is conspicuous that there are a number of monitoring and evaluation approaches. This article, however, delves into the practices of monitoring and evaluation, without necessarily trying to exhaust seemingly inexhaustible approaches of monitoring and evaluation. What is also clear is that there is unmatched flexibility in respect of monitoring and evaluation frameworks. This flexibility is exhibited by the fact that each organisation has its monitoring and evaluation framework. Examples include the United States Agency for International Development, Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, Canadian International Development Agency and Department for International Development. These international organisations have their monitoring and evaluation frameworks that are usually unique and incongruent with the supported interventions. Practitioners argue that frameworks are just a means to an end and not an end in themselves. Therefore, what is important is not the structure of the framework but results that are produced from using whatever framework. Preoccupation with frameworks is not a focus of this article, as frameworks are simply a means to an end.

## **Linking Monitoring and Evaluation**

Monitoring and evaluation are different as shown above, but complement each other. For example, monitoring provides information on where the project or programme is in relation to project and programme targets. If targets are not met, evaluation provides evidence why targets are not met. Causality is a function of evaluation. When monitoring sends information, perhaps of going off track or models not working as envisaged, evaluation then clarifies the realities bringing to the fore the broader project context. Kusek and Rist (2004) provide the complementarity that exists between monitoring and evaluation.

**Table 3:** The link between monitoring and evaluation

<i>Monitoring</i>	<i>Evaluation</i>
Clarifies programme objectives.	Analyses why intended results were achieved or were not achieved.
Links activities and their resources to objectives.	Assesses the specific causal contribution of activities to results.
Translates objectives into performance indicators and set targets.	Examines the implementation process.
Routinely collects data on those indicators.	Explores unintended results.
Reports progress to the manager and alerts them of problems.	Provides lessons, highlights significant accomplishment or programme potential, and recommends improvement.

Source: Kusek and Rist (2004)

### **Challenges of Establishing M and E Systems in Africa**

Kusek and Rist (2010) warn that developing nations face some challenges in relation to establishing M and E systems. These challenges should not be underestimated. It is imperative to understand that establishing an M and E system is a serious undertaking that usually takes a long period, as opposed to an overnight thing. That all countries, developed and developing, need good information systems is given, thus constructing an M and E system should not be pessimistically viewed as “too complicated, too demanding or too sophisticated” (Kusek and Rist 2010) for African countries to undertake.

Challenges faced by Africa in designing M and E systems are similar to those faced by developed countries, even though they differ in magnitude. Significant challenges faced by African states relating to the design of their M and E systems are demand and ownership of such systems. The lack of an evaluative culture (Schacter 2000) contributes to the lack of demand for M and E capacity-building, particularly in the public sector. Even, in the NGO sector, access to M and E systems and the related activities is a function of donor requirements than the demand for such systems.

In Zimbabwe, public sector M and E systems can best be described as weak, scant and absent. This is because of the lack of highly-placed champions, who actively advocate for the establishment of such systems. Kusek and Rist (2010) elaborate on the presence of highly-placed officials championing for the establishment of M and E systems, in spite of associated political risks in countries such as Egypt (Minister of Finance), Zambia (Secretary to the Cabinet), and the Kyrgyz Republic (Minister of Health). The presence of a national champion can go a long way towards helping a country develop and sustain M and E systems.

Some of the African countries lack strong and effective institutions for governance and administration. Thus, they need an assortment of civil service reform, legal reforms, and regulatory frameworks, as suggested by Kusek and Rist (2010). While international development corporations are assisting the developing countries in this regard, it then becomes a double burden to build strong and effective institutions, and at the same time, establish M and E systems. Given such a conundrum, the suggestion is to establish at least, a traditional implementation-focused M and E system (Kusek and Rist 2010) capable of producing baseline data that particularly show where the developing countries are currently at with regards to a given policy or programme.

Adding to the difficulties that developing countries are facing regarding establishing M and E systems is the lack of capacity among the workforce; capacity to develop, support and sustain M and E systems. This is exacerbated by the emigration of well-qualified people to other regions, particularly in Zimbabwe, where it is estimated that over 2 million human capital emigrated during the period of the “Zimbabwean Crisis” (Murisa 2010). Kusek and Rist (2004) recommend that officials be trained to collect the data, monitor and analyse data.

## **Summarised Historical Roots of the Practice and Discourse of Monitoring and Evaluation**

The genesis of monitoring and evaluation as a field can be traced back to the United States of America. The United States (US) is regarded as the motherland of the field in terms of its trends, number of authors and their academic and professional influence, as well as their degree of professionalisation, focus of academic programmes, legislation and institutionalisation of evaluation, development of models and approaches for evaluation. It further pioneered evaluation capacity-building initiatives, evaluation standards and guiding principles, number and attendees of evaluation conferences and workshops, publications and their impact factor, guides and evaluation handbooks (Basheka and Byamugisha 2015). With over 3000 members, the American Evaluation Association has, for years, remained the dominant evaluation association. The number of members is expected to rise to about 7000 members, reckon Basheka and Byamugisha (2015). The members are drawn from both the United States and foreign countries. Consequently, American authors have spearheaded the development and sharpening of theoretical underpinnings, models and methodological focus (Stockman and Meyer 2013).

The oldest known evaluation association in Africa was established in Ghana in 1997, with the African Evaluation Association, established in 1990. Since then, Africa has experienced phenomenal growth in monitoring; and not only regarding practices, but also professionally and academically. Over the years, there have been the establishments of country-based evaluation associations, for instance, in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Evaluation Association.



## **Methodological Issues**

In order to understand the principles and practice that underlie M and E, particularly as paraphernalia for effective development, the study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is described as an unfolding model that occurs in a natural setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences (Creswell 1994). Thus, qualitative research enables the researcher to interrogate a social phenomenon from the participant point of view (Williams 2007). Qualitative data collection methods of in-depth interviews and documentary analysis were used to collect the data.

Data that informed this study were collected using two approaches. These were in-depth interviews with M and E practitioners in Chegutu District of Zimbabwe and documentary analysis of various documents that guide the implementation of M and E activities of three organisations operating in Chegutu District. Concerning in-depth interviews, the discussions focused on the need to understand principles that underline monitoring and evaluation in Chegutu District. The discussions centred on how M and E is used as a platform for learning and accountability, how and why M and E practitioners go about reporting, M and E as a quality assurance exercise, and the practice of participatory monitoring and evaluation. Whereas the primary focus of the discussions was to elicit narratives on the principles of M and E, the discussions also centred on the importance of M and E in development interventions. A total of eight in-depth interviews were conducted, five with M and E practitioners and three with development practitioners in the Chegutu District. These interviewees were drawn from NGOs involved in various development-related projects. From the in-depth interviews that were conducted, it was clear that such interviews produce a massive amount of narrative data. No wonder Kajornboon (2005) argues that due to the unrestricted nature of in-depth interviews, a massive amount of data can emerge.

Complementing the in-depth interviews was documentary analysis. Ahmed (2010) provides a broad definition of a document as a written text. Various authors (see Bailey 1982; 1994; Polit and Hungler 1991; Treece and Treece 1982; Webb et al., t 1984) posit that in doing documentary analysis, the focus is mainly on institutional memoranda, reports, census publications, government pronouncements, proceedings, diaries and a preponderance of other written, visual and pictorial sources in a variety of forms. Bailey (1994) concludes that documentary research refers to the analysis of documents that contain information about the phenomena that one wishes to study. In this study, the researcher analysed the following documents: programme meetings minutes, activity and narrative reports, strategic plans, statistical reports, journal articles, and books on M and E. The above documents; that is programme meetings minutes, activity and narrative reports, strategic plans, and statistical reports, were analysed in order for the researcher to sharpen his understanding of the principles of M and E that guide the selected NGOs, and how those principles intersect with the notion of active development. In analysing the assortment of the above documents, the researcher

developed a keen interest in coming up with deep and central beliefs that underline the praxis of M and E in Chegutu District of Zimbabwe.

Judgemental sampling was used to select participants for the study. Judgemental sampling, also referred to as purposive sampling, enables the researcher to have control over elements included in the study. In this study, only respondents that were M and E practitioners and development practitioners were included in the study. Thus, the eight in-depth interviewees were included in the study because they were either M and E practitioners or development practitioners. Even the three NGOs from which the eight participants were drawn were purposively selected, as they had functional M and E units.

**Table 4:** Data collection methods

<i>Data collection methods</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>
<b>1. In-depth interviews</b>	
Interviewing M and E practitioners	5
Interviewing development practitioners	3
<b>2. Documentary Analysis</b>	Review of books, journals, activity reports, strategic plans, programme meeting minutes, narrative reports, statistical reports.

## Discussion of the Findings

### Learning and Accountability

Over the years, there has been a growing clarion call for accountability and learning when implementing policies and projects. Development practitioners notably monitoring and evaluation professionals, are superintendents of learning and accountability in development endeavours. While it is given that learning and accountability are themselves broad concepts, monitoring and evaluation professionals are tasked with organisational accountability and learning. It is not an overstatement to reiterate that accountability and learning involve some practices, but primarily, it manifests itself in some ways. Development interventions are premised on a given model. A model, as the name suggests, is theoretical and can only get its relevance in practice. In monitoring and evaluation, there is a need to learn whether a model is working or not. It is incumbent for monitoring and evaluation professionals to critically interrogate models being used to establish whether the model is working or not, and the reason why it is not working. Monitoring and evaluation practitioners should struggle and grapple with the question, *Is the organisation model working, if not why?* There is also a need to go further and offer strategic decisions to the implementers in relation to

the model that is not working. This is the whole essence of learning. The model that is working should be replicated in other areas, but bearing in mind intervening factors.

It is preposterous if the organisation or country implements policies or projects without establishing the workability of the implementation approaches. One of the basic principles of monitoring and evaluation is to interrogate the implementation strategies to establish if these are working or not. All this personifies learning. Learning should not be taken as an end in itself, but rather, as a means to an end. If the strategies are not working, there is a need to answer the question *Why and what should be done to address the irregularity?* The success of development interventions is premised on learning, and subsequent follow-up actions after learning.

The importance of monitoring and evaluation cannot be underrated. Kabonga (2016) is clear that development interventions overseen by NGOs are characterised by multifarious inadequacies and shortcomings that include, but not limited to falsification of reports and glorification of underachievement. Given this untenable situation, monitoring and evaluation become relevant in unearthing these scenarios and rectifying them accordingly. In an era where donor aid is plummeting drastically and stampeding for donor resources, NGOs are capable of using unorthodox means to please their handlers. Monitoring and evaluation then become essential to address tendencies earmarked to please handlers.

While the above narratives espouse how learning can be achieved, as well as the benefits of learning; accountability, as argued above, is a broad concept that involves, not only monitoring and evaluation practitioners but also accountants or similar conjectures. This article confines itself to accountability within the circles of monitoring and evaluation. Accountability in monitoring and evaluation should answer the question, *Are the project resources benefitting the correct beneficiaries?* It, therefore, means that development intervention must benefit beneficiaries who fit the predetermined selection criteria. One way to satisfy this is the carrying out of beneficiary verification.

### Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

One of the growing precincts of monitoring and evaluation is the participation of communities, as well as beneficiaries in the monitoring and evaluation of developmental interventions. Communities must be able to participate in assessing impact, efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, and sustainability of the development intervention. The World Bank (2004) notes that participatory methods provide active involvement in decision making for those with a stake in a project, programme, or strategy, and generate a sense of ownership in the M and E results and recommendations. This brings into focus the need to involve communities' right from the start of the project so that they can be able to monitor and evaluate the development intervention. Beneficiaries themselves, or other community members who are knowledgeable about the project can do participatory monitoring and evaluation. The greatest misdemeanour that development

practitioners make is neglecting the principle of participatory monitoring and evaluation. Participatory monitoring and evaluation is antithetical to a top-down approach. There are a number of ways through which communities and beneficiaries can monitor and evaluate their projects or development interventions. In evaluation, communities can be involved in shaping evaluation questions, identify credible sources of evidence, review findings and assist in their interrogation of the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP 2009). Community dialogue meetings that involve communities and stakeholders allow for the interrogation and critiquing of the project. Community members, beneficiaries, development superintendents, and stakeholders are brought together, where they interrogate the project model or intervention. Implementation strategies are also interrogated, and recommendations put forward. In the dialogue meeting participants come up with ways to better the implementation strategy or the project model. A phalanx of scholars argues that given that communities gather and interrogate the project and come up with action plans, the project is most likely to succeed. This is so in that factors militating against the project but emanating from the community, or the beneficiaries themselves, are dealt with during the meeting, and everyone becomes geared up to support the project. What is blatant is that for any participatory monitoring and evaluation to succeed, the beneficiaries and the communities must be included right from the beginning of the project.

Data collection and low-level analysis of the data for decision-making resonates well with the concept of monitoring and evaluation. Communities must be allowed to collect the data generated by the project, and make low-level, real-time strategic decisions, based on the analysis of the data. This principle is rarely practised in Africa and other regions. However, in carrying out this task, there is a need for a delicate balancing act in that the communities must be made aware of the kind of decisions that they are allowed and not allowed to make. For communities and beneficiaries to be able to make low-level, yet vital decisions of the development intervention capacity building of communities and beneficiaries is required. It is common practice for governments and NGOs to have community cadres (volunteers) concerned with development in communities. The cadres must possess skills in collecting the data, as well as analysing it. Strategic decisions, earmarked for the success of the project, or development interventions must emerge from the data.

### Quality Assurance

One of the most preeminent aspects of monitoring and evaluation is quality assurance. There is an avalanche of ways through which quality in development intervention implementation can be achieved. Quality is a cross-cutting dimension in project implementation, data quality being one of them. Data quality is assessed on completeness, accurateness, timeliness, and consistency. The data that meet the criterion mentioned above are considered to be quality data, while the data that fail to meet the criterion mentioned above are regarded as of compromised quality.

Data quality delves into the reliability and validity of the data. Data reliability is a prominent aspect of social research, and can be defined as the extent to which measurements are repeatable, when different persons perform the measurements, on different occasions, under different conditions, with supposedly alternative instruments that measure the same thing. Data validity, on the other hand, is concerned with the meaningfulness of research components. When researchers measure behaviours, they are concerned with whether they measure what they intended to measure (Drost 2011). To ensure data validity, development practitioners must align data collection tools to the specific development intervention. Data collection tools must measure the phenomena they purport to measure. If it is a questionnaire, the questionnaire must measure the phenomenon under investigation. Failure to do so militates against the quality of the data. Data can only be considered reliable if it is complete, accurate, timely and consistent. Demonstrating results becomes difficult if the data emanating from the field are unreliable and invalid.

On a periodic basis, more so on a quarterly basis, there is a need to conduct data quality assessment. Data quality assessment is premised on determining the validity and reliability of the data. There is an avalanche of ways to assess the quality of the data. Different organisations have different approaches of assessing the quality of the data. This article does not delve into approaches followed to assess the quality of the data. What is important to note is that periodic data quality assessments should be conducted, focusing on essential aspects such as data storage, data flow, data usage, and steps being taken to correct known data errors. Data quality assessments should answer the following questions: *Is the data secure? Is the flow of data smooth? What steps are being taken to correct known data errors?* A new practice is that of data quality assessments being conducted by external people, and not individuals within the organisation. This is usually done to ensure objectivity. After data quality assessment, data quality problems are appropriately described and recommendations made to address the described problems. It is not an overstatement to argue that data quality assessments serve as quality assurance measures.

Another similar conjecture of data quality assessment is data verification. Data verification is different from data quality assessment in the sense that data verification is just a component of data quality assessment. Data verification seeks to check whether reported statistics have source documents to back up the statistics. In practice, one of the elementary principles of monitoring and evaluation is reporting the figures that have source documents. A good example is making sure that participants of training or a meeting sign a standard attendance register. This author refers to this type of reporting as evidence-based reporting. Data verification delves into the completeness, accurateness, and timeliness of the data.

The practice of monitoring and evaluation has been made easy by the use of technology and software, primarily in the realm of ensuring precision and integrity. Software has played a pivotal role in data analysis. Massive data sets can be analysed within seconds,

using software. The most significant advantage of using software is that it ensures integrity and precision. This is preeminent in the sense that the role of monitoring and evaluation is to ensure that data is used for strategic decision making. Popular quantitative software includes SPSS, CsPro, and STATA, while popular qualitative software includes Nivo.

Similarly, a growing trend in monitoring and evaluation has been the use of databases in reporting. A plethora of database platforms are available. Databases within the monitoring and evaluation practices play a quantum of functions. Databases are essential in that they are used for data storage. They resonate well with the concept of paperless offices. Instead of maintaining stockpiles of papers, databases are used to store the information. Of late, electronic copies are recognised as bona fide source documents. Pundits in monitoring and evaluation recognise electronic copies as akin or equal to hard copies. More importantly, databases are used to report results. Accurate results can be reported if databases are used. This is because databases can process large amounts of data and precisely reflect achievements. Organisations that have databases are highly regarded than those without databases.

As alluded above, quality assurance is not inherently limited to data quality, but also involves issues related to adherence to Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and guidelines. SOPs spell out quality guidelines. It is, therefore, incumbent upon monitoring and evaluation professionals to track adherence to operating procedures and or quality guidelines. For instance, a good example will be that of HIV testing and counseling of children in schools, where the standard or guideline would spell out that before conducting HIV testing and counseling, parents must give their consent. Adherence to such a guideline is part of quality assurance. This brings to the fore the need to ensure that any project or development intervention has guiding principles enshrined in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

## Reporting

The power of monitoring and evaluation manifests in the ability to demonstrate results. Reporting is essential in multifarious ways, for it shows that work has been done, and how well the project has utilised funds meant for implementation. Reporting justifies the existence of project staff and generally, the existence of the project. Failure to report has multifarious implications, both to the organisation and to the monitoring and evaluation professional. Firstly, failure to report affects funding. A quantum of organisations have lost funding as a result of failure to report. Reports justify funding. Secondly, failure to report affects relationships at both organisational and personal levels. Animosity is aroused between the funder and the receiver of funds.

Consequently, this results in the total breakdown of relationships. On a personal level, those in the reporting structure have to grapple with animosity and uneasiness due to failure to report. Monitoring and evaluation practitioners must report the achievement

of a development intervention or programme. There are two types of reports that experts agree should be produced by monitoring and evaluation officials. These are statistical and narrative reports. The statistical report should inherently focus on reporting achievements in figures, on specified indicators. Therefore, statistical reports seek to answer the question, *How many have been reached?* In a nutshell, statistical reports are concerned with outputs. They speak to indicators at the output level. Narrative reports then explain the figures. Moreover, narrative reports explain the impact, outcomes, and sustainability of the project.

While the reports mentioned above form significant types of reports that monitoring and evaluation professionals should produce, there are intermediate reports that are generated as the project unfolds. These reports are in the form of activity reports. However, these reports feed into higher-level reports in the form of quarterly narrative reports and annual reports. The purpose of annual reports is to reflect achievements made over the four quarters of the year. No single reporting format, when reporting results, is acceptable; because different organisations use different reporting formats. There is fluidity and flexibility within that area. The frequency of reporting is another contested terrain within the discourse of monitoring and evaluation. Some argue that reporting ought to be done monthly. Interactions that the author had with organisations over the years show that quarterly is generally an acceptable frequency for reporting by most local and international organisations operating in Zimbabwe. Related to the reporting frequency are deadlines for reporting. A non-governmental organisation receiving funds from donors, usually from the international community, have strict reporting deadlines. While this article in no way, serves as a tutorial for writing developmental reports, it is crucial to outline expectations from developmental reports. The general rule is epitomised by the KISS (Keep it Simple and Straight) acronym. One should inherently try to keep it simple and straight. Reports of a narrative nature should also include graphical presentations. It is also innocuous to include pictures and photos. As alluded earlier, reports show work done, photos and pictures therefore, buttress the work done.

A similar concomitant to outcome reporting is the discourse and the practice of documenting success stories. An avalanche of names is used to reference success stories. Human interest stories and most significant change stories all denote success stories. There is fluidity and plasticity in defining success stories. However, one of the captivating definition of success story is that it inherently captures the significant impact that has occurred in the life of an individual as a result of a developmental intervention and a project. It is a fallacy to fail to mention that success stories can also be used to show significant changes that have occurred in the socio-economic environment of the community. As mentioned above, success stories documentations are part of outcome reporting. Generally, there are fundamental aspects that must be captured by the success story. A success story should be laden firstly, with background and baseline information. This is the background and baseline information of the subject of the success story. This background information captures who the subject of the success

story is (individual/group/or community). The name, date of birth and the general social, economic status form part of the baseline information. More importantly, it captures the change process. This is the core of the success story. In this section, one is grappling with questions such as, *What are changes that have occurred in the life of the subject as a result of the implementation of the development intervention?*, and essentially, *How did the project or the development intervention contribute to the changes in the life of the subject of the story?* Similarly, it is plausible to mention that the subjects should unpack the changes they have noticed over the period, and what they attribute these changes to.

According to HOSPAZ (2016) guidelines, after capturing the change process, one needs to elaborate further on the impact of the changes on the life of the beneficiary. This section is critical, and the writer must be detailed enough so that the impact is impeccably captured. This section juxtaposes the lifestyle of the subject of the story to the kind of lifestyle they led before the intervention. This should be backed by evidence that shows indeed that the life of the subject has changed as a result of the development intervention. In this section, one has to delve more into what the subject says regarding life as compared to what it used to be prior to the development intervention. If the subject can attest that there have been changes, he/she must answer the question, *Why does he or she say so?* HOSPAZ (2016) guidelines aver that the impact of the changes on the life of the beneficiary should also answer a pertinent question, *How does the subject of the story feel the changes in their life have impacted on those around them? Why do they say so?*

Given the changes that have occurred in the life of the subject—be it an individual, community, or group the story must also delve into the prospects—for instance, *Given the changes that have occurred in the life of the beneficiary, what are the prospects?* The impact should not be limited to the beneficiary, group or community that has experienced positive changes. The section on prospects should outline what encouragement, based on the experience of the subject, will be offered to those in similar situations. One should not neglect to document what the subject of the story thinks of their future, amidst all the changes that have occurred in their lives. Success stories should be buttressed with good pictures. The pictures should show the individual, group, and communities that have experienced significant changes in their lives. A good caption should inherently accompany the pictures, explaining the four Ws—who is in the photo, where are they, what are they doing and who took the photo?

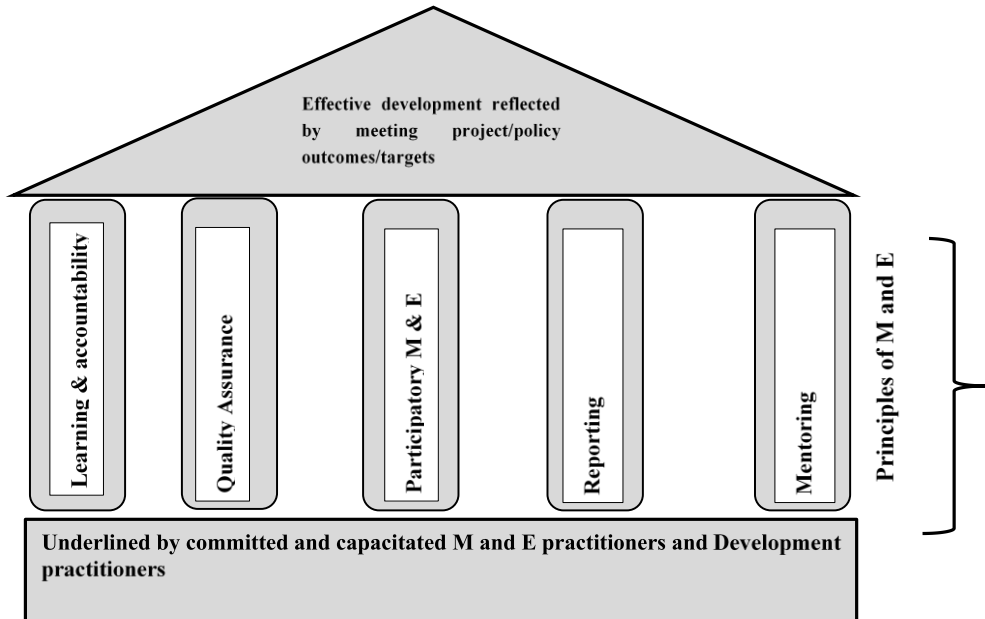
Whose responsibility is it to document success stories is a contested terrain. There is malleability in terms of who documents success stories in an organisation. This is primarily attributed to the fact that different organisations have different organisational structures. This structure usually determines who documents success stories in an organisation. A plethora of organisations has programme officers documenting success stories. This is because they are the ones responsible for implementing projects or developmental interventions.



Consequently, they are able to see when significant changes have occurred in the lives of an individual, group and communities. The monitoring and evaluation professionals must determine the veracity of the purported change that has occurred. Kabonga (2016) argues that one of the misdemeanours of Non-Governmental Organisations is glorifying their handlers with the expectation of continued funding. This is done through some ways, chief among them being inflated success stories. To guard against this, monitoring and evaluation professionals need to verify success stories.

### Monitoring and Mentoring of Project or Programme Staff and Volunteers

It is utopia to expect unique quality and outcomes from the project implementation without the regular monitoring and mentoring of project staff and volunteers. The monitoring and evaluation professionals must offer mentoring to project staff and volunteers working in the project. Mentoring should involve how to use project data collection tools effectively. More importantly, how to ensure data quality through completeness and accuracy of the data. According to Kabonga (2015), without denigrating intentions, a quantum of community volunteers in Zimbabwe is either illiterate or semi-literate. Given quality expectations, the need for constant mentoring cannot be overemphasised. Such typology of mentoring should be periodic. As implementation unfolds and anomalies emerge, this then determines the level, typology, and frequency of mentoring. Project staff should also be mentored on aspects of data quality, report writing and documentation of success stories. This also involves mentoring in respect of adherence to standard operating guidelines. Mentoring of community volunteers is not inherently limited to data quality or expectations, but cuts across all programming spectrums. While monitoring and evaluation professionals do mentoring of the project staff, both programming staff and monitoring and evaluation professionals can do mentoring of volunteers in the community.



**Figure 1:** Building blocks of effective monitoring and evaluation

Source: Fieldwork

Figure 1 shows the building blocks to effective development underlined by principles such as learning and accountability, participatory monitoring and evaluation, quality assurance, reporting and mentoring of data collectors. Guided by qualified practitioners, these principles, if applied, may lead to the achievement of policy and project targets.

## Conclusion

It is clear that monitoring and evaluation is paraphernalia for effective development, as evidenced by the growing utilisation of the practice. It is incumbent upon monitoring and evaluation professionals to ensure that they guide quality assurance processes, through a multifarious of monitoring activities. One of the principles of monitoring and evaluation is learning and accountability. Regular reporting of outcomes and outputs serves as a tool to reflect progress, as well as showing what is working and what is not working.

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