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INFLUENCE OF MONITORING PRACTICES ON THE PERFORMANCE OF VEGETABLE OIL PROJECTS IN THE BUVUMA DISTRICT, UGANDA

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Abstract

Project Monitoring & Evaluation, a control component of project management, is used for many different things, including improving managerial processes by providing evidence for decision-making, accountability, organisational performance and learning, where results and findings aid in the creation of learning organisations. It's still difficult to turn research findings into organisational learning. The degree to which monitoring practices affect organisational performance is likewise a subject of scarce research. Therefore, the study was to investigate how monitoring and evaluation affected the execution of Buvuma oil development projects. To investigate the influence of monitoring planning on the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma district Uganda, the researcher also used both quantitative and qualitative techniques in data collection and data analysis to provide thorough and broader findings. The study used a simple random study since it focused on selected vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma district of Uganda. The target population of this study was 149 project managers, finance officers, project team leaders, Buvuma oil projects community members and end-user key stakeholders, staff and administrators who are the area leaders affected by the Vegetable Oil Development Project. In conclusion, the survey results indicate that there are areas for improvement in monitoring planning practices within the organization. These include enhancing the applicability of monitoring plans, providing better training on monitoring planning practices to employees, promoting the use of network diagrams and frameworks in project scheduling, aligning staff roles with their experience and qualifications, adopting project management software for monitoring plans, and continuing the practice of rapid evaluation. Addressing these areas can contribute to more effective monitoring planning and ultimately improve project outcomes and organizational performance. The study Recommendations that Buvuma district Uganda oil projects must clearly define what percentage of the project cost would go to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Capacity building costs should be delineated from monitoring and evaluation for the sake of accountability and transparency.

Keywords: *Monitoring Practices, Performance, Projects*

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring is the process of routinely gathering and analyzing data on certain indicators in order to support prompt decision-making, assure accountability, and serve as the foundation for learning. It is an ongoing role that offers management and other stakeholders' useful feedback on what is working, what isn't, and why, as well as early signals of progress and goal attainment. A flexible and responsive community-driven development (CDD) programme must include ongoing monitoring. It should be used as a management tool and as a way to advance the CDD goals of accountability, transparency, and inclusion (The Water Aid, 2007)

Nowadays, many organisations regard monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as a donor obligation rather than a management tool for analysing progress and spotting and fixing issues with project design or execution (Abdul-Rahman, 2011). Although project funders have a right to know if their money is being used wisely, the main goal of M&E should be to help the organisation or project understand how it is doing and how to improve. Good project monitoring and assessment strengthen the foundation for judgements about project management that are supported by facts. M&E is a management function that consists of three main activities: baseline surveys, M&E planning, and M&E training (Bower, 2017)

Project M & E, a control component of project management, is used for many different things, including improving managerial processes by providing evidence for decision-making, accountability, and organisational performance & learning, where results and findings aid in the creation of learning organisations. But for many firms, it's still difficult to turn research findings into organisational learning (Kissi., 2019). The degree to which monitoring and evaluation affect organisational performance is likewise a subject of scarce research (Kissi., 2019). Recently, project management has come into emphasis. The majority of managers are using project management as a tool to accomplish corporate goals. The success of a project is typically used to measure project management success. Several contributing elements result in project success. Monitoring and evaluation play a key role in the success of a project. Researchers from many fields appear to agree that monitoring and evaluation are important for project success. Despite this, there are indications that several projects have also fallen short despite having an internal M&E role (Mwangi, 2019).

According to Abalala (2021), a sustainable investment project acts as a discrete investment activity, with a specific starting point and a specific ending point, intended to accomplish specific economic, social and environmental objectives simultaneously. It comprises a well-defined sequence of investments, which are expected to result in a stream of specific benefits over time (Abalala, 2021). The success of any project is critical in achieving the development agenda in local communities across the globe. Monitoring and evaluation of projects are fundamental if the project objectives and success are to be achieved since it improves the overall efficiency of project planning, management and implementation. Several projects could be initiated to transform the social, political and economic well-being of citizens in a particular country (Bryde, 2018). According to UNDP (2012) reports that there has been a growing demand for development effectiveness to improve people's lives. This calls for the effective utilization of monitoring and evaluation results for continuous improvement and quality of performance in the organization.

To improve project management in future, the current projects or proposed projects, the stakeholders need to evaluate and monitor these projects, monitoring and evaluation budget should be set aside for project activities and it should be done promptly (Kihuha, 2018). These provide information on project implementation and the difficulty that face this project thus providing records that can be used to try and reduce these problems and also make sure the goals of Buvuma district Uganda vegetable oil projects are always achieved in all the projects, feedback help in

controlling the workmanship thus enhancing the quality of a project. There is no proper system put in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the use of oil project funds. Kihuha (2018) argued that a program's effectiveness can be measured accurately only if one knows what would have happened without it (Kihuha, 2018).

The Ministry of Planning and National Development (2015) commissioned work on the design of an appropriate framework for Monitoring and Evaluation (M and E) in the National Development Program. This was a collective effort by the government, Civil Societies, Private Sector and the Republic of Kenya implementation of M and E. This proposed M & E framework has not been fully operational (Mwangi, 2019). Otherwise, there is a strong case that CDF should come up with participatory M and E components in its management. Wanjala (2017) supported this view by indicating in her Social Audit of oil projects that monitoring and reporting should be strengthened and deepened in all oil projects. The Act thus makes M & E to be somehow difficult and sometimes cosmetic as it is the CDFC to decide which project to be monitored, which one to be evaluated, how much funds to remove and who to do the exercise. The Act gives room for vegetable oil projects to determine for themselves instead of getting a different body to manage M & E within the oil projects. It also allows the unfaithful oil projects not to institute monitoring and evaluation of some projects they either have an interest in or have an interest in hiding something (Wanjala, 2017).

Conventionally, evaluating party is usually part of evaluation missions contracted and dispatched from the donor world Feuerstein (1986) came up with nine types of indicators cited as follows: indicators of availability, an indicator of relevance, indicators of accessibility, indicators of utilization, indicators of coverage, an indicator of quality, an indicator of effort, an indicator of efficiency and indicator of impact. These indicators can be very instrumental in managing the monitoring and evaluation of oil projects, indicators of quality, utilization, availability and even effort are very important in assessing project development (Sándor, 2018).

(Wanjala, 2017) asserts that locally managed and controlled funds have great potential to bring about positive development outcomes at the local level especially if community participation is sufficiently enhanced and political interference reduced. The emphasis on vegetable oil projects' effectiveness and results-based development obliges practitioners to empirically demonstrate the impacts of their projects and programs. This has shifted the focus of M and E from a concentration on inputs and outputs to a concentration on outcomes and impacts (Wanjira, 2018). The conditions in which M and E are carried out vary widely, depending on the demand for information, the extent to which it is used to inform decision-making, and the reliability of the systems that are in place to capture and convey that information. Throughout much of the developing world, these conditions are "less than-ideal." Information is irregular and often lacking altogether. In these conditions, there is a lack of effective demand for information on the part of policymakers. The conditions are often especially pronounced in rural areas, where the costs of data collection are very high, and the quality of existing data is particularly low (Zuñiga-Collazos, 2020)

Statement of the problem

The Buvuma District, located in Central region, Uganda has been witnessing a significant increase in vegetable oil projects aimed at promoting agricultural development and improving local livelihoods. These projects involve the cultivation of oil-producing crops such as palm oil, soybean, sunflower, and canola, as well as the establishment of processing facilities to extract and refine vegetable oils. While these vegetable oil projects hold great promise for economic growth and poverty alleviation, their performance and overall success are contingent upon effective monitoring practices. Monitoring plays a crucial role in assessing project progress, identifying

bottlenecks, and implementing timely interventions to ensure desired outcomes are achieved. However, the extent to which monitoring practices influence the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District remains largely understudied. The problem at hand is the lack of comprehensive research and understanding regarding the influence of monitoring practices on the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District. Without a clear understanding of the relationship between monitoring practices and project outcomes, it becomes challenging to identify and address key factors that may hinder or facilitate project success.

Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how monitoring practices are currently implemented and how they affect the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District. By examining the monitoring processes, tools, and methodologies employed, as well as the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved, the research aims to identify the specific areas where monitoring practices can be improved to enhance project performance. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing insights into the influence of monitoring practices on vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District. Furthermore, the results will inform project implementers, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders about the importance of effective monitoring and highlight potential strategies for optimizing monitoring practices to achieve better project outcomes. This research addressed the gap in knowledge regarding the influence of monitoring practices on the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District, with the ultimate goal of supporting sustainable agricultural development and socioeconomic growth in the region.

Objectives

To investigate the influence of monitoring planning on performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma district Uganda.

Scope of the Study

The study was to investigate the influence of monitoring practices on the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma district Uganda, with monitoring practices being the independent variable in this research and performance as the dependent variable. The study was carried out in Buvuma district Uganda looking at the operations of the vegetable oil project in the region. Buvuma District Uganda is wide with more than fifty islands and is located a few kilometres off the northern shores of Lake Victoria, Uganda. Buvuma is approximately 25 kilometres by water, south of the major city of Jinja, and around 90 kilometres southeast of Kampala. It was recently turned into a district by the government of Uganda, (BIDCO Plans 10,000 Hectare Palm Oil Projects in Buvuma District Uganda). The study covered the selected projects in Buvuma district Uganda looking at the operations of the vegetable oil project in the region with project management functions for the past 18 years from the year 2000 to the year 2018; and was conducted during 2018/2019, 2019/2023 academic years using a descriptive research design.

Justification of the Study

The research study aimed at strengthening monitoring practices in different projects and policy frameworks to ensure project success. This study was of interest to project managers, public sectors, private sectors, academicians and researchers, policy makers and both project internal and external stakeholders on the project. The outcome of this study contributes immensely and positively to rural development and in general, the economic development of the country especially project managers in addressing the issues that negatively influence the effective

implementation of projects. It provides performance feedback mechanisms for all projects undertaken in the Buvuma district Uganda. If this is done, then the high number of stalled projects, experiences of cost overruns and extended construction periods beyond the original completion dates cease in this very important Constituency thereby saving the county from unnecessary loss and wastage of much-needed resources which are in scarce supply. It also serves as a benchmark for identifying loopholes and corrective measures at the policy level as monitoring practices on performance serve as key management tools in the use and management of the devolved development funds in Uganda.

Literature Review

Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation (RBM) and Implementation-Based Monitoring (IBM) are the two forms of M&E. RBM is intended to offer feedback on the actual results and project goals, claim Kusek and Rist in 2004. RBM aids in determining if outcomes are being met or will be met as the project moves forward in this fashion. Naidoo (2011) On the other hand, implementation-based monitoring and evaluation (IBM) focuses on inputs, project activities, and outputs and encourages collaboration among stakeholders at all levels and ignites commitment to taking remedial steps when necessary (Kusek & Rist; 2004, Neubert; 2010). This further emphasises the impact M&E has on project performance. Consequently, it can be said that, as far as area of concentration is concerned, the present practise in project monitoring and evaluation focuses around RBM and IMB.

In order to fully benefit from what the company is doing, what they do, and how they do it, M&E helps to organisational learning and knowledge sharing by enabling organisations to reflect on and share experience and lessons from their implementation (Guist, Randwijk & Woodhill 2012). By providing pertinent information and learning, M&E enhances and supports the performance of the project and the organisation for Carol and Shoal 2013. It enables development players to benefit from one another's experience, developing expertise and knowledge, reviewing mistakes, and providing organisations with ways to learn from them and advance while applying the lessons to their practises and policies. There would also be many combinations of the aforementioned, which in turn would vary depending on the situation and topic. M&E might occasionally be a hazy idea as a result of this. The variety may be observed in the approaches taken, the topics examined, and the forms of M&E. (Jones, 2011).

Resources are needed for projects in order to complete the many tasks necessary to accomplish a set of objectives and goals. As a result, close supervision is required to ensure that tasks are completed correctly in order to prevent rework, increased project costs, and project duration (Ocharo, 2020). As a result, projects must be monitored and evaluated in order to produce the desired results, which is a management function intended to make effective and efficient use of resources. Through the targeted performance indicators, the M&E system provides an efficient method for evaluating the accomplishment of sponsored project objectives. Systems of monitoring and evaluation frequently include ongoing effort. Participatory monitoring, staff M&E training, sectoral coordination, scope management, and project partnerships that adhere to output, outcome, and goals may all be components of the system (Ocharo, 2020).

M&E helps organisations reflect on and share experiences and lessons learned from their implementation so that they may fully benefit from what they are doing, what they are doing, and how they are doing it. Through the use of pertinent information and learning, M&E enhances and supports the performance of projects and organisations (Nishimwe, 2022). It enables development players to benefit from one another's experience, developing expertise and knowledge, reviewing

mistakes, and providing organisations with ways to learn from them and advance while applying the lessons to their practices and policies (Muhayimana, 2020). There would also be many combinations of the aforementioned, which in turn would vary depending on the situation and topic. M&E might occasionally be a hazy idea as a result of this (Wanjira, 2018). The RBM theory states that several factors, including the monitoring abilities of the staff, technical activities, information systems (use of technology), reports, and gender issues, as well as management support, which serves as a mediating factor in the study, all have an impact on project performance.

Theoretical Literature Review

Theory of Results-Based Management (RBM)

As implied by the name, this theory is result-oriented. It is one of the management strategies. All of the local players working to accomplish the targeted development objectives make sure that their processes, products, and services all help to produce sustainable results, whether directly or indirectly (UNDG, 2011). This idea aids in the creation of project performance-influencing monitoring tools. RBM is intended to offer feedback on the actual results and project goals. RBM aids in determining if outcomes are being met or were met as the project moves forward in this fashion. The importance of M&E for project success is again shown by this argument. In light of this, it can be said that RBM serves as the focal point for the present project monitoring and evaluation practices.

Open system theory

The open system theory was developed by Von Bertalanffy (1956). The open system theory philosophies are built upon open system theory. An open system was understood to be a collection of items arranged so that they cooperate to carry out a function in a unified form. Katz et all (1966) were the first to use the term "open system" to describe how groups of things are arranged so that they cooperate to carry out a single purpose. (Katz, 1966) was the first to use the idea of an open system to examine organizations' projects. Organizational projects were seen as open systems because of the material interchange with the environment, including people, technology, and even machines. A system includes the fundamental three elements of people, processes, and products, each of which has input, process, and output characteristics (Tien, 2003). All of these parts are constantly interacting with the outside world. This theory can help to comprehend the interdependence of the components that comprise an M&E system and to define how they interact with some other subsystems within the organization.

Open system theory can provide a valuable link in studying the influence of monitoring practices on the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District in Uganda. Open system theory views organizations or projects as complex systems that interact with their external environment, exchanging inputs and outputs.

In the context of vegetable oil projects, monitoring practices can be seen as a means to create feedback loops between the project and its environment. Here's how open system theory can be applied to understand the relationship between monitoring practices and project performance:

Input-Process-Output Framework: Open system theory emphasizes the flow of inputs, processes, and outputs within a system. Monitoring practices in vegetable oil projects involve gathering data on various inputs (e.g., resources, labor, technology), tracking the processes (e.g., crop cultivation, oil extraction), and evaluating the outputs (e.g., crop yields, oil production). By monitoring these elements, project managers can identify potential issues or bottlenecks in the system that may impact project performance.

Environmental Interaction: Open system theory recognizes that organizations/projects are influenced by their external environment. Monitoring practices can help capture data and

information about the external factors that may affect the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District. For example, monitoring can assess market trends, changes in government policies, or climate conditions, allowing project managers to adapt their strategies accordingly.
Feedback and Adaptation: Open system theory emphasizes the importance of feedback loops and adaptation. Monitoring practices enable the collection of data on project performance indicators, which can be used as feedback to assess progress and make necessary adjustments. By continuously monitoring and analyzing project data, managers can identify areas of improvement, implement corrective measures, and enhance the performance of vegetable oil projects.
System Boundaries: Open system theory recognizes that organizations/projects have boundaries that define their interactions with the external environment. Monitoring practices help define and maintain these boundaries by providing insights into the project's performance within its defined scope. For vegetable oil projects, monitoring can determine whether the project is achieving its objectives and meeting the needs of stakeholders within the Buvuma District.
By applying open system theory, researchers can conceptualize vegetable oil projects as dynamic systems that interact with their environment and employ monitoring practices to facilitate feedback and adaptation. This perspective allows for a holistic understanding of how monitoring practices influence the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District, considering both internal project dynamics and external environmental factors.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research study used descriptive research designs and focuses on the frequency with which something occurs or the relationship between variables (Churchill & Iacobucci, 2005). Research design is the scheme, outline or plan that is used to generate answers to research problems. This research used a descriptive research design. According to Kothari (2007), the descriptive survey research design is a type of research used to obtain data that can help determine specific characteristics of a group.

Sample Size

A sample refers to a subset of a bigger group or segment of the population that is used for research. (Bryman & Bell, 2011) defines a sample size, "as one largely determined by the level of precision and confidence desired in estimating the population parameters as well as the variability of the population itself". The sample of 109 was calculated by using Taro Yamane (Yamane, 1973) formula with a 95% confidence level.

FINDINGS

A total of 109 questionnaires and interview guides were issued to the respondents and 105 were returned. Amin (2005) contends that a response rate of 50% is representative enough and acceptable for a correlation survey. Project managers yielded 7%, project finance officers were 9%, community leaders were 19%, project team leaders were 30% and the community members who took part in the survey were 35%. Generally, the representation sample exhibited a good turn for this study. Based on the assertion, the response rate was excellent. This response rate demonstrated the readiness of the respondents to participate in the study.

Monitoring planning practices

From table 2, the results of the survey indicate varying perceptions among the respondents regarding the monitoring practices in vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District in Uganda. Monitoring plans are well applicable in organization activities: Only 10.5% of the respondents

agreed that monitoring plans are well applicable. A majority of 58.05% disagreed with this statement, suggesting a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of monitoring plans.31.4% of the respondents were uncertain, indicating a need for clarification or better understanding of the monitoring plans.

Employees are well trained on effective monitoring planning practices in organization projects: Only 22.8% of the respondents agreed that employees are well trained in monitoring planning practices. A significant majority of 62.83% disagreed with this statement, indicating a perceived lack of adequate training. 14.3% of the respondents were unsure, highlighting the need for further clarification on the training provided.

Table 1: Monitoring planning practices

Monitoring planning practices	1(%)	2(%)	3(%)	4(%)	5(%)
Monitoring plans are well applicable in organization activities	8.6	1.9	31.4	39.05	19
Employees are well trained on effective monitoring planning practices in organization projects	9.5	13.3	14.3	33.33	29.5
Network diagrams and frameworks are used in scheduling organization projects	2.9	11.4	27.6	18.1	40
The organization conducts stakeholder analysis surveys on its resources before it plans.	9.5	70.5	0.95	8.571	10.5
The staff's roles match their experience and qualifications in the organization.	8.6	18.1	6.67	2.857	63.8
The organization uses project management software for monitoring plans.	19	27.6	8.57	6.667	38.1
Rapid evaluation is conducted in monitoring plans used in projects	43	38.1	0.95	0.952	17.1

Source: Primary data (2023)

Network diagrams and frameworks are used in scheduling organization projects: 39% of the respondents agreed that network diagrams and frameworks are used for project scheduling.

However, a majority of 58.1% disagreed, suggesting that these tools may not be commonly utilized. 27.6% of the respondents were unsure, indicating a need for clarification on the use of network diagrams and frameworks. The organization conducts stakeholder analysis surveys on its resources before planning: A significant 80% of the respondents agreed that stakeholder analysis surveys are conducted. Only 19.1% disagreed with this statement, indicating a generally positive perception of stakeholder analysis practices. Only a small percentage of 0.95% were unsure, suggesting a relatively clear understanding of this practice. The staff's roles match their experience and qualifications in the organization: Only 26.7% of the respondents agreed that staff roles match their experience and qualifications. A majority of 66.7% disagreed, indicating a perceived mismatch between roles and qualifications. 6.67% of the respondents were unsure, suggesting a need for clarification or evaluation of staff roles.

The organization uses project management software for monitoring plans: 46.6% of the respondents agreed that project management software is used for monitoring plans, 44.77% disagreed with this statement, indicating a lack of adoption or utilization of such software, 8.57%

of the respondents were unsure, suggesting a need for better communication or awareness of the software usage. Rapid evaluation is conducted in monitoring plans used in projects: A significant majority of 81% agreed that rapid evaluation is conducted in monitoring plans. Only 18.1% disagreed with this statement, indicating a generally positive perception of rapid evaluation practices. A small percentage of 0.95% were unsure, suggesting a relatively clear understanding of this practice.

Generally, the findings highlight areas of concern and potential areas for improvement in monitoring practices for vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District in Uganda. The results indicate the need for better applicability of monitoring plans, enhanced training for employees, improved utilization of network diagrams and frameworks, and alignment of staff roles with qualifications. Additionally, it is important to ensure the effective use of project management software, conduct stakeholder analysis surveys, and continue the practice of rapid evaluation in monitoring plans. These findings can serve as a basis for further investigation and improvement of monitoring practices to enhance the performance of vegetable oil projects in the Buvuma District.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey results indicate that there are areas for improvement in monitoring planning practices within the organization. These include enhancing the applicability of monitoring plans, providing better training on monitoring planning practices to employees, promoting the use of network diagrams and frameworks in project scheduling, aligning staff roles with their experience and qualifications, adopting project management software for monitoring plans, and continuing the practice of rapid evaluation. Addressing these areas can contribute to more effective monitoring planning and ultimately improve project outcomes and organizational performance.

Recommendations

Buvuma district Uganda oil projects must clearly define what percentage of the project cost would go to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Capacity building costs should be delineated from monitoring and evaluation for the sake of accountability and transparency.

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