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Assessing Effectiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in Promoting Transparency and Accountability of Constituency Development Fund Infrastructure Projects in Malawi. A Case Study of Mwanza District.

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ABSTRACT

This research assessed the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation practice in promoting transparency and accountability of Constituency Development Fund infrastructure projects in Malawi, a case study of Mwanza District. The research was motivated by persistent misuse of CDF, low citizen engagement, poor oversight in CDF infrastructure projects despite the fund's potential to enhance local development outcomes. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to district council officials, Area Development Committee members (ADC), Project Implementation Committee (PIC) members and ward councilors. Qualitative insights were drawn from interviews with the chiefs and documentary reviews. A sample of 56 respondents were selected from a population of 67, using Yamane's formula, with purposive and simple random sampling also applied. Quantitative data were described and inferred quantitatively using SPSS. Qualitative data were analyzed using a thematic analysis to identify themes from interviews, literature and document reviews. The themes were then coded and analyzed in SPSS.

The findings reveal that, although monitoring and evaluation practices are in place in CDF infrastructure projects in Mwanza district, their effectiveness is limited by undue political influence, lack of capacity building on M&E to community oversight bodies, weak community feedback systems, unclear and undefined M&E roles, inadequate community involvement in project oversight and irregular dissemination of information. The study recommends that strengthening community participation in M&E planning, improving quality and accessibility of monitoring and evaluation reports, enhancing capacity building local community oversight structures such as ADC and PICs, revision of CDF guidelines to avoid undue political influence in management of CDF and institutionalizing robust grievance redress mechanisms.

Keywords: Monitoring, evaluation, transparency, accountability, constituency development fund.

1. Introduction

In the context of Constituency Development Fund-funded infrastructure projects, effective M&E systems are indispensable for ensuring that resources are used efficiently and that projects deliver meaningful benefits to the communities. A robust M&E framework supports evidence based decision making, foster stakeholder engagement, promote learning and compliance. However, challenges such as capacity limitation, political meddling and end constraints undermine the effectiveness of M&E systems in development interventions such as CDF-funded projects in Malawi. Strengthening these systems through capacity building and inclusive participation is key in improving governance and guaranteeing lasting impacts particularly in local level infrastructure projects implemented under CDF.

1.1 Background of the topic

The Constituency Development Fund was introduced in Malawi to decentralize development and empower the local communities to implement small scale development projects. The fund aimed at ensuring equitable distribution of development project regardless of the geography and political differences. Despite its potential to foster development at grassroots level, the fund has fund criticism over mismanagement, lack of transparency, and poor accountability. Monitoring and evaluation are special tools for tracking project performance, ensuring responsible use of resources, and foster public trust. Mwanza district like many other districts, struggle with implementation of M&E systems which affects integrity and impact of CDF-funded projects

1.2 Importance and purpose of the article

This article addresses critical gap in governance of public resources by assessing the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation practices in Constituency Development Fund infrastructure projects in Malawi, with focus on Mwanza District. As CDF continues to serve as a key mechanisms for decentralized development, concerns over mismanagement, limited transparency and weak accountability persist. The importance of this article lies in its contribution to understanding how M&E systems can be leveraged to enhance oversight, promote citizen engagement, and ensure that infrastructure development funded through CDF deliver tangible benefits to the local communities.

The purpose of the article is to provide evidence on the strengths and limitations of the current M&E practices in CDF implementation. It aims to inform policy makers, development practitioners and local governance structures on how to strength M&E frameworks to improve transparency and accountability in CDF management in Malawi. By bringing on light the challenges and offering actionable recommendations, the article will contribute to the broader discourse on good governance, participatory development, and sustainable infrastructure mainly those funded through CDF.

1.3 Objectives of Research.

The study was guided by four specific objective:

1. Examine how needs assessment and project selection is conducted and its role in promoting transparency and accountability in CDF-funded infrastructure projects in Mwanza District.
2. Analyse the M&E planning process and its role in enhancing transparency and accountability in CDF- funded infrastructure projects in Mwanza District.
3. Assess effectiveness of M&E reports and grievance redress mechanisms in promoting transparency and accountability in CDF-funded infrastructure projects in Mwanza District.
4. To identify the key challenges affecting the effective implementation of M&E practices in CDF infrastructure projects in Mwanza District.

1.4 Scope of the discussion

The research focused on infrastructure projects funded by CDF in Mwanza District. It examined the role of various stakeholders including local government officials, project implementers and community members. The study explore both formal and M&E mechanisms and informal practices that influence project outcomes.

2. Literature Review

The literature highlights M&E as a cornerstone of good governance especially in decentralized development context. Researchers note that good M&E improves transparency by enabling access to information and accountability by monitoring performance and outcomes. In most African nations, including Malawi, the M&E systems are poorly utilized because of political interference, a lack of capacity, and weak institutional systems. The review also identify the role of participatory monitoring and evaluation where communities monitor project progress. The study was based on three theoretical approached: the Logical Framework, Stakeholder Theory and Social Accountability Theory, all of which emphasizes on stakeholder involvement in ensuring that local development project are implemented in a transparent and an accountable manner.

3. Main Content / Discussion

The study found that while M&E frameworks are established in infrastructure projects funded by CDF in Mwanza District, their application is very limited and does not effectively promote transparency and accountability.

- 1.1 **Transparency:** Project information is not consistently shared with community and other oversight bodies leading to suspensions and disengagement. . 80% of respondents reported that local development committees such as ADV, VDC and PIC are not informed about indicators to be tracked and how reports will be reported.
- 1.2 **Accountability:** Mechanisms for holding duty bearers accountable are weak, which result into persistent mismanagement of resources and projects failing to meet the intended outcomes. 73% of respondents disagree and strongly disagree there are mechanisms to share M&E plans, budgets, and reports with community members. This lack of communication leaves communities in dark about resource allocation and progress, which further weaken accountability.
- 1.3 **Community involvement:** Participation in M&E is minimal, with most community members are unaware of their oversight roles. For instance, 79% of respondents indicated that community members and other stakeholders are not meaningfully represented in M&E activities. 87% of respondents in this study indicated that M&E roles were not clearly allocated among the stakeholders.

- 1.4 **Political influence:** There is undue political influence whereby politician dominates the project planning and monitoring, sidelining the experts and community voices.
- 1.5 **Capacity gaps:** Local committees lack skills and resources to conduct effective M&E. 81% of respondents indicated that local governance committees had not been trained in M&E roles.

4. Findings / Observations

- 72% of respondents acknowledge existence of M&E structures, but only 38% believed they were effective.
- 80% respondents reported that limited access to project documents including monitoring reports.
- 79% of respondents indicating that community members and other stakeholders are not meaningfully represented in M&E activities.
- 87% of respondents in this study indicated that M&E roles were not clearly allocated among the stakeholders.
- 75% of the respondents felt that indicators not empower local governance structures track resource utilization effectively.
- Political interference and lack of technical capacity were cited as major barriers to effect M&E in projects funded by CDF in Mwanza District.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

the study revealed that while CDF has a potential to promote local development, the effectiveness of M&E practices to promote transparency and accountability in CDF infrastructure projects is limited by political influence, lack of capacity among local committee, lack of clarity on roles, lack of CDF committees and lack of transparency in M&E budgets, Unless these challenge are resolved, M&E will remain symbolic rather than functional. Thereby undermining both transparency and accountability in management of CDF. The study made the following recommend:

- There should be clarity and institutionalised M&E roles.
- Capacity building for local governance committees on basic M&E skills
- Enhance transparency in M&E budgeting
- Mwanza District should establish a constituency M&E committee to oversee implementation of CDF projects
- Revision of current CDF guidelines

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