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Conference Proceedings — Abstract Collection

The 4th Tanzania Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Conference

10th – 13th September, 2025 – Malaika Resort Hotel, Mwanza

“Evaluation for Sustainable Futures: Local Philosophies and Global Lessons”

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Shifting Power in Evaluation: From Technology to Youth-Led Agendas

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Introduction

Evaluation practice is undergoing a deliberate rebalancing of power, moving away from models in which external actors act as the primary decision-makers and toward participatory, context-driven approaches that centre communities, youth, and African voices. This keynote examines two forces driving that shift: responsible use of technology and the leadership of Young and Emerging Evaluators (YEEs).

Discussion Focus

Artificial Intelligence offers powerful tools for data collection, analysis, and visualisation, and can democratise participation by enabling community members to share their views through mobile and digital platforms. However, AI adoption also carries risks of exclusion and bias where digital literacy, data privacy, and data sovereignty are not deliberately addressed. In parallel, Africa's YEEs are shaping a "Made in Africa Evaluation Agenda" that reframes evaluation through African priorities, values, and philosophies.

Key Messages

Technology should serve as an enabler of inclusion rather than a gatekeeper of who gets to participate in evaluation. Investing in YEEs ensures that evaluation is locally grounded and future-oriented, not only externally defined. Combining technological innovation with youth leadership is a powerful lever for sustainable, community-owned MEL.

Implications for MEL Practice

The keynote frames the conference's opening panels on AI for community-led MEL and on empowering YEEs as champions of a context-driven future, underscoring that evaluation must not only measure change but also redistribute power to those closest to the issues and those leading tomorrow.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Young and Emerging Evaluators; Made in Africa Evaluation; Power in evaluation; Youth leadership

Abstract

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PLENARY ABSTRACT

Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Community-Led Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning: Opportunities, Challenges, and Pathways for Sustainable Impact

Eugene M. Swinnerstone¹ (Moderator), Ayabulela Dlakavu², Lubulwa Matthew³, Pantaleon Shoki⁴, Innocent Chamisa⁵, Chipeta Kettie Lomaquala⁶ & Kezia Yuri Oforiwa Poku⁷

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Introduction

Tanzania's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) landscape is being reshaped by rapid advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI). As the country institutionalizes MEL as a foundation for evidence-based decision-making, AI presents a timely opportunity to improve the effectiveness, precision, and inclusivity of data collection, analysis, and reporting, particularly for community-led initiatives.

Objective

This plenary session examines the transformative potential and the challenges of integrating AI technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing, and predictive analytics, into conventional MEL frameworks, with emphasis on how AI can support rather than displace community ownership of the MEL process.

Discussion Focus

AI-enabled platforms can automate data collection, accelerate analysis, and surface real-time insights, allowing community members to share their views through mobile and online channels and helping decision-makers detect patterns in large datasets. These gains, however, come with risks: digital-divide and literacy gaps, data privacy concerns, and questions of data sovereignty that must be addressed to sustain community trust and participation.

Key Messages

Realising AI's benefits for MEL requires continued investment in digital infrastructure, deliberate inclusion of marginalised groups, and capacity building for AI-driven tools. Strong collaboration between government, academia, the private sector, and civil society is essential to embed ethical safeguards while building the technical capacity needed to deploy and sustain AI-driven MEL systems.

Lessons/Conclusion

Integrating AI into MEL systems offers a powerful means of strengthening impact, accountability, and transparency at the local level, provided the process is accompanied by inclusive access, ethical governance, and sustained capacity building. The session's insights advance Tanzania's vision for a data-driven, participatory, and sustainable MEL future.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Community-led MEL; Digital transformation; Data sovereignty; Tanzania

Abstract

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PANEL ABSTRACT

The Made in Africa Evaluation Agenda: Empowering Young and Emerging Evaluators as Champions for a Context-Driven Future

Godfrey Kacholi¹ (Moderator), Gladness Kampa², Ayabulela Dlakavu³, Solomon Michael Waiyego⁴, Eugene Miheso Swinnerstone⁵ & Isaack Michael Nguliki⁶

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Introduction

The Made in Africa Evaluation (MAE) approach, championed by the African Evaluation Association, emphasises evaluation practice rooted in African philosophies, values, and contexts. As the continent confronts youth unemployment, poverty, and the need for localised solutions, MAE offers a framework for culturally responsive and transformative evaluation, with Young and Emerging Evaluators (YEEs) positioned as its future champions.

Objective

This interactive panel explores how YEEs can become active champions of MAE by unpacking the approach's relevance to Africa's development priorities and identifying practical steps to expand YEE access to networks, resources, and mentorship.

Discussion Focus

Discussion centres on five areas: integrating African ways of knowing into modern evaluation practice; adapting global evaluation tools to local contexts; using participatory methods to amplify marginalised voices; leveraging technology and creativity for homegrown evaluation solutions; and building mentorship, training, and networks that give YEEs ownership of the MAE agenda.

Key Messages

YEEs remain under-represented in shaping evaluation agendas despite being central to their sustainability. Deliberate investment in cultural relevance, contextual adaptability, inclusivity, and Africa-led innovation is required to move MAE from principle to everyday practice.

Lessons/Conclusion

Empowering YEEs within the MAE framework strengthens networks between emerging and established evaluators and produces concrete commitments for advancing youth participation in African-led evaluation, ensuring MAE evolves as a living, community-owned agenda rather than a static doctrine.

Keywords: Made in Africa Evaluation; Young and Emerging Evaluators; Indigenous knowledge; Capacity building; Africa

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS**Evaluation for Sustainable Futures: Local Philosophies and Global Lessons****Gerald G. Mweli***Ministry of Agriculture, Tanzania*

Correspondence to: Mr. Gerald G. Mweli, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Tanzania

Introduction

Evaluation is increasingly recognised as a strategic driver of sustainability, assessing not only outputs but whether interventions build resilience, equity, and long-term well-being. Sustainability, however, cannot be imported wholesale; it must be rooted in local values and complemented by global knowledge.

Discussion Focus

This keynote explores how local philosophies, including Tanzania's Swahili cultural lens and the national 4Rs framework (Reform, Rebuild, Reconcile, Resilience), intersect with global sustainability evaluation frameworks such as Eval4Earth to generate actionable insights. Communities such as Naitolia village demonstrate how indigenous concepts, language, and culture can anchor evaluation practice in ways that resonate with citizens and secure ownership.

Key Messages

Sustainable futures require a dual lens: outward toward global sustainability goals, and inward toward homegrown philosophies. Embedding the 4Rs philosophy into MEL systems illustrates how evaluation can support national reform and reconciliation agendas without overshadowing domestic priorities.

Implications for MEL Practice

The keynote sets the stage for the conference's panels on operationalizing the Swahili Evaluation Approach and on mainstreaming the 4Rs philosophy, inviting participants to reflect on how sustainability in MEL is achieved by grounding evaluation in both local and global contexts.

Keywords: Sustainability; Local philosophies; 4Rs; Swahili Evaluation Approach; Tanzania

Abstract

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PANEL ABSTRACT

Operationalizing the Swahili Evaluation Approach: Lessons from Community-Led Evaluations of TPP-Supported Water and Animal Health Interventions in Naitolia Village, Tanzania**Almas Fortunatus Mazigo¹ (Moderator), Djax Sanga Biria², Miriam Mkombozi¹, Agnes Maganga¹, Dorothea Lyamba¹ and Estella Mgala***1. Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), Tanzania**2. TanEA**3. University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) – Tanzania Partnership Program*

Correspondence to: Dr. Almas Fortunatus Mazigo (Moderator); Dar es Salaam University College of Education, Tanzania

Introduction

Evaluation has steadily shifted from technocratic, expert-driven models toward participatory and culturally responsive approaches. Community-led evaluation (CLE) positions local people as co-owners of both process and findings, yet many evaluations labelled “participatory” still operate within extractive frameworks that overlook local values and Indigenous knowledge.

Objective

This roundtable examines how the Swahili Evaluation Approach (SEA), an Indigenous, culturally grounded methodology rooted in relational ethics and collaborative knowledge creation, was operationalised in two community-led evaluations of Tanzania Partnership Program (TPP)-supported water and animal health interventions in Naitolia Village.

Methods

Evaluators used participatory indicator development so community members co-created evaluation questions, Indigenous data collection methods including storytelling circles, oral histories, and participatory mapping, and a team of five trusted community co-leaders. Findings were validated through community consensus workshops reflecting local priorities.

Results/Findings

The evaluations strengthened community ownership of MEL by amplifying the voices of women, youth, and other marginalised groups, generated policy-relevant evidence that guided adaptations to the TPP programme, and shifted MEL power dynamics from extractive data collection toward community-led learning while building local capacity in data interpretation.

Lessons/Conclusion

SEA demonstrates a replicable model for institutionalising Indigenous approaches within Tanzania's decentralised MEL systems, addressing power imbalances and centring African voices and knowledge as a strategic contribution to MEL Week's goal of building local capacity and ownership for sustainable impact.

Keywords: Swahili Evaluation Approach; Community-led evaluation; Indigenous knowledge; Participatory MEL; Naitolia

Abstract

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PANEL ABSTRACT

Mainstreaming the 4Rs Philosophy in Tanzania's M&E Systems: Institutionalizing Reform, Rebuild, Reconcile, and Resilience**Sakina Mwinyimkuu¹ (Moderator); Herbert Maximillian Lyimo¹, Evodia Kiwale¹, Charlton Meena¹, Pantaleon Shoki², Andrew Mntambo³.***1. Prime Minister's Office – Policy, Parliament and Coordination, Tanzania**2. Tanzania Evaluation Association**3. Tanzania Institute of Project Management*

Correspondence to: Herbert Maximillian Lyimo (Moderator); Prime Minister's Office – Policy, Parliament and Coordination, Tanzania

Introduction

Tanzania's Monitoring and Evaluation ecosystem is undergoing significant transformation guided by the 4Rs Philosophy, Reform, Rebuild, Reconcile, and Resilience, introduced in 2021 to steer national governance through post-COVID recovery and institutional revitalisation.

Objective

This panel explores the operationalisation of the 4Rs philosophy within government-wide M&E systems, drawing on institutional reforms, capacity-building efforts, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive learning mechanisms to trace how the 4Rs evolved from political doctrine into actionable M&E principles.

Discussion Focus

The panel interrogates how institutional frameworks have shifted to elevate M&E functions (Reform); what capacity-building and systems development have strengthened M&E across government (Rebuild); how participatory approaches foster inclusivity and responsiveness (Reconcile); and how adaptive learning and data systems enable agile, crisis-resilient evaluation practice (Resilience), reflecting on Government Performance Reporting reforms, national M&E guidelines, the elevation of M&E units, the establishment of MEL Week, and the e-Mrejesho citizen feedback system.

Lessons/Conclusion

Tanzania's experience offers a model of political economy-informed M&E transformation aligned with Vision 2050, FYDP III, and Agenda 2063, showing how the 4Rs create institutional legitimacy, inclusive participation, and sustained ownership at all governance levels, and offering replicable insights for other African countries balancing political commitment with localised M&E reform.

Keywords: 4Rs Philosophy; Institutional reform; Government-wide M&E; Resilience; Tanzania

Abstract

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Indigenous Evaluation Approaches for Complexity: Reclaiming Knowledge Systems

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Introduction

Development challenges are rarely linear. Climate change, inequality, and cultural diversity create layers of complexity that standard evaluation models often fail to capture. Indigenous evaluation approaches offer alternative pathways rooted in knowledge systems that emphasise relationships, storytelling, collective well-being, and intergenerational impact.

Discussion Focus

Drawing on experience from Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific, this keynote shows how Indigenous evaluators make visible intangible dimensions of change, such as trust, harmony, and resilience, that are critical to sustainable development but often overlooked. Indigenous evaluation does not reject rigour; it redefines rigour to align with community values and holistic systems.

Key Messages

Acknowledging complexity through Indigenous evaluation provides insight into how societies navigate uncertainty and change, inviting evaluators to move beyond technical tools and embrace cultural humility and pluralism, widening the epistemic base of global MEL practice.

Implications for MEL Practice

The keynote directly prepares participants for the conference panel on EvalIndigenous case studies, reinforcing that reclaiming knowledge systems is not only cultural preservation but a strategic response to complexity in development evaluation.

Keywords: Indigenous evaluation; Knowledge systems; Complexity; EvalIndigenous; Epistemic justice

Abstract

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PANEL ABSTRACT

Indigenous Evaluation as an Approach to Address Complexity: Case Studies of the EvalIndigenous Experience in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Pacific

Almas Fortunatus Mazigo¹ (Moderator), Mackfallen G. Anasel², Serge Eric Yakeu³, Solomon M. Waiyego⁴,
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1. Dar es Salaam University College of Education (DUCE), Tanzania

2. Mzumbe University, Tanzania

3. International Development Evaluation Association (IDEA)

4. Institution of Surveyors of Kenya (ISK)

5. African Evaluation Association (AfrEA)

Correspondence to: Dr. Almas Fortunatus Mazigo (Moderator); Dar es Salaam University College of Education, Tanzania

Introduction

Indigenous Evaluation offers a systemic approach to assessing complexity in development and humanitarian programmes that increasingly struggle to respond to community and government needs across the Global South.

Objective

This panel draws on the practical work of the EvalIndigenous network in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to demonstrate how systemic, culturally grounded evaluation approaches can strengthen and enhance community-led monitoring, evaluation, and learning for policy and governance.

Discussion Focus

Panellists present practical examples and problematic experiences of applying Indigenous evaluation across diverse regional contexts, with participants' own experiences invited to enrich the debate and broaden the evidence base for systemic approaches to complexity.

Lessons/Conclusion

Cross-regional experience from EvalIndigenous shows that systemic, Indigenous-rooted evaluation approaches offer a durable contribution to strengthening community-led MEL for policy and governance, reinforcing the case for embedding such approaches within national and regional evaluation systems.

Keywords: EvalIndigenous; Indigenous evaluation; Complexity; Community-led MEL; Global South

Abstract

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Building an Integrated MEL System: From Community Evidence to National Statistics**Amina S. Msengwa***National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania*

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Introduction

Robust national development requires systems that connect evidence generated at the grassroots with data used for decision-making at the highest levels. Community-led monitoring initiatives and national statistical systems too often operate in silos, reducing the utility of both.

Discussion Focus

This keynote argues for a whole-of-government MEL system in which community evidence and official statistics reinforce each other: community-led MEL strengthens accountability and responsiveness to real needs, while national statistics provide standardisation, comparability, and credibility for planning and budgeting. Achieving this integration requires harmonised frameworks, interoperable digital platforms, and institutional coordination across MDAs, Regional Secretariats, and Local Government Authorities.

Key Messages

Integration is not only technical; it is political, requiring commitment to transparency, resource allocation, and citizen engagement, so that evidence flows both bottom-up and top-down.

Implications for MEL Practice

The keynote frames the conference panels on community ownership of MEL and on whole-of-government MEL alignment, illustrating how Tanzania can move from fragmented initiatives to an integrated ecosystem serving stronger policy, better accountability, and improved outcomes.

Keywords: Integrated MEL systems; National statistics; Whole-of-government; Evidence-based governance; Tanzania

Abstract

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PANEL ABSTRACT

From Participation to Ownership: Strengthening Community-Led MEL for Accountability and Sustainability in Tanzania

Baraka Leonard Mfilinge¹ (Moderator), Benjamin James Magege², Hamida Mushi Juma³, Sinenhlanhla Tsekiso⁴, Thina Nzo⁵ & Simon Mlotshwa⁶

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6. City of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Correspondence to: Baraka Leonard Mfilinge (Moderator); EvalYouth Global Network

Introduction

Tanzania's national vision (TDV 2025), its Third Five-Year Development Plan (FYDP III), and global frameworks such as the SDGs all emphasise inclusive growth and good governance. Yet MEL practice has remained largely centralised and compliance-oriented, with limited capacity to capture community realities and link them to policy.

Objective

This panel examines how community-led MEL can be institutionalised and scaled in Tanzania by strengthening ownership, enhancing accountability, and ensuring sustainability, drawing on Tanzanian practitioners and continental experts from CLEAR-AA and Twende Mbele.

Discussion Focus

Evidence from participatory infrastructure frameworks shows how communities shift from passive beneficiaries to active owners; irrigation-scheme experience shows that willingness to pay service fees is tied to fairness, service quality, and participatory monitoring; and youth-led MEL in HIV programmes shows how marginalised groups can lead data collection, interpretation, and advocacy.

Key Messages

MEL must evolve beyond a reporting requirement into a governance mechanism that fosters accountability, sustains service delivery, and builds inclusive ownership, though top-down cultures, limited technical capacity, weak financial models, and difficulty translating grassroots evidence into national indicators remain barriers.

Lessons/Conclusion

The central question for institutionalising Tanzania's MEL ecosystem is how to embed community and youth ownership so that accountability and sustainability are ensured while remaining aligned with national and global goals.

Keywords: Community ownership; Accountability; Youth-led MEL; Sustainability; Tanzania

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PANEL ABSTRACT

Whole-of-Government MEL: Aligning Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation Across MDAs, Regional Secretariats, and Local Government Authorities

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1. Open University of Tanzania

2. Mwanza Regional Secretariat

3. Mwanza City Council

4. President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government (PO-RALG), Tanzania

5. Prime Minister's Office – Policy, Parliament and Coordination, Tanzania

6. Ministry of Energy, Tanzania

7. City of Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Correspondence to: Dr. Christopher Awinia (Moderator); Open University of Tanzania

Introduction

Tanzania's shift toward a harmonised, government-wide MEL system requires institutional coherence from the centre of government to the last mile of service delivery. This panel brings together national oversight, sector-level leadership, and subnational implementation authorities to explore how MEL can bridge strategic planning, resource allocation, and real-time service outcomes.

Discussion Focus

The Prime Minister's Office – Policy, Parliament and Coordination coordinates MEL systems across MDAs, Regional Secretariats, and LGAs, aligning evaluation practice with FYDP III and TDV 2025 through performance reviews and annual Government Performance Reporting. The Ministry of Energy illustrates how sectoral MEL data on rural electrification and infrastructure feeds into national evaluations, interacting with PO-RALG structures and PMO-PPC oversight to create a feedback loop for performance improvement.

Lessons/Conclusion

Bringing national, sectoral, and subnational institutions together points toward a coordinated, data-driven ecosystem that moves Tanzania from fragmented MEL functions to one that delivers timely insight and strengthens accountability across all levels of government.

Keywords: Whole-of-government MEL; Institutional coordination; Local government; Performance reporting; Tanzania

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KEYNOTE ADDRESS**DIRA 2050 and the Future of Evaluation Capacity: Higher Learning Institutions at the Core****William Mwegoha***Mzumbe University, Tanzania*Correspondence to: Prof. William Mwegoha, Vice Chancellor, Mzumbe University, Tanzania

Introduction

Tanzania's DIRA 2050 sets an ambitious vision of inclusive prosperity, knowledge-based growth, and institutional resilience. Achieving it requires not only sound policy and resources but also a skilled cadre of monitoring and evaluation practitioners able to ensure accountability and evidence-based decision-making, with higher learning institutions central to this effort.

Discussion Focus

This keynote examines how universities and colleges can catalyse the next generation of M&E professionals through curriculum innovation, research, and partnership, embedding competencies in data science, digital MEL, and developmental and Indigenous evaluation, while forging academia-government partnerships that move graduates into roles supporting national institutions.

Key Messages

Building evaluation capacity is a strategic investment in governance, not merely a technical task. Without a strong cadre of skilled professionals, institutional frameworks risk underperformance; when higher learning institutions lead, Tanzania can institutionalise a culture of evidence use that sustains its long-term vision.

Implications for MEL Practice

The keynote sets the stage for the conference panel on institutionalising evidence-based M&E within the President's Office, connecting academic capacity building with policy implementation and showing that DIRA 2050 depends on human capital development and institutional reform advancing together.

Keywords: DIRA 2050; Evaluation capacity; Higher education; Curriculum innovation; Tanzania

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PANEL ABSTRACT

Institutionalizing Evidence-Based Monitoring and Evaluation: Reflections from the President's Office – Planning and Investment M&E Framework

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Introduction

The President's Office – Planning and Investment (PO-PI) has undertaken a practical journey to institutionalise a robust M&E framework that is evidence-driven, policy-aligned, and performance-focused, transitioning from fragmented reporting structures to a unified, strategic, and outcome-oriented model.

Objective

This panel presents how the PO-PI M&E Framework (2024/25–2025/26) was conceptualised, designed, and implemented to align with the Tanzania Development Vision 2025, FYDP III, and the SDGs, through a participatory process involving internal divisions, affiliated agencies, and external technical partners.

Discussion Focus

Key reflections cover the separation of planning and M&E functions for institutional objectivity, coordination mechanisms across public and private institutions, integration of investment data flows and logic models into strategic planning, and challenges in human resource capacity, budgeting, and systems automation, alongside steps to align with the emerging Government-Wide M&E System.

Lessons/Conclusion

PO-PI's experience affirms the value of institutional M&E frameworks as enablers of adaptive governance and investment performance accountability, offering replicable strategies and system-level thinking relevant to both central and decentralised public institutions.

Keywords: Institutional M&E; Evidence-based governance; Performance scorecards; Government-Wide M&E System; Tanzania

Individual Research Abstracts

Arranged by conference sub-theme

Sub-theme 1: Strengthening Community-Led MEL for Policy and Governance

Abstract

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Strengthening Participatory MEL Models at the Grassroots Level Project Management

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Introduction

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a critical approach for enhancing project performance, accountability, and transparency across community, district, regional, and national levels. In Tanzania, development projects, particularly in the construction sector, face persistent challenges such as poor quality control, inadequate supervision, and weak feedback mechanisms. This study explores how participatory approaches improve decision-making, ownership, and service delivery outcomes in grassroots development initiatives in Mwanza Region.

Objective

This paper assesses the effectiveness of participatory M&E models in project management across multiple governance levels, examining challenges and opportunities associated with decentralizing M&E systems and proposing strategies to enhance stakeholder engagement, ownership, and accountability in project supervision and evaluation.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach combined qualitative and quantitative techniques. Data were collected through group discussions, physical site visits, and in-depth interviews with eight District Engineers and project officers involved in construction projects, focusing on practical experiences and the effectiveness of participatory M&E in real-world project settings.

Results/Findings

Projects implementing participatory M&E reported approximately 70% higher stakeholder satisfaction. Key success factors included strong local leadership, continuous capacity building, and adaptable M&E frameworks, with participatory approaches improving transparency, accountability, and trust. Challenges included limited literacy levels, insufficient resources, and low awareness of national M&E standards at the grassroots level.

Lessons/Conclusion

Strengthening community-led M&E requires investment in capacity building, user-friendly and culturally appropriate tools, and alignment with national frameworks such as FYDP III. Inclusive participation, particularly of vulnerable groups, is essential for effective implementation, and simplified processes and enhanced local ownership contribute to more accurate, timely data and improved decision-making.

Keywords: Participatory M&E; Community engagement; Project management; Decentralization; Tanzania

Abstract

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Community-Driven Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning for Accountability and Policy Impact: Lessons from the ZADEP Mid-Term Review

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Introduction

Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (PMEL) is increasingly recognised as a vital strategy for inclusive, transparent, and accountable development. Grounded in Stakeholder Theory, Utilization-Focused Evaluation, and Empowerment Evaluation, this study examines the roles, perceptions, and engagement of Non-State Actors, including communities, civil society organisations, and the private sector, in the PMEL processes of the Zanzibar Development Plan (ZADEP 2021–2026), drawing on insights from its Mid-Term Evaluation.

Objective

The study assesses stakeholder awareness of MEL frameworks, the level of participation by Non-State Actors in planning and evaluation, and the utilisation of M&E findings for decision-making, while examining stakeholder satisfaction with plan results and gaps in feedback mechanisms, capacity, and coordination.

Methods

A multi-stage sample was drawn from the 2022 Tanzania Population and Housing Census frame, selecting two Shehia from each of eleven districts and 88 Enumeration Areas using probability proportional to size. Fifteen households per Enumeration Area were randomly selected (1,320 households), with one respondent per household interviewed using Survey Solutions software. Data were also collected from leaders of civil society organisations, the private sector, and trade unions, supplemented by secondary statistical and policy documents, and analysed descriptively.

Results/Findings

Community awareness of ZADEP is critically low (29.1%), with disparities by gender, education, and region limiting inclusive participation in monitoring. While infrastructure, health, and education are recognised as key achievements, economic empowerment and regional equity remain concerns. Only 16% of Non-State Actors identified Monitoring and Evaluation as a notable achievement, indicating weak visibility and limited use of feedback.

Lessons/Conclusion

Awareness is foundational: low public knowledge of the plan limits participation and underscores the need for inclusive communication strategies and disaggregated monitoring data. M&E systems must extend beyond tracking infrastructure to capture governance, accountability, and social impacts, and the low visibility of M&E itself signals a need to raise its profile and actively nurture Non-State Actor participation through capacity building and co-creation.

Keywords: Participatory M&E; Non-State Actors; ZADEP; Stakeholder engagement; Zanzibar

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Decentralizing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Systems for Enhanced Local Governance and Service Delivery in Tanzania

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Introduction

For decades, the Tanzanian government has pursued decentralisation by devolution to empower local government authorities (LGAs) to plan and manage public service delivery. Monitoring and capturing implementation across LGAs has, however, remained weak, with centralised MEL systems undermining local data use, learning, and accountability, despite recent efforts such as the 2024 National Evaluation Manual.

Objective

This paper analyses the contribution of decentralised MEL systems to improved service delivery in Tanzania's local government authorities, assessing alignment with national evaluation reforms, identifying contextual opportunities and barriers, and linking MEL decentralisation to community engagement and data-based decision-making at the LGA level.

Methods

A Systematic Literature Review was used to identify and screen 56 documents, including government policies, national evaluation manuals, programme reports, and journal articles. Forty-nine documents were reviewed by title and abstract, 23 assessed in full text, and six met the criteria for final thematic analysis based on relevance, methodological rigour, and direct relation to decentralised MEL in Tanzania.

Results/Findings

MEL decentralisation enhances responsiveness and transparency in service delivery when supported by digital tools, community feedback mechanisms, and national guidance, contributing to data-driven decisions and improved local governance. Low capacity, fragmented systems, limited use of evaluation findings, and donor-driven practices that overshadow local agendas remain the major challenges facing MEL in LGAs.

Lessons/Conclusion

Government and M&E practitioners must strengthen local learning systems and stakeholder-driven evaluation, institutionalise evaluation standards, and integrate MEL into LGA mandates to bridge the gap between data collection and use. A legal framework compelling LGAs to embed MEL in daily operations, alongside zonal or regional MEL Learning Hubs, would support peer-to-peer learning and sustainability.

Keywords: Decentralization; Local government authorities; MEL systems; Service delivery; Tanzania

Abstract

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

From Evidence to Influence: Empowering Tanzanian Communities to Use MEL for Accountability and Policy Engagement

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Introduction

Tanzanian communities are central to development processes, yet their engagement in MEL often remains limited to data provision. This paper explores how equipping communities with MEL capacity transforms them into proactive users of evidence for accountability and policy engagement, drawing on experience in health, education, entrepreneurship, child protection, and anti-trafficking sectors.

Objective

The paper examines how empowering communities with MEL tools and capacity enhances their ability to promote transparency, demand accountability, and shape local and national policy, presenting tested approaches to democratise MEL and foster community-led governance through evidence-based advocacy.

Methods

This practice-based paper draws on experience from field projects implemented by ROMME Centre and ROMME Love Justice Tanzania (RLJT), using case study documentation, participant reflections, and learning from participatory MEL training sessions, including the 2025 M&E Awareness Workshop with the Tanzania Revenue Authority.

Results/Findings

Community MEL initiatives improved the responsiveness of local authorities and led to concrete actions, including better victim-support systems and KAIZEN-driven improvements in public health services. MEL tools were used for evidence-based advocacy, particularly by youth and marginalised groups, strengthening community ownership of data and decision-making.

Lessons/Conclusion

Community MEL works best when grounded in local realities, supported by continuous mentorship, and integrated with institutional systems. Practitioners should prioritise inclusive training, recognise indigenous knowledge, and ensure feedback loops are functional and respected by decision-makers, with national VOPEs such as TanEA serving as a bridge between grassroots MEL and national evaluation policy.

Keywords: Community empowerment; Social accountability; Policy influence; MEL capacity; Tanzania

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Rooted in Language: Afrocentric Communication Strategies for Community-Led Monitoring of TB in Mining Communities in East, Central and Southern Africa**Zacharia Grand***University of Johannesburg, South Africa*

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Introduction

This paper introduces an Afrocentric Community-Led Monitoring (CLM) framework that harnesses indigenous proverbs, idioms, and metaphors to transform how tuberculosis (TB) data is communicated and acted upon in mining communities across East, Central, and Southern Africa.

Objective

The study advances culturally grounded methods of communicating and interpreting health data, moving beyond top-down behaviour-change models, and asks how indigenous linguistic tools and traditional knowledge systems can contextualise TB data communication and strengthen MEL in health promotion.

Methods

The analysis draws on a critical literature review spanning Afrocentric pedagogy (Asante, 1990) and decolonial knowledge production (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), positioning oral traditions as repositories and instruments of health knowledge, and examines the localisation of the OneImpact digital platform under the Global Fund's TIMS III project.

Results/Findings

Localising the OneImpact platform into Kiswahili, Portuguese, and indigenous languages including Shona, Ndebele, Bemba, and Nyanja significantly strengthened community-led monitoring across Tanzania, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, overcoming language barriers and allowing mineworkers, ex-miners, and their families to report TB-related challenges with greater confidence and precision.

Lessons/Conclusion

Embedding monitoring and communication practices within indigenous knowledge systems repositions communities as agents, not subjects, of health data. Proverbs, metaphors, and idioms become tools of analysis as well as storytelling devices, calling for MEL systems that are as much about meaning-making as measurement, and for Africa to draw on models such as Ujamaa, Harambee, and Ubuntu to assess community impact in local languages.

Keywords: Afrocentric evaluation; Community-led monitoring; Tuberculosis; Indigenous languages; Mining communities

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Telling our Contribution Story: A Policy Research Organization's Journey towards Integrating Contribution Analysis and Elements of Outcome Mapping in its Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

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Introduction

Tracking and communicating policy influence outcomes remains complex due to multiple actors and non-linear change pathways. While REPOA has strengthened output-level performance monitoring, a gap remained in systematically capturing and communicating its contribution to policy change. This paper outlines REPOA's journey in embedding Contribution Analysis (CA) and elements of Outcome Mapping (OM) into its M&E framework.

Objective

This paper demonstrates how Contribution Analysis and Outcome Mapping can be integrated into an institutional M&E system to strengthen accountability and policy influence, offering practical insight into how development and research organisations can design systems that capture outcome-level change and support evidence-informed decision-making.

Methods

A participatory and iterative systems development approach was used, involving internal stakeholder consultations, review of existing M&E tools, and alignment with REPOA's Theory of Change. Contribution Analysis guided evaluation design while Outcome Mapping elements tracked behavioural change among key actors, supported by capacity-building sessions and pilot testing of tools.

Results/Findings

Integrating CA and OM strengthened organisational understanding of outcomes and improved the ability to generate credible contribution claims. Ownership of M&E processes increased across departments, supported by clearer evaluation questions and structured data collection, with a well-defined Theory of Change emerging as a critical anchor.

Lessons/Conclusion

Effective M&E systems should be guided by clear evaluation questions focused on strategy, operations, and outcomes. Contribution Analysis offers a practical alternative in complex contexts where attribution is not feasible, while Outcome Mapping enhances real-time tracking of behavioural change; institutionalising these approaches requires collaboration, capacity building, and alignment with organisational learning objectives.

Keywords: Contribution Analysis; Outcome Mapping; Policy influence; Monitoring and Evaluation; Theory of Change

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Scaling INCE Evaluation in Africa: Insights from Tanzania's Pilot**Francis A. Mwaijande¹, Juan Carlos Sanz¹ & Abdillahi Mussa¹***1. Mzumbe University, Tanzania**2. German Evaluation Institute for Development Cooperation (DEval), Germany**3. Prime Minister's Office – Policy, Parliament, and Coordination, Tanzania*

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Introduction

The National Evaluation Capacity Index (INCE) is a diagnostic tool assessing national evaluation systems across five dimensions: institutional structure, evaluation supply, evaluation quality, multi-actor dialogue, and use of evaluation. Established in 2020 in Latin America and the Caribbean, INCE is now being piloted in Africa through the African Evaluation Association, with Tanzania among six pilot countries and the first to complete a full assessment cycle.

Objective

The paper presents results from Tanzania's INCE pilot to inform national evaluation system strengthening, generates dialogue on adapting INCE to diverse country contexts, and explores pathways for scaling and institutionalising INCE within Tanzania and across Africa.

Methods

A structured questionnaire based on INCE's 74 indicators was administered to 304 stakeholders across central government, local government authorities, regional secretariats, executive agencies, academia, VOPEs, development partners, and parliamentary networks, coordinated by the Prime Minister's Office in collaboration with the Tanzania Evaluation Association.

Results/Findings

Tanzania successfully completed the first full INCE cycle in Africa, demonstrating strong political commitment and institutional collaboration. The multi-stakeholder approach enhanced ownership and credibility of findings, highlighting strengths in institutional coordination and emerging evaluation practices, while identifying gaps in evaluation use, capacity distribution, and system-wide integration.

Lessons/Conclusion

National ownership and high-level government leadership are critical for strengthening evaluation systems. The INCE process provides a structured, evidence-based approach for diagnosing system performance and guiding reforms, and Tanzania's experience offers a practical model for other African countries seeking to institutionalise evaluation and evidence-informed policymaking.

Keywords: National Evaluation Capacity; INCE; Evaluation systems; Tanzania; Evidence-based policy

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Making Policy Work: M&E Lessons from Nigeria, Uganda, and Lesotho**Emanoel Alfred***UONGOZI Institute, P.O. Box 105753, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

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Introduction

Across Africa, governments face increasing pressure to demonstrate how public policies translate into improved services and outcomes. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) has evolved into a central component of governance, yet institutionalising MEL within policy and planning systems remains challenging due to gaps in political commitment, legal frameworks, capacity, financing, and data systems.

Objective

This paper analyses experiences from Uganda, Nigeria, and Lesotho, countries at different stages of MEL system development, examining system evolution, institutional and operational challenges, and innovative practices to distil lessons for integrating MEL into national planning and governance systems.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach combined document review of national MEL policies, diagnostic reports, and peer-reviewed literature with primary data generated through CLEAR-AA facilitated engagements in 2025, including co-creation workshops and key informant interviews. Data were analysed using a six-dimension National Evaluation Systems framework covering policy, capacity, coordination, participation, quality, and use.

Results/Findings

Uganda demonstrates strong integration of MEL into planning and budgeting but requires strengthened legal frameworks and feedback mechanisms. Nigeria highlights the gap between policy adoption and implementation, emphasising coordination, financing, and capacity needs. Lesotho shows promising early-stage development with clear institutional roles and emerging systems.

Lessons/Conclusion

Institutionalising MEL is a long-term process requiring sustained leadership, clear mandates, adequate financing, and a culture of evidence use. The experiences of Uganda, Nigeria, and Lesotho show that effective MEL systems evolve from policy commitments into operational practices that inform decision-making, with continuous learning and adaptive management as priorities for strengthening policy effectiveness.

Keywords: Monitoring and Evaluation; Public policy; National evaluation systems; Governance; Africa

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Redefining Ownership – African Solutions for African Evaluations: The Role of AfrEA and National VOPEs in Capacity Development for Community-Driven M&E**Awuor Ponge***African Evaluation Association (AfrEA)*

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Introduction

The movement to redefine ownership in African monitoring and evaluation seeks to shift the field from externally driven models toward approaches rooted in African worldviews, values, and knowledge systems. The African Evaluation Association (AfrEA) and national Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) play a pivotal role in building capacity for community-driven, contextually relevant M&E.

Objective

The paper highlights the importance of local ownership in African M&E, examines how AfrEA and national VOPEs contribute to building sustainable evaluation capacity, and explores strategies for promoting community-driven approaches that enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and cultural appropriateness of evaluations.

Methods

The study used a qualitative documentary review, systematically analysing existing literature, policy documents, and case studies related to AfrEA, national VOPEs, and community-driven M&E in Africa, applying thematic analysis to identify trends, challenges, and best practices in capacity development.

Results/Findings

Over 40 VOPEs now operate under AfrEA, significantly enhancing peer learning and professional exchange, yet M&E capacity strengthening in Africa remains largely influenced by international partners and supply-driven agendas. AfrEA's initiatives have fostered networking and local capacity building, though challenges persist in mobilising resources and embedding contextually relevant evaluation practices.

Lessons/Conclusion

Local ownership and context-driven approaches are critical to meaningful and sustainable evaluation outcomes in Africa. Practitioners should prioritise collaboration with organisations like AfrEA and national VOPEs, leverage indigenous knowledge, and move beyond externally imposed models, recognising that empowering local actors is essential for M&E to serve the continent's development needs.

Keywords: African Evaluation Association; VOPEs; Local ownership; Capacity development; Community-driven M&E

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Introducing and Implementing a Regional Health Performance Scorecard: A Case of Lindi

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Introduction

In 2024, the Lindi Region Regional Health Management Team (RHMT) introduced a Strategy for M&E of health care services using a scoring tool that assesses and ranks individual council performance on a quarterly and semi-annual basis, covering 42 performance indicators across 15 health, social welfare, and nutrition thematic areas aligned with the WHO Health System Building Blocks.

Objective

The study evaluates the quality of health services provided across councils in Lindi Region using the designed M&E tool, computing overall council performance and rankings, implementing an award mechanism for best performers, analysing trends, and enabling continuous monitoring of the indicators.

Methods

Indicators were selected from national and regional strategic priorities with defined performance cut-off points and colour scales. Following advocacy with regional and council administrations and CHMTs, the regional health team monitors implementation and recording in DHIS2 and AfyaSS, with quarterly performance transcribed into a region-designed web-based system for weighting, comparison, and ranking.

Results/Findings

The 15-thematic-area, 42-indicator scorecard was designed and executed from July 2024, with January–March 2024 as baseline, and the reward mechanism for best performers was implemented for January–March 2025 at a regional meeting chaired by the Regional Commissioner. The average performance score rose from 54.70% to 55.91% between the two periods, with 48.4% of indicators showing an increase or sustained trend.

Lessons/Conclusion

Lindi RHMT has designed and implemented a replicable performance scorecard that assures quality health service provision across councils, stimulating performance through continuous monitoring and inter-council competition. The team recommends that DHIS developers enable region- or council-specific indicators and automated assessment, and that other regions adopt similar, locally relevant scorecard strategies.

Keywords: Performance scorecard; Health system M&E; Decentralized governance; DHIS2; Tanzania

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Importance of the Five Year Development Plan III (2021/22–2025/26), National Development Vision 2025, and Agenda 2063 from an M&E Perspective**Caroline Makuvire***Office of the President and Cabinet, Zimbabwe*

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Introduction

Robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems are key to achieving national goals and ensuring accountability. Tanzania's review of FYDP II implementation revealed incomplete delivery despite clear objectives and measurable indicators, pointing to a need for better coordination. FYDP III (2021/22–2025/26) prioritises strengthening institutional arrangements, streamlining task flows, and improving routine data collection.

Objective

The paper examines how to align national MEL frameworks with the SDGs and AU Agenda 2063, institutionalise MEL through a national strategy across government ministries, promote ownership and integration of MEL across government, private sector, and civil society, and strengthen institutional capacity and data quality for tracking FYDP III targets.

Methods

The approach involves mainstreaming FYDP and SDG indicators into the work plans of ministries, departments, agencies, development partners, and the private sector, developing results frameworks with national and thematic performance indicators, applying theories of change, and ensuring participatory monitoring through multi-stakeholder engagement and localisation of MEL processes.

Results/Findings

Many M&E systems remain activity-focused, limiting their ability to measure long-term impact and sustainability. While some institutions have integrated FYDP and SDG indicators, overall alignment is uneven, and gender and Leave No One Behind considerations remain insufficiently mainstreamed, compounded by inadequate funding, weak institutional commitment, and limited community participation.

Lessons/Conclusion

Aligning MEL with national and global frameworks ensures policy coherence, while active engagement in national processes fosters ownership and shared responsibility. Institutionalising MEL in Tanzania is vital for fulfilling FYDP, SDG, and Agenda 2063 commitments, with results-driven planning and participatory monitoring positioned to catalyse transformative, inclusive, and sustainable development outcomes.

Keywords: FYDP III; National Development Vision 2025; Agenda 2063; Institutional MEL; Results-based management

Sub-theme 2: Digital Transformation and Innovation in MEL

Abstract

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Examining M&E Data Management Practices: Insights from M&E Professionals Across Africa

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Introduction

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is essential for accountability, learning, and adaptive management in development. As digital tools transform M&E, this study examines data management practices across Africa from the perspective of M&E professionals, exploring current systems, key challenges, and practitioner-informed solutions for strengthening grassroots decision-making.

Objective

The paper assesses the adoption and effectiveness of digital tools for data collection, storage, and analysis; identifies challenges such as metadata neglect, weak system integration, and underutilisation of data; and documents practitioner-informed solutions to strengthen real-time decision-making at the grassroots level.

Methods

A mixed-methods study administered a structured survey via KoboToolbox, circulated through a regional WhatsApp group of African M&E professionals using snowball sampling. Data were collected between 9–19 January 2025 from 158 respondents (24.7% women) across 31 African countries. Quantitative responses were analysed descriptively, while qualitative inputs were thematically coded.

Results/Findings

Over 85% of respondents use digital platforms such as Kobo and ODK for M&E data collection, yet only 31% reported systematic metadata management and just 24% indicated integration of M&E data systems with other platforms. Only 41% said data is consistently used for decision-making, with limited digital infrastructure and low professional recognition cited as key challenges.

Lessons/Conclusion

Digital tools alone are not sufficient; effective data management requires investment in system integration, metadata practices, and user capacity. Strengthening local ownership, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring stakeholder engagement are critical, with professional associations such as TanEA and AfrEA well placed to promote standards and knowledge sharing for community-led M&E.

Keywords: Data management; Digital tools; M&E professionals; Metadata; Africa

Abstract

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Leveraging Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, and Digital Tools for Community-Led MEL

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Introduction

Community-led Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) offers powerful potential for generating context-rich insights, enhancing accountability, and fostering local ownership of development outcomes, yet its adoption remains limited by time constraints, limited technical capacity, and concerns over data reliability. Digital tools, Artificial Intelligence, and big data present a transformative opportunity to bridge these gaps.

Objective

This paper highlights the value of community-led MEL, examines the barriers that have hindered its adoption, and demonstrates how AI, big data, and digital tools can address these barriers while presenting practical, user-friendly methodologies that MEL professionals can adopt at scale.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach combined a review of literature on participatory MEL and digital innovation with case studies from community-driven projects across Africa, key informant interviews with MEL practitioners and technology developers, and lessons from pilot implementations integrating AI tools, mobile data platforms, and big data analytics into community-led MEL.

Results/Findings

Integrating AI, big data, and digital tools into community-led MEL significantly enhances data quality, participation, and responsiveness. Mobile-based platforms and AI-powered analytics reduce the burden of manual data processing, enabling timelier decision-making, though successful implementation requires intentional design, capacity building, and attention to data privacy and algorithmic bias.

Lessons/Conclusion

Technology is not a substitute for community engagement but a powerful enabler of it. Practitioners can democratise MEL processes and strengthen local ownership by co-designing tools with communities, ensuring digital literacy, and safeguarding ethical standards, shifting from extractive approaches to inclusive, learning-oriented systems.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Big data; Digital tools; Community-led MEL; Capacity building

Sub-theme 3: Climate-Sensitive MEL and Resilience Building

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Strengthening MEL Frameworks for Women's Resilience in Conflict and Climate-Stressed Settings: Insights from the Mandara Mountains, Cameroon

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Introduction

The Mandara Mountains in Cameroon's Far North region sit at the intersection of two overlapping crises: violent extremism from Boko Haram and increasing climate-related stress. Women face compounded vulnerabilities but also demonstrate remarkable resilience, developing psychosocial and economic coping strategies that traditional MEL systems often fail to capture.

Objective

This study aims to strengthen climate-sensitive MEL frameworks by identifying gender-responsive indicators that effectively capture women's resilience in conflict- and climate-affected settings, assessing current adaptation strategies, evaluating how existing MEL systems reflect or overlook these efforts, and proposing context-specific MEL tools.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach combined quantitative surveys with 380 women across Mayo-Sava, Diamaré, and Mayo-Tsanaga with qualitative tools including 15 focus group discussions, 30 key informant interviews, and participatory observation. Data collection focused on coping mechanisms, community resilience structures, and socio-economic initiatives, with triangulation ensuring reliability and ethical protocols observed throughout.

Results/Findings

Existing MEL frameworks in the Far North of Cameroon often fail to capture the full spectrum of women's resilience. Over 65% of women rely on psychosocial strategies such as prayer groups and storytelling circles, while 70% engage in economic initiatives through tontines; these locally rooted responses remain undervalued in conventional MEL systems.

Lessons/Conclusion

M&E practitioners must recognise that conventional frameworks often miss locally grounded indicators of resilience in fragile, climate-affected settings. Integrating gender-sensitive and community-driven metrics, valuing informal support networks, and aligning MEL tools with local realities enables more accurate tracking of resilience and strengthens the role of women as agents of change.

Keywords: Climate-sensitive MEL; Gender-responsive indicators; Women's resilience; Conflict-affected settings; Cameroon

Sub-theme 4: Sustainable MEL Financing and Multi-Sectoral Partnerships

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Economic Efficiency of Small-Scale Sunflower Farmers in Tanzania: A Stochastic Profit Frontier Approach

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Introduction

Sunflower is a key global oilseed crop valued for its oil and Vitamin E content, yet African countries, including Tanzania, face low productivity due to limited access to improved seeds and technologies. Tanzania ranks second in sunflower production in Africa, with smallholder farmers contributing 99% of output, but national productivity remains at 1 t/ha against a potential 3 t/ha.

Objective

The study maps the socio-economic activities of sunflower farmers and provides empirical evidence on their level of economic efficiency, determining farm profitability through the stochastic profit frontier method to inform strategies that enhance productivity, increase income, and reduce poverty sustainably.

Methods

The study used secondary data from the 2019/20 National Sample Census of Agriculture on mainland Tanzania, applying a two-stage sampling technique to select 632 smallholder sunflower farmers. A Stochastic Profit Frontier model with a Cobb-Douglas functional form and Maximum Likelihood Estimation was applied, following the profit function approach of Ali and Flinn (1989).

Results/Findings

Sunflower farming in Tanzania is male-dominated (78.16%), with smallholder farmers averaging 1.5-acre plots and primary education levels. Mean economic efficiency was low at 45.31%, with farm size, family labour, and seed costs identified as significant factors, reflecting inefficiencies linked to limited access to quality inputs and extension services.

Lessons/Conclusion

Findings inform M&E frameworks in agriculture by highlighting the need to track efficiency indicators alongside production outputs, including labour sources, input affordability, and resource-use patterns. Targeted interventions in input access, cost reduction, and resource allocation, tracked through robust M&E, can improve efficiency, raise farmer income, and support agricultural policy effectiveness.

Keywords: Economic efficiency; Stochastic profit frontier; Sunflower farming; Smallholder farmers; Tanzania

Abstract

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Beyond Donor Dependency: Mobilizing Local Resources to Sustain Grassroots MEL Systems in East Africa

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Introduction

Many grassroots MEL initiatives across East Africa remain underfunded, donor-driven, and short-lived. While their value in improving local accountability and adaptive learning is evident, sustainable financing remains a gap. This paper explores local resource mobilization (LRM) strategies that reduce dependency on external funding and empower local actors to own and sustain MEL systems.

Objective

The paper analyses context-appropriate strategies for mobilising financial and non-financial local resources to support grassroots MEL, and establishes the institutional conditions under which these strategies can thrive and be embedded within local governance and development planning processes.

Methods

A qualitative multi-case approach reviewed MEL practices in three Ugandan districts (Mukono, Kasese, and Mbale), using key informant interviews, local budget analyses, and document review. Resource mobilization strategies were categorised and their sustainability assessed using OECD-DAC criteria, grounded in the Local Public Financial Management framework (Boex & Martinez-Vazquez, 2007).

Results/Findings

Districts that integrated MEL into planning guidelines and budget frameworks had more stable MEL operations. In-kind contributions from community members, such as data collectors and local evaluators, sustained tracking even when funds were limited, while cross-sector partnerships with local universities and CBOs helped reduce costs and expand MEL coverage.

Lessons/Conclusion

M&E practitioners must go beyond technical support to engage in fiscal dialogue, embedding MEL into local government planning and resource envelopes to ensure longevity. Where formal financing is limited, hybrid models, including community volunteerism, school-based monitoring clubs, and shared data platforms, can provide alternative sustainability routes.

Keywords: Local resource mobilization; Grassroots MEL; Sustainable financing; Local government; East Africa

Abstract

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INDIVIDUAL ABSTRACT

Enhancing Financial Sustainability and Governance through MEL: A Case Study of Mwalimu Commercial Bank PLC's Audited Financial Performance**Pantaleon Shoki¹ and Richard L. Makungwa²***1. Tanzania Evaluation Association (TanEA)**2. Mwalimu Commercial Bank PLC, P.O. Box 68214, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

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Introduction

Financial institutions play a pivotal role in Tanzania's socio-economic development, with their performance directly affecting community livelihoods, investment flows, and policy confidence. Mwalimu Commercial Bank PLC (MCB) has prioritised transparency through regular publication of audited financial statements, yet systematic MEL integration remains underexplored in leveraging financial data for institutional strengthening and stakeholder engagement.

Objective

The study demonstrates how MEL frameworks can be applied to audited financial statements to enhance governance and attract impact investment, identifies trends and lessons from MCB's recent financial performance to inform MEL best practices in banking, and proposes recommendations for embedding MEL in routine financial reporting.

Methods

A mixed-methods approach combined quantitative analysis of MCB's audited financial statements (2022–2024) with qualitative interviews of bank management and key stakeholders. Key financial indicators, including asset growth, liquidity, loan portfolio quality, and profitability, were mapped against MEL metrics for institutional effectiveness and benchmarked against sectoral MEL standards.

Results/Findings

MCB's MEL-informed approach improved transparency, risk management, and stakeholder engagement, with regular audits and non-performing loan tracking boosting investor trust and attracting social investment. Evidence-based MEL reporting increased investor interest, particularly among social finance actors, with MCB's transparency and governance track record enhancing its appeal for blended finance despite sector challenges.

Lessons/Conclusion

Integrating MEL frameworks into audited financial reporting strengthens internal governance and accountability while positioning financial institutions to attract sustainable investment. As Tanzania advances Vision 2025 and SDG commitments, standardising MEL tools across banking operations would help institutionalise this momentum and support resilient, community-responsive financial systems.

Keywords: Financial sustainability; MEL in banking; Governance; Impact investment; Tanzania