Utilisation of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems by Development Agencies: The Case of the UNDP in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The study examines the utilisation of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (M&Es) by international development agencies, using the UNDP in Zimbabwe as the case study. M&Es are now used across the world by organisations to track progress, measure and evaluate outcomes. To this end, the study reviewed success story country experiences in Australia, Sri Lanka and Uganda as a basis for a comparative analysis with UNDP systems. In-depth interviews were also conducted with various categories of UNDP staff. The study noted that the UNDP in Zimbabwe is yet to install a comprehensive M&E system. It does not have a standalone monitoring and evaluation department. Its systems are at the formulation stage. The critical specialist personnel for the monitoring and evaluation function are yet to be recruited. Clear-cut baseline and performance indicators are also to be established. There is also low note systematic use of evaluation findings from previous programmes while its evaluation approaches have a disturbing skew towards the quantitative. Such overly quantitative approaches carry the risk of sidelining the impact of contextual factors in development programmes and projects. Against this backdrop, the study recommends speedy implementation of the M&E systems through the formulation of appropriate system designs and baseline indicators, strict and routine follow-ups on the implementation of evaluation findings and use of multi-disciplinary evaluation frameworks. Specialist services unit for monitoring and evaluation should be established to cater for technical challenges in the designing and implementation of M&E systems.

1.0 Introduction

There is a growing realisation of the need of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (M&Es) across the globe. Cognizant of the capacities of such systems in governments and public organizations, a number of countries are working towards installing the systems. This emerging consensus arises from widespread displeasure with the performance of development programmes in many countries today, especially in the wake of worsening poverty levels, malnutrition, low living standards, ill health, among other challenges. Scenarios suggest that the expected delivery of various development projects and programmes has not been forthcoming. Even those programmes with the right technologies and enough funds seem to perform poorly. Literature review generally attributes these scenarios to neglect of the management function, especially failure to appreciate the complementarities among technology, capital and management (Sivagnanasothy, 2007; Kusek, *et al*, 2004:19). The management problem has festered over the years, and is still negatively affecting the performance of development policies, programmes and projects. As further argued by Sivagnanasothy, p:1), although in Sri Lanka it is widely accepted that Monitoring and Evaluation Systems are crucial management tools, their smooth and effective operationalization has been impeded by management lapses.

For instance, ex post evaluations are done late, hence not contributing much to strategic decision-making in the implementation of policies, programmes and projects. The problem therefore is one of management weaknesses whereby inadequate attention is paid to the implementation of projects and programmes. The case for effectiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in development agencies then is just but one of the most crucial management facets whose effectiveness contributes immensely towards performance of development programmes. As Kusek, *et al*, (2004:19) argue, Monitoring and Evaluation Systems are crucial management tools in achieving results and meeting specific targets. These systems are also essential tracking instruments that are part of organizational management toolkits. This justifies the greater need for an effective 'tracking system' in the operation of development programmes especially for checking on progress and channelling of resources at any point in the life cycle of a programme. The question is what stakes do Monitoring and Evaluation Systems hold in the overall performance of development programmes? So, a single management dimension has been chosen for study. Hence, this study is not a comprehensive undertaking on management problems bedevilling development programmes, but a part of the larger picture. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that development programmes and their outcomes are influenced by a number of variables of which management is only one.

The case study for this research is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which is the United Nations' global development network. It advocates for change and connects countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life (United Nations, 2008:41; www.UNDP.org). It is one of the United Nations' specialised agencies. Along the lines of specialisation, the United Nations Development Programme "serves as the United Nations' global development network specialising on programs to strengthen democratic governance in developing countries, fight poverty, improve health and education, protect the environment, and deal with crises" (Sachs, 2005:287). It also focuses on protection of human rights and empowerment of women in all of its programs. The UNDP was formed in 1965, and it operates in 166 countries, working with nations on solutions to global and national development challenges and developing local capacity. Additionally, the UNDP works internationally to help countries achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations, 2008:41). The organisation also provides expert advice, training, and grant support to developing countries.

The UNDP focuses on six developmental challenges. First, it supports national democratic transitions by providing policy advice and technical support, improving institutional and individual capacity within countries. Second, the UNDP helps countries develop strategies to combat poverty by expanding access to economic opportunities and resources, linking poverty programs with countries' larger goals and policies, and ensuring a greater voice for the poor. It also works at the macro level to reform trade, encourage debt relief and foreign investment, and ensure the poorest of the poor benefit from globalization. Third, the agency sponsors developmental pilot projects, promotes the role of women in development, and coordinates efforts between governments, NGOs, and outside donors. Gender equality and women empowerment are emphasised in all aspects of the agency's work. Fourth, it works to reduce the risk of armed conflicts or disasters, and promote early recovery after crises have occurred. Fifth, the UNDP works to help countries prevent further spreading and reduction of the impact of HIV/ AIDS. Sixth, as the poor are adversely affected by environmental degradation and lack of access to clean, affordable water, sanitation and energy services, the UNDP seeks to address environmental issues in order to improve developing countries' abilities to develop sustainably, increase human development and reduce poverty (Ibid.). Selection of the UNDP, as a case study for the research was based on its visibility and prominence in the development arena globally. Over the years, the UNDP has been active in longer term development programmes and is the axis of multilateral development cooperation (Koivusalo, *et al*, 1997:64). The UNDP began operations in Zimbabwe in 1980.

2.0 Methodology

Data gathering entailed desk and field research, the later mainly relying on interviews and questionnaires. The analytical framework employed is essentially qualitative, case study based. In analyzing the effectiveness of a Monitoring and Evaluation System, it is not only the technical side that matters, because the design, operationalisation, and maintenance of the System involve much of the human element with its failures, manipulations, emotions and judgments. This human side of the story had to be told too in the study.

Respondents were randomly drawn from a population of thirty-eight that comprised UNDP staff in the following categories: programmes officers, assistants, and managers.

These are more or less linked directly to the area of study, and their involvement in the operationalization of the Monitoring and Evaluation System. Purposive Sampling was utilized to select specialists in the area of M&Es from the UNDP, which included the two monitoring and evaluation focal points. These were chosen on the basis of their in-depth knowledge of the organization's Monitoring and Evaluation Systems designing, functioning and maintenance.

2.1 Justification of the Study

There has been an evolution in the field of monitoring and evaluation involving a movement away from traditional implementation-based approaches towards new results-based approaches. The latter relates to the aftermath of programme implementation. That is to say, organizations may successfully implement programmes and projects, but have they produced the actual intended results? Have they truly delivered the promises made to the stakeholders? Implied in the foregoing are demands for real, tangible and demonstrable results and performance in various programmes and projects implemented. There is also an increasing number of international initiatives and forces at work pushing governments, development agencies and NGOs in the direction of adopting management systems geared towards results. These include Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative, International Development Association funding, World Trade Organization (WTO) membership, European Union Structural Funds and Transparency International (Kusek, *et al*, 2004:3). MDGs are among the most ambitious of global initiatives to adopt a results-based approach toward poverty reduction and improvement in living standards; and they contain some elements of a results-based monitoring and evaluation approach. For instance, the MDG targets have been translated into a set of indicators that can measure progress.

Information generated from this study is of much value to a number of stakeholders, including academics, policy makers, development managers and practitioners as well as the general public interested in issues of development programmes management. By analysing the effectiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in development agencies, programme managers in government and policy makers will be enlightened by experiences, practice and operations in these organizations whose technical and organizational capacities are usually way ahead of many governments. So good practice in development agencies may lead to sensitization at political and policy levels, which may further lead to the installation of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in key decision-making centres of government. This also means that there will also be legal and budgetary support for the institutionalisation of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in government projects and programmes. Moreover, when a Monitoring and Evaluation System is institutionalised it serves as an integral part of the development policy or programme cycle to improve performance accountability and to provide effective feedback to improve planning, budgeting and policy making to achieve development effectiveness. Sensitization at political level may again influence the decision to adopt a national evaluation policy to guide evaluations.

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems are a relatively new concept. Hence, not much literature exists on the subject. In a way, it is a new area that has emerged with the calls for results-based management and/or performance-related management. So, to the academia this study will add to the small existing body of literature on the subject. To development managers and programmes personnel, results of the study will help in the replication and maximization of strengths of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems, as well as seek remedy for shortfalls in these systems' design, implementation and maintenance. The general public will also benefit from knowing the importance of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems as management tools in development programmes.

3.0 Conceptual Framework

This section reviews literature relating to the theory and practice of monitoring and evaluation. It discusses the definitions of key terms and dominant thinking on the subject. Case experiences from both countries and development agencies are reviewed to single out factors for success and factors for failure in the setting up and management of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. Impliedly, this means the identification of success cases, challenged cases, as well as cases of poor practice. For the study, this ultimately assists in the mapping of the general terrain for Monitoring and Evaluation Systems at a global scale. Understanding of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems presupposes appreciation of 'monitoring' and 'evaluation' as its conceptual building blocks. The terms monitoring and evaluation are distinct, yet complementary (Kusek, *et al*, 2004). Both are intended to measure and assess performance of programmes and projects, and to review progress.

3.1Monitoring

Monitoring is a routine, ongoing, internal activity which is used to collect information on a programme's activities, outputs, and outcomes to track its performance (Kusek, *et al*, 2004:13). As a process, monitoring systematically collects data against specified indicators at each stage of the programme/ project cycle. Hence there is evidence-based reporting on programme progress at every stage, relative to respective targets and outcomes. And it can be distilled from the foregoing that monitoring is a detective tool, continuously generating information that enables programme managers to make adjustments during the implementation phase of a programme/ project. So, it follows then, that for the tool to provide accurate, valid and consistent information usable to programme managers, it must be well-designed and functioning smoothly. Poorly designed or weak monitoring systems will automatically be poor detectors of programme performance status. Problem areas will go unnoticed, and subsequently, appropriate adjustments will not be made where they should. In a way, such a system will not be of any good use to any organization, because ideally a good monitoring system should produce continuous streams of current, valid and timeous data to programme management, aiding their day-to-day decision processes on programmes.

3.2 Evaluation

Evaluation, as gleaned from the OECD (2002:21), is a systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed project, programme, or policy. The aim is to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, development efficiency, effectiveness, and impact. The process of evaluation gives explanations on why results, targets and outcomes were, or were not, achieved. And this way, the concept addresses issues of causality for both programme success or programme failure, by highlighting the contributing factors in each case, to draw lessons for organizational learning and enable replication of positive performance. It is clear then, that any good evaluation system should provide explanations to any kind of programme results: poor results, positive results or mediocre performance of programmes. However, not all evaluation systems provide such kind of explanations owing to many inhibiting factors that may include structural challenges, implementation failures and resource constraints.

3.3 Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems are management toolkits that enable decision-makers to track progress and demonstrate the impacts of a given programme/ project. In the long run, the toolkits help organizations make decisions on the success, failure, relevance, efficiency and effectiveness of their programmes. Reference here is made to "toolkits" because they comprise the twin concepts of monitoring and evaluation, bringing together their capacities and the complementarities between them – in which case strengths and weaknesses inherent in each concept are espoused therewith. Hence it also follows that for good returns from the systems, both the monitoring system and the evaluation system must be well-designed, functional, and well-implemented. Any slack in either component automatically leads to derailing of progress in the managing of programmes and projects. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems provide important feedback about the progress in programmes/ projects. That is, the success or failure of projects, programmes, and policies throughout their respective life cycles. These systems constitute a powerful, continuous management tool that decision makers can use to improve performance, and demonstrate results. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (especially Results-Based) have a special capacity to add to the learning and knowledge process. These systems provide for learning and knowledge, since by providing continuous feedback to managers, they promote organizational learning through a cycle involving reflecting on progress, learning, and adjusting the course of programmes or projects where there is need (Kusek, *et al*, 2004:140). These systems have been designed to monitor and evaluate at all levels: macro, meso and micro levels, which can roughly be translated to policy, programme and project levels respectively.

Information supplied by Monitoring and Evaluation Systems is used as a crucial management tool in achieving results and meeting specific targets. Such information, which reveals the level of progress, performance and problems, is crucial to managers striving to achieve results (p20). As Baum, *et al*, (1985:362) argue, these systems are actually one of the "techniques" for managing programme/ project implementation, especially because they provide an early warning to project management about potential or actual problems. Subsequently, when problems are identified, this may raise questions about assumptions and strategy behind a given programme or project.

This way, they aid development managers make choices and decisions on running projects and programmes. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems can also aid in promoting greater transparency and accountability within organizations and government (Rubin, 1995:31).

3.4 Categories of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Review of literature points out two common categories of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: Implementation-Focused Monitoring and Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System. These are discussed below.

3.4.1 Implementation-Focused Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

The Implementation-Focused Monitoring and Evaluation Systems focus on monitoring and assessing how well a project, programme, or policy is being executed (Amjad, 2009:1). In that vein, Kusek, *et al*, (2004:15) argue that "implementation-focused M&E systems are designed to address compliance – the "did they do it" question. Did they mobilize the needed inputs? Did they undertake and complete the agreed activities? Did they deliver the intended outputs?" However, the noted weaknesses in this approach include the fact that it does not provide policymakers, programme managers, and stakeholders with an understanding of the success or failure of projects, programmes, or policies. This seems to be one of the major reasons why the approach lost favour in both the development community and the management community at large. This resulted in the shift in preference to Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Systems, which have since dominated the arena from the beginning of the twenty-first century.

3.4.2 Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Systems are tools for managing and tracking progress in programmes and projects. Contrary to Implementation-Focused Monitoring, Fukuda-Parr, *et al*, (2002:11), argue that Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Systems capture information on the success or failure of development programmes in achieving desired outcomes, and there is a systematic reporting on the progress towards outcomes. Results Monitoring Systems are designed to help answer questions such as: What are the goals of the organization? Are they being achieved? How can achievement be proven? Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Systems differ from Implementation-Focused Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in that they move beyond an emphasis on inputs and outputs to a greater focus on outcomes and impacts. So, preference for the Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation Systems is justifiable on the basis of their capacity to "tell" the success or failure as well as impacts and outcomes of programmes and projects. By doing so, they have successfully patched the holes in the former approach.

4.0 Theoretical Basis

4.1 Results-Based Management Approach

Monitoring and Evaluation Systems have their roots in Results-Based Management Approaches. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC, 2002:142) defines this approach as "a management strategy focusing on performance and achievement of outputs, outcomes and impacts". In this light, it is clear that monitoring and evaluation concepts draw on the Results-Based Management Approach, especially with its focus on demonstrable results, outputs and impacts from development programmes. In this vein, it should also be recalled that Monitoring and Evaluation Systems are "management toolkits" aiding decision-making in organizations, and enhancing development effectiveness through delivery of results. The approach improves organizational performance by applying traditional tools such as results frameworks, strategic planning, monitoring, and program evaluation (www.adb.org/documents/guidelines/mfdr/introduction-to- results_management/default.asp). It was initially applied in private sector organizations and moved to the public sector as part of reform efforts in the 1980s and 1990s. It has increasingly been implemented in development agencies and multilateral organizations.

5.0 Country Experiences

There is a growing realisation of the need of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems across the globe. Cognizant of the capacities of such systems in governments and public organizations, a number of countries have worked towards installing the systems. Among such countries are Australia, Sri Lanka, and Uganda.

5.1 Australia

The Australian case is one of the commonly cited success cases with building Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. Australia was a pioneer in developing Monitoring and Evaluation Systems, starting in 1987. Two main factors contributed to success in building strong evaluation systems. First, budgetary constraints prompted the government to look at ways of achieving greater value for money. Second, Australia also had two important institutional champions for evaluation – the Department of Finance and the Australian National Audit Office (Morra, *et al*, 2009:53). It also had the support of cabinet members and key ministers, who placed importance on using evaluation findings to better inform decision-making. Weaknesses surrounding the Monitoring and Evaluation Systems in Australia include some noted uneven quality of evaluations due to lack of evaluation training. There was also a natural inclination by civil servants towards avoiding evaluations which they viewed with grave suspicion. From the case of Australia a number of lessons can be drawn. For instance, it is clear that a combination of positive factors – such as resource availability, strong political will, organizational capacity, structural solidity and strong Monitoring and Evaluation Systems design, all lead to overall success.

5.2 Uganda

The Government of Uganda developed the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), which is incorporated into its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. The country is still experiencing coordination and harmonization difficulties with respect to evaluation and the PEAP (Morra, *et al*, 2009:53). For example, the PEAP monitoring and evaluation regime is characterised by the separation of poverty monitoring and response monitoring, although both are coordinated by the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development (MFPED). A review carried out in 2007 reported several problems with Monitoring and Evaluation System. For instance, sector ministry outcomes and outputs, measurable indicators, baselines and targets were not clear. Again, there is no uniformity in evaluation standards within ministries.

From the Ugandan case, the major lesson is that where there are weaknesses in design, implementation or structural and resource challenges, the system is very much likely to falter in bringing out expected standards of performance. It will be a challenged system altogether. A number of constraints are quite obvious from the case: these include implementation failures where responsible personnel fail, manipulate or falter in operating the system well. There are also serious structural problems as manifested in the lack of coordination and harmonization between government units in the operationalisation of the system. Another strand of weaknesses is in the form of design weaknesses where data collection, reporting structures, indicator construction are very shoddy and dysfunctional. Resource constraints are also adding to the woes the nation faces in its attempt to build a well-functioning Monitoring and Evaluation System.

5.3 Sri Lanka

The Government of Sri Lanka adopted the idea of having a Monitoring and Evaluation System after realizing the need for development effective and accountable delivery of tangible results. The experience of Sri Lanka highlights strengths of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems design, and weaknesses in the implementation part. In terms of design, the system is functional, and has fewer loopholes. Lamentably, this positive picture is counterbalanced by implementation failures where management lapses are commonplace. There is an absence of effective use of the system to achieve programme goals and development effectiveness as expected.

The country has a strong comprehensive web-based national e-project monitoring system that captures implementation progress as well as results of all key development projects and programmes. The system provides policymakers and senior officials with on-line and real time access to progress information. The system generates early warnings and assists in trouble shooting of problem projects and projects behind schedule (Sivagnanasothy, 2007:1). The system identifies bottlenecks, delays, issues and constraints in the implementation of projects and any additional needs of the executing agency. However, monitoring and evaluation institutions and the planning units seem to function in isolation and do not have an effective formalized feedback arrangement to integrate lessons into the planning and design of new projects (p4). Moreover, ex post evaluations are done late and are treated as a "post-mortem" exercise, hence not contributing much to strategic decision-making. From the case of Sri Lanka, the most obvious lesson is that in a Monitoring and Evaluation System, design strengths should be accompanied by implementation and/or management strengths.

Having one component weak and another strong will only dilute the power of the stronger component, thereby negatively affecting the smooth-functioning of the whole system.

5.4 Development Agencies

5.4.1 International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

IFAD adopted Monitoring and Evaluation Systems a few decades ago. The idea was to use them for tracking progress, reporting success or failure of programmes and projects. There was need to assess the performance of such programmes on the basis of outputs and benefits that the programmes were expected to produce. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems were also to be used as management tools. However, the IFAD case manifests a situation where the Monitoring and Evaluation System is highly challenged because of the huge amount of constraints and weaknesses. Constraints therein are two-pronged: there are design constraints and implementation constraints, and these combine to give a scenario of gross failure of the system altogether. A review of most IFAD evaluation reports prepared since 1990 revealed an overall picture that was not favourable as many projects saw monitoring and evaluation as a policing exercise, which led to a lack of commitment, mistrust or even resistance to learning from experience (www.ifad.org/evaluation/oe/process/guide/index.htm). It was also found that irrelevant information is produced through monitoring as it focuses only on physical and financial aspects and ignores factors such as project outreach, effect and impact. Furthermore, there is a widespread lack of integration and cooperation between the monitoring and evaluation function and project management. The case of IFAD has some lessons that can be noted. For example, that a Monitoring and Evaluation System should be perfected in both the monitoring and evaluation components. Neither component should be weak as is the case with Sri Lanka where one component is strong and another weak. In a simple statement, strength should be counterbalanced by strength. That is to say, make strong the evaluation component as you make strong the monitoring component – for positive results.

6.0 Observed Challenges in Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Several lessons can be drawn from the sampled country and development agency experiences. For instance, it can be deduced that a number of factors account for success with Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. These include resource availability – that is, ample time, sufficient finances, adequate skilled personnel and ultimately, political champions who are committed to the cause of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. It is the combination of these factors that accounts for success with these Systems. Conversely, the absence of any or all the factors mostly produces dismal results. And furthermore, for any system to be functional, design strengths should be accompanied by implementation strengths. A slack in design or implementation translates to a slack in the whole system's performance.

In addition, there are numerous technical challenges in the application and institutionalization of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems as there are also less obvious political and organizational challenges to be considered. From the reviewed cases above, problems and challenges fall into two broad strands of design weaknesses and implementation weaknesses. Design weaknesses entail shoddy or poor construction of the whole or part of the Monitoring and Evaluation System. This is manifested in the form of too many or too few performance indicators, irrelevant baseline data, uncoordinated reporting structures, delays in relaying required feedback to managers (hence negatively impacting on their decision-making), duplicative monitoring systems, among other problems. Implementation weaknesses and/or failures entail much of the human element with all its manipulations, sabotage, errors, incapacity and even opposition. These are in the form of management lapses where implementation of the system is poorly done.

Related challenges affecting these systems include structural constraints and organizational loopholes, especially at country level, where there is need for coordination and harmonization of systems as well as a favourable administrative culture. In addition to challenges above, there are other inherent challenges besides. For example, there is an inherent challenge to balance different levels of methodological rigour and quality of data, given the different uses of data. For management purposes, for example, usually moderate levels of rigour and quality of data are required, while impact assessment requires high levels of methodological rigour and quality (www.mfdr.org/rt3/Glance/Documents/E&m_final.pdf) With regards to Monitoring and Evaluation Systems, Kusek, *et al*, (2004:40), have argued that experts have devised a number of different models for building these systems, but often miss the complexities of the wider country, government, or sector context.

The needs of the end-users are often vaguely understood by those ready to start the monitoring and evaluation building process. In addition, too little emphasis is placed on existing political, organizational, cultural factors and contexts (Ibid.p40).

7.0 Case Study Findings

Research findings are presented under thematic sub-headings with diagrams and charts providing descriptive analysis. Analysis of findings combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, however, with a strong inclination towards case and content analysis.

7.1 The Status of UNDP Monitoring and Evaluation

The UNDP does not yet have a standalone monitoring and evaluation department or unit. The organization is in its transition period to establishing a fully-fledged standalone department for monitoring and evaluation. At present, the organization has a makeshift arrangement of using two programmes officers as monitoring and evaluation focal points. These are the principal staff for the monitoring and evaluation function in the organization. Since the monitoring and evaluation department is still non-existent, the focal points have been sourced from other departments. The onus of designing and subsequently managing and implementing the organization's Monitoring and Evaluation System rests on both monitoring and evaluation focal points and other programmes officers and their assistants. However, noteworthy is the fact that among all these officers none is a monitoring and evaluation specialist *per se*. And inference into this point would reveal a picture of an organization that is currently understaffed given the absence of monitoring and evaluation specialist personnel, although services of such personnel are deemed available in the organization. The issue of understaffing closely follows the scenario of a generally lean staff base at the UNDP – which has no more than forty (40) persons staffing the whole organization.

While the UNDP uses the Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation System in its development programmes, the operational framework for monitoring and evaluation is drawn from a handbook entitled *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results (2009)*. This is a global resource for the UNDP family worldwide. So, for UNDP Zimbabwe this resource is used almost entirely as a monitoring and evaluation manual which they follow to the letter. However, the handbook does not prescribe indicators for country-specific programmes/ projects. So, the burden again rests on a country's UNDP programmes officers to source baselines and construct relevant indicators for country-specific programmes and projects.

7.2 System Design

7.2.1 Baseline Data

Interviews with programmes officers, lead programme specialist, and the two focal points for monitoring and evaluation revealed that there is a serious lack of up-to-date statistical data, which is more or less, baseline data, upon which performance indicators are constructed. The baseline data for at least five programmes and projects sampled rely on inappropriate baselines and subsequently irrelevant indicators. Such baselines were simply drawn from those used in past programmes. Normally, each programme should have its own baselines specifically for that particular programme, because development programmes often differ on the targets they aim and the social ills they seek to address. Hence, baselines for an educational programme cannot be used in a programme on governance or health.

Statistical capacity is an essential component for building Monitoring and Evaluation Systems. Information and data should be valid, verifiable and transparent. The practice of using inappropriate baselines defeats the whole concept of "data quality triangle", which encompasses elements of data reliability, data validity and data timeliness (Kusek, *et al*, 2004:108 – 9). Data reliability is the extent to which the data system is stable and consistent over time and space. Data validity refers to the extent to which indicators clearly and directly measure the performance intended to be measured. Data timeliness consists of three elements: frequency (how often data are collected); currency (how recently data have been collected); and accessibility (data availability to support management decisions), (Ibid.). So from the foregoing, the data quality triangle in UNDP programmes and projects comes out as a concept that is not properly and consistently applied in the organization. Credibility is also one of the most essential needs of any monitoring system. Valid and reliable data help ensure the credibility of the system. They are actually a prerequisite for system credibility.

It follows that where data are invalid, irrelevant and unreliable as is the case at the UNDP, the monitoring system automatically becomes suspect too, since it is set up on incorrect data. In addition, given the scenario of unavailability of reliable and valid baseline data, the obvious temptation to use data from previous different programmes is almost unavoidable for many organizations who then make-do with available data, howsoever irrelevant. And this deals a heavy blow on proper system functionality.

7.3 Indicators

Documentary search as well as interviews with programmes officers and their assistants reveal that the UNDP has pre-designed indicators for the whole UNDP family globally, for some development programmes such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Human Development Goals. This means that indicators for such programmes are simply designed at the UNDP headquarters in New York, and churned out to every branch worldwide as benchmarks for tracking progress. Pre-designed indicators are those indicators established independently of an individual country, organization, programme, or sector context. Strengths of using pre-designed indicators are that they can be aggregated across similar projects and programmes, and they reduce the cost of constructing multiple unique measurement systems. However, pre-designed indicators may not be relevant to a given country or organizational context. As Kusek, *et al*, (2004:74) argue, indicators should be internally driven and tailored to the needs of the organization and to the information requirements of the managers. Ideally and to the extent possible, it is best to develop indicators to meet specific needs because the appropriate choice of performance indicators differs for different countries, time, context and sectors.

7.4 Technical Aspects

Research findings point to some technical challenges involved in the setting up and operationalisation and/or implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation System in the organization. Generally, monitoring and evaluation is a technical field, demanding much of skilled personnel and appropriate technology to set up and manage the systems. The UNDP system is a computerised system – making the need for specialised services very clear. Technically trained staffs are a must, because organisations need to technically monitor and track progress at each level of the Monitoring and Evaluation System – at the input, output, outcome and impact levels. But as highlighted above, there are no technical persons to adequately perform the monitoring and evaluation function. This has complicated the situation for the organization which is currently relying on borrowed and irrelevant staff from established departments for its monitoring and evaluation function. The terms "borrowed" and "irrelevant" are used here to highlight the fact that the staff being used for the monitoring and evaluation function actually have their own defined areas of specialisation – apart from monitoring and evaluation – where they have been employed on the basis of appropriateness of their skills in their particular departments.

Research also revealed that the organization's programmes officers still need skills and knowledge to adequately set up and manage the Monitoring and Evaluation function effectively and to use the system correctly. Related challenges also included the apparent difficulty in setting up or designing programmes that will subsequently be monitored. This factor is reminiscent of the experience of Uganda where skills shortage was a visible factor contributing to the ineffectiveness of the Monitoring and Evaluation System. When reference is made to the need for capacity in setting up these systems, it should be a comprehensive picture implying financial capacity, human capacity, time and space capacity (adequacy), and technology capacity (that is, adequate technology levels). A shortfall in any dimension of capacity negatively impacts on system performance. It is a common inhibiting factor in a number of developing countries where adequate resources are almost a perennial problem. Uganda epitomises the experience.

### 7.5 Performance Gaps

7.5.1 Learning from Experience

Interviews with the two UNDP monitoring and evaluation focal points revealed that there is no systematic use of findings from evaluations of completed programmes and projects. This factor is worsened by the fact that the UNDP as an organization is predominantly a funder of development programmes, and not necessarily the implementer of many of these programmes. For example, they may fund programmes for the Parliament, the Department of Community Development, Department of Social Welfare, among others who may fall into the UNDP's special areas of interest. In either case, such units will retain the onus to implement the funded programmes. So it is from this point that learning from experience is not going on as it should.

The funded departments are not systematically using evaluation findings as is necessary – in which case such findings will be co-owned between the UNDP and the funded unit. This on its own constitutes a performance gap in the performance of the Monitoring and Evaluation System because using findings to improve performance is the main purpose of setting up a Monitoring and Evaluation System. Findings from programme evaluations trigger in-depth examination on the existing performance problems and the necessary corrections. So, where there is no systematic use of findings and a general lack of implementation of evaluation results, the whole notion of Monitoring and Evaluation systems as "powerful management tools" helping decision makers improve performance is defeated. What should happen in practice is that learning must be incorporated into the overall programming cycle through an effective feedback system (UNDP, 2002:75). This makes it a case of implementation failure for the UNDP, since their "manual" clearly states that "knowledge gained from monitoring and evaluation is at the core of the UNDP organizational learning" (p76). Lessons from evaluations of programmes and projects should be considered when new programmes are designed and when new outcomes are formulated.

7.6 Use of Statistical Evaluation Methods

From the documentary search conducted, it is clear that the UNDP relies mostly on strong quantitative evaluation designs which emphasise statistical rigour and econometric analysis. These are mostly experimental designs borrowing heavily from methods in the natural sciences. The strengths of such methods lie in their capacity to bring accurate calculations where frequencies and numerics are involved. However, one notable demerit is their inability to explain the contextual and social dimensions in the evaluations they are employed. It is a common argument (for instance, Freeman, *et al*, 1980) that statistical methods are limited in their ability to "ask" important questions about the social, cultural and political context within which development problems are embedded. Many kinds of econometric and statistical analyses fail to examine what actually happens during the process of project or programme implementation and consequently, are unable to determine the extent to which failure to achieve intended impacts is due to "design failure" or to "implementation failure". In a sense, use of statistical methods excludes both process and contextual analysis in the various programmes. Such methods do not consider or incorporate the local, social context in which the programme is implemented, which in turn accounts for significant differences in the outcomes of projects in different locations. The ideal situation is presented diagrammatically below in the model for capturing the process and contextual factors involved in development programmes.

Figure 1: Process and Contextual Factors in Development Programmes

KEY
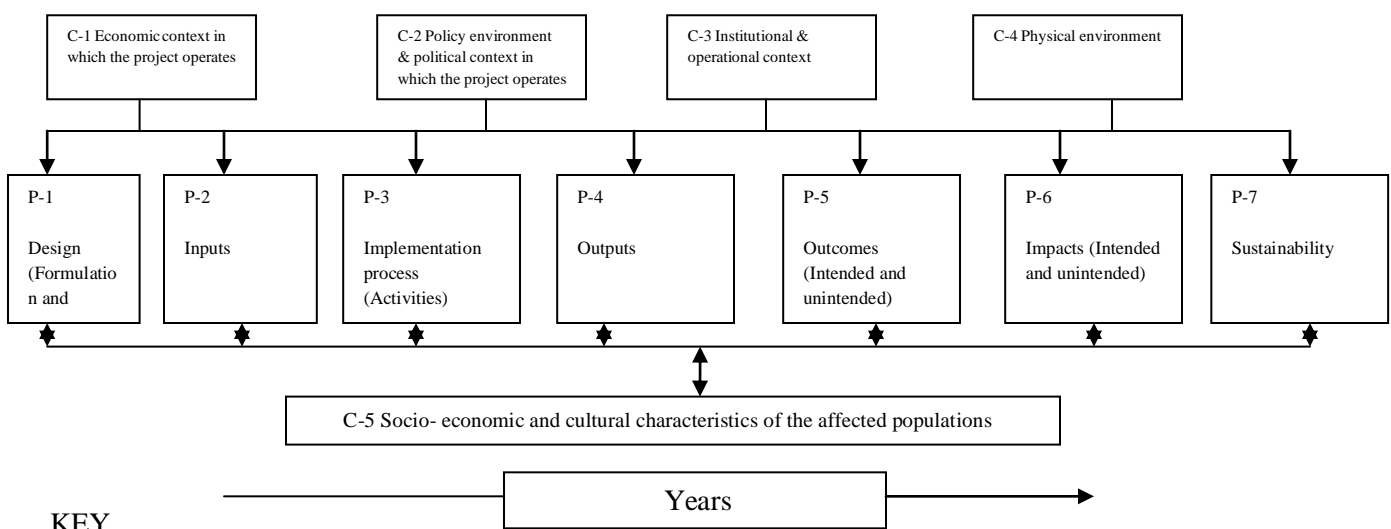
C-1 – C-5 Contextual Factors
P1 – P-7   Process Stages

Source: Bamberger, *et al*, (2010) "Using Mixed Methods in Monitoring and Evaluation: Experiences from International Development", *Policy Research Working Paper No.5245*, p14

For good returns in evaluating programmes therefore, statistical methods should be merged with qualitative methods that cater for the social and contextual factors. That is to say, econometric analysis could be used alongside ethnography, observations, focus groups discussions, interviews, questionnaires, and other related approaches, to give a full picture on contributing factors in the performance of programmes.

7.7 Pre-test – Post-test Evaluation Designs

Following the discussion on use of statistical methods, pre-test – post-test evaluation designs are commonly used in UNDP programmes, according to documentary search. This method involves longitudinal measurement of programme variables. It compares the results of a programme after a period of implementation, with conditions existing prior to its inception. It collects data at the start and end of the project and do not examine what happened during the process of project implementation and how this might have affected outcomes. In the UNDP, this approach is common in programmes that are related to poverty reduction.

One of the most notable demerits of this approach is that it is not free from contamination effects or intervening variables, which cannot readily be accounted for. The other problem with this design is that it does not allow for ongoing monitoring or formative evaluation. This makes the monitoring system a challenged system altogether, because an ideal system should be producing continuous streams of data for day-to-day managerial purposes. And since effective monitoring is necessary for effective evaluation, it follows that a malfunctioning monitoring system leads to poor programme/ project evaluation. Hence in the UNDP programmes where pre-test – post-test evaluation design has been used it has been difficult to explain the results, since causal linkages between such results and programme inputs are complicated by contaminating influences. So, in order to arrive at the net programme effects, it becomes necessary to 'purify' the outcomes by eliminating contaminating elements – which is a process that cannot easily be done.

7.8 The Constraints

7.8.1 The Human Factor

The human factor, as hinted to above, is part of the resource needs for establishing and managing an effective Monitoring and Evaluation System. Interviews and questionnaires with programme officers exposed the need for these officers – as system managers – to effectively adhere to system requirements for better results from it. Designing, and setting up a Monitoring and Evaluation System that can produce relevant information on the performance of programmes requires experience, skill, and real institutional capacity. This capacity, for a results-based Monitoring and Evaluation System has to include, at the minimum, the ability to successfully construct indicators; ability to collect, aggregate, analyse, and report on the performance data in relation to the indicators and their baselines.

At the UNDP, there is a clear absence (or lack) of specialised personnel to undertake the monitoring and evaluation function. This constitutes part of implementation failure where, as was the case with Sri Lanka, system design may be good but the implementers fall short in doing their job adequately.

7.9 Organizational Challenges

The UNDP monitoring and evaluation focal points were very clear on the fact that until recently, monitoring and evaluation as a concept has been seen as an add-on task, "coming in as a parenthesis". In other words, it was disaggregated and detached from mainstream programme cycling until such programmes were completed. As highlighted earlier, monitoring and evaluation are continuous tasks that ought to be carried out on an ongoing basis. For instance, evaluations can be classified on the basis of timing: ex ante evaluation, mid-term evaluation, terminal evaluation and ex post evaluation. Hence making the tasks add-on items reverses the expected normal process, contributing to system ineffectiveness at the end of the day. The 'neglect' of monitoring and evaluation at the UNDP is further compounded by the sad fact that despite being a giant in development practice, the UNDP does not yet have an established monitoring and evaluation department or unit. By implication, the functions that ought to be carried out by such a department are still being done elsewhere, and by inappropriate personnel.

The experience of the UNDP in monitoring and evaluation is almost similar to that of the reviewed cases in the second chapter. Given the fact that the UNDP uses the *Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results (2009)* as their monitoring and evaluation 'manual', it seems the problem is not necessarily with system design as highlighted in the responses of interviewed cases. This 'manual' itself states all that needs to be done in monitoring and evaluation, but sadly not everything is followed as given. At some points, some steps are skipped altogether. So, it is the implementation of the system that is faulty. This compares favourably with the Sri Lankan experience, where the design was good, and the implementation poor. Factors that contribute to system weaknesses in the UNDP are similar to those that were seen obtaining in the case of Uganda: resource constraints. There are differences in scale however. The UNDP suffers this setback only in the form of personnel shortages, while the latter suffers such constraints in both financial inadequacy, lack of political champions, technology, institutional and human capacity. Presence of such factors contributes immensely to system ineffectiveness.

8.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

8.1 Conclusions

8.1.1 System Design

On system design, the UNDP suffers the lack of up-to-date statistical data for programme baselines. As a result, the organization is reverting to use of inappropriate baselines, which is statistical data from other programmes irrespective of their relevance, validity and timeliness. Baselines form the basis of indicator construction. So, indicators being used in development programmes are irrelevant – for inappropriate baselines can only result in inappropriate indicators. Furthermore, for some development programmes the UNDP uses pre-designed indicators regardless of country, sector or organizational context in which they are applied. And the inescapable questions of their relevance in every country, organization or sector in this heterogeneous world remain unanswered. System design is further weakened by the lack of technical capacity to adequately perform the monitoring and evaluation function.

8.1.2 Performance Gaps

On performance gaps, it can be deduced that for many development programmes, there is a lack of learning from experience and a lack of systematic use of findings from past programme evaluations, where lessons ought to be drawn. Performance gaps are also widened by the organization's use of strong statistical evaluation designs, which fail to account for the role of contextual factors such as social, political, cultural, economic and institutional factors in the overall impact of development programmes and projects. Again, the use of pre-test – post-test evaluation designs has also not proved noble enough, because this type of design fails to do away with contaminating effects that can either enhance or mask programme results and outcomes.

8.1.3 Constraints

It can be concluded that the UNDP's constraints currently are two-pronged namely, the human factor and organizational challenges. Specialized human resources for monitoring and evaluation are lacking. These would be expected to cater for the lack of technical capacity cited above. In addition, the UNDP as an organization has a demonstrable disregard for the monitoring and evaluation function, which has seen it deferring the full incorporation of the function into its development programmes cycles. This also follows the fact that there is no standalone monitoring and evaluation department or unit, as should be the case for any organization that undertakes the function in its operations.

Cognizant of the foregoing conclusions, the overall conclusion that can be made on the UNDP's Monitoring and Evaluation System is that it is highly challenged to be an effective system. Inhibitive factors fall into the two categories of design failures and implementation failures, which, when combined, make the Monitoring and Evaluation System ineffective – contributing to lack of full realization of development goals in the development programmes and projects the organization runs.

8.2 Recommendations

8.2.1 Baseline Data

Since the reliability, validity and relevance of any monitoring system is strongly based upon the availability of valid and relevant baseline data, it is recommended that up-to-date statistical and other data be acquired prior to programme inception. Possible alternative sources may include the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and other related organizations such as Population Services International (PSI). The UNDP may also revert to gathering its own primary data through methods such as on-site observations, group interviews, questionnaires, extant reports and documents. These methods would be used in a triangulating fashion.

8.2.2 Indicators

Once more, availability of reliable and relevant baseline data is a prerequisite for the construction of good performance indicators. It is emphasized here that there is a strong need for up-to-date baselines, for the accuracy of performance indicators. It is also recommended that the UNDP (Zimbabwe) desists from the use or reliance on pre-designed indicators which are often context-insensitive. While guidelines for the construction of performance indicators may be welcome from the UNDP headquarters, country offices should always construct context-specific indicators or tailor them to suit the country, sector or organizational conditions obtaining at a given time.

8.2.3 Evaluation Designs

Instead of relying on strong statistical evaluation designs and related pre-test – post-test evaluation designs, a mixed-method approach is recommended. This approach would combine both quantitative and qualitative methods as weaknesses or gaps in one method are compensated in the other. This approach may be termed methodological pluralism. For instance, while qualitative methods (interviews, focus group discussions, ethnography, participant observations) can easily detect the contextual factors attendant in a given environment, quantitative methods (correlation, regression analysis, scatter graphs, probability principles, statistical tests) would come in handy on determining accurate sampling, generalizability and replicability on specific population numbers.

8.2.4 Learning from Experience

For all UNDP programmes/ projects, there must be a follow up on evaluation findings and recommendations of each evaluation report. Such findings and recommendations represent the lessons learnt from completed programmes, and must be considered in the formulation of new programmes and projects. Where evaluations are co-owned (joint evaluations), as is the case with many of the UNDP's programmes, partners need to agree on what to do individually and collectively, and decide on the follow up mechanism that monitors the status of the changes being implemented in new programmes.

8.2.5 Organizational Challenges

It is clear that the lack of a monitoring and evaluation unit or department at the UNDP contributes immensely to the constraints the organization faces with regards to monitoring and evaluation. The UNDP therefore, should quickly establish a monitoring and evaluation department or unit for the monitoring and evaluation function in the organization. This unit would have its own key result areas that are part of the overall organizational performance plan. Moreover, the monitoring and evaluation function must be fully integrated into mainstream programme cycles to enable regular on-going monitoring and formative evaluation to take place.

8.2.6 Technical Aspects and the Human Factor

After setting up the monitoring and evaluation unit, the next priority should be the manning of the unit with technically skilled and adequately qualified personnel. Such personnel should be capable of designing, managing and implementing the Monitoring and Evaluation System in the organization. They should be able to adhere to the dictates of the system. Specialized personnel would also put a stop to the established custom of using staff from other departments to do monitoring and evaluation work. In line with the need for specialist services, the UNDP may also undertake training of its programmes officers on monitoring and evaluation issues since these are also strongly involved in the implementation of programmes and projects.

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