AN ASSESSMENT OF THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM OF THE CEREAL GROWERS ASSOCIATION

BY

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been submitted for award of a degree in any other university.

Signed: ..... Date: 18 November 2020

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This research project has been submitted for examination with our approval as the University Supervisors.

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Finally to my family and close friends, thank you for always encouraging me along the way.

DEDICATION

To my sons, Ryan K. and Jeremy R. The duo are a key source of motivation to keep me working hard.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AfrEA	African Evaluation Association
AGRA	Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa
CGA	Cereal Growers Association
FHI	Family Health International
IEG	Independent Evaluation Group (IEG)
IFC	International Fund Corporation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
M & E	Monitoring and evaluation (M&E)
NIMES	National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperate Society
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFP	World Food Programme

ABSTRACT

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are an integral part of project implementation as they measure achievements, contribute to learning and enhance accountability. A robust system ensures that the project objectives are met in the best way possible therefore assessment of M&E system is a very vital activity in any organization. This research project sought to determine the status of the M&E system of the Cereal Growers Association (CGA) and to make recommendations with a view of strengthening it.

The study was guided by an internationally acceptable M&E framework developed by UNAIDS (2008) and focused on all the 12 components as they are relevant and applicable. To assess the CGA's system, this research applied a cross-sectional research design as it is descriptive in nature thus allowing ability to system identify strengths, gaps and make recommendations. Mixed methods were used where both quantitative and qualitative data was collected from primary as well as well as secondary data sources. A total of 48 respondents were interviewed during the assessment.

A total of five out of the 12 components assessed met the international standards to a large extent and these include: organization structures within M&E; partnerships to plan, coordinate and manage M&E systems; M&E plan; routine programme monitoring and; surveys and surveillance. All the other remaining components met the standards to a moderate extent. From discussions with various respondents and analysis of data human capacity for M&E emerged as weakest M&E plan was the strongest.

It was noted that the system is useful in reporting programme implementation progress and informing management on strategic and risk planning. The system has also made good contribution towards enhancing donor accountability with M&E findings helping to strengthen funding proposals submitted by CGA.

The CGA's M&E system is good for showcasing and sharing with other national organizations such as the cooperative societies that bring members together to pursue common objectives such as production and marketing.

When considering the three broad categorization of M&E components as described by UNAIDS (2008), that is, those relating to people, partnerships and planning; those that relate to data collection, capture and verification and; components relating to data use in decision making. The last component dealing with using information to improve results came was the found to be the weakest hence there is need for the CGA to consider strengthening the aspects contained therein.

From the findings, it can be concluded that the CGA's M&E system is functional and strong and also it is meeting its objectives. This is backed by the findings that 42 percent of the components meet standards to a great extent and the remaining 58 percent meet them to a moderate extent. The system is good for showcasing and sharing with other national organizations such as cooperatives that bring farmers together to pursue common objectives such as production and marketing.

Finally, there is potential for the CGA to have one of strongest and robust M&E systems in Kenya. This argument is supported by the fact that there is a good M&E strategy which compares to those developed by international organizations. It was also noted that the senior management was keen to ensure M&E processes were strengthened implying that the system enjoys goodwill which is a key enabling factor for successful systems.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a critical component in any programme or project implementation. Organizations must ensure that progress is monitored and results are achieved and documented. A vibrant M&E system therefore is necessary to ensure that monitoring and evaluation functions are undertaken properly. With a good monitoring system in place, organizations are able to produce reliable and policy-relevant information in a timely manner (Kusek and Rist, 2004).

Monitoring encompasses continuous systematic collection of data on selected programme indicators. The data collected through monitoring provides stakeholders with information to determine whether the manner in which activities are implemented is both effective and efficient. Evaluation is periodic and is used to assess various aspects such as design, implementation and results for ongoing or complete programmes, projects or policies. Evaluations determine relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of interventions carried out (Kusek and Rist, 2004).

M&E system's precise definition might have slight variations across organizations. However, different literature point to a definition where it refers to the processes, tools and indicators that are used to measure whether a program or a project is implemented according to the plan (monitoring) and is achieving the anticipated result (s) (Evaluation Tools for Development, accessed online).

FHI 360 (2013) defines M&E system 'as a system designed to guide the process of collecting, analysing, and using data with the purpose of measuring and documenting achievements as well as continually informing program planning and policy decisions'. Thus, it is imperative for programmes to ensure that the systems in place are efficient and effective to facilitate proper guidance of the entire cycle. FHI further argues that in addition to issues related to data; it is equally important to ensure required resources such as financial and human are in

place. Additionally, necessary supplies, equipment and infrastructure to adequately support data production, analysis and utility should be availed.

M&E systems are useful as they provide organizations with a tool to enhance sound governance by providing information to support evidence-based policy decisions and evaluating effectiveness of programmes. International Monetary Fund (2005) and World Bank (2009) advocate for strong M&E systems as these promote effectiveness of development initiatives and accountability. Progressively, various institutions including governments and non- governmental organizations are experiencing increased demands for acceptable governance practices that uphold transparency and necessary accountability. The three if ensured will contribute to enhanced effectiveness in terms of development for both internal and external stakeholders (Hiller, 2002; Kusek and Rist, 2001; Levesque et al., 1996; World Bank, 2009; UNAIDS, 2009; Mackay, 2007; Mayne, 1997; Mayne and Goni, 1997; McCoy et al., 2005). To meet these demands, it is inevitable that results-based monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects must be strengthened (Binnendijk, 1999). International Monetary Fund (2005), observed that a functional M&E system is an influential public and programme management approach with great capability to improve how governance and programmes are managed.

Kusek and Rist (2004) postulates that an effective M&E system offers the much needed constant flow of useful information to meet the needs of both internal and external players. Internally, information gathered from the M&E system plays a central role as a management tool as it aids in ensuring that set targets and envisaged results are realized. To any organization, information on progress, performance and challenges is critical. To stakeholders external to the organization, the information generated is essential because interested players expect results and want to see demonstrable impacts from projects being implemented.

Various authors, including Mackay, 2007; FHI 2006 and UNAIDS 2008, argue that M&E systems help to clarify goals and objectives that an intervention seeks to achieve. In addition, the systems are critical in formulating and justifying budget requests. M&E systems would enhance and promote accountability by providing value for money through

demonstrating results. They have been described as a 'source of knowledge capital' because they contribute by making it possible for organizations to set a knowledge base of the kind of projects, programs, and policies that are successful. They help determine and document what works, what does not, and why. Further, the systems provide ongoing feedback in the management process of monitoring and evaluating progress towards a given goal. M&E systems are therefore are useful in promoting organizational learning.

Practitioners in M&E such as the Evaluation Society of Kenya (ESK) continue to argue that evaluation is yet to reach the level of operation that could be considered acceptable especially in most developing countries such as Kenya. ESK observes that there is limited focus on impacts because the evaluations undertaken seem to deal more with inputs and outputs. There seems to be a strong perception that key evaluations are driven by donors and activists. Issues related to human capacity are also highlighted as it is noted that there is a lack of professionalism for qualified practitioners. The situation is further exacerbated by limited numbers of evaluators that have academic training. Some authors and practitioners say that evaluations lack the properties of expert evaluations because those driving them are mainly inclined towards social science research approaches. Whereas the research background is useful, additional specific and distinct evaluation training is required for expert evaluations. In Kenya, another gap relate to the lack of central monitoring and evaluation of all government programs and projects which would be useful in providing a holistic picture on performance in relation to achieving Vision2030 . The sectors mainly undertake financial auditing and monitoring so as to make returns to the Ministry of Finance (Olwa, 2016).

With M&E being a fairly emerging field, it is important for each organization to have systems that will ensure progress is tracked, achievements are recorded, lessons learnt inform programme decision making and accountability is maintained. This is only possible if M&E systems are in place and regular independent assessment is undertaken to determine how well the systems meet the objectives that they are expected to achieve. Over the years, scholars and other development practitioners have realised the need to conduct assessments of M&E systems, an exercise that has proven useful more so in making recommendations for strengthening the systems.

The assessments have provided findings that are relevant to date and continue to inform other assessments. For instance, while assessing the NIMES, it was noted that inasmuch as M&E is a technical function, it is affected by political dynamics. The assessment's report argued that the non-approval of M&E policy and framework was an indication that there were political issues involved (Andersson, B. et al 2014). Challenges to do with human capacity including training and need for strong communication/information dissemination to policy makers, counties, development partners etc. were also identified.

According to World Bank (2000), there seemed to be consensus among stakeholders in development and evaluations that the benefits of M&E systems outstrip the cost of implementation. It was argued that there is a need to identify champions both administratively and politically to advance M&E agenda. In view of this argument, the champion if identified would be required to engage in active communication and advocacy activities amongst various players. Proper communication can only be possible if it is based on data and information which is only possible if a strong M&E system exists.

The present study examines the M&E system of the Central Growers Association in Kenya in an effort to establish the status of the development of the M&E practice in the NGO sector.

1.1.1. Cereal Growers Association

The Cereal Growers Association (CGA) is a national member-based farmer organization incorporated in August 1996, to bring both small and large scale cereal farmers together in addressing industry challenges in Kenya. The CGA's leading mandate has been the mobilization of farmers both small and large scale to provide a forum for collective action for both enhanced operational efficiency and advocacy while promoting linkage to input, produce markets and other business development services. The organization has a board of directors who provide overall direction and oversight and has recruited competent staff from different areas of expertise necessary for implementation (CGA M&E Plan, 2016).

According to CGA, the organization has over the years increasingly attracted donor funding and has successfully implemented a number of large scale projects. For instance, between

2003 and 2012, CGA implemented the USAID Kenya Maize Development Program (KMDP) in which it mobilized maize smallholder farmers into business oriented farmers' groups, supporting their access to new farming technologies and their participation in structured markets. The project was implemented in Western, North Rift and Lower Eastern areas in Kenya. Some key successes of the projects include that farmers were formally organized into farmer-based organizations and new linkages to input markets were created.

In 2009-2012, CGA implemented the Strengthening the Capacity of Cereal Farmers in Kenya to Access Markets Project. The project which was funded by Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) mobilized farmers into groups in Meru, Tharaka Nithi, Uasin Gishu, Trans Nzoia, Elgeyo Marakwet, Narok and Nakuru counties, then training them on post-harvest management and linked them to major buyers and other service providers. CGA also implemented the USAID COMPETE project (Narok in Kenya and Kongwa in Tanzania) and USAID Market Linkages Initiative (Makueni County) focusing on good agronomic practices, post-harvest management, aggregation and quality standards.

The CGA has also worked with United Nations organizations most notably the World Food Programme (WFP). With support from WFP, CGA has been implementing activities aimed at strengthening aggregation facilities owned by farmer groups and linking farmer groups to formal grain markets. Some of the projects cited above are a clear demonstration that CGA has been implementing large interventions hence a functioning M&E system is vital.

1.1.2. Cereal Growers Association's Monitoring and Evaluation System

An M&E system was established in 2016 and has dedicated staff to manage M&E activities. A fairly elaborate M&E plan is in place which according to the organization it aims at the tracking and measuring progress to inform and make a contribution to decision making process. There are four objectives articulated in the M&E plan and they include to; (i) document the progress, success, and failures of CGA and it programs; (ii) inform CGA's management decisions, strategic planning and risk management; (iii) demonstrate the outcomes and impacts of CGA and to determine whether these have been achieved cost effectively and; (iv) provide accountability to CGA stakeholders.

With numerous donor-funded projects and a fairly wide geographical coverage CGA has commitments against which to report on. To meet these commitments a good functioning M&E system is required. The existing plan articulates what is expected from different players; data collection and management; performance indicators at different levels; evaluation and resources required to implement M&E activities. Initial anecdotal evidence had indicated that CGA was already making conscious efforts towards ensuring that M&E capacity is strengthened (CGA M&E Plan, 2016).

By looking at the nature of CGA structure where the organization is made of membership from farmers and considering the issues of cooperative movement in Kenya, issues of governance come to the fore. As observed in 2000 by key stakeholders in M&E, principles of transparency and accountability are fundamental to good governance hence a need to promote structures and establishments that support them. Proper M&E practice is fundamental to these principles given the existing strong link between good governance and monitoring and evaluation. An appropriate accountability framework is necessary as it has potential to provide valuable information on efficiency, effectiveness and quality of programs to both governments as well as the citizens. The framework therefore offers opportunity and an incentive for continuous learning, for members, government officers among others. It is very clear that M&E is a core element of the of the larger governance framework (World Bank 2000).

1.2 Problem Statement

M&E is a fairly new field in Kenya as and as such many organizations are in the process of either developing or seeking ways to strengthen their systems. Existing literature indicate that it is common for organizations to have M&E systems that have never been assessed (Obunga 2017, Olwa 2016). This scenario holds true for CGA as its M&E system has never been assessed since it was put in place in 2016 and thus, it is not known to what extent it confirms to the set international standards.

It is important and recommended to carry periodic assessments of M&E systems as this enables programme management teams, donors, key stakeholders make appropriate programme decisions (FHI 360, 2013; Global Fund et al., 2006; UNAIDS, 2008; World Bank, 2009). Assessing the CGA's M&E system is in line with sector's best practices because this will identify its strengths and weaknesses that should be addressed to facilitate the ability of the organization to collect data and analyze information that would eventually lead to better results.

Findings from various studies indicate that there has been an increase in assessments of M&E systems over the years to ascertain how they (systems) conform to international standards (Obunga 2017). These assessments report challenges and gaps that limit functionality of M&E systems in informing decision making process. Assessing the CGA M&E system will seek to understand how the findings compare to those undertaken by previous organizations. As indicated by UNAIDS (2009) and World Bank (2009) assessment of M&E systems over time is necessary to ensure that they are well placed to inform better reporting of results.

In a nutshell, it would be important to assess the existing system. This will determine whether all the components of an M&E system are in place and functioning well. Given that CGA's M&E has never been assessed, it is important to undertake the exercise at this point to understand the extent to which the M&E system has been operationalized. Discussion with staff and management of CGA indicated that the review of the M&E system is welcome as the organization is keen on strengthening the M&E system as earlier indicated.

The assessment is therefore timely and will make a contribution to addressing a knowledge gap that has huge potential to improve overall programme implementation. This coupled with recommendations from various players that M&E should be assessed periodically provides a very strong basis for undertaking the first assessment of CGA's M&E system as it will not only provide the current status but also make suggestions for improvements.

1.3 Key Research Questions

- Does the CGA M&E system meet the established international M&E standards?
- What should be done to strengthen the CGA's M&E system?

1.4 Research Objectives

The general objective of the study is to determine the status of the CGA M&E system and make recommendations with a view of strengthening the system.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows;

1. Determine whether the CGA's M&E system complies with the established M&E System standards.
2. Identify challenges that the CGA M&E system might be facing.
3. Make recommendations on how to strengthen the CGA's M&E system.

1.5 Justification of the Study

The role of CGA in contributing to achievement of larger Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets cannot be ignored. For example, smallholder farmers have a critical role in achieving global food security and nutrition (Nwanze and Fan 2017). In Kenya, Food security is one of the pillars of the Presidents' Big Four Agenda thus attention to this sector is very relevant. Therefore, to gauge progress towards achieving targets related both SDGs and Kenya specific targets on contribution of smallholder farmers has to be monitored and evaluated through appropriate M&E systems.

The CGA's M&E system has never been assessed and this is an obvious and critical information gap that was addressed by this assessment. Initial informal discussions with the CGA staff had indicated that there is need to assess the organization's M&E system with a view to strengthening it. In its current form, the organization cannot confidently confirm whether the M&E system is functioning optimally as no review or assessment of the system has been undertaken. The CGA management and staff are very keen to understand how the organizational M&E system works with a view to strengthening it. The assessment was therefore timely and benefited from the good will and support from senior management and key staff in various units.

Since this is the first assessment of the M&E system, findings from the study shall serve as baseline and establish benchmarks against which progress and proposed improvements will be measured. With deliberate effort from the organization on strengthening M&E, it will be possible to measure progress against the values established during this study in future. Finally, this assessment might be useful in informing a similar exercise of the affiliated farmers' savings and credit cooperative society (SACCO). As CGA is supporting the management of the SACCO, the organization might consider undertaking a review of its M&E system based on findings, recommendations and lessons learnt from the assessment. The research therefore sought to address an existing knowledge gap by assessing the 12 key components of the system and make a contribution to advancing knowledge especially on performance of M&E systems for organizations working with farmers.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This assessment focused on the standard and the widely accepted 12 components of an M&E system to establish the status and make recommendations on how to strengthen any weaknesses that are highlighted. Response rates for government staff was low and only two agriculture officers were reached. Another limitation relates to an earlier argument that M&E is a fairly new field especially in Kenya. As observed by Olwa (2016), there is no adequate literature to guide scoring of an M&E system. For example, it is not clear whether an M&E system that scores 49 percent, should be graded as 'good' or 'poor'. Most of the literature on M&E system assessments focuses on how each component can be improved and areas to focus in order to strengthen the system.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises an assessment of available literature on M&E systems from various sources. From the literature review, a tested and used operational framework containing the 12 components of an M&E system was developed.

2.2 Monitoring and Evaluation System

M&E system is critical and helps in formulating and clarifying goals and objectives. One of the compelling arguments on M&E systems are those advanced by Umhlaba Development Services (2017). Umhlaba postulates that an operational system is a key requirement for managing development programs. M&E system comprises a set of processes across the various phases of program design cycle. The processes relate to planning; gathering and synthesising information; reflecting and reporting. Key to note is that enabling conditions and necessary capacities are required to effectively support the M&E system decision making and learning purposes. Simister (2009) explains M&E system as a conglomeration of processes, practices and of policies that make it possible for effective and systematic collection, management and utilization of M&E information.

M&E should be viewed as an integral support to all those involved in running or management of programs. Matafeni (2009) points out at the need to ensure that M&E meets some key requirements to inform successful programme implementation. These requirements include:-establishing M&E processes that will result to continuous learning for all players in program strategy and operations; making use of prevailing learning, communication and decision making processes amongst stakeholders as a basis for project orientated M&E; recognizing/appreciating the close association between M&E and management functions and finally; setting up required conditions and capacities for M&E to be adequately achieved.

It is very vital to ensure that M&E systems are sustained in organizations and this calls for adequate investments. In this assessment, I examined the six components of sustaining M&E

systems as advanced by Rist and Kusek (2004) and apply them in the context of CGA. Demand is the first component of M&E system. In the case of CGA, there is already a demand for a good system more so with a requirement by donors and members to track monitor and measure results. Secondly, clear roles and responsibilities is the second critical component. There has to be clarity in what roles will be played by different members of the teams. For instance, the management should identity the members responsible for data collection, analysis and reporting among other functions. CGA needs to consider roles played by teams across departments and both national and field offices.

The third and fourth vital elements of sustaining M&E systems are trustworthy and credible information; and accountability- both of which are also critical and relevant to CGA. In every organization, the system should generate credible and accurate information that clearly helps to articulate what works and what does not work. The information generated from the system should be available to all stakeholders and CGA should provide a scope for independent verification if need be. On accountability, data collected through M&E systems play a big role in demonstrating achievements and explaining use of resources allocated. Accountable systems ensure that problems are recognized and addressed appropriately.

Capacity and incentives are fifth and sixth components that are necessary for sustaining M&E systems in organizations. Experts in M&E argue that good technical skills especially in collection and analysis of data are important in addition to sound managerial skills to guide strategic goal setting and organizational development. Lastly, the role of incentives in sustaining M&E systems cannot be overlooked. Incentives will contribute towards enhancing use of information generated by M&E.

2.3 Importance of Monitoring and Evaluation System

According to UNAIDS (2008), M&E systems provide programmes with integral management tools by providing programme management teams, donors, decision makers as well as other key stakeholders with an opportunity to collect and analyze information on interventions and make decisions.

FHI (2006) advocates for developing M&E systems to enable teams meet four objectives namely; (i) define the desired impact of the research team's stakeholder engagement activities; (ii) justify the need and budget for these stakeholder engagement activities; (iii) increase the rigor of stakeholder engagement programs, including the potential need to change organization's strategy and action planning and; (iv) establish organization's accountability with the stakeholders.

M&E systems facilitate three key roles. First, M&E systems ensure more effective results-based management in programmes. This is in addition to addition to planning and implementation. Hence, they play a critical role in steering programmes and projects towards the achievement of development results. Secondly, M&E systems lead to improved institutional learning through the identification of lessons and systematic follow-up. Thirdly, the systems lead to strengthened accountability across programmes thereby promoting transparency and participation (United Nations, 2010).

2.4 Components of a Monitoring and Evaluation System

There are 12 components of M&E system that seem to be well agreed across the literature reviewed. This sub-section will endeavour to describe the twelve components. UNAIDS (2008) largely groups the components in to three broad categories, that is; Firstly, those relating to people, partnerships and planning (structure and organizational alignment for M&E systems; human capacity for M&E systems; M&E partnerships; M&E plans; costed M&E work plans; advocacy, communication, and culture for M&E systems). Secondly are those that relate to, collecting, capturing and verifying data (routine monitoring; periodic surveys; databases useful to M&E systems; Supportive supervision and data auditing; evaluation and research); and finally are components relating to data use in decision making (using information to improve results).

1. Organizational Structures with M&E Functions

This relates to the need to have precise authority and responsibility on matters related to M&E and processes for collective decision making. There should be a well-defined organization structure where an M&E unit exists. Further, description of tasks/jobs for staff in addition to adequate and skilled staffing levels are essential (UNAIDS, 2008).

2. Human Capacity for M&E

To enable optimal implementation of M&E, relevant staff should have the necessary technical expertise. An organization should therefore have defined skill sets for individuals tasked with M&E functions. Work force training, supervision and coaching should be embedded to ensure that the staff are well equipped with necessary skills to undertake M&E (UNAIDS, 2008).

3. Partnerships to Plan, Coordinate and Manage the M&E System

For systems to function properly, it is important to understand the role of different stakeholders. Sound coordination and communication mechanisms among those involved in the processes should be established. Therefore, a management mechanism that will permit M&E technical working group to uphold effective support to stakeholders and facilitate exchange of information is essential (UNAIDS, 2008).

4. National, Multi-sectoral M&E Plan

This component refers to need to institutionalize well-organized planning procedures for key M&E stakeholders. These plans would include provisions for periodic assessments and performance monitoring linked to the national strategic plan. Objectives, inputs, outputs and outcomes of the intended project with accompanying indicators to measure performance should be outlined in an M&E framework. A programme to train on the national M&E plan implementation should be organized for effective roll out (UNAIDS, 2008).

5. Costed M&E Work Plan

This provides details on activities, responsibilities, period, costs associated with the activities and funding sources. The plan further indicates financial, physical and human resources that are allocated towards implementation of plans. The work plan is to be updated periodically based on performance monitoring with annual frequency recommended (UNAIDS, 2008).

6. Advocacy, communication and culture for M&E

The focus here is on the existence of policies and strategies within the organization that explicitly target to promote M&E functions. It is imperative to develop communication and advocacy strategies that articulate activities and avails resources to spur national investment in the M&E system -and- facilitate evidence-based decision-making. Further, it is worthwhile to ensure that communications infrastructure for M&E-related information is established and maintained. In addition to this, a strong communication team with responsibility for the timely production and distribution of useful M&E information targeted at key audiences is required (UNAIDS, 2008).

7. Routine Programme Monitoring

Organizations should have standardized tools that are regularly updated and distributed to key players. Further, data collection, analysis and reporting should be anchored on appropriate up to date operational guidance. That is, M&E systems should have clearly defined ways of collecting and transferring data; how to report and also contain collaboration and coordination arrangements for stakeholders involved. A plan to provide training data collection tools and guidance for all relevant individuals is also critical (UNAIDS, 2008).

8. Surveys and Surveillance

It is useful to undertake strategic planning in a consistent manner to not only assist in outlining evidence-informed data needs but also establish how surveys and surveillance can be used to address the identified needs. Therefore, a clear strategy to guide data collection efforts for both surveillance and surveys is necessary under this component. Standard operating procedures to safeguard data security and confidentiality during sharing should be activated (UNAIDS, 2008). For instance, organizations could consider adequate encryption of all data prior to sharing.

9. National and Sub-national databases

This refers to connections among various applicable databases aimed at ensuring data consistency thus averting duplication of efforts. There should be a distinct national database that is properly managed to capture, verify, analyze and present programme monitoring data from all levels. Organizations should set up a technical working group that comprises of

teams from different sectors that have data collection and compilation responsibilities. The working group will among other responsibilities help in guiding procedures for harmonizing databases whilst assuring quality of data management and sharing protocols (UNAIDS, 2008).

10. Supportive Supervision and Data Auditing

For effective M&E systems, data quality and integrity has to be ensured. As such, guidelines for data collection at lower level of programme implementation; routine supervision visits and periodic data audits are central to this component of M&E systems. External data auditors and internal staff charged with the responsibility of collecting data should meet regularly to review data related issues (UNAIDS (2008).

11. Evaluation and Research Agenda

Evaluation and research are necessary for M&E systems as they play a number of roles including learning and enhancing accountability in programmes. UNAIDS (2008) recommends that programmes should put in place measures for carrying out national evaluation and research agenda and also maintain an updated national register of evaluation and research studies. Equally important is also to have a way of disseminating evaluation and research findings complete with a summary and explanation on how the findings affect programme implementation (UNAIDS 2008).

12. Data Dissemination and Use

M&E generates valuable information in the course of programme implementation. This information should be packaged in a manner that meets the needs of different audience/stakeholders. An elaborate communication strategy to identify effective communication products while also undertaking analysis to establish barriers to data use is required (UNAIDS, 2008).

2.5 Assessment of M&E Systems

M&E systems should undergo regular assessments to meet dual objectives of establishing performance as well as determining whether the system are functioning as they ought to be. This sub-section will highlight some work related on assessments/evaluations of M&E systems with a view to demonstrate the importance of these exercises.

Given the importance of M&E systems in organizations, practitioners recommend reviews of the systems. For instance, the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (2013) argues that there is need to conduct independent periodic reviews of M&E systems. Results from the reviews provide an objective assessment on areas that are working well and gaps/areas that require strengthening thus informing decision making for better results.

FHI 360 (2013) comes across as a champion for effective assessment of M&E systems as evidenced by previous research literature. The organization, developed a tool to support programmes improve the quality and effectiveness of their M&E systems which is anchored on the 12 components as developed by UNAIDS (2008). The assessment tool is aimed at playing various roles namely: - (i) avail an all-inclusive overview of the functionality, strengths, and weaknesses of a programme M&E system and chart a course for its future development; (ii) encourage alignment between programme, national, regional, and global data needs; (iii) Strengthen/build capacity in M&E systems analysis and improvement; (iv) encourage ongoing M&E systems development and evolution within a common framework of standards; (v) identify human resource and capacity building needs for a well-functioning M&E system and finally; (vi) help to develop specific quality improvement plans to strengthen the M&E system.

UNAIDS (2009) and other organizations under Monitoring & Evaluation Reference Group (MERG) developed M&E system assessment tool based on the 12 components discussed previously in this document. The organizations argue that the assessments aim at diagnosing strengths and weaknesses in M&E systems and to help achieve consensus on actions needed to improve M&E system performance. The purpose of the tool is to ensure a common approach in undertaking assessment as it seeks to ensure practitioners involved in assessments understand and administer questions in the same way.

In 2013, World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group assessed M&E systems of International Finance Corporation (IFC) and Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA). The report from this exercise asserts that there should be periodic reviews of M&E systems. The review/assessment enables organizations to understand both areas that work well and those that need attention to improve on performance. The review employed various methods such as desk reviews of various documents e.g. policies, procedures; samples of project-level M&E data, internal databases, memos and strategic documents. Review team also conducted interviews and surveys targeting both staff and management.

National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES) capacity support from Sweden was evaluated in 2014. The objective of the capacity support programme was to assess, develop and sustain the capacity necessary to ensure the effective implementation and coordination of NIMES. The objective was to be achieved through six areas including development of policies, strategies and tools for M&E and to strengthen M&E capacity at all levels. In addition to meeting programme specific objectives; one of the objectives of evaluating the Kenya's national M&E system was to extract general lessons learnt and recommendations aimed at further enhancement of the national capacity development in M&E (Andersson, B. et al 2014). This points to the importance of reviewing M&E system to take stock of achievements made, lessons learnt and use those to make improvements to the system.

Karani et. al (2014) undertook a study to understand the effective use of M&E systems in managing HIV/AIDS related projects. The study targeted local non-governmental organizations in Kenya. The researchers argued that there was consensus among players that it is essential to acknowledge positive results and take the necessary actions where required. From literature reviewed by the researchers it was evident that there was a need to pay more attention to the usage of M&E systems for project efficiency, effectiveness and impact. The researchers used interviews, questionnaires and observation as research instruments in this study that produced good recommendations. The national M&E framework was used to gauge the effectiveness of the targeting organizations in implementing their respective M&E frameworks.

Perhaps one of the most useful compilation on literature relating to assessment of M&E systems is presented by Mackay (2007). Systematic assessments of governments' M&E systems from a number of countries were undertaken on an established three criteria for assessment which included high utilization, good quality M&E and sustainability. This study highlights findings from the assessments in various countries to demonstrate status of M&E systems across different contexts below:

In Chile, it was noted that M&E information was used in budget analysis and decision making to impose program improvements on ministries as well as for government reporting to key stakeholders. Key weakness attributed to Chile's model was low level of ownership of findings generated from evaluations which were initiated by ministry of finance as it was described as centrally driven (Mackay (2007).

The Government of Columbia created its own M&E system in 1991 which was later accompanied by relevant policies and legal frameworks to facilitate optimal performance. It was observed that the government of Colombia managed to create a monitoring subsystem of government performance relative to all 320 presidential goals and the country's other development goals [Mackay 2007). The subsystem proved useful to the president because he used it to provide oversight to gauge ministerial and ministry performance as well as reporting to civil society. Evaluation findings were also influencing government decisions including allocation of resources albeit in a limited manner.

Australian M&E system was developed over a number of years (1987-1991) and set out to meet three objectives namely: - to inspire programme managers to use evaluation to enhance programmes' performance; to support decision making by the cabinet; and to enhance accountability in a devolved environment by providing formal evidence of programme managers' oversight and management of program resources. From the assessment, it emerged that the Australian M&E system highly used evaluation findings for budget analysis and policy analysis across various ministries/sectors. Participatory approach was employed as evaluations were conducted in a collaborative between finance department, other central departments, and sector departments. Weaknesses included

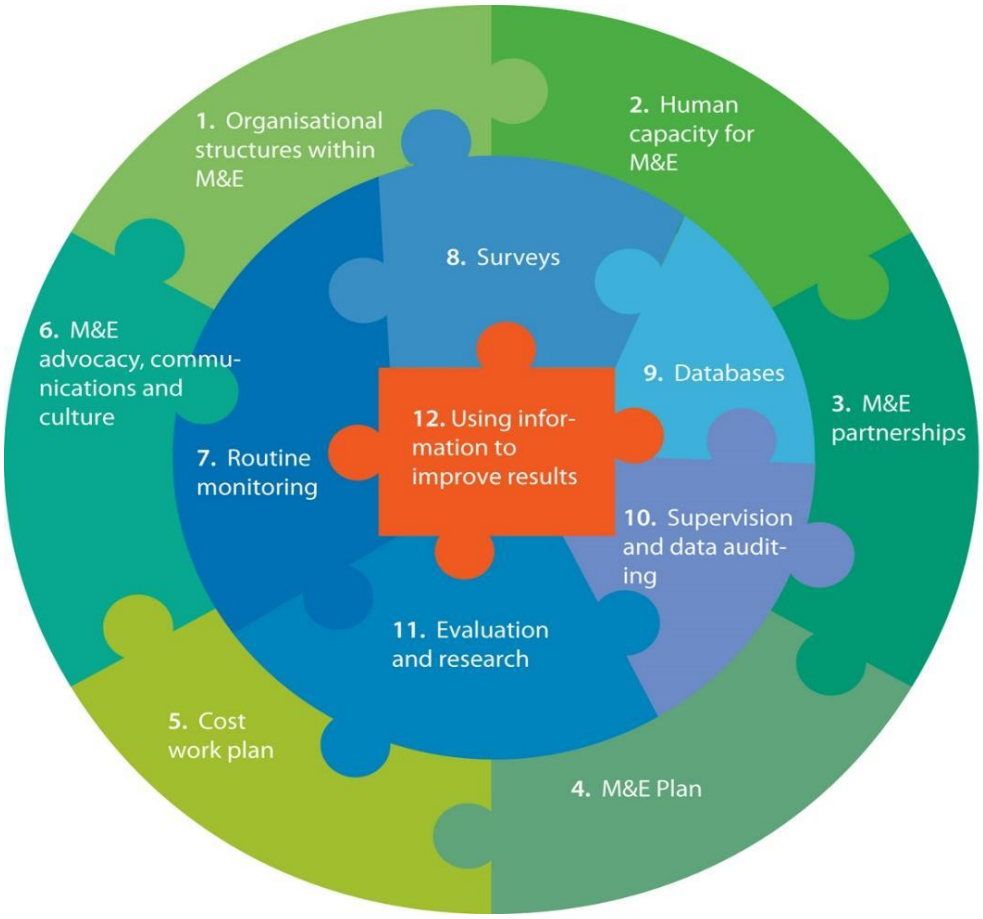
insufficient availability of advanced evaluation training and attention to regular performance information (Mackay, 2007)

For Africa, Mackay (2007) argues that M&E systems exist but still rely on donor support for statistical capacity building. African countries therefore need support to strengthen the existing systems. This is also the case with many organizations operating in Kenya such as CGA.

2.6 Conceptualization of the Study

Different authors appreciate that the UNAIDS *12 Components of a Functional National M&E System* framework was initially developed and applied to national M&E systems (FHI (2006); Karani et. al (2014); Atika (2016); Obunga (2015) and; Olwa (2016). The framework is still relevant and appropriate hence it can be applied to M&E systems in general with majority applicable at programme level. This conceptualization framework will therefore be used to assess the CGA's M&E system. This framework has been applied in various assessments with success and hence is the most suitable in this case.

Figure 1: Conceptualization Framework



Source: UNAIDS (2008)

2.7 Operationalization of the Study

To enable assessment, a set of indicators has been developed for each of the 12 components and presented in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Operationalization of variables

COMPONENT	ELEMENTS
1. Organizational Structures within M&E	▪ Job descriptions for M&E staff. ▪ Number of skilled M&E staff- establish whether it is adequate ▪ Organizational structure of M&E in CGA ▪ Is M&E strategy for CGA well updated/plan for updating in place ▪ Involvement of stakeholders through consultations and planning for M&E
2. Human Capacity for M&E.	▪ Establish skill sets for M&E staff ▪ Plan for development of staff capacity through training,

COMPONENT	ELEMENTS
	supervision and training ▪ Budget for M&E training
3. Partnerships to plan, coordinate, and manage the M&E system	▪ Participation in M&E technical working group. ▪ Capacity for coordination of stakeholders involved in grain production/marketing. ▪ Routine communication channels.
4. M&E Plan.	▪ M&E plan linked to CGA's Strategic Plan. ▪ There is an up to date M&E plan ▪ Targets have been set for key performance indicators. ▪ A PMP matrix exists that lists indicators, targets, data sources, baselines, methods, reporting frequency, and responsible entities.
5. Annual Costed M&E Work Plan.	▪ The plan with activities and timeframe. ▪ The plan updated annually informed by performance monitoring. ▪ Stakeholders endorsing work plan. ▪ Budgetary allocations to operationalize work plan.
6. Advocacy, Communications and Culture.	▪ M&E clearly referenced in policies/ Strategic Plan. ▪ High level people/senior management endorsing M&E actions. ▪ M&E materials targeting different audiences. ▪ M&E advocacy plan available.
7. Routine Programme Monitoring	▪ Data collection strategy explicitly linked to data use ▪ Data collection and reporting mechanisms. ▪ Essential tools and equipment for data management (e.g., collection, transfer, storage, analysis).
8. Surveys and Surveillance.	▪ Specific schedule for data collection. ▪ Regular supervision visits and reports. ▪ Data quality audits.
9. National and Sub-national Databases.	▪ Linkages between different databases ▪ Well-defined and managed databases. ▪ Historical data is properly stored, up to date and readily available
10. Supportive Supervision and Data Auditing.	▪ Guidelines for data collection at national and field levels. ▪ Routine supervision visits, including data assessments and feedback to local staff. ▪ Periodic data quality audits. ▪ Regular field visits.

COMPONENT	ELEMENTS
11. Research and Evaluation.	▪ Complete records of completed and ongoing evaluations. ▪ Evidence of use of evaluation results. ▪ Conference for dissemination of evaluation and research findings.
12. Data Dissemination/ Use.	▪ Information products tailored to different audiences ▪ Dissemination schedule for M&E information. ▪ Plan for data use ▪ Evidence of information use in funding proposals

Source: Adapted from UNAIDS (2008)

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology that was used to assess the CGA's M&E system. It specifically covers data sources, research design, target respondents, sampling procedures and data collection methods and tools, operationalization of variables and data analysis.

3.2 Data Source

The assessment used data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from 21 Agribusiness Coordinators who are based in counties, two M&E staff, five Project Officers based at the head office in Nairobi, eight donor staff, ten farmer organization representatives and two sub county agriculture officers based at the county in the Eastern part of Kenya. The secondary data was collected through review of existing M&E documents and programme reports. Other relevant documents such as strategic plans were also be reviewed and complemented by observation to broaden the overall understanding of the operations as well as to provide evidence. Table 2.2 below provides a summary of respondents reached during the assessment.

Table 2.2: List of Respondents

	Category of respondents	No. reached
1.	CGA Agribusiness coordinators (county based)	21
2.	CGA M&E staff	2
3.	Project officers- (headquarter based)	5
4.	Donor staff- from three organizations	8
5.	Farmer representatives	10
6.	Sub county agriculture officers	2
Total		**48**

3.3 Research Design

To assess CGA's M&E system, the assessment applied cross-sectional research design as it is descriptive in nature. As already highlighted in the previous sections, mixed methods were used to collect and analyse data collected. With the cross-sectional design approach, it was possible to gather necessary data and accurately describe the current status. The design was chosen as it was considered the most relevant, applicable and convenient to bring the status, strengths and challenges of the CGA's M&E system hence making it possible to make recommendations and ultimately meet the research objectives. Descriptive research obtains information on prevailing status of a phenomena and describes what exists with respect to conditions in a situation (Nath, 2007; Shamoo and Resnik, 2003). Descriptive research design therefore describes what is going on or what exists (Luz, 2006; World Bank, 2009).

3.4 Target Population and Study Sites

This study was done at both CGA headquarters in Nairobi but also reached field based staff in ten counties namely Nakuru, Narok, Kisumu, Migori, Busia, Siaya, Tharaka Nithi, Meru, Laikipia and Nyandarua to ensure that a wider representation of the findings. It is important to note that although programmes are undertaken at the counties, key staff and documents are found at the national level. Staff from key donors and government were also targeted for the interview. Lack of responsiveness from government partners is a key challenge that was faced in the course of this assessment. This means that Government's perspectives on the CGA's M&E system are missing out inasmuch as they were not consulted in preparation of the current system.

3.5. Sampling Procedures

Purposive sampling was be used to undertake the study with this approach recommended by key players such as FHI 360 (2013). The sampling approach ensured that respondents who were selected met a certain criteria- where- they were required to have interacted with CGA for at least two years and were also literate.

3.6. Data Collection Methods and Tools

3.6.1. Documents/Records

A number of key documents were reviewed during the study. The documents/records reviewed included M&E framework, project indicator matrices, project reports, data collection tools and management information system. The review of the documents has proved useful in triangulating data received from key informant interviews by providing evidence.

3.6.2. Key Informants Interviews

Interviews using a standard checklist were administered to a total of 48 respondents comprising of agribusiness coordinators M&E staff, project officers, donor staff, government officers and farmer organization representatives. This method proved very effective as both quantitative and qualitative data was collected during the interviews to assess the status and functionality of the M&E system.

In addition to the checklists, detailed discussions were held with M&E officer and one donor staff member to gain additional insights on overall management of M&E at the CGA. A proposed meeting with the management was not held as the matter was delegated to M&E officer. A discussion guide with guiding questions was used to collect information from the ten respondents. Information from each of the respondents was scored against of the 12 components (Annex 1).

3.6.3. Observation

Observation was used as a data collection method to take note of practical aspects of M&E. Specifically, observation to see how data collected is stored and managed (looking at the databases) as well as record keeping. No standard tool was developed to guide observation as this was done in the process of collecting data from CGA staff based at the headquarters.

3.7. Operationalization of Variables

This assessment used M&E System Assessment framework developed by UNAIDS (2008). The assessment framework has 12 components that have been broken down further to elements

for assessment purposes. Each element was scored on a five criteria ranging from 1-5; with five being the highest as described (1 – not at all; 2 – least extent; 3- moderate extent; 4 – great extent; 5 – very large extent).

3.8. Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used in the assessment. Scores for each of the 12 components were entered into MS Excel spreadsheet for analysis. Once the domains were scored, percentages, a table and charts were generated by the tool to display the quantitative results of the analysis. Qualitative data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Specifically, emerging themes were identified from qualitative data collected from discussions, observations and existing documents. This information was used in supporting scores recorded for each element that shall be assessed.

3.9. Ethical Considerations

This study upheld high ethical considerations to ensure that the results are credible and enhance confidence of the results. Ethical protocols and principles highlighted by Belmont (1979); FHI (2001); Bosnjak (2001); Pimpe (2002); Shamoo and Resnik (2003); Czech Republic (2006) and Resnik (2007) were observed. Informed consent was sought from all the respondents and they were given a choice to participate or not to participate in the assessment. The consent was explicitly sought before data collection.

Further, all the respondents were assured that there would be no direct individual benefits associated with the study as no incentives were offered. Finally and of great importance, all respondents were assured that that their answers would be strictly confidential and will not be attributed to any particular individual. Evidence was also given to both the CGA and donor staff that the assessment had been approved by the CGA's top management.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF THE CGA's M&E SYSTEM ASSESSMENT

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents results and an interpretation of the same. It begins with providing the results on the status of the CGA M&E system. The status is followed by a discussion of the key strengths and challenges of the M&E system. Finally a discussion in how the CGA M&E system is used to improve overall performance of improving farmers' access to markets is presented.

4.2 Status of the CGA M&E System

Each component was subjected to a five-point scoring criteria based on the extent to which it meets the established standard as guided by UNAIDS (2008). The five include: 1- Standard not met at all; 2- Standard met to a least extent; 3- Standard met to a moderate extent; 4- Standard met to a great extent and; 5- Standard met to a very large extent. The scores for each of the components are summarized in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Scores from Assessment of CGA's M&E System

No	M&E Component	Actual score	Maximum score	Average score
1	Organizational Structures within M&E	175	250	**4**
2	Human Capacity for M&E	90	150	**3**
3	Partnerships to plan, coordinate, and manage the M&E system	116	150	**4**
4	M&E Plan	163	200	**4**
5	Annual Costed M&E Work Plan	123	200	**3**
6	Advocacy, Communications and Culture	121	200	**3**
7	Routine Programme Monitoring	110	150	**4**
8	Surveys and Surveillance	108	150	**4**
9	National and Sub-national Databases	104	150	**3**
10	Supportive Supervision and Data Auditing	130	200	**3**
11	Research and Evaluation	134	200	**3**
12	Data Dissemination/ Use.	125	200	**3**
	Total	**1,499**	**2,200**	
Average score				**3**

Source: Primary data from the assessment (framework adapted from UNAIDS, 2008)

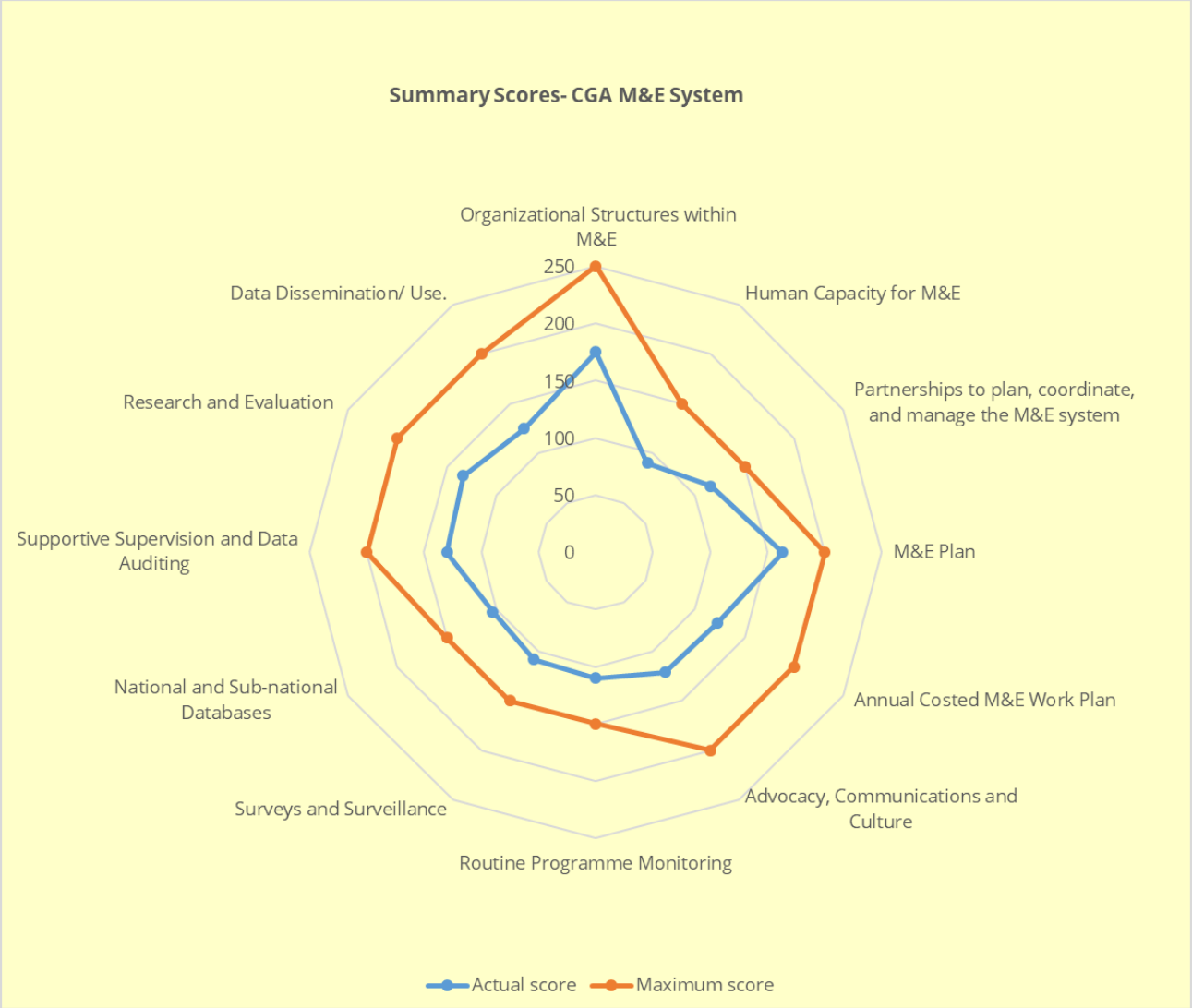
Findings from the data analysis indicate that the CGA's M&E system is strong. On the average, all the components met the required standards to at least a moderate extent with none of them being rated as not meeting the standard at all or meeting it to a minimal extent. Five out of the 12 components (42 percent) met the standard to a great extent which implies that almost all aspects are in place. The remaining seven components (58 percent) meet the standards to a moderate extent which signifies presence of key variables.

These findings compare favourably with the most previous studies. For instance, the finding that human capacity for M&E is a weak component compares to other studies undertaken in the recent past. For instance Atika (2016) while assessing the NACC M&E system reported that human capacity for M&E scored 40 percent. Obunga (2017) on assessment of M&E system for the Plan International Kenya made similar observation with regards to the weak human capacity for M&E system.

Findings from the assessment score are used to clearly indicate the specific components that require improvement in order to achieve an optimal M&E system. The summary of the scores is presented in a radar chart as Figure 4.1 below that shows actual score compared to the maximum score expected as guided by data collection tool presented in Annex 1.

The radar chart plots the values of each category of results along a separate axis. The scale starts with the lowest possible score at the centre and ends towards the margin where highest possible score is expected. The radar chart displays M&E system changes in components score relative to a centre point. Therefore, data from the table 4.1 is further represented in a radar chart below followed by a detailed discussion of the results of each of the components.

Figure 4.1: Summary of Assessment Scores



In the radar chart above, the red line depicts the maximum score for each of the 12 components. On the other hand, the blue line indicate the actual scores. CGA should pay close attention to the distance between red and blue points as these are the weakness/gaps that should be addressed to ensure a strong and solid M&E system is place. The visual presentation above is useful is presenting finding/results of the assessment in a simplified manner thus promoting easier understanding by various audience.

4.2.1 Assessment results summary of M&E components

In the subsequent section, findings and discussions from each of the areas are presented in the following section. The discussion of the findings will follow the 12 components of M&E system. In each of the sections, guiding questions were developed to guide assessment. The

approach used in presenting the findings compares to that used by other researchers in assessing M&E systems in Kenya including Atika (2016), Obunga (2015) and Olwa (2016).

4.2.2 Organizational Structures within M&E Functions

This first component scored an average of four as per criteria set which implies that it meets the requirements to a great extent. CGA has an established M&E department that has two dedicated staff with clear job descriptions. Worth noting, some M&E functions are also included in job descriptions for all programme staff. In addition, temporary support is sought as dictated by need specifically in cases where data entry clerks are recruited to enter data on casual basis. An area of improvement noted under this component relate to low involvement of some stakeholders such as farmers' leaders and board of directors. On the other hand, involvement of donor staff in developing project specific projects was reported to be high as further explained by one respondent below.

> *'I can say that there is adequate involvement of partners who provide specific funding to carry out project activities. I have actively participated in developing a detailed M&E framework for a project funded by my organization in which we came up with key project deliverables and contributed to enriching the M&E structure'* [A respondent from a funding agency).

4.2.3 Human Capacity for M&E

On human capacity for the CGA M&E, it was noted that the component met standards to a moderate extent. Whereas there are established skill sets for M&E staff with staff meeting the required skills, CGA does not have a plan for staff capacity development. Currently, there are no M&E training budgets thereby posing a challenge in terms of supporting staff development. Training and exposure opportunities on M&E boosts staff morale whilst providing opportunities to equip staff with more skills. A field based CGA staff said that:

> *'We have not seen any plans for capacity development through training. I think this is something that the management should plan for as a matter of priority'* [CGA project staff].

4.2.4 Partnerships for M&E

Issues related to partnerships for the CGA's M&E meets the standard to a great extent and emerged as one of the strongest components. The CGA staff participate in various M&E

technical working groups constituted by donors or key partners in the grain marketing/agribusiness. Routine communication channels were maintained through production of reports showcasing results. Overall coordination in managing M&E activities among stakeholders could however be improved as the activities were described as uncoordinated in some instances.

4.2.5 M&E Plan

In the course of data collection, this component was consistently highlighted as the strongest by all the respondents. It meets the standards to a great extent with only a few aspects missing to have it meet all the variables. There was evidence that M&E is linked to CGA's current strategic plan. An M&E system was also in place which had key performance indicators. An up to date performance monitoring plan incorporating indicators, targets, data sources, responsibilities and utilization plan. The CGA's M&E team was thus commended for good planning practices as this is a good step towards good implementation.

4.2.6 Annual Costed Work Plan

This component met standards to a moderate extent with an average score of three. After reviewing some secondary information, it was apparent that an annual work plan is prepared each year however detailed costing of activities was not always done. Another area of weakness under this component relate to endorsing the work plan as there is minimal involvement of key stakeholders. Consultation and review is only sought for donor specific projects. Generally, M&E budget accounts for an average of five percent of the overall budget.

4.2.7 Advocacy, Communications and Culture

Matters related to advocacy and communication culture moderately met the standards. M&E was referenced in CGA's strategic plan and all respondents reached in the study confirmed that the senior management is committed to implementing a strong M&E system thereby acting as good champions. Lack of M&E advocacy plan targeting different stakeholders was noted as an area that needs improvement. M&E materials for various audience were not available hence limiting advocacy efforts. A similar observation on unavailability of M&E materials was reported by Olwa (2016) who noted that M&E materials that target different stakeholders or various information users were not available or accessible for championing.

4.2.8 Routine Programme Monitoring

Programme monitoring component meets stands to a great extent as per results from this assessment. The M&E plan clearly articulates how monitoring data is collected as well as reporting mechanisms. For instance, field based staff are required to submit data by 25th of every month to M&E unit for analysis and preparation of programme reports. There exists standardized data collection forms/checklist that guide the monitoring process. All data collected is submitted in soft copies. Staff interviewed in this study reported that most of the data collected is useful in informing programme efficiency and effectiveness.

4.2.9 Surveys and Surveillance

This component meets standards to a great extent. There are schedules for periodic surveys where data on key grain marketing processes such as production, aggregation and other post-harvest practice are done. A key informant explained:

> '*Supportive supervision visits are done by a team comprising of both M&E and other staff programme. Data quality audits are also continuously undertaken through telephone calls, physical field visits and spot checks of activities. All these efforts have played a big role in promoting quality, integrity and validity of data collected through different surveys*', [CGA M&E staff].

4.2.10 National and Sub-national Data bases

Linkages between databases at the national and county levels met standards to a moderate extent. However, it emerged that there is a need to improve overall management of existing databases. Knowledge management and a strong back up systems for databases is needed to safeguard data confidentiality and possible loss.

4.2.11 Supportive Supervision and Data Auditing

The component scored 65 percent thus meeting standards to a great extent. Regular supervision visits are done by project officers and M&E teams to selected sites. These visits are useful in providing field based teams various teams with continuous training to ensure that they maintain momentum with regard to collecting useful data to continuously inform programme decisions. Data quality audits are thus done through various means such as phone calls, physical verification to randomly selected areas as well as spot checks.

4.2.12 Research and Evaluation

Research and evaluation component scored a three implying that the standards especially those related to evaluation are met moderately met. The M&E plan outlines monitoring processes that link to evaluations for all program activities. The evaluation is anchored on the principles of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. Noteworthy, specific areas of interest aligned to CGA's activities are stipulated in the plan. CGA has also included a principle of integration in its plan to measure the degree to which synergies and linkages have been established between CGA activities and other programs and how implementation is aligned in order to contribute to achievement of CGA's objectives. Research agenda should be revisited as it was not clear how CGA plans to contribute to this.

4.2.13 Data Dissemination and Use

This component scored meets the standards to a moderate extent. Information from M&E process is used to inform decision making and in writing project proposals to donors. On the other hand, although there is a very detailed dissemination plan in place, there was no enough evidence that M&E findings are shared with various stakeholders as planned. This is a variance between the plan and actual implementation. For instance, there are no information products for systematic sharing monitoring data with key stakeholders such as farmers.

4.3. The CGA's M&E System Contribution to Programme Improvement

The M&E system is structured in a manner that promotes programme monitoring to inform effectiveness and efficiency. FHI (2012), Olwa (2016) and Thomas (2010) postulate that it is critical to examine how existing M&E systems inform better decision making for programme improvement. In the section below, the study presents ways in which the M&E system has contributed to overall improvement in implementation of CGA activities based on available evidence.

4.3.1 Tracking progress against desired outcomes

The current M&E system provides evidence on progress made towards achieving set program objectives. Specifically the system provides information on success, challenges in programme implementation. This information is continually is used by programme teams to

better engage with farmers involved in grain marketing activities. Regular staff meetings use the findings generated from data collected by field based staff to assess progress made towards achieving annual/project cycle targets.

In addition, periodic rapid qualitative assessments are conducted on need basis to complement data collected through the established routine monitoring systems. They assess the relevance and effectiveness of the various project strategies and activities in terms of influencing knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of the target groups in the project areas. The assessments have been useful in documenting lessons, challenges, success stories and best practices for programme activities.

4.3.2 Informing CGA's management decisions, strategic planning and risk management

The nature of CGA's operations demand for regular review of risks and assumptions made in the activities related to linking grain/cereal farmers across the entire agricultural value chain. The M&E system collects indicators related to production, aggregation and marketing which facilitates timely intervention to avert loses. For example, after harvesting, aggregation process and storage is closely monitored to ensure that farmers fulfil their contracts with institutional buyers to avoid paying penalties. The close monitoring was informed by the fact that smallholder farmers defaulted on contracts often as a result of side selling which exposed them not only to low prices for their produce but also loss of income as a result of legal requirements such as cashing of performance bonds.

Therefore, the M&E system has been tracking performance on a continuous basis in and providing feedback to CGA management. According to a key informant:

> '*The system has been useful in identifying positive impacts to be reinforced as well as negative impacts to be mitigated through modification of program and project design and implementation',* [CGA M&E staff].

4.3.3 Accountability to donors and CGA stakeholders

CGA is a member organization meaning some money is raised through subscription. Also, the organization receives donor funds to especially support smallholder farmers in cereals/grain marketing. This means that accountability for resources received by the organization is critical. Donor reports on progress incorporating achievements and

challenges are prepared on a monthly basis as informed by monitoring findings. More comprehensive quarterly and annual reports are submitted to donors but not systematically shared with farmers who are key stakeholders. Nevertheless, the seemingly good donor accountability systems including reporting has seen CGA continue to attract donor funding. A key informant noted:

> *'It is evident that CGA uses information from M&E system in writing and submitting funding proposals. I have consistently seen this evidence in all the funding proposals that I have reviewed over the years'* [A respondent from a funding agency]

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this assessment was to determine the status of the CGA M&E system and make recommendations with a view of strengthening the system. It was envisaged that the findings from the assessment would give status on CGA's M&E system compliance to established standards. The assessment also sought to identify challenges in the M&E system and most importantly make recommendations on what should be done to strengthen the system.

5.2 Summary of Findings

As presented in the previous chapter, the CGA's M&E system scored an average of three out of five but with variations across the 12 components. From discussions with various respondents and analysis of data human capacity for M&E emerged as weakest M&E plan was the strongest. A total of five out of the 12 components assessed met standards to a large extent and these include: organization structures within M&E; partnerships to plan, coordinate and manage M&E systems; M&E plan; routine programme monitoring and; surveys and surveillance. All the other remaining components met the standards to a moderate extent.

When considering the three broad categorization of M&E components as described by UNAIDS (2008), that is, those relating to people, partnerships and planning; those that relate to data collection, capture and verification and; components relating to data use in decision making. The last component dealing with using information to improve results came to the fore as the weakest hence a need for CGA to consider strengthening the aspects contained therein.

With regard to contribution to programme improvement, it was noted that the system is useful in reporting programme implementation progress and informing management on strategic planning and risk planning. The system has also made good contribution towards enhancing donor accountability with M&E findings helping to strengthen funding proposals submitted by CGA.

5.3 Conclusion

The CGA's M&E system is functional and strong; 42 percent of the components meet the required standards to a great extent and the remaining 58 percent meet them to a moderate extent. It is also encouraging to note that none of the components was rated as not any meeting the standard or meeting only to a very limited extent. The system is good for showcasing and sharing with other national organizations such as cooperatives that bring farmers together to pursue common objectives such as production and marketing.

From the findings, there is potential for the CGA to have one of strongest and robust M&E systems in Kenya. This argument is supported by the fact that there is a good M&E strategy which compares to those developed by international organizations. Further, it was noted that senior management are keen to ensure M&E processes are strengthened.

5.4 Recommendations

This subsection provides recommendations on strengthening each of the components.

5.4.1 Organizational Structures within M&E Functions

There is need to strengthen the involvement of key stakeholders by consulting them during the planning of M&E activities. Currently, only the CGA staff are involved in the process leaving out board of directors and farmer representatives. The 2019 plan to engage all key stakeholders should therefore be actualized.

5.4.2 Human Capacity for M&E

The CGA should develop M&E staff capacity development strategy to increase overall understanding of key issues as well as equip staff with necessary skills. Well trained staff are a good asset for any organization hence a worthy investment that calls for allocation of resources in the organization's budget. In addition to training, CGA could consider mentoring, coaching and creating opportunities for exposure on M&E through participation in conferences among other relevant forum.

5.4.3 Partnerships for M&E

The CGA's M&E staff participate in various technical working groups but it was reported that it is important to strengthen coordination among different partners for optimal

engagements. The M&E staff could consider mapping the existing technical working groups on agribusiness and choose to only participate in the most well coordinated group. In the event that participating in some groups are mandatory perhaps due to donor requirements, CGA M&E staff could share lessons and best practices to consciously influence change in managing group activities.

5.4.4 M&E Plan

M&E plan emerged as the strongest component during the assessment thus the only recommendation in this case relate to need to ensure that the good plan is translated in to action. Maintaining consistency in developing and maintaining good M&E plans is also encouraged.

5.4.5 Annual Costed Work Plan

Whereas M&E budget is reflected in the overall budget , it is important to develop a detailed /specific M&E budget lines to ensures that activities that the M&E team is able to track expenditure and plan accordingly.

5.4.6 Advocacy, Communications and Culture

To increase advocacy and promote communications culture, CGA should prepare an advocacy plan. Materials for different audience should be prepared with those targeting farmers translated to Kiswahili and/or their respective local languages.

5.4.7 Routine Programme Monitoring

M&E staff should relook at the data collected and remove any that is not used. On tools, CGA should consider digitizing all quantitative data collection forms/tools/checklists and strictly use mobile data collection devices. Online data submission platforms such as 'ONA' should be considered. This has a high chance of improving timeliness of monitoring data and preparation of reports.

5.4.8 Surveys and Surveillance

The current arrangement in management of surveys should be continued perhaps with closer engagement with ministry of agriculture staff.

5.4.9 National and Sub-national Data bases

CGA should improve management of databases by establishing a stable system with a strong back system. Managing large data sets in Ms Excel spreadsheets is not ideal as this doesn't provide adequate controls against data loss and breach of confidentiality.

5.4.10 Supportive Supervision and Data Auditing

Data audits should be strengthened to ensure that only high quality data is collected and used for decision making. As articulated in the M&E plan, the project coordinator should make support supervision visits at least once a month to ensure data validity and integrity in reporting before they are sent to the headquarters for analysis.

5.4.11 Research and Evaluation

This component should be strengthening as there was limited information on research and evaluation for CGA. Proper records on completed, ongoing and planned evaluations should be maintained with tracking systems for evaluations done updated on a regular basis and made accessible to key stakeholders.

In consultation with government, donors, private sector and academia, the CGA should work towards establishing a research agenda around cereal/grain marketing. Currently, there is no information on relevant research which is a missed opportunity as findings from carefully designed studies can inform policy decision and potentially contribute to overall food security pillar of Kenya's Big Four Agenda.

5.4.13 Data Dissemination and Use

Dissemination of findings should be improved as this was one of the weakest components of the CGA's M&E system. Information products should be prepared and disseminated to key audience including farmers. There is an urgent need to prepare a dissemination schedule for M&E information.

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Annexes: Data Collection Tool

Annex 1: Key Informant Guide

Introduction

Hello. My name is Ruth Musili. I am assessing the M&E system of CGA which is the focus of my project for M.A. in Monitoring and Evaluation of Population and Development Programmes from the University of Nairobi. I would like to have a discussion with you on issues related to CGA's M&E system. I would like to assure you that the information you provide will remain confidential and will only be used for analysis and reporting purposes and that your name will not be quoted. You may choose not to answer any of my questions and you may terminate the discussion at any point. The discussion will take approximately 30 minutes.

Instructions

This guide shall help to assess the specific aspects of CGA's M&E system through discussions with targeted respondents. Available documents including project reports, M&E plan and statistics will be used to triangulate information as it may be relevant. Scoring will be based on five criteria for each of the elements ranging from 1 to 5 with five being the highest as described (1 – not at all; 2 – least extent; 3- moderate extent; 4 – great extent; 5 – very large extent). The most appropriate answer will be ticked appropriately.

M&E Component	Element	1	2	3	4	5
1. Organizational Structures within M&E	Job descriptions for M&E staff.					
	Number of skilled M&E staff- establish whether it is adequate					
	Organizational structure of M&E in CGA					
	Is M&E strategy for CGA well updated/plan for updating in place					
	Involvement of stakeholders through consultations and planning for M&E					
2. Human Capacity for M&E	Establish skill sets for M&E staff					
	Plan for development of staff capacity through training, supervision and training					

	Budget for M&E training					
3. Partnerships to plan, coordinate, and manage the M&E system	Participation in M&E technical working group.					
	Capacity for coordination of stakeholders involved in grain production/marketing.					
	Routine communication channels					
4. M&E Plan	M&E plan linked to CGA's Strategic Plan.					
	There is an up to date M&E plan					
	Targets have been set for key performance indicators.					
	A PMP matrix exists that lists indicators, targets, data sources, baselines, methods, reporting frequency, and responsible entities.					
5. Annual Costed M&E Work Plan	The work plan with activities and timeframe					
	The plan updated annually informed by performance monitoring.					
	Stakeholders endorsing work plan					
	Budgetary allocations to operationalize work plan					
6. Advocacy, Communications and Culture	M&E clearly referenced in policies/ Strategic Plan					
	High level people/senior management endorsing M&E actions.					
	M&E materials targeting different audiences.					
	M&E advocacy plan available.					
7. Routine Programme Monitoring	Data collection strategy explicitly linked to data use					
	Data collection and reporting mechanisms.					
	Essential tools and equipment for data management					
8. Surveys and Surveillance	Specific schedule for data collection					
	Regular supervision visits and reports					
	Data quality audits					
9. National and Sub-national	Linkages between different databases					
	Well-defined and managed databases.					

Databases	Historical data is properly stored, up to date and readily available					
10. Supportive Supervision and Data Auditing	Guidelines for data collection at national and field levels					
	Routine (six months) supervision visits, including data assessments and feedback to field staff.					
	Periodic data quality audits					
	Systems are in place for detecting missing data.					
11. Research and Evaluation	Evaluation activities are explicitly outlined in the M&E plan.					
	Complete records of completed and ongoing evaluations					
	Baseline data is available within the first one year of the project					
	Evidence of use of evaluation results to improve performance.					
12. Data Dissemination/ Use.	Information products tailored to different audiences					
	Dissemination schedule for M&E information					
	Plan for data use					
	Evidence of information use in funding proposals					