ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

SCHOOL OF COMMERCE

Exploring the Relationship of MEAL Practices and Project Performance on the Selected Case Organization.

By

Rahel Mekuria Abezaw

A Project Work Submitted to Addis Ababa University College of Business and Economics School of Commerce in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Project Management.

Advisor: Dr. Abdurazak M.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

August,2023

DECLARATION

I, Rahel Mekuria hereby declare that this project work titled "Exploring the Relationship of MEAL Practices and Project Performance on the Selected Case Organization" is my original work and that it has not been submitted partially; or in full, by any other person for an award of degree in any other university/institution.

Signature _____ Date _____

DECLARATION OF THE SUPERVISOR

I, the supervisor, hereby declare that Rahel Mekuria is conducting this project work titled "Exploring the Relationship of MEAL Practices and Project Performance" in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a master's degree in Project Management. It is, to the best of my knowledge, this is her original work. It has not been submitted in part or in full to any educational institution or to this university for a degree award, and it has not been presented in any projects by any means.

Name: Dr. Abdurazak Mohammed

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Dr. Abdurazak Mohammed	_____	_____
(Advisor)	Signature	Date
Internal Examiner	_____	_____
	Signature	Date
External Examiner	_____	_____
	Signature	Date

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List of Figures and Tables

Acronyms and Abbreviations

CO	Country Office
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
PIE	Plan International Ethiopia
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/Aids
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
PMP	Performance management plan
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
RBMG	Results-Based Management Group
MBO	Management by Objectives
NPM	New Public Management
TQM	Total Quality Management
RBM	Results-Based Management

Table of Contents

Abstract

The study used a descriptive research design and collected both primary and secondary data to examine the relationship between MEAL practices and project performance in the case organization. Data was gathered from 30 respondents through questionnaires and analyzed with statistical software (SPSS) and Pearson correlation analysis was used to determine the relationships between variables. The study discovered that all of the independent variables (MEAL practice, stakeholder involvement, MEAL planning, and capacity building) correlated significantly with the dependent variable, project performance. However, varying levels of agreement and concerns were identified within the organization's MEAL system. These concerns included the implementation of the MEAL practice, stakeholder involvement, capacity-building efforts, and MEAL planning. Recommendations were provided to address these areas of concern, such as improving the designated entity responsible for MEAL practice, enhancing stakeholder engagement practices, strengthening capacity-building efforts, and improving accountability for M&E activities. By implementing these recommendations, the organization can enhance its MEAL practices, stakeholder involvement, capacity building, and MEAL planning, ultimately leading to improved project performance and better decision-making processes.

Keywords: M& E, MEAL practices, Project performance

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the study's and organization's background, the problem statement, the research objectives, and the research question. It also explains the study's significance, scope, and organization.

1.1. Background of the Study

Monitoring and evaluation of projects enhances overall effectiveness, and as a result, numerous projects are launched with the primary goal of positively transforming the sociopolitical and economic conditions of residents in a specific region. Project information is gathered in a systematic and sequential manner as the project progresses. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has become increasingly important for development and humanitarian organizations. Measurement methods, indicators, targets, performance monitoring, and results management have all improved in recent years to ensure a comprehensive and effective evaluation of project progress and impact on development issues.

Monitoring entails identifying factors that contribute to the progression of activities or the successful production of outputs. In contrast, impact monitoring measures the initial responses and reactions to project activities, as well as their immediate short-term effects.

While monitoring and evaluation practices are costly, time-consuming, and require human resources, they are crucial for the performance of projects and should not be disregarded at the project's inception (Khan, 2013). It is then critical to ensure that management and donor agencies understand and are overly focused on these overheads, as well as committed to implementing the

recommendations resulting from monitoring and evaluation (Dyason, 2010). It is critical that project managers understand the methods and thinking that are based on the monitoring and evaluation practices employed. It is also critical that project managers accept responsibility for the processes used, are committed to them, and feel vested in convincing other stakeholders of their support as well as the long-term benefits. The requirement is that there be a significant effort made at the outset of an initiative to identify the main target groups and understand the desired outcomes for each. Aside from improving quality and the likelihood of sustainability, this method raises awareness and helps to build capacity.

Monitoring is regarded as a core tool for improving the quality of project management, taking into account that managing complex projects in the short and medium term will require corresponding financial strategies that must meet the criteria of effectiveness, sustainability, and durability. Monitoring activity assists both project managers and staff in determining whether projects are on track or meet their objectives, inputs, activities, and deadlines (Solomon & Young, 2007).

Australia is a global leader in the use of M&E systems in development projects (UNDP, 2012). The government established a full-fledged government evaluation system overseen by the Department of Finance. This provided a spending baseline and freed up the budget process from detailed, line-item scrutiny of spending, allowing it to focus on changes in government policy and development project spending priorities. The Australian government promoted program management and budgeting principles, emphasizing the efficiency and effectiveness of government programs through sound management practices, the collection of performance information and the regular conduct of program evaluations (Mackay, 2011). Project

sustainability is a major challenge in many developing countries. A large number of projects that are implemented at high costs frequently encounter difficulties with sustainability.

Over the past ten years, M&E has surpassed more traditional approaches to monitoring and evaluation in developing countries, particularly in Africa. According to CARE (2012), monitoring and evaluation are therefore required to ensure the sustainability of the development process in African-based agribusiness projects. M&E entails assessing change through processes involving a large number of people or groups, each of whom is influenced or affected by the impact under consideration. However, the most significant gap at the time was in the documentation of monitoring and evaluation. Dijkstra (2011) describes Uganda's monitoring and evaluation as fragmented, with multiple government and donor planning and progress reporting formats. Policy formulation, work planning, and budgeting are completed as separate exercises at the sector and district level. From an M&E standpoint, the main issue is that both information management and decision making are centered on the administrative process of expenditures and activities rather than the poverty outcomes, impacts, and goals that are pursued.

Monitoring and evaluation systems consist of a set of interconnected components that collaborate to monitor the progress and assess the outcomes of a project (Samdi, 2007). These components work in harmony to ensure effective tracking and evaluation of the project's implementation. By systematically collecting and analyzing relevant data, monitoring and evaluation systems provide valuable insights into the project's performance, effectiveness, and impact. This comprehensive approach enables project managers and stakeholders to make informed decisions, identify areas for improvement, and optimize project outcomes. The interconnected nature of these components ensures a holistic view of the project's progress and

facilitates the continuous monitoring and evaluation necessary for successful project management.

MEAL processes provide project managers with valuable information and insights that support decision-making, enhance project effectiveness, and contribute to overall performance. Monitoring helps track project progress, identify deviations, and ensure timely interventions. Evaluation assesses project impact, identifies strengths and weaknesses, and informs future improvements. Accountability ensures transparency and fosters trust among stakeholders. Learning enables organizations to capitalize on experiences and adapt strategies to enhance performance in subsequent projects.

The achievement of project goals serves as an objective measure of performance, performance measurements play a crucial role in evaluating the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of a program. By assessing performance, organizations can gauge their ability to successfully meet objectives and determine the overall value and outcomes of their initiatives. Performance measurements provide valuable insights into the efficiency of processes, the effectiveness of project management practices, and the broader impact of programs on desired outcomes (Kerzner & Saladis, 2017).

Project performance is the achievement of successful project execution, wherein predefined objectives are met or surpassed, and desired outcomes are delivered within allocated resources and constraints. Attaining effective project performance relies on several key factors. Thorough planning plays a vital role, involving the identification of project goals, defining project scope, establishing a comprehensive project schedule, and efficiently allocating resources. Clear and effective communication among project stakeholders, including team

members, clients, and other relevant parties, is essential for understanding expectations and facilitating seamless collaboration throughout the project (Kerzner, 2017). By considering these critical elements, projects can enhance their performance and increase the likelihood of achieving desired results.

Plan International is a non-governmental, child-centered, humanitarian, and development organization with a global presence. Founded in 1937 as Foster Parents Plan for War Children, the organization initially aimed to assist displaced children during the Spanish Civil War. Over time, it expanded its operations into developing countries during the 1950s, focusing on sustainable community development. Today, Plan International operates in 50 program countries with 20 national donor organizations across Australasia, the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

Within Ethiopia, Plan International operates in ten Regional States and one city administration, implementing over 60 humanitarian and development projects under its Strategic Country programs. The organization's goal is to create an inclusive environment where girls, adolescent girls, and young women are safe, valued, equally cared for, and provided with equal opportunities. Among these projects, 30 are implemented at the national level.

Plan International recognizes the importance of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) for project implementation. To facilitate continuous performance feedback and identify potential issues in advance, the organization has established a monitoring and evaluation unit under the head of program quality. The objective of this unit is to support project implementation in Plan International Ethiopia and provide evidence of the changes brought about by these projects.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Monitoring and evaluation of projects in Ethiopia is of utmost importance, as highlighted by Mebrahtu (2002). This is primarily due to the substantial allocation of government and donor resources to organizations for project implementation purposes. It is not only considered a best practice to monitor projects for effective control, but it is also essential to fulfill the needs of project stakeholders. Transparency, accountability in resource utilization, assessment of impact, ensuring good project performance, and facilitating organizational learning are crucial aspects that benefit future projects. By implementing robust monitoring and evaluation practices, organizations can meet these expectations, enhance project outcomes, and contribute to the overall success of development efforts in Ethiopia.

Additionally, Forss, Marra, and Schwartzberg (2016) argue that effective monitoring and evaluation ensure that projects address the needs and priorities of the target audience. This is because M&E involves engagement with stakeholders, enabling organizations to understand the needs of the communities they are serving.

Despite the increasing acknowledgment of the significance of Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) in project management, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding how the integration of MEAL practices impacts project management performance and outcomes (Alkin & Christie, 2004). Currently, limited research and empirical evidence are available that specifically examine the relationship between MEAL practices and project performance across different organizational contexts (Alkin & Christie, 2004).

In Ethiopia, numerous studies indicate that a significant portion of projects and organizations lack a dedicated monitoring and evaluation department or unit. Furthermore, among the non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia that do have M&E systems, the utilization of monitoring and evaluation for successful project implementation and control is found to be unsatisfactory. The primary issue lies in the practical implementation of M&E practices, even when an M&E program or unit exists within these organizations. In many cases, M&E processes, tools, and activities are not effectively put into practice. This can be attributed to the absence of skilled M&E professionals or a lack of understanding regarding the benefits and contributions of M&E. Additionally, in some organizations, M&E processes and activities are implemented selectively and arbitrarily, rather than being consistently applied (Yohannes, 2017).

As a result, there is a need for further study of the relationship between Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) practices and project performance in the case of the selected organization, which is Plan International Ethiopia. While PlE recognizes the importance of MEAL in project management processes, there is a lack of in-depth analysis and understanding of how MEAL practices are integrated into project performance. This research gap emphasizes the need for a thorough examination of the relationship between MEAL practices and project performance, as well as the role of MEAL plans and stakeholder participation in improving project outcomes. By filling this research gap, the study aims to provide valuable insights into how the organization can leverage its MEAL systems to improve project performance and bridge the existing gaps in MEAL practice.

1.3. Basic research questions

a) What is the relationship between Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) practices and project performance?

b) What is the relation among M&E Planning and Project performance?

c) What is the relationship of stakeholder involvement and project performance?

d) What is the relationship of capacity building and project performance?

1.4. Objective of the Study

1.4.1. General objective

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship of MEAL (monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning) practices and project performance in the case of Plan International Ethiopia.

1.4.2. Specific objective

The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To examine the relationship between Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) practices and project performance.
2. To evaluate the relationship between M&E Planning and project performance.
3. To assess the relationship between stakeholder involvement and project performance.
4. To examine the relationship between capacity building and project performance.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) practices and project performance. The study provides insights into how MEAL practice can contribute to improving project outcomes, such as

increasing efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and learning. In addition, the findings from the research will add more knowledge in the subject matter and contribute to bridging the gap.

1.6. Scope of the study

The study is focused on exploring the relationship of MEAL practices and project performance within the case organization. The study aims to examine how the case organization monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning practices can impact project performance.

To manage the research flow only the country office located in Addis Ababa, Kasanchis area was the subject of the study. The respondents for this paper are the organization project managers and monitoring and evaluation specialists/managers who are involved in the day-to-day activities in the various department found in the country office.

1.7. Limitations of the study

The sample size is one of the study's major limitations. The small number of participants limit the findings' generalizability to a larger population. As a result, caution should be used when interpreting the study's findings, and additional research with larger samples is required to confirm and extend these findings. The other limitation is geographical that is the study was conducted only in the country office of the organization.

1.8. Organization of the study

The study comprises five chapters. The first chapter is an introductory chapter consisting of background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, and objective of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, and Organization of the study. The second

chapter of the study deals with the review of relevant literature. The third chapter is methodology and research design followed by chapter four which will cover the data presentation, analysis and interpretation. The final chapter encompasses the summary, conclusion, and recommendation of the study. At last bibliography and appendices will be attached at the end of the research paper.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter compiles material from various scholars who have studied a related subject. The theoretical literature review, empirical literature review, and conceptual framework are the general areas covered.

2.1. Theoretical literature review

2.1.1 Theory of change

Kirkpatrick proposed the theory of change in the 1950s. Theory of Change is a planning, participation, and evaluation methodology used in the philanthropic, non-profit, and government sectors to promote social change. The Theory of Change defines long-term goals and then works backward to identify necessary preconditions (Brest, 2010). A Theory of Change explains the process of change by outlining causal linkages in an initiative, including its short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. The identified changes are mapped as the outcome's pathway, demonstrating each outcome's logical relationship to the others as well as chronological flow. The relationships between outcomes are explained by rationales or statements about why one outcome is thought to be a prerequisite for another (Clark & Taplin, 2012).

Reading program documents, speaking with stakeholders, and analyzing data can all help to develop a Theory of Change in retrospect. This is frequently done during evaluations, reflecting on what has worked and what has not in order to better understand the past and plan for the future. As a result, this theory will be used to collect and analyze monitoring and evaluation data, as well as to plan MEAL activities. Theory of Change can begin at any stage of an initiative, depending on its intended purpose. A theory developed from the beginning is best

suited to informing the planning of an initiative. Having developed a change model allows practitioners to make more informed decisions about strategy and tactics. As monitoring and evaluation data become available, stakeholders can update the Theory of Change as evidence suggests.

2.1.2 Results Based Management Theory

The Australian government introduced the Results-Based Management (RBM) Theory in the mid-1980s, and it gained widespread recognition in the 1990s with the support of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This Theory, as the name suggests, is results-oriented. The Results-Based Management Group (RBMG) observed the evolution of the results-based theory through preceding theories such as Public Sector Management in the 1960s, Program Management by Activity in the 1970s and 1980s, Management by Objectives (MBO) and Logical Framework Approach in the mid-1970s, New Public Management (NPM), and Total Quality Management (TQM) in the 1980s. RBM is one of several management strategies. All ground actors who contribute directly or indirectly to the achievement of specific development goals ensure that their processes, products, and output contribute to the achievement of long-term results (Crawford & Bryce, 2011).

RBM is based on clearly defined responsibilities. It defines the ultimate results while also requiring monitoring and self-assessment of progress toward long-term outcomes, including performance recording (UNDP, 2012). RBM is a continuous process that requires regular feedback from participants; it helps in lesson learning and process improvement (UNDP, 2012). The main plans are revised regularly to reflect lessons learned from monitoring and evaluation; previous plans are revised, and new ones are developed in response to current learnings.

Hwang and Lim (2013) illustrated the RBM model by emphasizing monitoring as an important task in the life of a program or project; as a continuous process of regular organized taxation based on stakeholder involvement, replication, criticism, data grouping, analysis of specific performance (using indicators), and periodic reporting. An essential element of effective monitoring is ensuring that information systems are established and data is collected on a consistent basis. The baseline data is typically collected at the start to show where the program or project is at any given time (Valadez & Bamberger, 2013). Monitoring is primarily an internal function within a program or project, involving managerial responsibilities. On the other hand, evaluation is an independent and external process. In order for Results-Based Management (RBM) to be considered trustworthy, it requires external validation of reported outcomes. RBM focuses on both the intended and actual achievements, examining the sequence of results, processes involved, and contextual factors that contribute to causality. This analysis helps understand the extent of accomplishments or shortcomings. According to Roberts (2010), an evaluation should provide information supported by credible and reliable evidence. Moreover, it should be useful and facilitate the timely integration of findings, recommendations, and lessons learned into the decision-making process.

To improve the usefulness of the findings and recommendations, key stakeholders should be involved in a variety of ways during the evaluation process (Clark, 2011). Evaluations provide vital purposes, including but not limited to utilization, accountability, and performance. The utilization rate is an important piece of feedback for decision-makers because it provides information as well as evidence of project performance and existing best practices. Accountability is for project donors, funders, government authorities, stakeholders, and the

general public, and contribution is for official policy-making, performance matrix, and organizational effectiveness (UNDP, 2012).

In a broader sense, the Theory contributes to the development of performance-monitoring tools that affect project performance. The evaluations used to improve performance are based on documented lessons learned and findings. The Theory focused more on reporting to stakeholders and holding management accountable for project outcomes.

The Theory focuses on sustainable change through a well-structured planning process that employs skilled labor to affect project performance. RBM provides elements for project performance monitoring, which are linked to the variable of staff capacity in M&E as a key element directly related to the RBM Theory.

2.1.3 Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning

2.1.3.1. Monitoring

According to Patton (2008), monitoring is a systematic and ongoing process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data or information to track the progress and performance of a project, program, or intervention. It involves the regular observation and measurement of key indicators or variables to assess whether activities are being implemented as planned and to identify any deviations or gaps. The purpose of monitoring is to provide timely information and feedback that enables project managers, stakeholders, and decision-makers to understand the status of a project and take appropriate actions to ensure its success. It helps in identifying potential issues, challenges, or bottlenecks that may hinder progress and allow for corrective measures to be implemented in a timely manner. Monitoring provides real-time information that can inform decision-making, resource allocation, and adjustments to project strategies or

interventions. It helps in identifying whether a project is on track, meeting its objectives, and delivering the intended outcomes. Monitoring is a dynamic process that plays a crucial role in project management by providing regular updates on progress, identifying areas for improvement, and facilitating informed decision-making to enhance project effectiveness and achieve desired outcomes.

2.1.3.2. Evaluation

Evaluation is a systematic process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data or information to assess the value, effectiveness, or impact of a project, program, policy, or intervention (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004). Evaluation serves multiple purposes, including accountability, learning, and decision-making. It provides stakeholders with information on the performance and results of an intervention, allowing them to make informed judgments and decisions regarding its continuation, improvement, or termination (Alkin, 2013). Evaluation is the systematic assessment of a project's design, implementation, and outcomes. It goes beyond monitoring by providing a deeper understanding of the project's effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability. Evaluation methodologies include impact evaluations, outcome evaluations, and process evaluations, which help determine the causal effects of interventions and assess project success (Bamberger et al., 2016).

2.1.3.3. Accountability

Accountability in MEAL refers to the responsibility of project managers and organizations to be transparent and answerable to stakeholders. It involves establishing mechanisms for reporting, feedback, and stakeholder engagement. Accountability ensures that project activities are conducted ethically, resources are used effectively, and results are

communicated to relevant stakeholders (Bamberger et al., 2016). Accountability comprises three main dimensions: answerability, enforcement, and sanctions. Answerability refers to the requirement to provide information, explanations, and justifications for actions or decisions. Enforcement involves the mechanisms or processes that ensure compliance with rules, regulations, or standards. Sanctions refer to the consequences or penalties imposed when accountability is not upheld (Bovens M., 2010).

According to research, organizations with a strong accountability culture are more successful at completing projects on time and within budget (Schillemans et al., 2016).

2.1.3.4. Learning

According to research, organizations with a strong commitment to learning are more successful at delivering projects that meet the needs of stakeholders (Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000).

The Association for Project Management (APM) outlines several important actions to be carried out during and after a project, as described in its Body of Knowledge (BoK) (Association for Project Management, 2012). These actions include the preparation and dissemination of lessons learned, which should be clearly defined in the communications management plan. It also emphasizes the importance of storing information in key documents, ensuring proper classification and accessibility to data. Conducting a post-project review is highlighted as an integral part of the project control process, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the project's outcomes and processes. Additionally, the APM emphasizes the need for audit trails to accompany archived information, providing valuable support for lessons learned documents and facilitating future reference and analysis. By incorporating these actions into project management

practices, organizations can enhance their knowledge management, promote continuous improvement, and foster the effective transfer of insights and experiences gained from one project to another.

Recent studies have highlighted the underlying issues surrounding knowledge transfer and learning. According to Hartmann and Dorée (2015), effective knowledge transfer and learning rely on social and situated learning approaches, and separating the lessons-learned process from these approaches significantly diminishes its value. Additionally, Duffield and Whitty (2015) emphasize the importance of six essential elements for the success of the lessons-learned knowledge model -learning, culture, social activities, technology, process, and infrastructure. These elements collectively contribute to the optimal acquisition and dissemination of knowledge within an organization. By acknowledging and integrating these factors, organizations can enhance their knowledge management practices and maximize the benefits derived from lessons learned.

According to PMI's PMBOK® Guide, lessons learned refer to knowledge gained during project execution. Lessons can be identified at any point. According to PMI (2010), project records can be included in the knowledge base for lessons learned. This definition emphasizes the importance of experience in learning lessons, which can occur at any stage of a project's lifecycle, but are typically conducted during the closeout phase.

2.1.4 Concept of Project Performance

Achieving good project performance involves successfully completing the project's scope within the allocated schedule and budget while meeting its predetermined objectives. Effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices are often crucial elements of achieving such

performance. M&E serves as a mechanism for ensuring accountability and promoting transparency towards stakeholders. It also facilitates organizational learning by documenting lessons learned throughout the project's implementation and incorporating those insights into future project planning and execution. Additionally, M&E supports knowledge sharing among different project implementers, thereby fostering collective experiences and expertise (World Bank, 2012).

Thomas and Fernández (2008) explore how project performance can impact stakeholder perceptions and satisfaction, thereby affecting an organization's reputation. Project performance also includes risk management, change management, and problem-solving skills. It involves identifying and mitigating project risks, adapting to changes in project requirements, and effectively addressing any issues or challenges that arise during project implementation.

The use of effective monitoring and evaluation practices has been discovered to affect project performance. This includes activities like data collection, analysis, and reporting. According to research, implementing these practices can improve project outcomes such as cost and schedule performance, quality, and stakeholder satisfaction (Fongwa & Yaya, 2021).

2.1.5 MEAL Planning and Project Performance

Effective planning has long been recognized as a key factor in the success of projects, encompassing elements such as time, cost, and quality. Hermano, López-Paredes, Martín-Cruz, and Pajares (2012) highlighted in their review that planning plays a crucial role in the achievement of targets in development projects by ensuring effective preparation. It is essential to have sufficient and accurate basic information obtained through thorough investigations and

surveys to enable comprehensive project monitoring and in-depth evaluation throughout the project lifecycle.

Regardless of their size, complexity, or value, all projects should have a performance management plan (PMP), also known as a monitoring and evaluation plan. PMPs are the primary tool used for detailed planning, and they specify what will be monitored and evaluated, as well as how these activities will take place.

According to Cooke, Bill, and Uma (2001), creating an M&E plan necessitates a thorough understanding of the project's inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes. According to Kalali, Ali, and Davod (2011), the necessary inputs would be human resources with M&E technical capacity and resources, authority and mandate to develop the M&E plan, and technological infrastructure. The process would include advocating for the importance of M&E, assessing strategic information needs (including planning for M&E utilization dissemination), achieving stakeholder consensus and commitment, particularly on indicators and reporting structure and tools, developing a mechanism for M&E plan review, and preparing a document for final approval. Detailed M&E planning begins with breaking down the components into sub-components to create a product (deliverables) breakdown structure to the extent that breakdown is feasible.

2.1.6 Capacity Building and Project Performance

Skilled individuals are essential for the functioning of the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system as they are responsible for effectively carrying out M&E tasks. Thus, it is crucial to comprehend the required skills and assess the capacity of the individuals involved in the M&E system. Identifying capacity gaps through structured capacity development programs lies at the

core of the M&E system, ensuring that the necessary skills are developed and strengthened (Gorgens & Kusek, 2010). In its framework for a functional M&E system, UNAIDS (2012) states that it is not only necessary to have dedicated and adequate numbers of M&E staff, but also that this staff have the necessary skills for the job. Furthermore, M&E human capacity development necessitates a variety of activities, including formal training, in-service training, mentorship, coaching, and internships. Finally, M&E capacity building should include not only technical aspects but also leadership, financial management, facilitation, supervision, advocacy, and communication skills.

Monitoring and evaluation carried out by untrained and inexperienced people is bound to be time consuming, costly and the results generated could be impractical and irrelevant. Therefore, this will definitely impact the success of projects (Nabris, 2002). In assessment of CSOs in the Pacific, UNDP (2012) discusses some of the challenges of organizational development as having inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems. Additionally, the lack of capabilities and opportunities to train staff in technical skills in this area is clearly a factor to be considered.

In the context of project performance evaluations, it is necessary to have dedicated and sufficient monitoring and evaluation staff; project evaluators must have the appropriate M & E skills. Malawi needed professionally trained staff and a budget to implement the monitoring and evaluation system (Rossi, 2012). There has been an unbalanced utilization of monitoring and evaluation personnel, with them primarily assigned tasks other than monitoring and evaluation. This adds to their workload as they focus on project M&E-related tasks. Time becomes a

challenge for them to fully manage the process and advocate for its use, resulting in ineffective monitoring and evaluation.

Human capital with significant experience is critical for achieving M&E outcomes. There is a need for strong M & E human resource capital in terms of quantity and quality, so M & E human resource strategies are required for achieving and maintaining a stable M & E (World Bank, 2012). Competent employees are a major barrier to selecting M&E practices. M&E, as a new tool in the field of project management, faces challenges in achieving long-term results and performance matrices. There is a significant shortage of skilled M&E professionals, capacity building for M&E systems, and standardization of project management courses and technical support.

2.1.7 MEAL Practices and Project Performance

MEAL practices and project management involve incorporating monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning activities throughout the project management lifecycle to enhance performance and outcomes. This aims to ensure that project activities are on track, progress is measured, stakeholders are engaged, and lessons learned are applied to improve project management practices. Several studies have explored the relationship between MEAL practices and project performance. These studies highlight the benefits of integrating MEAL practices into project management, such as improved project planning, enhanced decision-making, increased stakeholder satisfaction, and better project outcomes (Kaufmann,2020).

Alkin and Christie (2004) discuss the importance of incorporating evaluation practices into project management to enhance project performance. They emphasize the need for ongoing

monitoring and evaluation activities to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions throughout the project lifecycle.

White (2010) examines the integration of monitoring and evaluation systems with project management processes. The study emphasizes the role of monitoring and evaluation in providing feedback, enhancing accountability, and facilitating learning to improve project performance. MEAL practices provide a systematic approach for gathering information, assessing progress, and learning from project implementation. Through effective monitoring and evaluation, project managers gain valuable insights into project performance, identify areas for improvement, and make data-driven decisions. MEAL practices foster stakeholder engagement and accountability. Through effective monitoring and evaluation, project stakeholders are involved in the project cycle, ensuring their perspectives are considered, and accountability is promoted. This engagement strengthens relationships, increases transparency, and positively influences project performance.

MEAL practices have been shown to contribute to improved project management performance. Effective monitoring enables project managers to make informed decisions, detect problems early, and ensure project objectives are met. Evaluation provides evidence on project impacts and informs future interventions. Accountability mechanisms foster transparency, trust, and stakeholder satisfaction. Learning from project experiences enables adaptive management and continuous improvement (Bamberger et al., 2016).

2.1.8 Stakeholder Involvement and Project Performance

Stakeholder involvement is critical and can have a significant impact on project performance. Engaging stakeholders throughout the project's lifecycle ensures that their needs

and expectations are understood, considered, and effectively addressed. Several studies have examined the relationship between stakeholder involvement and project performance, and they have found that active stakeholder engagement yields positive outcomes.

Turner and Müller (2005) conducted a study that specifically examined stakeholder management in the context of project success. The authors emphasized that successful projects actively engage stakeholders and manage their expectations throughout the project's lifecycle. They discovered that effective stakeholder involvement enhances project performance, resulting in higher levels of satisfaction, increased stakeholder support, and better project outcomes.

Stakeholder satisfaction is a metric that measures the level of satisfaction of project stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, and employees. Stakeholder satisfaction can be measured using surveys, feedback forms, and focus groups. Stakeholder satisfaction is an important metric for measuring the success of MEAL practices, as it helps to identify areas where the project is not meeting stakeholder needs and take corrective action (Kerzner, 2017).

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

Conducting periodic project process reviews, as mentioned by Heagney (2012), serves various important purposes. These reviews allow for collaborative efforts with project stakeholders to optimize project efficiency. They also ensure that the quality of project work remains intact despite time and cost limitations. Additionally, these reviews enable the identification and resolution of emerging issues, ensuring effective problem-solving strategies are implemented. Moreover, they provide an opportunity to understand the unique components of other ongoing or future projects. Lastly, project process reviews keep clients well-informed about the project's progress, ensuring that the final outcomes meet their specific criteria. Overall,

these reviews play a vital role in fostering collaboration, maintaining quality standards, addressing challenges, promoting knowledge sharing, and achieving client satisfaction.

According to a study conducted by Yang et al. (2009), effective stakeholder management is identified as a crucial factor for the success of a project in the context of monitoring and evaluation (M&E). This involves effectively resolving conflicts among stakeholders, assessing their behavior, clearly defining project objectives, and evaluating stakeholder attributes such as power, urgency, and proximity. These stakeholder management activities significantly contribute to project success.

Additionally, in addition to stakeholder management, the study highlights several key M&E processes that are essential for project success. These include knowledge transfer, motivation, planning, testing, monitoring project progress, and managing communications. These best practices in project management, when applied in conjunction with stakeholder management, play a vital role in ensuring the success of M&E projects (Yang et al., 2010).

M&E, in relation to its objectives and timeline, serves as the evaluation process for a project. Evaluation is responsible for assessing the effectiveness of project activities and their methods. On the other hand, monitoring primarily focuses on risk control and evaluating project outcomes. The efficiency and quality of project success are determined through evaluation. Evaluation plays a crucial role in assessing the extent to which goals have been achieved, identifying and defining issues related to program preparation and implementation, and generating data for cumulative learning. This cumulative learning leads to the development of better programs, improved management, and more accurate evaluation of their impact.

Consequently, assessment is a process that examines the feasibility of programs/projects and facilitates decision-making regarding resource allocation (Bitwott et al., 2017).

2.3 Conceptual framework

According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2013), conceptual framework entails forming ideas about the relationship between variables in the study and illustrating the relationship graphically. The purpose of the conceptual framework is to determine to what levels the dependent variable relies on the independent variables. The independent variables include M&E Planning, MEAL practice, stakeholders involvement, and capacity building and the dependent variable is project performance.

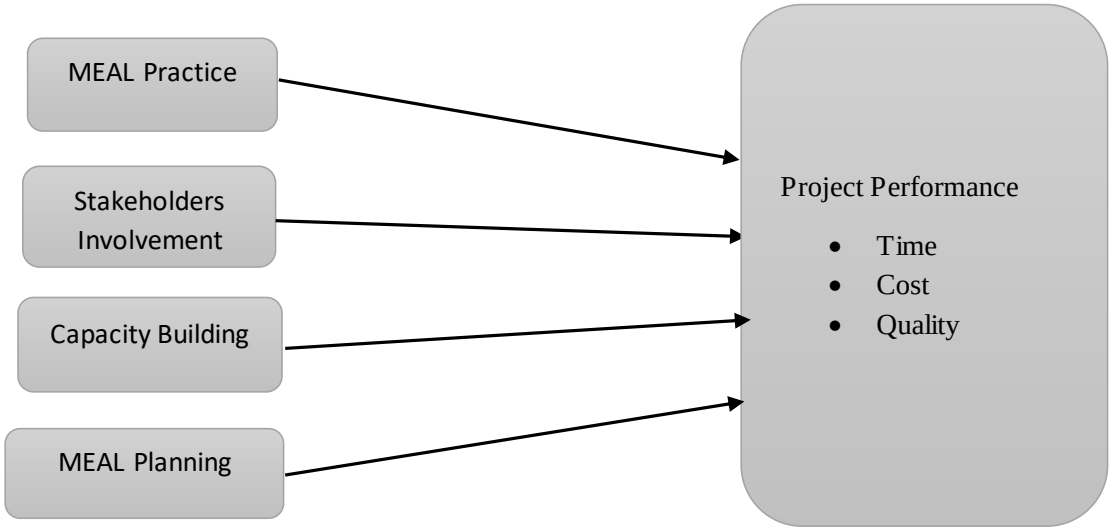

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter of the study focuses on the methods used to conduct the study, such as the study population, research design, sampling technique and sample size, data collection procedures, analysis and presentation techniques, and ethical considerations throughout the process.

3.1. Research Design

This study used a descriptive cross-sectional survey design. The study evaluated the data collected at a single point in time, where a census survey has employed, and the overall findings measures the perspectives of individuals who took part in the study, primarily project staff. The data will be also analyzed statistically and qualitative data complement the quantitatively generated data.

The study predominantly measures the relationship of dependent (Project performance) and independent variables (MEAL practice, MEAL planning, stakeholder involvement, and capacity building).

3.2. Research Approach

The study used a mixed-methods approach, which included both qualitative and quantitative research methods. By combining these two approaches in a sequential manner, the study was able to capture the strengths of each. This combination enabled the collection, analysis, and integration of quantitative and qualitative data, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

This study's unit of analysis is Plan International Ethiopia's 60 projects, from which 30 national based projects was used to assess the relationship of MEAL practice and project performance. As a result, in order to explore the practice of MEAL and the performance status of the project, 30 project staff, primarily project managers/leads and MERL personnel were engaged for the data collection.

3.3. Sampling Design

The MERL experts and Project Managers of Plan International Ethiopia who manage country office-based projects in Development and Emergency programs are the study's target population. The study used a non-probability purposive sampling method, with a selected group of 30 professionals actively participating in the questionnaire survey. To conduct the qualitative part of this study, project managers and MERL specialists were employed as techniques of data collection. These individuals were chosen due to their expertise and experience in project management and MERL practices, making them well-suited to provide valuable insights and perspectives.

3.4. Sources of Data

The study used both primary and secondary data collection methods to gather information from relevant sources. Primary data is firsthand data obtained directly from the original source, such as surveys, interviews, or observations. Secondary data, on the other hand, refers to data that has already been gathered by someone else, such as data from research studies, reports, or databases.

3.4.1. Primary Data Sources

The researcher collected the primary data for the study using questionnaires and interviews. Questionnaires were distributed to participants, allowing them to respond to a series of structured questions about the research topic. Interviews were also conducted with selected individuals to gain in-depth insights and perspectives on the research topic. Interviews allowed the researchers to engage directly with participants, asking open-ended questions and probing for detailed responses. This allowed for a better understanding of participants' experiences, opinions, and attitudes toward the research topic.

3.4.2. Secondary Data Sources

The secondary data was gathered through archived guideline/standard operating procedure, reports, research studies, databases and publication (Website, journals, articles, etc.).

3.5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The study involved the careful collection and use of a variety of empirical data such as data gathered from both primary and secondary data collection methods for mixed types of data. Primary data was gathered through questionnaires, while secondary data was gathered through document inspection. To gather primary data the researcher personally distributed a questionnaire to project personnel who were purposively selected.

The data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. The researcher employed descriptive analysis to analyze the collected quantitative data. The data was examined in terms of frequencies and proportions. Additionally, correlation analyses were conducted to assess the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. Statistical Package for

the Social Sciences (SPSS) was utilized for this purpose. Furthermore, the qualitative data obtained was analyzed and interpreted, resulting in the formulation of statements.

3.6. Validity and Reliability

The study used content validity, which draws an inference from test scores to a broad range of items similar to those on the test. Expert opinion was requested to comment on the representativeness and suitability of questions, as well as to suggest corrections to the structure of the research tools. This improved the content validity of the data collected. Content validity was determined by requesting feedback from the supervisor and colleagues on whether the questionnaire was adequate.

Reliability is defined as measurement consistency or stability under a variety of conditions, with the expectation of obtaining the same results. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the scale, which measures how well the items on the scale measure the same underlying concept. Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0 to 1, an alpha coefficient greater than 0.70 indicates that the collected data has a high level of internal consistency and can be generalized to represent the opinions of all respondents in the target population. Cronbach's alpha (α) was computed as follows:

$\alpha = N / (N - 1) * (1 - (\Sigma var(xi) / var(x)))$, α represents the Cronbach Alpha coefficient, N is the number of items in the scale, $\Sigma var(xi)$ denotes the sum of the variances of the individual items, and var(x) represents the variance of the total score.

3.7. Ethical Consideration

The information gathered from the respondents of the chosen organization was used only for this study, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the process, with the questioner not

revealing anything about the respondent's identity. Furthermore, all other authors' works used in this study were properly acknowledged in-text and in the study's references section.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the descriptive and correlation of both the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the respondents are presented and interpreted. As previously mentioned, a questionnaire was distributed to 30 employees, and all 30 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 100%.

4.1. Reliability Analysis

Reliability analysis was done using Cronbach's Alpha which measures the internal consistency by establishing if certain items within a scale measure the same construct. The results were as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Reliability Analysis

Variables	Alpha value	Comments
MEAL Planning	0.966	Reliable
MEAL Practice	0.981	Reliable
Stakeholder Involvement	0.951	Reliable
Capacity Building	0.954	Reliable

Cronbach Alpha was calculated for each variable. The findings in Table 4.1 illustrate that all four variables were reliable as their reliability values exceeded the prescribed threshold of 0.7. This, therefore, depicts that the research instrument was reliable and therefore required no amendments. This is in line with Cooper and Schinder (2014) who recommended that for a

variable to be reliable, the computed Cronbach Alpha should be equal or greater than the Alpha value threshold which was set at 0.7.

4.2. General Information of the respondents

The respondents were requested to specify their position, work experience, gender, age, and educational status (general information). Table 4.2. shows the results.

Table 4.2. General Information

Demographic Information		Frequency	Percentage %
Position	Project Manager	27	90.0%
	MERL specialist	3	10.0%
Work Experience	1-3 Years	3	10.0%
	4-10 Years	16	53.3%
	Above 10 Years	11	36.7%
Gender	Female	6	20.0%
	Male	24	80.0%
Age	Less than 35 Years Old	0	0.0%
	36-55 Years Old	26	86.7%
	More than 55 Years Old	4	13.3%
Educational Status	BA/BSc	2	6.7%
	MA/MSc	28	93.3%

The results in Table 4.2, showed that out of the 30 respondents, 27 (90%) work as project managers, while the remaining 3 (10%) serve as MEAL specialists. In terms of work experience, the research findings reveal that 3 (10%) have 1-3 years of experience, 16 (53.3%) have 4-10 years of experience, and 11 (36.7%) have over 10 years of experience. Regarding gender distribution, 6 (20%) of the respondents are female, while 24 (80%) are male. The findings indicate that the majority of respondents, 26 (86.7%), fall within the age range of 36-55 years, while 4 (13.3%) are above 55 years old. Additionally, the educational status of the respondents shows that 2 (6.7%) hold a BA/BSc degree, while 28 (93.3%) hold a MA/MSc degree.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

In this section, the study presented descriptive statistics for MEAL practice, Stakeholder involvement, capacity building, MEAL planning and Project performance. The results for each variable are presented in dedicated sections.

4.2.1 MEAL Practice

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement with various statements linked to MEAL practice using a 1-5 Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=strongly agree). The findings are as shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 MEAL Practice

Statement		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	St.Dev
1.There is a well-documented &well-defined MEAL system	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.57	.90
	Disagree	2	6.7%		
	Neutral	15	50.0%		
	Agree	7	23.3%		
	Strongly agree	6	20.0%		
2.A designated entity or individual is accountable for implementing and managing the MEAL practice and system.	Strongly disagree	12	40.0%	2.77	1.59
	Disagree	1	3.3%		
	Neutral	3	10.0%		
	Agree	10	33.3%		
	Strongly agree	4	13.3%		
3.The project's MEAL system is effectively comprehended by stakeholders.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.33	.88
	Disagree	5	16.7%		
	Neutral	13	43.3%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	3	10.0%		

4.Meetings with project partners and stakeholders are carried out on a regular basis	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.57	1.07
	Disagree	6	20.0%		
	Neutral	8	26.7%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	7	23.3%		
5.Data collection and analysis tool capable of generating both internal and external assessments reports	Strongly disagree	1	3.3%	3.13	1.20
	Disagree	12	40.0%		
	Neutral	3	10.0%		
	Agree	10	33.3%		
	Strongly agree	4	13.3%		
6.Data on the progress of implementation is collected periodically.	Strongly disagree	5	16.7%	3.03	1.38
	Disagree	8	26.7%		
	Neutral	2	6.7%		
	Agree	11	36.7%		
	Strongly agree	4	13.3%		
7.The implementation progress data is periodically evaluated and monitored.	Strongly disagree	4	13.3%	3.10	1.42
	Disagree	9	30.0%		
	Neutral	4	13.3%		
	Agree	6	20.0%		
	Strongly agree	7	23.3%		
8.The data generated through MEAL serves as valuable input for decision-making and future planning.	Strongly disagree	1	3.3%	3.17	1.26
	Disagree	12	40.0%		
	Neutral	4	13.3%		
	Agree	7	23.3%		
	Strongly agree	6	20.0%		
9.The leadership within my organization acknowledges and appreciates the learning opportunities as well as the challenges encountered by the program quality unit.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.30	.92
	Disagree	6	20.0%		
	Neutral	12	40.0%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	3	10.0%		

10.There is a sufficient budget assigned for M & E system for the organization	Strongly disagree	12	40.0%	2.93	1.76
	Disagree	1	3.3%		
	Neutral	3	10.0%		
	Agree	5	16.7%		
	Strongly agree	9	30.0%		
11.Data collection and analysis tools in place includes procedures, people, skills, and equipment necessary to systematically store and manage M&E data	Strongly disagree	13	43.3%	2.80	1.69
	Disagree	0	0.0%		
	Neutral	3	10.0%		
	Agree	8	26.7%		
	Strongly agree	6	20.0%		
12.The budget for M&E is used properly for the intended purpose only	Strongly disagree	13	43.3%	2.83	1.76
	Disagree	0	0.0%		
	Neutral	5	16.7%		
	Agree	3	10.0%		
	Strongly agree	9	30.0%		
Over all Mean of MEAL Practice				3.13	1.23

According to (OCHA, 2015) MEAL is an ongoing, integrated process that uses information and evidence to support decision-making and improve performance and impact. It involves the systematic and continuous collection, analysis, and use of data, information, and knowledge to inform organizational and programmatic learning, accountability, and decision-making at all levels. MEAL practice aims to enhance program effectiveness, inform decision-making, foster learning and adaptation, ensure transparency and accountability, and promote evidence-based approaches. It supports organizations and programs in continuously improving their performance, achieving results, and meeting the needs of beneficiaries and stakeholders.

From the above table (4.3) for the 1 statement 'There is a well-documented &well-defined MEAL system' we have received the result as follows, 2(6.7%) chose disagree, 15(50%) chose Neutral, 7(23.3%) chose agree and 6(20%) chose strongly agree.

From the above table (4.3) for the 2 statement 'A designated entity or individual is accountable for implementing and managing the MEAL practice and system', the respondents responded as follows, 12(40%) chose strongly disagree, 1 (3.3%) chose disagree, 3(10%) chose neutral, 10(33.3%) chose agree and 4(13.3%) chose strongly agree.

From the above table (4.3) for the 3 statement 'The project's MEAL system is effectively comprehended by stakeholders', the respondents replied as follows, 5(16.7%) selected disagree, 13(43.3%) selected neutral, 9(30%) selected agree and 3(10%) selected strongly agree.

From the above table (4.3) for the 4 statement 'Meetings with project partners and stakeholders are carried out on a regular basis', the respondents replied as follows, 6(20%) disagree, 8(26.7%) neutral, 9(30%) agree and 7(23.3%) strongly agree.

From the above table (4.3) for the 5 statement 'Data collection and analysis tool capable of generating both internal and external assessments reports', the respondents provided the following responses 1(3.3%) strongly disagree, 12(40%) disagree, 3(10%) neutral, 10(33.3%) agree and 4(13.3%) strongly agree.

From the above table (4.3) for the 6 statement 'Data on the progress of implementation is collected periodically', the respondents provided the following responses 5(16.7%) strongly disagree, 8(26.7%) disagree, 2(6.7%) neutral, 11(36.7%) agree and 4 (13.3%) strongly agree.

From the above table (4.3) for the 7 statement 'The implementation progress data is periodically evaluated and monitored', the respondents provided the following responses 4 (13.3%) strongly disagree, 9(30%) disagree, 4 (13.3%) neutral, 6(20%) agree and 7 (23.3%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.3) for the 8 statement 'The data generated through MEAL serves as valuable input for decision-making and future planning', the respondents provided the following responses, 1(3.3%) strongly disagree, 12 (40%) disagree. 4(13.3%) neutral, 7(23.3%) agree and 6(20%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.3) for the 9 statement 'The leadership within my organization acknowledges and appreciates the learning opportunities as well as the challenges encountered by the program quality unit', the respondents provided the following responses, 6(20%) disagree, 12(40%) neutral, 9(30%) agree and 3 (10%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.3) for the 10 statement 'There is a sufficient budget assigned for M & E system for the organization', the respondents provided the following responses, 12(40%) strongly disagree, 1(3.3%) disagree, 3(10%) neutral, 5(16.7%) agree and 9(30%) strongly agree.

According to the above table (4.3) for the 11 statement 'Data collection and analysis tools in place includes procedures, people, skills, and equipment necessary to systematically store and manage M&E data', the respondents provided the following responses, 13(43.3%) strongly disagree, 3(10%) neutral, 8(26.7%) agree and 6(20%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.3) for the 12 statement 'The budget for M&E is used properly for the intended purpose only', the respondents provided the following responses, 13(43.3%) strongly disagree, 5(16.7%) neutral, 3(10%) agree and 9(30%) strongly agree.

Overall, the survey results indicate several areas of improvement for the organization's MEAL practices, including the documentation of the system, accountability, stakeholder comprehension, meeting frequency, data collection and analysis tools, utilization of data, leadership support, budget allocation, and proper utilization of resources. These findings highlight the need for the organization to address these areas to enhance the efficiency and effect of its MEAL practices.

4.2.2 Stakeholder involvement

The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement with various statements linked to Stakeholder involvement using a 1-5 Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=strongly agree). The findings are as shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Stakeholder Involvement

Statement		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	St.Dev
13.The project considered stakeholders' expectations and requirements during implementation.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.33	1.24
	Disagree	13	43.3%		
	Neutral	0	0.0%		
	Agree	11	36.7%		
	Strongly agree	6	20.0%		
14.Stakeholders are communicated regarding project updates and progress.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.13	1.14
	Disagree	13	43.3%		
	Neutral	4	13.3%		

	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	4	13.3%		
15.stakeholders provide valuable input and feedback during project execution.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%		
	Disagree	13	43.3%	3.33	1.27
	Neutral	1	3.3%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	7	23.3%		
16.Stakeholder involvement has positively impacted the project's performance	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%		
	Disagree	3	10.0%	3.53	.82
	Neutral	11	36.7%		
	Agree	13	43.3%		
	Strongly agree	3	10.0%		
Over all Mean of Stakeholder Involvement				3.33	1.06

As presented in the above table (4.4) under the statement 13 ‘The project considered stakeholders' expectations and requirements during implementation’ the respondents provided the following responses, 13(43.3%) disagree, 11(36.7%) agree and 6(20%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.4) under the statement 14 ‘Stakeholders are communicated regarding project updates and progress’, the respondents provided the following responses, 13(43.3%) disagree, 4(13.3%) neutral, 9(30%) agree and 4(13.3%) strongly agree.

As presented in the above table (4.4) for the 15 statement ‘stakeholders provide valuable input and feedback during project execution’, the respondents provided the following responses, 13(43.3%) disagree, 1(3.3%) neutral, 9(30%) agree and 7(23.3%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.4) for the 16 statement ‘Stakeholder involvement has positively impacted the project's performance’, the respondents provided the following responses, 3(10%) disagree, 11(36.7%) neutral, 13(43.3%) agree and 3(10%) strongly agree.

Overall, the survey results show diverse perceptions of stakeholder involvement during project implementation. While there are positive indications of stakeholder consideration, communication, and impact, there is also a notable proportion of respondents indicating a lack of attention to stakeholder expectations, insufficient communication, and limited stakeholder input and feedback. These findings suggest the need for the organization to enhance stakeholder engagement practices to ensure effective involvement and harness the potential benefits of stakeholder participation in project execution.

4.2.3 Capacity Building

The participants were requested to express their degree of agreement with a set of statements related to capacity building. A 1-5 Likert scale was used, where 1 represented "strongly disagree," 2 indicated "disagree," 3 represented "neutral," 4 denoted "agree," and 5 indicated "strongly agree". The findings are as shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Capacity building

Statement		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	St.Dev
17.Technical experts are employed to run the respective areas in the projects	Strongly disagree	4	13.3%	3.43	1.63
	Disagree	9	30.0%		
	Neutral	1	3.3%		
	Agree	2	6.7%		
	Strongly agree	14	46.7%		
18.Project staff are trained in order to equip them with skills necessary to carry out M&E	Strongly disagree	13	43.3%	2.73	1.66
	Disagree	0	0.0%		
	Neutral	5	16.7%		
	Agree	6	20.0%		
	Strongly agree	6	20.0%		

19.The staff have adequate experience in monitoring and evaluation	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.63	1.10
	Disagree	6	20.0%		
	Neutral	7	23.3%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	8	26.7%		
20.The skills and competence of the staff helps them to participate effectively in Monitoring and evaluation	Strongly disagree	4	13.3%	3.00	1.34
	Disagree	9	30.0%		
	Neutral	5	16.7%		
	Agree	7	23.3%		
	Strongly agree	5	16.7%		
21.The level of education is considered in selection and recruitment of staff into M&E team.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.53	1.04
	Disagree	6	20.0%		
	Neutral	8	26.7%		
	Agree	10	33.3%		
	Strongly agree	6	20.0%		
Over all Mean of Capacity Building				3.27	1.27

As presented in the above table (4.5) for the statement 17 'Technical experts are employed to run the respective areas in the projects', the respondents provided the following responses, 4(13.3%) strongly disagree, 9(30%) disagree, 1(3.3%) neutral, 2(6.7%) agree and 14(46.7%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.5) for the statement 18 'Project staff are trained in order to equip them with skills necessary to carry out M&E', the respondents provided the following responses, 13(43.3%) strongly disagree, 5(16.7%) neutral, 6(20%) agree and 6(20%) strongly agree.

As presented in the above table (4.5) for the statement 19 ‘The staff have adequate experience in monitoring and evaluation’, the respondents provided the following responses, 6(20%) disagree, 7(23.3%) neutral, 9(30%) agree and 8(26.7%) strongly agree.

As presented in the above table (4.5) for the statement 20 ‘The skills and competence of the staff helps them to participate effectively in Monitoring and evaluation’, the respondents provided the following responses, 4(13.3%) strongly disagree, 9(30%) disagree, 5(16.7%) neutral, 7(23.3%) agree and 5(16.7%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.5) for the statement 21 ‘The level of education is considered in selection and recruitment of staff into M&E team’, the respondents provided the following responses, 6(20%) disagree, 8(26.7%) neutral, 10(33.3%) agree and 6 (20%) strongly agree.

Overall, the survey results indicate mixed perceptions regarding capacity building within the organization. While there are positive indications of technical expertise, staff experience, and educational considerations, there are also concerns regarding staff training and skills, as well as varying opinions on staff experience and technical expertise. These findings highlight the need for the organization to focus on enhancing capacity building efforts, including training programs, skill development, and ensuring the presence of technical experts in relevant areas. By addressing these areas, the organization can strengthen its M&E practices and improve the effectiveness of its projects.

4.2.4 MEAL Planning

The participants were requested to express their degree of agreement with a set of statements related to M&E planning. A 1-5 Likert scale was used, where 1 represented "strongly disagree,"

2 indicated "disagree," 3 represented "neutral," 4 denoted "agree," and 5 indicated "strongly agree". The findings are as shown in Table 4.6

Table 4.6 MEAL Planning

Statement		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	St.Dev
22.There is a monitoring and evaluation plan which is up to date	Strongly disagree	4	13.3%	3.23	1.48
	Disagree	9	30.0%		
	Neutral	1	3.3%		
	Agree	8	26.7%		
	Strongly agree	8	26.7%		
23.The current monitoring and evaluation plan clearly specify the individuals accountable for each activity, including any roles related to monitoring and evaluation assigned to the program/technical staff and implementing partners.	Strongly disagree	13	43.3%	2.83	1.68
	Disagree	0	0.0%		
	Neutral	1	3.3%		
	Agree	11	36.7%		
	Strongly agree	5	16.7%		
24.The monitoring and evaluation team has created plans for the dissemination and utilization of information.	Strongly disagree	2	6.7%	3.20	1.32
	Disagree	11	36.7%		
	Neutral	2	6.7%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	6	20.0%		
25.The M&E planning encompasses a comprehensive description of the project, encompassing both the problem statement and the framework(s) employed.	Strongly disagree	1	3.3%	2.83	.91
	Disagree	12	40.0%		
	Neutral	8	26.7%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	0	0.0%		
26.M&E Planning guarantees the efficient tracking of project progress.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	3.80	.96
	Disagree	2	6.7%		
	Neutral	11	36.7%		

	Agree	8	26.7%		
	Strongly agree	9	30.0%		
			Over all Mean of MEAL Planning	3.18	1.22

As presented in the above table (4.6) for the statement 22 ‘There is a monitoring and evaluation plan which is up to date’ the respondents provided the following responses, 4(13.3%) strongly disagree, 9(30%) disagree, 1(3.3%) neutral, 8(26.7%) agree and 8(26.7%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.6) for the statement 23 ‘The current monitoring and evaluation plan clearly specify the individuals accountable for each activity, including any roles related to monitoring and evaluation assigned to the program/technical staff and implementing partners’, the respondents provided the following responses, 13(43.3%) strongly disagree, 1(3.3%) neutral, 11(36.7%) agree and 5(16.7%) strongly agree.

As presented in the above table (4.6) for the statement 24 ‘The monitoring and evaluation team has created plans for the dissemination and utilization of information’, the respondents provided the following responses, 2(6.7%) strongly disagree, 11(36.7%) disagree, 2(6.7%) neutral, 9(30%) agree and 6(20%) strongly agree.

As shown in the above table (4.6) for the statement 25 ‘The M&E planning encompasses a comprehensive description of the project, encompassing both the problem statement and the framework(s) employed’, the respondents provided the following responses, 1(3.3%) strongly disagree, 12(40%) disagree, 8(26.7%) neutral and 9(30%) agree.

As presented in the above table (4.6) for the statement 26 ‘M&E Planning guarantees the efficient tracking of project progress’, the respondents provided the following responses, 2(6.7%) disagree, 11(36.7%) neutral, 8(26.7%) agree and 9(30%) strongly agree.

According to the survey results, the organization's M&E planning is generally positive, with the plan being kept up to date and project progress being tracked effectively. However, there are some reservations about accountability for M&E activities, information dissemination and utilization plans, and the comprehensiveness of project descriptions within the plan. These findings indicate that the organization's M&E planning processes should be improved by clearly assigning accountability, developing comprehensive project descriptions, and improving plans for disseminating and utilizing information. By focusing on these areas, the organization has the opportunity to enhance its monitoring and evaluation planning, leading to more efficient and effective monitoring and evaluation of its projects.

4.2.5 Project Performance

The participants were requested to express their degree of agreement with a set of statements related to Project performance. A 1-5 Likert scale was used, where 1 represented "strongly disagree," 2 indicated "disagree," 3 represented "neutral," 4 denoted "agree," and 5 indicated "strongly agree”. The findings are as shown in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Project performance response results

Statement		Frequency	Percentage %	Mean	St.Dev
27. Projects are completed on time.	Strongly disagree	6	20.0%		
	Disagree	7	23.3%	2.90	1.37

	Neutral	5	16.7%		
	Agree	8	26.7%		
	Strongly agree	4	13.3%		
28. Projects are completed within the Budget.	Strongly disagree	4	13.3%	3.53	1.30
	Disagree	1	3.3%		
	Neutral	8	26.7%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	8	26.7%		
29.The delivery of the projects is within the scope.	Strongly disagree	4	13.3%	3.03	1.40
	Disagree	8	26.7%		
	Neutral	9	30.0%		
	Agree	1	3.3%		
	Strongly agree	8	26.7%		
30.The project activities have been implemented within the quality standard of the organization.	Strongly disagree	0	0.0%	4.07	.91
	Disagree	1	3.3%		
	Neutral	8	26.7%		
	Agree	9	30.0%		
	Strongly agree	12	40.0%		

The findings in Table 4.7 show that for statement 27 ‘Projects are completed on time.’, the respondents provided the following responses, 6(20%) strongly disagree, 7(23.3%) disagree, 5(16.7%) neutral, 8(26.7%) agree and 4(13.3%) strongly agree.

As presented in the above table (4.7) for statement 28 ‘Projects are completed within the Budget.’, the respondents provided the following responses, 4(13.3%) strongly disagree, 1(3.3%) disagree, 8(26.7%) neutral, 9(30.0%) agree and 8(26.7%) strongly agree.

As presented in the above table (4.7) for statement 29 ‘The delivery of the projects is within the scope.’, the respondents provided the following responses, 4(13.3%) strongly disagree, 8(26.7%) disagree, 9(30%) neutral, 1(3.3%) agree and 8 (26.7%) strongly agree.

As presented in the above table (4.7) for statement 30 ‘The project activities have been implemented within the quality standard of the organization’, the respondents provided the following responses, 0(0.0%) chose strongly disagree, 1(3.3%) chose disagree, 8(26.7%) chose neutral, 9(30%) chose agree, and 12(40%) chose strongly agree.

4.3 Results of Inferential Statistics

4.3.1 Correlation analysis

The strength and direction of the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variable were assessed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. This analysis relied on the assumption of normal distribution for the data and the fact that the variables under consideration were continuous. As suggested by Evans (1996), the strength of correlation was interpreted as follows: (0.00 - 0.19 “very weak”), (0.2 - 0.39 “weak”), (0.4 - 0.59 “Moderate”), (0.6 - 0.79 “strong”), (0.8 - 1.0 “very strong”) . The results are shown in the below table (4.8).

Table 4.8 Correlations Matrix

Table 4.8 Correlations Matrix

		MEALPractice	Stakeholder Involvement	Capacity Building	MEALPlanning	ProjectPerformance
MEALPractice	Pearson Correlation	1	.981**	.977**	.980**	.981**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	30	30	30	30	30
StakeholderInvolvement	Pearson Correlation	.981**	1	.980**	.973**	.978**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	30	30	30	30	30
CapacityBuilding	Pearson Correlation	.977**	.980**	1	.974**	.970**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001		<.001	<.001
	N	30	30	30	30	30
MEALPlanning	Pearson Correlation	.980**	.973**	.974**	1	.976**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001		<.001
	N	30	30	30	30	30
ProjectPerformance	Pearson Correlation	.981**	.978**	.970**	.976**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	30	30	30	30	30

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The study computed into single variables per factor by obtaining the averages of MEAL practice, Stakeholder involvement, capacity building, and MEAL planning. Pearson's correlations analysis was then conducted. Table 4.8 shows the correlation matrix between the factors (MEAL practice, Stakeholder involvement, Capacity building and MEAL planning) and Project performance. As per Table 4.8 there is a positive relationship between project performance and MEAL practice as shown by coefficient of 0.981, a positive relationship between project performance and stakeholder involvement as shown by coefficient of 0.978, a positive relationship between project performance and capacity building by coefficient of 0.970 and a positive relationship between project performance and MEAL planning as illustrated by a

coefficient of 0.976. This shows all variable were significant in determining the relationship they have with project performance.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary of Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

This chapter presented a summary of the study's findings, conclusions, and recommendations. This study emphasized on the relationship of MEAL practice and project performance.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The study aimed to evaluate the relationship of MEAL practice, stakeholder involvement, capacity building, and MEAL planning with project performance as mentioned in the first chapter. From the results shown in the previous chapter (four); all of the variables which are MEAL practice, stakeholder involvement, capacity building, and MEAL planning have a positive relationship with project performance.

The findings indicate varying levels of agreement or disagreement among the respondents. While some respondents expressed positive views, such as agreeing or strongly agreeing with statements regarding the existence of a well-documented MEAL system and the effective comprehension of the system by stakeholders, others held more critical perspectives. For instance, there were concerns raised regarding the designated entity or individual responsible for implementing and managing the MEAL practice, as well as the adequacy of budgets assigned to the M&E system. These responses shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of the current MEAL system and provide valuable insights for further improvements and decision-making in the organization. The results also show diverse perceptions of stakeholder involvement during project implementation. While there are positive indications of stakeholder consideration, communication, and impact, there is also a notable proportion of respondents indicating a lack of

attention to stakeholder expectations, insufficient communication, and limited stakeholder input and feedback. These findings suggest the need for the organization to enhance stakeholder engagement practices to ensure effective involvement and harness the potential benefits of stakeholder participation in project execution. In addition the results indicate mixed perceptions regarding capacity building within the organization. While there are positive indications of technical expertise, staff experience, and educational considerations, there are also concerns regarding staff training and skills, as well as varying opinions on staff experience and technical expertise. This is in accordance with Turner (2011), who argued that M & E practical training is important in personnel capacity building because it facilitates the interaction and management of M & E systems. These findings highlight the need for the organization to focus on enhancing capacity-building efforts, including training programs, skill development, and ensuring the presence of technical experts in relevant areas. By addressing these areas, the organization can strengthen its M&E practices and improve the effectiveness of its projects. Further more, the results describes that the organization's M&E planning is generally positive, with the plan being kept up to date and project progress being tracked effectively. However, there are some reservations about accountability for M&E activities, information dissemination and utilization plans, and the comprehensiveness of project descriptions within the plan. These findings indicate that the organization's M&E planning processes should be improved by clearly assigning accountability, developing comprehensive project descriptions, and improving plans for disseminating and utilizing information. These findings resemble Hermano, López-Paredes, Martín-Cruz, and Pajares (2012) effective planning as a key factor in development project success, citing the ability to meet set targets.

5.2 Conclusions

In conclusion, the study aimed to evaluate the relationship between MEAL practice, stakeholder involvement, capacity building, and MEAL planning with project performance. The findings from the previous chapter indicate a positive relationship between all of these variables and project performance. However, the results also highlight varying levels of agreement or disagreement among the respondents, suggesting areas for improvement within the organization's MEAL system. Regarding the MEAL system, while some respondents expressed positive views on the existence of a well-documented system and stakeholder comprehension, there were concerns about the designated entity responsible for implementing the MEAL practice and the adequacy of budgets allocated to M&E. These findings emphasize the need for addressing weaknesses and ensuring proper implementation of the MEAL system.

Stakeholder involvement during project implementation showed diverse perceptions. While positive indications of stakeholder consideration and impact were observed, concerns were raised about limited stakeholder input and insufficient communication. The organization should enhance stakeholder engagement practices to effectively involve stakeholders and benefit from their participation.

Capacity building within the organization also received mixed perceptions. While positive indicators of technical expertise and staff experience were noted, concerns were voiced regarding staff training, skills, and varying opinions on expertise. Strengthening capacity-building efforts, including training programs and skill development, can address these areas and enhance M&E practices.

MEAL planning was generally positive, with up-to-date plans and effective project progress tracking. However, reservations were expressed about accountability for M&E activities, information dissemination, and utilization plans, as well as the comprehensiveness of project descriptions. Improving accountability, developing comprehensive project descriptions, and enhancing plans for information dissemination and utilization can enhance M&E planning processes. Overall, the study's findings provide valuable insights for the organization to improve its MEAL practices, stakeholder involvement, capacity building efforts, and MEAL planning. Addressing these areas can lead to enhanced project performance and better decision-making within the organization.

5.3 Recommendations

The study's findings provide valuable recommendations for improving the organization's MEAL practices, stakeholder involvement, capacity-building efforts, and MEAL planning. Firstly, addressing the weaknesses identified in the MEAL system is crucial. This entails ensuring that a designated entity is responsible for implementing MEAL practices and allocating sufficient budgets to M&E activities, thereby strengthening the overall framework and ensuring proper implementation.

Secondly, enhancing stakeholder engagement practices is essential. This can be achieved by improving communication channels, actively seeking input from stakeholders, and considering their expectations throughout project lifecycle. By fostering strong relationships and promoting meaningful participation, the organization can benefit from diverse perspectives and increase stakeholder satisfaction.

Thirdly, investing in capacity building is vital to improve MEAL practices. The organization should provide training programs, skill development opportunities, and resources to enhance the technical expertise and skills of staff members. Additionally, ensuring the presence of relevant experts in critical areas will contribute to more effective M&E implementation.

Fourthly, improving MEAL planning processes is crucial for comprehensive project monitoring and evaluation. The organization should address concerns related to accountability, information dissemination, utilization plans, and project descriptions. This can be achieved by clearly assigning accountability for M&E activities, developing comprehensive project descriptions, and establishing effective plans for information dissemination and utilization. Lastly, fostering a culture of continuous learning and improvement is essential. Regular assessments and monitoring of MEAL practices, stakeholder involvement, capacity building, and MEAL planning are necessary. The findings from these assessments inform decision-making, facilitate adaptation of strategies, and drive continuous improvement in project performance. By implementing these recommendations, the organization can enhance its MEAL practices, effectively engage stakeholders, build the capacity of its staff, and improve the planning and implementation of M&E processes. Ultimately, these efforts will lead to enhanced project performance, increased accountability, and more informed decision-making within the organization. While the above recommendations are based on existing research, it is important to recognize that the field of MEAL practices and project performance is continuously evolving. Therefore, conducting further research and evaluation studies on the specific relationship between MEAL practices, stakeholder involvement, capacity building, MEAL planning, and project performance can provide deeper insights and contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Dear Participants,

My name is Rahel Mekuria I am a third-year student at Addis Ababa University, pursuing my Masters of Arts degree in project management.

I would like to invite you to participate in a questionnaire aimed at gathering information about "Exploring the relationship of MEAL(monitoring, evaluation, accountability & learning) practices and project performance: A case study of Plan International Ethiopia."

Your participation in this questionnaire is greatly appreciated, and your input will be valuable in helping me to gain a deeper understanding.

Please note that your participation is entirely voluntary, and all the information provided will be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. Please find attached a questionnaire that requires you to provide information.

Thank you so much for your participation and time.

Sincerely,

Rahel

Appendix B

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is intended to collect data only for academic purposes. All information will be treated with strict confidentiality. Please do not include your name.

A. General Information

1. What is your current position?

   ☐ Project Manager/Lead ☐ MERL manager/specialist

   Other (please specify) ……..

2. Year of Experience in the position

   ☐ 1-3 ☐ 4-10 ☐ Above 10

3. What is your gender

   ☐ Female ☐ Male

4. Please indicate your age

   ☐ Less than35 ☐ 36-55 ☐ Above 55

5. Educational Status

   ☐ BA/BSC ☐ MA/MSC ☐ PhD

B. Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL) Practice

The following are MEAL practice statements related to project performance, please check the box to indicate your level of agreement.

Declaration		**Level of agreement**				
MEAL Practice		**Strongly agree (5)**	**Agree (4)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Strongly disagree (1)**
1	There is a well-documented &well-defined MEAL system					
2	A designated entity or individual is accountable for implementing and managing the MEAL practice and system.					
3	The project's MEAL system is effectively comprehended by stakeholders.					
4	Meetings with project partners and stakeholders are carried out on a regular basis					
5	Data collection and analysis tool capable of generating both internal and external assessments reports					

6	Data on the progress of implementation is collected periodically.					
7	The implementation progress data is periodically evaluated and monitored.					
8	The data generated through MEAL serves as valuable input for decision-making and future planning.					
9	The leadership within my organization acknowledges and appreciates the learning opportunities as well as the challenges encountered by the program quality unit.					
10	There is a sufficient budget assigned for M & E system for the organization					
11	Data collection and analysis tools in place include procedures, people, skills, and equipment necessary to systematically store and manage M&E data.					
12	The budget for M&E is used properly for the intended purpose only.					

C. Stakeholder Involvement

13	The project considered stakeholders' expectations and requirements during implementation.					
14	Stakeholders are communicated regarding project updates and progress.					
15	stakeholders provide valuable input and feedback during project execution.					
16	Stakeholder involvement has positively impacted the project's performance					

D. Capacity Building

The following statements are related to capacity building. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement using a 1-5 Likert scale.

Capacity Building		**Strongly agree (5)**	**Agree (4)**	**Neutral (3)**	**Disagree (2)**	**Strongly disagree (1)**
17	Technical experts are employed to run the respective areas in the projects					
18	Project staff are trained to equip them with the skills necessary to carryout MEAL.					
19	The staff have adequate experience in monitoring and evaluation.					
20	The skills and competence of the staff help them to participate effectively inMonitoring and evaluation					
21	The level of education is considered in the selection and recruitment of staff into the MEAL team.					

E. Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability & Learning (MEAL) Planning

The following statements are related to M&E Planning. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement using a 1-5 Likert scale.

	MEAL Planning	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
22	There is a monitoring and evaluation plan which is up to date					
23	The current monitoring and evaluation plan clearly specify the individuals accountable for each activity, including any roles related to monitoring and evaluation assigned to the program/technical staff and implementing partners.					
24	The monitoring and evaluation team has created plans for the dissemination and utilization of information.					
25	The M&E planning encompasses a comprehensive description of the project, encompassing both the problem statement and the framework(s) employed.					
26	M&E Planning guarantees the efficient tracking of project progress.					

F. Project Performance

The following statements are related to project performance. Please indicate your level of agreement with the statement using a 1-5 Likert scale.

	Project performance	Level of agreement				
		Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)
27	Projects are completed on time.					
28	Projects are completed within the Budget.					
29	The delivery of the projects is within the scope.					
30	The project activities have been implemented within the quality standard of the organization.					

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.