

# Optimizing, monitoring and Evaluation Practices in Urban Development Projects: A case Study of Abuja, Nigeria

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<p><b>Corresponding Author</b> PILLAH, TYODZER PATRICK PhD</p> <p>Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Veritas University Abuja</p> <p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Received: 04 /02/ 2025</p> <p>Accepted: 17 /02 /2025</p> <p>Published: 20 /02 /2025</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> Monitoring and Evaluation (M&amp;E) is a pivotal phase in the lifecycle of any project, determining its successful completion. The outcomes of M&amp;E reports often reveal the effectiveness of project implementation. This research focuses on enhancing M&amp;E practices in urban development projects, specifically in Abuja, Nigeria's capital. The importance of M&amp;E in national development and project performance is significant. The study, titled "Optimizing Monitoring and Evaluation Practices in Urban Development Projects: A Case Study of Abuja, Nigeria," aims to scrutinize and improve M&amp;E methods in Abuja's urban projects. Utilizing Contingency, Program, and Results-Based Management (RBM) theoretical frameworks, the research highlights M&amp;E as a vital tool for ensuring projects are completed on time by the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA). The study concludes with recommendations to institutionalize M&amp;E in the FCDA and other public sectors in Nigeria, provide proper training for government officials on M&amp;E metrics, and emphasize the necessity for professional staff knowledgeable in M&amp;E to enhance project performance.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Monitoring, evaluation, urban development, public service reform.</p>
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## 1. Introduction

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a process that assists project managers in enhancing performance and achieving results. According to the United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] (2012), the aim of M&E is to enhance current and future management of outputs, outcomes, and impact. Neglecting the roles and effects that monitoring and evaluation would bring to project performance would be detrimental and have a negative impact on the project (Akanbi *et al.*, 2018). Consequently, most public projects experience delays in completion or fail to meet specific goals despite significant investments (Afomachukwu, 2021). Poor performance issues in public projects are often related to inadequate monitoring and evaluation practices (Odile & James, 2020).

However, according to the World Bank in 2012, any project should have monitoring and evaluation (Yusuf, 2022). They serve as the foundation for required mid-course adjustments in policies, programs, or projects and give managers in the public sector information on how well targets and goals are being met (Akanbi *et al.*, 2018). In order to assess project success, monitoring and evaluation entail the methodical use of meticulously thought-out techniques utilizing information management, skills, and planning (Afomachukwu, 2021; Odile & James, 2020; Onifade *et al.*, 2017). According to Akanbi *et al.* (2018), monitoring and evaluation ought to be incorporated into government systems and utilized as a means of providing feedback on the results and

repercussions of project performance. In this way, monitoring and evaluation would support decision-makers in ensuring timely implementation of project performance in urban development projects.

Additionally, the failure of road projects, for instance, would result from a lack of monitoring and evaluation, especially in developing nations like Nigeria (Afomachukwu, 2021). By improving accountability and transparency in the management team's utilization of resources and accomplishment of objectives and goals, monitoring and evaluation improve project performance (Odile & James, 2020). According to Onifade *et al.* (2017), monitoring and evaluation inside the project performance system offer strategic inputs that regulate the key variables that define the project's control pillar, such as scope, quality, resources, time, and cost. Reviewing the function of monitoring and evaluation in project performance within the Abuja Municipal Area Council is the primary goal of the article.

Additionally, in order to professionalize project implementation from start to finish, the Planning, Research, and Statistics (PRS) department was established as a standard department in all Federal Government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies in the wake of Nigeria's 1988 Public Service Reform. But in order to emphasize the value of M&E in project execution, the Federal Government's Joint Admissions and Matriculation

Board established a Research, Monitoring, and Evaluation Department in accordance with the reform instructions.

## 2. Literature Review

### *Monitoring and Evaluation Practices*

An increasingly important tool for program management is monitoring and assessment. Dyason (2010) asserts that monitoring entails gathering and analyzing data on a particular program or intervention, whereas evaluation evaluates the program or intervention in order to provide answers to particular issues. According to all of these different definitions, monitoring is a continuous activity that is predicated on goals and actions that were planned during the project planning phase. It keeps the work on schedule and alerts management when a project is not proceeding as planned. When carried out correctly, it offers a suitable evaluation base and is a crucial instrument for effective project management. It enables one to ascertain whether the project is proceeding according to plan, whether the capacity is appropriate and sufficient, and whether the resources are sufficient and used appropriately. The project's results and effects are the main subject of evaluation. It is a recurring evaluation of how the program or project activities have affected the predefined outcomes (Kam & Ralf, 2005). It gives the project manager the ability to decide how the project will go and assess if its aims and objectives have been met.

Moreover, it is important to recognize the significance of monitoring and evaluation practices in project management. These practices ensure that project results can be quantified and provide a framework for accountability and informed decision-making at both program and policy levels. While implementing monitoring and evaluation practices involves significant costs and resource implications, they are essential for the success of projects and should not be overlooked (Silva & Warnakulasuriya, 2016). It is crucial for management and donor agencies to understand and prioritize these aspects and commit to implementing recommendations arising from monitoring and evaluation (Ryan, 2017). Additionally, it is important to involve a wide range of stakeholders in both implementing and steering the monitoring and evaluation process. The involvement of stakeholders from the early stages of evaluation planning promotes inclusion, significant participation, and ownership of results and recommendations. This approach not only improves the quality and sustainability of projects but also creates awareness and builds capacity within the community (Frederik *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, effective project management relies heavily on human resources management, particularly for monitoring and evaluation. The technical capacity, organizational know-how, and motivation of human resources significantly impact the evaluation process (Vanessa, 2016). Empowering stakeholders and involving them in decision-making processes from the planning stage onwards promotes their inclusion and significant participation, leading to better project outcomes. In addition, proper planning is essential in project control processes. Planning involves proactive identification of potential problems before they can significantly affect project cost and schedule during the implementation phase. It assists managers in fulfilling their primary functions of direction and control and facilitates effective communication and coordination among various parties involved in the project (Dyason, 2010).

The results of the research will benefit scholars in the field of project management; particularly those involved in monitoring and evaluation, by helping them understand how specific M&E practices influence project performance. In order to determine the best strategies for enhancing project performance, the study will collect data on progressive project monitoring and evaluation. In order to improve the results of urban development projects in Abuja, the information gathered will identify areas for improvement and expose current gaps in M&E processes. Better project outcomes will also arise from a deeper comprehension of the complex relationship between M&E practices and project performance.

Furthermore, the study's findings and recommendations will enhance efficiency and effectiveness in project management, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Vision 2030. The study will also generate new knowledge for other researchers and scholars. Moreover, the findings will greatly contribute to the body of knowledge for scholars specializing in project management, particularly in the implementation of monitoring and evaluation practices. It will also provide stakeholders with insights on how to establish and execute robust monitoring and evaluation practices by learning from the study's identified mistakes.

This study will examine the current methodologies and frameworks used for monitoring and evaluation in urban development projects in Abuja, assess the effectiveness of existing M&E practices in capturing project progress and outcomes in Abuja, identify common challenges and barriers to effective M&E implementation in urban development projects in Abuja, and propose recommendations for enhancing M&E practices to improve the overall effectiveness of urban development initiatives in Abuja. The paper is divided into five sections; the introduction, literature review, methodology, findings, conclusion and recommendations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

A theory is a collection of presumptions, widely held beliefs, and guidelines derived from scant data or understanding that are intended to assess, forecast, or clarify the characteristics or actions of a phenomenon. The Program, Results Management (RBM), and Contingency theory are the theoretical frameworks used in this investigation.

### *Program Theory*

Huey Chen, Peter Rossi, Michael Quinn Patton, and Carol Weiss created the program theory in 1195. It focuses on how to implement change and who is in charge of it. Program theory is frequently represented by logical models, which also demonstrate how the intervention's overarching logic is applied. The theory is well-known for its conclusive procedure to address issues and the necessity of doing assessments to supplement the findings, and it is a practical instrument for monitoring evaluations. Additionally, it offers resources for managing crucial assessment areas (Ralf & Rodney, 2007). The program theory employs the logical framework approach, and many companies' transactions involve human service programs that are intended to develop social demands. The theory is a comprehensive version of the logic model, presented through a graphical scale to relate to the logical model. It supports stakeholders' engagement, senior management, and review of outcomes (Njuki *et al.*, 2013).

Additionally, the idea offers a realistic and expected representation of how a hypothetical software operates (Muller & Jugdev, 2012). It demonstrates how the elements of the process program are meant to affect the outcomes (Callistus et al., 2021). In order to ensure that the intended service system is created and maintained, the theory includes an organizational strategy for allocating resources and structuring program operations. It also aids in the plans for the use of the money and examines how the service delivery systems link to provide the necessary intervention to the target individuals. This offers valuable insights into how the intended activities for the designated target individuals reflect the anticipated societal benefits. The assessor can comprehend the reasons behind and the operation of the program by employing a theory-based framework in monitoring and evaluation (Uitto, 2014; Coryn et al., 2011). The idea is applied via the input-output model to monitor performance, communicate findings, and improve project performance. Program theory explains how altering processes and inputs can increase output and produce favorable results. It provides answers to the project's uncertainty issues by keeping an eye on developments and correcting course as necessary to guarantee that the goals are met. A program theory helps determine whether there is a shift toward a desired performance level by demonstrating a single immediate consequence that the program has accomplished. A number of quick results are displayed by complex programs, which are primarily encountered in complex projects.

### **Results-Based Management Theory**

The Results-Based Management (RBM) theory has evolved over the years, starting with the Australian government in the mid-1980s and gaining importance in the 1990s with the support of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). RBM is a results-oriented approach to management, building on previous theories such as Public Sector Management, Program Management, Management by Objectives, and Total Quality Management. RBM is based on clear responsibilities and requires continuous monitoring and self-assessment to ensure sustainable results (Crawford & Bryce, 2013). It emphasizes regular feedback and incorporates lessons learned to improve processes and plans. Monitoring and evaluation are essential components of RBM, ensuring that programs and projects adapt to new information and continuously improve.

Moreover, effective monitoring involves stakeholder involvement, data collection, performance analysis, and periodic reporting (Hwang & Lim, 2013). Evaluation, on the other hand, examines expected and achieved outcomes, processes, and contextual factors to understand project accomplishments or shortcomings. It provides credible and reliable information to inform decision-making and improve project performance. Incorporating stakeholder feedback and involving key stakeholders in the evaluation process enhances the usefulness of findings and recommendations (Gilbert & Schipper, 2014; Clarke, 2011). RBM focuses on accountability, performance improvement, and sustainable change through structured planning, skilled labor, and stakeholder involvement (UNDP, 2012). It provides a framework for monitoring project performance and driving sustainable change.

### **Contingency Theory**

American psychologist, mathematician, and philosopher Edwin Guthrie first proposed this hypothesis in the 1920s. But

because to the efforts of Austrian psychologist Fred Fiedler, it became well-known. Contingency theory is based on five fundamental assumptions: i) there is no one-size-fits-all ideal organizational structure for all environments, ii) organizations may need to employ different approaches to address different issues, iii) when making decisions, Organizational management must take into account a number of factors, including the external and internal environment, as well as societal attitudes and values; iv) organizational management must be highly competent in identifying issues and determining the best course of action; and v) an organization must be extremely adaptable in order to adjust to unforeseen changes in the environment (Afomachukwu, 2021).

Furthermore, contingency theory emphasizes managerial choices that best suit the right course of action in light of outside circumstances. Additionally, the theory states that the only prerequisite for creating an association between a stimulus and a response is a close temporal link between the two. The idea also asserts that there isn't a single best approach to allocate company resources in order to continuously produce outstanding results. However, the fundamental premise of the idea is that any kind of destabilization in one activity might have a positive or negative impact on the breakdown of order in another. A mass or collection of objects in close proximity or touch is referred to as contingency; it is a state of being contiguous. This idea clarifies the justification for tracking and assessing project performance. While project performance is defined by cost-effectiveness, punctuality, quality standards, and satisfying project scope, monitoring and evaluation are acknowledged as essential flexible capacities to track project progress and detect difficulties. It is crucial to remember, nonetheless, that contingency theory's adaptability would offer a feedback system to guarantee project performance as well as monitoring and assessment (Yusuf, 2022).

### **Conceptualizing Monitoring and Evaluation**

The topic of monitoring and evaluation has been defined in a number of ways, just like any other social or management science. It is impossible to define it from a single point of view. These days, the terms monitoring and evaluation are frequently utilized. It is a meticulously organized process used to collect and evaluate data about a project in order to assess its degree of completion. For this reason, the notion of monitoring and evaluation has been defined by a number of academics as well as international organizations including the World Bank Group, the United Nations, and others. According to Akanbi et al. (2018), monitoring and evaluation are the methodical and impartial ways to collect data on a project. They define it as an analysis of how activities relate to the project's stated goals in terms of their relevance, efficacy, efficiency, and impact.

Thus, a key link in the project's value chain is monitoring and evaluation. In order to improve project success through control, scope, quality resources, time, and cost management, they noted, monitoring and evaluation would collect specific information (Odile & James, 2020). To encourage successful and efficient project implementation by making well-informed, fact-based decisions, for instance, monitoring and evaluation entails reflecting and communicating (Afomachukwu, 2021). Comparably, in another study, it is considered a system that measures the project's effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and impact, determines whether project objectives have been met, and incorporates lessons learned into the decision-making process. In

order to ensure a methodical understanding of a project, monitoring and evaluation are therefore crucial (Yusuf, 2022).

### Significance of Monitoring and Assessment

First and foremost, the relevance of Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) has been extensively discussed by scholars, highlighting its importance in terms of accountability, support for management functions, problem identification, suggesting possible solutions, and improving the quality of data and information (Afomachukwu, 2021; Catherine *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, Monitoring and Evaluation activities ensure alignment with accountability, support evidence-based decision-making, aid in problem identification, provide solutions to identified problems, and improve the quality of data and information.

### Project Performance and its Fundamentals

Project performance, which takes into account both financial and non-financial parts of the project life cycle, is essential and entails assessing the total result or objective achievement of a project's deliverables (Yusuf, 2022). Based on the sources of information on project performance, the studies can be divided into two categories, according to the opinions of experts on evaluating project performance in the context of M&E's impact: the "objective approach" group and the "subjective approach" group. The objective approach group, according to a research study, includes studies that gathered project performance data from credible sources (such as secondary data), whereas the subjective group includes studies that gathered project performance data by asking construction industry stakeholders about the performance of their projects in the past or in the future (Afomachukwu, 2021). All of the studies in this research's empirical review used subjective ways to gauge project performance, such as the opinions and impressions of the respondents. Not all project performance metrics can be assessed using the objective method, and this study is no exception. For example, a subjective technique is the only way to quantify client happiness effectively (Ezeagba, 2017).

### Empirical Studies Reviewed

An evaluation of project monitoring procedures on building sites in Abuja, Nigeria, was conducted in a study by Nkeleme (2021). In order to: examine the project monitoring techniques used in construction projects; and estimate the relative efficacy of these techniques in project delivery, the study concentrated on evaluating the project monitoring practices utilized in project execution in Abuja. The findings showed that the majority of firms in the research domain mostly use manual project monitoring procedures, and that satisfactory work breakdown techniques are rarely used for project monitoring. Onifade *et al.* (2017), on the other hand, looked at how monitoring and evaluation affected project management strategies in the road building industry. Using Julius Berger Nigeria Plc as a case study, the study sought to ascertain the effectiveness of monitoring and assessing road construction projects in Nigeria. In addition to conducting interviews and in-person observations in the study region, the study collected primary data from 95 respondents via a structured questionnaire. According to the results, the majority of respondents concurred that monitoring and evaluation are critical to the success of road development projects in Nigeria. Ezeagba (2017) evaluated the efficacy and efficiency of monitoring and assessment in Nigeria's construction industry. A total of 120 people who were chosen from road projects between 2012 and 2015 made up the

study's population. Structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data from a stratified sample of 20 road construction companies. Descriptive statistics (mean score, percentage, and standard deviation) were used to examine quantitative data. A high degree of efficiency in monitoring and evaluation for urban development projects, including road building, was shown by the results, which showed that the overall mean for effective monitoring and assessment was 3.72.

The review has emphasized how important it is for projects and program interventions to have efficient monitoring and evaluation procedures. It has been shown that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are becoming more widely acknowledged as crucial project management techniques. Furthermore, M&E offers a way to hold people accountable for how development resources are used. The review's analysis reveals that, in spite of the significance placed on adopting and implementing successful M&E practices in projects, little thought has been paid to whether or not these practices affect project performance in projects that get public funding. Monitoring and assessment have an impact on project performance, according to numerous insightful research on the subject. The majority of scholars have pointed out that Abuja has been the site of studies on project performance monitoring and assessment. However, these studies did not extensively focus on the effectiveness of existing M&E practices in capturing project progress and outcomes in Abuja. This study aims to address the knowledge gap by determining the effectiveness of existing monitoring and evaluation practices and how to improve these practices to ensure the performance of urban development projects in Abuja.

## 3. Methodology

Selecting the right methodology is crucial for the success of a research project, based on its objectives, questions, and validated findings. This research follows a nested approach by identifying the research philosophy, approach, strategy, and method. Hence, the study utilized a method that involved analyzing both published and unpublished literature, as well as archival materials. The research also concentrated on the Abuja region as the specific case study area. Due to rapid urbanization, the current capital city was examined with a focus on understanding the emergence of this significant issue and the impact of Monitoring and Evaluation practices on urban development projects carried out in that region. The primary method used to assess the study area was a comprehensive review of existing literature, complemented by on-site observations and practical experience gained in Abuja by the researchers, who are experts in sustainability and urban growth. The paper presents substantial data to investigate the impact of urban development projects in Abuja, how it has contributed to the challenges faced by the residents of the capital city, and the impacts and challenges of Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) practices employed to supervise those projects.

## 4. Findings

The study investigates the optimization of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices in urban development projects in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The findings indicate that the Abuja urban environment faces numerous challenges, and that effective M&E practices significantly influence these challenges and overall project performance in the region. Since the capital's relocation from Lagos to Abuja in 1991, there has been a



significant population increase in Abuja (Alkali, 2005). This growth has placed immense pressure on the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) to manage land use, housing, infrastructure, public services, and to keep up with the rapid population rise. Addressing this challenge of population increase is crucial at federal, state, and local government levels in Nigeria. Sustainable urbanism can only be achieved through putting measures in place that can control migration.

Rapid urbanization has led to several economic, cultural, and environmental issues. Uncontrolled and unplanned city expansion has resulted in the development of substandard slums and shanty towns, housing millions of urban residents for can barely afford the living standards of the upper and middle class. This may lead to loss of diversity (i.e. several interconnected phenomena that impact the social, cultural, economic, and ecological fabric of an area).

Other challenges from unregulated urban growth in Nigeria advanced include overcrowding, epidemic threats, security issues, reduced access to social infrastructure, lack of proactive advocacy and insufficient policies to promote planned economic growth and development. These and other issues have hampered the successful implementation of development plans and negatively affected project performance in Abuja.

To overcome these obstacles some of the reviewed literatures (Daramola & Ibem, 2010; Jiboye & Omoniyi, 2010; Jiboye, 2011; Akinagbe & Olatunji, 2016; Priye et al., 2017; Sergio, 2022) proposed that government should: establish effective research institutions for developing local construction materials, streamline bureaucracy in government projects, enforce strict rules and regulations to eradicate corruption and promote professionalism, and set up project management and evaluation offices to oversee and manage government projects.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### Conclusion

The study critically examined the optimization of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices in urban development projects within the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The findings revealed that despite various development strategies implemented by successive administrations, the challenges posed by uncontrolled urbanization have significantly impacted project performance and urban sustainability. Key issues identified include inadequate funding, corruption, lack of technical expertise, and insufficient public consultation in planning processes.

To address these challenges, the study recommends establishing effective research institutions, streamlining bureaucracy, enforcing strict anti-corruption measures, and ensuring the continuity of policies across different administrations. Additionally, the importance of good governance, committed leadership, and the integration of local communities in planning processes were highlighted as critical factors for successful urban development.

Overall, the study underscores the necessity of robust M&E frameworks and the implementation of comprehensive, inclusive, and sustainable development strategies. By addressing the identified obstacles and adopting the proposed recommendations, Nigeria can enhance the efficacy of its urban development projects,

particularly in Abuja, thereby fostering national progress and improving the quality of life for its citizens

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to optimize Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices and improve urban development projects in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. Government should:

- Establish robust and comprehensive M&E frameworks that include clear guidelines, benchmarks, and performance indicators to effectively track the progress and outcomes of urban development projects.
- Improve technical expertise by hiring skilled professionals and providing continuous training and development opportunities. Encourage collaboration with academic and research institutions to integrate the latest methodologies and best practices in M&E.
- Involve local communities, including rural peasants and local government officials, in the planning and decision-making processes. Ensure that the needs and interests of the populace are reflected in development plans.
- Implement strategic urban planning measures to manage population growth and prevent the proliferation of slums and shanty towns. Focus on sustainable development practices that balance economic, cultural, and environmental considerations.
- Establish research institutions dedicated to the development of local construction materials and innovative solutions tailored to the Nigerian context. Promote research that addresses the specific challenges of urban development in Abuja.
- Simplify administrative processes and reduce bureaucratic red tape to expedite project approvals and implementation. Foster a more efficient and responsive government apparatus.

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