FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) SYSTEM THEORIES IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT BY LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NGOs: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF MEDRA AND GRM INTERNATIONAL IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EFFECTIVE APPLICATION OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) SYSTEM THEORIES IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT BY LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL NGOs: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ANALYSIS OF MEDRA AND GRM INTERNATIONAL IN ZIMBABWE

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The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system concept guides Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in tracking project implementation progress, assessing project performance and the achievement of development objectives. The research problem suggests some inconsistencies and gaps in NGO M&E systems to the detriment of projects effectiveness. This study therefore sought to undertake a comparative analysis of the adoption and effective application of the M&E system theories by local and international NGOs, and the contributing factors.

The research employed a qualitative case study approach to generate in-depth evidence from the lived experiences and expert views of purposively sampled M&E and project staff drawn from a local and an international NGO case study in Zimbabwe. The study adopted the 'deductive qualitative design', a novel research design that tests theory using qualitative methods. Primary and secondary data was collected, thematic content analysis undertaken, and data triangulated.

Findings established that NGOs were on track in the adoption of M&E system principles, albeit with some application gaps and inconsistencies especially for the local NGO due to resource constraints. The M&E system was found to be relevant notwithstanding duplications in some of its theories, concepts and frameworks, worsened by some donors' imposition of inconsistent M&E approaches on NGOs.

The study makes recommendations on measures to hamonise duplicating M&E system theories, frameworks, enhancement of NGOs capacity by donors, In its contribution to the body of knowledge, the study also came up with an *M&E systems 'theory to practice' conceptual framework* that guides future M&E theory and NGO practice research, for effective projects that address societal development.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

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Acknowledgements

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List of Abbreviations

CCYB	Creative Commons BY License
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DFID	Department for International Development
FAO	Food & Agricultural Organisation
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
GMI	Group Maturity Index
ICT	Information, Communication Technology
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Society
ILO	International Labour Organisation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
LFSP	Livelihoods and Food Security Programme
LNGO	Local Non-Governmental Organisation
LOGFRAME	Logical Framework
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MeDRA	Methodist Development and Relief Agency
MIS	Management Information Systems
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD	Organisation for Economic Coorperation & Development
PCSF	Project Critical Success Factors
PMER	Project Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting
PMBOK	Project Management Body of Knowledge
PRP	Protracted Relief Programme
SAMDI	Southern Africa Management Development Institute
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMART	Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Results oriented, Time-bound
SWOT	Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	The United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Increasing poverty, underdevelopment, food insecurity, disease outbreaks, natural shocks, and many other societal challenges affecting humanity have been stretching the capacity of Governments in most developing countries to respond adequately (Banks et al, 2015). This has seen the increasing role of donor funded Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) implementing humanitarian and community development projects in the 3rd World (Banks et al, 2015). According to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK, 2021), efficient and effective projects rely on the right project management practices. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems have proven to be useful key functions of project management in the NGOs sector.

The Chapter discusses shows how the research topic is linked to development discourse, to the academic discourse and the project management body of knowledge in as far as the M&E Systems theory is concerned. Particularly it attempts to show how the nexus between theory and practice has implications to development programming by NGOs and the challenges being experienced with regards to translating theory into practice as part of the problem statement.

Overview of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): The need for M&E systems, as outlined by Mleke & Dida (2020) is for institutions to assess the performance of projects. This is with regards to tracking of implementation progress, identification of areas of improvement, assessment of delivery of results, achievement of project objectives and resource accountability. To demonstrate the centrality of M&E in project management, Markiewicz & Patrick (2016) reckons that monitoring and evaluation is not a stand-alone stage of the project life cycle but rather runs throughout the life of a project. Theoretically and practically therefore, monitoring and evaluation processes do anchor every stage of the project life from conceptualization (development of the project theory of change), planning, implementation and closure (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016).

According to Basheka & Byamugisha (2015), M&E has been growing as a profession, a field of practice and an academic discipline in Africa since the 1990s although its institutional frameworks still remain weak with potential to mature. This study's specific focus on M&E is premised not only on its importance in NGO development projects, but also on the belief that M&E is a discipline of its own. For instance, Basheka & Byamugisha (2015) outlines the key characteristics that make M&E a discipline. For instance, M&E is based on theories, concepts, models and principles, uses unique technical terminologies, it requires specialist knowledge and skills, while producing new knowledge. It is also a recognized specialized academic subject taught at Universities. Based on these tenets, M&E plays a critical role in societal development endeavors hence its efficacy becomes of interest to the research and development agenda (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015).

To guide development processes, monitoring and evaluation concepts, frameworks and tools remain popular among NGO projects, although with varied degrees of success in different NGOs (Creswell, 2018). Based on this background, the research topic was mooted to get an in-depth understanding of the key factors that influence the effective application of M&E system theories in project management, comparatively by local and international NGOs. Accordingly, this study took a theory testing approach comparatively within the local and International NGO contexts. This was on the presumption that the adoption and application of the M&E systems theory may vary between these two types of organisations, and if so what improvements would be needed to the theory itself and/or the practice. This is premised on the acknowledgement that theory is not always the absolute truth, and may not be applicable and relevant in all contexts (Abend, 2008).

In delivering their mandate, NGOs do implement projects, and according to Crawford and Bryce (2003) they make use of M&E systems as one of their key project management tools. To ensure the projects are designed and implemented in a way that attains the desired results and

objectives, robust and effective M&E systems play an integral role (Crawford & Bryce, 2003). As Cloete (2009) puts it, successful implementation of development projects is based on "doing the right things right" (p. 293), and the M&E system concepts, frameworks and tools help NGOs to provide that guidance.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): This research focuses on the NGO sector as the industry and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as the practice field or profession. It is therefore important to understand the NGO sector as an industry and M&E as the subject matter. NGOs as defined by Abakunzi, Nyamweya & Bogere (2020) are non-commercial institutions that are independent from Government, established and operating at community, national or international level. They offer and advance social and welfare services, humanitarian and developmental interventions especially to the underprivileged. The United Nations (UN) defines NGOs as 'not-for-profit' charitable institutions established to relieve suffering and support poverty reduction. They mostly rely on funding mobilised from philanthropic, private, international donor organisations and developed countries' public funds (United Nations, 2015). Donor funded NGOs have been actively contributing to community development through the implementation of various projects in under-developed countries, hence the study is based on case study NGOs in Zimbabwe. Since pre-independence to date, NGOs have always had a heavy presence in the country busy driving donor funded community development projects of different kinds. Whilst these efforts have brought development in some areas, experience, observations and literature suggest mixed successes (Chibonore, 2015).

The role of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) sector in the developmental and humanitarian agenda came to prominence since the end of World War II, in support of reconstruction and recovery interventions (Banks et al, 2015). The role of NGOs continued to be of significance in national development, especially after the failure of neo-liberal approaches to

development. It then extended its tentacles across the developing countries in the 1970s and gradually grew to its current recognition as a key poverty reduction, social and development sector of the 3rd world (Banks et al, 2015). Although the history of NGOs dates back to the 1940s, it is largely since the 1980s that they began receiving a high profile as development role-players offering an alternative development approach to poverty alleviation and sustainable development to poor communities in developing countries (Drabek in Matenga, 2001). In the developing world, the recognition of NGOs' development role stems from the difficulties experienced by governments in financing and sustaining development interventions in rural areas. NGOs, no doubt play a pivotal role in rural areas through poverty reduction, health services, education, sustainable agricultural development, infrastructure development, empowerment of local authorities, women empowerment and income generating programs.

Using a case study approach, two NGOs, one local and one international were purposively selected for this study. Being a case study, the selection criteria favoured those NGOs that have implemented a good mix of different types of community development, implemented in different geographical contexts of the country and funded by different donor organisations. Such a mix widens the scope of different factors that influence the adoption of M&E standards. For example, it is assumed that local and international NGOs have different capacities and experience to put in place and run modern monitoring and evaluation systems, while donor organisations also have some positive and negative influence on the M&E approaches to be used by the NGOs that receive their funding. Also, under the spotlight is the ability of NGOs to attract the requisite skills, financial and technological resources needed in the development and running of robust M&E systems.

The following is an overview of the two Case Study NGOs selected for this study;

The Methodist Development and Relief Agency (MeDRA): MeDRA is a small local NGO owned by The Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, formed in 2009 with a mandate to relieve the

suffering of the underprivileged and vulnerable communities and contribute to socio-economic development in Zimbabwe through humanitarian and development projects. Since its inception the NGO has attracted donor funding and technical support to implement projects from a number of international donors, and managed to reach communities in various districts of Zimbabwe that include Muzarabani, Gokwe, Buhera, Makonde, Bikita, Chipinge, Harare, among others.

GRM International Zimbabwe: GRM International Zimbabwe is a project management organization born out of GRM International, an International NGO which used to have Head Offices in the UK and Australia and managing donor funded programmes across the globe, including in Zimbabwe since the early 2000 period. The organization has been managing huge donor funded programmes in Zimbabwe implementing them through multiple International and local NGOs in Zimbabwe, the biggest being the multi donor funded Protracted Relief Programme that was implemented in almost all districts in the country for over 10 years. Until 2020, GRM International was responsible for Monitoring and Evaluation of the FCDO funded Livelihoods and Food Security Programme (LFSP) in Zimbabwe that was implemented in 10 districts of Midlands, Manicaland and Mashonaland provinces.

Two categories of NGOs, the local and the International NGOs, are found in Zimbabwe hence the decision for this case study to select one NGO from each category to allow for an analysis that taps into both the local and International NGO characteristics and perspectives. This was with a view to provide a comparative analysis that generates findings that would apply to both local and international NGOs' contexts. Literature also suggests that there is qualitative value in selecting contrasting and typical cases that represents both the local and international NGOs (Takahashi & Araujo, 2019). In addition, the fact that both NGOs have had experience implementing the same type of projects in different parts of the country allows this research to generate evidence on the same type of projects implemented from different contexts by different NGOs. This is buttressed

by Marshall & Suárez (2014), who argue that any research that overlooks the marked differences between international and local NGOs may produce misleading results.

A comparative analysis between local and international stems from the reality that NGOs are not homogeneous in nature. This study distinguished International from Local NGOs, where an International NGO is bigger, operates in multiple countries, while a local NGO, otherwise also known as a National NGO, is usually small and operates only in the country of origin (Ejim, 2022). Therefore, difference between the two types of NGOs mostly lies in their size, scope and resource capacity. Local NGOs have less access to funding than their International counterparts who are internationally well networked to donors and in most cases are headquartered in the developed world where most of development aid emanate from. The factors that affect application of M&E system theories therefore may not affect them the same way. In other words, if this research had focused on the International NGO only, the recommendations generated from the findings would not be applied to the Local NGO, and vice versa.

NGO projects are usually implemented over a period, some up to 5 to 10 years or even beyond, and a lot of changes in the context abound to happen with the passage of time. For this reason the research period spanned from 2010 to 2020, a ten year period long enough to determine the effectiveness and sustainability of the two NGOs' M&E systems. Ten years was long enough to capture a number of different projects having been implemented by each of the two case study NGOs. These changes come in different forms, such as climatic changes, political changes, technological changes, policy changes, project funding changes, or changes in the form and magnitude of original problem meant to be addressed by the project. Such changes affecting projects in different ways and sound project management practices that include M&E systems come in handy to keep project relevant and effective under dynamic operating contexts. In view of this, Simister (2015) amplifies the need for constantly reviewing and updating M&E systems in tandem

with any changes in project design and implementation. Such dynamic M&E systems remain relevant and in tandem with the contextual changes and are therefore able to generate relevant data that inform project improvements and modifications (Uwizeyimana, 2020). Micah & Luketero (2017) assert that the best way for NGOs to convincingly prove their worthy and the effectiveness of their work is through use of strong M&E systems. Because organisational M&E systems are largely adopted from the M&E system theory, continuous review of the M&E system theory and the application of its various concepts, frameworks, approaches and tools becomes an important academic exercise for continuous improvement in both theory and practice.

The primary intention of this study to explore whether and how the M&E system theories, concepts and frameworks are applied by NGOs, to what effect and success, with what shortcomings and gaps. Literature, supported by NGOs practical experience and observations have presented varying arguments relating to the interrelatedness between the M&E system theories, concepts and frameworks. According to Lahey (2015), M&E approaches used by most NGOs are borrowed from a blend of theories, concepts and frameworks, such as the Theory of Change and the Logical Framework, which have been adopted and used to varied degrees of effectiveness. For instance, Chibonore (2015) noted the existence of gaps in the effective application of the M&E system theory by NGOs to the detriment of projects success. Such anomalies between theory and practice present research gaps to be analysed by scholarly studies of this nature. For instance, Micah & Luketero (2017), in their analysis of M&E Systems and NGO performance in Kenya established how most NGOs find it difficult to provide evidence on the performance and results of their donor funded projects. The study however established that this problem is not unique to NGOs only but is worse in Governments, especially in the developing world where non-existent or weak M&E systems retard development processes (Micah & Luketero, 2017).

As argued by Thornhill and Van Dijk (2010), there is analytical richness in grounding a study on specific theoretical underpinnings and this is the approach adopted by this study. Black and Marron (2018) also agreed that the importance of research is complementing and improving current facts and practices. Alhadeff-Jones (2013) reiterates that research serves the purpose of generating new evidence and knowledge needed to fill in identified theoretical gaps and inadequacies.

Statement of the Problem

The need for a research emanates from an identified problem needing solutions. The world today is full of social, economic, political, developmental, and many other ills that needs to be addressed. A research agenda therefore either arises from the quest to solve such problems, or for academic purposes to increase the stock of knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications. This research was prompted by problems observed in the application of some M&E theories and concepts to the detriment of projects effectiveness. Anecdotal evidence and shared experiences from different NGOs in Zimbabwe seem to suggest a trend of unstandardized application of M&E approaches, and varying achievements of the projects implemented as well. These experiences and observations seem to have been confirmed through literature as well, suggesting some discrepancies in the application of the M&E systems concept as a project management tool by NGOs in Zimbabwe to the detriment of the effectiveness of some projects. For instance, an evaluation report for the Zimbabwe Livelihoods and Food Security Programme (LFSP), established that the multiple NGOs implementing this programme in different districts had varying M&E capacities, resulting in varied adoption and varied quality of project management and results (FAO, 2022).

This problem is echoed by Sindayigaya, Ngarambe & Nyamweya (2020) who observed that various factors do compromise the adoption of recommended standard M&E theories to the detriment of project management and performance. This in turn affect project quality in terms of efficient implementation and achievement of project results. A study by Fraser & Morkel (2020) on the state of monitoring and evaluation in Africa also revealed that M&E systems maturity is still uneven across organisations in Africa. The study revealed that M&E systems are in place but poorly organized and managed, with limited adherence to the basic M&E principles.

There are also claims of poor NGO project management in Africa emanating from poor M&E systems that focus more on the 'monitoring' component and less on 'evaluation' (Chirau, Mapitsa, Amisi, Masilela & Dlakavu, 2020). As such the role of evaluation in improving NGO project effectiveness and impact is compromised. Fraser & Morkel (2020) reiterate this problem, referring to it as limited organisational and leadership impact evaluative culture. This observation is not unique as project evaluators like Bailey & Sunderland (2019) had also observed the same and shared their experiences that NGOs rarely commission ex-post project evaluations. Upon conducting a rare ex-post evaluation for the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the results provided valuable evidence and lessons good enough to make a case for making ex-post evaluations mandatory for any NGO project M&E system. They argue that ex-post project evaluations are rarely commissioned because they have to happen years after the NGO has exited the project and donor project budgets are usually spend and exhausted within the NGO project implementation period (Bailey & Sunderland, 2019).

Other studies also show that the research problem dates back in history include Mapitsa and Khumalo (2018) who found out that most NGO M&E systems in Africa often do not constitute a full range of the recommended M&E elements because of various factors that include institutional, knowledge, skills and other capacity constraints. A study by Lahey (2015) also

established that "over two-thirds of ILO independent evaluations flag poor or non-existent monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches and practices as primary constraints to project effectiveness" (p .3). Chibonore (2015) agreed that such M&E anomalies in NGOs affect projects.

Purpose of the Study, Research Aims and Objectives

Study Purpose: This qualitative multi case study research undertook to carry out a comparative analysis of factors influencing the effective application of M&E system theories between a local and an international NGO. This was with a view to test the applicability of the M&E system theory by differently capacitated NGOs and the effect on project effectiveness. This way the research sought to determine the root causes and solution to why some NGOs are observed to exhibit poor project management through ineffective M&E systems that give rise to ineffective projects that fail to address the developmental needs of poor communities especially in Africa, as posited by Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018). The research focuses on the lived experiences and expert opinions of the NGO M&E practitioners in order to understand the nexus between M&E theory and practice and its implications on NGO projects effectiveness and impact. This way the study serves a dual purpose of ccontributing to the project management and M&E academic discourse and to the body of knowledge.

This was with a view to interrogate the relevance and applicability of the M&E system theory, and its concepts, against the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the existing NGO practices and the implications to the quality of projects implemented. According to Cloete (2009), successful implementation of development projects is based on "doing the right things right" and M&E tools help to achieve that (p. 293). Robust M&E systems play a significant role in ensuring the quality projects are designed, implemented and attain the desired developmental outcomes. The thesis was therefore expected to come up with findings, lessons and recommendations that would

be used to contribute to the improvement of organizational monitoring and evaluation systems through adoption of relevant proven theories and best practices.

According to Chibonore (2015), research has revealed existence of gaps in the application and practice of M&E theories and concepts by NGOs to the detriment of projects success. For instance, Lahey (2015) found that "evaluation assessments of large International Labour Organisation (ILO) projects that were undertaken over 2014-2015 have revealed some recurring weaknesses that impact the ability of project management to measure, monitor and use results information" (p. 4). For example, "Over two-thirds of ILO independent evaluations flag poor or non-existent monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches and practices as primary constraints to project effectiveness" (Lahey, 2015, p.3).

On the other hand, Groene and Branda (2006) observed that "organisations can design good M&E systems but fail to implement them fully" (p. 298). It is also common to see NGOs putting in place M&E systems just to comply with the requirements of donors or for administrative and reporting purposes only with limited use of the M&E information to improve project quality. This background also forms the basis and purpose of this study. This study therefore sought to generate evidence to verify the anecdotal observations on NGOs in Zimbabwe. The findings then informed the recommendations meant to address the problem, improve NGO project management and effective implementation for enhanced achievement of the intended projects objectives. This is in sync with Black and Marron (2018) who describe the purpose of research as to complement and improve current facts and practices in an endeavor to find solutions to problems. It is on this basis that research application gaps were identified, warranting and an in-depth study to unravel the real causes of the problem, and provide practical and context specific than the usual theoretical and generalized findings and solutions.

The research also builds upon previous studies conducted on the status on NGO monitoring and evaluation systems. As new challenges emerge in this fast changing world, research becomes

a vehicle to inform continuous improvement processes in the NGOs' development processes. The study is therefore important for the improvement of project management by NGOs, who form a critical sector in the advancement of community development projects in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, hence the need for them to have robust systems in place to ensure maximum results from their projects. In the end, this study was therefore not only intended to be an academic resource, but intended to also benefit the NGOs themselves and donors who usually have an interest in aid effectiveness, accountability, service delivery and impact (Naido, 2010). This topic was therefore selected with a desire to come up with a research product that contributes to knowledge and practice. In the process, the study also helped the researcher as a student of development studies, to also gain research skills while also deepening his technical and theoretical knowledge on the subject matter. The research, as an academic piece of work gave the researcher an opportunity to apply concepts, theories and research methods learnt and studied under this degree programme.

Literature on the primary purpose of research also do help us understand the motivation behind this theory testing study, Gowry (2014) argues the word research is a combination of two words 're' and 'search' which means finding out again, re-look, search for new truths, evidence and details, or alternatively improve old facts. Additionally, research is also motivated by the desire to fill in identified or assumed application gaps, look for missing or insufficient information which somehow may limit the ability to make conclusions and certain decisions confidently. In this regard, future research is searching again for new or enhanced evidence. This is buttressed by Black and Marron (2018) who view the purpose of research as to complement or improve current facts. When certain phenomenon is not clear or demonstrates its inadequacy, Alhadeff-Jones (2013) says future research will be needed to generate new knowledge, evidence and detail necessary to interpret, review and update the identified gaps. If the applicability of a research or a concept fails

to yield the intended results, this may be considered as a research gap hence it may be subjected to further research.

The purpose of employing a dual case study approach for this research stems from the need to achieve varied contextual replicability of the research findings. The applicability of an empirical study to more than one context becomes necessary to test its practicability, a key characteristic also raised in some of the articles reviewed. Wacker (1998) agrees that a theory that can be widely applied is better than one that is useful in a single situation. Characteristically therefore, a theory proposes models that can be applied in certain contexts and settings.

Research Aim and Objectives: Guided by the research topic and based on the research problem, the aim and objectives of undertaking the research are here outlined and explained. This is to address the 'Why?' question, that is, why the research is being undertaken. According to Ahmad (2016), the primary purpose of research is to establish facts, come up with conclusions and find solutions. Based on experience in working with community development projects over the years, the researcher was inspired and challenged to deep dive into carrying out this critical analytical research. Having made observations and made various postulations around NGO driven community development projects, and in an endeavor to contribute to this academic and developmental discourse, the researcher undertook the study. The research objectives speak to assertions that research is needed to generate new evidence and knowledge (Farooq, 2019; Panezai, 2016).

Research Aim: The main aim of this research was to conduct a comparative assessment of factors that influence and affect the application of the M&E system theories for effective project management by the case study local and international NGOs. This is broken down into specific

objectives in order to guide the study and inform hypotheses setting and development of research instruments.

>   ***Research Objectives:*** The objectives derived from the research aim were to;
>
>   ***O1.*** Identify any gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness.
>
>   ***O2.*** Analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories comparatively between by local and international NGOs.
>
>   ***O3.*** Come up with suggested solutions for recommendations to improve both theory and practice and contribute to the monitoring and evaluation body of knowledge.

These objectives are based on the assumption that local and international NGOs have different capacities to effectively apply the M&E system concepts, frameworks and approaches, yet they both run key community development projects and in most cases as partners in the same projects. The theory testing research is driven by the recognition of the strong nexus between M&E system theory and NGO practice and the implications on the effectiveness of project management and attainment of community developmental goals. In executing the study, the priority therefore, was to unravel and get a deeper understanding of the dynamics around the identified problem, its root causes, effects and find workable solutions. To achieve this, the objectives formed the basis for this research's design, hypotheses setting, and determination of the research instruments, to answer the problem statement and achieve the research objectives.

The Nature and Significance of Study

Nature of the Study

The study adopted a qualitative case study approach using two purposively nominated NGOs. According to Goodrick (2014), "comparative case studies involve the analysis and synthesis of the

similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus" (p. 1). This comparative approach is not only between different NGOs' M&E systems, but also between M&E theory and practice. Compared to a single case study, this dual case study approach is deemed appropriate as it entails comparative analysis, unlike conclusions derived from one case study unit. This is the basis for undertaking this research using a dual case study approach in order to test the M&E system theory in using two different types of case study NGOs (Local and International NGOs), who in addition have been implementing projects in varying provincial and district contexts of Zimbabwe. According to Wacker (1998), a key characteristic of theory is that it should be applicable at least to more than one context, arguing a theory that can be widely applied is better than one that is useful in a single situation. In an analysis of NGO M&E dynamics in Cambodia, Marshall & Suárez (2014) posited that any research that overlooks the marked differences between international and local NGOs may produce misleading results.

Being a review of the M&E system theories against the existing organisational M&E systems, the case study starts with a secondary research that embarked on a literature review of the M&E system theories and concepts, and then a desk research of the two NGOs' M&E documents. The subject matter also called for an analysis of organizational M&E practices and this benefited a lot from some primary research conducted through in-depth qualitative interviews with key informants within the selected NGOs. As argued by Creswell (2013) such new primary data is vital in updating, validating and triangulating existing secondary data. In addition, the interviews helped identify the existing opportunities for the improvement of not only the NGO systems and practices, but the M&E theory as well.

The sequencing of these research methods started with literature review, followed by a qualitative desk study and physical inspections of the available NGO M&E system and then the

primary research interviews. The desk research focused on reviewing the M&E system theories against the existing organisational M&E systems, processes, structures, documents and reports. In analysing the existing NGO M&E systems, critical document review was key supported by perspectives from selected NGO management, M&E and project staff interviews. This approach was ordered that way to first get an understanding of the M&E system before augmenting with feedback interviews on practices. All these research methods put together helped in assessing the existing NGO M&E systems and practices against the dictates of the theoretical and conceptual approaches.

Most donor funded NGO implemented projects do carry out donor commissioned periodic reviews, some mid-term and end of project evaluations and reports produced to inform improvements. It is these reports that were reviewed against any disparities and alignments observed between theory and practice to make conclusions whether there are project quality implications as a result of adopting the M&E system theory or not.

Following Yin (2014) propositions, employing a case study approach for such a 'theory versus practice' research would work well through a 'deductive qualitative analysis'. Azungah (2018) reiterates that the deductive qualitative design has always been relevant for explanatory case studies in order to provide detailed explanations to the how and why theory is, or is not applicable, relevant, useful and effective in real life practices.

The rationale for using the deductive design for this qualitative research was based on the fact that the research topic itself suggests an M&E systems theory testing study, hence according to O'Connor & Joffe (2020) the analysis automatically requires a methodology that departs from theoretical hypotheses. Other proponents of the deductive qualitative design, that include Saldana (2016); Jones et al (2018) and Pease (2019) call this deductive qualitative analysis a 'top down'

approach where the analysis starts from a theory down to testing its application. Coupled with this, qualitative data was preferred because of its strength in generating lived experiences and expert opinions from participants who are practitioners in the field. To a large extend, the study seeks to also probe and understand the How? and Why? explanations of NGO M&E practices against expected M&E theories. Furthermore, Hyde (2000), argued that unlike quantitative data that would require the researcher's interpretation after analysing it, qualitative data comes with some interpretations already suggested by participants hence the researcher introduces less of own subjective conclusions which may be biased. The tried and tested marrying of qualitative research to the deductive design was found to generate in-depth data, including organisational behavioural practices (Saldana, 2016).

Significance of the Study

NGO projects are funded and implemented with the objective of developing communities and improve human lives. To achieve this, robust M&E systems form part of the core project management processes needed to design the projects themselves, and most importantly to track and assess the implementation, progress and achievements of desired results (Cloete, 2009). Monitoring and evaluation processes have therefore proven to constitute a system of effective tools useful to ensure the success of project implementation and achievement of desired outcomes (Cloete, 2009). In addition, Groene and Branda (2006) observed that "organisations can design good M&E systems but fail to implement them fully" for various reasons (p. 298). This study seeks to identify those factors and inform improvements. This will benefit project quality improvements through early detection of project inefficiencies, ineffectiveness and failures in time, and taking corrective measures as a best practice in project management.

Consistent with this, two-thirds of NGOs evaluated by Lahey (2015) in different countries were found to be ineffective due to poor project management, including weaknesses in NGOs M&E systems. Similarly, Mapitsa and Khumalo (2018) postulate that most NGOs in Africa suffer from poor application of M&E systems for effective project management. These scenarios could be associated with continued community underdevelopment and poverty regardless of NGOs' efforts as suggested by Lahey (2015). The problem could be with factors around the M&E system theory itself or its application by NGOs, hence ineffectiveness in some projects. According to Mapitsa and Khumalo (2018), most NGO M&E systems in Africa often do not constitute a full range of the recommended M&E elements because of various factors that include institutional, knowledge, skills and other capacity constraints. The shortcomings and inconsistencies between theory and practice observed in NGO M&E systems and practices defeat the role of M&E in tracking progress and impact of donor funded projects. The significance of this study therefore includes generating evidence on the role of theory in enhancing project quality and community development is therefore of paramount importance.

The study is therefore important in improving project management by NGOs, who form a critical sector in the advancement of community development projects in Zimbabwe hence the need for them to have robust M&E systems in place to ensure maximum results from their projects. The study will also serve as an independent evaluation of the case study NGO M&E systems, especially the small local NGO that has limited technical capacity to undertake a self-evaluation or the technical skills to identify and tap into existing progressive research. In the end, this study will therefore not only benefit the NGOs themselves, but the community beneficiaries of the NGO projects, and the funding donors who usually have an interest in accountability and value for money analysis.

According to Black and Marron (2018), theory application gaps do arise when there is a gap between theory and practice, hence the purpose of research is to complement or improve current facts and practices. Alhadeff-Jones (2013) adds that when certain phenomenon demonstrates its inadequacy, research is required to generate new knowledge, evidence and detail necessary to interpret, review and update the identified gaps. The thesis also provides an opportunity to test and challenge the existing M&E system theory, its applicability and relevance, thus contributing to improving theory and in turn practice. The world and its problems continues to be dynamic hence theory should always be challenged and further researched on in order to adapt it and keep it abreast with the changing contexts. Wacker (1998) warns that a research cannot always be completely applicable but should be challenged to come up with a better theory, a justification for further research. This therefore is yet another justification for a research of this nature.

Research gaps do arise when there is a variance between theory and practice, and to close this gap further research becomes important. Identification of gaps to inform future research begins by searching, reviewing and critiquing arguments presented in past and current literature. To understand the identification of gaps and implications for future research, it is important to appreciate that any researcher may be vulnerable to be overtaken by changes in the prevailing contexts. The world is ever changing and presenting new challenges and opportunities, so there is always going to be a need for future researcher building upon previous researches. Such world dynamism creates research gaps that would otherwise have not been there. So, research gaps are not always methodological but contextual.

Bendassolli (2013) warns that hypothetical claims not backed by observed, tested or researched evidence are not good enough, as theory must be grounded on empirical evidence. Theory therefore should be testable either through experiment, observation or in practice for it to be a good theory. Hennig-Thurau (2004) claims that some researches have not put their findings to

test, which makes some recommended approaches not empirically tested approaches despite their plausibility. This study therefore attempts to make validations of the M&E systems theory albeit their long-standing history of use by NGOs. With the advent of emerging contemporary challenges such as climate change, Covid-19, technological advancements, conflicts and other ills, the need for revalidating, challenging and enhancing existing theories becomes necessary. The efficacy and effectiveness of strategies and interventions to deal with all these different emerging challenges need to be assessed and M&E processes become central.

One of the main objectives of research and theory testing is to help find solutions to development problems (Ahmad, 2016). In line with this agenda, this study aims at generating evidence based recommendations for possible solutions to theory improvement, theory application, further research and improving M&E practice for better project management and effective NGO developmental projects. This stems from Wacker (1998)'s emphasis that theory ought to be applicable for it to be useful. True to the objectives of this research, theory has to be tested and be challenged through research based evidence for it to be proven as relevant and effective to practice (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). This study, being a practice oriented research therefore had to culminate in advancing possible solutions to NGOs, their donor partners, to M&E practitioners, their professional bodies, including M&E training institutions that supply M&E skills to NGOs.

Apart from generating evidence and recommendations that would benefit local and international NGOs as well as the communities they serve, study is also significant to the academic world and the research fraternity. The thesis is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge and be one of the reference materials for scholars and students. Likewise, the M&E and project management profession, its professional bodies that include the Zimbabwe Evaluation Society and its membership would also find the study helpful in improving their profession. Donors are also a key beneficiary of this study, as funders of the NGOs who rely on M&E systems in monitoring and

accounting for use of their funds and the impact brought by NGO projects to the recipient communities.

Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

To answer the research objectives, the study was guided by the following research broad research questions;

Research Questions (RQ)

RQ1 What is the level of adoption and application of the M&E system theories by the case study local and international NGOs.

  RQ1(a) How effective have been the M&E system theories, concepts, frameworks and approaches to the local and international NGO case studies.

  RQ1(b) Are the M&E system theories relevant and effective as project management tools for successful NGO projects?, how?, and why?

RQ2 Which factors mostly determine the effective application of the M&E system theories by the local and international NGOs? how?, and why?

  RQ2(a) What is the influence of donor support and compliance requirements to the effectiveness of NGOs M&E systems and practices?

RQ3 Which aspects of the M&E system theories need improvements, and which aspects of NGO M&E practices need improvements, how?, and why?

It is important to note that Research Question 1 has two sub-research Questions 1(a) and 1(b) because the effectiveness and relevance of the M&E system theories are derived from the level of their adoption and application by the NGOs. Likewise, Research Question 2 also has its own sub-research Question 2(a) because donor influence and support to NGO M&E systems could be one of the factors that determine effective application of M&E system theories by NGOs.

Hypotheses

Chigbu (2019) explains the use of hypothesis in qualitative research as a priori speculative proposition of the possible outcome of a research. Equally, Anupama (2018) defines a hypothesis as a proposed predictive explanation of a research problem, it predetermines the expected research findings and is usually based on limited evidence, observations or experience on a phenomenon. The objective being to set it as a theoretical postulation that guides research to test it, then accept it as true or reject it as false, based on evidence based research findings. Chigbu (2019) adds that a hypothesis therefore explains a phenomenon under investigation or provides an explanation of a research problem. Thus, it helps in drawing logical conclusions about a research problem. The research topic suggests that there are factors that influence and affect the effective application of M&E system theiories by local and international NGOs. As one of the problems, this is assumed to have implications on project management by NGOs and consequently on the quality and performance of projects they implemented.

Qualitative Alternative Hypotheses: According to Chigbu (2019), qualitative research use alternative hypotheses because they are expressed as statements of the expected outcomes of the research in terms of how research variables are linked, associated or influence each other. This is unlike null hypotheses which are expressed in statements suggesting lack of relationships between variables, and commonly used in quantitative research. The alternative hypotheses adopted for this study therefore meant to show attribution by explaining for example the M&E systems theory application situations within the case study NGOs. In addition they should show 'causal' relationships in terms of factors that influence or affect effective application of M&E system theories by NGOs. Chigbu (2019) adds that hypotheses are qualitatively tested through open ended research questions to establish general thematic patterns observed from the in-depth data gathered. The scholar further clarifies that the patterns may show some consistency that

support, confirm or prove a pre-set hypothesis as true. Alternatively, there may be some inconsistencies or contradictions in the research findings in a way that refutes, disprove or reject as false the hypothesis.

Based on this guidance, and drawing from the research objectives and research questions earlier listed, the following three hypotheses were crafted to examine this M&E theory versus practice research subject;

H1. There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO.

H2. The resource capacity of an NGO influences the effectiveness in the application of the M&E System theories.

H3. Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs.

Hypothesis 1: According to Chibonore (2015), research has revealed existence of gaps in the application of M&E theories and concepts by NGOs to the detriment of projects success. This hypothesis therefore assumes that there could be challenges faced by NGOs to embrace and make use of the recommended M&E theories, concepts and approaches in implementing projects. Because of this, it is presumed that few NGOs do adopt, and those that adopt do so poorly, creating a gap between theory and practice. The hypothesis seeks to test the variances between the local and international NGOs' in how they apply the M&E systems theory in their project management practices, based on the differences between the two types of NGOs with regards their size, scope and resource capacity (Ejim, 2022). Hypothesis 1 is therefore tested through Research 1 and its sub-research questions 1(a) and 1(b) all whose focus is on three related aspects; the adoption and application of M&E system theories, their effectiveness, and their relevance, respectively. All these

feed into Objective 1 which seeks to identify gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness.

Hypothesis 2: The hypothesis suggests that some NGOs have limited capacity to design and implement robust M&E systems, or inversely, the adoption and application of the M&E theory and all its concepts and frameworks require specific skills and resources. This resonates well with observations made by Kithinji, Gakuu, & Kidombo (2017) that capacity and resource constraints are a huge drawback for establishing effective M&E systems for sound project management. This hypothesis therefore assumes that some NGOs' resource inadequacies could be responsible for gaps between M&E theory and practice, as suggested in the problem statement. For instance, NGOs can adopt this ready-made M&E system theory but may may fail to implement it effectively. Lahey (2015) observed that putting in place a good M&E system is one thing, implementing it to the book is another task. Hypothesis 2 therefore directly draws from Research Question 2 which interrogates factors that determine the effective application of the M&E system theories by the local and international NGOs, a replica of Objective 2.

Hypothesis 3: Since most NGOs rely on donor funds for their projects, donors enforce specific M&E requirements as part of their compliance requirements for NGOs (Nalianya & Luketero, 2017). This hypothesis therefore postulates that such donor M&E compliance requirements do promote the adoption and effective application of the M&E system theory by NGOs in an endeavor to comply. The hypothesis assumes that this motivates NGOs to strengthen their M&E systems so as to adhere and be accountable for the donor funds. Beyond compliance, the hypothesis was also be tested based on whether this will also contribute to effective project management and success as posited by Sindayigaya et al (2020). This hypothesis is therefore tested through Research Question 2(a) drawn from Objective 2 which seeks to analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories by the NGOs.

Research Objectives, Research Questions and Hypotheses Alignment: Each and all the steps of the whole research process, from its design, determination of research methods, data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting of findings, implications, recommendations and conclusions, is guided by the interlinkages between the research objectives, research questions and hypotheses. For instance, the research questions were derived from the objectives, while in turn the research questions were set to test the hypotheses, all meant to generate findings that address the research objectives. Figure 1.1 below summarises the alignments and linkages that exist between Research Objectives, Research Questions and Hypotheses.

Figure 1.1

Linkages between Research Objectives, Research Questions and Hypotheses
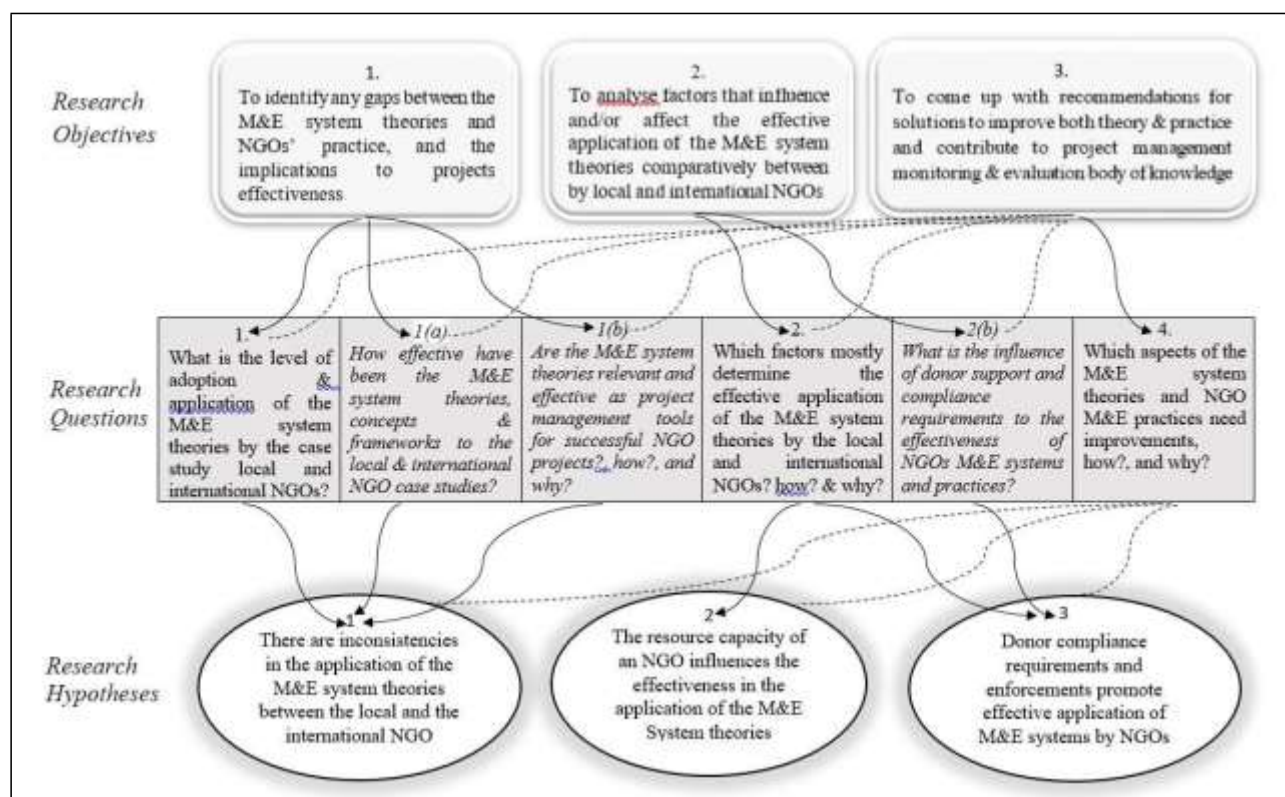
Note: Author Compilation

The arrows indicate the direct linkages, while the dotted lines depict the indirect linkages. The linkages between the objectives and hypothesis are traceable through the research questions.

For instance, while Research Question 4 is directly linked to Objective 3 on recommendations, it is also indirectly linked to all the Hypotheses. Overall, Objective 3 draws from all the three hypotheses, directly through Research Question 4 and indirectly through the rest of the other research questions.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE

The study topic focuses on assessing the factors that influence and affect local and international NGOs' effective application of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems theories in project management. Most importantly, the qualitative research attempts to undertake an in-depth exploration of the key determinant factors driving or stifling the effectiveness of NGO M&E systems and the implications on projects success. This chapter outlines, describes and discusses the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings upon which this study builds upon and bases its analysis and arguments. Theories and concepts inform and provide frameworks for analysis in a study. Theory, however, may not necessarily be the reality but rather a set of abstract ideas, postulations and perceptions which make claims, propositions and suppositions on a specific subject or phenomena (Thomas, 2017). Through an in-depth review of literature, the chapter therefore identifies the M&E theories, concepts and frameworks and the different thematic areas relevant to the topic and the subject. Guided by arguments made by Bendassolli (2013), theory must be tested and proven through empirical evidence and application for it to be relevant and useful. One of the objectives of this scholarly research is to do exactly that, with a view to validate monitoring and evaluation theories, concepts and frameworks against their application and practice by different NGOs in the implementation of various developmental projects. This analysis then culminates in evidence-based propositions to improve both theory and practice as argued by Fischer (2010) and Stam (2010).

The chapter is structured in an analytical manner that discusses the logical organization of the constructs of the literature review, the field or industry description based on the topic, including the different thematic areas of the subject matter of the study. Conceptual framework and literature review around each of these thematic areas form the basis for the definitions and analysis for this

thesis. The review uses citations from relevant scholarly literature composed of journals, seminal peer-reviewed articles, textbook, the majority of it within the last 5 years from 2015 to 2020. Most of the resources were accessed through recommended academic library databases and search engines, mainly Google Scholar and the Unicaf Online library, the ProQuest Library eJournals and eBooks accessed using various key search words extracted from the thesis topic, the research objectives, research questions and other aspects of the research proposal.

This chapter therefore presents all the literature review that was conducted on existing literature and studies undertaken by other researchers, scholars, development practitioners and institutions on M&E theory and practice within the NGO sector. The literature review, apart from guiding the theoretical/ conceptual framework and the research design, also acted as reference points for checking the extent to which the research findings were consistent with existing research and theory. The literature review therefore helped the researcher in gathering considerable background information about the research subject, the problem statement, rationale of the study and to establish the importance of this research. Additionally, it also helped in identifying the research gaps.

Literature review was conducted on all aspects of the research topic, starting with the role of both local and international NGOs in community development and how and why the M&E system theory is relevant to their work as a project management tool. Furthermore, literature was also reviewed on the effective adoption and application of M&E systems elsewhere and how that may be related to the Zimbabwean context. The major component of this literature review Chapter focused more on the M&E systems theory itself, the importance and role of each of the theory's concepts, frameworks and tools as well as they link to the NGO project management. Lastly a lot of literature was analysed with regards the factors and conditions needed for application of the

M&E systems theory, especially guided by the research hypotheses. For instance how local and international NGO resource capacities determine NGO ability to adopt and effectively apply the M&E system theory and all its elements of concepts, frameworks and tools.

For a study whose subject falls under the project management domain, where both monitoring and evaluation support project implementation hence become integrated in project management, the Project Management Body of Knowledge, PMBOK (2021) and other scholars provide insights into understanding the definitions of the following key terms used in this thesis;

Theory: For this 'theory versus practice' study, it is important to discuss what theory is so that the rationale of this research is provided with context. According to Thomas (2017) to theorise is to contemplate or conceptualise in an attempt to explain or describe observed phenomena or predict events. Theory therefore forms the basis for scholarly research and analysis (Fischer, 2010, Stam, 2010). From the definition, theory relies on verifiable assumptions, should be tested and proven. As stated by Abend (2008), a theory is a set of abstract ideas and perceptions which make claims, propositions and postulations on a specific subject or phenomena. It therefore makes projections, predictions and suggestions to make sense of why? , how? , and when? , on certain things, events and behaviours. Theory also attempts to establish relationships between variables in a logical manner (Abend, 2008). Reading through various literature, there seems to be a variety of related definitions of theory, notwithstanding common understanding of what constitutes a theory and the characteristics of a good theory. Wacker (1998) defines theory using some criteria or virtues that characterize its qualities and features, these include the four characteristics of conceptualization, domain specific, relationships and predictions. In addition, the scholar explains that theory should be abstract, unique, logical and consistent. Wacker's views therefore resonate well with the views of other scholars, with a few interpretation based variations and additions that

include speculative, hypothetical, have traceable claims and should be tested empirically based (Wacker, 1998). Empirical in that they can be tested, observed or proven.

A theory puts together a number of concepts or abstract ideas, notions and perceptions. This means a theory makes proposition and claims, propositions are hypotheses, postulations, suggestions, suppositions, and all these constitute what theory is (Abend, 2008). In this regard, a theory therefore suggests and postulates why and how certain things happen the way they happen, hence says the primary goal of theory is to suggest answers to how, when or where, and why. This said, it can be concluded that a theory is predictive, and its projections are based on statements and questions such as; could, should, would a certain event occur? (Abend, 2008). Another scholar who agrees with this 'speculative' nature of theory is Nixon (2004), as mentioned before, he also adds that theory provides mechanisms to understand human behaviour and its implications. It is not enough for a theory to make propositions, claims and hypotheses, but as defined by Abend (2008) theory is a well-organized and connected structure of well thought out generalized propositions that establish associations between variables. Based on this, a theory should be logical and show consistency in explaining the relationship between variables. This includes a theory's predictive characteristic where its predictions should be logical and demonstrate the chronology and interconnectedness of variables, or there should be a causal relationship between variables. In this regard a theory demonstrates a logical way of understanding phenomena and events. A theory is useful in testing a hypothesis, and if a hypothesis makes claims on the relationship between variables, which can be rejected or accepted when tested.

Another characteristics of theory is that it should be applicable and backed by empirical evidence. For example, this 'theory versus practice' study is designed to do exactly that, to test theory applicability and relevance. Bendassolli (2013) strongly warns that hypothetical claims not

backed by tested or observed evidence are not good enough to support or dismiss, so theory must be grounded on empirical evidence. Another key characteristic agreed by many scholars is that a theory should be applicable, at least to more than one context. Wacker (1998) thinks a theory that can be widely applied is better than one that is useful in a single situation. This scholar, however presents another dimension to this when he warns that a theory cannot always be completely applicable but should be challenged to come up with a better theory. But how do you test the applicability of a theory? Theory should be testable either through experiment, observation or in practice for it to be a good theory. Characteristically therefore, a theory proposes models that can be applied in certain contexts and settings. A theory is applicable under certain assumptions and it should be explicit about the conditions under which it makes certain postulations and claims, it should be clear under what circumstances a theory is likely to hold. This way it makes it easy to test or challenge a theory.

All these scholarly views on what constitutes a theory helps in defining what theory is. This explains why it has not been easy to have scholars agree on a single definition statement of what a theory is. A theory is best defined by its characteristics, that is, what it ought to be and what it should not be, its purpose and functions. Nixon (2004) concludes that all these features of theory makes us wake up to the reality that for any phenomena there are always different schools of thought to it, and many way of possibly doing the same thing. The argument being that reality cannot be adequately, conclusively viewed and interpreted from one angle. Bendassolli (2013) also came to the same conclusion that theory helps us to guess how things should work and that everything we observe is based on theoretical hopes and experiences. An unclear theory may mislead practice, and equally so a weak M&E system that does not adhere to ta good theory would mislead project management, attains poor results and wastes resources.

A Project: PMBOK (2021) define a project as a special kind of work and activity planned and executed to achieve set objectives, to deliver a particular need or solve an identified problem. A project is implemented for a defined period, so it has start and end timelines, meaning if an operation becomes ongoing it ceases to be a project (PMBOK (2021). Examples of community development projects executed by NGOs include; the development of water and sanitation facilities, establishment of schools and health facilities, supporting household income-generating projects, agricultural production and food security (Banks et al, 2015).

Project Management: For a project to planned and implemented efficiently and effectively to its intended fruition, it has to be managed. This involves the application of knowledge, skills, strategies, tools and resources by qualified and skilled personnel to ensure the efficient and effective planning and execution of project activities (Banks et al, 2015).

Monitoring: PMBOK (2021) defines project monitoring as project control, the most critical process of project management which entails regular tracking of progress, performance and making corrective measures to ensure the project activities are kept on course to achieve the desired objectives. Monitoring is therefore not only undertaken to maintain efficiency and effectiveness of project implementation, but also to control both project quality, costs and budgets.

Evaluation: According to Basheka & Byamugisha (2015), evaluation, unlike monitoring which looks at progress, it focuses on assessing results and impact achievement of a project, hence it is not a continuous process during the project life cycle. It is periodic, and usually starts with a baseline assessment or situational assessment at the beginning of a project to set the basis of the subsequent evaluation processes that include the mid-term evaluation, end of project evaluation and ex-post evaluations (Basheka & Byamugisha (2015). The mid-term evaluations are undertaken midway through the project life mainly to assess if the project implementation is on course to

achieve the desired results. Instead of waiting until the end of project, a mid-term evaluation is worthy in reviewing project strategies, interventions and processes for purposes of identifying areas needing improvements and adaptations for better results (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015). Then at the end of the project implementation, an end of project evaluation is commissioned to measure the achievement of results. Because most projects are meant to address societal problem and bring long term, sustainable and lasting impact, ex-post evaluations are commissioned years after the end of project (Bailey & Sunderland, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

This section describes the theory (the M&E system theory) used in this study and the rationale for the framework and the literature underpinning it. Abend (2008) states that theory attempts to establish relationships between variables in a logical manner that demonstrates the chronology and interconnectedness of the variables, demonstrating a causal relationship between variables. In agreement, Pearse (2019) explains an M&E system as a theoretical framework usually presented as a graphical illustration supported by narrative descriptions of the main interrelated elements of the system. Literature therefore shows that M&E systems are theory driven hence the M&E system theory and there is evidence that a lot of scholarly work has been undertaken over the years to come up with theories and concepts that guide development of NGO M&E systems. The M&E system theory brings together the monitoring and evaluation concepts together in a nexus that forms a system. The symbiotic distinction and synergy between monitoring and evaluation is demonstrated as illustrated in table 2.1 below;

Based on the literature reviewed and scholarly propositions available, the researcher visualises an M&E System as a depiction of a framework that brings together a collection of interlinked monitoring and evaluation components. Drawing from literature, the author put

together the following graphical presentation of the M&E System Theoretical Framework showing the main components of an M&E system, which include the main theories, concepts, frameworks and tools. These, as shown in figure 2.1 below include the 'theory of change', the 'logical framework' and the 'M&E framework' as well as the supporting elements of the resources needed to design and operationlise the system;

Figure 2.1

The M&E System Theoretical Framework
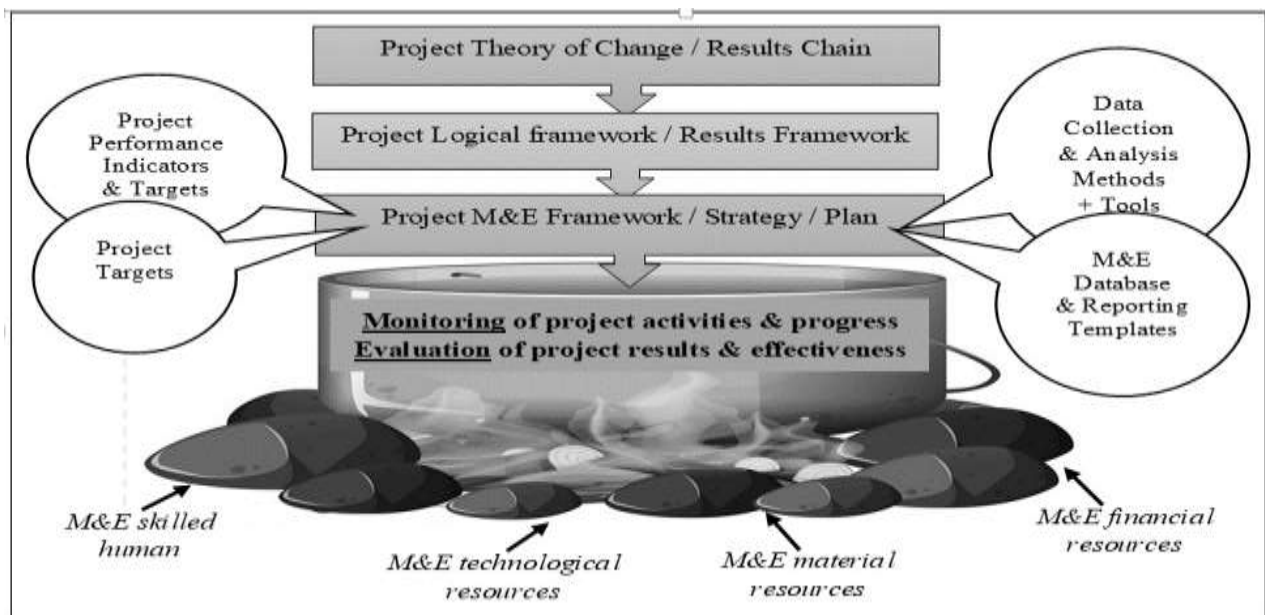
Note: Author's compilation guided by Markiewicz & Patrick (2016) and Mleke & Dida (2020)

There are several theories, concepts and frameworks that are used in designing project M&E systems, and as depicted in the theoretical framework, Lahey (2015) consider the Theory of Change, the Logframe and the M&E framework as the key ones. The others, are considered to be components of these three, for instance the 'performance indicators and targets' are part of the logframe (Martinez, 2011). On the other hand, data collection and analysis methods, the database and reporting templates, as well as the data usage are part of the M&E Framework (Markiewicz & Patrick (2016). According to Pearse (2019), a theoretical framework can be loaded and complex

hence can compel the researcher to prioritise and decide to focus on the main key constructs or variables without necessarily losing the most meaningful relationships with the rest. From this basis, the three concepts; the Theory of Change (ToC), then the Logical Framework (Logframe) and the Monitoring & Evaluation Framework, were found to be more relevant for this study and topic.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) System Theories

According to various monitoring and evaluation theorists and proponents, an M&E System is a composition of various M&E theories, concepts and frameworks (Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018; Fraser & Morkel, 2020; Mleke & Dida, 2020; Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Borrowing from the Systems Theory which according to Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018) defines interconnections between different elements of a structure as a system, the M&E system is made up of interconnected and interrelated monitoring and evaluation theories, concepts, and frameworks, thereby monitoring and evaluation is viewed and used as one whole system whose function becomes compromised when one element is excluded. In agreement, Fraser & Morkel (2020) advocate for a system based approach to monitoring and evaluation, where a system consists of interrelated processes put together to form a unified and coordinated structure of executing work. An M&E system therefore is defined as a structured way of collecting, organising, analysing, reporting, dissemination and use of information and data for learning, decision making, planning and adaptation. Markiewicz & Patrick (2016) broadly define an M&E system as the scope, structure and roadmap of the organizational monitoring and evaluation strategy, standards, approaches, processes and plans. According to Fraser & Morkel (2020), M&E systems were born out of the limitations observed with audit and accounting systems which focused only on budget expenditure monitoring and little attention on achievement of results especially for developmental projects.

Different scholarly perspectives and analyses help to understand what a Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) System is, its components and its functions. Markiewicz & Patrick (2016) broadly define an M&E system as the scope, structure and roadmap of the organizational monitoring and evaluation strategy, standards, approaches, processes and plans. In other terms, SAMDI (2007) explains that a Monitoring & Evaluation System consists of a set of functions that are related to each other within a structure and serve a common purpose of tracking the implementation and results of a project. But why is it called a system? Saunders (2015) explain that monitoring and evaluation is about 'systematically' tracking progress to guarantee compliance to set plans, hence M&E is a system (p.3). This agrees with Rabie & Goldman (2014) who indicated that any formal evaluation is undertaken 'systematically' through 'systematic' procedures and techniques to ensure accuracy and credibility, and this makes evaluation a system. According to

As described by Umhlaba Development Services (2017), purpose, level of detail, timing and focus are therefore key distinguishing aspects between monitoring and evaluation. Notwithstanding their differences, monitoring and evaluation are mutually interactive processes hence the two terms 'monitoring' and 'evaluation' are used in unison and in combination as 'M&E' to refer to one broader process of project management. Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018) confirm that the system theories show strong interconnections between all elements of M&E systems, hence the need to treat monitoring and evaluation as one system. However, there is a claim that in Africa monitoring tend to get greater attention and ends up overshadowing evaluation (Chirau, Mapitsa, Amisi, Masilela & Dlakavu, 2020). This probably is because evaluation tends to be more technical and requires advanced more expertise than monitoring, hence the need to build the M&E capacities of entities in developing countries.

The purpose of M&E systems therefore, as outlined by Mleke & Dida (2020) is for institutions to track and assess the performance of projects with regards to implementation

progress, delivery of results, achievement of targets and objectives, as well as show impact. The establishment and operationalization of M&E systems demonstrates organizational commitment to transparency and accountability, self-assessment, self-introspection and willingness to cultivate a culture of learning for performance and quality improvements (Ammons & Roenigk, 2015). It is from such studies where we derive evidence that the effectiveness and performance of organisations can be enhanced by putting in place and using effective M&E systems. So, what does literature say about what a good M&E system should consist of? Lahey (2015) considers the Theory of Change, the Logframe, the performance indicators, M&E Plans, data collection tools, data analysis and reporting frameworks, all as apparatus that consist the M&E system kit. The quality and success of projects rests on the selection and use of the right monitoring approaches, data collection tools, skilled personnel, clear M&E plans and adequacy of resources. It is the adoption of such standards and protocols that ensured most developed countries to design sound M&E systems that produced high flying, successful and sustainable projects (Mleke & Dida, 2020).

In agreement with other scholars as discussed earlier, Khan (2003) argues that an "efficient M&E system is based on sound theoretical basis" (p.15) and the M&E system theories is composed of a number of M&E concepts, frameworks, tools and protocols. These include the M&E strategy, the project theory of change, logical framework (logframe), the M&E framework and the M&E plan, among others (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). On the other hand, Lahey (2015) and The World Bank (2010) place a lot of emphasis on the Theory of Change, the Logframe and the M&E framework as the cornerstones of a project M&E system. Martinez (2011) prioritised the logframe while Markiewicz & Patrick (2016) puts the M&E Framework at the core of the M&E system. These are therefore discussed in that deliberate sequential order based on their different purpose, uses and contribution to the organizational or project monitoring and evaluation system. This thesis provides an opportunity to test and challenge these existing M&E concepts and their respective

frameworks, their applicability and relevance, thus contributing to improving and developing the theories further. Putting together ideas from various pieces of literature, the author developed the following illustration of the sequential steps followed in designing an M&E system;

Figure 2.2

Sequential steps of a monitoring & evaluation system.

Note: Author compilation - with literature guidance from Lahey (2015), Reinholz & Andrews (2020)

In a related approach that has some variations, Umhlaba Development Services (2017) present the following steps of developing an M&E Framework as a process of setting up an M&E system;

> ***Step 1:*** Defining the purpose, scope and comprehensiveness of a project M&E. This may depend on the size of the project, the available budget, the technical skills and expertise. Issues to do with the approaches also come in here, for instance qualitative and/or quantitative research methods, information management systems and tools.

> ***Step 2:*** Identifying what needs to be monitored and evaluated, that is, the information needs, performance indicators and questions. This is first defined in the project logframe, particularly the performance indicators and their respective means of verifications. These then informs the performance questions and information needs.

> ***Step 3.*** Step 1 and 2 pave way for deciding on the relevant data collection and analysis approaches, methods and tools.

> ***Step 4:*** Preparation of how data will be reported, used and communicated for learning, decision making and project improvements. It is important to plan this in advance so that data is not just collected but used as well, especially to fulfill the purpose as stated in the first step Step 1.

Step 5: Lastly, what resources, capacities and conditions are needed for the proper implementation of M&E processes?

NGOs need robust M&E systems to measure progress, demonstrate impact, promote accountability, compliance to set standards, organizational learning, knowledge sharing, policy influence and enhance sustainability. By insisting on setting up M&E systems by NGOs, donors put pressure on NGOs to perform and produce value for money. Such donor requirements have resulted in enhancing the organizational capacity of local NGOs in Africa (Emmanual, 2015). However, Lahey (2015) reminds that putting in place a good M&E system is one thing, implementing it to the book is another task. Some NGOs manage to set a good M&E system but then lack adequate resources to implement it. There are various scholarly views, observations, and analysis on this. M&E becomes relevant if the information it generates is used, and Emmanual (2015) observes that in some cases M&E is donor driven and some NGOs only implement M&E processes just as a compliance to donor requirements. In such cases M&E tend to address more perceived donor requirements than contextual project requirements. This usually happens when NGOs simply adopt M&E systems from donors and international agencies without contextualizing to the local needs. This is tantamount to lack of ownership of M&E systems by NGOs. To promote the use of M&E generated evidence and knowledge, M&E should be adopted as a project management tool. This way, as further elaborated by Ramadan & Borgonovi (2015), ensures that NGOs satisfy all their stakeholders, not only donors but project beneficiaries, their host governments, as well as their own internal organizational image.

In view of the study objective to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of NGO M&E systems in an endeavor to seek improvements, the study benefits from existing and extant literature that reveals the gaps. For example, Nalianya & Luketero (2017), reveal that globally Governments and NGOs' M&E systems have some weaknesses that constrain achievement of projects results.

In a related analysis, Lahey (2015) found out that the absence of, or weak M&E systems in the majority of International Labour Organisation (ILO) funded projects curtailed projects effectiveness. As a result, the organization has been increasing their support in designing and implementing strong M&E systems with particular focus on documentation of the quality of project implementation and results.

The Project Theory of Change: The theory of change, as shown in figure 2.1, is one of the key M&E system theories and is the basis upon which M&E systems are designed as depicted in figure 2.2. The historical background of the Theory of Change can be traced to the field of theory-driven evaluation, which gained eminence in the 1990's, and was popularized by Carol Weiss through the Aspen Institute and the Roundtable on Community Change (Coryn, Noakes, Westine, & Schröter, 2011). Its proponents include Serrat, 2017; Reinholz & Andrews, 2020; Uwizeyimana, 2020. The theory of change (ToC), as defined by Serrat (2017) shows the steps through which a project is intended to undergo, and the chain of results it is supposed to achieve as a build up to the achievement of the final intended objective and goal. The ToC therefore serves as the first step of each project planning process. A theory of change is "project-specific and makes the underlying rationale of a project explicit" (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020, p.1). As discussed earlier, the theory of change is a component and concept of the M&E system. It is premised on the desired developmental changes needed in society. Projects implemented by NGOs are meant to address specific societal problems, therefore are designed to bring specific changes in people's lives. The 'theory of change' conceptualises how such change can be achieved. Projects implemented to achieve the desired change therefore follow the theory of change.

Based on this definition, different other terminologies are used to refer to the theory of change, for example "Pathway to Change" or "Impact Chain". The following illustration depicts

the conceptualisation of the Theory of Change process flow from project inputs upwards to the desired impact;

Figure 2.3

Project Theory of Change Pathway

Inputs ⟶ Activities ⟶ Outputs ⟶ Outcome ⟶ Impacts

Notes: Adapted from *A step by step guide to* M&E, by The University of Oxford, 2014, p.9.

Progress has to been seen through each of the steps in the chain of expected results, demonstrating how the project activities and interventions feed into project outputs, which are then supposed to translate into outcomes and expected impacts. The development of the ToC follows a 'top-down approach' starting from defining the Goal and Impacts expected to be achieved by a project, then come up with what needs to be achieved (outcomes) to achieve that goal its impact, then define the results (outputs) that needs attained to get the outcomes. From there project managers can determine the actual project 'activities' to be undertaken using what resources (inputs). The process therefore follows the following steps;

Step 1: It starts with identifying and understanding the problem to be addressed by a project, the problem then sets the intended project goal, meaning the expected change/goal to be achieved through implementing the project. This leads to the next step;

Step 2: Answers the question, what Outcomes need to be achieved for the goal to be realized, and under what assumptions (conditions)? Then;

Step 3: What Outputs are needed if the set outcomes are to be achieved under what conditions (assumptions) then;

Step 4: The Outputs are used to formulate the relevant project Activities to be executed, the activities then are used to determine the *Inputs (resources)* needed to implement the activities

for the achievement of all the aforementioned chain/hierarchy of objectives or stages/layers of results. That is, the Outputs, Outcomes and the ultimate Goal.

The development of the project theory of change is an intricate process which if wrongly done will lead to wrong formulation of the Outputs, Outcomes and even the Goal. To ensure that all the stages are achieved, monitoring and evaluation processes come in. If any of these is wrong, it misleads the design of the M&E system, generating wrong data that feeds into wrong project decisions. A Theory of Change helps in the design of a project in as far as framing and mapping its expected outputs, outcomes and results. Reinholz & Andrews (2020) add that it consists of a sequence of hypotheses on how a project will realise change and under what conditions (assumptions).

The ToC concept is an integral component of the M&E system in the sense that it defines what needs to be monitored and evaluated, it helps in defining success. So M&E processes do track and assess progress along this theory of change's results chain to ensure the project is on course to achieve the set objectives and help identify any course corrections in time. A weak M&E system whose design is not informed by the theory of change or does not adhere to this concept would mislead project implementation, attaining poor results and wasting of resources. A project theory of change is hypothesized at the design and inception of the project as the envisaged and desired process flow of the project implementation towards the achievement of the project objectives. Figure 2.4 below is an illustration of the monitoring and evaluation of the hypothesized project theory of change from project inputs upwards to the desired impact;

Figure 2.4

Project 'Theory of Change' within the M&E system

Logframe objectives   **Monitoring questions**

Goal — Measuring changes at goal-level requires a longer time frame, and is therefore dealt with by evaluation and not monitoring.

Outcomes

Outputs — Are outputs leading to achievement of the outcomes? How do beneficiaries feel about the work?

Activities — Are activities leading to the expected outputs? Are activities being implemented on schedule and within budget?

Inputs — Are finance, personnel and materials available on time and in the right quantities and quality?

What is causing delays or unexpected results? Is there anything happening that should lead management to modify the operation's implementation plan?

Logframe objectives   **Evaluation questions**

Goal — Impact
• What changes did the project bring about?
• Were there any unplanned or unintended changes?

Sustainability
• Are the benefits likely to be maintained for an extended period after assistance ends?

Outcomes

Outputs — Effectiveness
• Were the operation's objectives achieved?
• Did the outputs lead to the intended outcomes?

Relevance
• Were the operation's objectives consistent with beneficiaries' needs and with Red Cross Red Crescent policies?

Activities — Efficiency
• Were stocks of items available on time and in the right quantities and quality?
• Were activities implemented on schedule and within budget?
• Were outputs delivered economically?

Inputs

Note: Adapted from *Project/Programme M&E Guide,* IFRC, 2011, p. 11,14.

The implementation and improvement of the project theory of change is informed by the two pillars of the project management M&E system, that is, 'monitoring' and 'evaluation' processes as depicted in figure 2.4. Suffice to say all the analysis and discussions that will constitute this study comes back to the illustrated monitoring and evaluation questions. The research topic's focus on the factors influencing the effective application of M&E system theories culminates into answering these monitoring and evaluation questions that apply to NGOs project management practices in one way or another. If poorly articulated therefore, a project's theory of change may mislead the project M&E approach resulting in limited ability to measure the

performance and report the correct project results (Lahey, 2015). Projects are therefore grounded on a theory of change, but then how does it become a monitoring and evaluation theory? Without a theory of change, a project may be poorly designed and in turn a poor quality M&E system meant to guide the performance of that project is also developed. This results the purpose of M&E to assess the realization of the Theory of Change becomes a futile and misleading exercise.

The validity of a project theory of change needs to be continuously monitored and reviewed during the project implementation in order to track its progress (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Sometimes the cause-and-effect linear relationship between project activities, outputs, outcomes, impact and goals ought to take into account unforeseen contextual factors that may arise during project implementation distorting the originally set theory of change. This is a view strongly held by Lomofsky (2016) who reminds project managers that projects are not implemented in isolation but within dynamic multidimensional contexts that maybe beyond the control of the project. So, the theory of change may be affected by external social, economic, cultural, political, and factors that may change the original ideation and design of the project. In this respect, if a theory of change is not reviewed it may become redundant, outdated and render the project irrelevant before it has achieved its objectives (Uwizeyimana, 2020). By implication, the theory of change and its logframe should not ignore the context that defined them in the first place is can be subjected to unpredictable changes hence the need for flexibility in the concepts and frameworks to respond and enable projects to remain relevant to the prevailing circumstances (Lomofsky, 2016; Auriacombe, 2016).

In spite of the discussed importance of the theory of change in designing projects and in guiding the M&E systems, a survey by KPMG (2014) showed only 42% NGOs having framed theory of change concepts for their projects. In most cases this is because the donors would have already developed 'assumed' theory of change frameworks for the projects they intend to fund instead of allowing the NGOs on the ground to do that in a more practical way.

The Logical Framework (Logframe): As illustrated in the Theoretical Framework figure 2.1, one of the key theories that make up the M&E system is the Logical Framework, popularly known as the Logframe (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017). The University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development (2018) traced the history of the logframe approach to the logic model, arguing that the distinction between the two is misty. In agreement, The Center for Disease Control (2018) observed that the two are usually used interchangeably for the same purpose, therefore are complementary to each other. In addition, the logframe itself has undergone lots of reviews culminating in different organisations adapting to their own situations. Literature has therefore referred used varying terms interchangeable, that is, the 'logframe', 'logframe matrix', 'Project Matrix', 'logic model', 'logical model' or 'project logic' (Brown 2017, 3). The logframe started in the 1960s as an organizational management tool in structured military and business environments that work with quantitative objectives, focusing on executing activities and achieving outputs. The framework evolved to become a key development planning, management and monitoring tool, or simply a Project Planning Matrix (Fujita, 2010).

The majority of M&E theorists are proponents of the logframe and consider it the backbone of the M&E system, chief among them being Bakewell & Garbutt, 2005; Couillard et al, 2009; Martinez; 2011; Auriacombe, 2016; Brown, 2017; Gordon & Sebastian, 2019; Uwizeyimana, 2020). They all concur that the Logical Framework (Logframe) is one of the most commonly used models in designing and applying M&E systems and approaches by most Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and donor organisations. This is because donors found it to be useful in managing projects, as a result they make it a requirement when funding NGO projects hence it is now the basis upon which most NGO projects and their M&E systems are designed (Couillard et al, 2009). In concurrence, Uwizeyimana (2020) argue that it's rare to come across a project funded, supported or implemented by an international development organization which does not use the

logframe as a monitoring and evaluation tool. For this reason, this study's theoretical framework is rooted on the logframe approach making it desirable for this research to explore whether this framework is being applied by NGOs, and to what effect.

The logframe, is usually a (4 rows by 4 columns) matrix that breaks down the key components of the Project Theory of Change, that is, the Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes and Goal. For each of these (except for the inputs) performance indicators are identified to guide project monitoring and evaluation, for each indicator the means (methods) of verification/sources of performance data, and the key assumptions/conditions that should prevail if each of the objectives is to be achieved. The assumptions are usually drawn from possible risks that may emerge during project implementation. The following is an outline of a Logframe;

Figure 2.5

Logical Framework

Narrative summary	Objectively verifiable indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions
Goal – the overall aim to which the project is expected to contribute	Measures (direct or indirect) to show the project's contribution to the goal	Sources of information and methods used to show fulfillment of goal	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's control necessary for maintaining the progress towards the goal
Outcomes (or objectives) – the new situation which the projects is aiming to bring about	Measures (direct or indirect) to show what progress is being made towards reaching the objectives	Sources of information and methods used to show progress against objectives	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's control, which are necessary if achieving the objectives is going to contribute towards the overall goal
Outputs – the results which should be within the control of the project management	Measures (direct or indirect) to show if project outputs are being delivered	Sources of information and methods used to show delivery of outputs	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's control, which are necessary if producing the outputs is going to help achieve the objectives
Activities – the things which have to be done by the project to produce the outputs	Measures (direct or indirect) to show if project outputs are being delivered	Sources of information and methods used to show that activities have been completed	Important events, conditions or decisions beyond the project's control, which are necessary if completing activities will produce the required outputs
Inputs	Resources – type and level of resources needed for the project Finance – overall budget Time – Planned start and end date		

Note: Adapted from *The use and abuse of the logical framework approach* by Bakewell, O., & Garbutt, A., 2005, p. 3.

Arguably, the concept behind the logframe is therefore not much different from the Theory of Change, rather can be interpreted as a structured matrix presentation of the project theory of change. Just like it is almost impossible to discuss the M&E system without delving into the Theory of Change and the Logframe, it is not easy to discuss the logframe without making reference to the Theory of Change. According to Gordon & Sebastian (2019), "both may serve to guide project development and management, monitoring, and evaluation, and fully integrating the program theory of change within the program logframe provides for a stronger and more holistic understanding of program progress" (p. 1). The underlying principles between the two are almost the same, although by design and purpose they are not synonymous.

According to Uwizeyimana (2020), one weakness of the Logframe is its rigidity over the project life cycle. Traditionally, logframes are designed and agreed at the inception of the project and were rarely reviewed in response to any changes transpiring during project implementation. This explains earlier works by Auriacombe (2016) asserting that some organisations, especially those implementing projects in dynamic and fragile contexts are having to be forced to constantly have a relook at their project logframes to ensure the projects to remain relevant in view of any emerging issues in the context. This is where the power of logframe assumptions comes in. The purpose of setting assumptions in a project is to ensure that the project constantly watches the risks or any foreseen or unforeseen emerging contextual issues affecting the original design of the project or affecting the actual implementation of the project itself. This is why the logframe is not only used as a project planning tool, but also as a key M&E tool, in order to keep track of any changes in the context, monitoring the stated assumptions and risks and provide early warning to the project management and implementers. This is confirmed by Buttigieg, Gauci & Day (2016) who posited

that "The framework helps with the identification of key performance indicators. With a focus on monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes" (p. 1027).

Project Performance Indicators: A component of the Logframe theory, project performance indicators are guiding statements that give direction for measurement, assessment and reporting on progress and performance projects (Rabie & Goldman (2014). They define how the project outputs, outcomes and impact are to be measured to determine progress, performance and achievement of objectives and results. In order to correctly, accurately and effectively monitor and evaluate a project, it should be clear what needs to be achieved, by how much and when, that is, the objectives and milestones must be spelled out and well defined (Oxford University School of Geography & Environment, 2014). Project performance indicators provide the direction, ambition, and the basis upon which a project monitoring and evaluation system is set. Karani, Bichanga, & Kamau (2014) posit that it is important to monitor how you are progressing towards achieving the set targets and performance indicators, otherwise you may be wasting project resources and not addressing the intended problems. Setting of performance benchmarks is usually based on on the project goals, on baseline situations, on standard thresholds, on international and industry best practice (Auriacombe, 2016).

If the project theory of change and logframe wrongly or inadequately identify and spell out the outputs, outcomes and the expected results, then the M&E systems will measure the wrong or incomplete indicators (Lahey, 2015). In studying the NGOs' M&E systems, an assessment of the adequacy, relevance, correctness, and clarity of the M&E indicators is a key focus area important to answer some of the research questions. In this regard a review of available literature helps to understand different perspectives around M&E indicators. This provides the study with a foundation upon which to provide an understanding, arguments, critiques and scholarly

recommendations on the definitions, types, characteristics, importance and uses of indicators in M&E.

To enable systematic monitoring and evaluation, there is need to be guided by the right indicators. KPMG (2014) in its survey of the monitoring and evaluation approaches in the development sector, established that performance indicators are the second widely used evaluation tools by 75% NGOs. Indicators need to be relevant, context specific and grounded on the social, economic, political, cultural, geographical, climatic and any other contextual factors within which the project is being implemented (Ebi, Boyer, Bowen, Frumkin, & Hess, 2018). In view of this, project indicators ought to be carefully selected and crafted in relevance to the project and its circumstances. Unfortunately, this principle is at times violated by some international donors who have a tendency of imposing M&E indicators on NGOs without testing their relevance to the local context within which projects are implemented. On the other hand, when a project has a poorly designed logframe it may end up monitoring the wrong indicators (Emmanual, 2015).

Scholars seem to generally present common definitions of project performance indicators. Reinholz & Andrews (2020) view indicators as indications or signs that show the achievement of pre-determined project objectives have been attained or the degree to which project implementation is progressing towards meeting the targets. Indicators spell out the variables to be measured and the milestones to be achieved towards a set pre-condition, and this helps to determine project performance. This helps to provide feedback to project management and inform any changes that maybe required to remain on course towards the project goal (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). Another commonly used terminology is Key Performance Indicators (KPI) defined by KPMG (2014) as the standards used by organisations to measure and assess their success. These are indicators carrying the same purpose as defined earlier but are usually used at organizational than at project level, mainly to assess if an institutional performance against its strategic plans, objectives, mission,

vision or goal. KPIs differ from one organization to another based on the standards within which the respective organisations fall under, and in most cases, they are quantitative, for example using scorecards as tools of measuring performance (Bishop, 2018).

While indicators can be project specific, Lahey (2015) advises that they also need to be informed by international results-oriented best practices. In additional there are also existing pre-set standardized indicators that are based on global thresholds on specific technical areas that include health, nutrition, sanitation, education, human rights, and these are sometimes referred to as compendium indicators (Ebi et al, 2018). This is not in violation of the need to contextualise indicators as minimum acceptable standards are taken into consideration regardless of any context. A good example of such indicators is set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators that cover social, environmental, and economic sectors (United Nations, 2015).

There are two broad categories of M&E indicators, namely quantitative and qualitative indicators whose choice and use depends on the type of project being implemented (Lahey, 2015). Quantitative indicators, their milestones and targets are expressed in numerical terms such as numbers, ratios and percentages. On the other hand, qualitative indicators, their ambitions and thresholds are expressed in descriptive terms that answer the what, how, why questions (University of Oxford School of Geography & Environment, 2014). The choice to use qualitative or quantitative indicators also depends on the type of objective within the result chain or project theory of change. That is, the Outputs indicators, Outcome indicators or Impact indicators. For instance, Ebi et al (2018) distinguish indicators into 'Monitoring' and 'Evaluation' categories, where monitoring indicators are referred to as 'process indicators' with reference to indicators that track if the progress of project implementation is progressing well and on track. Then the evaluation indicators include Outcome and Impact indicators which give indications of effectiveness or the degree and rate at which you are achieving the set objectives (University of Oxford School of

Geography & Environment, 2014). Put differently, outcome indicators do measure improvements in the quality of life and behavior. Proxy, symbolic or indirect indicators is another type of indicators that are only used when it is difficult to directly measure a variable (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017). For example, if it becomes difficult to directly measure increase in household income then household expenditure plus savings maybe used to estimate household income indirectly.

According to literature, there are key expected attributes of good M&E indicators. A good indicator, as recommended by MacFeely (2019) should be well defined and conceptually clear, has a set method of measuring it. In agreement Myrick (2013) stresses that an indicator should be 'objectively verifiable' (p. 424), meaning it should be clear and factually easy to measure. In other words, as Lahey (2015) puts it, an indicator should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented and Time-bound). Specific means they ought to be unambiguous and clearly defined, without double barrel meanings to avoid misinterpretation during measurement and reporting. In addition, they should be plausible and clearly defined for easy attribution of their achievement directly to the project activities. Measurable entails that they should have a reliable, clearly defined and a correct methodology of measuring to avoid different people using different approaches that give varying results. An indicator has to be verifiable and based on proof and evidence of achievement. The indicator and its target must be realistically Attainable and achievable using the laid down project implementation methods within a given timeframe 'Timebound'. Lastly an Indicator should be Results Oriented in that it should be linked to a specific project objective, be it at Output, Outcome, Impact or Goal level (University of Oxford School of Geography & Environment, 2014). The Umhlaba Development Services (2017) also added 'Factual' as another attribute of a good indicator. Meaning an indicator is also supposed to be based on facts, not assumptions in their measurements.

The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework: From the theory of change to the logframe, the third M&E system theory following the sequence demonstrated in figure 2.2 is the M&E Framework. While the M&E Framework ultimately anchors this study, the conclusion from this discussions is that it is derived from the Theory of Change and the Logframe. All the three therefore are arguably integral components of most NGO project M&E systems. Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) reason out that the M&E Framework presents a theoretical outline and plan of operationalizing project monitoring and evaluation processes, outlining what to be monitored, that is, the performance indicators at each stage of the hierarchy/chain of results, monitoring methods, the set targets, roles and responsibilities, timeframes and the reporting structures.

Figure 2.6

Monitoring and Evaluation (M & E) Framework

OBJECTIVES The project desired aims, results & impacts.	INDICATOR How do we know achievement of each objective?	DEFINITIION How is the indicator measured?	BASELINE What's the situation or status of the indicator at project start	TARGET What's is the desired value of the indicator ambition	DATA SOURCE Where & how do we get data to measure progress & achievement	FREQUENCY How often will M&E data be collected & reported	RESPONSIBLE Who will monitor, evaluate and report what?
Goal							
Outcomes							
Outputs							
Activities							
Inputs							

Note: Adapted from 'How to write an M&E framework', by Tool4Dev, 2014, p. 6

The first column of the framework mirrors the hierarchy of the Theory of Change, and together with the second column, they are also derived from the logframe and sets out the hierarchy of intended objectives and their respective monitoring indicators of success or failure, of performance and non-performance, of achievement and non-achievement. Therefore, the M&E Framework's role is to check and identify what's working and not working during project implementation. In essence, the framework helps to monitor and evaluate the utilization of the

project 'Inputs'/resources, progress in the implementation of the project 'activities', the attainment results (outputs), and achievement of desires changes set in the 'theory of change' (outcomes and goals).

Sometimes literature has a tendency of using different terminologies in defining M&E, resulting in a confusing or blurred difference between an M&E system, an M&E framework and an M&E plan. For instance, Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) consider an M&E Framework as an outline and plan of operationalizing project monitoring and evaluation processes. On the other hand, an M&E plan is at times viewed as an M&E framework or an indicator matrix that defines project indicators, how they will be measured, who will collect the data and how often. This includes how the data will be analysed, the reporting timeframes, and how the information will be used (Simister, 2015). Lahey (2015, p.12) shares the same M&E Plan definition but calls it a 'Performance Measurement Strategy'.

NGO Projects Monitoring and Evaluation Plans: After an M&E system has clearly defined the performance measurement indicators, the next question is how to operationalize it. Failing to plan is planning to fail hence the importance of getting things right in the first place. Simister (2015) places a lot of emphasis on M&E planning and cautions that designing project M&E systems needs to be followed up with putting in place a plan to execute the M&E system, otherwise it will remain just but a system. M&E Plans should display a well-organized, structured and systematic approach of what, how and when data will be collected, analysed and reported, and clearly apportioning roles and responsibilities (Lahey, 2015). It's however one thing to put in place a well-organized M&E plan, and it's another task to implement it. This is a common pitfall for some NGOs.

Umhlaba Development Services (2017) lament the development of M&E Plans as an afterthought process that should otherwise be prioritized at the project planning stage. Sometimes

M&E Plans can be well designed at project planning stage but then become irrelevant during implementation, because of various factors. M&E Plans should therefore be kept simple and practical and within the capacity of the organization. In the evaluation of ILO funded projects Lahey (2015) observed some anomalies in the M&E Frameworks and Plans which inhibited effective measurement and reporting of project effectiveness and results. At times, M&E Plans are overloading with too much to monitor and evaluate, making it complex and difficult to execute. Just as M&E systems are affected by situational and contextual changes, Simister (2015) advises that M&E plans also need be constantly updated to remain relevant. Whenever any aspect of the project is revised and the M&E system also reviewed, then the M&E Plan should follow suit so that it remains they all remain in sync with each other.

Other Concepts Constituting the M&E System

Data Collection and Analysis in NGO Projects M&E Systems: Data collection is a key element of the NGO M&E system implementation matrix, as wrong data also gives you wrong and misleading results. Accordingly, it is of paramount necessity to ensure M&E applies the correct and relevant data collection approaches, methods and tools. This ensures the M&E system produces credible and useful data for the project and organization (Umhlaba Development Services (2017). Depending on the type of project and its intended objectives, M&E data is collected through a wide range of approaches, methods and tools. These include surveys, special/technical studies, observations, interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, documentaries, photos, secondary data from relevant institutions that include schools, hospitals, among others.

As discussed under the performance indicators section, a project can have both qualitative and quantitative indicators. The monitoring and evaluation of such indicators also need to be aligned to the respective qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods and tools. Umhlaba Development Services (2017) emphasise the importance of using this mixed data

collection methods and approaches in measuring indicators for purposes of triangulation and getting a full picture from both quantifiable measurements and descriptive information. Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis approaches do help in triangulating or comparing and augmenting the same data collected using different methods to ensure credibility and validity. Qualitative data is known to provide in-dept information that may also come in the form of feedback, opinions and testimonies of changes brought about by the project in a community (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017). Numbers and percentages alone without explanations are inadequate to understand the full picture, so there is always need for a story behind every figure.

There are various forms of data analysis methods in project performance measurement. First, it is important that baseline data be collected for all indicators to allow for easy determination of achievement of set targets and objectives. This allows for a 'before' and 'after' project comparative analysis (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017). This way you can measure 'change' in a way that tests the initially conceptualized project Theory of Change. Alternatively, to measure the same change, data can be collected from the project area, technically called the 'treatment' and from 'control', an area not being served by the project. Data from the treatment and control areas are also put through some comparative analysis to determine if the treatment area is gaining some benefits as a result of the project compared to the control area where there is no project. The same data collection and analysis should be repeated over time to establish a trend analysis that shows project impact and progress towards achievement of objectives and set targets (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017).

Monitoring and Evaluation in the Project Life Cycle: The purpose of monitoring and evaluation systems as outlined by Mleke & Dida (2020), is for institutions to track and assess the performance of projects with regards to implementation progress, delivery of results, achievement of targets and objectives, as well as show impact. 'Project life' implies that a project

is implemented over a specified period, after which it continues to benefit its targeted beneficiaries, communities and society. According to the Project Management for Development Organisations/PM4DEV (2015) the project life cycle consists of stages through which projects go through during their lives or timeframes. This follows a sequential order of the project cycle stages from project initiation, project planning, project implementation and monitoring, review and adaptation, re-design and updating, then go round the cycle again before getting to project closure.

Figure 2.7 below therefore illustrates how and why a project life is referred to as a 'cycle' where the project phases run in a sequential order until making a full cycle which repeats itself before the project goes to closure. Most importantly in relation to the focus of this study, the project life cycle also shows how the monitoring and evaluation functions and processes are appearing along the full cycle.

Figure 2.7

Monitoring & Evaluation in the Project Life Cycle

Note: Adapted from *M&E Planning: Guidance & Tools,* by Chaplowe, S.G., 2008. P. 3.

Whilst some literature includes monitoring and evaluation at distinct stages in the cycle, most scholars share the same view that M&E cuts and runs across all the stages of the cycle as each

stage requires key inputs from M&E (Kamau & Mohamed, 2015). Monitoring and evaluation, as project management processes, run across all stages of the project, from project design, planning, implementation up until project end. The M&E is imbedded to the project life cycle to ensure effective project management. Figure 2.7 demonstrates that it is part of the project management process, and is an integral part of the project cycle.

A project is managed throughout its life hence the term 'Project Management Cycle'. Umhlaba Development Services (2017) demonstrates that M&E processes start even before project implementation. These include problem analysis, needs assessments and project feasibility studies, all to inform project design. A proper project design also influences the correct formulation and smooth implementation of the subsequent M&E processes. Even during the project design before implementation, M&E has the responsibility of setting the stage for the project design through undertaking the initial problem or needs assessments for the project. This then informs the project planning stage where M&E takes a lead in logframe design, M&E planning and running the project baseline study which lays the base upon which the subsequent project performance measurements will be compared. Thereafter the project implementation starts in conjunction with the routine monitoring processes, including the periodic annual or mid-term evaluation or project reviews, which ought to be undertaken throughout the project life. This informs any updates or improvements needed for the project during the whole implementation years culminating in an end of the project evaluation, to assess the extent to which project objectives, goals, targets, and impacts are achieved. Ideally, the role of M&E goes beyond the project life cycle as a follow up 'ex-post' project sustainability evaluation ought to be conducted years after the project end. This is so as sustainability is a long-term factor that demonstrates how the project survives for long and its benefits and impacts are sustained in the long run, and these aspects cannot be assessed in an end of project impact evaluation (Bailey & Sunderland, 2019).

Utilisation of M&E Data by NGOs: Project performance information and evidence generated from M&E processes and reports is only useful when they are put to use beyond just meeting management and donor reporting requirements. If the information is not ploughed back to the project and shared with project stakeholders to inform decisions, make project quality improvements, course correction and lesson learning for future programming, then there is no value for money in investing in project monitoring and evaluation (University of Oxford School of Geography & Environment, 2014). In this regard, project implementation should be taken as a learning experience that enriches current and future development processes. To cement this agenda, Umhlaba Development Services (2017) define data as the primary meaningless raw material collected from the project area, which can only be turned into meaningful information when analysed and synthesized, then into knowledge when it is contextualized to give explanation, evidence and lessons useful for decision making. So, collecting data is one thing and turning it into meaningful and useful information and knowledge is another.

As earlier discussed, there is a tendency by some NGOs to put in place and running M&E systems just to satisfy donor requirements, and use the M&E data to fulfill donor reporting protocols without turning the data into useful information and knowledge to improve project quality and performance. Lahey (2015) agrees with this perspective, lamenting that such situations render M&E to become more of administrative tools meant to generate information used just for compliance reporting to justify project funding than to achieve project objectives. Information and evidence generated through M&E processes is usually rich and pregnant with lessons not only for project improvement but for use in future organizational and project planning and implementation. KPMG (2014) confirms that the majority of NGOs are motivated to generate M&E data for the primary purpose of transparency and accountability (87%), lessons learning (85%), and the

improvement of project efficiency (91%) and impact (82%) and 75% mainly for compliance to donor demands, and 50% to attract additional funding (p. 9).

The low adoption of ICT tools in monitoring discussed earlier was found to be a major reason for lack of timely or real time data. Manual feedback loops are usually slow such that in most cases evidence of project poor performance becomes available for use well after things have gone wrong (KPMG, 2014). To demonstrate the positive effect of use of M&E data to improve projects, 66% NGOs surveyed by KPMG indicated that they have observed improvements in project delivery within a year of evidenced based project reviews.

The University of Oxford School of Geography & Environment (2014) give various ways through which M&E data can be used. M&E evidence can be used for regular project update and review meetings to interpret findings and discuss how project implementation is progressing. This helps to identify what's working, what's not working and why, and the level of attainment of the intended project objectives, the set milestones and targets. In addition, M&E information can help in extracting lessons, identify risk factors and test the project assumptions and inform the appropriate mitigation strategies. Furthermore, knowledge generated from M&E data can be used to brainstorm decisions and any changes that need to be made to the project design and implementation strategy. Using adaptive management, Umhlaba Development Services (2017) calls for regular review of the project logframe and strategy at least annually to allow for any necessary updates. Projects implemented in complex and fragile contexts are bound to be affected by risks and such problems are not failures, instead they provide lessons that should be used for project learning that challenge project managers to innovate for improved and resilient projects. In agreement to this, The University of Oxford, School of Geography & Environment (2014), Auriacombe (2016) and Lahey (2015) also advocate for flexibility in project theory, hypotheses and M&E systems especially for projects implemented in unpredictable and complex environments.

M&E learning can be organized through a series of planned learning and reflection events with project management and staff, project partners and stakeholders, including beneficiaries, the community, donors and the host government agents. In tandem with earlier assertions, the purpose is to give feedback and discuss what is working and what is not working and why, then propose and agree on the way forward for the success of the project (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017). These project learning and reflection review meetings can be organized periodically on an annual basis.

The fact that NGOs are only present during the project implementation inception and implementation phases before the exiting means that M&E data and evidence is more used during the project life, and less utilized in the post project era. This was established by Kithinji et al (2017) whose study respondents observed, on a likert scale of 5, that there was high monitoring data utilisation of between 4.028 to 4.231 scores. However, the story was different for evaluations data utilisation where;

> Over the last decade, internationally, several billions in US dollars were spent on evaluations, but there has been little to show for this amount of money because meta-evaluations have shown that a third of evaluations are not worth their investment in terms of utilization (p. 283).

The utilization of both monitoring and evaluation data contributes significantly to the sustainability of NGO projects (Kithinji et al, 2017). The study confirmed that project stakeholders where learning from M&E data to inform how they plan for the future of projects and identify factors that can threaten the future of projects, and most importantly the participation of project beneficiaries in M&E processes to enable continuity after the NGOs have exited.

Efficacy of NGOs Project Management Practices: The literature review seems to place emphasis on the overall and cross cutting role of the monitoring and evaluation function in project

management throughout the project life. However, some NGOs do not practice this and exclude the M&E staff from the project design and planning process. Lahey (2015) laments this weakness arguing that the first pitfall for many project managers is the wrong diagnosis of the problem to be addressed by a project. This will lead to the development of the wrong project M&E system, for example if the project theory of change is wrongly developed it means the logframe becomes weak as well, and consequently wrongly informs the development of the project M&E Framework. So the M&E system elements will have gaps since every element of the M&E system is based on the theory of change. This, according to Khan (2003) leads to poor project planning, and if things go wrong at this initial stage of the project cycle, the whole process is doomed, because it will be informed by poorly defined elements of the project M&E system. For instance, the knock on effects of a poorly defined project theory of change leads to a poor project logframe, translating to a misleading M&E Framework and strategy that generates misleading monitoring and evaluation evidence, and in turn an ineffective project.

According to Buckland and Graham (1990), NGOs are known for their strength in experimenting with innovative approaches, including trialling the practice of new developmental concepts and approaches. It is no surprise that NGOs have been known to be involved in practical research and development of appropriate developmental technologies and approaches. NGOs largely rely on donor funding for their work and in this regard the need for accountability of resources as well as achievement of results and developmental impact weigh heavy on them. This is as argued by Nalianya & Luketero (2017) reason that most NGOs struggle with pressure to demonstrate accountability for the resources they get from their funding donors. In this respect it is easy for NGOs to distort their professional image if their donor funded projects do not yield the expected results or if donors feel they did not get value for money. One way therefore is for NGOs to strive for effective accountability and deliver developmental results from donor funded projects

through strong project monitoring, evaluation and management systems and practices (Nalianya & Luketero, 2017). Robust M&E systems play a pivotal role in ensuring the quality projects are designed, implemented, and attain the desired developmental outcomes, hence the need for NGOs to have robust M&E systems and practices to ensure maximum project results (Marshall & Suárez, 2014).

Having worked with different NGOs over the years, there seems to be no standardized application of monitoring and evaluation standards in the sector, and in turn varying achievements of the projects objectives. From this perspective, the background of the M&E concept and its contextual applicability by NGOs in Zimbabwe comes on the spotlight through this study. For instance, Naidoo (2010) notes that most historical literature on M&E practice emerged largely from observations in countries outside Africa. The concept and practice were introduced much later into the continent mainly through donor funded NGO projects, as a requirement by donors for accountability and transparency in project implementation and funds utilisation. The research also seeks to establish if NGOs in Zimbabwe are up to date with the adoption and contextualization of M&E theories and methodologies, posing practice and applicability questions in this field and industry. Or is it a capacity issue? Does the NGO sector in Zimbabwe have the required resources, for example the technical skills, technological and strategic policies to institutionalise, develop, design and implement project M&E systems?

The Conceptual Framework

Having defined and discussed the M&E system, its theories, concepts and frameworks, and its importance to NGO projects, next is a presentation of the conceptual framework that guided this research. Grant and Osanloo (2020) opine that a conceptual framework is a tool used for demonstrating how the research problem will be analysed. It outlines and defines the concepts and

key variables and constructs to be explored by the research, and shows the presumed interrelationships between the variables (Adom et al, 2018). Noteworthy, both Grant and Osanloo (2020), and Adom et al (2018) posit that a conceptual framework can be presented in a diagrammatic or narrative form or both to describe and simplify how ideas in a study are related to one another. To guide this study a framework was conceptualised based on M&E theoretical framework presented earlier as well as informed by literature around M&E system theories and practice.

Guided by the M&E system theoretical framework presented in figure 2.1, research objectives and the hypotheses, and borrowing from various pieces of literature, the author developed the following Conceptual Framework to guide the study. The conceptual framework presented in figure 2.8 below suggests that if one adds (+) the three Organisational Resource Capacities to the three Theory Principles, and removes or subtracts (-) the negative external factors and pressures that affect NGO M&E systems this sets the progression towards achieving effective M&E systems and projects.

Figure 2.8

The M&E System Theory to Practice Conceptual Framework
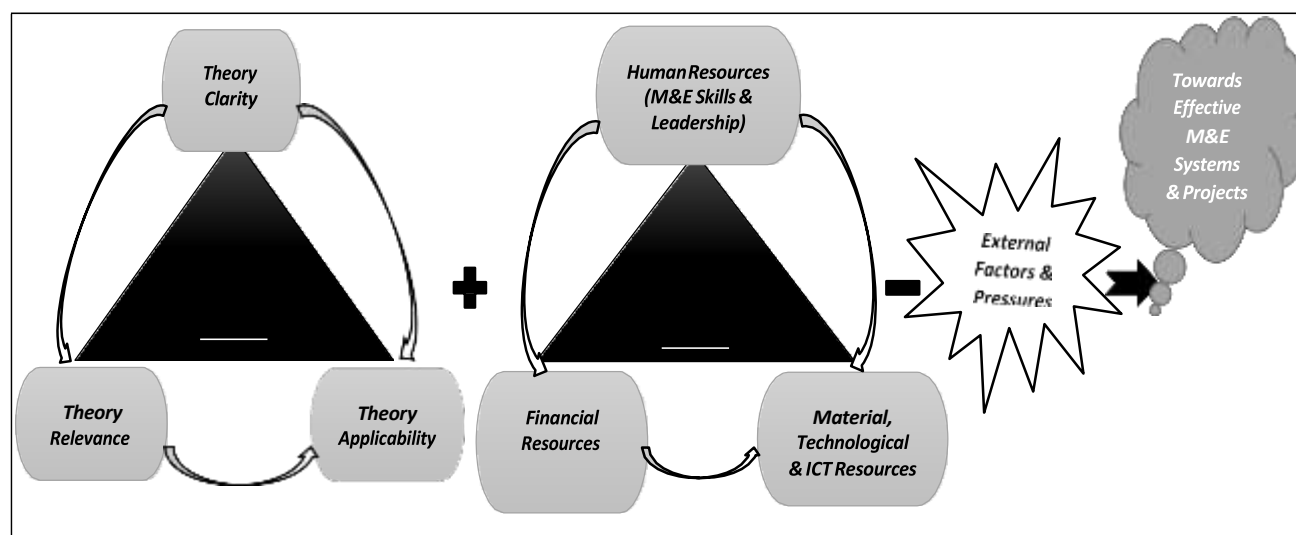
Source: Author's Conceptualisation Guided by Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018), Mleke & Deda (2020), Ratfree (2020)

The development of this Conceptual Framework drew from the research objectives and the hypotheses which the research seeks to test.

First, the framework starts with the three theory principles of applicability, relevance and theory clarity (Wacker, 1998; Bendassolli, 2013), to address Research Objective 1; *"Identify any gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness"* and test Hypothesis 1; *"There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO´.*

Secondly, the framework adds the Organisational Capacity in the form of resources needed to apply M&E theories effectively (human, financial and material/technological resources). This was to address Research Objective 2; *"Analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories comparatively between by local and international NGOs",* to test Hypothesis 2*; "The resource capacity of an NGO influences the effectiveness in the application of the M&E System theories´.* In an endavour to fully address the aforementioned Objective 2 and test Hypotheses 3; *"Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs"*, other 'external factors' that influence M&E theory application were added to the conceptual framework. Suffice to say Objective 3; *"Come up with suggested solutions for recommendations to improve both theory and practice and contribute to the body of knowledge of project monitoring and evaluation"* cuts across the entire conceptual framework and draws from all the hypotheses and research questions.

 The three-pronged triangular variables concept was innovated for each of the two components of the conceptual framework. First, the theories to be tested and second, the NGO capacity. Conceptually, when these two components are combined together they contribute to effective NGO M&E systems and projects. It is therefore hypothesized that if the M&E system

theories haves clarity, relevance and are applicable, and then the NGO has adequate capacity (M&E skilled staff, adequate budget and the required material and technological resources), then project management becomes effective and NGO projects will successfully achieve the desired results.

How the Conceptual Framework was applied in this Study: As opined by Bendassolli (2013), a theory is applicable under certain assumptions, it should be explicit about the conditions under which it becomes relevant, and it should be clear under what circumstances a theory is likely to hold. The framework was conceptualized to guide the research on the key determinants, factors and variables that ensure the translation of M&E theories to practice. In other words, the framework shows NGO resource capacities the research must assess to test the M&E system theories applicability, relevance and effectiveness to realize successful community development projects. Only then can the study identify theory and practice strengths, weaknesses and opportunities and come up with relevant and evidence based recommendations and propositions. Only then can the theory serve its purpose of providing solutions to the problems for which the NGO projects are executed for.

As postulated in the hypotheses, the conceptual framework suggests that the major driver of M&E theory adoption and practice by NGOs is organizational capacity mainly in the form of financial, skills, material and ICT resources. Such resources, when combined with 'theory relevance' and 'theory clarity and applicability' do make theory useful and practical. For this study therefore, the conceptual framework was used as a diagnostic and analytical tool to identify where the research problem is emanating from an M&E system and its application is concerned. It was also used as a theory testing tool to establish M&E system theory clarity, relevance and applicability.

Organisational Capacity and M&E Resources

Project monitoring and evaluation processes require organizational capacity and a wide range of M&E resources that range from financial, human resources, technical expertise, technological and material. According to Kithinji et al (2017), M&E resource capacity is categorized into three components, financial, human and physical; where human encompasses M&E staff, knowledge and skills, while physical includes the materials needed to execute M&E work such as technology and equipment. The study postulates that capacity and resource constraints are a huge drawback for effective M&E systems. Kithinji, Gakuu, & Kidombo (2017) rightly observed that the project information generated by under resourced M&E systems is more likely to have gaps hence compromising its credibility, quality and usefulness. Project monitoring and evaluation processes are technical, rigorous and demanding hence require adequate resources. These include qualified and experienced staff, hiring of expert consultants to support and undertake independent evaluations, competitive salaries, transport, laptops for data management, tablets for data collection, and other relevant ICT technology, development of databases, among others.

Budgetary Allocation to M&E

Despite it being the backbone of project management, M&E as Lahey (2015) observed that M&E usually receives the lower priority at project design stage especially due to organizational resource constraints. Evidence generated from NGOs operating in Kenya's Meru region through a study by Kithinji et al (2017) shows that there was a 26% increase in M&E data utilization for every unit increase in resource allocation to M&E. This is a positive mindset shift from the past where some NGOs leadership lacked organizational commitment and prioritization of M&E. The study clarifies that some organisations perceived M&E as an unnecessary expensive extravagance and workload, while some stigmatise it as a scrutiny and policing instrument on their performance.

This was found to be the reason why some NGOs allocate resources to monitoring only and not prioritized evaluations, which they have limited control of since they are usually undertaken by independent externals.

As alluded to by Emmanuel (2015), putting in place and running effective M&E systems require at least 10% of the organizational or project budget as an international threshold. A survey conducted by KPMG (2014) shows that just 6% NGOs do meet the 10% international advocated threshold of their project budget allocated to M&E, with the majority well below 5% as illustrated in figure 2.9;

Figure 2.9

Proportion of Program Budget Spent on M&E
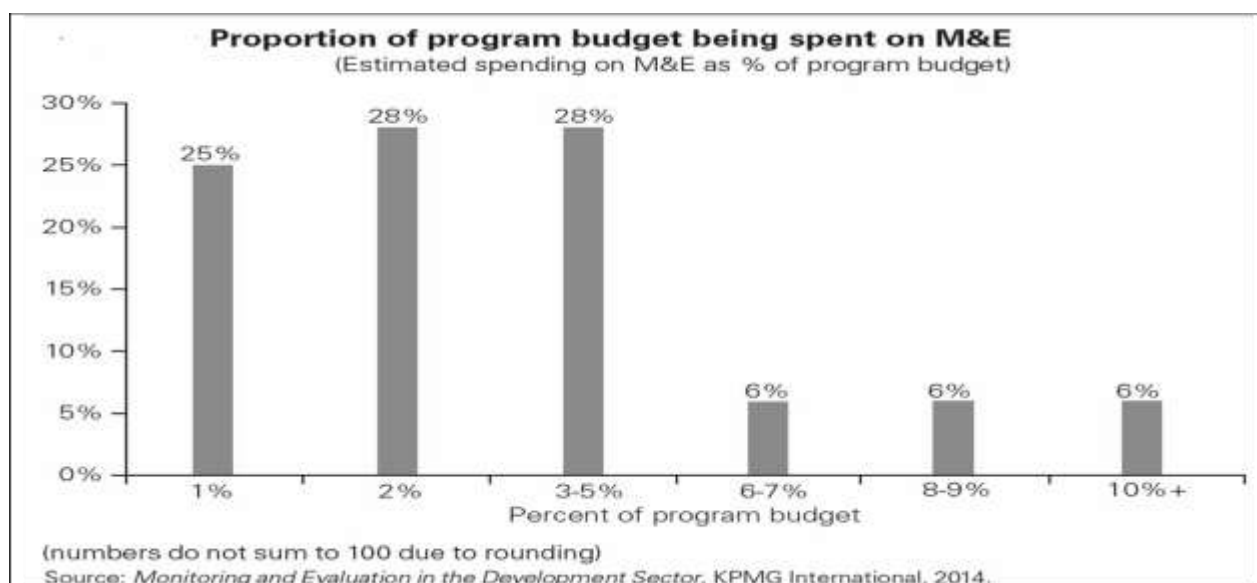
Note: Adapted from *Monitoring and evaluation in the development sector,* by KPMG, 2014, p. 22.

Lazio (2015) observed that under resourcing of M&E systems is at times not a result of lack of resources but rather lack of leadership commitment to M&E for various governance reasons. He argues that the state of organizational M&E systems is a true reflection of the leadership and managerial systems of their institutions. It is further reasoned that basic and standard M&E can

still be practiced even within the limits of resource constraints. NGO leadership should wake up to the reality that there is value in allocating adequate resources to M&E.

Human Resource and M&E Skills Capacity

According to Nalianya & Luketero (2017), evidence exist that NGOs adequately resourced with qualified, skilled and experienced M&E personnel are better equipped to achieve their project objectives. M&E data utilization is key in improving the quality and delivery of NGO projects. Kithinji et al (2017) agree with this observation based on their study which confirmed that there is a positive correlation between M&E data utilization by NGOs and having qualified and skilled staff and. The same study also noted a positive correlation between investing in M&E training and the M&E data utilization. Based on this finding, the study concluded that there is need for training, capacity building and practical mentoring of project staff to build sustainable NGO M&E systems. This of course, comes with costs but such costs can never outweigh the benefits accrued from well managed projects.

In terms of human resources, it was established that there are limited M&E specialists in Africa to support NGOs, hence the reliance on international experts from donors and headquarters of International NGOs (Kithinji et al, 2017). This observation is supported by Wanjiku (2015), who observed that in Kenya there is widespread lack of M&E expertise. This was validated by Mbiti & Kiruja, (2015) who decried inadequate relevant skills among most M&E staff in public organisations. To reduce overreliance on expatriate M&E skills and enhance sustainability in the NGO sector in developing countries, local capacity building is a priority. Basheka & Byamugisha (2015) weighed in with their analysis of the lack of adequate supply of M&E professionals by Universities in Africa, arguing that M&E as an academic discipline is fairly new in Africa, hence a gap and mismatch between supply and demand.

Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018) observed that most capacity building processes however tend to prioritise M&E technical trainings ignoring the broader organizational capacity issues that make or break the implementation of the M&E skills being developed. Organisational culture, leadership, governance and change management are examples of institutional capacity issues that also need attention to advance the adoption of modern M&E practices that steer efficient and effective project management. Most M&E practitioners in developing countries always complain that the M&E systems that they are pressured to uptake are mostly adopted from the developed world where there is generally strong institutional capacity to drive them (Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018).

Technological and ICT Resources

In this technology era, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) based M&E systems are more effective and yield real-time data for timeous evidence-based decision-making. This entails migration from manual and paper based to ICT data/information management systems. While the use of ICT based M&E systems makes it easier and efficient to collect, analyse, manage and disseminate M&E evidence, it however comes with challenges associated with ICT skills and literacy levels, not only for users but some M&E staff as well.

Literature review on ICT use in NGO M&E processes makes interesting reading if tracked in a trajectory manner in order to understand the trends in changes over the years as development keep assuming a technology face. Looking back for instance, a KPMG (2014) study revealed that M&E was still 'labour intensive' as the majority of NGOs indicated that ICT innovations is never or rarely used in M&E in their organisations to collect, analyse and manage information. Fifty-two percent of the NGOs surveyed attributed this to inadequacy of resources. Fast forward to 2017, Nalianya & Luketero (2017) survey found 50.6% respondents were still experiencing difficulties in accessing and understanding Management Information Systems (MIS). The same study revealed

a positive correlation between adoption of information systems and project performance with regards to timeliness of delivery, the same applies to human resource M&E capacity and project performance.

The recent state of technology in M&E reported by Raftree (2020) revealed two main factors that have contributed to an improvement in adoption of ICT in NGO M&E systems. First is the emergency of new technology players, and then comes the increasing need for virtual M&E approaches in response to Covid-19 movement restrictions that prompted the need for adoption of remote M&E approaches. The study also indicates that at least 50% of the world population now have at least some level of access to internet. Riding on this, M&E practitioners are having to graduate from paper-based to technology-based M&E approaches that use ICT gargets and internet. As a result, digital data, mobile phone, media and information technologies are driving improvements in project M&E.

Indeed, NGO M&E systems have to move with the tide as the trend of ICT keeps on an upward trend. Between 2001 and 2018, there was generally an increasing ICT adoption in all aspects, with mobile cellphone subscriptions leading the pack, followed by internet usage, and the only downward trend was observed in the use of fixed telephone systems. Such positive trends in the adoption of ICT is hoped to make communication much easier and also contribute to reducing the manual workload in M&E work. The same survey by Raftree (2020) went further to do literature review on the state of M&E technology in the development organisations. The desk review focused more on; the amount of available literature on ICT in the NGO M&E work, the thematic areas with most available literature, the type of technology most used by development organisations, and the most common M&E activities undertaken using ICT. The findings were mostly on the positive, especially for the developing world.

To enable ICT adoption, M&E work needs attention in the allocation of the relevant and adequate ICT assets, gargets and infrastructure. While ICT now claims the most priority assets lists needed in M&E, such as computers, data collection tablets, internet servers, phones. Other non ICT assets still remain key and should not be overshadowed by ICT which needs other supporting resources for it to work efficiently and effectively. The same study by Kithinji et al (2017) referred to earlier also found a positive correlation between access to M&E assets and the utilization of M&E information.

Summary

Most NGOs M&E system designs are based on a blend of theoretical frameworks, such as the Theory of Change and the Logical Framework, which have been adopted and used to varied degrees of effectiveness (Lahey, 2015). There are a number of monitoring and evaluation inconsistencies that arose in the literature review, with different scholars presenting varying positions on different aspects of the role, design and implementation of some components of the M&E system. These variations do contribute to differences in approaches and levels of adoption and application of M&E processes by different NGOs thereby creating project quality gaps, hence the main rationale for this study. Notwithstanding these variations, it is the duty of scholarly works to critique different theories, concepts, models and approaches for purposes of presenting alternatives that enrich the development initiatives, hence each different terminology referring to almost the same or related M&E practice always comes with value added perspectives and rationale.

First, the Theory of Change, as the foundation of both the project and the M&E system carries more or less the same definition with the Results Chain, which other scholars termed the Impact Chain as discussed earlier. In addition, the project logframe goes further to carry some

elements of the Theory of Change in that some scholars, include the term 'hierarchical logic of the objectives' to explain the logframe's vertical causal relationship of different steps of interventions and results (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017). This may be confused or linked to the term 'chain' that is carried in the Results Chain or Impact Chain. Whilst this may be construed to demonstrate the interlinkages between the Theory of Change, Results Chain, Impact Chain and the logframe, it may also bring confusion in the NGO sector. It is therefore not surprising to observe that not many NGOs will have all these designed and practiced within their project management systems. Some NGOs will not have a Theory of Change but have a Results Chain or an Impact Chain or vice versa, while some may just start at the Logframe stage. Theoretically and practically these seem just to be terminologies variations yet in essence they carry almost the same elements. Fundamentally, it can be argued that just using any of the terms may not be an issue as any NGO that leaves out one or two of these may not have lost anything as they all would have defined the project Theory of Change even in a logframe, results chain or impact chain.

Secondly, the terms M&E System, M&E Framework, M&E Strategy are at times used interchangeably to mean almost the same thing by different sets of literature. In addition, the M&E Framework goes further to be referred to in the same way as the M&E Plan.

Third, the stages at which different M&E processes are applied in a project life cycle or project management cycle also come in different versions. This again has a potential of influencing NGOs' M&E approaches differently and leaving room for some M&E system gaps and weaknesses depending on which literature and M&E guides different NGOs follow. This also presents inconsistencies of standards in the practice of the M&E profession, and in particular within the NGO development sector itself.

Lastly, on project resources to be allocated to M&E, there seems to be different messages coming from literature with some giving a 10% threshold while some put it at a minimum of 5%.

Again, this needs further interrogation and setting of factors associated with a ten or five percent threshold respectively, instead of making in a blanket benchmark for all types of projects. There are also gaps that have been identified by some scholars with regards to the conventional M&E practices. For instance, Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018) observed that in setting performance indicators for monitoring, focus is mostly on project activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts without also planning to monitor indicators related to the organizational capacity and governance issues that impact project performance. They argue that just as M&E looks at external risk factors that may affect projects, the internal institutional enabling factors should also be monitored and evaluated to give a holistic analysis of project performance appraisal. There is therefore need to provide NGOs with proper technical advice on M&E, especially with the growing demand for M&E in Africa to generate evidence for development projects (Mapitsa & Khumalo, 2018), hence this study's focus on Zimbabwe case study NGOs.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

The research methods for the study were determined by the objectives, purpose of this study, the hypotheses and research questions. This enabled addressing the overall research aim of assessing the factors that influence and affect the effective application of M&E System theories in project management, comparatively by local and an international NGO's. For NGOs that had started operations in Zimbabwe at different times; year 2000 and 2009 for the INGO and LNGO respectively, it was important to set the same reference period, hence the ten year period from 2010 to 2020. Putting the two at the same contextual timeline would contribute an important factor that would suit the comparative nature of the study. Ten years was also deemed long enough to capture a number of projects having been implemented by each of the two case study NGOs, to allow breadth in the study.

The study tested M&E theory application in the different NGOs' capacity contexts. Hence an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the two different case study NGOs' M&E systems and practices. This study sought to generate empirical evidence to ascertain if it supports or refutes the research hypotheses formulated to test the effective application of the M&E system theories. This Chapter details the research methods that were selected on the basis of their appropriateness to the purpose of this study. Precisely, the research methods had to be relevant to enable the study answer the following research objectives as previously discussed in Chapter 1;

Identify any gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness.

Analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories comparatively between by local and international NGOs.

Come up with suggested solutions for recommendations to improve both theory and practice, and contribute to the monitoring and evaluation body of knowledge.

As discussed in Chapter 2 literature review and theoretical frameworks, NGOs' M&E systems are usually informed by the M&E system theories, concepts and frameworks which are adopted and practiced to varied degrees of success (Lahey, 2015). According to Chibonore (2015), research has revealed existence of gaps in the application of M&E concepts by NGOs to the detriment of projects performance and success. For example, in his review of ILO projects evaluations reports, Lahey (2015) discovered that over 75% of projects were found to be ineffective because of poor or no monitoring and evaluation practices.

There is evidence elsewhere that the M&E system theories can be used to develop good organizational and project M&E systems which are not always fully implementation due to various reasons (Groene & Branda, 2006). It is also common to see NGOs putting in place M&E systems just to comply with the requirements of donors or for administrative and reporting purposes only, with limited practical use of the M&E information to improve project quality. Cloete (2009) adds that successful implementation of development projects is based on "doing the right things right" (p. 293), and M&E systems help to achieve that. Robust M&E systems play a critical role in ensuring the quality projects are designed, implemented and attain the desired developmental outcomes. The thesis is therefore expected to come up with findings, lessons and recommendations that will be used not only to contribute to the body of knowledge, but also to the improvement of organizational M&E Systems through adoption of relevant proven theories and best practices.

This chapter therefore outlines and discusses the research approach and methods adopted for this study to address the research problem, purpose, objectives and test the hypotheses. A proper planning process, otherwise known as the research design development, is required before a

researcher undertakes a study. This enables a researcher to properly identify and map out the main stages of the research process. Criswell (2013) elaborated a research design as a logical plan that is followed when conducting research and is informed by the research problem and clearly shows the statement of the problem, detailed procedures for data collection, analysis and presentation of results, and describing the population to be studied. Research can therefore be defined as a procedure of collecting and analyzing data for purposes of finding a solution to an identified and defined problem. It generates evidence to understand phenomena. In this regard, research had to be a systematic procedure with clearly laid down steps that follow a logical sequence. Research is therefore a process of steps used to collect and analyse data to increase our understanding of a topic or matter (Creswell, 2008).

As such, the chapter presents and discusses the procedures and methods applied throughout the research processes from sampling, research instrumentation, data collection, up to the analysis and interpretation stage. The protocols to ensure data quality, validity, reliability, reflexivity, as well as the ethical considerations, study limitations and the related mitigation measures are also expounded. Throughout the chapter, the rationale and justifications for the selection and appropriateness of the preferred research approach, methods and tools are articulated. All these, including the researcher's views and claims are well supported and substantiated by relevant literature and cited scholarly arguments.

Research Approach and Design

Having clearly outlined the research objectives, and the hypotheses, the next step was to choose and define the relevant and appropriate research design which encompasses a clear road map detailing the chosen research methods, and how the research will be conducted. The next section therefore defines the research paradigm that was employed, which in turn determined the

chosen data collection approaches, sampling methods, and how the data was analysed and reported. This is as informed by Walliman, (2006) who described a research design as a data collection and analysis guiding framework. There are various research designs under the chosen qualitative research approach. These include Ethnography which is suitable for cultural studies, Grounded Theory which is appropriate for the development and generation of new theory, and the case study design (Mohajan, 2018; Tomaszewski et al, 2020). Creswell & Creswell (2018) provide a guidance to the effect that a research approach and design is informed by the researcher's underlying philosophical assumptions related to the research problem and the study topic and its objectives. Ontologically, positivists as advocates of quantitative methodologies argue that reality is fixed and is measurable using pre-determined hypotheses. This, unlike the interpretivists who believe in many flexible and socially constructed realities which are dependent on contexts and individual situations and beliefs. Because reality is social construct which is embedded in social interactions, qualitative researchers prefer to be close to the researched and become part of the research participants during a study and engage in informal interviews. By being part of the research participants, qualitative researchers believe they are better able to depict the participant's view of social reality. From an idealism perspective, social reality is viewed differently by different people, hence the subjectivity of qualitative research acknowledges the fact that social reality is better viewed, interpreted and constructed by the individuals, according to the varying contexts, experiences and beliefs (Cohen et al, 2013). Qualitative research methods therefore allow researchers to get local perspectives, needs, and contexts of different people on the same problem, believe that the qualitative approach. The choice of a research design and approach is therefore based on the research problem (Criswell, 2014) or the researcher's preference.

Qualitative Research

The research objectives, as stated in Chapter 1 are better answered through in-depth qualitative explanations derived from informants' perceptions and experiences as recommended by Rashid et al (2019). In order to fully and comprehensively understand in detail the NGO M&E practices and the way they help in testing the applicability and appropriateness of the M&E system theories, the research was more inclined towards using a qualitative than quantitative research approach. In addition, this research focuses on testing M&E theories through assessing the level of NGO adoption and practice, therefore it became a deductive than inductive research approach (Hyde, 2000; Bitektine, 2008; Pease, 2019). Based on the worldview, philosophy and epistemology guiding the requirements of the study topic whose main thrust is on 'theory versus practice', a deductive qualitative research design through a case study was deemed most appropriate. The research therefore seeks critically explore discrepancies between M&E theories and practices in an endeavour to make scholarly analyses that test, validate, challenge or endorse the M&E system theories, its concepts and frameworks' applicability and relevance. This is because to test the relevance, applicability, adequacy and effectiveness of the M&E system theories there is need for information that answer and explain the 'why?', 'how?', 'relevance', 'strengths', 'weaknesses', 'lessons', 'opportunities', all which are better addressed through qualitative research (Yin, 2014). The strength of qualitative research, according to Criswell (2008) therefore lies in its ability to explore, explain, and answer the why and how questions. It is all about building and constructing knowledge through gathering participants' lived experiences, realities, opinions, viewpoints and perspectives (Chauvette et al, 2019), hence it draws from interpretivism and constructivism. Interpretivism is based on personal experiences while constructivism respects participants' reflection on their experiences too (Tomaszewski et al, 2020).

Deductive Qualitative Design

Qualitative research, as Hyde (2000) and Pease (2019) explain, has mostly been associated with inductive approach for purposes of developing theory, while the deductive research design has conventionally been associated with quantitative research to test theory. A literature search showed that most M&E system assessments have been conducted using either the conventional deductive research design (which follows a quantitative approach) or inductive design (which follows a qualitative approach), and not yet through the deductive qualitative design which seems to be an emerging hybrid of the two (Rashid et al, 2019). Those researchers who have applied the deductive qualitative design have dwelt on other subjects, not M&E system theories specifically, hence an opportunity to replicate it on this subject.

This design, viewed by Hyde (2000) as a realist post positivist research paradigm, saw the emergence of a hybrid of qualitative research and deductive approach that fused the strengths of both, although it is still neglected albeit it's proven robustness (Pease, 2019). While qualitative deductive research has not yet gained wide usage, its proponents have been able to demonstrate its rigour. This is so as it not only test theory but goes further to explore and answer the how? and why? qualitative questions that help in explaining and providing reasons why a theory is applicable or not (Pease, 2019). Azungah (2018) reiterates that the deductive qualitative design has always been relevant for explanatory case studies in order to provide detailed explanations to the how and why theory is, or is not applicable, relevant, useful and effective in real life practices.

The departure from the conventional deductive (quantitative) and inductive (qualitative) was inspired by Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004)'s observation that researchers' overreliance on the same conventional research methods may constitute static research. The proponents of deductive qualitative research proved that research methodological dogmatism is probably a limiting purist academic argument as it relies on the strict use of a conventional research approach

without innovating to enrich the academic field and body of knowledge (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). After reviewing the works of 'deductive qualitative research' scholars, specifically Hyde (2000), Saldana (2016), Jones et al (2018), Azungah (2018), Pearse (2019), Rashid et al (2019) and O'Connor & Joffe (2020), this research got adequate guidance on the appropriateness of the design.

The use of quantitative methods in deductive research is perceived by Bitektine (2008) as insufficient, especially for testing those theories that do have qualitative demands. In addition, the added value in testing theory using qualitative methods benefits from the depth of the information gathered where research participants or respondents are given room to provide as much feedback as they can. The information generated is therefore not limited to the structured questionnaires used in quantitative research only because open-ended questions are better (Creswell, 2008). This way the importance of qualitative research lies in its ability to allow the researcher to have flexible human interactions, conversations and observations that allow derivation of meanings that can be analysed within contexts. This is supported by Bacon-Shone (2015) who argues that understanding theory application benefits more from exploring the what? why? how? questions without which it would not be easy to find the root causes of the problems of theory versus practice issues. From these perspectives, proponents of deductive qualitative design present a hunger for detailed evidence in theory testing.

With deductive qualitative research, the M&E theoretical framework propositions discussed in the literature review chapter form the point of departure that informed data collection and analysis (Pease, 2019). The theoretical framework identified some behavioural aspects related to M&E decisions and practices by NGO. Related to this, Fischer et al (2017) and Brown (2018) remind us that practices by organisations are behavioural issues that can be best understood through qualitative than quantitative research. This helps to generate research findings that help us to fully

understand the real M&E experiences and actions by NGOs. Using a theory-based hypotheses setting recommended by Bitektine (2008) qualitative deductive research was deemed most appropriate to test the following research hypotheses already outlined in Chapter 1;

Hypothesis 1   *There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO.*

Hypothesis 2   *The resource capacity of an NGO influences the effectiveness in the application of the M&E System theories.*

Hypothesis 3   *Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs.*

During the development of research instruments for this deductive qualitative research, each hypothesis was assigned a list of semi-structured questions that tests it (Pease, 2019). For example, to test the hypotheses, the data collection instruments constituted specific questions that were derived from the following Research Questions;

Hypothesis 1	*RQ1*	What is the level of adoption and application of the M&E system theories by the case study local and international NGOs.
	RQ1(a)	How effective have been the M&E system theories, concepts, frameworks and approaches to the local and international NGO case studies.
	RQ1(b)	Are the M&E system theories relevant and effective as project management tools for successful NGO projects?, how?, and why?
Hypothe	*RQ2*	Which factors mostly determine the effective application of the M&E system theories by the local and international NGOs? how?, and why?

Hypothesis 3

RQ2(a)	What is the influence of donor support and compliance requirements to the effectiveness of NGOs M&E systems and practices?
RQ3	Which aspects of the M&E system theories need improvements, and which aspects of NGO M&E practices need improvements, how?, and why?

The above research questions are qualitative because the detail and depth of information required to test the listed hypotheses cannot be comprehensively generated through quantitative research. It is not conclusive to just know that there is high or low adoption and practical use of the M&E systems theories, concepts, frameworks and tools, that NGO resource capacities do or don't determine the application of recommended M&E theories and frameworks, or that the available M&E theories are/are not relevant, adequate and effective for NGOs. Quantitative research mainly generate quantified numerical statistical answers devoid of any narrative explanations and details (Apuke, 2017). Testing a theory maybe a daunting research task hence Bansal et al (2018) advise that the qualitative research paradigm does well in understanding complex challenges through reasoning. It also generates diverse data in diverse forms than quantitative research. Added to that, it generates new insights better especially in digging deeper into "what causes what" (p. 1190), which helps in generating conclusions and practical solutions to problems. The tried and tested marrying of qualitative research to the deductive design was found to generate in-depth data, including organisational behavioural practices (Saldana, 2016). In justifying the use of deductive qualitative design in theory testing, Hyde (2000) perceived that qualitative and quantitative methods can both be applied equally in deductive and inductive paradigms without placing superiority of one over the other, depending on the research topic, subject and objectives.

Case Study Approach

The theoretical framework set in chapter 2, as informed by Gaya and Smith (2016) had a role in informing the research approach and design to ensure rigour and consistency during the study. The research topic, *"Factors influencing the effective application of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system theories in project management by local and international NGOs: A comparative case study analysis of MeDRA and GRM International in Zimbabwe"* implies that a multi-case study approach using 'selected' NGOs would best suit this research. Multi-case studies do not necessarily constitute a sample of many NGOs but a few selected. Yin (2014), a highly regarded proponent of deductive qualitative research recommends its application through the use of case studies, which were described by Hyde (2000) as real-life context specific analysis. The researcher also found value in Starman (2013)'s perspective that case study approaches are more valuable in practice oriented fields, of which M&E is one of them, hence case study became the preferred research design suitable for this study. Since this study is assessing the adoption and practice of already existing M&E theories and concepts, grounded theory became less appropriate, while on the other hand ethnography was not preferred because this is not a cultural study.

Bacon-Shone (2015) defines a case study as "studying a small number of cases in great depth in the expectation that this gives deep insight, the focus being on understanding the full scope of the problem" (p. 45). A case study is a real life contextualised assessment, exploratory investigation and analysis of a selected single or multiple cases with an intention to get a focused, particularistic, detailed and deeper understanding of intricacies of issues (Yin, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Hyett et al, 2014). This way, qualitative research speaks to the context and does not generalize issues. Through a case study, the researcher is able to focus on specific, delimited, delineated units, entities to enable holistic concentration of the study on the selected cases in their entirety (Gaya and Smith, 2016). The objective is for the study to benefit from the depth than the

breadth of the research, which is consistent with the chosen qualitative approach as described before. In addition, a case study, as in this case can also be descriptive and explanatory in nature (Turnbull et al (2021). This is because it seeks to develop the research topic narratives based on extant M&E theoretical framework to enhance theory and contribute to the M&E and project management body of knowledge (Yin, 2012; Creswell, 2013; Hyett et al, 2014; Takahashi & Araujo, 2019). While case studies are applicable for both quantitative and qualitative research, there seems to be stronger common association with qualitative research. Baskarada (2014) observed that the case study approach is widely applied by qualitative researchers. This is buttressed by Gaya and Smith (2016) who posit that post positivist school of thought do support the use of a qualitative case study approach.

Dual Case Study Approach for Comparative Analysis: In an analysis of NGO M&E dynamics in Cambodia, Marshall & Suárez (2014) asserted that any research that overlooks the marked differences between international and local NGOs may produce misleading results. To meet the 'comparative analysis' demands of the research topic, two different types of NGOs were selected. MeDRA, being a local NGO that has implemented projects in different districts of Zimbabwe and GRM, an International NGO that has implemented projects in Zimbabwe and other countries. The basic distinctive criteria used here being that an International NGO operates in multiple countries, while a local NGO is national in nature, was founded and is headquartered in the country of origin. As Ejim (2022) puts it, the other difference between the two types of NGOs lies in their size, scope and resource capacity. Local NGOs have less access to funding than their International counterparts who are internationally well networked to donors and in most cases are headquartered in the developed world where most of development aid support emanate from.

For this case study approach, the rationale of balancing between local and international case study NGOs was to give some degree of balance between the local and international NGO

dynamics and perspectives. Compared to single cases, such multiple case studies allow for gathering of evidence from different contexts, comparisons in terms of areas of convergences and divergences across the different cases on the same issue (Takahashi & Araujo, 2019). In addition, the strategy of choosing more than one case therefore is to be able to reduce the weaknesses of single case study approach to reduce the imbalance between the depth and breadth of the study. The rationale for a multi organizational case study approach is further advanced by Brink (2018) to allow for multi-dimensional information sources. This enables comparative and triangulated analysis where differences and similarities can be drawn. This way, a comparative analysis of the selected cases gives some degree of breadth. According to Goodrick (2014), "comparative case studies involve the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases that share a common focus" (p 1). This comparative approach is not only between different NGOs' M&E systems, but also between M&E theories and practices. Compared to a single case study, this two-case study or multiple case study approach is deemed appropriate given that it allows a broader bird's eye view of M&E practices in the NGO sector. Comparatives do enrich the analysis, unlike conclusions derived from one case study unit.

In terms of execution, Starman (2013) explains that multiple case studies can be implemented either as parallel juxtaposed studies (cases are studied concurrently) or sequential studies (cases are studied consecutively one after the other). This study adopted the former where each case was studied separately and compared to the other, as one study.

Being a qualitative research, the two NGOs were selected purposively based not on scientific representation of NGOs in Zimbabwe as postulated by Starman (2013). Since the NGOs in Zimbabwe are broadly categorised as local or International NGOs, the decision to have a mix of both than have a single Case Study NGO was to have a balance between a local and International NGO. This was in order to provide a comparative analysis and achieve a balanced analysis and

findings that would apply to both local and international NGOs. Literature also suggests that there is qualitative value in selecting contrasting and typical cases that represents both the local and international NGOs (Takahashi & Araujo, 2019). In addition, the fact that both NGOs have had experience implementing different types of projects in different parts of the country allows this research to generate evidence from different contexts.

Secondary Research/Desk Review

Being a review of the M&E system theories against existing NGO M&E systems and practices, the study therefore took a two pronged approach involving secondary and primary data collection and analysis. For each of the two case study NGOs, data was collected from multiple sources; the institutional secondary document review and primary qualitative research through in-depth key informant unstructured interviews. Such diversity in data collection allowed for enriched analysis and robust conclusions. The sequencing of these research methods were as follows;

Figure 3.1

Sequencing of Research Methods
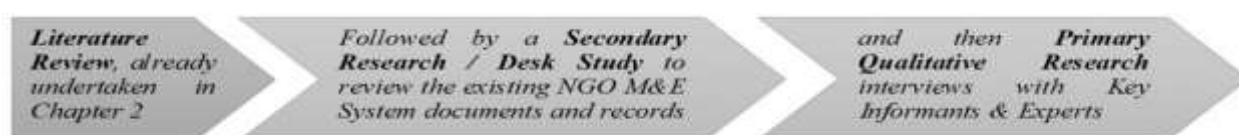
Note: Author Compilation (2022)

This approach was sequenced this way for (a) the literature review to first establish the theoretical framework that set the direction and guided the 'deductiveness' of the study, followed by (b) a secondary research through a desk research to review the NGO M&E system documents and records, and lastly (c) primary qualitative research data collection from NGO key informants and M&E experts.

According to SIS International Research (2021) the use of available organisational information in research is a form of gathering intelligence to better understand internal systems and

functions. NGO's reports, documents and records therefore were windows through which the study gained insights to understand the M&E operations and make conclusions. This case study therefore benefited a lot from secondary or desk research where existing organisational M&E and project documentation from the selected two NGO cases were reviewed and analysed. As suggested by Bhasin (2020), internal desk research is when the information (published or unpublished) about the topic is already available within the case study organisations and the researcher identifies, gathers and reviews the already available materials.

A qualitative review of organisational M&E systems, processes, structures, documents and practices against the expected standard theoretical and conceptual approaches was central to this study. In analysing the NGOs and project M&E systems, critical document review became key for the different components of the theoretical framework already outlined in the previous chapter. Based on the M&E system theoretical framework, the desk study undertook a deductive content analysis of NGO documents for each of the M&E elements listed in figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

M&E System Desk Review Guide
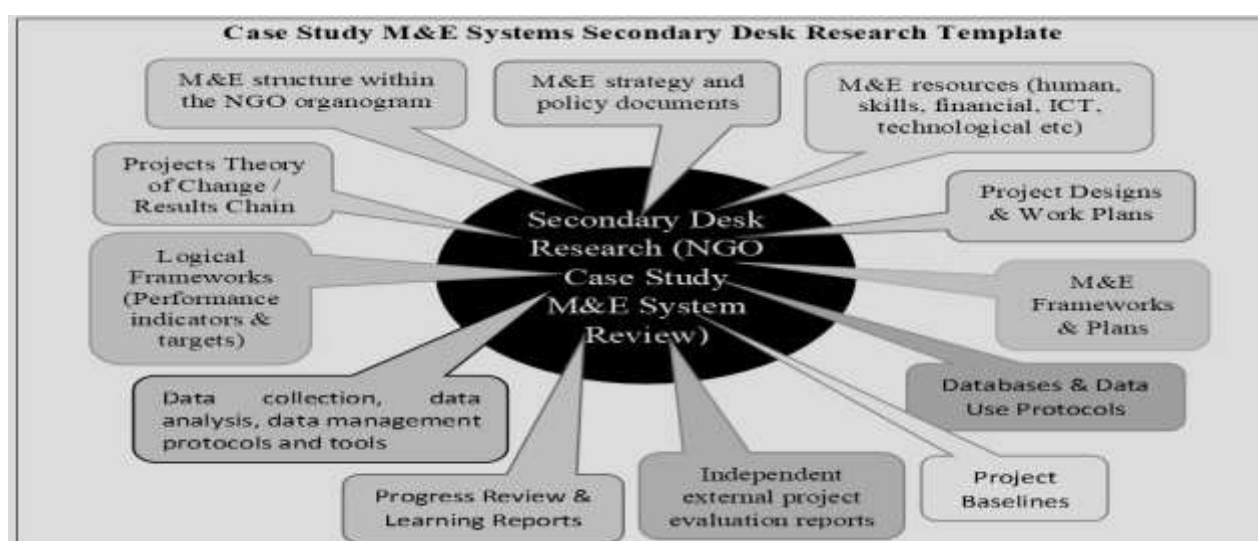
Note: Author Compilation (2022)

Informed by the theoretical framework and the elements of the M&E System already presented in the theoretical framework, the following template was developed to guide this study's desk review, representing the standard elements of NGO's M&E system. Institutional documents and projects reports illustrated in figure 3.2 were therefore requested from the case study NGOs, including accessing them from the respective organizational websites. As stated by White & Marsh (2006) content analysis is an organised process of examining secondary data documents relating to the research topic. As such, the researcher targeted to request NGO documents that contain the following M&E aspects for a desk review, first to establish their availability and application by the NGOs, and then establish any documentation that speak to their effectiveness in the NGOs' project management practices.

In analysing the NGO M&E systems, the desk review was augmented and elaborated through interviews from key informants from the same organisations. To avoid duplication, Martins & Serra (2018) caution that when studying organisational systems one needs to watch out for key informants who may end up extracting the same information from the already reviewed documents and records. It is possible to have NGO employees who hold different views from the status quo prevailing in their organisation and this needs to come out in a research. This therefore calls for the researcher to start with the document review before embarking on the key informant interviews in order to be able to also follow up on desk research observations for explanations, clarifications, gap filling and validations.

In agreement Azungah (2018), organizational documents and records are a key source of qualitative data albeit the difficulties in accessing all of them and determining their accuracy. It is however assumed that institutional documents are most likely to be formal and official records that can be rely on to verify consistency and interpret key informant participants' perceptions (Azungah,

2018). Where the NGO documents and their key informant accounts are in agreement it helps in gaining confidence and trustworthiness of data generated out of the two triangulated approaches. Further, secondary desk research also has its limitations and associated caveats. For instance, some NGOs may choose what documents to share or not to with the researcher for various reasons. Some records and publications maybe censored in the spirit of confidentiality and protection of sensitive organisational information. Some NGOs may not be comfortable sharing reports and records that show poor performance and non-achievement of project targets, objectives and impacts. In some instances, documents and records may even be manipulated to give a good image to the organisation's project management practices. It is therefore not advisable to make conclusions based on secondary research findings alone (Azungah, 2018).

Primary Research

Not everything that is planned and documented is practiced, so it's one thing for an NGO to put in place an M&E system and it's another to fully and effectively implement it. For this study and its objectives, the desk review was conducted fully aware that it was not going to be adequate to give full and in-depth insights into the real M&E practices. Accordingly, as the research design dictated, there was a need for in-depth qualitative interviews. As indicated earlier, the level of implementation of the documented organisational M&E system can be established and understood through empirical evidence generated from primary data collection and analysis. This is as argued by Creswell (2013)'s assertion that such new primary data is vital in updating, validating and triangulating existing secondary data. The interviews will also help identify existing opportunities for the improvement of not only the NGO systems and practices, but M&E theories as well.

The key informant interviews targeted NGO management, their M&E staff and other relevant project staff. The interview guides and data collection instruments adopted a 'SWOT

Analysis' approach that gathers primary qualitative data on their experiences and opinions regarding the M&E systems' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The key informants' interview tool was thus informed by the research hypotheses as outlined in Chapter 1, the M&E systems elements/components discussed in Chapter 2's theoretical framework and also illustrated in the desk research section.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2006), this qualitative primary research approach becomes investigative in nature, seeking explanations for the identified M&E systems, practices and malpractices for each of the case study NGOs. Using the same procedure, further primary qualitative feedback will be sought from industry M&E experts to gather expert feedback that strengthens the researcher's M&E theory versus practice analysis. This allowed the researcher to harness expert insights that inform this theory testing adventure.

Population and Sample of the Research Study

Enago Research (2019) describes sampling as the selection of a smaller set of a population to narrow down a research's data collection process. Sampling techniques can either be probability and non-probability and the sampling techniques ought to ensure the units selected into the sample should have all the characteristics of the entire population being studied. In qualitative research however, there is no pre-occupation with generalizations to the population as focus is on context specific in-depth feedback. For a qualitative case study design like this, there is no hard and fast rule that justifies the need to pre-determining the sample size. Instead, this is sometimes determined during data collection based on the saturation of information collected from participants to avoid (i) collecting inadequate information and (ii) collecting unnecessary too much repetitive information from unnecessarily huge samples. Derived from its name, qualitative

research place importance on the quality than quantity of information collected (Constantinou et al, 2017).

Case Study NGO Selection: Starman (2013) reasons that the selection of case studies is best done purposively than based on pure representativeness. Two NGOs, one a local NGO and another an International NGO were purposively chosen as case studies in order to provide a comparative analysis as stipulated in the topic. The assumption, as provided for in one of the hypotheses, being that local NGOs have limited capacity to design and implement robust M&E systems than international NGOs. He adds that there is qualitative value in selecting contrasting and non-typical cases that have some interesting aspects and elements of the subject being studied. On the other hand, the two cases could also be viewed as typical and representing both the local and international NGOs. Compared to single cases, such multiple (dual in this case) case studies allow for gathering of evidence from different contexts, comparisons in terms of areas of convergences and divergences across the different cases on the same subject (Takahashi & Araujo, 2019). Similarly, Hyde (2000) had earlier contented that multiple cases provide for theoretical replication than single cases, especially when the cases are selected based on their variances, such as the institutional and capacity differences between the two local and international case NGOs.

Therefore, the two NGOs, MeDRA (a local NGO that has implemented projects in different districts of Zimbabwe) and GRM International (an International NGO that has implemented projects in and outside Zimbabwe) were selected to an analytical balance and contrast between the local and international NGO dynamics. The researcher purposively selected the two cases based on them being well established NGOs. In addition, these were selected on the basis of the researcher's prior-knowledge of these NGOs acquired from previous work experiences at the two organisations. It is during such experiences that the researcher made some anecdotal M&E theory versus practice observations, which prompted an interest to undertake in-depth academic research

into these organisations through this thesis. Whilst purposive case selection is criticized as introducing some researcher bias towards the set hypotheses, Starman (2013) views it as positive bias that adds value to the research. He posits that this is a solid ground for a study, a kind of a follow up to test the validity of observations, assumptions and hypotheses already made by the researcher which prompted the study itself. Such a case selection sampling approach is deemed to have some subjective bias which can be argued to present more merits than demerits. This, is argued to lead to a better and well-informed research plan. Prior-knowledge that inform case selection is at times key in developing a solid theoretical foundation for a research and rigorous theory testing. In addition, case studies selected based on prior knowledge contribute to an informed and thorough research design and theoretical base (Starman, 2013).

It is further argued that as long as the researcher gets into it fully aware, acknowledges and transparently declares such a selection approach then he/she is mindful to avoid any prejudices and will institute more informed mitigation measures to avoid being influenced. As debated by Bansal et al (2018), while it is important for researchers to distance themselves from what they are researching for objectivity, qualitative proponents argue that a connection between the researcher and the researched generates more engaged insights. For instance, Moghadam et al (2021) adds that for most qualitative case studies, a subjective sampling approach is used to select cases based on theoretical than statistical reasons. This, in most instances is applied for convenience of easy access to organisational documents and secondary data relevant for the study.

Population of the Study

The study population is the total of units or individuals that can be considered for a research based on the fact that they share the same characteristics in relation to the subject of the study (Creswell, 2014). It is from this pool that a sample is drawn. For this study there are two distinct

populations, the first population was constituted of the total number of project staff employed by the selected two case study NGOs. The third population being the number of M&E Consultants/Experts on the service providers' database of the two case study NGOs. The following table shows the population for this study derived from the number of employees of the two case study NGOs, as well as the number of M&E Experts that provide M&E related consultancy services to NGOs in Zimbabwe and have are registered in the databases of these two NGOs and their partners:

Table 3.1

Population/Number of Case Study NGO Employees and M&E Consultants

MeDRA Staff	GRM International Staff	M&E Experts/Consultants	Total
14	22	25	61

Note: Compilation by Author

Sampling Procedure

A sample is a sub-set chosen from the population during a study using a selection criterion (Creswell, 2014). As permissible under qualitative research, a non-probability purposive sampling approach was used for this study. Based on this, the research participants; the M&E Officers, NGO leadership and selected Project Officers were selected on the basis of them deemed to be more suitable and knowledgeable for the provision of relevant in-depth qualitative feedback on their practical experiences with project M&E systems and the application of standard M&E theories and approaches. The inclusion of M&E Experts/Consultants as participants opened up for expert feedback which by default compared the two case study NGO's M&E systems with the Consultants' experiences from other NGOs. This also strengthen data validity and ensure credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), and confirmability (objectivity), all according to Gaya and Smith (2016)'s qualitative research integrity and rigour criteria. In

addition, this ensured multiple sources of information in line with the concept of data triangulation and in the spirit of cross-checking trustworthiness, reliability and legitimacy of data collected (Hyett et al, 2014; Brink, 2018).

Lists and contacts for both the NGO Key Informants and the M&E Experts/Consultants were provided by the two NGOs. The researcher then purposively drew a list of the participants by order of their roles with regards to understanding the organisations' M&E systems. To ensure harvesting of in-depth qualitative data, as well as gather as much of the technical facets of the M&E systems, the researcher intentionally prioritised those participants who are more knowledgeable, have in-depth information, or have first-hand experience with the organisation's M&E processes. In this case, M&E personnel, project staff and management from each of the case study NGOs were prioritised in selection for interviews. Likewise, the list of M&E experts/consultants provided by the two NGOs was also reorganised by priority of whether they have provided M&E services to the respective NGO in question. The next stage was then to contact each one of them to check for willingness and availability to participate, set appointments and engage in the interviews one by one until information saturation is achieved, as suggested by Hennink et al (2017).

According to anti-positivists that include Takahashi & Araujo (2019), sample representation and results replication is not the primary objective of qualitative case studies because they argue that the world is never common but largely diverse. For this study therefore, the research would have benefited more from M&E practitioners and NGO project staff and management based on their peculiar experiences derived from their work in the NGO cases than from generalised research findings from a wider probability sample. It can be argued that NGOs practitioners operate in very diverse contexts where it may not be obvious that all research findings related to their work are easily applied and practiced as is.

Sample Size: Different scholars reiterated that sample size is not a technical priority of qualitative research as focus is more in the depth and detail of information gathered. Hyde (2000) for instance argues that qualitative methods can generate sufficient rich and in-depth insights even from a single case study or a small sample of key informant participants. During data collection therefore, the researcher kept focus on the richness and adequacy of information gathered using the saturation concept, as posited by Nelson (2016), Constantinou et al (2017) and Guest et al (2020). Guest et al (2020) in an extensive literature review on saturation sampling in qualitative research, identified the following key attributes of this sampling technique;

First, that it works well in theoretical saturation and is achieved after all the aspects that constitutes a theory or concept being studied have emerged from the data. Being a theory testing research therefore, this theoretical saturation attribute suited very well. In other words, based on the M&E system theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the study, saturation was achieved when philosophical sufficiency was achieved to test the hypotheses.

Second, Guest et al (2020) makes reference to the themes saturation concept where interviews can stop after the data being collected has covered issues relating to all the themes of the research topic. In this case the deductive coding frame developed to guide the study

Third, all the above hinge on the concept of information power or data saturation comes into play, where selection of participants and interviews continue until there is no new information is emerging from the data being collected.

Fourth, the saturation data collection procedure culminates in a sample size saturation and sample achievement. Guest et al (2020) notes that the attributes of saturation sampling explain why there is no strict rule of thumb on the thresholds of the exact sample size for qualitative research. Different scholars recommend different size, different ranges are proposed, that include fifteen to twenty, twenty to thirty to fifty, and so on, depending on the nature of the study, the phenomena

being researched and other qualitative contextual diversities and variation factors. From these different thresholds, this study fell within the 20 to 30 range. At twenty-two interviewed participants, there was adequate data to start analysis and the saturation concept allows for continuation of additional interviews if information gaps had been established after data analysis. This situation did not arise here probably because before stopping at 22 participants, information saturation had already been felt earlier before twenty interviews and the researcher decided to continue a bit just to be sure.

Table 1.2 below shows the sample size achieved using the information saturation method;

Table 3.2

Distribution of Research Participants

	MeDRA Staff	GRM International Staff	M&E Expert Consultants	Total
Population	14	22	25	61
Saturation Sample	8	8	6	22

Note: Compilation by Author

The information provided by the participants began to be repetitive after interviewing 16 participants. Interviews continued in search of new information until at the 22nd participant when the researcher was no longer getting any more new information, and felt that continuing beyond that would yield no major new insights, hence it did not make sense to continue due to diminishing returns.

Given the different population sizes, saturation sample as a proportion of the NGO staff population was achieved earlier for GRM International compared to MeDRA. This is probably because for GRM an International NGO with better systems, most of its staff are well oriented and acquainted to their M&E system, hence they have a more common understanding of their M&E system. Hence, easy to reach saturation than for a less capacitated local NGO staff. For the same reasoning, saturation was unsurprisingly quite early for the M&E Consultants who are experts in

M&E and likely to have experienced less divergences experiences from the NGOs they offered technical support.

Instrumentation of Research Tools

Having defined and outlined the research approach and design, next is planning for its operationalization which requires the appropriate research tools, otherwise known as research instruments (Balucanag-Bitonio, 2014). Research instruments are the tools used for data collection, such as questionnaires and guides. The process of identifying, developing and constructing the research tools is called instrumentation. For instance, the preparation of systematically ordered questions to answer specific research objectives (Balucanag-Bitonio, 2014). The research instruments were developed guided by the following research questions already introduced in Chapter 1;

RQ1.   What is the level of adoption and application of the M&E system theories by the case study local and international NGOs.

RQ1(a)   How effective have been the M&E system theories, concepts, frameworks and approaches to the local and international NGO case studies.

RQ1(b)   Are the M&E system theories relevant and effective as project management tools for successful NGO projects?, how?, and why?

RQ2.   Which factors mostly determine the effective application of the M&E system theories by the local and international NGOs? how?, and why?

RQ2(a)   What is the influence of donor support and compliance requirements to the effectiveness of NGOs M&E systems and practices?

RQ3.   Which aspects of the M&E system theories need improvements, and which aspects of NGO M&E practices need improvements, how?, and why?

Qualitative Research Instruments: Consistent with the chosen deductive qualitative research approach, this study's data collection tools are composed of qualitative questionnaires or research guides/templates executed through secondary desk research and primary research. Being a case study to review and assess NGO M&E systems and practices vis a vis the M&E theories, concepts and frameworks, the approach required the use of research instruments that satisfy the secondary and primary data requirements. The idea of including focus group discussions was considered but was deemed impractical because the prevailing Covid-19 restrictions that were prevailing at that time made it impossible to convene FGDs as an additional qualitative data collection method. To maintain the qualitative nature of the study, these data collection tools were developed in a semi-structured design whose questions were open ended. Such qualitative primary data collection tools, blended with a desk study of NGO M&E system documents as a secondary research method were deemed appropriate to fully answer and provide the much needed detailed qualitative data to answer the research questions, test each of the research hypotheses and address the research objectives.

The sequencing of data collection proposed in figure 3.1 starts with secondary data collection through a desk review of NGO M&E documents, then followed by primary data collection through interviews with NGO key informants and M&E experts. Based on this, the following data collection instruments, and their importance, were developed to collect primary and secondary qualitative data;

Instrument	Importance
Desk Review Guide	Serves as a secondary research data collection tool. Helps in reviewing the NGO M&E system documents and records to better understand the NGO internal systems, operations and functions (SIS International Research, 2021). To identify and assess their application of M&E system theories.

Key Informant In-depth Interview Questionnaire	To provide empirical evidence from raw/primary qualitative data generated from NGO M&E staff's experiences, perceptions and feedback in a detailed and elaborated way. The primary data collection tool augments the desk review, to follow up, provide explanations, clarifications, validations, gap filling of secondary data observations for triangulation purposes (Martins & Serra, 2018).
M&E Expert In-depth Interview Tool	Designed to gather expert opinions, insights and analyses from NGO industry M&E Consultants. Such technical views strengthen the researcher's M&E theory versus practice analysis.

The descriptions, rationale, purpose and importance of each of the research instruments is discussed in further details as follows;

The Desk Research Guide

To assess the NGOs' M&E systems, the first step was a desk review of organizational and project M&E documents and records that pertain to each of the critical elements of the M&E system as outlined in the theoretical framework and the conceptual framework. The desk review guide was used to guide the assessment of the NGOs M&E systems' conformity to the M&E concepts, frameworks, approaches, standards and protocols as recommended by the M&E system. Creswell & Poth (2018) posits that in such qualitative desk reviews, the researcher becomes the main research tool because they don't use questionnaires in examining documents. However, whilst the desk review process may not necessarily need a tool, the process would become more organised if its guided by a template, so as to ensure the researcher remain focused on the study objectives and research questions.

Available literature offers some templates that could have been adopted for this purpose, but most would have needed some adaptations to suit the approach proposed for this study. For instance, the 'Checklist Tool' was considered by the researcher, but turned out to be relevant only in as far as listing and checking the key elements of expected M&E System, without capturing the

qualitative details of each element's status. All it could do was simple ticking or marking of any confirmed elements. Various scholarly works, including The British Columbia Institute of Technology (2010), Mok (2017) and Watts (2019), are in agreement that a Checklist is a tool only used to identify and verify the presence, absence, conformity, completeness of a sequence of critical tasks, procedures, processes, activities or protocols. Watts (2019) stresses that while the Checklist can be used as quality assessment tool, it only goes as far as rating the quality as 'poor' or 'good' without elaborating further.

In the end, the researcher decided to refer to the theoretical framework in Chapter 2 for guidance in developing own Desk Study Guiding Template that lists the standard elements of an M&E System against which each NGO's M&E System would be assessed. Such a tool was meant to assist the researcher in taking stock not only of the existence but also generate the details of each element of the M&E System. According to Tinkler & Allan (2015) 'taking stock' is an important practice for scholars to identify theories, concepts, methodologies or elements of a system that are either strong, weak, sidelined or applied in an ad hoc manner. The following template was therefore developed to guide the desk review of NGO M&E Systems;

Key Informant and Expert Interview Guide

As alluded to earlier, because secondary data generated through a desk review of the NGOs' M&E Systems would not fully answer and address the research hypotheses, this had to be followed up and augmented by primary research (Creswell (2013). As a result, NGO key informant and M&E expert in-depth interviews became a necessity. This necessitated the development of key informant and expert interview questionnaires that allow for harnessing of in-depth qualitative data. Qualitative questionnaires, as explained by Balucanag-Bitonio (2014) are composed of 'open-ended' questions that do not provide a list of possible or pre-determined response options as is the

case with quantitative research questionnaires. 'Open ended' means the questions allow the respondent to flexibly give their opinions, perceptions and experiences, and the researcher to record the responses verbatim.

For consistency and keeping abreast with the research objectives and hypotheses testing, the researcher designed a Key Informant Questionnaire used for interviews with the NGO management, their M&E staff and other relevant project officers. It is important to reiterate that the questionnaire was designed in line with the study objectives, the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, the research questions and the hypotheses. A corresponding questionnaire was also designed to gather additional primary qualitative feedback from industry M&E Experts in order to validate the researcher's M&E theory versus practice analysis. Such expert opinions provide more technical insights, gathers more technical recommendations, all to build a stronger case for meaningful contribution to theory, industry practice and the body of knowledge on the subject. Key Informant and M&E Expert Questionnaires *(see appendices)* were self-developed by the researcher with adaptations from the earlier discussed SWOT Analysis tool (Nazarko et al, 2017; Gurel & Tat, 2017; Galea & Sammut-Bonnici, 2017), Checklist tool (Mok, 2017; Watts, 2019) and the Taking Stock approach (Tinkler & Allan, 2015).

Pre-testing of Research Instruments: As a mini piloting of the preferred qualitative case study approach, the researcher ran a pretest of the research instruments within the researcher's NGO workplace to identify areas of data collection and tools improvement. The tools and data collection approach were also tested for appropriateness and comprehensiveness. This was done through dry-run interviews conducted by the researcher and one volunteer M&E Officer to ensure an independent peer review of the tools. Just as highlighted by Balucanag-Bitonio (2014), this dry run process was undertaken to test the appropriateness and effectiveness of the instruments. This included verification of the logic and flow of the questions, checking if the tools collect the required

data, and ensuring the questions are well phrased for easy understanding by the interviewees. After this process, the researcher was able perfect the tools based on the identified gaps and inconsistencies. This process ensured the instruments were adequately drawing from all the research questions, to test all the three hypotheses and address the three research objectives. This ensured suitability of the tools to gather reliable data.

Study Procedures

The integrity of researchers should be demonstrated through their honesty, trustworthy, truthfulness and avoidance of deceitful practices to the research participants. Such integrity virtues do contribute significantly to all the research ethical principles and protocols. Every profession is guided by some form of ethical standards in one way or another as asserted by Shamoo and Resnik (2015), and the research profession is no exception. Ethical principles constitute moral protocols (dos and don'ts) that regulate research processes and the conduct of researchers, what they are allowed and not allowed to do. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2012, p.14) refers to ethics as "moral principles guiding research, from its inception through completion and publication of results and beyond". According to Halai (2006) research ethics are meant to protect research participants from potential risks that are associated with a research, or from researchers' misconducts and their lack of adherence to the profession's ethical standards. To avoid or minimise the risks, researchers have a moral and professional obligation and responsibility to follow prescribed and expected standards and actions.

Ethical Assurances

There is therefore an array of ethical principles that guided the researcher's actions when dealing with research participants. According to Pillay (2014, p.196) these are "safeguards that should be considered to ensure that the entire research process is ethically sound". These include

maintaining integrity, upholding confidentiality and anonymity, seek informed consent, ensure voluntary participation, protection from harm, avoid deception, use of appropriate data collection methods, mitigating and correcting harm that happens during research, avoid negligence behaviour, respecting participants' views and perceptions. To meet these ethical principles and ensure ethical approaches to research participants, there are various actions and conduct that had to be observed by the researcher.

Research Clearances: According to Madushani (2016) it is mandatory for researchers conducting any research involving people participants to apply for ethical clearance. In other words, no research should be conducted without the knowledge of any kind of authority or a reference institution for the benefit of both the researcher and the participants. A researcher should therefore seek some kind of authority or clearance to conduct a study. Procedurally, the research went through the UNICAF University research ethics protocols and approval processes of the research ethics committee, before data collection. This involved the researcher reading and understanding the Research Security Policy, completing and the submitting a research ethics application form which required signing to commit to the adherence to the research ethical standards. Also verified and provided for use during data collection were UNICAF standard Gatekeepers Letter templates and the Informed Consent Forms. On both forms the researcher had to filled-in the detailed information about the study, including personal details of the researcher, the supervisor, the purpose of the research and the right of the participant to consent.

Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation: The two NGO's consented to sharing their organizational materials on condition the researcher signs and adheres to confidentiality codes of conducts and protocols. This is also in line with academic research protocols imposed by UNICAF University through who also have research ethics forms that have been completed by the researcher. The research had to be alert to the right of each participants to participate in the study,

even after their employer NGOs had agreed. Acceptance to participate had to be obtained upfront before the respondent participation stage of the research. In this regard, ESRC (2012) stipulates that this should be done in writing and signed off by both the researcher and participants, and before consenting, participants should be allowed to take time to decide. Informed consent exists to ensure that all research involving human subjects allows for voluntary participation by subjects who understand what participation entails. Informed consent and right to refuse is a principle that ensures respondents enjoy their right to privacy, non-disclosure and to avoid invasion of their privacy by researchers. The researcher was therefore obliged to seek consent from targeted case study NGOs and participants after fully disclosing and informing them about the full details of the research and its demands. For example, how long the interviews would take as well as the type of information that will be sought, the benefits and possible risks of participating.

According to Krugar et al (2014) research participants, even when participating on behalf of their organisations, still have a right to give their own personal and voluntary informed consent. The researcher was therefore obliged to also provide adequate information, good understanding of what the research entails to each participant before proceeding with any interview. In this case the participants were supposed to participate in the study without undue influence from their NGOs, and this also ensures that they do not provide imposed biases by their authorities for whatever reason. Neither their bosses nor the researcher had a right to exert pressure to compel the NGO key informants to consent. Coupled with this, participants were also given an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarifications from the researcher to empower them to make decisions on participate and fully understand what they are getting into. By implication, informed consent comes with the right to refuse, right to privacy and even non-disclosure when they feel so.

To ensure participants' willingness to participate was not entirely reliant on instructions from their respective NGOs, the researcher had to build rapport with participants and gain trust by

informing them about the nature of the research in a transparent manner. As M&E practitioners, already conversant with research approaches, some of the participants asked questions related to the methodologies of the research. Having received all the information they needed, the participants saw the need to share their experiences and give their perspectives freely looking forward to also get feedback on the results and findings when the study gets completed. This was not surprising as they identified with the subject under study. From this perspective, the study benefited from full willingness and dedication to the research by the participants. On the other hand, such level of interest from some participants could come with pros and cons that include biased responses, so interviews with such participants had to be carefully handled to watch out for any possible biases.

The selected NGOs and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage if they decided to do so for any reasons they deemed necessary. In any case pushing for continuation under such circumstances would compromise the accuracy of information gathered. This indeed was about to happen for a few participants who later discovered that the interviews were taking longer than they had anticipated, prompting them to seeking to rush or cut short the interviews. In such situations, negotiations were undertaken to continue with the interviews at later scheduled times as follow-up virtual interviews. So, as soon as a participant starting showing signs of impatience, the researcher had to suggest discontinuing the interview and negotiate to complete it at a later day or time. This was done to avoid inconveniencing them in terms of time and risky getting rushed responses. In this case, the researcher adopted Dahlin (2021)'s explorative follow-up interviews technique which applies to participants who may not be able to sit through one long interview.

Confidentiality of Participants and Information: Linked to the principle of informed consent is the confidentiality principle. Participants needed to be assured that their identity and certain information they provide will be anonymized during publication without revealing

identities. The confidentiality principle in research entails that participants have a right to remain anonymous, this relates to their identity, personal details and the information they supply. Confidentiality does not only apply to the individual research participants, but also to the NGOs, for instances where the researcher was also requesting for organizational, M&E systems and project documents for purposes of undertaking desk review to generate secondary data. There are of course certain aspects of the research that the organisations gave consent to reveal their identity. It is important to note that for this study there was no need to take any photos or videos, while the recording of interviews was granted permission. Most importantly the questionnaires did not require the recording of participants' names and contact details but the name of their organization only as consented to by the NGO management. The two NGO's consented to sharing their organizational materials on condition the researcher signs and adheres to confidentiality codes of conducts and protocols.

Surmiak (2018) emphasizes the need to ensure participants' personal information and identifies anonymized through various ways that include concealing of such information by using pseudonyms, codes, and the use secure data storage facilities. Getting such assurances makes participants feel safe to freely share information about their NGO M&E practices without fearing any possible reprisals for any reason. One may not rule out that there could be individuals in some organisations that may not feel comfortable if for instances some M&E shortcomings in their systems are shared in researches. This may happen in spite of any assurances that had been given to the case study NGO management that the analysis and presentation of the research findings was going to be professionally done as per research ethical procedures. Some researches involve soliciting for sensitive information from participants, and as ESRC (2012) alludes, there could be adverse effects of revealing certain information. Participants therefore need concrete assurance that the information is important but they will not be exposed for revealing certain confidential

information. For instance, in the case of this research some NGO employees would have wanted to be objectively and constructively critical of their organisations' M&E systems and practices which if revealed may have them questioned by their bosses who might for some reasons wanted to be protective of their M&E weaknesses.

Participants Safety and Protection from all Forms of Harm: There various forms of potential harm to participants associated with different kinds of researches, be it physical, psychological, emotional, anxiety, embarrassment, social, invasion of privacy, confidentiality, discomfort (Surmiak, 2018). For every research, there is need to assess potential harm and declare it beforehand, including putting in place protective, mitigating and corrective measures to assure and ensure the safety of participates. The researcher must also share their identity particulars with sampled respondents, as well as details of how and where to report the researcher's misconduct or negative consequences of the research processes, to be able to seek appropriate redress. As standard practice, researchers, their organisations and community gatekeepers have an obligation to ensure the protection of research participants.

This research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic era and the researcher had planned to conduct virtual interviews through video calls. However, during the data collection stage of the research, the Covid-19 situation had subsidized, the lockdowns and people movement restrictions had been lifted in Zimbabwe. As a result, the NGO staff were back at work and working under the observance of the regulated preventive protocols. The researcher was therefore asked by the case study NGOs to come and conduct the interviews at the workplace. The risk of exposing participants to the virus was the first priority considered as research ethical considerations require that all participants be guaranteed safety from any form of harm that may arise during or as a result of the research. The circumstances therefore required that interviews were conducted in adherence to the necessary preventive and protective guidelines recommended by the health authorities. Still

it remained an ethical protocol not only to seek participant permission to have face to face interviews but also to ensure the observance of all Covid-19 prevention guidelines that included maintaining social distance, proper wearing of face masks throughout the interview process as well as hand sanitization before and after the interview. Based on the nature of harm associated with this research, it is important to observe that researchers are not exempt from harm during research and the research ethics also cover them. So, the researcher's professional obligation to protect the participants also covered him in the process as he could also expose himself to contracting the virus from the participants.

Treating Participants with Dignity and Respect: According to Madushani (2016) human research participants should be accorded respected. This is supported by Bell and Bryman (2007) who add that respect and dignity assure participants of lack of discomfort or anxiety about being stripped of their dignity, for instance by the way the research talk to them. The researcher was always alert to this. Shamoo and Resnik (2015) also reiterated against researchers expressing disgust over some of the responses given by respondents. In this case, if a participant tells that their organization has a really poor M&E system. A good example of the respect and dignity ethical principle is given by Walton (2013) who remarks that the basic research ethics standards are based on the general moral standards of society. In this respect, ethical considerations should also be extended to context specific customs. This was easy for the researcher to observe since at least he comes from the same society with the participants. Researchers therefore have a responsibility to have the professional etiquette in their conduct.

Mitigating Against Research Biases: According to Podsakoff (2012) a research bias is the prejudice and partiality that has various consequences to research, its results, and use of findings, and they come in various forms. It was important to have a full understanding of various forms of biases in order to make sure they are well taken care of in this study. To understand the

various consequences, one may need to understand the different forms and causes of biases. Biases may be intentionally introduced by the researcher to achieve certain objectives, on the other hand unintended biases can arise during different stages of the research process. Sampling biases arise through coverage bias, selection bias and non-response bias (Blair & Zinkhan, 2006). Some of the sampling partialities have been seen to arise from poor research design, research procedure errors, poor planning, limited research resources and time, unskilled personnel and methodological influences.

From a methodological point of view, this study being a qualitative research that is arguably usually associated with lack of objectivity from sampling, data collection until analysis, the researcher had to be conscious enough to reduce such biases (Blair & Zinkhan, 2006). For instance, the case study NGOs were purposively selected based on previous work experiences at the two organisations where the researcher made some anecdotal M&E theory versus practice observations. This prompted an interest to undertake in-depth academic research into these organisations through this thesis, and Starman (2013) views it as positive bias that adds value to the research. As debated by Bansal et al (2018), while it is important for researchers to distance themselves from what they are researching for objectivity, qualitative proponents argue that a connection between the researcher and the researched generates more engaged insights. Moghadam et al (2021) add that sometimes dealing with case study organization that research know brings convenience of easy access to organisational documents and secondary data relevant for the study.

There are debates around possible biases that can be associated with qualitative purposive sampling, and these issues were carefully considered to mitigate potential biases. Proponents of quantitative research sampling techniques argue that as a scientific approach it is free from bias (Enago Academy, 2019). Equally, advocates of qualitative sampling techniques also defend it as an unbiased because purpose sampling, for example is not meant to generate representative

quantitative measures (Onsembe, 2000). The justification being that it ensures getting in-depth information from the most knowledgeable targeted participants. Another form of sampling bias may be introduced when a researcher has some conflict of interest in the sample or in the research itself. For example in the case of this study there was need to ensure that the participants as staff of the NGOs whose M&E systems were being assessed remain as objective as possible. Chances were some participants could thrive to give a good account of their NGOs, while some who might hold some issues with their organisations or bosses may also attempt to misrepresent facts in an endevour to spite.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was undertaken through in-person interviews with NGO key informants and the M&E Experts over a two-week period. This case study therefore collected secondary data from the two NGOs' organisational and project documents. Then went on to collect primary data from NGO management and project M&E staff as key informants, before finally collecting data from M&E Consultants/Experts in the NGO sector in Zimbabwe. Both key informants and M&E Experts were selected on the basis of them being people who had direct knowledge of the M&E subject being researched on, therefore they were assumed to be able to speak with authority on the topic.

In Person Face to Face Interviews: To kick-off the study, the researcher engaged in meetings with the Directors of the selected NGOs (MeDRA and GRM International) to seek permission to use the two organisations as case studies for the research. Out of interest to benefit from the study, the request was well received. At that time, it was mutually agreed that the researcher would come for data collection through back for face to face interviews with the NGOs'

management, M&E personnel and project staff. Lists and contacts for both the NGO Key Informants and the M&E Experts/Consultants were provided by the two NGOs. The next stage was then to contact each one of them to check for willingness and availability to participate, set appointments and engage in the interviews one by one until information saturation was achieved (Nelson, 2016). As stated in the sampling procedure, the researcher interviewed those participants who are more knowledgeable, have in-depth information, or have first-hand experience with the organisation's M&E processes. A total of 22 participants were interviewed, achieving a 36% sample size at saturation point beyond which continued interviews were gathering more and more repetitive information from any additional participants (Nelson, 2016).

In person or face to face interviews are a strong method of collecting qualitative data, detailed qualitative data comes from talking with people directly compared with self-completed questionnaires send via emails or phone interviews. It was therefore important for this study to get an in-depth discussion with participants. According to Wagner (200) an interview is a conversation with a purpose and consists of direct narrations from people about their experience, opinion, feelings and knowledge. Wagner (2001) considers them as an exercise in which there is a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee for the purpose of eliciting information from the interviewee through direct questioning.

In view of this, the face to face interviews approach was able to provide more feedback to questions that could not have been answered in that detail by other techniques. The beauty of face to face interview lied in gathering both verbal and non-verbal responses, which is key in research. Participants' facial expressions during interviews were also key to detect the possibility of biased responses, possibilities of exaggerated, understated or withheld information. This assisted the researcher to either identify areas that needed probing or responses that needed to be taken with caution. To allow for more engaging interviews, the study used more of unstructured than

structured questions as a data gathering technique. Structured interviews have a tendency of limiting research participants' feedback to what you are asking even if there could be other issues to be shared, hence the use of predominantly semi-structured interviews that allowed more scope for open-ended answers (Creswell, 2018).

Email-Posted Organisational Documents for the Desk Study: For the desk study, the researcher agreed with the two NGOs to share desk study documents via email, hence the required M&E system documents will be requested by the researcher. These included project proposal documents, logical frameworks, M&E frameworks, M&E plans, project evaluation reports, strategy papers. In addition, the documents would also be accessed through the NGOs' websites, while some of the information was accessed from the NGO's donor organisations' websites where documents related to the funded projects are usually posted.

Data Collection Limitations: No data collection process is without its own shortcomings, what is important is for the researcher to be alert to the limitations and reduce the impact on data quality. One challenge experienced by the researcher was the length of the key informant and expert interviews because the questions are open ended, hence required more time for the participants to give the required qualitative feedback. It was not easy to shorten the questionnaire without compromising on the exhaustiveness required to address all the research objectives. To mitigate against this the researcher adopted Dahlin (2021)'s recommendation to use explorative follow-up interviews until all the questions are exhausted. This would apply to participants who may not be able to sit through one long interview. Guided by Dahlin (2021), virtual interviews were avoided because of their shortcomings associated with lack of direct interface between the researcher and the participants. Email interviews through participant self-completed questionnaires were also avoided as they can tempt some participants to give brief and short

feedback while there is also risk of some questions misinterpreted (Fritz & Vandermause, 2017, CohenMiller et al, 2020; Jemielniak, 2020).

Qualitative Data Analysis

For a study using a qualitative deductive approach, qualitative data analysis techniques and processes are the most appropriate to be applied. Sutton and Austin (2015) describe qualitative data analysis as an analysis that follows an orderly multi-stage process involving interpretation, transcription, coding, theming and data synthesis. Where interpretation is done through extracting meaning from the participants, transliteration by converting words to text, coding by identifying recurring issues*,* theming through categorizing codes together into broader subjects, and sythesising by distilling everything into findings and conclusions.

According to the amount of data collected, Saldana (2016) advises that qualitative analysis can either be coded manually or electronically using Microsoft Word processor or any other computer assisted analysis software. Similarly, Smit & Scherman (2021) recognise the role played by computers in making contemporary research processes more efficient, instead of the manual approach which is a convoluted and time-consuming process that demands high levels of concentration (Brink, 2018). Examples of qualitative analysis computer software at the disposal of the researcher include Nvivo, Taquette, Delve, Microsoft Word or Excel (Saldana, 2016). The first three software are handy in organising unorganised raw data, yet for this study the data was collected and recorded already organised by key elements of the M&E system. This was influenced by the researcher's choice of a qualitative deductive research design which tests theory using in-depth qualitative research, instead of the conventional quantitative research which would in this lack detailed explanatory data on why a tested theory is or is not applicable, relevant and effective (Saldana, 2016; Rashid et al, 2019; Pearse, 2019). These scholars are all

in agreement that this is an emerging contemporary research design which has been tried and tested and yet to get widespread use by research. Such claims sparked interest in understanding this design in greater detail and adopted it for this study in endeavour to use something new and demonstrate its suitability for the benefit of other researchers' appreciation and understanding. This study therefore adopted the same with an objective of contributing to the body of knowledge and enrich contemporary research practice.

The nature of this deductive qualitative design is the reason why the data collection instruments were semi-structured suited to collect qualitative data for each elements of the M&E system in line with the theories and concepts tested. Resultantly, Microsoft Word processor became the preferred software for the analysis process which needed less of organising the raw data but more of coding and theming using the 'word search' function (Ose, 2016). There were other factors for MS Word processor to be considered ahead of the conventional qualitative data analysis software. The choice of qualitative data analysis tools to use also depend on the volume of qualitative data collected, also determined by the sample size (Bree & Gallagher, 2016). In this case, where data collected from 22 participants was not too large as compared to quantitative data that would come from hundreds of respondents. The researcher therefore managed with Microsoft Word processor, supported by some inevitable manual content reading analysis as is usually the case with qualitative data analysis. Additionally, MS Word processor became more convenient since the raw qualitative data collected from the participants would be transcribed into MS Word while the thesis itself is also being written using MS Word. Therefore, by using MS Word processor, there will be no need for exporting and importing processes during analysis and report writing (Bree & Gallagher, 2016).

Deductive Qualitative Analysis: According to (Saldana, 2016) qualitative data coding analysis follows either a deductive or inductive approach, or a combination of the two. With

deductive coding analysis is based on pre-set coding frame developed from the theoretical framework, and this coding frame contains codes and themes to look out for in the data based on the theories and hypotheses being tested by the research (Saldana, 2016). In agreement, Pease (2019) adds that with deductive research, the M&E theoretical framework informs what data to be collected and during analysis the theoretical propositions to explain the case that was being investigated. On the other hand, inductive coding derives codes and themes as you do the coding process. For this research precedence is given to deductive coding in line with this study's qualitative deductive research design whose objective is to test the application of M&E theories, concepts and frameworks by NGOs. Depending on any additional information having been given by the participants beyond the deductively determined indicators, inductive coding will be applied as a second layer of analysis to ensure reflexivity that enriches the analysis with any emerging issues and ideas in a transparent and unbiased manner. It is recommended to clearly distinguish deductively confirmed themes and the inductively added themes so as not to mix the deductive analysis with any emerging inductive data which may only be used to improve a theory that would be found to be relevant, applicable but weak in some way (Pease, 2019). This is the strength of qualitative research whose flexibility allows participants to contribute beyond the researcher' pre-conceived assumptions and hypotheses.

Qualitative Content Analysis, Coding and Theming: Content analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that systematically transforms large amounts of transliterated qualitative interview text into well-structured and synthesized findings (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). In line with the study's qualitative deductive research design, content analysis is a deductive approach to analyse qualitative data to generate evidence that can support, refute or build upon an existing theory, concept or framework (Saldana, 2016). The study sought to compare theory versus practice. As presented in the research methods chapter 3, this qualitative research sought to test

the level of adoption, relevance and effectiveness of the M&E system theories and the key elements of the M&E system were used as priori themes to look out for from the NGO M&E systems and practices. This made deductive qualitative relevant in this qualitative study.

Development of the Coding Frame: Proponents of the deductive qualitative design, that include Saldana (2016); Jones et al (2018), Pearse (2019 and O'Connor & Joffe (2020), call this deductive qualitative analysis a 'top down' approach, or a theoretically driven coding and theming process that hinges on a theoretical framework. This is because it is an analytical approach that uses the theoretical framework to pre-set the codes and themes in order to develop a coding frame which guides the analysis process (Saldana, 2016). Guided by Pease (2019), the theories tested in this study were used to develop the M&E system conceptual framework which in turn informed what data to collect. Based on this, content analysis of the participants' data was conducted to find excerpts that fit into the coding frame's list of codes and themes. Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017) define content analysis as a qualitative analysis technique where a researcher attentively goes through participants' transcripts to systematically identify data codes and themes that fit the coding frame. This is in sync with assertions by Pease (2019) that content deductive qualitative content analysis requires that theories being tested be used to first pre-set the themes to look out for in the participants' transcripts. The researcher therefore followed that process in order to check data alignment with the theories and concepts being tested.

As depicted in the M&E system theoretical framework, the theory of change, the logframe concept and the M&E framework were chosen to be entry points in testing the effective application of the M&E system theories by the two NGOs. This tallies with Lahey (2015) and The World Bank (2010) who place a lot of emphasis on the Theory of Change, the Logframe and the M&E framework, in as far as project M&E systems are concerned. The rest of the concepts, frameworks and tools that constitute the M&E system components were seen to be feeding into

these three main ones in one or the other. For instance, Martinez (2011) shows that the 'performance indicators and targets' are part of the logframe. Data collection and analysis methods, the database and reporting templates, as well as the data usage are part of the M&E Framework (Markiewicz & Patrick (2016). In addition, Lazio (2015) points out that M&E Resources do oil the whole system's functionality. So to guide data analysis, these prioritised elements of the M&E system became the priori themes around which codes and themes arising from participants' transcripts were organized. Whilst the ToC, the logframe and the M&E Framework were selected, they are part of the whole system and they interlink with each other too, hence they could not be analysed in isolation and generate comprehensive results and findings, as opined by (Savigny & Adam, 2009). It is for this reason that the data collection instruments contained a broader list of M&E system elements for which participants were asked the following open-ended question that sought their feedback with regards their experience with each one of the elements in their respective case study NGOs.

Open Ended Question asked to Research Participants.

> **"What's your assessment of how each of the following components of an M&E system is practiced by the organisation?"**
> Organisational M&E Strategy
> Projects Theory of Change
> Projects Logical Frameworks
> M&E Frameworks and Plans
> Results Frameworks
> M&E Functions and Structure
> M&E Budget & Resources
> M&E Staff & Skills
> Data Collection and Analysis Techniques
> M&E Reporting
> Data Usage for Project Management and Quality Improvement
> Project Baseline Assessments and Evaluations

The following coding frame was therefore developed using this list as derived from the theoretical framework, together with other themes/variables derived from the conceptual framework, that include adoption, practice, applicability, relevance, strengths, and weaknesses. All these put together constituted the priori codes and themes whose purpose was to guide the 'what to look for' content analysis concept, a technique suggested by Bitektine (2008).

Figure 3.3

Deductive Qualitative Analysis 'Top-Down' Coding Frame
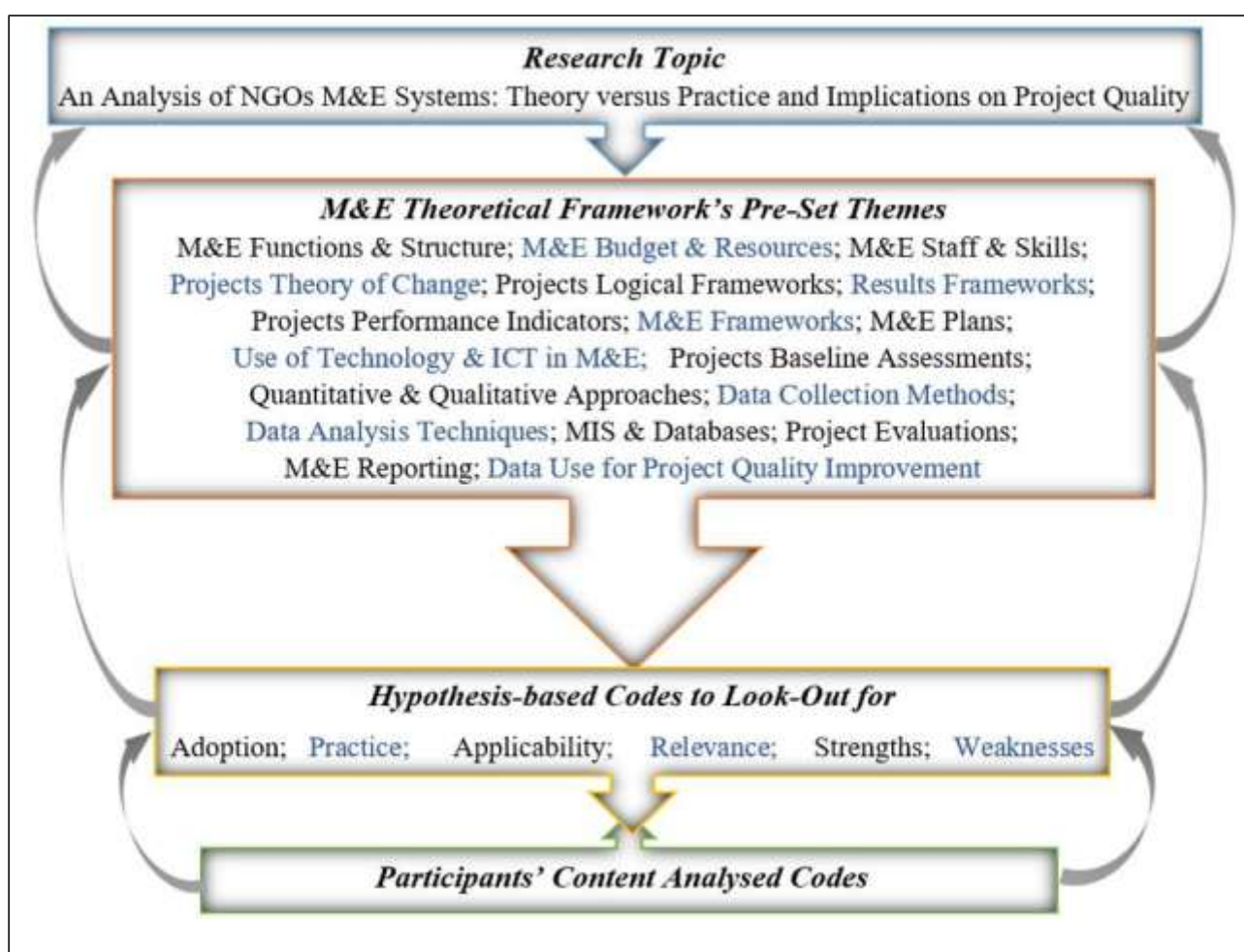
 Note: Author Compilation

The conceptualization of the coding from starts from the bottom going upwards. The content analysis was therefore undertaken through a sequentially staged process that started at the

base of the coding frame. This is where the transcription of the notes and recording of participants' feedback happens during the data collection interview process. This stage started during the interview process itself as for most of the interviews the researcher was taking notes through typing into MS Word using a tablet, while some notes where handwritten into note books for transliteration into MS Word later.

The second stage of the content analysis then entailed thorough reading and perusing through all the transcribed feedback from participants to understand the main issues and ideas coming out of the participants' responses and views (Bansal et al, 2018). These issues were coded according to the hypotheses constructs or variables.

The third content analysis stage was categorization of the emerging codes, which culminated into a 'theming' process where themes we developed and juxtaposed to the study's priori themes. Saldana (2016) elaborated that this is a process of identifying themes, concepts and categories of information emerging from the collected data, before deriving meaning. This process was guided back to the research topic and its objectives.

Lastly the results were presented and discussed drawing back and downwards. This entailed going back to extract excepts from the participants recorded feedback as supporting evidence of the formulation of the and findings, making conclusions on the tested hypotheses, deriving implications and proffering recommendations.

SWOT Analysis: Still within the content analysis, coding and theming process described already, a SWOT analysis was undertaken. A SWOT analysis is defined as an analytical tool, technique and method used to assess an organisation, a project, a system's capacity to achieve intended objectives through evaluating the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (Nazarko et al, 2017; Gurel & Tat, 2017). The SWOT analysis, which is already qualitative in

nature was adopted in this study to aid the analysis of information gathered on NGO project M&E systems. This was deemed relevant to enable identification and understanding not only of the weaknesses and strengths of NGO project M&E systems. Additionally, this also helps the researcher in identifying the threats to the systems and the opportunities to enhance the systems. This way it becomes easy to assess the efficacy and deficiencies of a system or project and identify solutions to gaps between theory and practice. While most scholars describe opportunities and threats as external to an organisation, Nazarko et al (2017) rightly adds that these can also be internal, this is so because the adoption of robust M&E theories and approaches by NGO is affected positively and negatively by both internal and external factors. In concurrence, Galea & Sammut-Bonnici (2017) posit that the SWOT approach helps in analysing internal organizational competencies, capabilities and resources. These turn out to be some of the key determinant factors for developing and operationalising strong project M&E systems and practices in NGOs. As discussed in Chapter 2, embracing the right concepts, frameworks and tools of the M&E system into project management requires organizational resource commitments such as human resource and skills, assets, ICT and budgets. These enhance the organisational capabilities and competencies (strengths) to run robust M&E systems.

The SWOT analysis helped bring out a strong analysis of the NGOs' M&E systems and most importantly test the first hypothesis on the level of practice and application of the dictates of the M&E system theories. Therefore, the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of NGO M&E systems and the application of M&E concepts and frameworks helped in exploring the NGOs' capacities in terms of human, financial, technological and other key resources needed for institutionalising and operationalising the recommended M&E systems. Limited resources and poor competencies and capabilities do demonstrate the organisation's 'weaknesses' which then

extent to M&E 'weaknesses' that in turn translate to poor adoption and application of the right M&E concepts and frameworks (Galea & Sammut-Bonnici, 2017). A SWOT analysis was therefore deemed relevant and appropriate for this study and its research design because it is qualitative in nature, and is best suited for easy identification and understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of NGO M&E systems. It also helps to bring out any threats to the NGOs' M&E systems and capacities, including identification of opportunities that exist to build and enhance the robustness of M&E systems, opportunities to adopt, practice and apply relevant and appropriate M&E concepts, frameworks and tools. This way it becomes easy to assess the efficacy and deficiencies of a system or project and identify solutions to gaps between theory and practice.

Comparative Analysis between the Case Studies NGOs: After engaging in all the analytical processes using data collected for each NGO, all that was synthesised into a comparative analysis between the case study NGOs as well as between the M&E theory versus practice, as required by the research topic and the first hypothesis. To achieve this, Moghadam et al (2021) posits that in a multi case study research, data analysis follows a case by case approach in order to make case specific intra and then inter case study interpretations. This is then followed by a critical process of systematic cross-case analysis that compares and contrasts patterns evolving from the identified and coded themes in both cases. This also helps in making generalised conclusions based on common and similar patterns emerging from both cases (Moghadam et al, 2021). While the consistent findings from different cases helps to confirm the reliability of a theory, varying findings are equally important in seeking explanations (Bansal et al, 2018).

Interpretive Technique: While computer assisted analysis made all the other qualitative analysis processes much easier, this final stage of interpreting and giving meaning to the data is better left to the researcher (Saldana, 2016). Borrowing from Sutton and Austin (2015)'s scholarly

work, interpretive technique is used to interpret, explain, describe and give meaning to qualitative data, in this case to the interviewed NGO M&E practitioners and project managers' opinions and perspectives on M&E practices and their implications to project quality. Using the interpretive technique, this final stage of the analysis culminated in proving the hypotheses correct or wrong, and then drawing of conclusions on the applicability of the M&E theories, concepts and frameworks. This was based on the findings on NGO practices, capacities and the effectiveness of projects implemented in line with the three research hypotheses. In order to enhance validity and credibility, findings and conclusions made by the researcher were buttressed by direct and verbatim quotes from the respondents to demonstrate that there was no researcher's bias in the analysis. This is as observed by Elos & Kynga (2008) that the richness of findings and conclusions drawn from qualitative analysis is compromised if not well supported by selected excerpts from the participants' own words.

Data Triangulation: Olsen (2004) defines triangulation as the blending or integration of different research approaches, methods or data types to get varied opinions on a specific subject or issue. This entails using several kinds of methods and sources or data, in the case of this study it involved the blending both primary and secondary data. Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012) assert that the researcher's analysis of issues is broadened if data is generated from multiple sources. Using approaches or methodologies that collect data from various sources is therefore an advantageous form of triangulation. Fenech and Kiger (2005) do concur that research triangulation also include data triangulation and analytical triangulation. Where triangulation entails the use of different types of data and data sources in a single study, while analysis triangulation involves different analytical techniques on the same topic. For instance, the coding and theming technique coupled with the SWOT analysis as already discussed. Triangulation tests for complementarity,

convergence and confirmatory of research findings from different data sources. It helps to identify contracting findings from different data sources on the same subject and this prompts a researcher to question some aspects of the research design and the research process. Otherwise a researcher may not know such contradictions, as a result will miss some key shortcomings of the research design, process or the findings.

This case study collected secondary data from the two NGOs' organisational and project documents. Then went on to collect primary data from NGO management and project M&E staff as key informants, before finally collecting data from M&E Consultants/Experts in the NGO sector in Zimbabwe. Findings from primary data collected from the NGO key informants were triangulated with findings from M&E Consultants/Experts, before both were triangulated with the secondary data generated from desk research of organisational documents collected from the respective NGOs. Lastly, the findings from this study were also be triangulated with the M&E system theoretical framework from where the coding frame was derived. For instance, through patterns matching the identified data patterns are compared with conceptualisations that emerge in the literature review (Almutairi et al., 2014). Such triangulation enhances data accuracy, quality, validity and legitimacy of research findings. Triangulation therefore strengthens the testing of theory applicability, if proven through various data sources this provides enough empirical evidence to dismiss or support a theory.

Triangulation is most favoured by methodological pluralists, a class of researchers who believe in the use of not one mainstream research approach, but different methodological techniques to research. There is an array of advantages of adopting research triangulation. Theory triangulation is when a study tries to test or apply an existing theory through empirical investigations (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Data triangulation is the use of different types of

data and data sources in a single study, while analysis triangulation involves different analytical techniques on the same topic. Each of these types of triangulation comes with its own advantages and purpose.

Using different methodologies in the same study is important in identifying areas where there are contradictory findings on the same issue/subject. This prompts a researcher to question some aspects of the research design or the appropriateness of research questions. In the absence of methodological triangulation, a researcher may not know such contradictions, as a result will miss some key shortcomings of a study findings. One key observation is that in most researches cannot be entirely conclusive of a phenomenon. A study always opens avenues for further research which is usually conducted using a different method in order to look at it from another perspective for triangulation. This is one reason why this study adopted the deductive qualitative research design which has not yet gained widespread use as argued by Pearse (2019). The advantage therefore is that the findings from this study will be able to be compared to existing studies that used alternative and conventional designs, another form of triangulation. From this perspective, a research conducted using one methodology always lays a foundation and clear the ground for future research using a different approach as other scholars try to confirm, test or validate it.

For a theory testing study of this nature, theoretical triangulation helped to validate or test a theory and its applicability. It is not enough for a theory to make propositions, claims and hypotheses. A theory should be logical and show consistency in explaining the relationship between variables. Triangulation can help to demonstrate and prove the logic, chronology, interconnectedness and the causal relationship between variables (Bendassolli, 2013). As opined by Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012), using approaches or methodologies that collect data from various sources is therefore an advantageous form of triangulation. For example, when secondary

and primary data collected from individuals, FGDs and key informants cross validate each other it increases validity in the research findings. When there is consistency and limited contradiction in the data provided by different sources it gives confidence to the researcher and the users that the findings are trustworthy and do represent the true picture of the subject being investigated.

For a theory versus practice study of this nature, triangulation helped to move researchers from theoretical rigidity to practical rationality. Research methodological dogmatism which is strict on the use of a single research approach has been proven by contemporary scholars as an unnecessary purist academic argument. Literature review itself, is a triangulation precursor of a study. Most studies, quantitative or qualitative usually start by reviewing literature and theories, already this is a form of triangulation which informs a research and its design. It is therefore important to adopt such a form of triangulation to avoid duplication of work that was already studied by predecessor researchers.

How the Study Accrued Benefits from Triangulation: As explained by Bekhet & Zauszniewski (2012) involves the use of different research methods for purposes of confirming complementarity of research findings, gather comprehensive data and enrich understanding of a subject. For this study, methodological triangulation took two forms. First the research took a deductive qualitative design for a subject matter whose previous studies were undertaken using other research designs. This way, the findings were compared with those from other related studies on the M&E theory and practice, and to a large extend there was complementarity in the findings. Secondly, the research applied both primary and secondary data collection methods through interviews and a desk research respectively. This way findings from both methods were compared for consistency.

The findings from this deductive qualitative study as compared to other studies that used different research designs were largely in sync. This way the researcher gained confidence in the quality and accuracy of the findings as well as assurance that the deductive qualitative design was equally solid. The researcher's recommendation to other researchers to adopt this design would therefore be based on evidence, and contribute to efforts by scholars such as Pease (2019) to advocate for the use of this design. Equally, the findings from the secondary desk review of NGO documents compared well to those generated from primary research. So, methodological triangulation went a long way to assure legitimization of the research, its methods and the findings. This goes a long way in reducing chances of research contestations. Most studies are contested on the basis of research gaps arising from methodological shortcomings.

Pragmatic triangulation, otherwise known as realism, acknowledges the influence of behavioural practices and subjective decisions within institutions such as NGOs (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). These have implications on the adoption, application and practice of standard M&E concepts and approaches. It can be argued that some of the findings generated by this study are behavioural related, for instance, the unethical M&E practices like decisions to influence the outcome of project evaluations by NGO management forcing the external consultants to bend M&E theory rules. The same applies with donor imposition of their own preferred M&E systems on NGOs, among other findings. As such deductive qualitative research design was preferred to capture such qualitative experiences from NGO staff on M&E practice in NGOs. In this instance, it can be argued that deductive research design which has been taken and believed to be an approach that has been known to test theory through quantitative research has in recent years been evolving to flexibly adopt the emerging deductive qualitative design.

Again as established by Bekhet & Zauszniewski (2012), data triangulation or data sources triangulation is encouraged to ensure the research does not over rely on a single source type for information. For instance, the research benefited from multiple sources of data such as the NGO staff as Key Informants, the NGO Project and M&E documents as well as from M&E Expert Consultants drawn from the NGO sector in Zimbabwe. This way triangulation happened during analysis, for example Key Informants constituted from the NGO staff and management provided information that was used to validate some of the observations made from the secondary data generated from NGO documents, and vice versa. In the same manner, M&E expert view were sought to provide technical explanations to some of the findings from the NGO Key Informants and from the NGO documents desk review.

Multiple different sources of data also help to counter any possible research biases. This also extends to methodological triangulation where a balance would be attempted when the two methods (primary and secondary data) are mixed to counter the perceived and known weaknesses of each. For instance, this research would have been biased if it relied on secondary data only as one may never be sure of the accuracy of data collected and analysed within NGOs. Similarly, it was going to be inadequate to rely of experiences of the NGO staff to understand their NGO M&E systems and pratices without also checking and referring to the NGOs' M&E documents themselves.

It is not only convergence that is sought by triangulation. Even contradictions in research findings are important to establish in a research and that can only be achieved through triangulation, without which a researcher may not know. Establishing contradictions in findings enables the researcher to ascertain the reasons for contradictions and provide explanations or even recommendations for future research. It also helps to determine the extent to which a certain

research methodology was the most appropriate for the study. Using different methodologies in the same study is important in identifying areas where there are contradictory findings on the same issue/subject. This prompts a researcher to question some aspects of the research design or the appropriateness of research questions. In the absence of methodological triangulation, a researcher may not know such contradictions, as a result will miss some key shortcomings of a study findings.

Using methodological and data triangulation enhances research completeness and makes it holistic, comprehensive enough while enhancing its depth and breadth. In this instance, one example was the reliance on qualitative case study approach to test theory. Conventionally, as alluded by Bingham & Witkowsky (2022), quantitative research would have been used in this deductive theory testing study. But thanks to the proponents of deductive qualitative design, in-depth case study data was generated to test theory.

Triangulation tests logic in a theory by facilitating the testing of a theory and its applicability. It is not enough for a theory to make propositions, claims and hypotheses. A theory should be logical and show consistency in explaining the relationship between variables. This came in handy and relevant for this theory testing study. Triangulation helped to demonstrate and prove the logic, chronology, interconnectedness and the causal relationship between variables (Bekhet & Zauszniewski, 2012). For instance to prove if M&E theory adoption and application by NGOs is determined by NGO resource capacity, to test the level of adoption and practice of M&E concepts by NGOs and the effect on project quality, as well as test the relevance of M&E concepts to NGO work. A theory should therefore be applicable and backed by empirical evidence which can be generated through various research triangulation techniques, be it methodologically, investigative, analytically, or otherwise. But how does triangulation test the applicability of a theory? In agreement with Wacker (1998), Bagozzi and Phillips (1981) assert that a theory should be testable

either through various means for it to be a good theory, and where there give the same of converging results, that becomes one benefit of adopting triangulation.

Another key characteristic of research, concept or theory is that it should be applicable, at least to more than one context for it to be credible. This brings in contextual triangulation as another form of triangulation. A research can also be conducted in different contexts and environments for the findings to have credibility. Wacker (1998) thinks a research or a theory that can be widely applied is better than one that is useful in a single situation. For this study contextual triangulation was achieved through the use of two different case study NGOs, one a local NGO and the other an International NGO. Both NGOs had implemented projects in various districts of the country. The research established that indeed the local and international NGOs were contextually different organisations, for instance in terms of their different M&E skills and resources capacities that were established to be key determinants of their M&E practices. On the other hand, the information provided by the NGO staff as research participants were generated from their lived experiences from the different contextual districts where their NGOs implemented projects.

Qualitative Testing of Hypotheses: With guidance from Chigbu (2019), hypotheses were qualitatively tested using results from the data analysis, and based on the observed patterns emerging from data analysis. The decisions to accept or reject the hypotheses was derived from the nature of the patterns, for instance where data showed some consistency that support, confirm or prove a pre-set hypothesis as true, the hypothesis would be accepted. Alternatively, where the patterns refuted the hypothesis through some significant inconsistencies or contradictions in the research findings, the hypothesis would be proved false, and hence rejected. For instance, to address Research Objective 2; *"To analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories comparatively between by local and international NGOs",* Hypothesis

2: *"The resource capacity of an NGO influences the effectiveness in the application of the M&E System theories"* was tested by establishing data patterns that show a 'causal' relationship between the NGO resource capacity factors and the effectiveness in NGO application of M&E theories.

Similarly for Hypothesis 2: "There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO" was tested through matching M&E theories to NGO practice. Where data establishes consistency between the dictates of M&E theories and NGO practice, the hypothesis is accepted as true. This would then feed into Research Objective 1; "To Identify any gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness".

Summary

The research methods discussed in this chapter provide a clear guideline on how the qualitative deductive case study research design was operationalized in undertaking this research process from the sampling procedures, data collection up to analysis. A mix of primary and secondary data collected from a diversity of sources was triangulated to generate rich, reliable and credible evidence on the applicability and relevance of the M&E system theories tested. The chosen qualitative content analysis, coding and theming data analysis procedures applied with the aid of computerised MS Word processor are tried and tested techniques that aided the SWOT analysis of the two NGOs to prove or dismiss the set hypotheses.

The experience with the discussed qualitative data analysis was useful but not an easy process compared with the researcher's past experiences with quantitative data analysis. The process was painstaking as reading through huge volumes of qualitative data required a lot of concentration and time dedication. The qualitative research analysis was a time consuming process

that required a lot of focus and patience. This is in sync with Brink (2018) who stated that the qualitative data analysis process is meticulous and more involving than quantitative analysis. This is also supported by Sutton and Austin (2015) who defined considered it as a long procedure requiring reading through volumes of transcripts, synthesising, and interpreting, explaining, describing and giving meaning to qualitative data. Enduring through each participant's feedback was therefore an unavoidable but worthy standard procedure that eventually culminated into interesting findings supported by verbatim extracts from the participants' practical experiences and opinions. Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017) reckons that although the qualitative analytical process seems long and winding, the time and energy spend on it is less of a limitation, but rather a worthwhile investment into a more credible research product. Although the researcher also used the Microsoft word searching process during the coding process, (Smit & Scherman, 2021) posits that this computer assisted qualitative data analysis makes it easy but cannot totally replace the need and advantages of the researcher also reading through all the text recorded from participants. Based on this literature, understanding every statement from each research participant enabled the researcher to support all findings with key quotations and verbatim extracts from the respondents' transcripts, as presented in the preceding chapter. According to Elos & Kynga (2008) the interpretations, presentation of results and conclusions drawn from qualitative data may be compromised if not well supported by selected excerpts from the participants' own words.

The research topic, study objectives, purpose, hypotheses and research methods were based on the following assumptions, limitations & delimitations within which the findings ought to be interpreted. The research ensured there were mitigation measures to reduce the effects of the limitations to the study and its findings in order to maintain reliability;

Assumptions: The research was conducted under certain assumptions. First, the purposively sampled participants were assumed to be more knowledgeable and had practical

experience with NGO M&E systems and practices. The assumption emanated from the fact that research participants were deemed M&E key informants drawn from NGO managers, M&E staff and project officers who have some M&E roles and responsibilities as part of their jobs. In addition they were sampled based on their experiences developing, implementing and/or managing M&E processes.

Second, the Case Study NGOs did not withhold any of their Project M&E documents requested by the researcher for a desk review. This assumption was informed by the realities that some organisations consider some of their project documents to be confidential hence not to be shared by external third parties. In addition, one cannot totally rule out possibilities of NGOs that may want to protect their reputation by not sharing project reports that portray organisational weaknesses or poor project performance.

Limitations: No research is without its own limitations, and this study was not an exception, although no serious limitations and challenges were experienced to the extent of jeopardizing the final analysis, research findings and conclusions. The following are the study limitations encountered and the mitigations measures that were applied to prevent or minimize the possible risks to the research.

First, data collection interviews were conducted in 2020 to 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic era and this affected physical face to face interviews with all the sampled participants. According to Dahlin (2021) face to face interviews promote direct interface between the researcher and the participants, and this enhances the quality and accuracy of data collected. As mitigation strategies, social distanced face to face interviews with face masks were given as an option to participants who were comfortable with it. All participants who were not comfortable with face to face interviews were given an option of virtual interviews and were requested to conduct them as video calls in order to maintain the desired face to face interviews.

Second, unknown accuracy of secondary data extracted from organisational documents shared by the two case study NGOs for a desk review. This is as cautioned by Creswell (2013) that one can never be sure of the accuracy and credibility of these organizational documents because of the shortcomings and biases of the individuals who collected, analysed and compiled secondary data and unpublished reports cannot always be assured.

Fourth, deductive qualitative research is also not without its own fair share of criticisms, one of which being that it comes with some subjective biases from both the researcher and the research participants. It is accused of sometimes corroborating and authenticating the researcher's preconceived perceptions as suggested by Turnbull et al (2021). However, while critics of qualitative research attack it for its subjectivity, Tomaszewski et al (2020) sees this differently, contending that this in fact makes it sensitive to the research participants' opinions. In addition, asking the researcher to be totally objective as is the case with quantitative research is unrealistic, as this may disconnect the researcher from the researched. This blinkers the researcher from picking some of the valuable and relevant insights that can emerge during data gathering. For this study therefore, the researcher proceeded with this qualitative deductive approach with eyes wide open to mitigate against such possible negative consequences associated with subjective biases.

Study Delimitations: The study was undertaken within the following delineations;

Firstly, the study focused on two Case Study NGOs only, MeDRA (a local NGO) and GRM International (an International NGO now rebranded to Palladium). This approach was preferred to enable the gathering and generation of in-depth context specific analysis as posited by (Turnbull et al (2021), as compared to a generalised study whose breadth spreads across many NGOs. Bacon-Shone (2015) defines a case study as an assessment of a few selected cases in greater detail to generate deep perceptions in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the problem. The preferred qualitative research method generally does not follow large samples. According to anti-

positivists such as Takahashi & Araujo (2019), large samples for representation is not the primary objective of qualitative case studies because the world is never common but largely diverse, hence context specific samples. In addition, the study opted for two instead of one case study. Local and International NGOs were assumed to have different M&E practice capacities hence the decision to have two different case study NGOs, one a local and the other an international. This allowed for a balanced case study selection that avoids a one sided analysis while allowing a comparative analysis between the two. Such a research makes its findings and recommendations applicable at least to both types of NGOs.

Secondly, the research reference period was confined within the same ten year period from 2010 to 2020 for both case study NGOs. For NGOs that had started operations in Zimbabwe at different times; year 2000 and 2009 for the INGO and LNGO respectively, putting the two at the same contextual timeline would contribute an important factor that would suit the comparative nature of the study.

Third, the research focused only on the monitoring and evaluation component of project management based on PMBOK (2021)'s consideration of M&E as the cornerstones of project management practice.

Lastly, the research placed higher priority on the three elements of the M&E system; the ToC, Logframe and the M&E Framework and analysed the rest of the elements within the ambit of these three. For instance, Martinez (2011) who demonstrated that the 'performance indicators and targets' are elements of the logframe, while Markiewicz & Patrick (2016) showed how project data collection and analysis methods appear on the M&E Framework structure.

Reliability and Validity: In summary, the measures and approaches discussed in this chapter contributed to the reliability and validity of the data collected and the research findings in different ways. The use of appropriate research methods that suit the chosen deductive qualitative

research design, the mix of primary and secondary data from various sources enabled triangulation as part of analysis. Also key was the alignment of the research instruments to the objectives, to the research questions and to the hypotheses, including pretesting of the research instruments before data collection. The use of the appropriate purposive sampling suitable for this qualitative study. The unbiased selection of research participants and the interviewing process, including mitigation of researcher biases. The development of a coding frame drawing from the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, as well as the application of the appropriate deductive qualitative data analysis procedures such as the thematic content analysis.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of monitoring and evaluation systems as outlined by Mleke & Dida (2020), is for institutions to track and assess the performance of projects with regards to implementation progress, delivery of results, achievement of targets and objectives, as well as show impact. As discussed in Chapter 2 literature review and theoretical frameworks, NGOs' M&E systems are usually informed by the M&E system theories, concepts, frameworks and tools which are adopted and practiced to varied degrees (Lahey, 2015), with implications on the quality of donor funded projects. This research study therefore focuses on the theory versus practice analysis of NGOs' M&E systems and the implications on the quality of projects implemented. The purpose of this study therefore, was to assess the application of the M&E system theories comparatively between the two selected NGOs. In the end the research intended to identify the strengths and weaknesses of each of the NGOs' the M&E systems and the implications to the effectiveness of their projects. The objective being to contribute to the academic body of knowledge, theory improvement and proffer recommendations to NGO M&E practice. A deductive qualitative research design was used, and data was collected and analysed from key informant research participants drawn from two case study NGOs' management and M&E staff, including projects staff and Consultants.

Overall, this Chapter focuses on results reporting and trustworthiness of data, and is organised around four sections. First, is this 'introduction' section, which outlines a brief overview of the purpose of the research including a description of how the chapter is organised and arranged. Secondly, the chapter then discusses the measures taken to ensure Data Trustworthiness. Here, the dependability, credibility, confirmability and transferability of the research data, results and findings are not only discussed, but the measures taken by the researcher to assure trustworthiness are explained. Third, the chapter gets into the presentation of the results, starting with the

characteristics of the research participants, then give an overview of the deductive qualitative analysis approaches that were undertaken, before delving into the results and findings.

The results and findings are presented by hypothesis, as this theory-testing process was meant to generate empirical evidence to test the M&E systems theories and determine their level of adoption, application by the NGOs, relevance and its effectiveness to the projects. In this chapter therefore, the findings from the analysis of the qualitative data collected in relation to the following hypotheses are presented and discussed;

Hypothesis 1: *There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO.* The hypothesis is tested through Research 1 and its sub-research questions 1(a) and 1(b) all whose focus is on three related aspects; the adoption and application of M&E system theories, their effectiveness, and their relevance, respectively. All these feed into Objective 1 which seeks to identify gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness.

Hypothesis 2: *There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO.* This hypothesis directly draws from Research Question 2 which interrogates factors that determine the effective application of the M&E system theories by the local and international NGOs, a replica of Objective 2.

Hypothesis 3: *Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs.* This hypothesis is tested through Research Question 2(a) drawn from Objective 2 which seeks to analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories by the NGOs.

The Chapter rounds off with the evaluation of the findings, where a brief reporting of the interpretation of the results is given, also in relation to the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2 of literature review.

Trustworthiness of Data

As the results are presented in this Chapter, it is important to give assurance on the accuracy and trustworthiness of the collected and analysed data and how that was instituted in this study. This is because the degree to which qualitative data, results and findings can be trusted is based on how credible, dependable, confirmable and transferable it is (Devault, 2019; Statistics Solutions, 2020). Nowell et al. (2017) define trustworthiness as the recognition of the legitimacy, acceptability and usefulness of the research findings by other researchers, practitioners and other interested stakeholders. This suited one key aspect of the purpose of this research, which was discussed in Chapter 1 where reference was made to these stakeholders as some of the targeted beneficiaries/users of this research's findings.

Both Devault (2019) and Statistics Solutions (2020) go on to share common definitions of the different elements of data trustworthiness. They agree that *Credibility* relates to the truthfulness and accuracy of the research findings, for instance through triangulation using different methods and data sources. Building on that, *Confirmability* is explained in terms of how neutral and unbiased the research findings are, especially them being based on participants' feedback than on the researcher's personal motivations. Over and above that, *Transferability* is acknowledged as the applicability of research findings to other similar contexts and phenomena. Lastly, they concur that *Dependability* is the explained as the extent to which there is adequate and clear detail on a study and its methodology that enables it to be replicated by other researchers with consistent findings. For instance, the availability of an audit trail which can be reviewed, examined and reapplied (Devault, 2019). Qualitative research therefore focuses on data trustworthiness in the same way quantitative research focuses on data reliability. To secure and guarantee robustness, legitimacy and trustworthiness of data and the results, the research design

adopted and implemented a number of research protocols during data collection and analysis. The following sections discuss the measures and processes that were undertaken in this research to ensure these data trustworthiness parameters were adhered to.

Credibility: For credibility, the research design adopted data triangulation as a key factor of trustworthiness, hence a mix of primary and secondary data collected from a diversity of sources as articulated in the research methodology. Questionnaires were used to collect primary data from participants, while secondary data was gathered through a desk study. The desk study was guided by a Checklist tool designed to take stock of the existence of the standard M&E system elements in the NGOs organizational and project documents, as suggested by Mok (2017) and Watts (2019). As asserted by Bekhet and Zauszniewski (2012), the researcher's understanding of the study phenomena's underlying factors is broadened through multiple sources of data. The multiplicity of data sources ensured there is triangulation which helped in identifying complementarity, convergence, divergence and confirmatory of results and research findings. This helped in cross-checking trustworthiness, reliability and legitimacy of data collected as posited by Hyett et al (2014) and Brink (2018). Such triangulation strengthened the testing of theory applicability, which was proven through various data sources that provided enough empirical evidence to dismiss or support a theory.

Specifically, this case study collected secondary data from the two NGOs' institutional and project documents. Compared to single cases, these two 'cases' allowed for gathering of evidence from different contexts, allowing for comparisons in terms of areas of convergences and divergences across the different cases. This was as advised by Goodrick (2014) who explained that "comparative case studies involve the analysis and synthesis of the similarities, differences and patterns across two or more cases" (p. 1). Comparatives do enrich the analysis, unlike conclusions derived from one case study unit. This is why data was also collected from varying

participants, that is, NGO management and project M&E staff as key informants, as well as from M&E Consultants/Experts in the NGO sector in Zimbabwe. Findings from primary data collected from the NGO key informants were then triangulated with findings from M&E Consultants/Experts, before both are triangulated with the secondary data generated from desk research of documents collected from the respective case study NGOs. Lastly the findings from this study were also validated with the theoretical framework from where the coding frame was derived. For instance, the pattern and trend of observations identified in the data, results and findings were compared with the conceptualizations that emerged in the literature review, an approach adopted from Almutairi et al. (2014).

Dependability: The trustworthiness of research findings is also based on the dependability of the methodology used, for instance the application of overlapping methods. To ensure this theory testing case study can be repeated and replicated, the chosen tried and tested deductive qualitative research design methodology has been fully and clearly described in the research methods chapter. This was to ensure it can be easily understood, followed, trusted, replicated and adopted in any follow up and future researches. Both the case study approach and the qualitative approach share a common characteristic of generating in-depth data, hence that overlap make them complementary to each other. This is a tenet of data dependability in theory testing studies of this nature. As a result, this thesis presented an opportunity to test the replicability of this qualitative deductive research paradigm. Most importantly, evidence has been provided in the research methods chapter that the chosen deductive qualitative research design has been successfully applied elsewhere by different scholars with research results that have been journal peer reviewed (Bitektine (2008), Hyde (2000) and Pease (2019). The research instruments and processes must be in sync with the research conceptual framework for them to be dependable and accurate.

A key source of data dependability and research replicability is the quality of research instruments and the methods used. To ensure such dependability, the questionnaires were pretested first to check if they are robust, relevant and able to generate all the required data that can adequately address the research hypotheses. This quick testing of the tools was conducted by the researcher internally at his workplace with support from one volunteer M&E Officer to ensure there is also an independent peer review of the tools. As recommended by Balucanag-Bitonio (2014), such a dry run process is undertaken to test the appropriateness and effectiveness of the instruments. After this process, the researcher was able perfect the tools based on the identified gaps and inconsistencies.

Confirmability: According to Devault (2019), confirmability is a key component of the trustworthiness of research data and its findings. In this research, this was applied through declaring and admitting the researcher's own perceived and pre-conceived biases, beliefs and assumptions, as recommended by Statistics Solutions (2020). The fact that the researcher is a development practitioner in the NGO sector, and had some prior knowledge of the selected two case study NGOs means that there were previous experiences and observations that could have been brought into this research. In addition, confirmability was achieved through identifying and acknowledging the research methodological limitations and shortcomings. This enabled the researcher to take the necessary and relevant mitigatory measures that moderate and reduce the effect on the accuracy and trustworthiness of data, results, findings and conclusions.

Turnbull et al (2021), observed that most researchers are inevitably bound to knowingly or unconsciously bring in their own personal influences, biases, viewpoints, perceptions, beliefs and emotions into the research process. This then blinds them from being objective in handling any research results that could be contrary to their expectations and worldviews, or any strong findings that do not corroborate or authenticate their assumptions. For instance, the researcher

had some anecdotal M&E theory versus practice observations from his previous work in the NGOs in Zimbabwe, which some scholars like Starman (2013) view as positive biases that also add value to the research. In light of this, such prior-knowledge somewhat also helped the researcher in developing a solid theoretical foundation for a rigorous theory testing research. As a mitigation measure, it was therefore important for the researcher was to remain conscious and avoid such biases in order not to prejudice the research (Starman, 2013). As argued by Bansal et al (2018), in qualitative research it is not always that the researcher has to totally distance himself from what they are researching, because at times the connection between the researcher and the researched generates more engaged insights.

Confirmability is also derived from recognizing and declaring the study's methodological shortcomings and their potential effects on the trustworthiness of data (Devault, 2019; Statistics Solutions, 2020). No research methodology is without its own proven shortcomings and the qualitative deductive research methodology is not an exception. The research methodologies chosen for this study were therefore applied with proactive mitigation measures against their known limitations. For instance, the qualitative research approach is critiqued mainly for its perceived subjective biases that may inevitably come from both the researcher and the research participants (Turnbull et al., 2021). For this study therefore, the researcher proceeded with this qualitative deductive approach with eyes wide open to mitigate against such possible negative consequences associated with subjective biases.

An audit trial, being a documented outline and description of steps and procedures taken throughout the research process, is needed to establish confirmability (Devault, 2019). An audit trail is thus an important requirement for the confirmability in order to build confidence in data trustworthiness. As part of research ethics therefore, all the academic research protocols were adhered to and documented, including an audit trail of the whole research process. The following

audit trail is available as presented in the appendices of this thesis; signed gatekeepers' letters, signed research participants consent forms, the University Research Ethics Committee approval and all the completed research instruments from participants. In addition, there is evidence in the University systems that each stage of this thesis was quality controlled by the assigned supervisor and the School of Doctoral Studies. There is also evidence of email communications with the case study NGOs' management and the organisational documents they shared with the researcher for desk review. Email communications with the research participants are also available as audit trail, as evidence that indeed the data used in this research was generated from primary research.

Transferability: While in quantitative research we speak of generalisation of research findings, qualitative research refers to transferability as the extent to which the research findings can be applied or transferred to comparable contexts. It is the duty of the researcher to provide descriptive evidence that the research is transferable, especially through declaring the robustness of the research process and the resultant findings (Kasirye, 2021). The trustworthiness of data and the research findings also depends on how much the situation under study can be speak to real life situations being experienced by the study population. As suggested by Hyde (2000) and Yin (2014), case studies are considered to provide more real-life and context specific analysis, and as such, case study approaches do contribute to trustworthiness from a transferability point of view.

In the interest of ensuring the findings are not limited to one type of NGO, a multi (dual) case study approach was preferred to bring a balance between local and international NGOs. This worked well as results showed differences in M&E theory applications between these two different NGOs primarily due to their different resource capacities and institutional differences. While the findings may not be generalized to all local and international NGOs in Zimbabwe, at least the research can provide lessons to any other such NGOs. This way the findings were hoped to resonate with other similar NGOs operating within similar contexts, in one way or another.

This was achieved through deliberately including, in the participants' sample, those M&E experts who worked as consultants not only to the case study NGOs, but to other NGOs in Zimbabwe. Because of their experiences from a wider range of NGOs in the country, qualitative flexibility was allowed for these experts' to also give views that compare the case study NGOs M&E systems to other NGOs. That way some form of validation was done in an attempt to have results that speak relevantly to the wider NGO sector, for transferability.

The objective, through this theory testing study was therefore to verify the practicability and relevance of theory in order to relate it to practice. For NGOs to be able to compare their circumstances with the research phenomenon and apply the study findings to their situations, this research sought to understand the qualitative aspects related to M&E decisions and practices by NGOs in relation to the theoretical framework. The researcher also found value in Starman (2013)'s perspective that case study approaches are more valuable in practice-oriented fields, of which M&E is one of them, hence the findings can be transferable beyond the case study to the wider industry. In order to enhance trustworthiness of data, the findings and conclusions are buttressed by direct and verbatim quotes from the respondents to demonstrate that there was no researcher's bias in the analysis. This way there is trust in the data for easy transferability. This is as observed by Elos & Kynga (2008) that the richness of findings and conclusions drawn from qualitative analysis is compromised if not well supported by selected excerpts from the participants' own words.

In the interest of ensuring the results are not only restricted to the case study NGOs, but can also apply to the wider NGO sector in Zimbabwe, a multi-case study approach was preferred to bring a balance between local and international NGOs. Otherwise, the findings would be one-sided and achieve limited transferability due to the institutional differences between the two categories of NGOs in the country. To achieve the same, harnessing of additional perspectives

from the wider NGO sector, beyond the two case studies was considered key, hence the sample deliberately included M&E experts who worked as consultants not only to the case study NGOs, but to other NGOs in Zimbabwe. Because of their experiences from a wider range of NGOs in the country, flexibility was allowed for these experts' to also give views that compare the case study NGOs M&E systems to other NGOs. That way some form of validation was done in an attempt to have results that speak relevantly to the wider NGO sector, for transferability.

Findings

This section of the Chapter presents the findings systematically and organised mainly around the research hypotheses, while following the structure of the preceding chapters 1 and 3, the introduction and methodology respectively. This was so to ensure the results remain focused to the research topic, purpose and objectives, as well as sticking to the research design and analysis methods. The results are presented within the context of the literature review and theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2.

Characteristics of Research Participants: Qualitative primary data, followed by a secondary data desk research of organisational M&E systems was collected from two case study NGOs, one an International NGO and another a local NGO, both implementing various community development projects in Zimbabwe. A sample of 22 participants was achieved, interviewed from the two case study NGO staff using a qualitative research's information saturation sampling technique (Hennink et al, 2017). M&E staff were the primary targeted participants based on their direct involvement with M&E work in their respective NGO projects. Thus, they were strategically positioned to give more first-hand lived experiences feedback on the theory versus practice nexus of M&E systems. Equally, the NGO management held key leadership positions that had a bearing on decision-making and support to organisational M&E

systems. In addition, the projects officers were included to assess the extent to which their projects received M&E services.

Table 4.1

Professional Characteristics of Research Participants

Leadership & Management	Project Officers	M&E Staff	M&E Consultants
5	5	6	6

Note: Analysis by Author

The sample comprised of a pool of M&E practitioners who are knowledgeable and experienced enough to participate in this research on a technical subject that required this study to prefer a purposive sampling technique targeting such a group of respondents. Accordingly, figure 4.1 below further shows participants' a good number of years' experience with NGO M&E work, implying that they had enough exposure to NGO M&E practices to be able to reflect back and make good judgements of the M&E systems they have been involved in.

Figure 4.1

Research Participants M&E Experience in NGOs
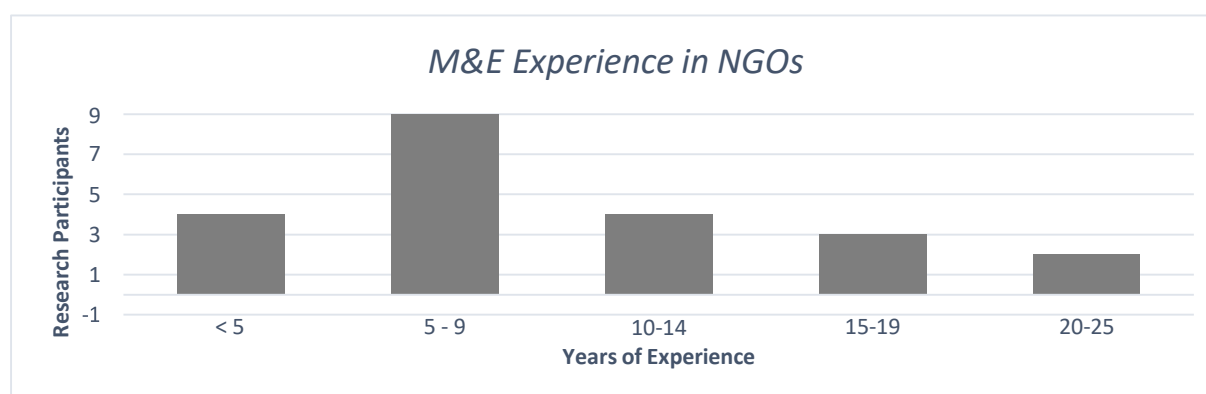
Note: Analysis by Author

M&E being a professional field whose technicalities are generally not easily well articulated by non-M&E NGO staff, the above analysis in table 4.1 and figure 4.1 serves to show why the study targeted mainly the M&E staff who are practitioners in this area, as well as M&E

Consultants who are deemed to be experts in this area. Furthermore, all the research participants were drawn from the NGO sector and the majority had vast experience working in NGOs, especially predominantly over 5 years within the two case study NGOs. This justifies why the sampling had to be purposive and gives confidence that the information provided by the selected research participants was from knowledgeable respondents and therefore the right data was generated.

Thematic Content Analysis: After the coding frame was set, an analysis of the content of research participants' transcripts was then conducted using a thematic content analysis process. Thematic content analysis is a process that converts "raw data to final patterns of meaning which can be systematically categorised according to what a unit of meaning signifies for the researcher" (Henning et al., 2004, p. 102). Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017) define content analysis as a qualitative analysis technique that systematically translates transliterated qualitative text into organised and distilled findings. This was done through a meticulous process of searching for patterns of themes from a dataset, otherwise known as pattern coding or thematic analysis using the 'find what you look for' technique proposed by Bitektine (2008:176). A content analysis entailed coding of each of the participants' feedback on the adoption and practice of the respective M&E concepts, approaches and tools was undertaken and response codes were identified. The presentation of findings from this exercise adheres to the confidentiality principle of research ethics, where each participant's feedback was anonymised using the following identifier codes.

In compliance with the research ethics, this anonymisation of participants' personal identification details was important, especially as the results were to be buttressed with verbatim excerpts extracted from specific participants' responses, most of which would have been shared objectively in confidentiality.

Table 4.2

Anonymised Identification Codes for Research Participants

Local NGO Case Study Participants	International NGO Case Study Participants	M&E Consultants Participants
A1; A2; A3; A4; A5; A6; A7; A8	B1; B2; B3; B4; B5; B6; B7; B8	C1; C2; C3; C4; C5; C6

Note: Compiled by Author

A thorough and careful perusing of each of the participants' transcripts was undertaken to interpret how their responses rated the adoption, application, relevance, strengths and weaknesses of each M&E system components. It was observed during the content analysis that participants' perceptions were either *Good, Needs Improvement or Poor* on each of the M&E system elements. All the different recurring codes identified from the participants' responses were then grouped into broader themes based on their commonalities in meaning, for each of the M&E system component.

The results of the analysis are presented in table 4.3 below, which shows the most recurring codes extracted from the participants' own descriptions of the status of each of the reviewed M&E elements, aka themes. The following words and phrases were picked from the participants' completed questionnaires as codes that were categorised into the respective rating and code;

Table 4.3

Rating Guide for Codes Extracted from Participants' Transcripts

Rating & Colour Code	Codes Extracted from Participants Responses
Positive	Exists; Adequate; Strong; Appropriate; Relevant; Institutionalised; Receives expert support; Effective; Efficient; Operationalised; Constantly updated; Contextualised; Accurate; Comprehensive; Up to date; Well structured; Well-funded; Robust
Needs Improvements	Available but not implemented; Has gaps; Donor-driven compliance; Not fully implemented; Needs capacity building; Requires Support; Inconsistent; Inadequate; Lacks sustainability; High staff turn-over; Lack of Knowledge; Outdated; Donor dependent

Negative	Not available; Non-existent; Wrongly applied; Unqualified and unskilled staff; Lacks management support; Weak; Poor; Ineffective; Inefficient; Complex; Misunderstood; Just to please donors; Incapacitated; Lacks; Inaccurate; Unaware; Limited; Improper; Misconception; Struggling; Under-resourced; Limited resources; Imposed by donors

Note: Compiled by Author

This content analysis summary served as the reference table for the subsequent detailed analysis that presents evidence to accept or reject each of the research hypotheses. In the end, this analysis informed the conclusions whether the tested M&E system theories were proven to be applicable, relevant, or need further strengthening, as postulated by Saldana (2016) and Bansal et al (2018).

Figure 4.2

Thematic Analysis of Research Participants' Feedback

Note: Analysis by Author

When these themes were analysed against the local and international NGO, the picture presented in figure 4.2 above shows that most of the negative sounding themes were associated with the local NGO case study (Yellow), while the international NGO (Blue) had more positive comments than negative ratings. On a scale therefore, the local NGO seemed to lag behind in most of the M&E system elements assessed. Though comparatively the local NGO had a weaker M&E system, at least most of the elements that it was struggling with were available in their system, a sign of adoption but lacking in implementation or effectiveness. According to the analysis illustrated in table 4.2, it is evident that almost all the M&E system elements were deemed to be relevant to the NGOs (first column). The international NGO only had two that needed improvement (second column), but rated 'strong' (third column) in only five elements. This agrees with participants who indicated that while the international NGO fared better than the local NGO, it still needed to improve in many aspects. In terms of resources, both NGOs were regarded as donor dependent.

Comparative Analysis between the Local and International NGO: As discussed in Chapter 3, the choice of a multiple (dual) case study approach had an objective to do a comparative analysis between the local and the international NGO. Observations made by each participant were consolidated into the following figure distinctively categorized by each of the case study NGO, including a comparison with how these two case study organizations fare against other NGOs based on the M&E Consultants' feedback who gave an industry wide perspective.

Figure 4.3

Participants' Rating of NGO M&E System Components

Note: Analysis by Author

From this figure 4.3, it would appear the International NGO (INGO) generally fared better than the local NGO (LNGO) across all the M&E system elements, and the reasons will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5. The results suggest that the local NGO struggle with M&E strategy development and policy formulation, where three of the eight participants negatively rated this aspect. Similarly, the same number also negatively rated the adoption and use of MIS and databases. In the majority of M&E elements, at half of the local NGO participants perceived that their organization needed to improve in about ten of the twenty of the M&E aspects assessed. The most featuring being M&E staff and skills, M&E framework, M&E Plans, Data analysis

techniques, M&E Reporting, Standardized application of M&E approaches across different projects, and the Use of M&E data for project quality improvements.

Having presented the overview of the research findings, next is the presentation of results by hypothesis, the propositions upon which this research is based. The research sought to address three main hypotheses that were set to answer the objectives of the survey, and help in testing the level of NGO adoption and application of the M&E system theories as outlined in the theoretical framework. To address the research topic, this section presents key findings and common themes and patterns for each of the following hypotheses;

Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis '*There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO'* assumes that the research topic was chosen on the basis that there could be challenges faced by NGOs to effectively practice the dictates of the M&E system theories in managing and implementing projects. This then creates a gap between theory and practice. Participants were therefore asked to provide feedback that confirms if and how each of the M&E system elements are being practiced within their organisations, and in addition provide their assessment of the effectiveness of projects. This was meant to help and determine the existence of gaps in the application of the M&E system theories and its concepts, frameworks and tools. The hypothesis sought to test for any inconsistencies and variances between the local and the international NGO and causal factors behind such.

Based on feedback from primary data analysed from the participants' transcripts, figure 4.4 below shows how the disparities between the two NGOs in the adoption and application of each of the main M&E system theories;

Figure 4.4

Comparative Analysis of the LNGO and INGO's M&E System Theories Application
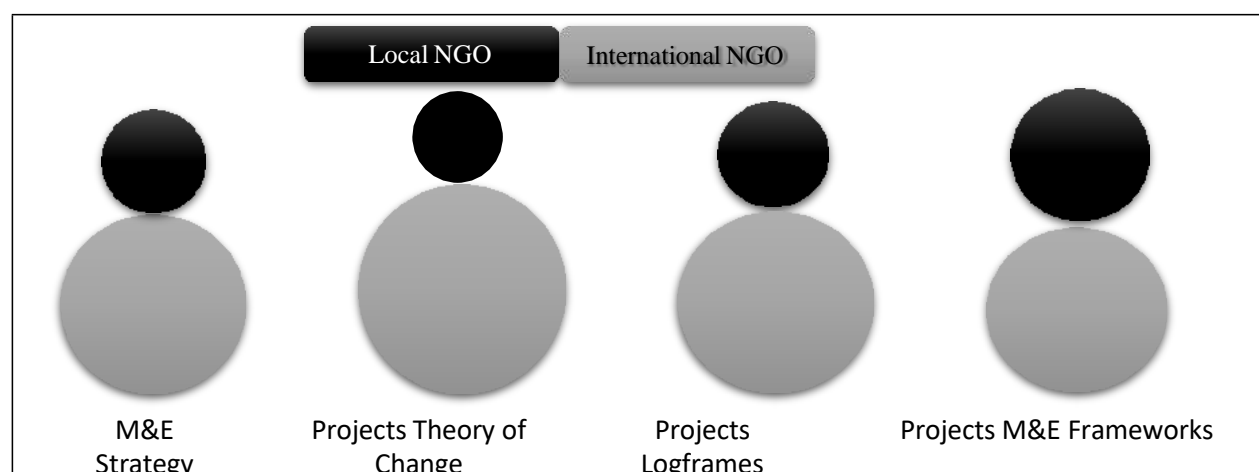
Note: Analysis by Author

The following table goes further to unpack and explain the inconsistencies by NGO;

Table 4.4

Inconsistencies between the INGO and LNGO in M&E Practices

		Key: Black=Not Available Charcoal=Partially Developed Grey=Available		
		GRM International	**MeDRA**	**Observations**
M&E Strategy		Project specific M&E strategy available. No organizational M&E strategy in place.	The overall organization strategic documents includes strategies may been deemed an M&E. No project specific unnecessary duplication. M&E strategies in place.	To some extend having both M&E. No duplication.
Project Theory of Change		All projects have a defined theory of change.	Not all projects have a defined theory of change depending on donor requirements.	For projects without a theory of change, the logframe also shows the hierarchical expected changes from project inputs, to outputs, to outcomes, to impact and goal.
Project Logframes		All projects have a logframe.	The logframe has been adopted as a standard tool for project design.	
M&E Framework		The M&E Framework is a standard tool for M&E system.	The M&E Framework and M&E Plan were combined in the NGO's draft Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting Framework.	For some projects the M&E Framework is imbedded in the Project M&E Strategy document.
M&E Plan		This is made a standard tool.		Misses implementation timelines & responsibilities.

Note: Compiled by Author

The local NGO, though lagging behind in the application of all the key components and

theories of the M&E system analysed to test the hypothesis, has made progress in adopting the

basic principles of the theory. A check on the secondary data generated from a desk review of the two NGOs' M&E system shows an almost similar trend where the INGO seem to be doing better albeit with its own shortcoming. To discuss the findings and place them into context, the following paragraphs delve into each of the four M&E system elements and theories analysed in table 4.4.

M&E Strategy: According to Scope Training (2017), an M&E strategy is a high level guide for an organisation to continuously track, review, analyse project and programme performance throughout its life cycle to enable accurate progress reporting and assessment of achievement of objectives. In the process, it makes it easy to identify the challenges and inform quality improvement. The adoption and development of an *M&E Strategy and Policy* by NGOs was analysed under this hypothesis, mainly because it is the compass that gives direction to the implementation of the M&E system. Results from participants' feedback on the existence and operationalisation of an M&E strategy and policy documents revealed that the NGOs had at least an M&E strategy and policy in place to guide project monitoring and evaluation processes. Participants however expressed mixed reactions on the quality and implementation of such policies and strategies especially for the LNGO, while some had no knowledge of the existence of an M&E strategy document for their respective NGO. There were many responses attesting to these findings, notable among them being the following expressions from research participants;

A4: There is need to develop a stand-alone M&E policy and strategy, not just a paragraph in the organization' 5 year strategy as is currently the case.

B1: The organisation has an M&E policy and strategy in place which is regularly updated to keep up with changing trends.

B5: Strategy is in place but of poor quality, a reflection of limited expertise and experience with M&E and lack of professionalisation of M&E in Zimbabwe.

B6: The organization had an M&E policy and strategy in place. However, it lacked proper implementation due to budgetary constraints.

C1: Most local NGOs in Zimbabwe do not have an institutional M&E Policy, but project specific M&E strategies mostly advocated for by donors for accountability purposes.

C3: Of the 30+ NGOs I have worked with so far, most (approx. 80%) do not have clearly laid out M&E Policy/Strategy.

C4: Centralised development of M&E strategies by international donors sometimes divorced from realities in different countries where the projects are implemented.

C5: Not put to full use. It is a matter of fulfilling donor requirements.

Major highlights of the most featuring issues arising from the participants assessments of their NGOs' M&E strategic and policy documents include such codes as; *regularly updated; still in draft form; not organizational but project specific; to fulfill donor requirements; needs constant review; lacks full implementation; poor quality; not contextualized.*

Since the findings place attention on the local NGO, the analysis went further to triangulate these observations with secondary data generated from a desk review of the international NGOs' M&E systems. The findings of that desk review are as follows;

GRM International's Livelihoods & Food Security Project M&E Strategy: From the desk review of the two case study NGO's M&E Systems, it was clear that the International NGO had better capacity to put in place M&E strategy documents to manage their project implementation. GRM International therefore consistently developed M&E Strategy documents for its major projects. An example is the one for the FCDO funded Livelihoods and Food Security Project (LFSP) 2018 – 2021 M&E Strategy whose key highlights and features were as follows;

Desk Reviewed LNGO Case Study:

Strategy Objective

The LFSP Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy sought to provide an overarching framework for monitoring and evaluation of the LFSP, uphold donor and stakeholder accountability geared towards generating evidence for adaptive management of the project.

How the Strategy was Developed

The strategy was shaped by experiences and lessons learned from the first phase of the project (2014 – 2018). The strategy was therefore developed from desk review of programme documents, annual internal and DFID-led reviews, peer reviews and experiences of the LFSP M&E working group.

Components of the Strategy

The following five components made up the strategy;

Performance Monitoring and Reporting: focused on documenting programme activities, tracking programme inputs, interventions and logframe outputs, monitoring progress, quality and achievements of milestones and targets.

Outcomes Monitoring: focused on monitoring progress towards outcome achievements such as knowledge and its application, skills, behaviours and practices, incomes, systemic changes, business model viability

M&E for Learning and Adaptation: focused on the use of M&E evidence to facilitate cross-learnings, reflections, feedbacks and reviews, all to inform programme adaptation which is the fine-tuning and re-designing of programme activities, approaches and strategies.

Research and Analysis: focused on generating new knowledge and insights through special studies, research and further analysis of M&E data, to guide strategic decisions, including policy engagement

LFSP Information Management: focused on influencing thinking and practice, triggering discussions and dialogue on policy implications and programming experience through managing information flow to and from the multiple LFSP partners and stakeholders, including government partners.

The M&E Strategy Guiding Principles

The strategy rightly outlined the guiding principle and objectives of the organisation's M&E system, as follows;

Accountability: to upholding accountability to DFID, the donor, project beneficiaries and other stakeholders by showing that activities are leading to certain outputs, outcomes and the goal, and that this was achieved efficiently, effectively and with good value for money.

Evidence-based learning: generating evidence and building knowledge about the extent to which project strategies and activities have been effective or not in their respective contexts and why.

The impact assessment and evaluation: to generate evidence on how change occurs, based on the theory of change and assumptions made on the cause and effect relationships in the pathways of change.

Projects Theory of Change (ToC): As attested by Lahey (2015) the theory of change is the basis upon which a project M&E system is developed, hence its adoption by NGOs was asked to the participants. Results indicate that all the participants confirmed that generally most NGO projects do have a theory of change in place, but reservations were expressed around how it is usually developed, especially for the local NGO. Two issues came out prominently. First, for some of the projects the theory of change was developed by donors with little input from the LNGO itself, and secondly for most of the projects the theory of change was rarely reviewed to respond to evolving contexts and emerging challenges. A number of responses informed the codes generated during analysis on this, outstanding among them being the following participants' views;

A1: The TOCs are poorly developed and seem developed more as a donor requirement than as a project management tool and a good base for developing the M&E framework. Training still required in improving understanding of TOCs and their use in project management.

A2: Continued reflection and adjustment of the ToC at project level is usually missing and this affects achievement of set goals and objectives.

A4: Some projects have ToC, but some do not have. In some cases, this is in response to the needs of the donor but not as an M&E practice.

A5: There is a gap in the development of theory of change per project. Theory of Change are developed depending on donor requirements.

B3: Strong, every project has a theory of change as a mandatory project design standard.

From these statements, the most recurring codes identified were; *the projects theory of change exists in most projects; it is mandatory; it is not understood by all; not all projects have it; it is donor dependent; it has gaps; it needs improvement and updating.*

Findings from the desk review show how GRM International's LFSP Project M&E Strategy (2018-2021) recognized the role of the Theory of Change in monitoring and evaluating the project implementation. The strategy document recognized the role of the Theory of Change in development programming. It stated that the Theory of Change lays out how the hypothesized changes/results/impacts will be achieved from implementing the project interventions based on the programmatic and contextual assumptions.

Projects Logical Frameworks (Logframe): The third element/theory of the M&E system assessed was the logframe, a key project matrix that guides M&E and is derived from the theory of change. This is based on Gordon & Sebastian (2019) who asserts that both the theory of change and the logframe "serve to guide program development and management, monitoring, and evaluation" (p.1). This is supported by Buttigieg, Gauci & Day (2016, p.1027) who posits that "the logical framework helps with the identification of key performance indicators, with a focus on monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes". Based on this background, the research participants were asked to give their assessments of their NGO projects logframes, and results showed a widespread use of the framework in both the INGO and LNGO. Only a few participants raised concerns of some incorrectly designed logframes and their inadequate implementation. The following selected quotes that featured in the participants' completed questionnaires are evidence of these findings;

A3: Yes there were logframes and results frameworks although not properly framed.

B1: The Logframes and results frameworks are mandatory for all projects and these guide M&E processes within the organization. There is need to update these documents if the context and operational environment changes.

B6: The Project Log frames and the result frameworks are always in place for each project and the documents are as a result of consultations with the donors.

C1: There is widespread use of the logframe and results framework. Zimbabwe NGOs use logframes and results frameworks, even though the logframe is commonly seen as complicated.

The coding process picked the following codes that cropped up with regards NGO adoption and use of the logframe concept; *widespread; mandatory; properly framed; complicated; not always properly designed; not usually updated.*

Desk Reviewed NGO M&E Documents: Findings from the INGO M&E Strategy document indicated that the LFSP project logframe mirrors the project Theory of Change, in providing a logical sequence in which change/results/impacts wereexpected to happen, as well as the indicators that will be used to measure such changes. Lessons from project implementation were used to ensure that the set of indicators selected for the project logframe were specific and adequate to measure the hypothesized changes outlined in the theory of change. There was no documented evidence from the local NGO that such best practice processes were happening.

M&E Frameworks: The M&E framework, according to Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) is a theoretical outline and plan of operationalizing project monitoring and evaluation processes, specifying the type of data to be collected, the performance indicators, the set targets, the data collection, analysis and reporting techniques. Also included in this framework are the M&E activities to be implemented, baselines assessments, project progress monitoring, performance and impact evaluations, implementation plan and timeframes, and the allocation of M&E roles and responsibilities. As such, this M&E framework is the reference document for monitoring and evaluation of projects, and a guiding tool for managing M&E processes.

To assess the status of M&E frameworks in NGOs, research participants were asked their views on the design and operationalisation of M&E frameworks in their NGOs, and this question generated a lot of qualitative responses. The results obtained from the coding analysis showed that all the 22 participants attested to the existence of M&E frameworks in their NGOs, however issues were raised on full implementation of the framework, and a few concerns on some gaps in the framework, particularly for the local NGO. For the INGO, this is the M&E tool participants spoke most highly. A few however indicated that there are instances where the M&E framework is just developed to meet donor funding requirements not followed by full implementation, even in the International NGO. Some examples of responses provided from the NGO key informants and M&E consultants are as follows;

A3: Yes, there was something, although not well structured.

A5: A draft M&E framework was developed in the 2016-2020 strategic plan.

B1: Developed just as part of meeting the project proposal requirements.

B6: The M&E framework and plan are always in place and subjected to review by project staff and stakeholders, though they are always driven by project requirements/donor.

C1: Zimbabwe NGOs seem to have mastered developing M&E frameworks and plans. However limited resources limit the operationalisation of such frameworks.

C4: There is somehow confusion among staff that the M&E plan and M&E framework save the same purpose, create reluctance in fulfilling those M&E requirements fully.

C5: Yes, the M&E Plan is always developed but may not be followed.

The data from all the participants was consolidated, analysed to produce codes that include; *it is available; it is always developed for all projects; it is in draft form; it is not well structured; it is confused with M&E plan; it is developed but not fully implemented; it is not adequately followed; resource constrained to operationalise it.*

Given the M&E framework is composed of various M&E processes, to make it the key reference document that guide the M&E staff in operationalising the M&E system, there was value

in digging deeper and determine its strengths and weaknesses. The respondents were therefore further asked to share their sentiments on the existence (in the M&E framework) and application of the following aspects of the framework.

  MeDRA Secondary Data: A desk review of MeDRA's M&E system conducted to test the adoption and application of the M&E Framework concept as it is described Markiewicz and Patrick (2016). The NGO had drafted a Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) which was still under development. Theoretically, Simister (2015) listed the following principles for an M&E framework concept;

  The framework has to outline the project objectives and expected results in the form of Outputs, Outcomes, Impacts and Goal. It must show what is to be monitored, written in the form of project performance indicators for each of the projects' expected Outputs, Outcomes, Impacts and Goal. Each indicator ought to have baseline values/status, set milestones or targets, quantitative, qualitative, or both depending on the nature of the project. For each indicator, the monitoring methods have to be specified, including the data collection methods, data sources. Timelines and frequency of monitoring/data collection processes. M&E roles and responsibilities have to be stipulated in terms of who does what within the NGO, including any external consultants to conduct independent evaluations as well as any stakeholder roles. The reporting structures, formats and timeframes to be specified. Based on these guidelines, the following table attempts to show how each of these principles were observable in the MeDRA PMER Framework.

Table 4.5

Assessment of MeDRA M&E Framework

	MeDRA PMER Framework		
	M&E Concept	**Compliance**	**Observations**
A	Project Outputs, Outcomes, Goals, Impacts	*Available*	All the projects' logframes and their respective outputs, outcomes and goal statements were included in the M&E Framework.
B	Performance Indicators	*Available*	For each output, outcome and goal, performance indicators were defined.
C	Performance Indicators' baseline, milestones and targets.	*Not Available*	Baseline, milestones or target values are missing, hence there is no basis for determination of project performance and results achievements.
D	Data collection methods and sources.	*Partially Included*	Predominantly, the frameworks provides sources of data as logframe indicator 'means of verification' and not methods as per M&E Framework requirement.
E	Timing and frequency of monitoring and evaluation processes.	*Available*	The frequency and timelines are given in the M&E Plan section of the framework.
F	M&E Roles and Responsibilities.	*Available*	The roles and responsibilities to ensure smooth implementation of the M&E processes are given, though they only include internal MeDRA staff excluding other key stakeholders and even the M&E role of the board.
G	M&E Reporting and Data Use.	*Available*	The framework also gives indications on how the M&E data will be reported and used for project management.

Note: Compiled by Author

It was clear that the NGO's PMER framework progressing to adhere to the dictates of the concept and only one element to work on, as well as improve on just one. The case study presented in table 4.5 provides evidence of what practically prevails with regards theory clarity and effective application.

The Projects Performance Indicators and Targets: Indicators are guiding statements define how the project implementation progress, performance and achievement of results is assessed. (Rabie & Goldman (2014). They state what needs to be achieved, by how much and when. Karani, Bichanga, & Kamau (2014) posit that it is important to monitor how you are progressing towards achieving the set targets and performance indicators, otherwise you may be

wasting project resources and not addressing the problems. The following figure illustrates the main feedback highlighted by participants regarding project performance indicators and targets;

Figure 4.5

Project Performance Indicators and Targets
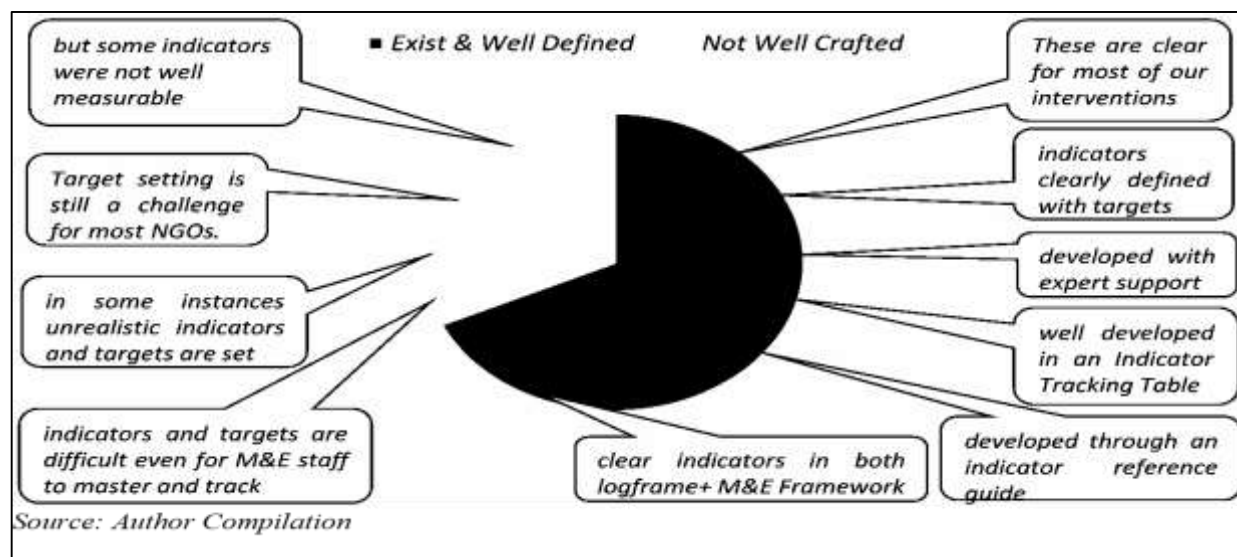
Note: Compiled by Author

The crafting of project performance indicators, and setting of targets seem to be a standard M&E practice for NGOs. No participant indicated the absence of indicators and targets in their projects, although some gaps were stated, a weakness that was highlighted from both the local and international NGO.

   An Analysis of Other Components of the M&E System: Other M&E Framework aspects were also assessed and participants were generally in agreement that the adoption and practice was evident although there are some weaknesses to be addressed by both the local and international NGOs. The following are the M&E practices drawn from the M&E framework, and the number of research participants who percieved them to be strong or weak based on various reasons, as summarised in this table;

Table 4.6

Rating of NGOs' M&E Framework Practices

M&E Practice	LNGO	INGO	Available & Practiced / Needs Improvement / Not Practiced
M&E Plans	Needs Improvement	Available & Practiced	Sometimes plans are not fully implemented due to budgetary and skilled staff limitations.
Quantitative Measurements	Available & Practiced	Available & Practiced	Most M&E staff strong in quantitative methods hence the bias.
Qualitative Measurements	Needs Improvement	Needs Improvement	Skills gaps exist in setting and measuring qualitative than quantitative indicators & targets.
Data Collection	Available & Practiced	Available & Practiced	The 2 NGOs were equally very strong in a variety of data collection methods.
Data Analysis Techniques	Needs Improvement	Needs Improvement	Most M&E staff more skilled in quantitative than qualittaive data analysis techniques.
Baseline Assessments	Available & Practiced	Available & Practiced	Baseline assessments were considered mandatory except in a few projects due to funding constraints.
Project Evaluations	Needs Improvement	Needs Improvement	Evaluations are done for all projects but ex-post project sustainability evaluations do lack.
M&E Reporting	Needs Improvement	Available & Practiced	Reporting is routinely adhered to, but sometimes its done more for donor compliance hence biased.
M&E Data Usage	Not Practiced	Needs Improvement	Use of M&E data was viewed less practiced in the local than it is in the International NGO.

Source: Author Compilation

From this analysis, gaps were reported in all the M&E practices, but most glaring across the two NGOs were data usage, qualitative data and project evaluations. NGOs seem to be practicing well the data collection processes, quantitative measurements and baseline assessments.

The Relevance and Effectiveness of the M&E System Theories*:* For the study to remain in sync with the research topic's focus on analysing the '*factors influencing the effective application of M&E systems theories in project management'* by the two NGOs, the study also assessed the relevance and effectiveness of the M&E system theory. This was meant to get an appreciation of whether and how this could be associated with the first hypothesis' analysis of the '*inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the*

international NGO'. To examine this, the research instrument posed the following questions to the participants;

> *'What's your assessment of the relevance of M&E theories and concepts to NGO work?*
>
> *'Comment on how the adopted NGO's M&E systems and practices have contributed or affected the effectiveness and performance of NGO projects'*

These questions generated mixed reactions on the relevance and effectiveness of some M&E theories, concepts, frameworks and approaches adopted by the participants' NGOs. From the content coding analysis, the following *themes* were derived from the participants' feedback to explain the relevance, applicability and effectiveness of the M&E theories and concepts examined;

The Logframe: Compared to the other theoretical elements of the M&E system examined in this study, feedback from research participants regarded the logframe as the most popular and most widely adopted and used concept. It was hailed by the two NGOs for its relevancy and effectiveness in guiding project monitoring and evaluation. The framework was viewed as well structured, user friendly and simple template. However, there were some concerns that while the frame work is good, it is how it is completed that matters the most. For instance, some donors given ready-made project logframes yet this is best compiled informed by the needs assessments of the intended project beneficiaries than by the donors who in most cases are located away from the targeted geographical locations of the projects.

The following represent the most frequently featuring feedback from most participants, and the text size indicates the importance placed by participants. The larger the text the greater the significance of the feedback to participants. The five statements quoted in the box below do represent and summarise what the majority of the research participants indicated with respect to the logical framework concept;

Figure 4.6

Perceptions on Log-frame Concept relevance and effectiveness

The logframe has a template that has made project design much easier and better structured for NGOs. This has helped to guide development of project M&E systems. There is widespread use of the logframe because it works well for NGOs. Some donor imposed logframe objectives, performance indicators and assumptions may be divorced from the operating context. Its weakness is that it is too linear, it assumes that inputs usually lead to outputs and outputs lead to outcomes and this sometimes can mislead project implementers.

Note: Compiled by Author

Generally, there was consensus on the widespread use on the framework in designing projects and guiding monitoring and evaluation processes. Of particular interest is the observation that the logframe is also viewed as too theoretical for its assumption of a linear theory of change where project 'inputs' (resources) are expected to translate to project 'activity' implementation, which in turn should result in project 'outputs' and then project 'outcomes' and results. Participants argued that practically this is not always the case for various reasons. Some participants however reacted that this weaknesses is well catered for by the 'assumptions' which are also catered for in the logframe. Such divergent views on the logtframe were explained by M&E experts as evidence of skills gaps and varying capacities between different NGOs and their M&E staff.

The M&E Framework: This is the concept that had the most mixed perceptions from research participants, without however no reservations on the importance of the framework. The main concerns were how it is usually confused and used inter-changeably with the M&E Plan and terminologically the M&E systems and M&E strategy. No wonder why some commented

that the M&E Framework was the M&E system itself, and that it is a concept that brings together all the M&E elements, an observations that may also hold true of the M&E system and M&E strategy. In summary participants called for a clearer distinction between these different M&E concepts, or rather more training to understand the differences to bridge any theory versus practice gaps. Participants were also asked on how they found the M&E framework's relevance and the following statements summarise the general experiences with this component of the M&E system.

Figure 4.7

Perceptions on M&E Framework Relevance and Effectiveness
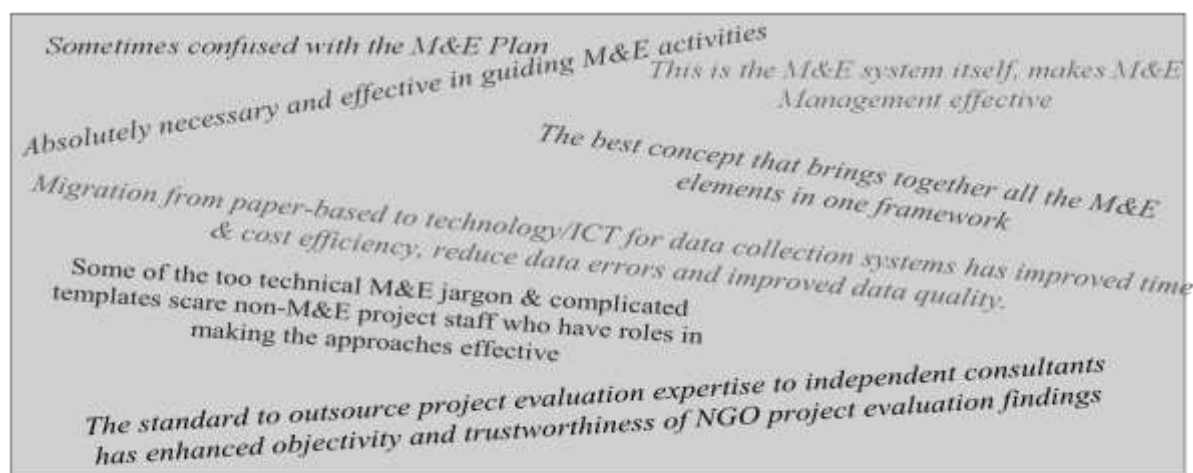
Note: Compiled by Author

The text sizes were almost similar indicating they carried almost the same weight based on how the participants' feedback were categorized into different themes;

The M&E Theory of Change: There was no dispute on the relevance and effectiveness of the theory of change in project design and project management particularly as a key tool for guiding project monitoring and evaluation. It was confirmed as a precursor to the development of the M&E system's logframe, M&E framework as well as setting the parameters for progress monitoring and evaluation towards the achievement of targeted project objectives. Participants

were unanimous on the need to constantly monitor the relevance of the theory of change in tandem to shifts in the context and environment under which the project is being implemented. Without this the original theory of change developed at project design stage may become irrelevant and divorced from the realities on the ground making the project ineffective to achieve its purpose.

Figure 4.8

Perceptions on the Theory of Change Relevance and Effectiveness
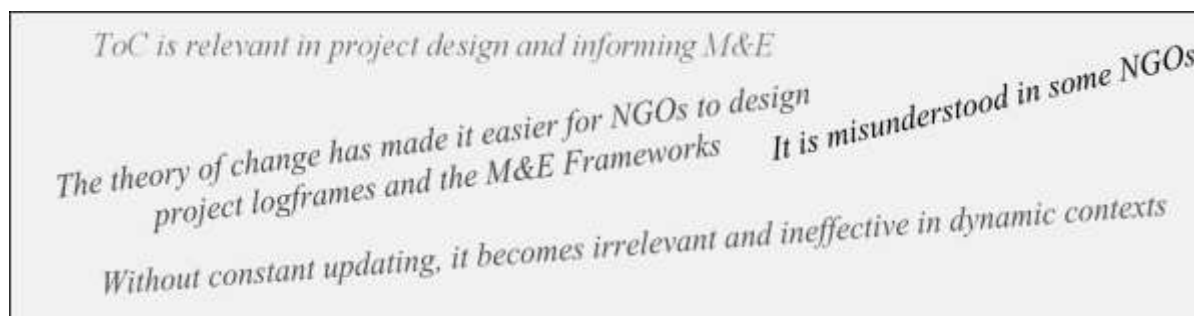
Note: Compiled by Author

Just like they expressed for the logframe, participants also lamented the practice by some donors and NGOs to design the project theory of change without or before undertaking needs assessments on the ground.

Findings from Desk Review of Case Study NGOs M&E Systems: As detailed in the research methods chapter, a desk review of the two case study NGOs' secondary data related to their M&E systems was conducted for purposes of triangulation and diversity in the sources of data for this research. Such analysis of available NGO secondary data was conducted to assess for any '*inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theory between the local and the international NGO*' as required for testing hypothesis 1**.** The desk review generated the following observations;

To understand how GRM International and MeDRA case study NGOs' M&E practices impacted on the quality of their projects, project evaluations reports were reviewed and found to contain the following key findings;

GRM International's Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) M&E strategy was generally found to be consistent with the M&E system theories and thus effective in supporting programme delivery and results achievement, but could have been even better in a couple of areas. For instance, the 2013 Impact Evaluation report for the Protracted PRP hailed the programme's robust and innovative M&E system for strongly contributing to programme eeffectiveness and achievement of results, especially with reference to the 2012 logframe targets (Jennings et al. (2013). The report goes on to indicate that the programme impact could have been even better had the NGO not delayed in using M&E data to make tactical improvement changes to the programme. The delays we caused by challenges faced in measuring logframe indicators of impacts for the first phase of the programme (Jennings et al, 2013). The evaluators therefore concluded that no matter how strong a project's M&E system maybe, project quality will remain compromised if the M&E data is not used to make project improvements.

An evaluation report for another project implemented by GRM International, the Zimbabwe Livelihoods and Food Security Programme (LFSP), found out that the project's M&E system's strength was in informing programme adaptation to remain relevant to the dynamic operating context. It however cautioned that the multiple NGOs implementing this programme in different districts had varying M&E capacities and hence the varying adoption and varying quality of project management and results (FAO, 2022).

MeDRA's M&E Strategy: A rapid assessment of the local NGO's M&E strategy conducted by an independent consultant in 2016 to analyse the NGO's capacity to implement its new 2016-2020 Strategy showed previous weaknesses in its M&E system with regards learning

for quality improvement. Based on this observation, the consultant recommended MEDRA to strengthen its M&E system for the organization to generate lessons from previous interventions and improve (MeDRA. 2016). Subsequent to this observation in 2016, there is evidence that by 2020, MeDRA had made some improvements in its M&E practices, and resultantly its projects quality albeit still with some gaps still to be addressed. For example, according to its 2020 Annual Programs Report, MeDRA was implementing various projects funded by about 6 different donors, and the majority of them were reported to be scoring some achievements (MeDRA, 2020). However, the M&E section of that annual report did not report much on the M&E system's achievements, most probably because this was a Covid-19 year where much of the year had lockdowns that prevented the NGO to do much in monitoring its projects on the ground.

Desk Review of M&E Databases: Also assessed were the two NGOs' data management practices and the existence and functionality of M&E databases. Generally, activities are reported to be tracked electronically, although the local NGO lacked a cloud based electronic database, relying more on other forms of back-up that put M&E data at risk of loss. One document that was desk reviewed from the international NGO was an evaluation report on the effectiveness of the database by one of the donors. Some of the highlights from the report included;

The database has seen an improvement in the quality of analysis and reporting.

The quality of reporting has improved, including timely progress reporting.

It provides real-time empirical evidence of change for programme decision making.

It is useful for tracking beneficiaries and has reduced double dipping.

Desk Review of Project Log-frames: For both case study NGOs, there was no consistency in the logframe formats as different donor funded projects had some variations in their logframe formats, where some donors placed more emphasis on project activities, some on different levels of project outcomes, impacts and goals. Some logframes gave priority to quantitative and others to

qualitative indicators on related project types. Further donor influenced logframe variations were observable in the processes used to complete the logframes, where some logframes came ready made by the donors and given to the NGOs to implement. On the other hand, some were developed by the NGOs through participatory and evidence based processes, making them more relevant.

Hypothesis 2

The hypothesis '*The Resource Capacity of an NGO Influences the Effectiveness in the Application of the M&E System Theories'* suggests are that some NGOs have limited capacity to design and implement robust M&E systems, or inversely, the adoption and effective application of the M&E system theories require specific resources. This hypothesis therefore assumes that NGO resource inadequacies could be responsible for gaps between M&E theory and practice, as phrased in the research topic. To explore this, the research instruments contained questions that prompted participants to reflect on their respective NGOs' resource capacities in terms of the M&E budget, the M&E staff and skills, as well as the use of technology and ICT in M&E processes. According to Nalianya & Luketero (2017), with qualified, skilled and experienced M&E human resources skills, NGO projects are able to achieve their planned results", as M&E data is key in improving the quality and delivery of NGO projects. In addition, ICT based M&E systems are more effective and yield real-time data for timeous evidence-based decision making.

NGOs' Resources Capacity: For hypothesis 2 to remain focused on the research topic's focus on assessing the '*factors influencing the effective application of M&E systems theories in project management'* by NGOs, the study assessed the two NGOs' resource capacities. The research instruments probed for the adequacy of M&E resources; the budgets, staff, skills and technology for M&E. The findings portray the same trend for all the three components of the main M&E resources comparatively between the two case study NGOs. That is, the M&E budget, M&E

staff and skills as well as material resources such as technology for M&E. The majority of the

research participants' experiences were that the resources were generally inadequate, particularly

for the local NGO. The budget was deemed to be the most determining factor for all M&E resource

inadequacy and was seen as the main reason why the local NGO struggled to attract and recruit

enough M&E staff, and be able to retain them for long. Figure 4.9 summarises the findings;

Figure 4.9

Assessment of NGOs' M&E Resource Capacity

Local NGO	International NGO	
M&E Budget	M&E Staff & Skills	M&E Technology/ICT

Note: Analysis by Author

The availability and use of technology and ICT in M&E processes was deemed by

participants to be much higher across both the local and the international NGO. The local NGO

was hugely understaffed with regards qualified and experienced M&E staff, while the budget

allocated to M&E had huge disparities between the two NGOs with the local NGO underfunded.

NGO Resources Capacity versus M&E System Practices: Having looked at the

resource capacity levels of NGOs, the next step was to juxtapose this with the level of application

of the M&E system theories, as is required by the hypothesis. The findings decoded each

participant's feedback into 'adequate', 'inadequate' and 'not available' for each of the three M&E

concepts studied, giving a visual interpretation that shows comparisons between the two local and

international NGO case studies. The findings depicted in the figure show the local NGO having inadequate M&E resources; budgets, staff, skills and technology.

To interpret the findings, the 'Resource Capacity' performance ratings given by participants for each block. That is, the LNGO and INGO, is compared with the 'M&E System Practices' ratings. For instance, it is observable that the INGOs have more 'grey' ratings consistently for both the resource capacities and M&E practices. On the other hand, the LNGO has more 'charcoal' rating for resources and practices. Both trends show that resource capacity determine M&E practices.

Figure 4.10

NGOs Resource Capacity versus M&E System Practices

NGOs' Resource Capacity and the Application of key M&E System Concepts and Frameworks																													
Rating Key						Local NGO Participants								International NGO Participants								M&E Experts/ Consultants						
Adequate	Inadequate	Not Available				A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	B6	B7	B8	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6		

Notes: Analysis by Author: *While other research participants provided feedback on the LNGO and INGO, the M&E Expert Consultants provided feedback for the wider NGO sector in Zimbabwe for validation purposes.*

The same grey and charcoal colour codes were reflected almost in the same trend in Hypothesis 1 assessment to the local NGO's application of the M&E system's key concepts and

frameworks. In the same manner the predominance of grey codes in the International NGO block reflects better resourced M&E systems, a trend that also reflected the same on the first hypothesis analysis. The M&E Consultants' views show the same phenomena where the M&E resources seem to mirror the level of adoption of M&E approaches for their ratings of both NGOs combined.

The following are the verbatim extracts from the participants' feedback on the second hypothesis that tested the influence of NGO resource capacity on the application of the M&E system theories, concepts and frameworks;

M&E Budgets

C4: Yes, there is adequate M&E budget to support operationalization of M&E strategy

B1: The organisation has set a separate M&E budget for each programme which gives the M&E unit flexibility and power to carry out its mandate

A4: M&E budget is less due to less recognition of the M&E function in the organization.

A6: The budget does not always cover all M & E activities throughout the project life cycle.

C1: NGOs allocate limited resources for the M&E function. Hardly 2% of resources are allocated to M&E.

M&E Staff & Skills

B1: The organisation places enough attention on the M&E staff and their skills to ensure delivery of expected results. All staff were highly qualified and experienced.

C1: NGOs have started recruiting qualified M&E personnel and this is significantly contributing towards improving the M&E practice.

C2: The NGO is poor at retaining staff, hence are usually under-staffed, coupled with limited funds for staff capacity building and this affects execution of M&E Strategies.

A5: The whole organisation has just one M&E Officer for all projects supported by Field Officers have who partial knowledge in M&E and with little skills.

A8: Some M&E skills are typically outsourced.

Technology & ICT

A3: The organization uses ICT and technology but it was not fully utilized for M&E.

A8: Good adoption of ICT skills in the last few years but still some gaps in smaller NGOs

B5: The use of ICT was embraced achieving sending information in 'real time'.

C1: Internet connectivity and the high cost of data limits the use of ICT.

C6: This is still a new but upcoming component of M&E. Mostly at development stage for most local NGOs, hence the M&E team is not very competent with regards to ICT.

These feedbacks lay bare the fact that M&E resources are generally not adequate for both NGOs and worse for the local NGO. Compared to the bigger and strategically positioned international NGOs, the smaller local NGO struggled to attract all forms of resources, be they financial, skilled personnel or ICT for M&E work. Such findings for hypothesis 2 seem to be consistent with hypothesis 1 findings where the local NGO lagged behind in the application of the M&E system theories effectively.

Factors Affecting the M&E System Effectiveness: Participants identified a host of factors affecting M&E system effectiveness, among them NGO resources that include M&E skilled staff and M&E budget, as reflected in the responses illustrated in the figure 4.11 below. The figure also cites other factors that affect the effectiveness of M&E systems. These are discussed in detail in the subsequent sections. Meanwhile, there was evidence that regardless of the inadequate resources available the two NGOs have been able to show that the M&E systems theories can be effective and thus remains relevant.

Figure 4.11

Participants Views on Factors affecting M&E Systems Effectiveness
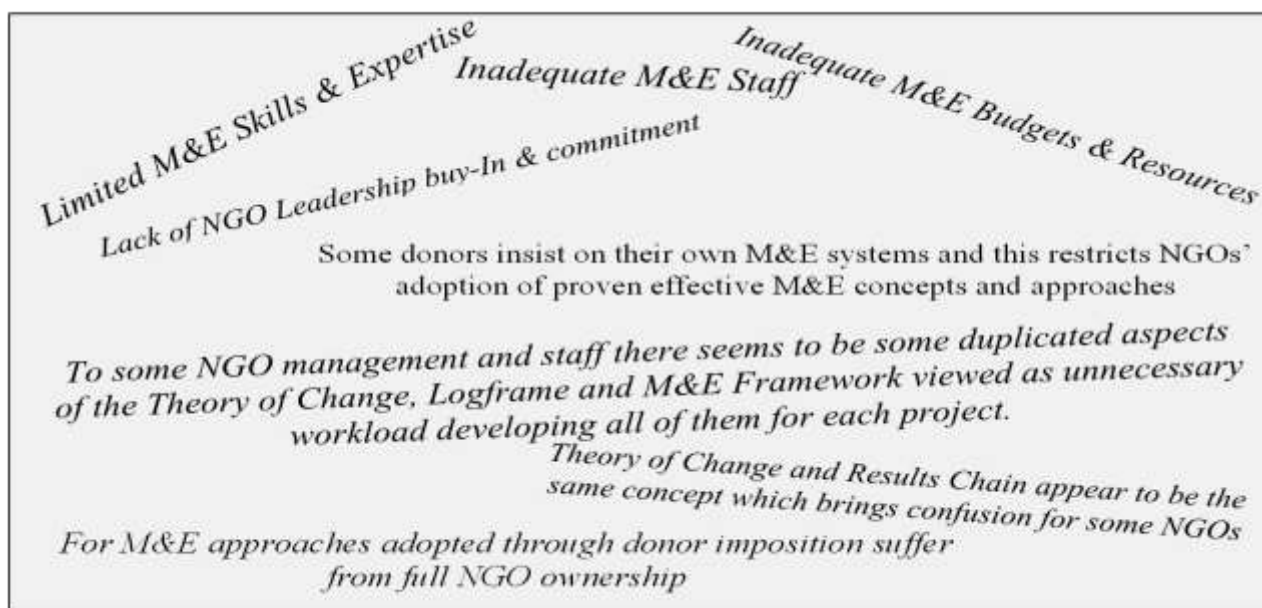
Note: Compiled by Author

In spite of the institutional and capacity challenges, the adopted and practiced M&E system approaches have had some success in the following ways as cited by research participants;

Improved Quality and Performance of Projects;

C1: M&E Practices have greatly improved the quality and performance of projects even though more still has to be done to improve M&E standards.

Increasing professionalisation of M&E in the NGOs;

C6: The widespread application of M&E theories and concepts is evident in the increased professionalism and increased reputation and trust of the NGO in Zimbabwe by key stakeholders such as the government and funders.

Promoted Evidence Based Decision Making by NGOs;

C2: M &E theories have greatly helped NGOs to put in place systems that can easily detect projects implementation inefficiencies and provide data to inform areas needing improvements.

Findings from Desk Review of Case Study NGOs M&E Systems: As detailed in the research methods chapter, a desk review of the two case study NGOs' secondary data related to their M&E systems was conducted for purposes of triangulation and diversity in the sources of data for this research. This desk review adopted a SWOT analysis of the NGO's M&E processes mainly to identify and establish their strengths and weaknesses, with particular focus on the capacity and effectiveness of M&E to contribute to project management quality. The exercise found weaknesses and strengths in M&E human resources and skills, budgetary allocations to M&E work, data collection, analysis and reporting capacity, development of M&E tools, M&E frameworks, log-frames, data utilisation for projects performance and quality improvement.

Capacity gaps were found in MeDRA's M&E system's previous ability to generate enough data, analysis and lessons for projects quality improvements. The secondary data detailed the following;

M&E Staffing and Skills: Staffing and skills gaps were evident, particularly M&E staff attrition and turn-over. Records showed that skilled staff usually stay short in the local than in the international NGO. The huge discrepancy in the salaries paid to M&E staff between the two NGOs could be attributed to this. M&E staff expertise was generally high in the International NGO, no wonder why project reports showed better quantitative and qualitative information. On the other hand, the local NGO had only one M&E Staff and the backlog observed in most M&E processes is a sign that he is overwhelmed and overworked, and the National Director' feedback expressed concerns about burnout.

M&E Material Resources: Mobility for M&E staff for data collection activities seemed constrained by a lack of transport especially for the local NGO where project staff have to share a pool vehicle for multiple tasks which at times require to be undertaken simultaneously.

M&E ICT Resources: Staff in both NGOs owned computers and had access to other ICT equipment and software. Internet connectivity was generally not a big issue especially within the office premises.

M&E Budgets: There was no standard project specific M&E budgets allocation thresholds in both NGOs because there were variances across different projects depending on the donors' approaches and requirements. The allocations ranged from as high as 15% for projects whose donors have high M&E requirements, as well as those who gave flexibility to the NGO to determine the allocation at project proposal and approval writing stage. One project from the local NGO had as low as 1% M&E budget mainly because the donor did not allocate such a budget, which was left to be funded by the resource constrained NGO. For the same NGO, some projects' M&E budgets were underspent in the allotted time because of slow M&E implementation caused by understaffed M&E department as alluded to earlier on.

Hypothesis 3

Just as hypothesis 1 fed into hypothesis 2, hypothesis 3 '*Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs*' draws from 1 and 2 in the sense that NGOs rely on donors for their project and M&E resources and technical support. Since most NGOs rely on donor funds for their projects, donors enforce specific M&E requirements as part of their compliance requirements for NGOs (Nalianya & Luketero, 2017). This hypothesis therefore postulates that such donor M&E compliance requirements do promote the adoption and effective application of the M&E system theories by NGOs in an endeavor to

comply. The hypothesis assumes that this motivates NGOs to strengthen their M&E systems so as to adhere and be accountable for the donor funds.

The findings show mixed reactions, where on one hand there is acknowledgement of the role and contribution played by donors to NGO M&E systems development, M&E budgets (albeit generally inadequate), and NGO staff capacity building. On the other hand, the two NGOs fell there is too much imposition of different M&E approaches and templates, usually inconsistent (between different donors to the same NGO), hence at times confusing to both INGO and LNGO M&E staff. Coupled to that, some donors were reported to mount too much compliance pressure that forces some NGO staff to cut corners in the implementation of M&E systems. The following is evidence of some of the feedback from research participants with regards to;

Donors' contribution to NGO M&E Systems Development & Effectiveness

M&E Strategy

> *C1: Most local NGOs in Zimbabwe do not have an institutional M&E Policy, but project specific M&E strategies mostly advocated for by donors for accountability purposes.*

M&E Frameworks

> *B6: The M&E framework and plan are always in place and subjected to review by project staff and stakeholders, though they are always driven by project requirements/donor.*

M&E Budget

> *C4: Yes, there is adequate M&E budget to support operationalization of M&E strategy*

M&E Reporting

A1: Reporting is routinely adhered to, but sometimes its done more for donor compliance hence biased.

Donors Contribution to NGO M&E systems Ineffectiveness

M&E Strategy

> *C4: Centralised development of M&E strategies by international donors sometimes divorced from realities in different countries where the projects are implemented.*
>
> *C5: Not put to full use. It is a matter of fulfilling donor requirements.*

Project Theory of Change

A1: The TOCs are poorly developed and seem developed more as a donor requirement than as a project management tool and a good base for developing the M&E framework. Training still required in improving understanding of TOCs and their use in project management.

A4: Some projects have ToC, but some do not have. In some cases, this is in response to the needs of the donor but not as an M&E practice.

A5: There is a gap in the development of theory of change per project. Theory of Change are developed depending on donor requirements.

M&E Framework

B1: Developed just as part of meeting the project proposal requirements.

M&E Budgets

A6: The budget does not always cover all M & E activities throughout the project life cycle.

The testimonies attest that donors are the reason why the NGOs were found to have most of the required M&S system frameworks and tools. However, pperceptions from the same research participants pointed to the fact that M&E systems are run more for the donors to fulfill donor requirements than for the project management purposes.

Findings from Desk Review of Case Study NGOs M&E Systems: As detailed in the research methods chapter, a desk review of the two case study NGOs' secondary data related to their M&E systems was conducted for purposes of triangulation and diversity in the sources of data for this research. This desk review adopted a SWOT analysis of the NGO's M&E processes mainly to identify and establish their strengths and weaknesses, with particular focus on the capacity and effectiveness of M&E to contribute to project management quality. The NGO's secondary data desk reviewed to test hypothesis 3 on '*donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs'* observed the following;

M&E Data Utilisation and Dissemination depended on the donor requirements, and each of the two case study NGOs was implementing multiple projects funded by different donors who

had different requirements. This means the priority was not to always follow the recommended M&E System theories and principles that place emphasis on using M&E data to inform project management and quality improvements, and less emphasis on donor reporting. This made data utilisation processes inconsistent between different projects under the same NGO, as well as inconsistent between the two NGOs. For instance, most large international donors, that include FCDO and USAID made it mandatory the use of M&E data for project improvements. On the other hand, small donor organisations, including banks that funded some MEDRA projects in the past simply provided funding and asked for financial accountability more than the monitoring and project evaluation processes and how the data is utilised. All they followed up was the completion of the classroom blocks at schools and financial audits, but not M&E systems or impact evaluations is usually the norm with NGO projects.

Evaluation of Findings

Having discussed the findings, this section evaluates, interprets and give meaning to the findings, as well as make conclusions on the hypotheses that had been set to guide this study. This also entails situating of the findings within the study's 'M&E theory to practice' Conceptual Framework's two triangles, each triangle depicting the 'three leg' variables. The first triangle represents the conceptualized three theory testing principles of 'theory clarity', 'theory relevance' and 'theory applicability'. The second triangle represents the three NGO capacity components of 'M&E human and skills resources', 'M&E budget/financial resources' and 'M&E material and technological resources'. The central themes that emerged from the data analysis processes are discussed and reconnected with literature. The adoption, applicability and relevance of the M&E theories, concepts and approaches tested in this research was tested more through the consistency of findings from the two case study NGOs through the different sources of information.

Hypotheses Testing Conclusions

The hypotheses were qualitatively tested using results from the data analysis, and based on the observed patterns emerging from data analysis. The decisions to accept or reject the hypotheses was derived from the nature of the patterns, for instance where data showed some consistency that support, confirm or prove a pre-set hypothesis as true, the hypothesis would be accepted (Chigbu (2019). Alternatively, where the patterns refuted the hypothesis through some significant inconsistencies or contradictions in the research findings, the hypothesis would be proved false, and hence rejected. For instance, Hypothesis 2: "*The resource capacity of an NGO influences the effectiveness in the application of the M&E System theories*" was tested by establishing data patterns that show a 'causal' relationship between the NGO resource capacity factors and the effectiveness in NGO application of M&E theories. Similarly for Hypothesis 2: *"There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO"* was tested through matching M&E theories to NGO practice. Where data establishes consistency between the dictates of M&E theories and NGO practice, the hypothesis is accepted as true.

Based on the results and findings presented and discussed for each of the three hypotheses, the analysis was able to make the following evidence based conclusions. The first two hypotheses where confirmed as had been hypothesized from the researcher's anecdotal observations from experience working with NGOs. It therefore did not come as a surprise when the two hypotheses where confirmed through this research as well. Surprisingly though, the third hypothesis was unexpectedly denied after the research generated overwhelming evidence against accepting it.

Table 4.7

Hypotheses Testing Conclusions

Hypotheses	Conclusion	Justifications
1: There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO.	True (Accepted)	Notwithstanding the decent adoption of the recommended M&E system concepts, frameworks and tools, there were some and inconsistencies between and within the two case study NGOs, which has implications of project effectiveness.
2: The resource capacity of an NGO influences the effectiveness in the application of the M&E System theories.	*Very True* (Accepted)	Indeed it was proven that resource capacity is a factor of the level of application of M&E concepts and approaches. The hypothesis held true for both the local and International case study NGOs. The better resourced International NGOs were found to have strong M&E systems than their poorly resourced local NGOs.
3: Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs.	Not in all Cases (Rejected)	The contributions made by donors to improving the NGOs' M&E systems seem to be eroded by the NGOs ending up doing M&E more for the donors than for project effectiveness due to too much M&E compliance reporting pressures. This seem to be worsened when one NGO end up getting different imposed M&E guidelines from different donors.

Note: Compiled by Author

Hypothesis 1: Notwithstanding the general alignment of the two NGOs' M&E systems with most of the components of the M&E system, the findings seem to confirm the hypothesis that indeed there are some inconsistencies in M&E system practices and application by and between the two case study NGOs assessed in this research. Linked to hypothesis 2, it came out clearly that the most affected were the local NGOs as compared to international NGOs who normally are better capacitated especially with regards to M&E resources that include staff, skills, budgets and ICT. The findings tally with Muzinda (2007)'s study on locals NGOs' M&E capacities in neighbouring Botswana, whose M&E processes were also found to be ineffective because of limited M&E financial resources and M&E expertise. Similarly, a recent study by Fraser

& Morkel (2020) on the state of monitoring and evaluation in Africa revealed that M&E systems maturity is still uneven across organisations in Africa, where systems are in place but poorly organized and managed.

The consistencies and inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories were noted in various ways that point more to NGO practice gaps and to a less extend to gaps in the theories.

The Logframe: The logframe was the most popular M&E tool being used by NGOs, and one research participants summed up his fellow participants' views by remarking that 'there is widespread use of the logframe because it works well for NGOs'. There was a chorus of feedback that this framework is preferred for its relevance and effectiveness based on its user friendliness, hailed as a clear and comprehensive project planning, monitoring and evaluation tool. This is consistent with available literature (Martinez, 2011; Uwizeyimana, 2020). There were however concerns that the effectiveness of project logframes is sometimes spoiled by some donors who 'impose logframe objectives, performance indicators and assumptions some of which may be divorced from the operating context'.

The Theory of Change: Just like the logframe, participates did not dispute the relevance and effectiveness of the 'theory of change' concept. There was consensus among research participants that it is relevant for conceptualisation of projects by NGOs during the project design stage. It was also seen to be a good precursor to the project logframe formulation, and in turn the determination of the M&E framework. Gordon & Sebastian (2019) also observed this relationship between the logframe and the theory of change and their importance in guiding project design, management, monitoring, and evaluation.

M&E Framework: The M&E Framework is seen by participants, mainly the NGO M&E practitioners as the M&E 'bible' for any project. Literature also confirms this (Markiewicz &

Patrick (2016). While this is so, there seems to be inconsistency in the NGO sector in the use of different M&E concepts and frameworks related to the M&E framework, known and used in different terms by different NGOs as suggested by the research participants' feedback. Different NGOs seem to use different terminologies and even different tools and frameworks for the same purpose. Some use the M&E framework, some the M&E Plan, some the M&E strategy, and some the M&E system, to serve the same purpose, while some use a combination of these. Some of the views expressed by participants on this include the perceptions that; 'the M&E framework is sometimes confused with the M&E plan' and that 'the concept brings together all the M&E elements in one framework'.

This is evident of the confusion on the definition and purpose of each of these, and these findings resonate well with literature. For instance, The University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development (2018) traced the history of the logframe approach to the logic model which is argued to be a version of the theory of change, arguing that the distinction between the two is misty.

Absence of Ex-Post Impact Evaluations: The M&E system constitute two major pillars; monitoring and evaluation. Of the two, findings from this research suggest that NGOs technically fall short on project impact evaluation. This aligns with assertions by Chirau et al (2020) that in Africa monitoring tend to get greater attention and ends up overshadowing evaluation probably because evaluation tends to be more technical and requires more expertise. In conformity to existing literature, this study also generated similar evidence, for instance the following excerpts from selected M&E expert Consultants who were part of the sample;

C3: Seems most progress has been made in activity monitoring. The quality of evaluations still must improve. Impact is one of the most misused words! It is commonly used in explaining change and yet it should be used where there is a counterfactual that makes it

possible to make an attribution. Most NGOs conduct performance evaluations that are then presented as impact evaluations!

C5: Impact evaluation is still hard considering that it takes time for projects to demonstrate impact especially with Zimbabwean macro-environmental factors where things change rapidly.

C1: Evaluations are normally limited to midline and end-line only. No follow up is done after the project has come to an end.

Findings from this study show that the majority of research participants lamented a common practice by NGOs to conduct impact evaluations immediately at the end of the project implementation period, otherwise known as end of project or summative or project completion evaluations. Feedback from research participants suggests that this is inadequate since the real impact of NGO projects usually manifest years after the NGOs project implementation period, hence the preference for ex-post impact evaluations, defined as project evaluations conducted years after the project has ended in order to give time for impact to be realized and then assess its sustainability over time (USAID, 2021). None of the two case study NGOs have ever implemented ex-post evaluations, with most M&E consultants who were part of this study sample confirming from their experience that this is a trend across the wider NGO sector in Zimbabwe. Major reasons given for this gap being that the NGOs immediately pull out at the end of the project implementation period and donor funding for projects are only available up to that time. Because of this there ought to be M&E budgets put aside for impact evaluations to be conducted years after the NGO has pulled out of the project. This is the reason why none of the two case study NGOs nor their donors have a record of the impact and sustainability of the projects they would have supported in the past. Only end of project evaluations reports were available from the desk study conducted by the researcher.

Project implementation and results achievement can be an easy and smooth process which however does not usually result in the desired impact due to other external contextual factors, and ex-post impact evaluations are good at revealing such outcomes. After getting good end of project evaluation reports, some organisational leadership would not be much willing to have any other evaluation process that may taint the good end of project evaluation reports. Not many NGOs are prepared to be challenged by the results of their own work, especially as there is pressure to always appear good before donors. Observations by Fraser & Morkel (2020) seem to be in sync with such findings.

The findings suggest that M&E resources were predominantly allocated to monitoring than evaluations, and this had a knock on effect on the utilisation of M&E evidence for decision making and project improvement. This is buttressed by Kithinji et al (2017)'s argument that NGOs learn more from project evaluations than from monitoring processes, otherwise they keep repeating the same strategies even if they did not yield impactful results from previous projects.

Project Based versus Institutionalised M&E Systems in NGOs: This research confirmed that the inconsistencies found between the two NGOs' M&E systems witnessed in the studied NGOs is directly linked to the research findings that both local and international case study NGOs' M&E systems are not institutionalised but are project based. One research participant had this to say about the importance of NGO institutionalised than project based M&E systems, *"Having fully fledged institutional level M&E as opposed to project level M&E is also key".* This means NGOs implement different projects funded by different donor agencies and different M&E systems are being used for the different projects depending on the different donor M&E requirements. This seems to assert that NGO M&E approaches are adopted and applied mainly to meet donor requirements than to serve their real purposes as guided by the M&E concepts, standards and principles. The situation was confirmed worse for the local NGO where some

projects do not even have any M&E systems, as the funding donors did not give M&E as a requirement. In such situations there were no initiatives by the NGO to use own M&E approaches to ensure all projects are monitored and evaluated as one of the project management practice.

These findings are testimony to the fact that both NGOs did not have institutionalised M&E systems hence they had no control over the M&E systems of their projects and relied more on the donor instructions which turned out to be diverse. As a result, there were no standardized M&E systems and approaches being used. Furthermore, the absence of monitoring and evaluation in some projects compromises the quality of projects and in turn the project results, impact and sustainability.

Limited Use of M&E Data for Project Quality Improvement: Research participants were correct to highlight that the objective and purpose of undertaking project monitoring and evaluation is not only for donor compliance and accountability, but most importantly to generate evidence for decision making and project quality improvements. Unfortunately, for the LNGO, the use of M&E evidence is still limited. The study observed that M&E budget mainly cater for M&E staff salaries, hire external evaluators, fund M&E processes, and forget M&E utilisation processes that include dissemination, learning processes and stakeholder feedback sessions. If evidence generated from M&E is not used to steer the project ship, project managers would lack the early warning signs of any impending derailment of the project. M&E data is able to tell how project implementation is going, what's working well and what's not working well. Routine review of M&E data is a standard project management practice, without which the NGO would blindly implement projects and miss the opportunities to course correct and lesson learning, for quality improvement and project success. Project performance information and evidence generated from M&E processes and reports is only useful when they are put to use beyond just meeting donor reporting requirements. Figure 4.12 shows an artistic illustration tells the story;

Figure 4.12

The Danger of Ignoring M&E Data Usage in Project Management

Hypothesis 2: Indeed the research confirmed the hypothesis that access to M&E resources (M&E budgets, M&E expertise, M&E technological and others) determines NGO capacity to adopt, design and implement M&E systems effectively. The results presented earlier on laid bare the fact that due to inadequate M&E resources local NGOs suffer a number of M&E weaknesses and some gaps between M&E theory and practice. On the other hand, International NGOs have stronger M&E systems due to better access to M&E resources.

One research participant reiterated that *"Capacity, capacity and capacity. This relates to capacity to develop the systems, and to implement the systems".* The research findings confirmed the hypothesis that NGO resource capacity determine affects the level of adoption and application of standard M&E concepts and approaches. It is therefore important to discuss the reasons and implications for this, based on feedback given by the research participants. Some of the M&E Consultants noted that their observations in MeDRA and GRM International M&E systems and practices are not unique but also reflect the situations in similar NGOs that they have worked with

in Zimbabwe. For instance, the following quotations from two research participants transcripts do represent such perceptions;

> *C2: M&E is not well funded by NGOs in Zimbabwe, despite M&E functions being resource intense for good quality M&E functions. Studies and analysis done show that the M&E budget must be between 8-10% of the total budget of the project. However, in Zimbabwe, NGOs allocate limited resources for the M&E function. Hardly 2% of resources are allocated to M&E. For USAID funded activities, it is now a requirement that the M&E budget minimum be about 8%, to ensure M&E activities are well funded and generate the required quality of outputs.*

> *C4:Most NGOs in Zimbabwe are poor at retaining staff, hence are usually under-staffed, coupled with limited funds for staff capacity building and this affects execution of M&E Strategies.*

The desk review of secondary data from the case study NGOs' project and M&E documents triangulated well with the primary research findings. For instance, during the implementation of the DFID funded Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) in Zimbabwe, GRM International conducted an M&E capacity assessment of its NGO implementing partners. Incidentally, most of the factors assessed in this review were consistent with some of this research's areas of focus, hence the findings were found to be comparable. These included the assessment of NGO M&E human resources, M&E frameworks and their links to the programme log-frame. Interestingly, the findings from this NGO M&E capacity review were largely consistent with the findings of this study's primary research. First, where M&E is limited by resources it was often due to insufficient budgets for M&E. Second, M&E staff generally required training on specific M&E skills like quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Third, new M&E approaches introduced by the programme improved the M&E skills of the NGO implementing partners, and in turn the quality

of data analysis and reporting and real-time empirical evidence. Fourth, budgets were reported as adequate at around 15% on average, mostly for international NGOs, while some local NGOs were reporting budgets as low as 1%.

All these findings point to inconsistent application of standard M&E system approaches by the NGOs based on feedback, experiences and perceptions shared by the majority of the research participants. The following are examples of excerpts extracted from some of the research participants' responses;

A3: The M&E approaches and practices are not standard across NGOs projects because some projects are funded by different donors who place emphasis on different concept.

B1: Some donors such as USAID tend to provide fully fledged M&E systems while others are a bit flexible allowing some form of dialogue between implementing NGO and the donor. In most cases NGOs are instructed to implement M&E approaches & methodologies although the larger international NGOs are at liberty to develop and implement approaches & methodologies for projects funded through organisational funds.

Local versus International NGOs' M&E Capacity Differences: NGO M&E capacity is derived from the budget allocated to M&E processes, the availability of M&E human resources and skills as well as other resources such as ICT. In comparing the two case study NGOs with other NGOs in the country, the M&E Consultants highlighted that international NGOs have better access to donor funding compared to local NGOs. The same scenario also extends to the capacity to attract and recruit qualified, experienced and skilled M&E staff. These research findings are derived from research participants' experiences as expressed in the following feedback;

C6: The application of standard M&E practices varies a lot across Zimbabwean NGOs, a reflection of differences in M&E capacity. International NGOs tend to have higher standards compared to local NGOs. This is mainly a result of resources, with international NGOs better

able to budget for M&E and invest in developing their M&E capacity. Local NGOs struggle to access adequate resources, and the priority is on programming and M&E is least prioritised despite its critical role in upholding accountability and learning.

C3: Apart from resources, NGOs, particularly the local NGOs struggle to attract qualified and experienced M&E professionals and as such end up recruiting those without experience thereby stifling the development and application good M&E practices and standards.

Across almost all aspects of M&E theory and practice assessed in this research, findings show glaring differences between local and international NGOs; be it the extent of M&E concepts adoption, the capacity to design and implement recommended M&E concepts and approaches, or the level of effectiveness of M&E theories when applied. Such findings are validated if triangulated with existing literature, for instance, Kithinji, Gakuu, & Kidombo (2017) found out that that resource capacity is a determinant of the strength and effectiveness of NGOs M&E systems. It is on this premise that the research hypothesis *"the resource capacity of an NGO affects the level of adoption and application of standard M&E System theories, concepts and frameworks"* was found to hold water. Additionally, Nalianya & Luketero (2017) presented evidence that with qualified, skilled and experienced M&E staff NGOs are better positioned to achieve project outcomes efficiently and effectively.

There are opportunities for small local NGOs to improve on M&E practices as evidenced by organisational commitment and efforts being put by MeDRA. The desk review of the NGO's M&E and projects documents provided evidence that although they operated for a couple of years without an M&E strategy and without qualified M&E staff, the situation has been slowly but surely improving in recent years. After engaging a consultant to assist them assess their institutional systems, a 5 year strategy (2016 – 2020) was put in place, which made the following commitment

towards the establishment of a Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) Framework;

> *MeDRA remains committed to putting in place a robust PMER Framework to guide the implementation of the Strategy. This will enable MeDRA to effectively and efficiently implement, monitor and evaluate its programs for community transformation. The Strategic Planning process has commenced a participatory approach that has been more inclusive in the design, development, management, and implementation and monitoring of the projects. MeDRA will continue to tap into this potential by involving all the different stakeholders to examine the existing gaps.*

Source: MeDRA 2016-2020 Draft Strategic Plan

Following up on this commitment, a year later in 2017 a draft 20 page PMER Framework was developed. The next step was to see it implemented effectively for project quality. As Lahey (2015) postulates, putting in place a good M&E system is one thing, implementing it to the book is another task. This is where the resource capacity factor comes in as found in this study. This resonates well with one M&E Consultant who reiterated that, "*There are too many M&E tools, frameworks that are developed at planning stage which are never used, so NGOs should be assisted to adopt M&E concepts that are relevant and within their capacity to apply (Participant C4).*

Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018) seems to have generated evidence that indeed M&E systems can be tailor made to suit the level of capacity of an organization, and still serve the purpose well. Their study suggests that an M&E system can be sophisticated or simplified depending on the expertise, technology and resources available. This gives room for participatory M&E approaches that include the role of various project stakeholders some of whom may not be technically skilled in M&E, for instance the logframe as an M&E tool can easily be simplified, understood and used even by community beneficiaries in managing their projects after the NGO has exited.

M&E Human Resource Inadequacy Incapacitating the Smaller Local NGO: Research participants from the LNGO seemed to unanimously agree that having just one M&E qualified and experienced staff in the organisation was the key driver of gaps identified in their M&E system. Upon probing the underlying causes of M&E skills gaps, the M&E experts who were part of the sample lamented on resource constraints but went further to contextualise the problem to the historical lack of M&E courses offered by colleges and universities in the country. It was established through this research that until a few years ago there was no educational institution offering M&E courses either at certificate, diploma or degree level. Currently, as observed by some of the research participants, the University of Zimbabwe offers a short course certificate in M&E, while only the Lupane State University recently started offering a degree in M&E. The following expressions made by the research participants confirm this;

> C5: Over the past years there has been a large increase in M&E resources and training available online that NGOs can make full use of to improve the competency for their staff in M&E.
>
> C1: M&E is now a profession offered at universities at various levels, up to bachelor degree. Zimbabwe universities are now offering certificate courses in M&E that are flexible to allow participation of people that have full time jobs. This creates a great opportunity for staff to be trained in M&E and this will contribute greatly towards professionalising the M&E practice.
>
> C2: The emergence of associations like the Zimbabwe Evaluation Association (ZEA) that offer various M&E related trainings provide NGOs with opportunities for providing training to their M&E staff so as to improve practice.

Hypothesis 3: While the research generated evidence that donor compliance requirements and enforcements do promote adoption of M&E systems by NGOs, it was clear that the benefits outweighed the following negative implications;

NGOs M&E Systems Dependent on Donor Decisions and Funding: The findings laid bare the donor dependency syndrome on M&E resources and M&E decisions by most NGOs. Participants reiterated the fact that NGO M&E systems are more implemented to satisfy project funders. While this is good for accountability, concerns were raised on the consequences that have been experienced where the adoption and practice of M&E approaches becomes unsustainable and inconsistent based on when and which projects have received M&E donor support. Both the local and international case study NGOs assessed in this study reported that they do implement different projects from different donors and not all of their projects have M&E systems, neither are M&E processes applied consistently across all projects. The two case study NGOs confirmed that different donors have different M&E requirements.

Perceptions from research participants pointed to the fact that when M&E systems are run more for the donors than for the project quality management purposes, they become a box-ticking exercise, just to fulfill donor requirements. It emerged in this research that at times M&E is often conducted only when reports are due for submission such that manipulation of M&E data production occurs to portray a good picture of the projects that make donors happy. Related NGO malpractices have also been reported in other studies that include Baggini (2015). Such are the negative effects of donor prescribed M&E systems, compared to objectively determined M&E systems where the NGOs are involved in deciding on the M&E systems that are relevant to their situations and contexts. One participant had this to say about NGOs' dependency on donors for M&E decisions;

C5: Most M&E practices are designed to satisfy donor expectations and different donors have different expectations and requirements. This brings about the variations. Also funding levels and appreciation of M&E has an impact on approaches, methods.

For both NGOs, some of the inter and intra inconsistencies in their M&E systems approaches, templates and tools vary according to their different donor requirements and standards, as well as the available resources. This unstandardized M&E systems exposes NGOs to different interpretation and application of the M&E system theories. NGOs' overreliance and dependency on donors for their project M&E systems decisions and resources came out as one of the top most reasons for gaps in the adoption and application of recommended M&E approaches. Local NGOs are reported to have more donor compliance pressures than international NGOs who have closer relationships to donors and they understand each other better. The causal factors identified included; differences in levels of M&E professionalism, overreliance on donor resources and expertise for M&E work and contrasting institutional capacities. Such findings from a different context in Cambodia suggests that the NGO situation in Zimbabwe is not unique, as portrayed by the two case study NGOs, one an international (GRM) and another a local NGO (MeDRA).

Pros and Cons of Donor Prescribed M&E Systems for NGOs: As discussed in the results presentation section, research participants unanimously attributed some of the M&E shortcomings in their NGOs to the general practice by most donors of 'imposing' M&E approaches to NGOs. This findings were echoed across the first two hypothesis tested;

On the second hypothesis (resource capacity of an NGO determines the level of adoption and application of standard M&E system concepts), observations made by this research were that international NGOs have better access to resources, hence they tend to have better M&E practices than their local NGO counterparts. By implication, this finding dovetails observations by Kithinji

et al (2017) that donor resources also influence the capacity of an NGO to implement the standard recommended M&E concepts and approaches.

On the third hypothesis donor prescribed M&E systems were found to also suppress NGO flexibility to use other proven M&E approaches. This was identified as one of the reasons why some NGOs have low adoption of certain recommended M&E concepts as they will be bound to follow the preferred donor approaches. This however is not to say the donor preferred M&E approaches are inadequate, but sometimes they would not be best in certain contexts, while they hinder NGO innovativeness to adopt best practices from elsewhere. This finding mirrors observations made by Sindayigaya et al (2020).

One of the findings of this study was that most NGOs generally do not have organizational M&E strategies and policy documents to guide their M&E work. This was attributed to the fact that they get funding from different donors who have different M&E approach preferences and usually prescribe M&E systems on NGOs. As a result most NGOs use varying M&E approaches for their different donor funded projects which makes it difficult to come up with their own organizational position and identity with regards to M&E strategy. Research participants' lived experiences attest to this, for instance one M&E Consultant who has worked with multiple NGOs in Zimbabwe indicated that;

> *Of the 30+ NGOs I have worked with so far, most (approx. 80%) do not have clearly laid out M&E Policy/Strategy. A possible sign that since NGOs implement different donor funded projects, their M&E strategy varies depending on the donor desired M&E approaches, hence cannot lay down a specific organisational M&E strategy which may end up not in sync with certain donors. This seem to cripple ability to adopt and practice some M&E concepts that they may see fit for their circumstances (Participant C3).*

The prescription of M&E systems on NGOs in Zimbabwe was not only confined to donors, but the research established that even International NGOs are found wanting on this practice. One M&E Consultant who has experience working with International NGOs in Zimbabwe and across the globe shared her experience that some International NGOs in Zimbabwe rely on M&E systems that are centralized at the headquarters of their NGOs and applied the same across their different Country Offices;

> *Centralised M&E strategies in headquarter offices of International NGOs and donors may somehow be divorced from the varying realities prevailing in different countries where the projects are implemented. In most cases, l have seen people deciding to conduct impact evaluation using Randomized Control Trials in emergency communities which are too complex and hard to identify control group. I feel NGOs should be capacitated to identify the most relevant evaluation methods that suit their contexts than be asked to use what the donor or NGO HQ prefer. The evaluability assessment tool would become handy, otherwise a wrong evaluation approach and methodology will give misguiding findings that will add very little or nothing to the reforms. So 'one size fits all' cascading of certain M&E concepts may reflect different 'theory application results'. Contextualized M&E practices must be considered. Otherwise donor driven M&E sometimes force NGOs to manipulate performance in order to show evidence of what is so called quality performance – yet in reality it might not be true. NGO M&E systems and practices are now M&E for funding rather than M&E for quality and impact (Participant C4).*

Since most International NGOs in Zimbabwe implement projects through local NGOs as their implementing partners, this scenario has ripple effects on those local NGOs who will get prescribed M&E systems from the International NGOs. This is over and above the prescriptions that come from donors, thus exacerbating the confusion on the local NGOs as they will have to

deal with using various approaches in applying the same M&E concept. For instance, (Brown 2017) explain that for the same logframe concept some organisations use varying terms and templates such as the 'results framework', 'project logic'. Expert participant C4 adds that "*M&E framework, Results Framework M&E plan and Logframe may not always necessarily be developed for one project as some may be unnecessary duplication*".

A Synthesized SWOT Analysis of the Case Study NGOs' M&E Systems:

To bring together the three hypotheses and tell a single story that addresses the research topic that sought to assess the factors influencing the effective application of M&E systems by NGOs, the following sections gives a synthesized SWOT analysis that consolidates the findings.

Table 4.8

A Synthesised SWOT Analysis of the Case Study NGOs' M&E Systems

Strengths *(in NGO M&E practice and M&E Theories & concepts)*	1	All the tested M&E theories were mostly deemed to be relevant, applicable and effective for NGOs work despite the NGO capacity and other constraints to effective application.
	2	The research found that donors also use NGOs for trialling new concepts and approaches and that makes it easy for M&E theory application and improvement.
	3	The INGO had qualified and experienced M&E staff and most are able to retain them for years. This made their M&E systems stronger and more sustainable than the LNGO.
Weaknesses *(in NGO M&E practice and M&E Theories & concepts)*	1	The under-budgeted project M&E department mainly for local NGO affected effective theory application.
	2	The Local NGO had inability to attract and retain skilled and experienced staff hence affecting their projects M&E processes.
	3	The two NGOs' over-reliance on donor funds and M&E technical support is unsustainable.
	4	One 'size fit all' M&E systems are prescribed by donors regardless of NGO capacity.
	5	Multiple M&E concepts & frameworks with duplicating functions confuse NGO M&E staff, resulting in unstandardized application of the M&E Theories, concepts, frameworks, tools and approaches.
	6	Donor pressures caused the two NGOs to over prioritise M&E for donor compliance at the expense of M&E for effective project management, effectiveness and results.
	7	Lack of formal collaborative partnerships between academia and NGOs inhibits the nexus between theory and industry practice and bridge the gap between the two.
	8	Non application of critical ex-post project impact evaluation concept makes M&E systems incomplete affecting evidence generation for effective project management.
	1	The emerging adaptive project management approach by the INGO allows for constant improvements in NGO M&E practices.

Opportunities *(for NGO M&E practice and theory improvement)*	2	Continued availability of donor funding and technical support for NGO work is an opportunity for improving M&E systems.
	3	The recent establishment of an M&E professional body, the Zimbabwe Evaluation Association. This is a good opportunity to support the M&E profession and improve practice.
	4	The study found that donors & NGOs are known for supporting the development of innovative development models. An opportunity to develop & improve new M&E theories.
	5	International donors usually have highly qualified and experienced M&E staff who can provide technical support NGOs that they work with in Zimbabwe. Alternatively they have the capacity to hire expert consultants to provide that support.
	6	Multiple researches produced by scholars and universities are available for use by NGOs.
Threats *(to NGO M&E practice and M&E theory application)*	1	Unsustainable NGO M&E Systems whose continuity is disrupted by the end of projects donor funding and staff contracts' expiry.
	2	Emerging global challenges put pressure on donor funding, such as climate change, new disease outbreaks, conflicts. M&E budget allocation can also be affected.
	3	Unethical M&E practices by some of the NGO staff that don't follow recommended theoretical/conceptual and professional standards in order to come up with donor reports that conceal organisational and projects under performance, to attract more funding.
	4	Availability of non-academically and professionally researched and validated M&E concepts and frameworks on the internet, which may not be suitable for use.

Note: Compiled by Author (2022)

It was important to bring the findings together in a synthesised analysis that brings bring out not only the weaknesses, but also the strengths and opportunities that can be leveraged to improve both theory and practice. This summarised presentation also helped in understanding the internal and external organisational threats to effective application of standard M&E concepts and frameworks, including the organisational competencies, capabilities and resources which are key elements of a SWOT analysis as posited by Galea & Sammut-Bonnici (2017). To ensure the study comes up with recommendations that mitigate against worsening of the existing situation and slowing down of progress made so far by the two NGOs, the analysis included an identification of 'threats' to the effectiveness of the NGOs' M&E systems. As proposed in the methodology Chapter therefore, a SWOT analysis was conducted premised on Gurel & Tat (2017)'s opinion on its effectiveness in assessing organisations, their projects and systems. This being a qualitative study, the methodology was deemed appropriate in view of Nazarko et al (2017) assertion that the SWOT

analysis is qualitative in nature as it helps to identify organisational issues and their causal factors well.

Research Findings versus Literature

Organisational M&E Strategy and Policy: The research findings on the two NGOs' M&E strategies sit well in literature. For instance, Scope Training (2017) define an M&E strategy as a high level guide for an organisation to continuously track, review, analyse project and programme performance throughout its life cycle to enable accurate reporting of progress and achievement of objectives. The development and implementation of the M&E system and all its tools and frameworks are therefore guided by this overarching strategy document. The desk review of the case study NGOs showed that none of the NGOs had this strategy and policy document in place, instead one had a project specific M&E strategy and the other was in the process of developing one. In both cases the reason was that M&E strategies are guided by the respective project funding donors, who usually have different strategic and policy guidelines to M&E hence having an overall organisational strategy seems redundant since it may conflict with different donor requirements. Participants gave the following analysis of the use and characteristics of an M&E Strategy;

An M&E strategy outlines a set of rules, norms, and standards to be followed under M&E, and is a living document that is referred to when conducting major surveys like baseline surveys, mid-term and end of term assessments for all the organisational projects and programmes.

M&E Budget: There wasn't much divergence between research findings and what literature discusses in as far as M&E budgets are concerned. Lahey (2015) laments the fact that usually M&E receives the lower priority at project allocation stage despite its pivotal role in project management, and this is attributed mainly to resource constraints. Putting in place and running effective M&E systems require at least 10% of the project budget according to international threshold standards

(Emmanual, 2015). A study by the KPMG (2014) indicated only 6% NGOs do meet this 10% standard, with the majority found to be below 5%. Common perspectives were shared by participants with regards the M&E budget, the main ones are discussed as follows;

The organisation should have a separate M&E budget for each project which gives the M&E unit flexibility and power to carry out its mandate. There is need to ensure that sufficient budgets are crafted to ensure all necessary M&E processes are done than to suspend some like outcome surveys and mid-term assessments on account of lack of budgets. The M&E budgets should also be set in a way that they can focus and help to train and build the capacity of M&E staff to perform their duties better.

GRM International always budgeted between 5-10% for M&E, and it was always adequate, including to hire special expertise, as well as undertake staff on the job training. On the contrary, some NGOs were said to sometimes either under-budgeted or spend M&E budget lines on non-M&E activities. M&E budget is always limited and in most cases ride on other project activities which compromised the effectiveness of M&E processes. Feedback from M&E experts who were part of the sample indicate that M&E is generally not well funded in Zimbabwe, despite M&E functions being resource intense for good quality M&E functions. Studies and analysis done show that the M&E budget must be between 8-10% of the total budget of the project. However, hardly 2% of resources are allocated to M&E especially for the small local NGOs. For USAID funded activities, it is now a requirement that the M&E budget minimum be about 8%, to ensure M&E activities are well funded and generate the required quality of outputs. Resultantly, NGOs prefer to compromise on methods and systems for M&E, adopting instead cheaper methods that at times do not adequately measure achievement of outcomes.

M&E Staff, Skills and Expertise: Literature supports the research findings in many ways. According to Nalianya & Luketero (2017), evidence exist that NGOs adequately resourced with

qualified, skilled and experienced M&E personnel are better equipped to achieve their project objectives. However, evidence exists that skills shortages are still abound. In case in point being Wanjiku (2015) who observed that in Kenya there is widespread lack of M&E expertise in designing logframes, setting indicators, designing data collection tools, including even modern data collection skills. NGOs should pay enough attention to M&E staff and their skills to ensure delivery of expected results. Due to scarcity of M&E skilled personnel, investments in on the job trainings become paramount.

For the International NGO, all M&E staff were highly qualified and experienced, mainly holders of Bachelors and Masters Degrees mostly in Development Studies, Economics, Statistics and other Social Sciences, and some with some additional professional certificates in M&E specific. Some NGOs, mostly smaller local NGOs, did not have experienced and qualified M&E staff and donors ended up seconding consultants support out M&E roles. Apart from using internal staff, both NGOs also relied on outsourcing M&E consultants to give an independent eye. M&E experts interviewed reckon that with professionalisation of M&E, Zimbabwe NGOs have started recruiting qualified M&E personnel and this is significantly contributing towards improving the M&E practice. With Universities now offering short courses and diplomas in M&E, the skills are improving. However, there are still areas of concern where skills remain limited, for example, evaluations and evaluation design. Seems most progress has been made in activity monitoring. The quality of evaluations still must improve, to include more complicated designs that incorporate counterfactuals.

M&E Technology: According to KPMG (2014), M&E in Africa was still labour intensive as a significant proportion of NGOs are still paper based. Related to this, a study by Nalianya & Luketero (2017) found out that 50.6% NGO M&E staff were still experiencing difficulties in accessing and understanding Management Information Systems (MIS). For both the International

and Local NGO, participants expressed that M&E started being paper based and required more time in collection sending and input to the databases. Over time, the use of ICT was embraced with staff having tablets for data collection using simple software for data collection. This had the advantage of sending information in 'real time', hence most participants advocated for the adoption electronic based M&E and shared the following views;

According to M&E experts' feedback, Zimbabwe NGOs fare well on data collection methods, especially through the use of electronic management systems because they are more effective and accurate and information is easily accessible. However, this has been seen to be a recent development. Migration to tablet/online data collection systems was indeed found to improve time & cost efficiency, reduce transcription errors and generally improve the quality of data collected. Paper based systems were found to be susceptible to transcription errors as well.

M&E staff continuous trainings is needed to keep up with the technological changes and ensure the skills of M&E staff are in pace with such changes to ensure that they take advantage of technology and perform better. Examples include migration from paper based M&E using tables and software like Kobo for data collection.

The adoption of technology in M&E also reduces expenses, for instance electronic data collection becomes combined with data capture/entry, a process that needed a separate budget and separate staff. There was a sharp increase in the adoption of ICT based M&E during the Covid-19 pandemic, a context that pushed most NGOs to engage in virtual data collection especially during the lockdown phase when project staff could not physically carry out work in project areas.

GRM International always used technologies and software – including GIS software, SPSS, CSPro, EpiInfo and Database software. However, during the first phase of the LFSP programme, one major weakness was that of reporting unverified figures with a lot of duplicates as there was no properly managed database. Reports were usually submitted very late such that even the M&E

team couldn't have enough time to verify the reports. From isolated experiences, the challenge with technology came when the system fails and there is a risk of losing all the data. In addition, the widespread unavailability of internet services in most rural districts as well as some remote areas that do not even have strong mobile phone network signals, made some electronic M&E tools difficult to use. MeDRA was in the process of working on improving its management information systems and databases with an option of using 'one drive'. The common database is the beneficiary database. The use of databases is improving though most NGOs particularly local ones do not have adequate resources to invest in good databases and adding additional functionality of such databases eg adding quick analysis tables.

Project Theory of Change: Literature agrees with the research findings in that a ToC consists of a sequence of hypotheses on how a project will realise change and under defined contextual conditions and assumptions (Serrat, 2017). Reinholz & Andrews, 2020) explains that the ToC shows the cause-and-effect linear relationship between project activities, outputs, outcomes, impact and goals. It therefore demonstrates the steps through which a project is intended to undergo and the chain of results it is supposed to achieve as a build up to the achievement of the final intended objective and goals. It ought to take into account unforeseen contextual factors that may arise during project implementation distorting the originally hypothesised change logic (Reinholz & Andrews, 2020). There was a good understanding and use of the theory of change among participants, based on their responses that outlined the following experiences within their NGOs;

A project theory of change sets out a pathway of desired changes and the elements of the theory of change included a description of how change happens in a particular context, and the definition of underlying assumptions. The project M&E system is modelled around the theory of change in order to check the progress towards achieving the change than to wait at the end of

project evaluation. Because ToC guides not only M&E but the whole project implementation and management, the concept is not supposed to be an M&E tool only but also understood by all project staff. This presented a challenge to the rest of the team who were not quite familiar with M&E jargon and flow diagrams. Complicated diagrams at first glance but got clearer with staff training. Feedback from MeDRA indicated that some projects have a theory of change, and some operate without depending on the donor specifications.

Project Logframes: In tandem with the research findings, literature defines the logframe within the context of the theory of change, hence buttressing the observations that its development is guided by the ToC. Umhlaba Development Services (2017) define the logframe as a Project Matrix or Project Planning Matrix that breaks down the key components of the Theory of Change; Inputs, Activities, Outputs, Outcomes and Goal. The Center for Disease Control (2018) observed that the two are usually used interchangeably for the same purpose, therefore are complementary to each other. Just like participants shared their experience with how the logframe ought to be adaptive to change, Auriacombe (2016) asserts the same especially for projects implemented in dynamic contexts in order to maintain relevance and accommodate any emerging needs. Participants unanimously provided consistent explanations and perceptions on the logframe concept, its use and importance;

The Logframe, as a results framework are mandatory for all projects and these guide M&E processes measuring and working towards the results. There is need to update this document if the context and operational environment changes. In many cases both the ToC and logframe come already prepared by the donor and based on outdated context analysis extracted from secondary data. Without updating these with grounded fresh assessments the project design becomes poor and not 100% relevant, hence the need for a participatory and consultative process in updating the

project theory and design. This did not always happen for all projects either for the local and international NGO as it depended on the finding donor.

M&E Framework:

Research findings were based on the following experiences shared by participants in as far as shared the use of the M&E Framework concept in their NGOs;

Both NGOs recognize the importance and role of M&E frameworks in their project management. While GRM International had existing project M&E frameworks, MeDRA was in the process of developing one using a contracted expert consultant. The M&E framework clearly follows the theory of change and the logframe as all the three concepts outline the project objectives, inputs, outputs and outcomes of the project, while with the logframe they both specify the project performance indicators. The M&E framework is essential as it linked the objectives with the process and enabled the M&E team to know what to measure and how to measure it. In sync with the same experiences of constantly reviewing the ToC and logframe, likewise MeDRA was in the culture of relooking at the M&E Framework annually to find out whether the framework is still relevant. Observations made by M&E expert participants suggest that Zimbabwe NGOs seem to have mastered developing M&E frameworks and plans. However limited resources limit their operationalisation, with M&E activities selected and included in the framework based on the available budget, M&E staff and skills, and not on the importance of the activities.

M&E Performance Indicators: Project performance indicators are part of the logframe and are the basis of measuring the performance and results achievements of a project. KPMG (2014) define them as project performance benchmarks. Myrick (2013) stresses that an indicator should be 'objectively verifiable' meaning it should be clear and measureable. Lahey (2015) reiterates that indicators as the cornerstones M&E processes should be SMART. Literature

therefore confirms the attributes of performance indicators as stated by participants from their experiences;

Each project has a set of performance indicators and targets which help to measure project performance and also to hold organisations accountable to what they committed to achieve. Both NGOs were confirmed to the development and use of an indicator tracker which was being completed on a quarterly basis.

In some instance unrealistic indicators and targets are set making the implementation a chase after the wind as so many indicators are sometimes set with unrealistic targets. Depending on the nature of the project, some indicators are usually too technical to master and track correctly for most M&E staff who usually may not possess technical skills in specific project subject matters hence they have to work with the relevant experts for that project, such as nutritionists and engineers.

Setting indicators is a very technical skill not easy for some M&E staff who struggle to adhere to the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results oriented and Time-bound) standards of indicators. In most cases indicators are influenced by the donors, but NGO input is usually given room.

Project Baseline Assessments and Evaluations: Monitoring and evaluating project performance is based on baseline figures that establish the status of the situation before the project is implemented to identify the starting point or reference point of monitoring and evaluating the progress and achievement of results (KPMG, 2014). This definition mirrors the experiences shared by participants with regards to how baselines assessments in their NGOs;

At times baseline surveys are done long after the project has started implementation which does not give a correct before picture which should be used to measure project performance and changes after implementation. As a way of improvement there is need to do baseline before any

implementation starts. The baseline studies always came in handy in informing project design and project evaluation. As observed through desk review of NGO M&E systems, MeDRA staff confirmed that some of their projects have baselines depending on donor requirements while some just undertook needs assessments. Equally, project evaluations are rarely done depending on budget availability.

Mid-term and end line evaluations are done and usually the mid-term is done by the internal M&E unit while the end line evaluation is done by external consultants on approved terms of reference. The end line evaluation should be done well after the end of project not when the project is closing because the project results that remain after 6 months or more after project completion will reflect the realistic impacts of such projects than the one that is done when the operations are still underway. In most cases, however no follow up is done after the project has come to an end. There is therefore need to budget and allow for end of term evaluations to be done after the project life cycle so as to see the real impacts and inform better the future projects.

M&E Data Analysis Techniques: Literature clarifies more on some of the revelations by research participants on their experiences with data analysis within their NGOs. For example, Creswell (2018) asserts that most NGO projects do have both qualitative and quantitative outcome and impact indicators in their project M&E systems, therefore the monitoring and evaluation of such indicators therefore need to be aligned to the respective qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods and tools. Umhlaba Development Services (2017) emphasise on the importance of using this mixed data collection methods and approaches in measuring indicators for purposes of triangulation and getting a full picture from both quantifiable measurements and descriptive information. Qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods help to triangulate or compare and augment the same data collected using different methods to ensure credibility and validity. Qualitative data is known to provide in-dept information that may also

come in the form of feedback, opinions and testimonies of changes brought about by the project in a community (Umhlaba Development Services, 2017). Numbers and percentages alone without explanations are inadequate to understand the full picture, so there is always need for a story behind every figure.

Feedback from participants expressed some worries over limited data analysis techniques and gaps for some NGO M&E staff. Such limitations contribute to challenges in the correct application of certain M&E concepts, approaches, tools and methodologies, and this falls back to the issue of M&E skills gaps. The following feedback was therefore key to consider within this theory versus practice study;

The weakness within most NGO M&E units is that most M&E staff are not acquainted with data analysis and the majority only do data collection and data analysis is centralised or done by a few. There is therefore need to empower all M&E staff with data analysis techniques as this will also improve the way data will be collected and the kind of data that will make sense during data analysis stage. MeDRA management still see gaps in data analysis to adequately inform programming and they view this as an area still under improvement.

Experiences from M&E experts who have provided consultancy services to NGOs in Zimbabwe, including to the two case study NGOs reveal that NGO M&E staff consider data analysis as a term more associated with quantitative data, hence the general neglect of qualitative analysis. Most project evaluations, including those done by the external consultants are predominately quantitative yet NGO project deliver a lot of qualitative results and impact. There is a tendency of attempting to quantify even the unquantifiable achievements hence distorting the impact in the process. Qualitative analysis is usually limited to the Most Significant Change Story concept for most NGOs showing a neglect of other qualitative analysis concepts such as content analysis which are part of the techniques not seem to be widely used despite their relevance in

enriching M&E methods. To their credit, there appears to be good progress in the application of quantitative methods.

One M&E expert expressed that from experience working with NGOs, impact is one of the most misused words as it is commonly used in explaining change and yet it should be used where there is a counterfactual that makes it possible to make an attribution. Most NGOs conduct performance evaluations that are then presented as impact evaluations. This is one example of wrong application of M&E theories and concepts, based on lack of knowledge and skill, hence the need for staff training and capacity building rather than theory improvement.

Reporting and Use of M&E Evidence: There were sentiments by participants that expressed reservations around the culture of undertaking M&E just to satisfy donor reporting requirements at the expense of the utilization of such data for project performance improvement. M&E expert interviews reflected that Zimbabwe NGOs need to transition from just meeting reporting requirements to conducting more analysis and sense making of the data and information collected to inform design of future projects and to support adaptive management of projects. However, there were some positives experiences also experienced by some participants within their NGOs;

After generating M&E evidence, learning events are organised during the life cycle of the project as reflection and learning opportunities created to draw lessons from the project implementation. Knowledge is generated and documented to share with donors and government agencies. Besides using data for reporting and being accountable to both the donors and government there is need to improve on data usage by using it for future programming and improve on the ways of doing business to avoid same pitfalls over and over again. Most small local NGO implementing partners' M&E activities were primarily driven by accountability purposes and rarely lesson learning and the desire to improve programming. Without external supervision, they

would stick to bare essentials of M&E. MeDRA still expressed the desire to improve on impact reporting that adequately exhibit the amount of work that the NGO is being undertaking.

Primary and Secondary Data Triangulation of Findings

It was important to establish the trustworthiness and credibility of the research findings before delving into Chapter 5 discussion of research implications, recommendations and conclusions. Devault (2019) and Statistics Solutions (2020) recommend the application of data triangulation through the use of different methods and data sources to generate accuracy of the research findings. Hence, a mix of primary and secondary data collected from a diversity of sources as articulated in the research methodology. Pursuant to this, secondary data from the two case study NGOs' M&E systems and project documents were analysed. This process was conducted through a desk study guided by a checklist tool designed to take stock of the existence and application of the standard M&E system elements in the NGOs organizational and project documents, as suggested by Mok (2017) and Watts (2019). Through this exercise, strong complementarity, convergence and confirmatory of the primary research findings was established.

Generally these findings from the primary research conducted resonate positively with the secondary data generated from a desk review conducted on the two case study NGO's M&E and project documents. When juxtaposed with existing literature, the research findings did not come up with unexpected results, surprises or conflicting results not supported by literature. Most interesting was evidence in the different project documents that indeed some donors stipulate and dictate what M&E approaches to use for their funded projects. Partly because of such pressures exerted on some resource constrained NGOs, the desk review observed some M&E concepts, approaches and frameworks that were included as part of the M&E systems yet there was no evidence of their application. This proved true the general perceptions by research participants that

at times NGOs just 'pay lip service' incorporation of donor M&E demands in their M&E systems as a formality and 'ritual' simply to pacify donors.

On the flip side, there was also some evidence from the desk study that some donors did not make M&E a requirement for their funded projects. This was more evident for projects funded by banks, church organisations and individual philanthropists. This was probably because such private donors were not acquainted with formal M&E systems, and all they wanted was financial accountability and seeing the projects established. In such cases, some NGOs did not bother to develop own M&E systems for those projects whose funders did not provide M&E frameworks to follow. Such projects were implemented with limited monitoring and some were never evaluated at the end to quantify impact. On the other hand, some international donors allowed the NGOs to design and conduct their M&E processes in their own manner as long as the M&E systems can account for the needs or expectations of the donors upon project completion.

Furthermore, evidence contained in the NGOs project design documents showed that ¾ of projects indeed had theories of change, and those without were found in the local NGO. The projects evaluation reports reviewed also showed that most of the theories of change had not been updated over the life of the project except for the International NGO where there was evidence of constant updating to respond to the ever-changing operating environment. More scrutiny of the NGOs' project documents also showed that most projects indeed had logframes, confirming the earlier finding that the logframe was the most widely adopted and practiced M&E tool. Again it was the local NGO found to have a few of their projects implemented in the past without logframes.

Skills Training and Capacity Building to Improve M&E Practice: The NGO M&E Strategy Documents reviewed acknowledged the need for continuous capacity building of project monitoring and evaluation staff, to ensure that staff have the requisite skills and expertise to deliver M&E services. The GRM International M&E Strategy, in particular clearly articulates how it

would fully equip the project staff and stakeholders to carry out monitoring, evaluation and learning systematically. The planned trainings included skills in understanding M&E principles, data collection, analysis and management, as well as stakeholder participatory monitoring and evaluation to ensure continued project monitoring and evaluation beyond NGO pull out. Each of these trainings were to be targeted to specific project staff and stakeholders based on identified needs.

Secondary data obtained from the case study NGOs MeDRA and GRM International show that at the end of project funding phase, both organisations do handover projects to local Government, community leaders or local project management committees are put in place to take over in the respective districts of operations. The project reports indicated that these stakeholders normally lack the requisite project management skills, including monitoring and evaluation experience. In some instances before the NGOs exit, they usually assist training and capacitating these stakeholders to be able to continue with all aspects of project management. However, it is not always the case that enough M&E skills are acquired, while on the other hand M&E operations suffer to the detriment of the project smooth continuity.

Desk Review Findings of the Case Study NGOs' M&E Strategies: According to the two NGOs' M&E strategy documents reviewed, as best practice, both case study NGOs (MeDRA and GRM International) undertook some evaluation of their respective M&E systems and made acknowledgements of their weaknesses and areas needing improvements. Most of their findings dovetail with most of the findings of this study. Most importantly the two NGOs put in place strategies to improve although some of those recommendations were yet to be actioned because of reasons that align with the findings of this research, such as lack of resources, inadequate M&E staff, limited technical skills, among others.

MeDRA Case Study: In the interest of objectivity, in 2016 MeDRA engaged an external consultant to facilitate a rapid assessment of their organizational strategic review, which

culminated in the development of a 5 Year Strategy (2016 – 2020). Although the NGO did not have a stand-alone M&E Strategy, the organizational strategy had a section on M&E strategy, and the following key findings and recommendations contained in the assessment report resonate very well with this study's primary research's findings;

There is need for MEDRA to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation system, particularly the incorporation of regular organizational learning reviews to enable the use of M&E data to improve projects design, implementation, performance, results and impacts. The Log Frame for the 5 year period for the 4 strategic pillars needs further work, hence the need to give due priority to populating the log frame with support from M&E technical members of the board. Limited M&E Resource Capacity - Adequacy of financial, human, skills, IT and other operational resources for monitoring and evaluation is key for operationalising an M&E strategy.

As postulated by Groene and Branda (2006) it's one thing to deign sound M&E systems but it's another to operationlise them. So, designing a 5 year strategy that incorporates M&E direction was one success, but operationalising can be a challenge if not well oiled by adequate resources. For MeDRA the strategy was implemented between 2016 and 2020 and by 2021 when this study conducted the data collection, there were still gaps in M&E practices which the management and the staff attributed to lack of capacity especially limited M&E staff. The organisation only has one M&E person who is supported by non-M&E officers. Translating M&E theories, concepts and frameworks to practice requires adequate resources, both human, technical skills, financial, hardware and software tools.

GRM International Case Study: Equally, GRM International, in their 2018 – 2021 M&E Strategic document did a self-assessment of their M&E system and presented the following weaknesses that needed improvement;

Inefficiencies from a paper-based data collection system, which created a substantial data capturing load for the organisation, resulting in challenges with timely analysis and reporting. To address this, more resources were allocated towards electronic data collection and capture making use of tablets and cell phones. Subsequently, a cloud-based Management Information System (MIS) was developed in 2019. Data flows became IT based, with platforms like Open Data Kit (ODK), Kobo Toolbox and Geographic Information System (GIS). This aligns well with this study's second hypothesis which theorises that resource capacity is a key factor in NGO adoption and effective implementation of standard M&E concepts and approaches.

Challenges with M&E under-reporting given the complexity of the LFSP project, ensuring consistent reporting was a challenge at the beginning. In response to this challenge, a realistic data quality assurance process was put in place, including ensuring closer monitoring of field data collection and reporting.

Dovetailing with the primary research feedback from participants, the GRM International M&E Strategy document points out that investment in M&E systems pay off when partners and stakeholders effectively use that information for adaptively managing the projects management and improvements. The strategy further states that there is a risk of failing to strike a balance between just collecting and analysing M&E data just for donor compliance, and going further to gather important insights that aid in managing the projects efficiently and effectively. As alluded earlier, apart from accountability purposes, project monitoring and evaluation data is meant to be used for learning, quality improvement and inform future projects designs. It is therefore important for NGO M&E strategy document to reflect how this will be achieved. Without this, there will be limited evidence to show the M&E concepts such as the theory of change, the logframe and M&E framework are being effectively practiced. The GRM International M&E strategy had this

explicitly documented and evidence from key informant interviews confirmed this was also being implemented. The strategy stated the following;

Evidence, reports and other products produced under monitoring and evaluation activities were mostly shared among key stakeholders, such as donors, Government and even externally to other donor funded programmes as well as regionally and internationally. These shared reports provided some detail on how projects are progressing towards set results and outcomes. Strategies for dissemination of knowledge products varied depending on intended audience, but efforts were be made to ensure wider circulation. Throughout the duration of the projects implementation, knowledge generation and dissemination was informed by the needs of different groups and stakeholders. Feedback was also given to project beneficiaries and the local community leaders, where NGO staff had to communicate some of the project evidence and information in local languages. In this respect, the M&E Strategy would feed into the NGO Communications Strategy where different types of media would be used for knowledge sharing though reflective processes designed to facilitate communication, feedback and dissemination of key M&E findings and lessons to fine tune the project designs, and implementation strategies. In fact, this was meant to allow programme stakeholders to achieve double loop learning (cross learning), improve on effectiveness and efficiency of projects and accountability.

Lastly, GRM's International's LFSP Project M&E Strategy boldly points out that the strategy would require adequate financial resources to operationalise it and ensure it is effectively implemented. As discussed in literature review, there doesn't seem to be convergence on the actual proven recommended budget allocation to project M&E, with Lahey (2015) recommending 10% of the total project budget, compared to other scholars. The GRM International M&E strategy makes mention of a 5-8% threshold of the total budget, which it attributes to international practice.

The variances could possibly be based on different types of projects which may not require the same level of M&E budgetary allocations.

Summary

   Role Monitoring and Evaluation in NGO work: The M&E system definitions and explanations by research participants resonate well with literature. Monitoring and evaluation indeed play a major role in ensuring the quality projects are designed, implemented, and attain the desired developmental outcomes, hence the need for NGOs to have robust M&E systems and practices to ensure maximum project results (Marshall and Suárez, 2014). Added to this, SAMDI (2007) views an M&E system is a set of components which are related to each other within a structure and serve a common purpose of tracking the implementation and results of a project. Feedback from participants defined M&E and its function as follows;

   M&E functions within the organisation are clearly set out as a support function that are meant and focused on improving the programme effectiveness. For both case study NGOs, the M&E system has helped the organisation in identifying problem areas early, involvement of stakeholders, and giving transparency to funding partners. It also helps in future planning for new projects. Feedback from the sampled M&E experts/Consultants revealed that the findings from the two NGOs resonate well with their experiences and observations from most NGOs in Zimbabwe, particularly the local NGOs who indeed struggle with where to place M&E in their organograms. The M&E function struggles when the M&E team is buried under projects, where in most cases the M&E function is then viewed as some kind of policing act. The role of M&E is primarily accountability and learning, and as such creating a separate independent M&E unit independent of the projects has been found to be better in aiding the M&E function of accountability (includes reporting) and learning. International NGOs seem to be well structured to allow the M&E unit to

thrive. The M&E function should be centralized to maintain independence and objectivity than for them to be stationed together with those implementing the programmes. The reporting structure for M&E unit should not be such that the M&E reports to the Project Manager who is in charge of the programme they are monitoring, they should be independent and only be able to share reports with the Manager implementing and not be accountable to them as this destroys their independence and objectivity. The autonomy of M&E is absent hence at times it is easy for program managers to influence the manipulation of M&E findings if they are not in favour of the projects they manage. This defeats the whole purpose of M&E as a programme management and quality improvement system.

Relevance and Effectiveness of the M&E System Theories: The research findings discussed earlier demonstrated the strong nexus between M&E theory and practice in the NGO sector, and the implications on project quality. It is one thing for NGOs to and practice M&E theories and concepts but it's another thing for those theories and concepts to be relevant and effective to the projects being implemented. This third hypothesis therefore helps in tackling this last part of the research topic. It is one thing for NGOs to adopt and practice M&E theories and concepts but it's another thing for those theories and concepts to be relevant and effective to the projects being implemented. Generally all the tested M&E theories were confirmed to be relevant and effective to NGO work, albeit with some 'issues' that scholars are challenged to have a relook.

Participants also observed that most M&E theories, concepts and frameworks are relevant to NGO work but their adoption and effective application is not optimised due to various factors, the most highlighted in this research findings being the limited M&E skills and expertise, inadequate M&E budgets and other resources, lack of NGO leadership commitment to M&E, as well as donor prescribed M&E approaches that may be irrelevant to some NGO contexts. Almost all these limitations were found to be more associated with local than international NGOs, hence

they lag behind in project monitoring and evaluation at the detriment to the quality and impact of their projects. Otherwise the research found evidence of huge potential in the relevance and effectiveness of M&E theories and concepts to NGO work based on the following reported achievements that were also confirmed through desk research conducted on the case study NGOs' project documents;

M&E Practices have greatly improved the quality and performance of projects even though more still has to be done to improve M&E standards. The widespread application of M&E theories and concepts is evident in the increased professionalism and increased reputation and trust of the NGO in Zimbabwe by key stakeholders such as the government and funders. M&E theories have greatly helped NGOs to put in place systems that can easily detect projects implementation inefficiencies and provide data to inform improvements.

New Knowledge Emerging from the Findings

One key purpose of research is to generate new evidence and contribute to the body of knowledge to fill existing gaps (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013). The following aspects of the findings show the research's contribution of new knowledge to the existing literature on the testing, analysis and application of M&E system theories;

First, an 'M&E Theory to Practice Conceptual framework' developed to guide this study successfully managed to test the M&E system theories qualitatively. The research findings make this framework a new knowledge available not only for future research as a tried and tested the conceptual framework for M&E system theory testing, but also new knowledge for use by NGOs in guiding effective application of M&E systems.

Secondly, the findings established that one of there are some unpublished M&E system concepts and tools out there being innovated by NGOs out there. The INGO, GRM International innovatively developed new M&E concepts and frameworks, like the Group Maturity Index

(GMI), the Quality of Life Index (QLI) and the Participatory Health and Hygiene Index (PHHI). One of the tools, the GMI had started to be adopted by MeDRA as a best practice. This presents an opportunity for the intellectuals to research, analyse, develop and publish M&E theories and frameworks from these for wider use in the project management space.

Third, the rejection of hypothesis 3, *"Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs",* revealed the negative implications of Donor support to NGO M&E systems. The research established how some NGO M&E practitioners succumb to the donor pressures to the extend to being forced to engage in unethical M&E practices and deceptive M&E reporting so as to appease Donors. The findings indicate how this is done through manipulating the M&E system theories to detriment of project effectiveness. In such cases there is no effective application of the M&E system theories for sound project management.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Robust NGO monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems play a major role in ensuring that quality projects are designed, implemented and attain the desired developmental outcomes. Khan (2003) argues the available standard M&E systems, standards and best practices are based on thorough conceptual basis. However, anecdotal observations of gaps between M&E theory and practice in some NGOs and the implications on project effectiveness prompted this study. For instance, an analysis by Chibonore (2015) pointed to the existence of gaps in NGO M&E practices to the detriment of projects success. Similarly, Lahey (2015)'s assessment of International Labour Organisation (ILO) projects revealed poor or non-existent monitoring and evaluation systems to the detriment of project management and project quality. According to Omonyo (2015), while theory is not always the reality, it is usually an evidence based proposed guide to practice. Based on that critical role of theory, observed shortcomings and inconsistencies between theory and practice cannot be easily ignored without further research to understand if the problem lies with the theory or with its adoption and practice. Literature, for instance Gwadoya (2012) established that there were gaps in proper understanding of M&E concepts in most donor funded projects, particularly in the developing world where the majority of NGOs are found.

It was on this basis that this study was undertaken in an in-depth qualitative manner to get to the root of it and unravel the real causes of the problem, and provide practical and case study based context specific solutions, than the usual generalized recommendations. The purpose of this research was therefore to provide a comparative analysis of selected NGOs' M&E systems and practices against the standards set by the M&E system theories. This was with a view to test the relevance and applicability of the M&E system theories, concepts, frameworks and tools against the existing NGO practices. According to Ahmad (2016), the primary purpose of research is to

establish facts, come up with conclusions and find solutions. To guide discussions for this Chapter, the objectives of this study are here reiterated as;

Identify any gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness.

Analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories comparatively between by local and international NGOs.

Come up with suggested solutions for recommendations to improve both theory and practice and contribute to the monitoring and evaluation body of knowledge.

Methodologically, a case study deductive qualitative research design was preferred based on its strengths as guided by Hyde (2000) who recommended it as a realist post positivist research paradigm. This suited the research objectives, as stated in Chapter 1 which are better answered through in-depth context specific qualitative explanations derived from informants' perceptions and experiences as asserted by Rashid et al (2019). This claim is comparable to the argument posited by Starman (2013)'s perspective that case study approaches are more valuable in practice oriented fields, of which M&E is one of them.

The research was not without its own limitations and mitigation measures had to be taken to reduce the possible implications of the subjective biases that come with qualitative research from both the researcher and the research participants. For instance, the researcher's own preconceived perceptions as suggested by Turnbull et al (2021) and the biases by research participants who may be influenced to provide information that portrays a good image of their case study NGO as having strong M&E systems. The researcher also adhered to the standard research ethical protocols and principles. These were guided not only by UNICAF research guidelines but also supported by institutions such as the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) whose role is to promote

the upholding of moral and professional values in the whole research processes until the publication and use of results (ESRC, 2012). The researcher therefore followed the following research ethics which Madushani (2016) instruct as mandatory for researchers conducting any research involving people participants. These included ethical clearance, informed consent, and confidentiality of participants and information, treatment of participants with dignity and respect.

Overview of Chapter 5: Following up to the discussion of the research findings in the previous chapter, Chapter 5 serves to wrap up the thesis by discussing the implications of the research findings, proffering practical recommendations and drawing logical conclusions. Firstly, the implications will place the results back into context by describing how the results respond to the study problem, fit with the purpose of the study, align with the conceptual framework and demonstrate significance. In addition, it links the findings to available literature. The limitations that may have possibly affected the results, their interpretation, the findings and conclusions are also discussed. A description of whether the results and findings were expected given the available literature is also presented, including the potential explanations for any unexpected or conflicting results. Since the research was also meant to inform NGO M&E practice, implications to practice are also discussed within the context of the findings and literature as well. Of importance is how the findings address the first part of the research topic, '*factors influencing the effective application of M&E system theories in project management by local and international NGO*s'**.** The implications section includes both the theoretical implications, implications to practice and to future research.

Secondly, this chapter moves from implications to recommendations in an attempt to come up with solutions that respond to the research problem way forward to the issues arising from the findings and within the context of literature. The recommendations are broken down into recommendations to address theory flaws and variances between theory and practice,

recommendations for practice especially for NGOs and their development partners, and the recommendations for future research. All these categories of recommendations are presented within the context of the research topic, the research objectives, the research problem, the hypotheses and significance of the study. Third and finally, the chapter closes with conclusions that outline the take home messages drawn from the entire dissertation study, its findings and their meaning with respect to theory, literature, future research and practice. This also includes the benefits of the study findings to the NGO sector and to M&E practitioners, relevant professional bodies as well as the academia and research institutions. Just like the recommendations, the conclusions also place the findings back into context in terms of how they respond to the study problem, demonstrate significance, and contribute to industry practice and to the existing literature.

Implications

The results, findings and the hypotheses testing conclusions reached in Chapter 4, do have implications to M&E theory and practice, and in turn inform future research as well as to the study's recommendations. Implications are also related to the limitations and how they might have affected the research and its findings, how they demonstrate relevance, significance and are fit for purpose. The implications also place the research findings into context, how they are in sync with the conceptual framework and how they relate to literature, contribute to literature and how they address the research problem and how they are fit for purpose. The implications also provide clarifications for any conflicting and unexpected findings. Last but not least, the implications delve into how the research contribute to the existing body of research on monitoring and evaluation and NGO practice.

Study Limitations

Research limitations and challenges are common in any research process and it is important is for the researcher to mitigate against their effect on the findings. As presented in Chapter 4, the data collection process, analysis and interpretation of results did not encounter any serious limitations and challenges, and the findings were largely supported and confirmed in literature. The following limitations experienced in this study did not affect the research process itself, the results nor the findings much because of the mitigation measures that were instituted, as is discussed below.

First, data collection was conducted in 2020 to 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic era and this affected 100% physical face to face interviews with all the sampled participants. According to Dahlin (2021) face to face interviews promote direct interface between the researcher and the participants and this enhances the quality and accuracy of data collected. As mitigation strategies, assurance was given to all participants that Covid-19 prevention protocols were to be adhered to during face to face interviews, mainly social distancing and wearing of PPEs, and this was fulfilled. In addition, all participants who were not comfortable with face to face interviews were given an option of virtual interviews and were requested to conduct them as video calls in order to maintain the desired face to face interviews.

Second, the secondary data used was generated from a desk review of the two case study NGOs' project documents whose accuracy was unknown. As presented in the research methods Chapter 3, it was going to be inadequate to understand the case study NGOs' M&E systems from primary data collected from research participants only without desk reviewing the NGO M&E system documents. SIS International Research (2021) advises that the use of available organisational information in research is a form of gathering intelligence to better understand internal systems and functions. In this case, the NGO and their donor partner organisational

documents, including websites, social media platforms, project reports and M&E records presented a window through which the researcher could further understand their M&E systems and operations. While this is the positive side of the process, the inevitable limitation cautioned through literature is that one can never be sure of the accuracy and credibility of these organizational documents (Creswell, 2013). The scholar reasons that the shortcomings and biases of the individuals who collected, analysed and compiled secondary data cannot easily be detected in organizational documents, hence the accuracy of the unpublished reports cannot always be guaranteed.

Third, potential withholding of some important organisational documents and information by the case study NGOs could also have been a possibility. After requesting NGO reports, one cannot rule out the possibility of NGOs choosing which documents to share and which to withhold, for various reasons. For instance, project evaluations reports containing strong NGO ineffectiveness or poor achievement of results may not be shared with externals to protect the image of the organisation. Some records and publications maybe censored in the spirit of confidentiality and protection of sensitive organisational information. It is for this reason that literature discourages researchers to rely and make conclusions based on secondary desk review alone (Creswell, 2013).

Implications to Practice

It is also important to discuss the findings in terms of their implications to project effectiveness because the ultimate objective for improving NGO M&E systems is to have effective projects that develop communities and solve societal problems. Projects that are managed efficiently, attain impact and in a sustainable way. Not just implementing projects for the sake of it wasting donor funds. The research findings, across all the three hypotheses do culminate into this

objective. But first, how does literature define and explain what project effectiveness. There seems to be consensus among scholars that Project Critical Success Factors (PCSF) concept of (a) the cost effectiveness of implementing a project, (b) effective delivery schedule, (c) achievement of quality results, and (d) impact and project beneficiary satisfaction, are the key parameters of project quality and effectiveness (Ling, 2004; Kamau & Mohamed, 2015; Tengan & Aigbavboa, 2016; Wanjala et al, 2017). To align with this study topic, the Project Management Body of Knowledge, a projects management standards resource guide then weighs in, stressing that monitoring and evaluation is significant in attaining project quality and success (PMBOK, 2021).

Overall, the results and findings from primary data, supported by desk review of the case study NGO project documents show that adoption and application of standard M&E theories and concepts contributes to better project quality, implementation and impact. A study by Sindayigaya, Ngarambe & Nyamweya (2020) observed that various factors that compromises adoption of recommended standard M&E concepts and models do hinder development and performance of sound M&E systems, and in turn affect project quality in terms of efficient implementation and achievement of project results. This research also confirmed the same and the following are examples of positive and negative M&E practices and their implications on the quality of NGO projects;

Inadequate M&E Budgets Cripple Project Management Protocols: Resources define the capacity of institutions to manage their businesses efficiently, effectively and successfully (OECD, 2006), and resources come in various forms, from financial, adequate skilled staff, assets and others. As discussed in the findings, one of the most limiting factor in the delivery of monitoring and evaluation services is financial resources. Literature suggests varying thresholds of M&E budget allocations. In his assessment of NGO projects funded by the ILO in different parts of the World, Lahey (2015) established that the best practice for budgeting for monitoring and

evaluation would be 5-8% of total project budgets. On the other hand, Emmanual (2015) argues that putting in place and running effective M&E systems require at least 10% of the project budget. A survey conducted by KPMG (2014) shows that just 6% NGOs do meet the 10% international advocated threshold of their project budget allocated to M&E, with the majority well below 5%. The worst case example found in this thesis was as low as 1% for some local NGOs in Zimbabwe, and the implications were clear from the research findings included the lack of a basic project logframe for some local NGOs' projects, while a good number of projects were reportedly not even evaluated at the end. This is a clear implication on the violation of the standards of project M&E as stipulated by Markiewicz & Patrick (2016). One participant shared that one of the projects in his NGO failed to adequately track results due to an under resourced M&E team because M&E activities were given the last priority hence inability to conducted project field monitoring.

M&E Skills Shortages affect NGOs' Capacity to Run Effective M&E systems: Skills shortages was a major finding of this research, and the problem was attributed to the inadequacies found in the assessed local NGO case study. Evidence exist that NGOs able to attract qualified and experienced M&E staff have stronger project management capacity that produce project results (Micah & Luketero (2017). In a study on M&E systems and NGO projects performance in Kenya for example, the World Health Organisation (WHO) observed inaccurate and misleading maternal and neonatal mortality data as a result of making use of community health workers with limited M&E skills to collect data (Micah & Luketero, 2017). This nexus between M&E skills, effectiveness of M&E systems and project quality is further stressed by Nyakundi (2014) who provided evidence that increasing technical skills by 1 unit results in a 0.122 efficiency in M&E practices and a boost in achievement in NGO project results. Kithinji et al (2017), also weighed in with a demonstration that investing in M&E training strengthens M&E practice and evidence based project management efficiency for better results. Likewise, Basheka & Byamugisha (2015)'s study

of the state of M&E in NGO projects in Africa also identify skills and expertise as the major bottlenecks to attain quality standards in development programming. Such evidence do explain this study's observations about the rift between local NGOs and International NGOs in terms of staff and skills capacity in Zimbabwe. The thesis findings are therefore not unique as highlighted by Muzinda (2007)'s study of local NGOs in neighbouring Botswana, whose M&E processes were also found to be ineffective because of limited M&E financial resources and M&E expertise.

A desk review of this study's case study NGOs' M&E systems showed that between 2014 and 2019, the local NGO did not have an M&E qualified and experienced staff in its team, mainly due to inadequate human resources budget. As a result the NGO management and Project Officers had to take up M&E responsibilities albeit without the requisite M&E qualifications and experience. For instance, the Communications Officer had to double as the M&E Officer and had to put a lot of effort to read and learn on the job and put in place in Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PMER) Framework. The process therefore took long and meanwhile the projects were not receiving adequate and relevant M&E attention.

Implications to Projects Effectiveness and Quality Improvement: Incidentally, feedback drawn from research participants seem to be concur that project quality is defined by the effectiveness and achievement of the project set targets and results. The research analysed both primary data and conducted secondary data desk review of NGOs M&E and project documents. Participants were asked to; *"Comment on how the NGO's M&E systems and practices have contributed or affected the quality and performance of projects",* and the following are samples of the experiences they shared;

> *B1 - The M&E systems and practices have affected positively the quality and performance of projects, cost effectiveness and achieve better results for the benefiting communities.*

B3 - The M&E processes have helped organisations to inform project changes and adaptation of projects to changing contexts to keep the trajectory of achieving good results.

B2 - Most local NGOs' project quality lags behind due to their M&E activities being driven primarily driven by donor accountability purposes and rarely lessons to improve programming. NGOs should prioritise learning as well and not just reporting to donors. There is need for the right balance between accountability and learning.

B4 - M&E systems have contributed much on the quality and performance of the projects through informing efficient allocation of resources.

B6 – Helping in identify gaps as they arise and make timely amendments to achieve the desired results.

A1 - The M&E system has helped the organisation in identifying problem areas early.

A3 - Projects did not benefit fully from M &E systems because there was no learning component to allow reintegration of M&E findings to enhance project effectiveness and efficiency.

A4 - The M&E system have managed to contribute to the efficiency of the projects by providing information that can improve the quality of programming. The practice provide consistent data on project performance which can enable implementers to assess outputs and detect irregularities during the project cycle.

A5 - On going monitoring helps in improving the performance of the project where corrections are picked and rectified thus improving the quality of the project as staff can easily assess what worked and what did not work, why it failed and how they can adapt to the ever-changing environment and improve or make revisions based on evidence not assumptions.

A6 – M&E is aiding Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) of projects.

C1 - M&E Practices have greatly improved the quality and performance of projects even though more still has to be done to improve M&E standards.

The main themes emerging from these extracts on NGOs M&E practices' contribution to projects quality are;

M&E is enabling early detection of project inefficiencies to inform timeous project quality improvements.

There is improved project performance and achievement of results as a result of adoption of standard M&E approaches.

There are however some sentiments that some projects from the local NGO case study have not yet fully realised the project quality benefits of M&E.

The project quality improvements reported did not come as a surprise. In fact, these findings are corroborated by literature too. For instance, Kamau & Mohamed (2015) advise that M&E is a key project management function that contributes significantly to efficient and quality programming that leads to project success.

Implications to Donor Practices: Hypothesis 3 findings confirmed that donors were responsible for some of the positives and negatives of the two NGO M&E system findings, on one hand they fund NGO M&E capacity improvements while also imposing inconsistent M&E systems and exerting too much compliance pressure that push NGOs into cutting corners in M&E reporting. According to Micah & Luketero (2017) sometimes there is a lot of pressure from donors, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), for NGOs to demonstrate project results, or risk losing funding. This, as perceived by the majority of the research participants pushes NGOs to engage in M&E malpractices in an effort to report positive results to donors and protect their funding. It is assumed that without such pressure the incidences of manipulating M&E concepts would be reduced resulting in correct application of M&E theories that generate objective project performance evidence. Whether caused by donor pressures or otherwise, the research findings show the existence of some unprofessional practices in the management of project evaluations and these too have implications on projects quality. Participants, especially the M&E consultants who were part of the sample, shared their experiences with cases of corruption in the awarding of M&E

tenders by some NGOs, to the detriment of proper execution of some project evaluation processes. One example being a testimony to the effect that;

> *"There is now a lot of corruption in the NGO sector with regards getting contracts to conduct project evaluations as most NGOs now prefer to hire Consultants who they can arm twist to produce evaluation findings that are favourable to them in order to paint a good picture about their performance. The NGOs will also be under pressure to please their donors and position themselves for future funding", (Participant C3).*

The implications to project quality comes when the evaluation consultants' objectivity becomes compromised and get biased in their work, and Fraser & Morkel (2020) describe the effects of using wrong evidence in decision making as potentially disastrous. This study found out that this is done to manipulate the project evaluation findings in favour of the interests of the NGO itself, its donor or funding partners, or other interested stakeholders. To achieve this, the NGO or its donor intentionally hire evaluation consultants who they can influence or are known to them, for instance consultants that have a relationship with the influential NGO leadership and management. This is analogous to what White & Phillips (2012) term 'friendship bias', which may also extend to situations when evaluators develop relationships with project staff who may have interests to have their project shortcomings exposed to their bosses. Research participants also claimed that in most cases 'carrots' favours are dangled to the evaluators in the form of promises of future evaluation tenders, hence the term 'contract renewal bias' as well (White & Phillips, 2012).

There are therefore many interests from all parties here, the NGO can also engage in this unethical practice in order to present impressive project evaluation reports to their donor partners so that they remain favourable for future funding. This way, the objectivity importance of the independence of the external evaluator stressed by Umhlaba Development Services (2017) is

compromised and consequently the correct adoption and practice of relevant evaluation concepts by the concerned NGOs become affected and the whole purpose of project evaluations is defeated. It then becomes a vicious cycle where the quality and performance of such projects is affected and cannot be improved and in turn future projects cannot benefit from such evaluation reports. A chain of biases would have been created, from the corrupt NGO, to the Consultant and the evaluation reports themselves.

As insinuated by Camfield, Palmer-Jones, & Duvendack (2014), sometimes biases affect the adoption or correct application of the most relevant project evaluation theories, concepts and approaches. According to Fraser & Morkel (2020)'s study on the state of monitoring and evaluation in Anglophone Africa, including Zimbabwe, such compromises are not only confined to project evaluations, but even to the whole M&E system and practice. The study revealed that at times M&E systems can be deliberately designed in ways that divert attention from the real problems and focus more on easy issues and with loopholes for easy corrupt practices (Fraser & Morkel, 2020).

In relation to this study's research problem, objectives and hypotheses, such findings imply that proper project monitoring and evaluation methods, principles and protocols as dictated by theory are not practiced as is. The gap between theory and practice therefore remains, but not visible, hidden under the carpet of corrupt practices. This gives a false sense of comfort not only to donors but to scholars as well that the standard evaluation theories are relevant and being adopted and practiced effectively yet this is only on paper based on manipulated evaluation reports.

The Independence of the M&E Function in NGOs Enhances Objectivity: Research participants, as M&E professionals in both NGOs lamented the lack of independence of their roles from the rest of the departments in their organisations, especially those teams responsible for implementing the same projects that have to be monitored and evaluated. Monitoring and evaluation teams in NGOs

are generally viewed as having a policing function whose purpose is to looks for faults that make other NGO staff uncomfortable. Experiences shared by the majority of research participants indicate that at times even NGO management also feel uncomfortable with M&E to the extent of making attempts to influence the evidence generated from M&E processes. In such cases the objectivity of M&E staff becomes compromised and in turn the application of standard M&E theories and concepts exhibit some gaps which may not necessarily be associated with theory weaknesses but rather practice issues in NGOs. The following are examples of participant feedback that bears testimony to this;

Independent execution of M&E functions is normally the challenge. M&E reports at are usually diluted by the leadership. In instances where objectivity is promoted, M&E accountability practices have also assisted in detection of fraud and other malpractices in NGOs (Participant C2).

In most cases the M&E function is then viewed as some kind of policing act. Creating a centralized M&E department to maintain independence and objectivity is encouraged. The autonomy of M&E is absent hence at times it is easy for program managers to influence the manipulation of M&E findings if they are not in favour of the projects they manage. This defeats the whole purpose of M&E as a project management and quality improvement system (Participant C1).

Implications to Theory

The study findings identified a few theory gaps whose implications are discussed leading into recommendations to improve theory. The most recurring theory gap echoed by the majority of participants was around M&E concepts and frameworks that appear to overlap into each other to serve the same monitoring and evaluation purpose. This was viewed to be creating confusion

and inconsistency in the application of M&E theories by the NGOs. The problem was also attributed to the academia and research institutions who practitioners thought needed professional bodies that coordinate the process of developing and generating theories, concepts and frameworks specific to each industry of practice. Participants were of the view that donor organisations were also busy using the NGOs and their project beneficiaries as research grounds to test one concept after the other, hence churning out unpublished multiple concepts into the NGO industry. Some of these concepts have actually been developed with a lot of testing using the donor funded NGO projects and have proven to be innovative, relevant and effective. However they need to be scholarly reviewed and published for authenticity. For instance, GRM International apart from effectively relying on the proven M&E system theories, the NGO developed own innovative M&E tools and frameworks that included the Group Maturity Index (GMI) for monitoring grouped project beneficiaries. Similarly they innovatively developed other conceptual M&E tools like the PHHI Index for monitoring Participatory Health and Hygiene projects, as well as the Quality of Life Index to monitor the support given to people living with HIV & AIDS. The lesson from such initiatives is that the development of M&E concepts and frameworks is not exclusive to academics only but also practitioners. The unfortunate part of such internal frameworks is that they don't always get published for scholarly reviews or wider use within the industry.

Now to the specific theories, concepts and frameworks that were identified by this study to have some challenges during application. The Theory of Change, the Logframe and the Results Chain were found to be used interchangeably or in combinations by and between two NGOs, rightly or wrongly for the same purpose. The same applies to the M&E system, M&E strategy, M&E framework, and the M&E Plan. To provide examples, what one NGO called their M&E system turned out to be either the M&E framework, the M&E Plan, or the M&E strategy for the other NGO. Reading through literature, one also finds some variations in the definitions and purpose of

each of these, confirming the claims by research participants in this study. For instance, The University of Kansas Center for Community Health and Development (2018) traced the history of the logframe approach to the logic model which is argued to be a version of the theory of change, also arguing that the distinction between the two is misty. In agreement, The Center for Disease Control (2018) observed that the two are usually used interchangeably for the same purpose, further causing M&E practice inconsistencies across NGOs. Be that as it may, borrowing from (Gwadoya, 2012)'s perceptions, the research could not rule out possibilities of mere cases of lack of understanding of the distinction features of these theories and concepts, rather than them being real duplications. Patton (2003) presumes that this could be caused by lack of comparable definitions or different interpretations of the same theories, which may be a cause for confusion to the field of practice. It seems understandable from a theoretical perspective that as scholars seek to test and improve theory there is always bound to be variations depending on differences in conceptualization (Omonyo, 2015).

A Desk Review Analysis of MeDRA's M&E Framework: One of the secondary data documentation shared by MeDRA for a desk review was their Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (PMER) Framework which represented their M&E framework. The document, which also had elements of an M&E strategy, contained logframes for all their projects as well as an M&E Plan. As it is the documents is very useful to guide the NGO's M&E processes, yet most literature does not define an M&E Framework the way they innovatively attempted to present it in a way that reduced the burden of having to develop separate documents as most literature stipulates. Looking at theory versus practice, there are concepts and frameworks that theoretically are easy to have in separate documents, but practically and operationally not that easy according to the research findings discussed earlier. For instance, the Theory of Change and the Logframe are strongly linked to each other, the same way it may be difficult to comprehensively interpret the

M&E Framework in isolation from the ToC, and also from the M&E Strategy and the M&E Plan that operationalize it.

From the findings, there seems to be a blurred and thin line between an M&E system, an M&E framework and an M&E plan. At times the M&E Framework gets referred to the same way as the M&E Plan, and this operationally tended to confuse M&E practitioners within the case study NGOs. As a result, it would appear like the terms M&E System, M&E Framework, M&E Strategy are at times used interchangeably to mean almost the same thing by different sets of literature. For instance, Markiewicz and Patrick (2016) consider an M&E Framework as an outline and plan of operationalizing project monitoring and evaluation processes. On the other hand, Simister (2015) considers an M&E plan as an M&E framework or an indicator matrix that defines project indicators, how they will be measured, who will collect the data and how often? How the data will be analysed, the reporting timeframes, and how the information will be used. Lahey (2015), in defining M&E Plan calls it a 'Performance Measurement Strategy', and this appears a mirror definition of an M&E Strategy. Technically, if critically analysed all these definitions make sense, until they get to be used by less qualified and experienced M&E practitioners who unfortunately were found by this study to constitute a significant proportion of the NGO M&E staff in NGOs in Zimbabwe, and Africa in general (Muzinda, 2007; Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015).

An Overview of Unexpected and Conflicting Findings

As evidenced by how the findings were supported by literature, and the acceptance of two of the three research hypotheses, to a large extend the results and findings from this study were generally as expected. It is in a few areas like in hypothesis 3 where donor practices were found to be contributing to inadequate adoption and inconsistent application of some of the M&E system theories, concepts and frameworks. From another angle, this could also be viewed as conflicting

findings where donors were found to be contributing to NGO adoption and application of the M&E system theories while at the same time causing some inconsistent application of the same. For instance, on one hand international donors appear to be blamed for imposing their preferred M&E systems on NGOs to the detriment of ownership and relevance of NGO M&E practices. On the other hand, they were hailed for contributing significantly to the M&E capacity of NGOs. However, in both instances these findings were explainable and supported by literature therefore irrefutable. Evidence has been generated to show how donors have been investing in NGO capacity building (Schaumburg-Müller, 1996). This study also found the same, as confirmed by participants' feedback that include participant C1's comment that *"Most local NGOs in Zimbabwe do not have an institutional M&E Policy and strategy. Where it is available its development has been advocated for and supported by a donor for accountability purposes".* The same participants were emphatic about how bad it is for donors to impose M&E systems on NGOs.

The evaluation of the research findings also sought to assess participants' understanding of the key M&E systems elements, concepts and approaches and see how that fits within the definitions given by literature. This analysis helped to establish the knowledge levels of participants with regards to what an M&E Strategy is and its purpose. As M&E practitioners, this is the basis upon which they are able to translate M&E theory to practice, and effectively so. Despite the M&E practice gaps discussed in this chapter, it seems participants both from the local and international NGOs have a good knowledge about M&E. This somehow presents some contradiction between M&E knowledge and practice, especially for the local NGO where most of the gaps were identified. This leaves a question and an assumption that the M&E theory versus practice gaps identified through this research may not necessary be entirely a result of knowledge gaps but other factors. These may include limited M&E resources and donor related issues that

force the M&E officers to apply the M&E system more for the donors than the intended project management purpose.

It is hoped that while seemingly contradictory, the findings could be applying to different contexts, hence this could be an area of further research as will be discussed under the implications and recommendations sections of chapter 5.

Recommendations for Application

One of the main objectives of research and theory testing is to help find solutions to development problems (Ahmad, 2016), hence this section on recommendations for application. In this case, application would be by the NGOs, including their relevant partners such as donors and others with roles in the NGOs' M&E system development and implementation. Wacker (1998) emphasized that theory ought to be applicable for it to be useful. True to the objectives of this research, theory has to be tested and be challenged through research based evidence for it to be proven as relevant and effective to practice (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). This study, being a practice oriented research had to culminate in advancing possible solutions to NGOs, their donor partners, to M&E practitioners, their professional bodies, including M&E training institutions that supply M&E skills to NGOs. The findings point to the role played by M&E in project quality improvement, as supported by Sindayigaya et al (2020), yet some gaps still exist between the M&E system theory and NGO practice. For that reason, there is therefore good enough justification towards recommending enhanced M&E theory understanding and application by NGOs especially the local NGOs. Where theory brings confusion to practice, the recommendations also challenge the academia as think tanks to work with practitioners in making theory more user friendly to practice.

Recommendations for Improving NGOs' M&E Capacity

The issue of a shortage of professionally trained M&E personnel was highlighted by participants as a critical area in need of attention.

Universities in Zimbabwe to Introduce M&E Programmes: The findings pointed to lack of M&E skills supply because academic institutions have not been offering such programmes until recently when a few started introducing such. Based on that the recommendation to enhance the supply of M&E skills to the NGO industry and other relevant sectors therefore becomes inevitable. This dovetails with Acevedo et al. (2010)'s assertion that the sustainability and effectiveness of NGO M&E systems rests on a good supply of relevant skilled human resources, an observations echoed by UNDP (2009). It was noted in the results presentation chapter that there have been very limited supply of M&E skills personnel to the NGO industry by universities in Zimbabwe. Evidence presented by research participants showed that currently there is only Lupane State University offering degree programme in M&E, while the University of Zimbabwe offers a professional certificate only. Therefore more needs to be done by Universities to promote M&E as a field of practice. Professional training on M&E needs to be promoted and improved so as to enhance M&E practice. Literature agrees with these findings, where Basheka & Byamugisha (2015) confirm that M&E as an academic disciple is fairly new in African Universities hence they struggle to supply enough of that profession to the NGOs in the continent.

This study's sample was purposively targeting research participants who are responsible for projects monitoring and evaluation functions in the NGOs. However, a quick analysis of the academic backgrounds of the M&E practitioners who were participants in this study may be tip of the iceberg, where almost half of them hold other degree qualifications that are not related to M&E, yet they are practicing some M&E functions at their respective NGOs.

Table 5.1

Research Participants' M&E Qualifications

Degree + M&E Certificate	Degree + M&E Diploma	M&E Degree	Research & Statistics Degree	Other Degrees
6	1	2	4	9

About a quarter of the participants joined the NGOs with other degrees before they went on to acquire a six months short training course in M&E that started being offered by the University of Zimbabwe. This was arguably the first mainstream M&E course to be introduced by a university in Zimbabwe not very long ago, after identifying that gap. This analysis confirms why the participants rightly pointed out that a good proportion of the current experienced NGO M&E practitioners actually acquired their M&E skills on the job. The situation has been reported in this study to be improving, as observed by Basheka & Byamugisha (2015) who reported a steady increase in M&E as profession and academic disciple in Africa since the 1990s.

Donors to Support System-wide NGO Capacity Building: Fraser & Morkel (2020)'s study of M&E systems in Anglophone Africa, including Zimbabwe concluded that M&E capacity building should not only focus on skills training but rather be a comprehensive system-wide need based process. The argument being that skills shortages are just but one of the causes of poor NGO M&E systems and practices. A look into the whole organizational context and capacity is more curative (Fraser & Morkel, 2020). This approach may have to be all encompassing to include issues of sustainable M&E resources, ICT based M&E adoption, leadership and governance, participatory M&E approaches, NGO ownership versus donor ownership of M&E systems, among other factors. All that resonates well with Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018) observations that most capacity building processes however tend to prioritise M&E technical trainings ignoring the broader organizational capacity issues that make or break the implementation of the same M&E skills being developed.

Organisational culture, leadership, governance and change management are examples of institutional capacity issues that also need attention. Therefore, the motivation for this recommendation stems from the fact that fixing the M&E system only without addressing the addressing the associated factors would be a futile exercise. Related to this recommendation, it is suggested that just imposing an M&E system to an NGO before assessing its capacity and first provide M&E skills development, training and capacity building, adequate M&E resources and the necessary technical support, would be a waste of donor resources.

M&E Professional Bodies to Advocate for Standard M&E Budget Thresholds: With respect to under-budgeting of critical project management functions such as M&E, the relevant NGO and M&E professional bodies need to take a leaf from other professional bodies who advocate, set, monitor and regulate minimum standards for their membership. Lobbying for donors and their funded NGOs to always respect recommended budget allocation thresholds to project M&E processes. This does not only do good to the quality and integrity of the service provided by the NGOs, but also ensures donors resources are efficiently used while the targeted communities benefit from the project and the desired societal development is achieved. Such measures go a long way in protecting their field of practice, maintain quality of service and instill professionalism. In Zimbabwe for instance, the newly established Zimbabwe Evaluation Association may need to consider strengthening that aspect. Equally or alternatively, the Zimbabwe National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations may also consider incorporating that mandate on behalf of their membership, particularly the under-resourced local NGOs.

The other side of the coin involves internal sustainability of NGO M&E systems within the NGOs themselves. Evidence extracted from research participants' lived experiences indicate that most NGO staff, including M&E personnel don't usually stay long in the same organization mainly because donor funded projects are usually time framed for say 3 or 5 years. So, NGOs employ staff

using project specific budgets hence the widespread use of 'fixed term' contracts within the NGO sector. This means when projects come to end and there is no other project to work on the staff contracts come to an end and they look for other jobs in other NGOs that will be having new projects. EDC (2020) identify with this finding, based on observations that the biggest constrain for local NGOs lies in a lot of staff attrition and turnover due to the uncompetitive salaries they offer and the erratic nature of funding sources. As such, whenever a project comes to an end they usually take time before accessing funds for other projects. When this happens, they lose staff at every end of a project so there is no consistency of staff and long term retention of key management, technical and M&E expertise (EDC, 2020). An analysis of the staff movements in terms of the number of NGOs served by the research participants showed that the majority had worked for three NGOs, followed by those who worked for 5 NGOs as depicted in the chart below.

Figure 5.1

Research Participants Experience in Different NGOs
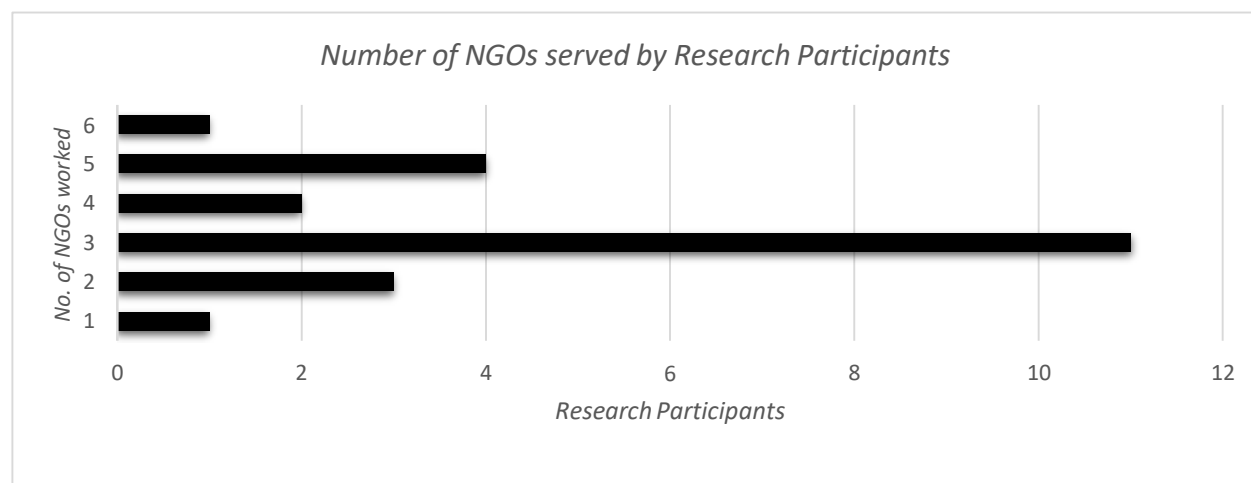
Whilst Micah & Luketero (2017) established that M&E skills are not only acquired through academic education, continuous training, years of M&E experience working in different NGOs also builds one's expertise. However, this research also provided evidence on how M&E staff movements affect continuity and institutional memory of M&E concepts and approaches that

would have been adopted by NGOs. While the on the job M&E training and capacity building that would have been supported by the donors benefits the wider NGO sector when staff move between NGOs in the same country, it is the local smaller NGOs that were found to be the net losers as they struggle to replace any experienced M&E staff that leave. Continuity of any momentum that had been gathered in the proper application of effective M&E approaches is disrupted and the NGO has to start all over again with new M&E staff in the next project. This affects sustainable M&E systems in NGOs, worse still for the small local NGOs who struggle to retain qualified and experienced M&E staff. On the other hand, some donors and International NGOs were reported to second their International M&E staff to come down and do some M&E tasks at NGOs in Zimbabwe, and that approach is not sustainable for the recipient NGOs who remain with not capacity to undertake M&E processes on their own, hence unsustainable.

Recommendation for Donor Organisations to Harmonise NGO M&E Systems

One of the major findings under hypothesis 3 relates to inconsistent M&E systems among different donor organisations who in most cases do fund the same NGO at the same time, resulting in some of the NGOs getting confused. According to Ferris & Graddy (1994) the Agency theory of M&E suggests that funders have different motivations and interests, hence at times they tend to advance their own preferred development models when supporting NGOs. Research findings therefore influence a recommendation for donors to desist from the practice of imposing varying as well as 'one size fit all' M&E systems on NGOs. For instance, this research found out that international and local NGOs have different technical and resource capacities to adopt and implement M&E systems. Basheka & Byamugisha (2015)'s research seem to suggest that some NGOs in Africa could be in infancy in as far as standard M&E processes are concerned. The recommendation therefore suggest to donors to first do an assessment of the NGO and its context

before prescribing the M&E system to use for their funded projects. Additionally, donors should consult, engage and allow participatory M&E decisions to ensure ownership of the M&E systems used on funded projects. This recommendation is a response to the following sentiments expressed by research participants' based on their experiences working in the NGO sector;

Donor driven M&E systems sometimes force NGOs to adopt even concepts that do not work for them, forcing them to adopt some M&E approaches just to appease the donors. This is tantamount to 'M&E for funding' rather than M&E for project quality improvement and impact (Participant B6).

Having worked in other NGOs and exposed to M&E best practices, some M&E officers have their hands tied to specific donor preferred M&E approaches which force them to just use them to meet donor requirements (Participant C4).

Zimbabwe NGOs need to transition from just meeting reporting requirements to conducting more analysis and sense making of project M&E data to inform design of future projects and to support adaptive management of projects (Participant C1).

NGOs seem comfortable just meeting donor requirements, hence their M&E seem to be focused more on accountability and not project quality and impact (Participant C3).

It is unfortunate that NGO M&E systems are more like a testing platform for research and evaluation models by some donors, rather than search for quality of project performance. From my understanding M&E is evolving and become more adaptive, open to learning, innovation and learning from best practices, contextually flexible hence should not be a 'straight jacket'. This cripples innovation and ability to adopt and practice some M&E concepts that NGOs may see fit for their circumstances (Participant C4).

There are standard M&E approaches and practices however, organisations use these differently depending on donor requirements as well as budget. Also other NGOs are

limited by size and capacity of the staff to use all the M&E approaches and practices

(Participant C2).

This context specific approach to M&E approaches mirrors the findings from a related assessment of M&E systems in Africa by Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018) whose findings also indicate that M&E practitioners in Africa express reservations on their M&E systems being assessed using the same yardstick as NGOs in developed countries that do have better technical capacities. Because NGOs differ in size and capacity, and their projects also differ in size, Micah & Luketero (2017) assert that the scope of M&E systems can also differ without compromising on their effectiveness. The rationale being that donors would not do any good to their funded projects by insisting on complex and large M&E systems if the recipient NGOs do not have the capacity to implement them. In addition, the study argues that M&E systems cannot be assessed mainly on technical basis without also looking at the broader institutional and other contextual factors. Such context specific findings were able to come out strongly because of the case study approach adopted for this study. More relevantly was the decision to deductively test theory using qualitative methods as this worked on digging deep in order to extract such dynamics which were assumed not to have been easy to generate through the conventional deductive quantitative design..

Recommendation to Continuously Adapt M&E Systems to Changing Contexts

A desk review of one of the case study NGOs, GRM International's LFSP Project's M&E system generated some best practice lessons and experiences regarding constantly reviewing and adapting the M&E system of a project implemented in a fluid, dynamic and ever changing context. This ensures the M&E system helps to ensure projects remain relevant to the operating environment that may render both the M&E system and the project redundant. To achieve this, the following

case study describes the processes through which the NGO underwent, and could be a best practice to be recommended for adoption by the local NGO and other similar NGOs.

GRM International 2014 – 2020 LFSP Project Best Practice Case Study

A Case for Project and M&E System Iteration and Adaptation

The primary objective of M&E processes is to monitor project implementation progress and identify and inform areas and stages where project adjustments and improvements are needed. This could be caused by changes in the context and changes in the original circumstances and needs meant to be addressed by the project. If such adjustments are not made, the project's original theory of change becomes misaligned to the new context and the project ceases to be relevant in addressing the emerging needs, as the original needs become overtaken by events. One of the key findings of this study was that some M&E systems are designed and remain statistic and unchanged throughout the project implementation phase despite the changing project contexts. Faced with such an ever changing economic and climatic environment characterized by hyperinflation, ever-changing market prices and recurring droughts that affected the Livelihoods and Food Security projects, GRM International adopted an adaptive approach to its M&E system and its projects. The following are some of the contextual changes experienced and adaptations made in project monitoring and evaluation, the improvements made and how the flexible M&E system contributed to projects remaining effective.

Complexity of the Theory of Change and the Logframe Indicators & Targets

In stable environments NGOs can easily implement projects for years without having to adjust the theory of change and logframe. The situation was different in Zimbabwe for GRM International between 2014 and 2020. As the context kept on changing, the projects targets kept shifting, previous achievements got eroded and new community challenges emerged. The organisation was always having to chase new project targets, set new milestones and needs and this meant continuously changing the Theory of Change (ToC) and the project logframe to respond to the not stable context. Overall, this meant updating the M&E system in order to monitor the shifting context and the updated programme. The original assumptions ceased to hold and new risks and assumptions took over and the translation of project outputs into outcomes and impact also became more difficult and all this needed to be accurately reported to donors using accurate M&E data.

Heavy and Loaded Logframe

The multi-crises context presented numerous community challenges to be addressed by the programme and the NGO kept on adding more and more project interventions to the programme in order to respond to the emerging needs. This culminated in the programme becoming complex as it ended up carrying multiple interventions and in the end the LFSP ended up with a 'loaded' logframe, not so easy to implement and monitor effectively. To address this, a decision was made to monitor some of the performance indicators outside of the logframe, a situation not catered for by any M&E theory, concept or framework and not viewed as best practice. However, this somehow worked and can provide food for thought for theory improvement.

Continuous Changes in the Logframe rendered the Programme Baseline Data Redundant

As per dictates of M&E theory, a baseline assessment had been conducted at the beginning of the programme in 2014 and the same performance indicators assessed at baseline were meant to be evaluated at the end of the programme to estimate achievement of project goals and targets. However, the ever-shifting context called for annual revision of the logframe, including its assumptions, outputs, indicators, milestones and targets. The need for the programme to respond to new challenges meant the emergence of new indicators that had not been benchmarked during the baseline assessment at the inception of the programme. This was going to make end of project evaluation not an easy technical task, as some performance indicators lacked baseline values. More complex was the fact that the baselines for different indicators were in different years depending on when new interventions were introduced and added to the logfarme to respond to emerging needs. The M&E team responded by developing staggered baseline values for different indicators depending on when they were introduced into the logframe. The programme logframe therefore ended up with 'multi-year' baselines, a unique situation to development and management of M&E systems. As a result, the end of programme evaluation will have to deal with the complexities of analyses that accommodates the original and revised versions of the logframe and also follow through the trail of ambition changes that were introduced over the years. Again, food for thought for theory improvement and development.

The Dynamic Contextual Changes affected Data Validity and Realtime Reporting

At the beginning of the programme in 2014, the M&E system was largely paper based and not real time, with data being consolidated and analysed on a quarterly basis. With time, the contextual changes became frequent and within a quarter some of the programme data would have been overtaken by events. In 2018, the programme responded by introducing a real-time ICT based

M&E system which included the development of a database system. This approach became critically useful when the programme M&E team could not do field monitoring and data collection for six months due to the Covid-19 lockdown travel restrictions. During this period all data collection was conducted remotely using ICT, including a series of phone surveys.

The need for an Increased M&E Budget

All this calls not only for an increased programme budget, but an increased M&E budget allocation that enabled an efficient system that could monitor and evaluate the increased M&E demands. This called for increased M&E staff, further M&E training in new skills and techniques.

Lessons

The lessons profiled in this paper clearly show that M&E systems are sensitive to contextual pressures and complications as experienced in Zimbabwe during the LFSP programme period. As such the design and implementation of M&E theories, concepts and protocols are recommended to be accommodate context specific demands, and one size fit all frameworks are limiting. Researchers and academics therefore are called upon to up their game and work more closely with practitioners to understand their practical situations and develop context specific and tailor made M&E theories and concepts. Regular training is also required to ensure that the programme technical teams are kept abreast of best practice in the monitoring and evaluation of programmes in fluid contexts.

What Does Literature Say in Relation to this Case Study?

Emmanual (2015) reflected that there are complexities and dynamics contextually specific to Africa that are encountered by NGOs in monitoring and evaluating development projects. These have implications on M&E methodologies, resources and timelines. Micah & Luketero (2017) and Simister (2015) are in agreement that for M&E systems to remain relevant in managing projects they ought to be reviewed in response to changing circumstances during project implementation of a programme. The UNDP (2009) has set standards for its project M&E systems to be reviewed annually to check for relevance and update in response to changes in situations. Uwizeyimana (2020) poses a critical question on how difficult a logframe can remain logical and rigid in a dynamic, chaotic and complex context. Fugita (2010) puts it differently asking how a logframe can be an evaluation tool for a project that implemented in an environment where the caused, effects and results are unpredictable and likely achievable in the long run due to inhibiting factors. With regards to the design of project theory of change, Lomofsky (2016) advises the acknowledgement

of dynamic complexities that have to be treated as beyond the scope of the project, making it vulnerable to unexpected risks. Woodhill (2007) observed that the regular updating of logframes remains theoretical for some NGOs and donors because in most cases the logframes becomes locked when project funding has been approved. This is because there is usually no additional funds to accommodate any modifications to the logframe, hence it usually remains inflexible.

The desk review showed how the experiences from the LFSP project M&E system were guided by the project's M&E Strategy, which acknowledged the operating environment complexities brought by the fragile socio-economic context in Zimbabwe that was constantly and unpredictably shifting and changing. This prompted the NGO to design and implement an M&E System that could be adapted to align and cope with such complexities, otherwise the project implementation was going to be disrupted. Based on this, the strategy itself became a living document which was constantly reviewed informed by a number of M&E reflective processes that were planned and executed. This strategic approach was also confirmed through feedback from interviews with key informants indicating that this process allowed project stakeholders to achieve double loop learning (cross learning), improve on effectiveness and efficiency of internal and external processes and strategies as well as accountability. This then generated the evidence that was required for informing intervention design and adaptation for project effectiveness.

Recommendation to Budget for Ex-Post Project Sustainability Evaluations

The research found that in practice the two case study NGOs' M&E systems will remain inadequate until they and their donors incorporate ex-post project sustainability evaluations in their M&E budgets. The M&E Consultants who were sampled to provide expert opinions and insights in this study opined that the gap is not unique to the two case study NGOs only but seem to prevail across the board in the NGO sector even beyond Zimbabwe. It seems a common practice for donors and NGOs to conduct end of project evaluations immediately at the end of their funding period

while the project continues. Both case study NGOs (MeDRA and GRM International) did not undertake any ex-post evaluations, hence fell short in adopting the M&E system concept in full. For instance, GRM International a relatively well resourced NGO had its 2018 – 2021 LFSP Project's M&E Strategy only makes mention of plans to commission an end line evaluation at the conclusion of the project in March 2021. Beyond that date no ex-post impact and sustainability evaluation is mentioned, which widens the gap between M&E theory and practice.

To its credit, USAID (2021) places emphasis on ex-post project evaluations, which it defines as the most realistic evaluations conducted years after the project has ended in order to give time for impact to be realized and then assess its sustainability over time. This study laments the absence of ex-post project impact and sustainability evaluations as a big gap, which makes NGO M&E systems incomplete. This finding is not unique as project evaluators like Bailey & Sunderland (2019) also observed the same and shared their experiences that NGOs rarely commission ex-post project evaluations. Upon conducting a rare ex-post evaluation for the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the results provided valuable evidence and lessons good enough to make a case for making ex-post evaluations mandatory for any NGO project M&E system. They argue that ex-post project evaluations are rarely commissioned because they have to happen years after the NGO has exited the project and donor project budgets are usually spend and exhausted within the NGO project implementation period (Bailey & Sunderland, 2019). This could be the main possible reason why an NGO or its donor may become unable to revisit and conduct an ex-post impact evaluation five or more years after the end of project implementation phase and pull-out.

As a development practitioner, the researcher finds it paradoxical that the same donors and NGOs that preach long term project sustainability do not put in place measures that ensure M&E processes as part of project management practices continue. The recommendations by Emmanual

(2015) that monitoring and evaluation requires at least 10% of a project budget, demonstrates the important of monitoring and evaluation in project management, ex-post evaluations included. In this case, the implications of not budgeting for ex-post evaluations warrant attention. This is a real developmental problem that warranted further research and analysis to find and understand the root causes and proffer practical recommendations for future sustainable programming.

The research findings present a case for such a recommendation, that M&E should serve current and future development projects, by availing information and evidence of what worked and what did not work in the previously implemented projects to ascertain the long term impact and sustainability of NGO interventions. This way lessons are generated as to the effectiveness of donor supported development projects implemented by NGOs, and to inform adaptation of future funding and NGO development models. As it stands, research participants expressed worries that projects that crumple down a few years after NGO pull out are not formally accounted for by the M&E system because of the absence of ex-post evaluations. There was no evidence found from this research's two case study NGOs that they have conducted any ex-post project evaluation amid claims from participants that this is a trend across the wider NGO sector in Zimbabwe. Only end of project evaluations reports were available from the desk study conducted by the researcher. This leads to another recommendation related to this, of not only reserving projects funds for ex-post project evaluations, but putting in place sustainable M&E systems that go beyond the donor and M&E project implementation period.

Given this background, it is recommended that donors, NGOs, and M&E professional bodies like the Zimbabwe Evaluation Associations work together and put in place a system of setting aside of funds for follow up ex-post impact and sustainability projects evaluations years after the end of projects.

Recommendation for Sustainable M&E Systems beyond NGOs' Pull Out

There seems to be a problem attaching M&E budget to the NGO than to the project because in most cases projects were found to be continue beyond the NGO's period of implementation. This means when the NGO pulls out of the project that would be the end of the M&E budget and the end of efficiently monitoring and evaluation processes. Project management begin to suffer and the project heads for hard times, putting at risk its effectiveness. Continuing with the previous discussion, one possible cause for the two NGOs not to plan for ex-post evaluations could be because their activities are usually confined within the project life cycle concept and donors don't normally fund them beyond that. PM4DEV (2015) defines the project life cycle to imply that a project is implemented over a specified period which runs from project initiation stage, to project planning, project implementation and monitoring, project review, implementation and then project closure. Project evaluations are therefore usually conducted during the mid-term review stage and the end of the project, while project monitoring runs throughout the project life. Rightly so, most literature share the same view that M&E cuts and runs across all the stages of the cycle as each stage requires key inputs from M&E (Kamau & Mohamed, 2015). This is the reason why M&E budget covers M&E processes within and not outside the project life, and the concept of ex-post evaluations is placed years after the project has ended, hence the process lies way outside the project life cycle and becomes deprioritized.

The findings also imply that after the adopting, developing and implementing M&E systems for specific projects, there is no continuity of the system beyond donor funding phase. Meanwhile the project continues without the requisite M&E and related project management resources. Skilled staff leave and the local NGO is left with limited skills and resource capacity to continue running the M&E systems put in place when donor funding was available. The perceptions from participants point to an abrupt end of project monitoring and evaluation when the

responsible NGOs pull out at the end of the project implementation period. This could be the reason why earlier in this chapter there were sentiments of piece meal approaches to M&E practice by NGOs. This unfortunately is creating an M&E vacuum after the donor funded project M&E processes come to an end when the implementing NGOs are no longer there.

As a recommendation therefore, a more sustainable approach to the adoption of M&E theories and concept contributes to project sustainability beyond donors and NGOs. An example of recommended M&E models to be adopted during project design and implementation by both donors and NGOs include the participatory M&E approaches promoted by such scholars as Onyango (2018). The concept, which emerged in the 1980s (Miller & Campbell, 2006), has unfortunately not yet been adopted by all NGOs as per evidence generated by this research. This is said to be caused by monopoly in the development and execution of project M&E systems by the NGOs without the involvement or capacity building of other key stakeholders that usually take over the project management after the NGOs have pulled out. These include Government departments, beneficiary communities, among others.

In agreement, Micah & Luketero (2017) argues that for development projects to be sustained beyond donor support, NGOs should capacitate project stakeholders with basic project monitoring skills, including involving them in project management. This way, at least some continuity in the monitoring and evaluation of projects would somehow continue into the future. There is indeed value in participatory M&E if findings from an assessment of NGO M&E systems in Botswana are anything to go by, where lack of stakeholder M&E participation eroded trust in NGOs resulting in project failures (Micah & Luketero, 2017). When excluded in M&E local leaders and some community groups suspected NGOs where covering up something, hence some of the M&E concepts and approaches did not work as the sources of data included the communities who had lost trust in the systems. However, stakeholder participatory M&E should be applied

carefully so as not to compromise the quality of M&E data as stakeholders do have different M&E literacy and skills levels, hence some may not be given M&E technical responsibilities (Micah & Luketero, 2017). Basic M&E stakeholder training would go a long way in sustaining project management after NGO pull out.

This participatory M&E recommendation, if considered for adoption by NGOs, may provide part of the project M&E solutions on how to sustain effective project management for community development after the NGO has pulled out of the area at the end of the project funding period. Otherwise, if NGO project M&E processes are not participatory, effective project management may indeed only happen when the NGO is still present in the community. This is expected to enhance impact of donor funded development projects implemented by NGOs. This analysis sits well with the researcher's own observations over the years where NGOs invested a lot in community development projects, but long term sustainability could not be sustained after some of the projects started to struggle after the NGO has exited from the project. Project management, inclusive of proper M&E processes ought to continue undisrupted post NGO project implantation period.

According to Scoones (2009)'s sustainable development concept, development processes by either Governments or NGOs would gain more momentum if participatory approaches are employed right from the priority setting stage, during planning, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The framework is designed in such a way that technocrats will not be able to effectively use it without involving the people whose development is intended to benefit. From this perspective, this study therefore considers this research finding as a theory versus practice gap too. It is paramount therefore to consider participatory processes in project initiation, project design, implementation, monitoring and how M&E theories and concepts should be take note of how and who will apply them beyond the NGOs. To this effect, user friendliness of M&E concepts and

frameworks becomes important, so that they don't become a preserve of the technocrats, yet project management in reality becomes the baby of other non-technical stakeholders after the donor funding has ended and the NGOs have pulled out. The M&E capacity building should therefore extend beyond the NGO project staff, to include other stakeholders so that they are able to viably manage the projects on their own after NGO. Theory therefore should be developed in a way that it can also be translated into less technical jargon for easy operationalization by any development player of any level, including the rural communities where most NGOs operate.

Strategies to Curb Unethical NGO M&E Malpractices

Any deliberate unethical malpractices in the execution of project monitoring and evaluation processes affects not only the correct application of M&E concepts and credibility of M&E evidence, but also the quality and effectiveness of project results and impact. As a recommendation to donors and NGOs, there is need to come up with strategies to prevent, detect and mitigate against such practices. The gravity of the issue was laid bare through this study, where M&E experts/consultants who were part of the sample raised red flags on the credibility of some of the project evaluations being produced by M&E Consultants. Allegations were raised on the existence of some corrupt practices by some NGO management with regards to their processes of recruiting independent consultants to undertake end of project evaluations. Examples were given of how some NGOs unethically award project evaluation tenders only to consultants who they can easily influence to 'dance to their tunes' by agreeing to manipulate evaluation findings that show poor project performance. The objective being to present to donors evaluation reports that cover up any incompetence on the part of the NGOs in order to paint a good picture of the performance, success and impact of the NGO's projects.

The issue is not only confined to project evaluations involving external M&E consultants, but also to the objectivity of the internal NGO M&E staff. The study established that the M&E function in most NGOs generally viewed by other project staff as policing act which some NGO management try to influence and compromise to conceal project inefficiencies. It is expected that NGO management, unless they are deliberately involved in unethical project management malpractices should instead be freely supporting the M&E function to help them provide analytical evidence for project quality and performance improvement. For NGOs, donor accountability promotes trust and confidence for future funding, and the role of M&E is not only accountability but also learning and inform project iterative adaptation. As such the M&E function ought to be objective and to achieve that, research participants advocated for its autonomy and independence within the NGO structure to avoid being compromised. When probed for further explanations, a few factors attributed to such practices were brought to the fore. These included;

There is lot of competition by NGOs for donor funds hence some NGOs desperately do this in an attempt to appear good in the eyes of the donors to ensure they remain favourable for future funding.

After struggling to achieve project objectives and targets set by project funders, some NGOs get under pressure to protect their reputation by influencing project evaluators to cover and hide their inefficiencies and project failures, including doing so to cover up for misused donor funds.

While there is some available literature and research already conducted on this subject in general, it was not easy to come across a specific study conducted on manipulation of project evaluations by NGOs in Zimbabwe. There are however a few other related studies elsewhere, that include Heap (1997) on building trust in NGOs, Smith (2010) on corruption development scams by NGOs in Nigeria, Burger & Seabe (2014) on NGO accountability in Africa and Baggini (2015)

on aggressive fundraising tactics by NGOs. Apart from compromising M&E standards with consequences to quality and effectiveness of NGO projects, the issue is a serious unethical professional contact and a threat to the M&E systems relevance. If left unattended, such corrupt practices in project evaluations, although brought to the fore by a few of the research participants, could be the tip of an iceberg. Possible actions to find a solution to NGO Malpractices may include;

Regulation by the National Research Ethics Authourities: M&E functions are research oriented and there ought to be a national body responsible for research ethics in the country to regulate such conduct. The research attributed unethical NGO M&E practices to the need to cover up incompetence by some NGOs, as well as covering up fraud involving misuse of donor funds. On the other hand, findings also attributed this to pressures exerted on NGOs by donors to deliver certain results even under difficult conditions, as well as the pressure to please donors to ensure continued funding in the face of stiff competition for the scarce donor funds. NGO umbrella bodies like the National Association of NGOs in Zimbabwe (NANGO) also have a role to play to maintain integrity of their membership in the eyes of the donor community, the host Government and other stakeholders. Any NGOs found wanting should be taken to task and necessary penalties instituted in order to protect the image of the sector.

Donor imposition of preferred M&E systems on NGOs: The issue of donors prescribing some M&E compliance that may not be applicable to some NGO contexts and their technical and resource capacities was found to put pressure on NGOs as well. Resultantly, for compliance purposes some NGOs would be forced to produce fake project documents to deceive such donors that they are indeed applying such M&E systems. Donors are therefore urged to seriously look into the practicality of some of the M&E requirements they exert on NGOs and their consequences.

Promoting the Independence and Autonomy of NGO M&E departments: Based on the research findings, the role of M&E staff in NGOs must be objective and impartial in order to

produce credible M&E evidence that is useful for NGO accountability, learning and project quality improvement and effectiveness. The recommendation therefore is for NGO management to structure their organisations in a way that make the M&E function to be as independent as possible. Research participants indicated that currently in the majority of cases, the M&E function in NGOs is usually internal and part and parcel of the projects teams. The objectivity of the M&E function then comes into question. To what an extent are they able to freely report on inefficiencies of their fellow project staff members without creating animosity amongst themselves? Feedback from research participants also indicated situations where some NGO managers influencing M&E teams not to report too much negativity even where it exists and needs to be corrected. In addition, some of the sampled M&E experts/Consultants revealed that most NGOs in Zimbabwe, particularly local NGOs, struggle with where to place M&E in their organograms.

The recommendations are informed by suggestions made by research participants that role of M&E is primarily accountability and learning, and as such creating a separate independent M&E unit independent of the projects has been found to be better in aiding the M&E function of accountability (includes reporting) and learning. Some International NGOs were reported to be well structured to allow the M&E unit to thrive. The M&E function should be centralized to maintain independence and objectivity than for them to be stationed together with those implementing the projects. There were sentiments that the reporting structure for M&E unit should not be such that the M&E staff report to the Project Managers who are in charge of the projects that they are monitoring. This creates some conflict of interests, hence they should be independent instead of being accountable to them as this destroys their independence and objectivity. For the two case study NGOs, the autonomy of M&E was generally found to be weak, and this creates a fertile ground for project managers to influence the manipulation of M&E findings. This defeats the whole purpose of M&E as a project management and quality improvement system.

Best Practice Case Study Example of Donor Monitoring of funded NGOs: Most donors have their own mechanisms of monitoring the work of their funded NGOs, while some sub-contract that role to project management consultancy agents. However, research participants perceived that some of the 'cooked' M&E reports from NGOs still go undetected by donors and they get deceived with regards some of the projects they are funding. This points to the existence of some loopholes in donor monitoring systems. As a recommendation, this study's desk review of the case study NGOs' M&E systems and project documents took note of one of the donors (FCDO)'s best practice 'Annual Review' system. Through this approach, every year the donor undertakes an intensive monitoring and review of the projects being implemented by their NGO partners. This study found the process to be thorough and objective, while participatory and transparent to the NGOs. The following are examples of highlights of key findings from FCDO's selected Annual Review reports on the Livelihoods and Food Security Project in Zimbabwe between 2014 and 2020.

Table 5.2

Case Study Example of Donor Monitoring of NGO Projects

Year	FCDO Project Monitoring Findings of GRM International LFSP Project
2015	The following M&E processes have been completed;
	- Refinement of the ToC and Logframe
	- The development of a programme level evaluation framework
	- Assessment of implementing NGOs' M&E capacity
	- Development of baseline survey and associated sampling strategy
	- Development of approach to quarterly (cohort) monitoring and tools
	- A comprehensive baseline survey for impact evaluation is underway which will be completed by August 2015.
	- A centralised Management Information system (MIS) is being developed and progress is on course.
	- mid-term evaluation will be carried out in 2016

2017	The project's Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation (MRE) component seeks to deliver robust monitoring, reporting and evaluation of the LFSP, and facilitate internal lesson learning throughout the programme's lifetime. A number of evaluative studies were conducted during the year under review and key among them was the midline evaluation. The key findings of the midline evaluation that was carried out concluded by November 2017 confirmed that: - LFSP has benefited the poorest farming households. - Agricultural production and crop diversity has increased substantially since baseline, particularly biofortified and drought tolerant crops. - LFSP has been successful in targeting women. - The proportion of LFSP farmers accessing financial services has increased. - Farmers' main source of market information is direct contact with LFSP stakeholders and extension workers. - Participation in markets among the poorest households has increased significantly in LFSP districts. - Cash shortages are not helping smallholder farmers to effectively participate in markets. - There is evidence that households have improved their food security. Household hunger has decreased and households are consuming an increased variety of foods.
2018	- A number of changes to the log frame were made following the last year's annual review. This started with the theory of change (ToC) of the programme which was revised, in phase 2, the programme theory and logframe should more formally track the degree of systems-level change expected of the programme. - DFID monitored the programme through quarterly field visits, joint steering committee visits, quarterly programme coordination meetings and monthly bilateral progress meetings with the managing organisations. DFID also received quarterly financial and narrative reports on progress. - In the last year, DFID commissioned a Consultancy firm to carry out quarterly field verification visits to help verify the validity of APN and MD beneficiary lists – which are the main methods of calculating programme reach. This was done through spot checks on farmers who are on the list to ascertain whether they are or have meaningfully participated in the programme. In addition brief interviews with beneficiaries and opportunistic discussions with key informants such as village headmen and LFSP staff were conducted to identify any programme delivery and quality issues at field level. - Four rounds of these verification visits have been carried out reports with recommendations produced for each visit and compilation report of the issues raised has been produced. Emerging themes include data quality review and MIS design. These recommendations will be picked up and addressed.

	- The M&E thematic group meetings were held with the main objective of reviewing systems and data flow to enhance the quality of statistics generated by the programme. This group designed and field test survey tools and subsequent data collection for the 2017/18 season crop and livestock assessment, which was conducted successfully. - Monitoring of local market actors on the ground improved following recruitment of district and provincial market coordinators during the year under review. - Participatory monitoring and business record keeping was enhanced through the introduction of Daily Sales & Purchase Registers to ensure data capture of daily transactions details such as volumes and values of goods traded, names and details of clients/farmers. - The 3rd and 4th rounds of the open market farmers' surveys were conducted during the year under review, primarily to estimate number of farmers buying inputs traded by market actors.
2019	- Programme M&E evidence is generated from studies, literature review and using programme monitoring data. - Insufficient data on the impact of ICT platforms and messaging is currently collected or reported on by the programme. LFSP to determine how best to capture impact information for reporting. - An internal M&E review and strategy development process found the programme ToC to still be relevant. A separate Results Framework document contains indicators to track progress towards achieving the outcomes.

Notes: The 2016 report could not be obtained for review

The projects 'annual review approach' which also covers a review of projects M&E systems is also advocated by Micah & Luketero (2017) who recommend yearly revisions and adaptations to always align with any changes in the project context and performance. The approach that goes a long way in validating NGO M&E practices and contributes to ensuring M&E concepts and frameworks are put to good use, and not being misrepresented just for donor compliance without being used for the intended project quality and effectiveness.

Recommendations for Future Research

Just like most studies, this dissertation as an academic piece of work generated a couple of findings that prompt the need for further research in order to dig deeper into understanding emerging issues arising from the findings. This proves correct an affirmation by Thornhill and Van

Dijk (2010) that phenomena cannot entirely be fully understood through a single research study and one school of thought. In line with one of the objectives of this thesis, to contribute to the body of knowledge, research and academic discourse, findings from this thesis opened up other areas of further research. The recommendations for future research are targeted at academia, research institutions, researchers, students as well as M&E practitioners and their professional bodies, donors, the NGOs themselves. The findings, provide an opportunity for interested stakeholders to consider the following recommendations arising mainly from the M&E theory and practice gaps and the opportunities identified by this research.

Follow-up Research to Explore Harmonisation of Duplicating M&E Concepts

In their NGO M&E work, most of the research participants experienced some inconsistencies and duplications between some theories, concepts and frameworks of the M&E System that clearly seem to serve almost the same functions and purpose. Experiences shared by the NGO M&E practitioners demonstrated how this brought confusion in M&E practice within the case study NGOs. For instance, the Theory of Change, the Logframe and the Results Chain which evidently were being applied interchangeably within and between the two NGOs. Also found to be used interchangeably were the concepts of the M&E strategy, the M&E framework, and the M&E Plan. This study established that what one NGOs call their M&E system would either be the M&E framework, the M&E Plan, or the M&E strategy for the other. This is an example of how theory can then become confusing, uncoordinated and at times difficult to follow and apply.

The question for future research therefore becomes 'do we really need all these concepts and frameworks if some of them seem to have similar functions?, what opportunities exist and how can there be some form of streamlining and hormonisation of such duplications? The recommendation therefore is for scholars to engage in research that help answer such research

questions and come up with adapted tools and frameworks that bring clarity to practitioners. This would also help donors who were found to be directing their funded NGOs to use varying M&E approaches. This would also make M&E practice easy for NGOs that implement different projects funded by different donors with varying M&E requirements. Therefore, research that guides the development of user friendly M&E guides for practitioners is needed. In an analysis of the differences between the ToC and the logframe, Chandani (2021) observed that the two concepts appear similar in principle hence at times the logframe can be used to also serve as the theory of change without the need to use both. However, there appears to lack clarity on their unique attributes that bring out their real differences and similarities, resulting in some NGOs struggling to make a decision whether to use both or not. This may also address Patton (2003)'s observation that lack of comparable theory definitions may be a cause for confusion.

Concerns were also raised on the long list of the M&E system theories, concepts, frameworks and tools that need to be developed for each project, especially with some being viewed as duplicating. Through a desk review of the case study NGOs' M&E systems, none of the two was found to have developed the whole list for any of their projects. Each of the NGOs' project had a different combination of these M&E tools and frameworks depending on the respective donor requirements.

Further Replication of the Deductive Qualitative Design in M&E Theory Testing

Although still gaining traction in the research fraternity, the deductive qualitative research design worked well in qualitatively testing the M&E system theories through generating in-depth qualitative insights that would have been missed through quantitative measurements. The design continues to gather momentum and various scholarly reviews of it have endorsed and formalized it, and these include Hyde (2000), Bitektine (2008), Azungah (2018), Pearse (2019), Rashid et al

(2019). Evidence has therefore been generated on the efficacy of using qualitative research to deductively test theory. This motivated the researcher to adopt the research design and it turned out to be an interesting research adventure. The fact that findings from this study were largely aligned with existing literature and other studies related to the M&E system subject further confirms deductive qualitative research as an alternative approach that can equally test theory. Incidentally, as discussed earlier, the findings to a larger extend were in congruent with findings from other studies that employed different research designs on related M&E system subject (Kimaro (2018).

**Research Contribution to the Body of Knowledge and M&E Practice:**

One of the key objectives of academic research is to contribute to the body of knowledge and find solutions to practice. Chidi (2018) asserts that this entails generating additional empirical evidence to available literature on a subject of study. The strength of the qualitative approach used to test the M&E system theories yielded additional in-depth information beyond the initially proposed Conceptual framework that guided this study. The research findings generated evidence that NGO support from donors can also come with negative consequences on the application of theory, particularly emanating from compliance pressures and impositions.

Adoption of the M&E System 'Theory to Practice' Conceptual Framework: The study, in pursuit of testing the effective application of the M&E system theories and the associated factors around that, developed a guiding conceptual framework based on literature. Accordingly, the framework was termed 'theory to practice' in view of its role as a tool to test the translation of the M&E system theory to practice. The framework worked well and managed to serve its intended purpose. There were lessons learned during the process culminating into the following improved version of the conceptual framework which is here being recommended for future research of similar nature.

The conceptual framework presented in figure 5.2 below suggests that if one adds (+) the three Organisational Resource Capacities to the three Theory Principles, and removes or subtracts (-) the negative external factors and pressures that affect NGO M&E systems this sets the progression towards achieving effective M&E systems and projects.

Figure 5.2

M&E System 'Theory to Practice' Conceptual Framework
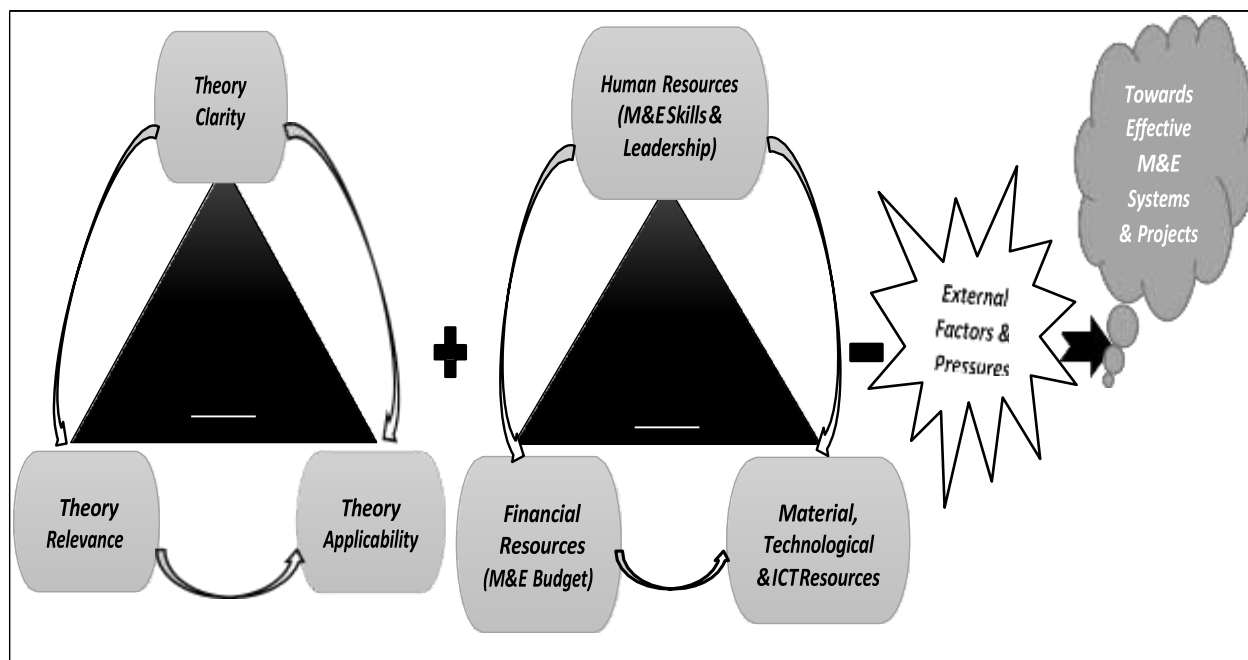
Source: Author's Conceptualisation Guided by Mapitsa & Khumalo (2018), Mleke & Deda (2020), Ratfree (2020)

Beyond using it as a research guiding tool, observations were also that it could come in handy as a NGO guide to know the conditions and resources needed for effectively developing and operationalizing project M&E systems. For academic and project management use, the framework is interpreted and used as follows;

A Guiding Framework for Researchers: Just as demonstrated through this research, the framework is meant to guide researchers and M&E practitioners on the key determinants, factors and variables that ensures the translation of M&E theories to practice. In other words, the

framework shows what conditions must prevail for M&E theories to be adopted and applicable, and be able to contribute to effective projects. Only then can the theories serve their purpose of providing solutions to the problems for which the NGO projects are executed for.

   A Diagnostic Tool for Assessing Application of M&E System Theories: For both researchers and M&E practitioners, the framework is envisaged to come in handy as a diagnostic tool when assessing the adoption, application and effectiveness of M&E concepts and approaches. For, instance if a project is struggling, or when an M&E system is failing, evaluators can use the framework to identify; if the necessary M&E resources (M&E skills, M&E budget, technological) are inadequate, if the M&E concepts and approaches being used are relevant to the organization and the type of projects being implanted, and if the M&E theories, concepts and approaches themselves are clear and applicable.

   Factors, Variables and Pre-Conditions for Translating M&E Theory to Practice: As posited by Bendassolli (2013), a theory is applicable under certain assumptions, it should be explicit about the conditions under which it becomes relevant, and it should be clear under what circumstances a theory is likely to hold. As the study findings demonstrated, the major driver of M&E theory adoption and practice by NGOs is organizational capacity mainly in the form of financial, skills, material and ICT resources. Such resources, when combined with 'theory relevance' and 'theory clarity and applicability' do make theory useful and practical. While all these predominantly internal factors, additional evidence generated by the study demonstrated that external factors also come into play. Donors influence was also found to comes with some negative consequences to the NGOs' M&E system performance, notwithstanding the positive contributions donors make in supporting NGOs with resources, capacity building and technical support needed for robust M&E systems that yield effective projects.

Conclusions

Ahmad (2016) advises that the primary purpose of research is to establish facts, come up with conclusions and find solutions. This last section of the chapter attempts to wrap it up by presenting the final take home messages from the whole research process and the findings with respect to theory analysis against industry practice. The conclusions therefore refer back to the research problem, the study objectives, the hypotheses tested, the findings made and significance and contribution of the study to NGO practice and academic discourse on the subject.

Professionalisation of M&E as a Technical Practice: Basheka & Byamugisha (2015) argue that M&E is a technical profession, which in many African countries is not treated as such due to absence of formal structures and professional bodies that regulates it. It is postulated that this results in unstandardized M&E practices and application of M&E protocols. The recent establishment of the Zimbabwe Evaluation Association seems a step in the right direction in coordinating M&E as a profession. According to Basheka & Byamugisha (2015), having a professional body comes with a number of benefits accruing to the M&E profession. Unethical M&E practices established by this study could be one problem that could be regulated by a professional body. An example is the African Evaluation Association which also has inspectors. The study also found out that in most NGOs M&E is being practiced by unqualified staff without M&E qualifications, and the association can also put in place training programmes, including collaborating with Universities to support the same. A number of African countries like Uganda and Kenya established M&E professional bodies that have promoted knowledge sharing networking community of practices.

With the Zimbabwe Evaluation Association still young and yet to comprehensively bring together M&E practitioners, a number of gaps identified by this study could be the immediate

priorities for this professional body. The following comments made by the research participants demonstrate how M&E is regarded and understood as a technical area yet being practiced by NGO staff without M&E professional and academic background;

> *The M&E practice is often viewed as complicated and requiring high levels of technical expertise on one hand and on another M&E is seen as cross cutting and that anyone can do it (Participant A5).*

> *Zimbabwe NGOs use logframes and results frameworks, even though the logframe is commonly seen as complicated. Additional capacity building on logframes will enhance its use in project management (Participant B3).*

> *M&E often present challenges to project staff who often are not quite familiar with M&E jargon and the flow of complicated diagrams (Participant B4).*

> *The organization still have gaps in the development of project theory of change concepts, results frameworks and data analysis, thus training and support in this area is needed (Participant C6).*

> *The weakness within our M&E unit is that most M&E staff are not acquainted with data analysis and the majority only do data collection and data analysis is at times outsourced. There is need to empower all M&E staff with data analysis techniques (Participant A6).*

Most of the research participants testified that most M&E practitioners in NGOs learnt their skills on the job than from their educational background at colleges and Universities. A senior Manager in one of the case study NGOs bemoaned that, *"it's shocking that there are some M&E staff with very limited knowledge on databases, spreadsheets analysis or any other data analytics tools. This is usually so because local Universities do not offer M&E courses hence new graduates*

recruited for M&E positions may have other degrees like Statistics, Economics, Development Studies, and they learn M&E on the job" (Participant A8).

Findings from this research agreed with literature that M&E practice in NGOs suffered from limited supply of qualified professionals from colleges and Universities, a gap that is not only in Zimbabwe but widespread in Africa (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015). Findings from this dissertation research attributed this to limited availability of M&E as specific curricula in local Universities and Colleges, hence NGOs cannot find candidates with specific M&E academic qualifications on the market when recruiting for the profession.

Opportunity for Collaboration between Academics and NGOs to Improve M&E: There is an opportunity for collaboration between academics/research institutions and the NGO Industry to promote the nexus between M&E theory and practice for enhanced project management systems. According to Basheka & Byamugisha (2015), in countries where M&E professional bodies have been established it was observed that even M&E scholars also become members of such associations. This results in a blending of practice and theory, and this link between academics and practitioners fostered the development of M&E training programmes which goes a long way in dealing with the lack of NGO staff with adequate M&E training, skills and experience. Without this, NGOs and other organisations may continue to struggle with lack of technical support in the adoption and application of standard M&E theories, concepts and approaches.

This research laid bare a number of inconsistencies between M&E theory and practice that could be dealt with through deliberate marrying of practice to theory through the professionals involved in both. Literature advises on how the two benefit from each other. In order to improve both theory and practice, Fischer (2010), Stam (2010) and Bendassolli (2013) are in agreement that theory must be tested not only through research evidence but also through application for it to be relevant and useful. Theory is meant to inform practice and practice gives feedback on the

applicability and relevance of theory and how to improve theory. M&E theory and practice are thus not an exception. To achieve this, scholars and M&E practitioners should not operate in silos with regards to developing, innovating, improving and operationalizing M&E concepts, approaches, frameworks and tools. The two need each other as theory can only be useful if it is applied to bring solutions to problems.

Bridging the gap between M&E theory and practice is possible in Zimbabwe, and the M&E professional body presents a good opportunity for that. Basheka & Byamugisha (2015)'s study on 'The State of M&E as a discipline in Africa' present a best practice from the European Evaluation Association whose goal was to support both M&E theory and practice. The associated managed to bring theory closer to practice by creating a platform for practitioners and academics together to cooperate and find each other, and feed into each other's work. This way scholars where able to have their theories tested while practitioners where able to proactively provide feedback to academics for theory improvement.

Lessons drawn from Seemingly Contradictory Findings: Paradoxically, while some of the findings discussed in chapter 4 and 5 do a not show a rosy picture of the implications of donor imposed M&E systems on NGOs, in some instances literature however demonstrate some positives out of this. It is important here to try and draw lessons on both sides of the paradox in order to ascertain if indeed these could be concluded as contradicting findings. For instance, the same donors blamed by some of the research findings for imposing M&E systems to NGOs are also applauded for their contribution in advancing the adoption of the right M&E concepts to most NGOs. The flip side of earlier presented findings confirms that in most cases when donors make it mandatory for M&E to be a project funding requirement they couple that with providing the resources for that, including provide support in M&E training and capacity building. Most NGOs that boast of strong M&E systems have donors to thank for that (Holvoet and Renard, 2007). These

findings compare well with other studies on the widespread work done by various international donor agencies in providing M&E capacity development to NGOs across the globe (Schaumburg-Müller, 1996; James, 2009; OECD, 2009). In fact, the OECD study provides detailed evidence of capacity building that was provided to many NGOs in different parts of the world by the likes of NOARD, DFID, USAID, GTZ, Irish Aid, JICA, SIDA, UNDP, World Bank (OECD, 2009). So, indeed, as supported by literature donors have been promoting M&E as a key tool in project management for NGOs. International donors have over the years funded a lot of M&E training and capacity building for NGO management and staff.

However, the thesis also established that local NGOs have been having less of access to this donor support than their international NGO counterparts, one of the factors they had varied adoption and application of M&E theories and concepts. One M&E expert interviewed confirmed that; *most local NGOs in Zimbabwe do not have an institutional M&E Policy and strategy. Where it is available its development has been advocated for and supported by a donor for accountability purposes (Participant C1).* This seems to imply that if donors were to give the same attention to local NGOs as they have done to international NGOs over the years, adoption of proven M&E concepts like the logframe, theory of change and the M&E framework concepts for projects quality improvement will be boosted in Zimbabwe. An analysis of the M&E status in Africa has actually provided evidence that donors' pressure on NGOs to set up M&E standards as resulted in strengthening the institutional capacity of NGOs in Africa (Emmanual, 2015). The pressure from donors for NGOs to adhere to the set M&E compliance and accountability standards also helped to build the skills and capacity of NGOs. Because of this, the researcher would not take these as conflicting findings but complementary findings. Literature actually clarifies that for donors, M&E contributes a lot in ensuring NGO accountability, standards compliance, quality improvements, and promotion of project impact and sustainability (Emmanual, 2015).

The take home from this discussion ought to consider both sides of the coin as relevant research findings. On one hand, the message being driven home here is that NGOs should not misconstrue M&E as a policing tool by donors. While on the other hand, donors should also not make M&E appear as a policing function but a project management and quality improvement tool (Sindayigaya et al, 2020). IFRC (2011) provide guidance that M&E should not be practiced to please donors but considered as a key and standard project management system as graphically portrayed in this artistic impression.

Figure 5.3

Artistic Impression of the Purpose of M&E

Note: Adapted from *Project/Programme M&E Guide,* IFRC. 2011, p. 5

A seemingly one sided power dynamics enforced adherence without the by-in and input from the NGO's prevents resistance and a lip service approach to M&E practice just to pacify project funders. This will help to avoid observations made by Mouton (2010) that sometimes project evaluations are conducted more as a part of fulfilling donor requirements regarding financial, results and impact accountability. It sounds unfortunate that some NGOs' adoption and practice of project monitoring and evaluation processes focused more on the donors than on the projects. However, the experiences and perception from most participants in this research is

as observed by Holvoet and Renard (2007, p.77) that 'donors want a lot, and they want it fast', however this is also viewed more of an accountability issue misconstrued as a 'policing act' by some NGOs as Khan (2003) puts it. There is therefore need for a collaborative approach in M&E between donors and NGOs.

Summary of Key Take Aways from the Study: Having gone through the rigorous and quite enriching process of this research, analysed all the evidence generated, and reflected back to the research topic, study objectives and the set hypotheses, the researcher is inevitably bound to take a final position. Of course, this position is informed by the findings and how they are placed back into context, how they speak to the research problem, research objectives, existing literature, and contribution to both academic, theory and industry practice.

In an analysis of NGO M&E dynamics in Cambodia by Marshall & Suárez (2014), any research that overlooks the marked differences between international and local NGOs may produce misleading results. This conclusion was derived from observed variations in M&E practices between international and local NGOs were also observed. The study also noted that while M&E has become a widespread project management practice across the two different types of NGOs but it's more organised and credible among international NGOs. The findings managed to identify and provide qualitative evidence that the differences in the two case study NGOs' resource capacity was responsible for the disparities between their M&E system practices. In essence, the local NGO' limited human, skills, financial and technological resources was the major reason for lagging behind in adoption and effective application of some of the theories, concepts, frameworks and tools of the M&E system. Be that as it may, the M&E system theories were found to be relevant as NGO project management guides and tools. On the other hand, the clarity of some of the theories of the system were felt to be in need of improvement. It is again all this background that a couple of recommendations were proffered to improve both theory and practice.

There is a very strong nexus between M&E theory and NGO practice as demonstrated by the evidence from this research, as well as literature. However, opportunities presented by this nexus are not being adequately tapped into by both the NGOs and Academics in Zimbabwe to enhance both theory and practice, and in turn improve project quality in order to drive the NGO development agenda. Gaps still exist between theory and practice to the detriment of projects success (Chibonore, 2015). According to Wacker (1998) theory ought to be applicable for it to be useful, otherwise practice without evidence based theory can sometimes be a risky and an unchallenging occupation. However it should not be misconstrued that this gap means theory is always the reality. In fact, Bagozzi & Phillips (1982) argue that theory should be testable and be challenged to contribute to practice, otherwise its application becomes risky too.

M&E theories and concepts proved relevant to NGO M&E project management and project success, but skills shortages and budgetary resource constraints do hinter the optimal application and the potential effectiveness of these M&E concepts and practices, especially for the small and less capacitated local NGOs. This corroborates claims from literature that capacity and resource constraints are huge drawbacks to effective M&E systems and NGO project quality (Kithinji et al 2017). The role of M&E in project success was also supported by other related studies. For instance, Kamau & Mohamed (2015)'s study in Kenya established a relationship between M&E and project effectiveness.

Some inconsistencies between the planned and the implemented M&E processes do exist in some NGOs both for genuine and deceptive reasons. The desk review of NGO M&E systems revealed some M&E approaches visible in NGO project documents but with little or no evidence of practice on the ground. This substantiates affirmations posited by Groene and Branda (2006) that NGOs can put in place good M&E systems but fail to implement them fully for various reasons. In some cases the NGO would have run into implementation resource challenges, while in some

cases it is a case of pleasing donor imposed requirements or just fulfilling donor compliances at the expense of practicing M&E for its primary purpose of improving project effectiveness.

Achievement of Research Objectives

The thesis wraps up with a reflection on the objectives that had been set for this research as an assessment of how the study managed to achieve them. Based on the findings, recommendations and conclusions, the research successfully managed to address the objectives, as follows;

Research Objective 1: *Identify any gaps between the M&E system theories and NGOs' practice, and the implications to projects effectiveness.* This research objective was achieved as gaps were indeed identified between M&E theory and NGO practice, more from the local than it was with the international NGO. As a result, based on the M&E system theories tested, Hypothesis 1 *"There are inconsistencies in the application of the M&E system theories between the local and the international NGO",* which is linked to this objective was proved correct hence confirmed and accepted.

Research Objective 2: *Analyse factors that influence and affect the effective application of the M&E system theories comparatively between by local and international NGOs.* The study explored and established that M&E skills/human resources, M&E budgets/financial resources, M&E material and technological resources were the major factors that determine the capacity of NGOs to effectively apply M&E theories. This came out as had been postulated in Hypothesis 2 "The resource capacity of an NGO influences the effectiveness in the application of the M&E System theories" which was proven correct for both the LNGO and INGO cases. This implied that the gaps between theory and practice as stated on Objective 1 and used to test Hypothesis 1 were linked to Objective 2 and the factors used to test Hypotheses 2.

Objective 2 was also achieved through testing Hypothesis 3 *"Donor compliance requirements and enforcements promote effective application of M&E systems by NGOs",*

considered another factor influencing how and why NGOs effectively or ineffectively put into practice the available and recommended M&E theories for quality project management. This hypothesis was not proven correct because findings also established that instead of promoting effective NGO M&E systems and projects, donor influences also come with detrimental effects as NGOs also succumb to the pressures and impositions exerted by donors. There was confirmation that at times NGOs engage in misleading M&E reporting just to please the donors as a way of mitigating the pressures. This was proven to have detrimental effects to the genuineness of NGO M&E practices and the reported effectiveness of their projects. This aided to the achievement of Objective 2 as additional factors that affect NGO M&E practice were analysed.

Research Objective 3: *Come up with suggested solutions for recommendations to improve both theory and practice and contribute to the body of knowledge of project monitoring and evaluation.* This objective was overwhelmingly achieved judging by the list of recommendations that were derived from the research findings. The recommendations covered both theory and practice as stated in the objective. The recommendations therefore managed to accommodate the interests of all stakeholders that include the two case study NGOs, and other NGOs that may share related M&E issues, and have characteristics and contexts depicted in the study. Donors also have vested interests in this research, as providers of funding to the NGO projects. There are also recommendations to the Academia for their future research interests, as well as the proposed collaboration between researchers and practitioners to bridge the theory versus practice gap. For future research, the novel deductive qualitative research design was also recommended after being successfully applied for this research, while the conceptual framework developed for this study was also recommended for future M&E theory testing studies.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Data Collection Tools

AN ASSESSMENT OF NGOs' MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) SYSTEMS
M&E EXPERT QUESTIONNAIRE
Instruction: You have been selected to participate in this study as an M&E Expert drawn from a list of M&E Consultants that usually provide M&E technical services to NGOs in Zimbabwe. Your feedback is sought in this study whose main objective is to "Assess NGO M&E Systems: Theory vs Practice, and Implications on Project Quality". Based on your specialist knowledge and experience, your expert feedback is therefore being sought, in general to the NGOs in Zimbabwe and where possible in particular to any specific NGOs whose identity will be treated with confidentiality. Whilst the names of NGOs will be treated with confidentiality you are at liberty not mention their names.

A: Background Information			
1. Area(s) of Expertise			
2. Qualifications		3. Years of Experience	
4. Which NGO have you provided M&E service to?			
5. Type of M&E Consultancy Services Provided			

B: NGO M&E Practices	
6. What's your assessment of how each of the following components of an M&E system is practiced by NGOs in Zimbabwe, e.g. relevance, applicability, strengths and weakness/areas needing improvement.	
(a) Organisational M&E Policy & Strategy	
(b) M&E Functions & Structure in the NGO Organogram	
(c) M&E Budget	
(d) M&E Staff & Skills	
(e) Technology & ICT	
(f) Projects Theory of Change	
(g) M&E Framework & Plan	
(f) Project Logframes & Results Frameworks	
(g) Performance Indicators & Targets	
(h) Baselines & Project Evaluations	
(i) Qualitative vs Quantitative Approaches	
(j) Data Collection Methods	
(k) Data Analysis Techniques	
(l) Progress & Impact Reporting	
(m) MIS & Databases	
(n) Learning, Knowledge Management & Data Usage	
(o) Project Evaluations – Results & Impacts.	
7. Which other M&E elements not listed above have you seen mostly applied and practices by NGOs, and comment on them?	
8. Which additional M&E elements & concepts not listed above that you consider relevant and appropriate for NGOs to adopt, and give reasons.	
9. Comment on how the NGO's M&E systems and practices have contributed or affected the quality and performance of projects.	
10. Is the adoption and application of standard M&E theories, concepts, approaches, frameworks, methods and tools standard across NGOs?, Why?	

AN ASSESSMENT OF NGOs' MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&E) SYSTEMS						
NGO KEY INFORMANT QUESTIONNAIRE *(To be completed by Researcher during Interviews)*						
Instruction: You have been sampled on the basis of you being a current or former employee of one of the NGOs selected for this Study, therefore your responses and feedback should be confined to that specific organisation only.						

A: Background Information						
1. NGO Worked for		*(a) GRM International*		*(b) MeDRA*	2. Position	
3. Employment Status with the NGO		*(a) Current*	*(b) Former*		4. Years in organisation	
5. Qualifications						
6. M&E (or related) Training Received						

B: NGO M&E Practices	
7. What's your assessment of how each of the following components of an M&E system is practiced by the organisation, e.g. applicability, strengths and weakness/areas needing improvement.	
(a)	Organisational M&E Policy & Strategy
(b)	M&E Functions & Structure in NGO Organogram
(c)	M&E Budget
(d)	M&E Staff & Skills
(e)	Technology & ICT
(f)	Projects Theory of Change
(g)	M&E Framework & Plan
(f)	Project Logframes & Results Frameworks
(g)	Performance Indicators & Targets
(h)	Baselines & Project Evaluations
(i)	Qualitative vs Quantitative Approaches
(j)	Data Collection Methods
(k)	Data Analysis Techniques
(l)	Progress & Impact Reporting
(m)	MIS & Databases
(n)	Learning, Knowledge Management & Data Usage
(o)	Evaluations e.g. How, When & Who conducts them?
8. Which other M&E elements not listed above that are used by the organization?	
9. Which additional M&E Elements not listed above that you consider relevant and appropriate for the organization to adopt, and give reasons.	
10. Comment on how the NGO's M&E systems & practices have contributed or affected project quality & performance.	
11. Is the application of M&E approaches and practices standard across all the NGO's projects? and Why?	
12. How and who decides on the M&E approaches and methodologies to use for the NGO's projects? and Why?	
13. What challenges do you face in the adoption, design and application of standard M&E systems.	
14. What Opportunities exist for the improvement of M&E practices by the NGO?	
15. Are there any other issues M&E theories & concepts issues you would like to share to guide NGO practice.	

NGO M&E Systems Desk Review Template *(To be completed by Researcher during document review)*

	Elements of an M&E System	Qualitative Observations from NGO & Project Documents Reviewed	
		Available **Partly Available** **Not available**	
		Case Study 1 - MeDRA	Case Study 2 – GRM International
1	M&E Strategy & Policy Document	*Example:* No organisation M&E Strategy document, nor is there a project specific M&E Strategy paper.	e.g. No organisation M&E Strategy document, only an M&E Strategy Paper for one project as a donor requirement.
2	M&E Structure in Organogram		
3	M&E Resources		
	Budget		
	Human/Skills		
	Technological & ICT		
	Assets etc		
4	Theory of Change		
5	M&E Framework/Plan		
6	Project Logframes / Results Frameworks		
7	Performance Indicators & Targets		
8	Baselines & Evaluations		
9	M&E Methods, Protocols & Tools		
	Qualitative vs Quantitative Methods		
	Data Collection		
	Data Analysis		
	Reporting		
10	MIS & Databases		
11	Data usage, Learning, Knowledge Management		

Source: Author (2021)

Appendix B: UREC Approvals

Research Ethics
Application Form - Di

UREC Decision Daniel
Harunashe Matimba

Appendix C: Consent Forms

Inform Consent Form
2.1.pdf