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Monitoring and Evaluation of Transformative Service Delivery: Evidence from a Provincial Department of Transport in South Africa

Dönüştürücü Hizmet Sunumuna Yönelik İzleme ve Değerlendirme: Güney Afrika'daki Bir İl
Ulaştırma Departmanından Kanıtlar

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Monitoring and Evaluation of Transformative Service Delivery: Evidence from a Provincial Department of Transport in South Africa¹

Abstract

The distribution of transportation amenities is a critical component of public goods and services essential to the daily lives of citizens in South Africa. However, this distribution frequently diverges from strategic objectives, with many projects and programmes managed by the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT) failing to meet their targets. This study quantitatively assesses the efficacy of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) within the South African public sector, focusing on the ECDoT. The absence of a robust and systematic M&E framework was identified, resulting in practices marked by minimal compliance, lack of transparency, inadequate communication, and insufficient focus on data quality and security. Structured questionnaires were administered to 200 ECDoT officials, with responses statistically analyzed to evaluate current M&E practices and their limitations. However, the findings indicate that the existing system fails to provide actionable insights or support effective decision-making, with major challenges including insufficient human capital, weak planning, poor data governance, and the lack of a multi-stakeholder approach. This study proposes a quantitative, phased M&E framework that prioritizes capacity building, strategic planning, and enhanced data security. The proposed framework emphasizes collaboration and accountability across all levels of the department to address systemic weaknesses. Transformative service delivery requires the department to adopt a well-structured and transparent M&E system supported by evidence-based decision-making.

Keywords: Data performance, monitoring and evaluation, performance management, service delivery

Dönüştürücü Hizmet Sunumuna Yönelik İzleme ve Değerlendirme: Güney Afrika'daki Bir İl Ulaştırma Departmanından Kanıtlar²

Öz

Güney Afrika'da ulaştırma olanaklarının dağılımı, vatandaşların günlük yaşamını doğrudan etkileyen kamu mal ve hizmetlerinin temel unsurlarından biridir. Ancak uygulamada bu dağılımın çoğu zaman belirlenen stratejik hedeflerle örtüşmediği; Doğu Cape Ulaştırma Departmanı (Eastern Cape Department of Transport-ECDoT) tarafından yürütülen birçok proje ve programın hedeflenen çıktılara ulaşamadığı görülmektedir. Bu çalışma, Güney Afrika kamu sektöründe İzleme ve Değerlendirme (Monitoring and Evaluation-M&E) sistemlerinin etkinliğini nicel bir yaklaşımla incelemekte ve ECDoT'yi örnek olay olarak ele almaktadır. Araştırma bulguları, kurumsal düzeyde sağlam, bütüncül ve sistematik bir M&E çerçevesinin bulunmadığını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu durum, uygulamaların büyük ölçüde asgari mevzuat uyumuna indirgenmesine, şeffaflık ve kurumsal iletişimin sınırlı kalmasına, veri kalitesi ile veri güvenliğine yeterli önemin verilmemesine yol açmaktadır. Çalışma kapsamında ECDoT bünyesinde görev yapan 200 personele yapılandırılmış anketler uygulanmış; elde edilen veriler, mevcut M&E uygulamalarının işleyişini ve sınırlılıklarını ortaya koymak amacıyla istatistiksel yöntemlerle analiz edilmiştir. Bununla birlikte, analiz sonuçları, mevcut M&E sisteminin karar alma süreçlerini destekleyecek eyleme dönük bilgi üretmede yetersiz kaldığını göstermektedir. Bu yetersizliğin temel nedenleri arasında beşerî sermaye eksikliği, zayıf stratejik planlama, yetersiz veri yönetimi uygulamaları ve çok paydaşlı bir yaklaşımın kurumsal olarak benimsenmemiş olması yer almaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışma, kapasite geliştirme, stratejik planlama ve veri güvenliğinin güçlendirilmesini merkeze alan, nicel temelli ve aşamalı bir M&E çerçevesi önermektedir. Önerilen çerçeve, kurumsal düzeyde iş birliği ve hesap verebilirliğin artırılmasını hedefleyerek, departman genelinde tespit edilen yapısal zayıflıkların giderilmesine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, dönüştürücü hizmet sunumunun hayata geçirilebilmesi, kanıta dayalı karar alma süreçleriyle desteklenen, iyi yapılandırılmış, şeffaf ve sürdürülebilir bir İzleme ve Değerlendirme sisteminin benimsenmesini zorunlu kılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Veri performansı, izleme ve değerlendirme, performans yönetimi, hizmet sunumu

Introduction

The effective distribution of community facilities is critical for the socio-economic well-being of any modern society. In South Africa, public entities are mandated to deliver essential services such as transportation infrastructure, basic civic amenities, and other public goods. The success of these initiatives depends heavily on the ability of these entities to set clear targets and implement

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strategies to achieve them. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems play a pivotal role in this regard, serving as indispensable tools for promoting accountability, improving efficiency, and ensuring that service delivery aligns with established goals. As noted by Brownson and Fowler (2020), M&E has become essential to modern public sector management, providing clarity and transparency to stakeholders, including managers, investors, and administrators. Despite its importance, M&E remains underutilised and poorly implemented in many public entities, including transport departments. The Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT), which oversees the delivery of transportation services in the province, has faced significant challenges due to the absence of a robust M&E framework. This shortfall has resulted in widespread inefficiencies, irregularities, and resource wastage, with profound implications for the province's ability to achieve its developmental objectives and improve the quality of life for its citizens.

South African public entities, such as the ECDoT, are expected to provide timely, cost-effective, and high-quality services to their constituents. However, research indicates that the ECDoT is plagued by systemic issues, including the appointment of unqualified and inexperienced personnel, corruption, financial misconduct, and non-compliance with established procedures (Fengu, 2019). Mofokeng and Luke (2014) emphasise that effective service delivery requires public entities to ensure their inputs, outputs, and processes are aligned toward achieving organisational objectives, a feat that M&E is designed to support. However, Kanyamuna, Katowa, Mubita, Kanenga, Simui, and Kotze (2020) note that M&E practices in public entities often lack the specialised expertise needed for effective implementation.

These systemic challenges are further exacerbated by the absence of a dedicated and competent M&E unit within the ECDoT. Organised labour groups, such as the National Education, Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), have criticised the department for its lack of accountability and transparency, linking these deficiencies to its inability to implement effective M&E practices (NEHAWU, 2019). Additionally, the department's operations have been mired in legal disputes, irregular appointments, and fraudulent activities, including falsified invoices and underperforming service providers (Fengu, 2019). The lack of a well-designed M&E framework has also led to fragmented decision-making and an inability to enforce compliance. This has undermined the department's mandate to deliver reliable transportation services, further compounding the challenges the Eastern Cape Province faces. As Abrahams (2015) and Mahlala (2019) assert, M&E systems are essential for ensuring that service delivery is both efficient and effective. Yet, the ECDoT's failure to adopt and implement such a system has left it ill-equipped to fulfil its responsibilities.

This study critically examines the potential for M&E to transform service delivery within the ECDoT. It seeks to address the department's systemic challenges by proposing a comprehensive M&E framework tailored to its specific needs. The central question guides the research: Is there an effective M&E model that can be developed and implemented to improve the delivery of public transport services within the Eastern Cape Department of Transport? By employing a mixed-methods approach and integrating empirical and theoretical insights, this study aims to provide actionable solutions that will enhance the ECDoT's capacity to deliver on its mandate. Ultimately, the findings and recommendations of this research aim to inform a transformative agenda for public service delivery in the Eastern Cape, with broader implications for the South African public sector.

1. Literature Review

1.1. The Role of Monitoring and Evaluation in Public Service Delivery

An examination of the literature reveals that Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is conceptualised in various ways, reflecting its complexity and significance in public administration. Mugenda and

Mugenda (2013) define M&E as a framework that enables public entities to operationalise their initiatives and programmes, facilitating the planning and delivery of public services. Deogratias (2020) highlights that M&E serves as the foundation for proper governance practices, ensuring that activities are executed effectively or halted when necessary. According to Gorgens and Kusek (2010), a robust M&E system involves the systematic collection of processes, benchmarks, strategies, performance indicators, and accountability structures, all of which are designed to ensure organisational effectiveness in achieving goals. This study positions M&E as an integral component of a broader performance improvement system in government, generating actionable feedback to correct variances and align actual performance with set objectives (Kusek and Rist, 2004).

In the context of the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT), M&E is essential for synchronising strategies and ensuring efficient service delivery. The absence of a standardised framework for monitoring performance has hindered the effective execution of community facility projects. Ensuring efficient and fully operational governance systems and structures is fundamental to the successful realisation of policy objectives and the broader developmental agenda, as they provide the foundation for accountability, transparency, and sustainable progress (Rulashe and Ijeoma, 2022). Central to M&E are key principles such as efficiency, performance, effectiveness, public accountability, monitoring, and evaluation, each playing a distinct role in improving service delivery outcomes. A thoroughly developed model of M&E in the public service can lead to a more effective government that will be able to attain its policy objectives and development agenda, especially in the South African context (Mahlala, 2024).

1.2. Key Principles of Effective Monitoring and Evaluation

Efficiency measures the extent to which development intervention goals are achieved using available resources while maximising their impact (Kusek and Rist, 2004). Eichhorn and Towers (2018) emphasise that efficiency links organisational actions to their resultant effects. For the ECDoT, efficiency refers to the optimal utilisation of resources to achieve desired outcomes, such as a reliable transport system and cost-effective service delivery. It ensures that transport services meet the expectations of the province's residents in a timely manner, thereby enhancing the department's operational impact. Performance, as defined by Ghalem et al. (2016), relates to the allocation of resources towards achieving set goals. In the context of the ECDoT, performance is tied to its ability to monitor and evaluate the distribution of transport services, ensuring that the department meets its strategic objectives. Effective performance management enables the ECDoT to achieve an efficient transport system that aligns with the needs of its constituents.

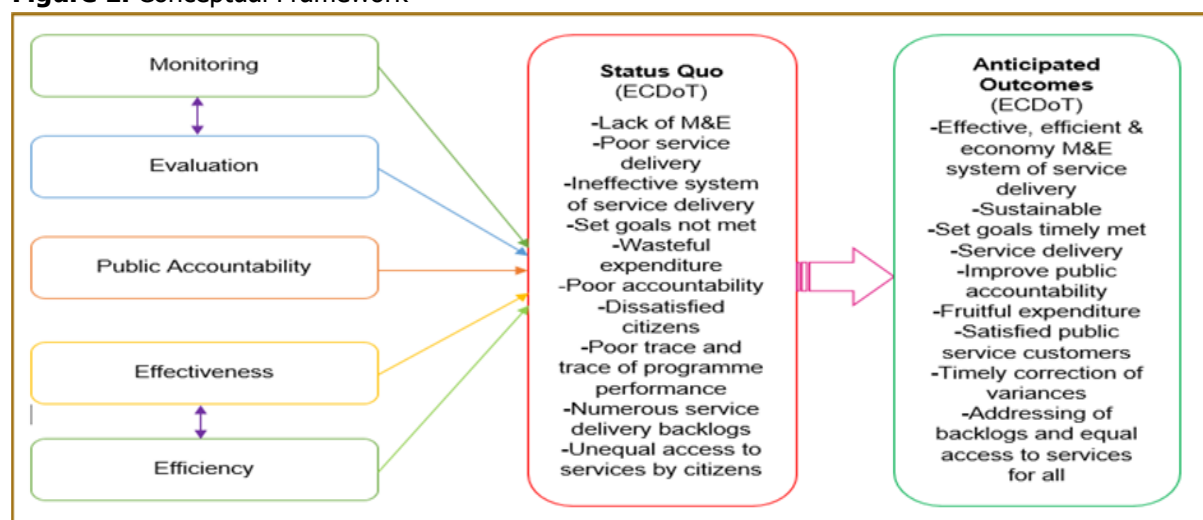
Effectiveness, on the other hand, focuses on the ability to take the correct actions to meet objectives. Immordino (2010) notes that effectiveness measures the extent to which a public entity fulfils the standards of public goods and services. For the ECDoT, this entails delivering transport services that meet user expectations in a timely and reliable manner. Effectiveness is critical for ensuring that the department's goals are not only met but also aligned with the broader public interest (Eichhorn and Towers, 2018). Public accountability, as discussed by Mabillard and Zumofen (2020), is another cornerstone of effective service delivery. Accountability involves the commitment of all stakeholders to justify decisions, actions, and outcomes. For the ECDoT, accountability is crucial for ensuring transparency in its operations and gaining public trust. The department must demonstrate that its decisions and actions are justifiable and aligned with its mandate to deliver quality transport services.

Monitoring is an ongoing activity that involves the systematic collection of data on performance indicators to guide decision-making and ensure that goals are met (Mertens and Wilson, 2018).

For the ECDoT, monitoring is essential for assessing the quality of service delivery and making timely adjustments to improve outcomes. It provides the foundation for evaluating the effectiveness of the department's strategies and interventions. Evaluation complements monitoring by assessing whether policy objectives, actual performance, and desired outcomes are aligned (Thornhill, 2012). It ensures that all goals and sub-goals of transport service delivery are periodically reviewed to determine their success. Evaluation is critical for identifying gaps, learning from past experiences, and refining strategies to enhance the ECDoT's performance. Outcomes, as defined by Simister (2017), represent the tangible results achieved within a given timeframe. For the ECDoT, outcomes include the timely and quality distribution of transportation services. Outputs, on the other hand, refer to the immediate products or advantages derived from development interventions (Simister, 2017).

In the ECDoT's case, outputs include improved resource utilisation, enhanced service delivery, and capacity building through training and development programmes. These outputs ultimately influence the effectiveness and efficiency of the department's operations, ensuring that it meets its objectives. M&E provides a structured framework for assessing and improving the performance of public entities such as the ECDoT. By integrating principles of efficiency, performance, effectiveness, accountability, monitoring, and evaluation, the department can enhance its service delivery outcomes and fulfil its mandate. The interrelationship between these components articulates the importance of a comprehensive M&E framework in driving sustainable improvements in public service delivery.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



Source: Researcher's illustration (2022)

The diagram provides a conceptual framework linking Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) principles to the challenges and anticipated outcomes for the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT). It highlights M&E components Monitoring, Evaluation, Public Accountability, Effectiveness, and Efficiency as key drivers for organisational performance and effective service delivery. The central section illustrates the ECDoT's status quo, marked by inadequate M&E, inefficient service delivery, unmet goals, wasteful expenditure, poor accountability, and unequal access to services. These systemic inefficiencies hinder organisational performance and public satisfaction. In contrast, the anticipated outcomes on the right highlight the transformative potential of robust M&E systems. These include efficient and sustainable service delivery, timely goal achievement, improved accountability, reduced waste, and equitable access to services. Enhanced public satisfaction and the resolution of service backlogs are also projected. This

framework emphasises M&E's role in bridging the gap between current inefficiencies and desired operational excellence, promoting accountability, transparency, and sustainable public service delivery through evidence-based decision-making.

1.3. Monitoring and Evaluation Challenges in South Africa

- **Political Will**

Kusek and Rist (2004) argue that the success of M&E initiatives hinges on strong political commitment and resource mobilisation. Implementing robust M&E systems may disrupt institutional power dynamics, alter budget allocations, and expose inefficiencies—often making political buy-in unpredictable. Without sustained support from leadership, M&E efforts are likely to falter.

- **Weak Governance Structures**

Effective M&E requires sound governance and institutional arrangements. As Kusek and Rist (2004) caution, “strong economies cannot be built on weak governments.” Similarly, Bennett and Satterfield (2018) assert that adequate governance infrastructure must precede the introduction of tracking and evaluation mechanisms. In disorganised or poorly managed institutions, M&E systems typically underperform.

- **Technical Capacity Deficits**

Many developing contexts face severe shortages in the technical capacity required to manage M&E systems effectively (Kusek and Rist, 2004). This includes gaps in measuring inputs, outputs, and outcomes. McDonough and Rodriguez (2020) highlight the importance of investing in ICT infrastructure and technical skills to support M&E implementation. Donor-funded projects can also include ICT training to build foundational capacity.

- **Lack of Coordination**

Kanyamuna (2021a) stresses the importance of coordination across sectors for effective M&E. However, in many African contexts, fragmented systems prevent the alignment of objectives and data sharing (Joshi and Islam, 2018). ECDOT's limited coordination and siloed operations, as outlined in Chapter 1, contribute to poor data use and decision-making.

- **Absence of a Whole-of-Government Approach**

Fragmented governance undermines inclusive M&E practices. Kanyamuna (2021b) and Lee (2020) advocate for the integration of all stakeholders—across local, regional, and national spheres—in the design and execution of M&E systems. For ECDOT, adopting this approach is essential to ensure broad-based support and enhance service delivery outcomes.

- **Low Employee Buy-In**

Kools (2019) and Binnendijk (2019) warn that M&E systems often fail due to lack of buy-in from lower-level staff. When implementation is top-down, without meaningful employee participation, systems are perceived as imposed and ineffective. Laitinen et al. (2018) emphasise a citizen- and employee-centred model where co-design and engagement are essential. Effective M&E must involve those who collect and act on the data.

- **Funding Constraints**

Adequate funding is vital for the feasibility and sustainability of M&E. Lopez-Acevedo et al. (2012) emphasise the need for ring-fenced budgets to protect M&E from contingency disruptions. Kusters et al. (2018) further argue that M&E should not be treated as an auxiliary function, but as central

to institutional performance. ECDOT should commit annual budgetary provisions and explore donor partnerships to support M&E development.

- **Weak Use of Social Impact Assessments**

Social impact assessments (SIAs) provide critical feedback on the outcomes of public interventions. Kaplan-Hallam and Bennett (2018) describe SIAs as diagnostic tools essential for performance evaluation. However, many institutions fail to collect or utilise this feedback effectively (Lopez-Acevedo et al., 2012). ECDOT must prioritise SIAs to improve programme design and outcomes.

- **Absence of Theory of Change-Driven Data**

A Theory of Change (ToC) clarifies which interventions are likely to achieve desired outcomes (Epstein and Yuthas, 2014). ToC-aligned data helps M&E systems focus on transformative change. ECDOT must track performance indicators-such as human capital practices and procurement effectiveness-as discussed in Chapter 1, to evaluate progress and adjust interventions accordingly.

- **Poor Emphasis on Continuous Improvement**

M&E systems should promote iterative learning and improvement. Lopez-Acevedo et al. (2012) and Rickwood et al. (2019) argue that performance data must inform future cycles of reform. Failure to embed feedback loops limits M&E's transformative potential. ECDOT must embrace a cyclical model of M&E to adapt to evolving challenges and sustain performance gains.

1.4. Monitoring and Evaluation Policy and Legislative Frameworks

The implementation of effective Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems in the public sector is underpinned by a robust legislative and policy environment. In South Africa, the evolution of M&E practices has been shaped by constitutional imperatives, statutory regulations, national development plans, and administrative reforms aimed at improving governance, accountability, and service delivery. These frameworks provide both the legal mandate and strategic direction for integrating M&E into public sector planning, budgeting, and performance management. This section outlines the key legislative and policy instruments that inform and guide M&E practices across all spheres of government in South Africa, highlighting their purpose and relevance in promoting a culture of evidence-based decision-making.

Table 1: Policy and Legislative Frameworks

Policy / Legislation	Purpose	M&E Relevance
Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)	Section 195 outlines the basic values and principles governing public administration, including transparency, accountability, and responsiveness core pillars of M&E.	Forms the foundation for performance monitoring in public institutions.
Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) No. 1 of 1999	Ensures sound financial management and accountability in national and provincial departments.	Mandates departments to ensure effective, efficient, and transparent systems of financial and risk management and internal control, including performance monitoring.
Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) No. 56 of 2003	Promotes effective municipal financial management and performance-based planning.	Requires municipalities to monitor service delivery and budget implementation.
Public Service Regulations (2001, as amended)	Requires departments to monitor and evaluate performance against strategic goals.	Institutionalizes performance monitoring in the public service.
Medium-Term Strategic Framework (MTSF)	Guides systematic use of evaluations for improving government performance and accountability.	Establishes a national standard for evaluation practice in government.
	Outlines the government's five-year implementation plan aligned with the NDP and measurable indicators.	Provides five-year implementation plans aligned to the National Development Plan (NDP), including performance indicators tracked through M&E systems.

Table 1: Policy and Legislative Frameworks (cont'd)

National Development Plan (NDP) - Vision 2030	Provides long-term development goals and a vision for a capable, accountable state.	Uses M&E to assess development progress and government capability.
Batho Pele White Paper (1997)	Sets service delivery standards based on transparency, consultation, and value for money.	Promotes evaluation of service delivery against citizen-centred standards.
Treasury Regulations (2005, as amended)	Mandates reporting on performance, reinforcing internal control and accountability systems.	Supports performance monitoring through mandatory reporting frameworks.
Framework for Strategic Plans and Annual Performance Plans (2010, revised 2020)	Directs development of results-based performance plans with clear outcomes and indicators.	Links planning with M&E to ensure accountability and performance improvement.

Source: Author Constuction (2025)

2. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research methodology to systematically address the research problem and ensure the validity and reliability of findings (Kothari, 2004; Maxwell and Mittapalli, 2010). The study was guided by specific research objectives and focused on measuring variables statistically to evaluate the implementation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices within the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT). A descriptive research design was adopted to quantify and analyse the current status of M&E practices in the ECDoT. The study aimed to identify trends, relationships, and gaps in the application of M&E, with the ultimate goal of developing a model for effective implementation. The primary data collection instrument was a structured questionnaire designed to gather quantitative data from ECDoT officials. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions to facilitate statistical analysis and a limited number of scaled questions (e.g., Likert scales) to measure attitudes and perceptions. The survey was distributed to a sample of 200 ECDoT officials, selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across managerial levels and functional areas (Kumar, 2019; De Vos et al., 2011).

Secondary data was obtained through desktop analysis of relevant documents, including the ECDoT's Strategic Plan (2020–2025), Annual Performance Plans, Auditor-General Reports, and global best practices on M&E. These documents provided supplementary quantitative insights, such as statistical trends and performance metrics, which were integrated into the analysis (Mogalakwe, 2006). A sample size of 200 respondents was determined, with a target response rate of at least 135 completed questionnaires to account for potential non-responses and ensure the robustness of statistical inferences. The stratified random sampling technique ensured that data was representative of the population, improving the generalisability of findings (Kothari, 2004). Quantitative data collected through the questionnaires was analysed using statistical methods, including descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and means) and inferential statistics (e.g., chi-square tests and regression analysis). This analysis provided insights into the patterns, relationships, and effectiveness of M&E practices within the ECDoT. By adopting a purely quantitative approach, this study provided an objective and systematic evaluation of M&E practices, contributing to the development of evidence-based recommendations for improving organisational performance and service delivery.

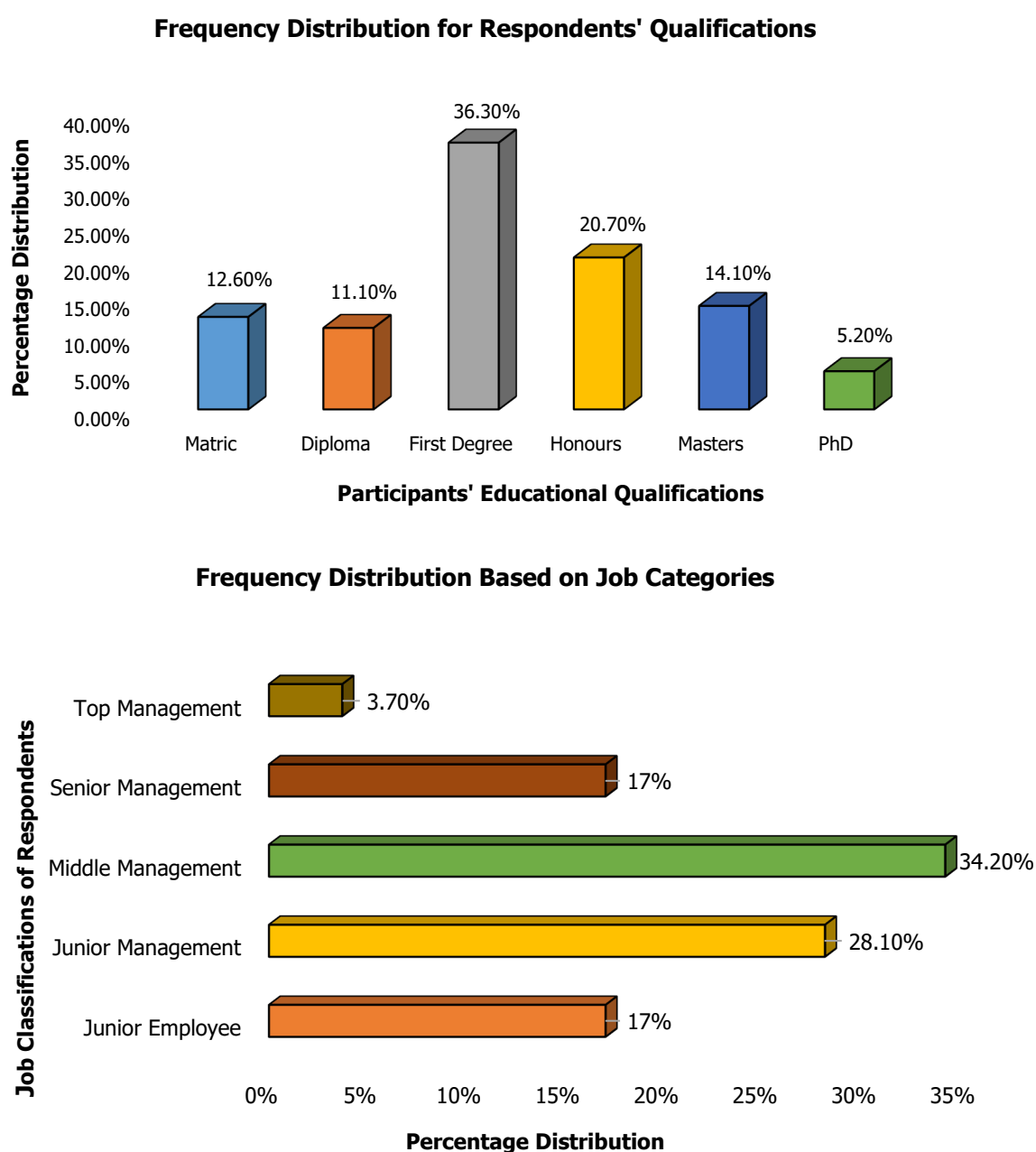
The study achieved a strong response rate, exceeding fifty percent, sufficient for valid and reliable findings. This is attributed to the researcher's familiarity with the sample as an ECDoT employee. Data showed a gender distribution of 56.30 percent female and 43.70 percent male, reflecting compliance with public sector policies on affirmative action. This gender balance supports the Department's alignment with government priorities, which can facilitate the adoption of effective M&E practices to enhance service delivery. The findings also highlight a skilled workforce, with most respondents holding at least an undergraduate degree, increasing the likelihood of familiarity with M&E concepts. Additionally, 54.90 per cent of respondents were in the middle to top management, directly involved in programme design and implementation, ensuring their insights

are credible. The remaining participants, mainly junior management, focused on operational-level programme implementation. This alignment between planning and execution signifies the Department's readiness to adopt and sustain M&E practices for improved public service delivery.

Table 2. Data Collection Instruments and Responses

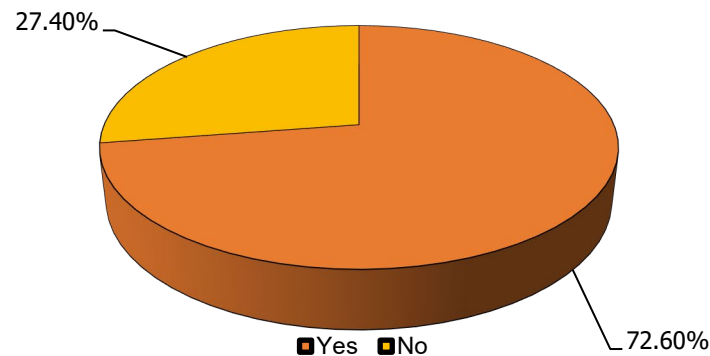
Instrument Type(S)	Questionnaires		
Number of Respondents	200		
Distributed/Contacted	200		
Returned/Interviewed	135		
Instrument Response Rate	67.5%		
Parameter	Male	Female	Total
Frequency	93	42	135

Figure 2. Frequency Distribution for Respondents' Qualifications and Job Categories



The data gathered through semi-structured questionnaires and secondary sources provided critical insights into the state of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices within the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT). Each section below critically examines the findings, aligning them with the corresponding figures and integrating relevant literature.

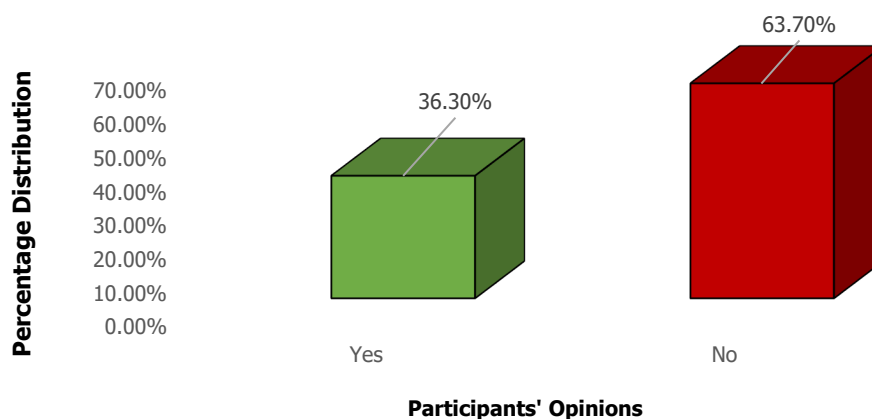
Figure 2. Frequency Distribution for the Department's Understanding of M&E



Source: Researcher's own illustration (2023)

The findings reveal that 72.60 per cent of respondents demonstrated an understanding of M&E concepts, particularly within the context of the ECDoT. However, 27.40 per cent of participants lacked knowledge about M&E, a concerning observation given its critical role in enhancing public sector efficiency. This lack of awareness among a significant portion of employees undermines the Department's ability to operationalise M&E as an organisational tool fully. According to Nalubega and Uwizeyimana (2019), awareness and comprehension of M&E principles are prerequisites for their effective application, as they encourage accountability and performance improvement. The respondents who understood M&E emphasised its functions, such as monitoring project implementation and ensuring alignment with strategic objectives. However, the absence of a systematic and well-structured M&E framework in the Department has resulted in fragmented practices, echoing Basheka and Byamugisha's (2015) assertion that inconsistent M&E approaches often lead to inefficiencies in public sector operations. The ECDoT's current status demonstrates a need for foundational reforms to address these gaps.

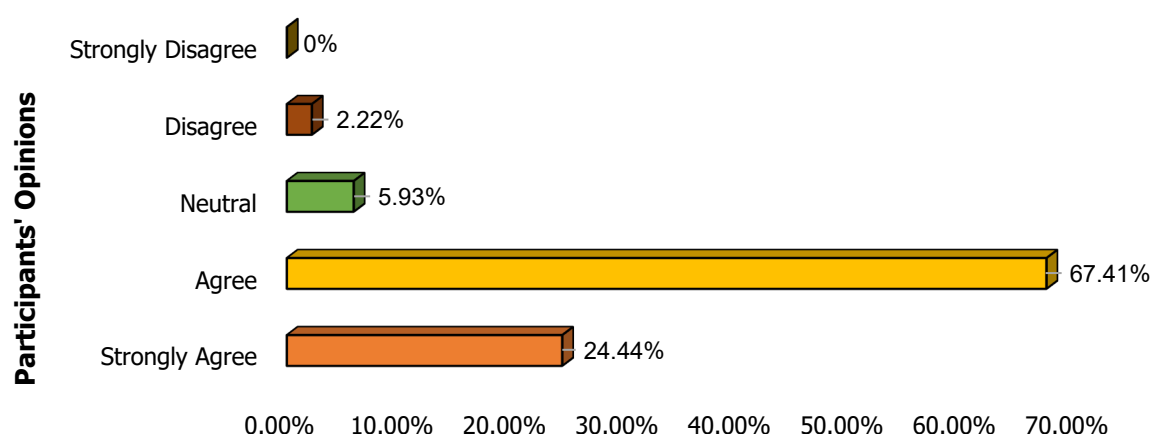
Figure 3: Distribution according to the department's Appreciation of M&E



Source: Researcher's own illustration (2023)

The data indicates that 64 per cent of respondents believe the Department does not sufficiently appreciate the importance of M&E, highlighting a pervasive organisational culture that undervalues this critical function. This perception aligns with Chirau and Blaser-Mapitsa's (2020) argument that public entities often treat M&E as a compliance exercise rather than a transformative tool. The 36 per cent of respondents who view the Department as appreciative of M&E are predominantly from middle and senior management. Their views, however, contrast sharply with operational realities, marked by a lack of systematic implementation and insufficient integration of M&E practices. The lack of appreciation is compounded by decision-makers' reluctance to take bold steps toward fully operationalising M&E. This reluctance has ensured a superficial approach to M&E, characterised by inadequate data collection and irregular project evaluations. The literature highlights that such superficial practices result in suboptimal outcomes (Kanyamuna et al., 2020). Addressing this disconnect requires cultivating an organisational culture that values M&E as an integral component of governance and decision-making.

Figure 4: Distribution of the potential of M&E Transforming the ECDoT



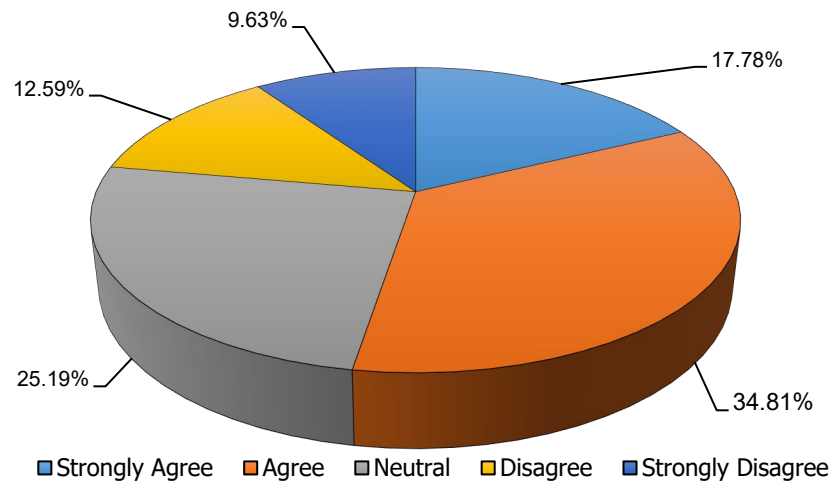
Source: Researcher's own illustration (2023)

The data illustrates that an overwhelming majority of respondents (91.85 per cent) acknowledge the transformative potential of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT). Specifically, 67.41 per cent of participants agreed, and 24.44 per cent strongly agreed that M&E could play a pivotal role in improving service delivery and operational efficiency. These figures reflect a widespread belief that, if effectively implemented, M&E could enhance the Department's oversight mechanisms, ensure accountability, and streamline project execution. However, the data also reveals a degree of scepticism, with 5.93 per cent of respondents remaining neutral and 2.22 per cent disagreeing. Those who expressed disagreement highlighted systemic challenges such as inadequate leadership commitment, limited resource allocation, and fragmented data systems. According to Chirau and Blaser-Mapitsa (2020), such systemic issues often hinder the realisation of M&E's full potential in public sector organisations.

These concerns suggest that while there is a recognition of M&E's benefits, significant barriers remain in actualising these benefits within the current organisational framework. The majority viewpoint, which supports M&E's transformative potential, aligns with international best practices. For example, the integration of M&E into public sector management has yielded notable successes in countries like Canada and Zambia, where it has been instrumental in improving transparency, resource allocation, and service delivery (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015). These examples highlight the importance of designing an M&E framework tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities

of the ECDoT. Critically, the findings suggest that leveraging M&E as a transformative tool will require addressing foundational issues, such as enhancing leadership buy-in, investing in capacity-building initiatives, and establishing a robust data management system. Furthermore, encouraging a culture of accountability and results-driven governance is essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability of M&E practices. The ECDoT must prioritise these reforms to align its operations with strategic goals and the broader objectives of the National Development Plan 2030.

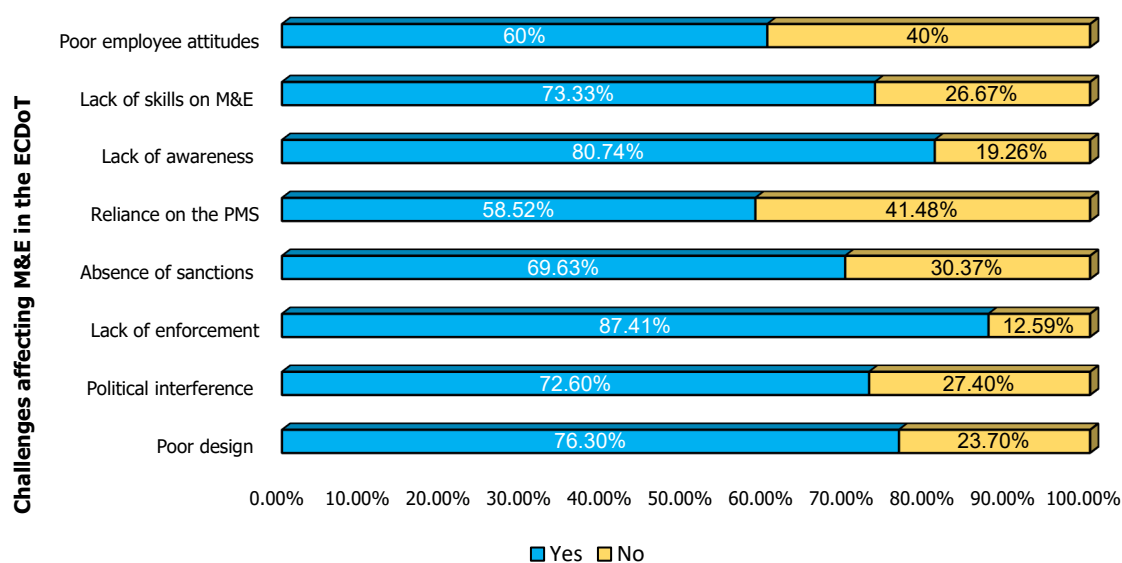
Figure 5: Distribution of the Readiness of Employees for an M&E Model



Source: Researcher's own illustration (2023)

The findings indicate a predominantly positive outlook among employees regarding their readiness to adopt a comprehensive M&E model. Specifically, 34.81 per cent of respondents agreed that they are prepared for the transition, while 17.78 per cent strongly agreed. This demonstrates that over 52.59 per cent of the participants displayed a readiness to embrace M&E, underlining a collective recognition of its potential to enhance departmental performance. These results are consistent with the arguments of Goldman et al. (2018), who emphasised that ensuring organisational readiness is a key enabler for the successful implementation of M&E systems.

A substantive number of respondents (25.19 per cent) expressed a neutral stance, possibly reflecting uncertainty or a lack of sufficient information regarding the Department's plans for M&E implementation. This hesitancy suggests the need for targeted awareness campaigns and capacity-building efforts to ensure alignment across all employee levels. However, a smaller segment (12.59 per cent) disagreed with the notion of readiness, citing concerns over inadequate resources, a lack of training, and a perceived organisational resistance to change. This aligns with Abrahams' (2015) findings, which highlighted that resistance to change in public institutions is often rooted in systemic barriers, including limited infrastructure and entrenched organisational practices. The overall high levels of agreement in this distribution point to a significant opportunity for the ECDoT to leverage its human capital in implementing M&E effectively. To drive a meaningful shift in the organisational development paradigm, the integration of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches and strategies must be embedded as an inherent and dynamic aspect of governmental operations (Miggels and Rulashe, 2022). To capitalise on this readiness, the Department should prioritise structured training programmes, clear communication strategies, and an inclusive approach to rolling out the M&E framework. By addressing the concerns of the minority, the ECDoT can further solidify its preparedness and ensure a smooth transition to enhanced monitoring and evaluation practices.

Figure 6: Distribution of Challenges Affecting the Efficacy of M&E in the ECDoT

Source: Researcher's own illustration (2023)

The data highlights several systemic challenges affecting the efficacy of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices within the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT). The most prominent challenge identified by 87 per cent of respondents is the weak enforcement of M&E practices by provincial and national governments, which reflects a lack of robust oversight and accountability frameworks across different levels of governance. This finding is consistent with Chirau and Blaser-Mapitsa's (2020) observation that weak governance structures undermine M&E functionality in public institutions. Additionally, poor data management emerged as a critical issue, with 76 per cent of respondents indicating that inefficiencies in data collection, storage, and analysis are hampering the Department's ability to make informed decisions. This challenge is exacerbated by the absence of centralised data systems, a problem also noted by Basheka and Byamugisha (2015), who argue that fragmented data management practices often result in unreliable reporting and poor decision-making.

Political interference was cited by 73 per cent of respondents as a significant barrier to effective M&E. This shows how political agendas and vested interests can compromise the impartiality and effectiveness of evaluation processes, a trend observed in other public sector institutions across South Africa. Abrahams (2015) argues that such interference often prioritises short-term political gains over long-term institutional efficiency, making it a critical area for reform. Furthermore, a lack of accountability mechanisms for non-compliance was highlighted by 70 per cent of participants. This suggests that employees and leadership are not sufficiently held accountable for failing to meet M&E objectives, thereby perpetuating a culture of negligence and inefficiency. Goldman et al. (2018) emphasise that establishing clear accountability structures is pivotal to ensuring compliance and maintaining a culture of continuous improvement.

The findings also revealed other secondary challenges, such as insufficient training and capacity-building initiatives, which were noted by a smaller proportion of respondents. These issues further compound the Department's struggle to institutionalise M&E practices effectively. To address these challenges, the ECDoT must adopt a multi-pronged approach. Strengthening oversight mechanisms at both provincial and national levels is essential to ensure that M&E practices are uniformly enforced and aligned with broader governmental objectives. Enhancing data governance systems

by introducing integrated, centralised data platforms would improve data reliability and accessibility. Moreover, mitigating political interference requires institutional reforms that insulate M&E units from undue influence, potentially through independent oversight bodies.

Finally, establishing a dedicated M&E unit, adequately resourced and staffed with trained professionals, is critical to driving the necessary reforms. These recommendations align with best practices observed in international contexts, such as Zambia and Australia, where well-integrated and autonomous M&E frameworks have proven successful in enhancing public sector performance (Basheka & Byamugisha, 2015). The findings highlight the critical need for the ECDoT to adopt a holistic and integrated M&E framework. While there is widespread recognition of M&E's transformative potential, its implementation is hindered by organisational, structural, and cultural barriers. Addressing these challenges requires a strategic focus on capacity building, intergovernmental coordination, and ensuring an organisational culture that values evidence-based decision-making. By aligning its practices with global best practices and leveraging the insights from this study, the ECDoT can significantly enhance its service delivery and fulfil its mandate effectively.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal significant deficiencies in the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices within the Eastern Cape Department of Transport (ECDoT), which has direct implications for the department's ability to fulfil its mandate. Empirical and secondary data indicate that M&E within the department is not embedded as a strategic management tool but rather approached as a procedural obligation. Despite the presence of legal, policy, and regulatory frameworks intended to facilitate the adoption of M&E, their operationalisation remains inconsistent and fragmented. This misalignment undermines the transformative potential of M&E, limiting its ability to drive performance improvement, efficiency, and evidence-based decision-making.

A critical insight from the study is that the failure to institutionalise a robust M&E system has resulted in disjointed data collection and analysis mechanisms, leading to poor decision-making processes. The absence of a cohesive framework exacerbates the challenges of inadequate oversight, poor data governance, and limited accountability among departmental units. This is further compounded by a lack of skilled human capital, which hinders the effective implementation of the Government-Wide Monitoring and Evaluation System (GWME&S) introduced by the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME). The continued reliance on outdated performance management systems (PMS) by certain factions within the department further obstructs efforts to modernise and integrate M&E as a standard operational practice. A fundamental issue highlighted in this study is the credibility and reliability of data, which are essential for effective M&E. The findings indicate that data inconsistencies, coupled with an under-resourced M&E Unit, limit the department's capacity to generate accurate performance indicators (KPIs). This weakens the accountability mechanisms that should underpin M&E practices and exposes a gap between policy commitments and actual implementation.

In theory, M&E should serve as a mechanism for continuous improvement, enabling the department to assess its performance against predefined benchmarks and make data-driven adjustments. However, in practice, the study finds that M&E within the ECDoT lacks the rigour needed to function as an instrument of organisational learning and reform. From a theoretical perspective, the findings align with the Theory of Change (ToC), which emphasises the necessity of structured and outcome-oriented interventions to achieve organisational transformation. This framework suggests that achieving long-term goals requires a clear pathway that links inputs, activities, outputs, and desired outcomes. The study illustrates that while the department has

identified the need for M&E, it has not effectively defined the steps required to integrate it within its operational framework. Without addressing the underlying systemic and structural barriers, the department remains incapable of translating policy objectives into tangible service delivery outcomes. The historical context of the Eastern Cape, often referred to as the poorest province in South Africa, reinforces the urgency of improving transport infrastructure and service delivery. A province with significant socio-economic challenges cannot afford inefficiencies in critical public services. Given the pressing need to optimise resource allocation and ensure equitable access to transport services, the ECDoT must adopt a more structured and performance-driven M&E framework. By doing so, the department can enhance its operational efficiency, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and contribute to the broader goals of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030.

To address these challenges, this study proposes a set of actionable recommendations that align with international best practices in public sector M&E implementation. The department should develop and formalise an integrated M&E strategy that aligns with national policy frameworks and the objectives of the NDP 2030. A dedicated and fully resourced M&E Unit should be established, staffed with personnel who possess specialised expertise in data analytics, evaluation methodologies, and public sector performance assessment. Standardised data collection, reporting, and verification procedures must be implemented across all directorates to ensure the integrity and consistency of KPIs. Executive-level accountability should be enforced to ensure that departmental leadership actively uses M&E data to inform policy and operational decisions. Legislative and policy mechanisms should mandate periodic reporting on KPIs to the provincial and national oversight bodies. A performance-linked incentive system may encourage compliance with M&E practices at all levels of the department.

Technological integration is essential for improving data governance and efficiency. A centralised digital platform should be introduced to enable real-time data tracking, predictive analytics, and performance dashboards for decision-makers. Cloud-based data management systems would mitigate risks associated with data fragmentation and loss, ensuring secure and accessible data storage. Periodic data audits should be conducted to assess the reliability and validity of information used in performance assessments. Building human capital is critical for ensuring a sustainable M&E system. Structured capacity-building programmes should be introduced to train employees on advanced methodologies, impact assessment, and data interpretation. Partnerships with academic institutions and research organisations may be leveraged to enhance technical capacity. Recruitment policies should prioritise competency-based selection criteria to fill key M&E positions with professionals who have the requisite skills and experience.

Political interference has been identified as a major obstacle to effective M&E implementation. An independent oversight committee should be established to safeguard M&E processes from undue influence and ensure objective assessment of departmental performance. Transparency measures, such as public disclosure of M&E reports, would reinforce accountability and stakeholder engagement. Intergovernmental collaboration with other provincial departments and national agencies would help align objectives and share best practices. Sector-specific M&E frameworks should be developed to address the unique challenges of transport service delivery, including road infrastructure, commuter services, and rural connectivity. Community engagement and participatory evaluation approaches should be prioritised to ensure that M&E outcomes reflect the needs of transport service users. Budgeting and resource allocation processes should be directly linked to empirical performance data to ensure efficient public spending.

This study highlights the urgent need for the ECDoT to move beyond a compliance-driven approach to M&E and embrace it as a strategic instrument for performance improvement and transformative service delivery. By adopting the proposed model, the department can address systemic inefficiencies, improve data governance, and strengthen accountability mechanisms. The historical and socio-economic realities of the Eastern Cape Province necessitate a proactive, data-driven, and outcome-oriented approach to transport service delivery. A well-integrated and institutionalised M&E framework will not only enhance operational efficiency but also contribute to broader socio-economic development objectives in line with national and provincial strategic priorities.

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