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Investigating the Effective Use of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems on Church Programs: A Case Study of Nkhoma Synod CCAP Congregation in Lilongwe Urban

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Abstract

This study investigated the effective use of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in church programs within the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Nkhoma Synod. Despite the essential role of M&E in enhancing program effectiveness, accountability, and informed decision-making, many congregations within the Nkhoma Synod lack robust M&E mechanisms. This deficiency impedes the systematic collection and analysis of data, leading to inefficiencies in resource allocation and an inability to comprehensively assess program outcomes. The study identifies various contextual and organisational challenges, including socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and limited institutional capacity, which hinder the adoption and implementation of effective M&E practices. Key findings indicate significant gaps in the understanding and implementation of M&E among church leaders, with 58% of leaders not integrating M&E practices within church program planning. Additionally, 67% of leaders reported never using logframes, and 75% of leaders lacked adequate knowledge of M&E techniques. Despite these challenges, there is a willingness among leaders to embrace new ideas, provided they receive adequate support and training. The study concludes with 13 detailed findings, including the critical roles of transformative, accountable, and participative leadership in fostering effective M&E practices, and the necessity of incorporating M&E activities throughout all stages of church programs. Recommendations for enhancing M&E practices include comprehensive training for church leaders, the establishment of formal M&E committees, and the adoption of systematic data collection methods. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on M&E in religious institutions and offers practical insights for church leaders, policymakers, and development practitioners. It underscores the importance of effective M&E systems in maximising the impact and sustainability of church programs, fostering a culture of accountability and innovation, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of faith-based initiatives.

Keywords: Monitoring, evaluation, systems, processes, leadership.

1. Introduction

The effective utilisation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems is essential for assessing the success of programs and initiatives across various sectors. Within religious institutions, including the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Nkhoma Synod, the adoption of robust M&E practices holds significant implications for enhancing program effectiveness, fostering accountability, and promoting holistic development within congregations and communities. Churches grapple with the complexities of addressing spiritual, social, and material needs within their communities, and the adoption of effective monitoring and evaluation practices becomes imperative for maximising impact and stewardship (Alkin & Christie, 2004) [1]. However, there is a worrying absence of

robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems within church programs including the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Nkhoma Synod. Despite the critical role that these systems play in assessing program effectiveness, tracking progress, and informing decision-making processes, many congregations within CCAP Nkhoma Synod continue to operate without adequate M&E mechanisms in place. This deficiency often results in a lack of systematic data collection, limited insights into program outcomes, and challenges in assessing the overall impact of church initiatives on congregants and communities.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) have emerged as a critical aspect of organisational management worldwide. Patton (2018) notes that M&E plays a pivotal role in enhancing accountability, transparency, and performance across various sectors. Organisations of all types and sizes, including businesses, nonprofits, governmental agencies, and international institutions, have increasingly recognised the importance of implementing robust M&E systems to assess their activities, track progress towards goals, and make informed decisions based on evidence (OECD, 2020) [12]. One key reason for the growing importance of M&E is the increasing complexity of organisational operations in today's globalised and interconnected world. As organisations engage in multifaceted projects and initiatives spanning different geographic locations and involving diverse stakeholders, the need for systematic monitoring and evaluation becomes paramount (UNDP, 2015) [21]. M&E provides organisations with the tools and mechanisms to systematically collect, analyse, and interpret data related to their activities, enabling them to assess the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of their interventions (UNICEF, 2019) [22].

Therefore, this study investigated the effective utilisation of monitoring and evaluation systems in church programs within CCAP Nkhoma Synod congregations. Through a comprehensive examination of monitoring and evaluation systems within CCAP Nkhoma Synod, this study aimed to contribute to the growing body of literature on M&E in religious institutions and facilitate evidence-based decision-making for church leaders and stakeholders.

1.1. Problem Statement
The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Nkhoma Synod, like many religious institutions worldwide, faces significant challenges in effectively assessing the impact and outcomes of its programs and initiatives. Despite the vital role that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems play in ensuring program effectiveness, promoting accountability, and informing decision-making processes (Smith, 2015), many congregations within CCAP Nkhoma Synod operate without robust M&E mechanisms in place.

The absence of adequate monitoring and evaluation systems within CCAP Nkhoma Synod congregations is rooted in various contextual factors and organisational dynamics. Koehrsen and Heuser (2020) [8], identified socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and institutional capacity limitations as significant barriers to the adoption and implementation of M&E practices within religious contexts. Additionally, competing priorities, resource constraints, and a lack of technical expertise further exacerbate the challenges faced by church leaders and stakeholders in establishing effective M&E frameworks. As a result of these challenges, churches often operate in a state of uncertainty regarding the impact and effectiveness of their programs. Without reliable data and evidence-based assessments, church leaders struggle

to make informed decisions, allocate resources judiciously, and address the evolving needs of congregants and communities. This lack of accountability and transparency undermines the credibility of church programs, erodes trust among stakeholders, and limits the synod's capacity to fulfil its mission of holistic ministry and service (Alkin & Christie, 2004) [1].

Therefore, the central problem addressed by this research is the ineffective utilisation of monitoring and evaluation systems on church programs within CCAP Nkhoma Synod congregations.

1.2. Framework of the Study
The conceptual framework for this study encompassed ecclesial leadership marked by transformative, accountability, and participative traits, integration theory advocating for the incorporation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices throughout program planning, implementation, evaluation and improvement, and the utilisation of logic models to guide effective M&E processes in church programs within CCAP congregations in Nkhoma Synod.

1.3. General Objective
The study's objective was to investigate the effective use of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems in church programs within CCAP congregations in Nkhoma Synod.

1.4. Specific Objectives
To Achieve the Main Objective of this Study, the Following Specific Objectives Were Followed
a) To evaluate leadership traits in CCAP congregations (Nkhoma Synod) and their impact on M&E system usage in church programs.
b) To investigate the integration of M&E practices within church program management in CCAP congregations (Nkhoma Synod).
c) To assess the effectiveness of logic models in guiding M&E processes within CCAP congregations (Nkhoma Synod) for church programs.
d) To formulate recommendations based on the findings to enhance M&E practices within CCAP congregations (Nkhoma Synod) for church programs.

1.5. Main Research Question
The main research question for this study was; "How are monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems effectively utilised to enhance the planning, implementation, and evaluation of church programs within CCAP congregations in Nkhoma Synod?"

1.6. Specific Research Questions
The Following Were the Specific Research Questions
a) How do leadership traits within CCAP congregations (Nkhoma Synod) influence the adoption and utilisation of M&E systems in managing church programs?
b) What M&E practices are currently integrated into the management of church programs within CCAP congregations (Nkhoma Synod), and how are they implemented?
c) What are the perceptions and experiences of church leaders and members regarding the effectiveness of M&E practices using logframes in improving program planning, implementation, and evaluation?
d) What specific recommendations can be formulated based on the evaluation of leadership traits, integration of M&E

practices, and effectiveness of logic models within CCAP congregations (Nkhoma Synod) to improve M&E processes for church programs?

1.7. Significance of the Study

This research has significant implications for improving the effectiveness of programs within CCAP Nkhoma Synod congregations by providing practical insights and recommendations for enhancing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices. The research can help church leaders and stakeholders address shortcomings in M&E systems and make well-informed decisions, allocate resources wisely, and improve the overall impact of church programs on congregants and communities.

The findings are also relevant for religious institutions worldwide, offering guidance for enhancing M&E practices across diverse cultural and organisational contexts Furthermore, the research provides valuable insights for scholars and researchers exploring the intersection of religion, development, and organisational management, advancing theoretical understanding in these fields.

Practical implications extend to policymakers and funders by guiding their funding priorities, resource allocation, and capacity-building initiatives for faith-based programs. The study also supports social justice, equity, and inclusivity within religious institutions by enhancing transparency and accountability. Stakeholders, enhancing program effectiveness and promoting accountability.

Lastly, the research also enhances the capacity and skills of church leaders, volunteers, and congregants in M&E, which helps to foster a culture of accountability, innovation, and continuous improvement.

2. Literature Review

Despite the recognised importance of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems in enhancing program effectiveness and accountability, there is a dearth of empirical research on their effective utilisation within the context of church programs. While numerous studies emphasise the significance of M&E in diverse sectors (Wasserman & Faust, 1994) [23], there is limited understanding of how these systems specifically operate in religious organisations, particularly in churches. This research sought to investigate the effective use of M&E systems and their direct influence on the impact of church programs.

2.1. Importance of M&E in Program Assessment

Researchers agree on the pivotal role played by Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in the effective assessment of programs across diverse sectors, including churches. Scriven (2018) argues that the significance of M&E is in its ability to systematically collect, analyse, and interpret data, providing valuable insights into the performance and impact of programs. He says that one importance of M&E in program assessment is its contribution to evidence-based decision-making.

M&E also serves as a tool for organisational learning and adaptation. As highlighted by Patton (2016) [13], the feedback loop established through M&E allows institutions to learn from their experiences, identify areas for improvement, and adapt strategies accordingly. This adaptive capacity is also crucial in the context of church programs to stay relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of their members and the communities they serve.

Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry (2012) [3] emphasize that M&E mechanisms provide a means for organisations to demonstrate their commitment to responsible and effective program management. This, enhance credibility in the context of church programs and foster greater support from both church members and the community.

2.2. Biblical Principles Supporting Monitoring and Evaluation of Church Programs

Biblical principles play a significant role in guiding the ethical foundations of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) practices, particularly within the context of faith-based initiatives. Literature is limited to foundations of Monitoring and Evaluation in a church context. Since a church is a Christian faith-based organisation, Smith (2018) [18] outlines several principles to guide M&E in a faith-based organisation context that can also be applied to a church context.

The first principle is stewardship which is rooted in the biblical understanding that individuals and organisations are accountable for managing resources responsibly. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 emphasizes the importance of faithful stewardship, aligning with the notion of effective M&E as a means to ensure responsible and accountable management of resources.

The second principle of justice and righteousness also provides a foundation for M&E. Proverbs 21:3 states, "To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice." This principle underscores the importance of evaluating programs to ensure they align with ethical standards and contribute positively to the well-being of individuals and communities (Smith, 2018) [18].

The Biblical emphasis on love and compassion (Matthew 22:39) serves as a guiding principle for M&E in the context of a faith-based organisation that can also be applied in the church program context. Evaluations that incorporate a compassionate and empathetic approach can better reflect the transformative impact of faith-based initiatives on the lives of individuals and communities through meticulous monitoring and evaluation (Smith, 2018) [18].

2.3. Conceptual Reviews

The conceptual framework of this study is built upon the three theoretical foundations in applying monitoring and Evaluation on church programs. These are ecclesial leadership (Jones and Henshaw, 2018) [7], integration theory (Smith and Brandon, 2014) [19] and logic models (Rodgers, 2016).
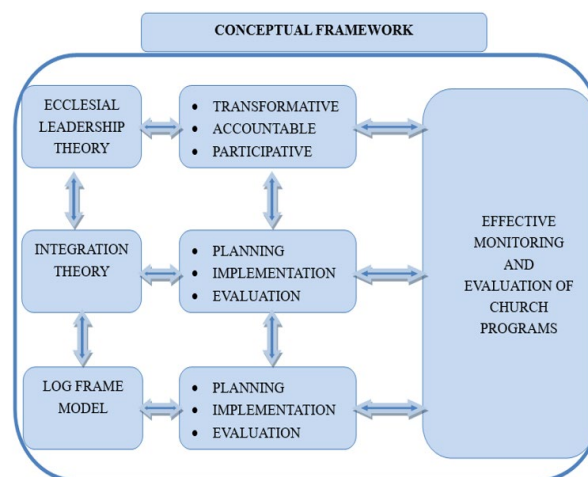

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

2.3.1. Ecclesial Leadership Theory

In monitoring and evaluating church programs, leadership plays a crucial role. Rodgers (2016), picks out three essential ecclesial leadership skills that will enable leaders to encourage a robust monitoring and evaluation of church programs. These are transformative, accountable and participative. According to Northouse (2013) [11], a transformational leader inspires and motivates followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and transcend their self-interests for the greater good of the organisation or community. A transformative leader inspires positive change and innovation within the organisation, encouraging stakeholders to embrace new ideas and approaches to M&E (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013) [2].

An accountable leader exhibits transparency and integrity in the M&E process by ensuring that data collection, analysis, and reporting are done ethically and accurately (Pless & Maak, 2011). Accountability is critical for executives involved in monitoring and evaluation (M&E), guaranteeing transparency, integrity, and trustworthiness throughout the process. Accountability requires accepting responsibility for the results of M&E efforts, including data collection, analysis, and decision-making (Pless & Maak, 2011).

Participatory leadership emphasises cooperation and shared decision-making. This trait of leadership also improves the effectiveness of M&E in church programmes (Yukl, 2013) [24]. A participative leader enables varied stakeholders to contribute to the design and implementation of M&E initiatives (Bass & Riggio, 2006) [4].

2.3.2. Integration Theory

For assessment procedures to be smoothly integrated into all facets of programme design, execution, and assessment, integration in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is crucial (Patton, 2018). Integration of M&E in a church context entails integrating assessment procedures into the conception, execution, and assessment of church initiatives and events (Bratton *et al.*, 2015). This entails setting precise goals and metrics for evaluating the influence of ministries, gathering and examining information on the actions and results of programmes, and applying evaluation results to guide resource allocation and decision-making (Coryn *et al.*, 2019).

2.3.3. Logic Model Theory

A log frame, or Logical Framework, is a planning and management technique for systematically structuring and managing projects or programmes (UNDP, 2009) [20]. It offers a rational structure for compiling and summarising important project data, such as its aims, objectives, activities, indicators, and presumptions. The value of a logframe in organisations is that it offers an organised structure for project or program planning and administration, guaranteeing that the aims, objectives, and activities of the project are understood by all parties involved (World Bank, 1996). The logframe helps project stakeholders communicate and coordinate, which helps to align resources and activities towards shared goals (UNDP, 2009) [20]. The logframe also acts as an accountability and transparency tool, allowing organisations to monitor and report program or project performance and results to donors and stakeholders (World Bank, 1996).

The logframe is a useful instrument for organising, tracking, and evaluating programme performance when it comes to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of church programmes. A logframe method can be a useful tool for efficiently articulating and monitoring the precise goals and objectives of church programmes, particularly those about spiritual growth, community outreach, and social impact. Church leaders can define essential activities and outcomes, define programme objectives, and create indicators for tracking progress and success by creating a logframe for their programmes (Mayne, 2012) [9].

2.4. Research Gap

While there is a growing body of literature addressing Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in various contexts, there are notable gaps when it comes to the specific evaluation of church programs. These gaps in the literature highlight areas where further research is needed to enhance our understanding of the unique challenges, opportunities, and best practices in assessing the impact of faith-based initiatives. The identification of these gaps is crucial for advancing both theoretical and practical knowledge in this field.

The first key gap in the literature is the limited study of theological viewpoints in church programme monitoring and evaluation. There has been little research into how theological principles determine the assessment criteria and methodologies used inside churches. Understanding the interplay of theology and evaluation is critical for creating culturally sensitive and context-relevant M&E frameworks.

Secondly, although some literature addresses the challenges of measuring intangible spiritual outcomes, methods specifically designed to capture the transformational and spiritual dimensions of church programs have not yet been adequately explored which has hindered the development of frameworks and models for assessing the impact of church programs.

Thirdly, a noticeable gap exists in the availability of comprehensive M&E models tailored for small congregations. Many existing frameworks are more suited to larger organisations, with limited guidance on adapting these models to the unique dynamics, resources, and challenges faced by smaller church communities.

Again, in the era of digital transformation, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the integration of technology in the M&E of church programs. As churches increasingly leverage online platforms for ministry and outreach, understanding how to measure the impact of virtual engagement, online communities, and digital resources is critical.

Lastly, there is a gap in the literature regarding the long-term sustainability of M&E practices in church programs. While short-term impact assessments are common, there is a need for research that explores the sustainability of evaluation efforts over time. This includes understanding the factors that contribute to the institutionalisation of M&E within churches and how sustained evaluation practices influence programmatic outcomes over the long term.

These identified gaps in the literature underscore the need for further research and exploration in specific areas related to the M&E of church programs. Addressing these gaps will contribute to the development of more holistic, contextually relevant, and sustainable evaluation frameworks that align with the unique nature of faith-based initiatives. Researchers and practitioners alike can benefit from filling these voids to advance knowledge and enhance the effectiveness of M&E within religious contexts.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design

Research design refers to the overall plan or structure that guides a research study. According to Smith (2010), Considering the topic of investigating the effective use of monitoring and evaluation systems on the impact of church programs within the CCAP Nkhoma Synod congregations, a mixed-methods research design was used. This is because it allows for the collection of both quantitative data, such as numerical information on the usage and outcomes of monitoring and evaluation systems, and qualitative data, including insights from church leaders and members on their perceptions and experiences with these systems.

3.2. Population of the Study

In the context of this project report, the population of the study is specifically the congregations affiliated with the CCAP Nkhoma Synod. This includes all members, clergy, and stakeholders associated with these congregations. The choice of this population is significant due to the prominent role of the CCAP Nkhoma Synod within Malawi. As noted by Mhone and Mlenga (2012) [10], the synod commands a substantial following within the country, with millions of members spread across various regions.

3.3. Data Collection Tools

The study utilised both quantitative and qualitative data. Therefore, questionnaires, interviews, and document inspection were used as data collection tools. The quantitative data collected for this study provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices within the selected Presbyterian churches. This analysis focuses on three key hypotheses: leadership in M&E practices, the integration of M&E processes, and the use of Logframes as a tool for planning, implementing, evaluating, and improving church programs. Through the administration of structured questionnaires, responses were gathered from a diverse group of church leaders, including ministers, elders, deacons, clerks, and members of M&E departments.

The qualitative data were collected through follow-up phone interviews with church ministers, clerks, and M&E committee chairpersons, and were analysed to identify common themes and insights. These interviews focused on three key questions to gain deeper insights into the use and effectiveness of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) systems in church programs within CCAP congregations in Nkhoma Synod. The first question explored the leadership traits that enhance M&E processes in church programs, identifying specific characteristics that contribute to successful implementation and operation. The second question examined the challenges hindering the adoption and implementation of M&E practices, uncovering various barriers faced by congregations. The final question sought recommendations to improve the adoption and implementation of M&E processes, providing practical suggestions for overcoming identified obstacles and enhancing program effectiveness.

Document inspection was conducted to assess the presence and quality of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) components in the congregations with established M&E committees. This inspection aimed to verify the actual implementation of M&E practices and the extent to which these congregations align with best practices in M&E. The document checklist covered a range of essential elements, including clear objectives, appropriate indicators, baseline data, data collection methods, data sources, data quality assurance, data analysis, reporting mechanisms, feedback and learning, resource allocation, timelines and milestones, roles and responsibilities, and ethical considerations

3.4. Data Analysis Tools

For the quantitative data, the researcher used correlation analysis which was employed to explore the relationships between key variables relevant to the study objectives. By applying correlation analysis, the researcher aimed to investigate the extent of association between various factors identified within the scope of the research. This method enabled the researcher to identify potential patterns, trends, or dependencies among variables, thereby providing valuable insights into the dynamics of monitoring and evaluation of church programs.

For the qualitative data thematic analysis was used to analyse data. The thematic analysis provides a structured yet flexible approach to identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data, allowing the researcher to uncover common experiences, perceptions, and practices related to monitoring and evaluation systems.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed analysis of both quantitative data and qualitative insights gathered from church leaders, members, and stakeholders. Through this comprehensive examination, the chapter seeks to provide valuable insights that can inform strategies to enhance M&E effectiveness, promote accountability, and improve program outcomes within the context of the CCAP congregations in Nkhoma Synod.

4.2. Demographic Data

The demographic data collected from the study participants of CCAP Nkhoma Synod congregations reveal a diverse composition. Among the respondents, 93.1% were male, and 6.9% were female. This showed gender imbalance in church leadership. The age distribution shows that 9.8% were between 25-34 years, 26.5% were 35-44 years, 20.6% were 45-54 years, and 43.1% were over 55 years old. The relatively lower representation of younger age groups (25-34 and 35-44) could imply a generational gap in leadership roles or involvement in M&E activities within the church.

The distribution of education levels among respondents highlights a diverse range of educational backgrounds. The highest representation was among those with first degrees (36.3%), indicating that many respondents had completed undergraduate education. A significant proportion of respondents held diplomas (25.5%) and MSCE and below (19.6%), suggesting a mix of educational attainment levels. The relatively smaller percentages of master's (15.7%) and PhD holders (2.9%) point to fewer respondents with advanced academic qualifications. This varied educational background could affect the depth of understanding and perspectives on M&E practices.

As for a number of years of experience in church leadership, a notable proportion of respondents (34.3%) have relatively less experience, with up to 5 years in leadership positions, potentially indicating a mix of new and seasoned leaders contributing fresh perspectives alongside their learning curves. Those with 11-20 years of experience represent a smaller segment (13.7%), while a very small proportion (3.9%) have over 21 years of leadership experience,

suggesting fewer long-term leaders. This distribution underscores a dynamic leadership landscape with a balance of emerging leaders and those with substantial experience, which can enrich the church's M&E processes through a combination of innovative approaches and seasoned insights. The data on the presence of M&E committees revealed a significant gap in establishing formal monitoring and evaluation structures within the churches. Only 10.7% of the churches had a dedicated M&E committee, indicating that structured M&E practices are not widely adopted. The fact that only one congregation (3.6%) was in the process of developing such a committee suggests some emerging awareness and efforts towards institutionalising M&E practices. However, the overwhelming majority (85.7%) of congregations lacking an M&E committee highlights a critical area for development. This lack of formal M&E structures impedes the systematic assessment of church programs and initiatives, underlining the need for concerted efforts to establish and support M&E frameworks across the congregations.

4.3. Quantitative Data
4.3.1. Hypothesis 1: Ecclesial Leadership in M&E Practices

The ecclesial leadership theory states that leaders who are transformative, accountable and participative encourage monitoring and evaluation systems in the church programs. The research showed that respondents generally perceive their church leaders as effective in promoting and implementing M&E practices.
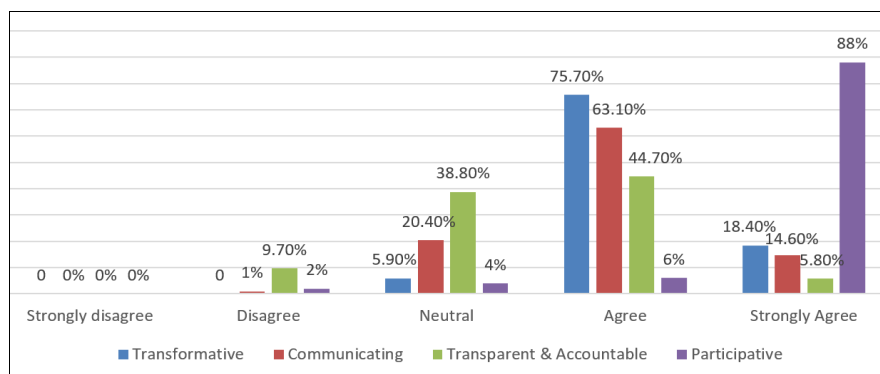

Fig 2: Ecclesial Leadership in M&E Practices

A significant majority (75.7%) agreed that their leaders demonstrate transformative leadership, and a combined 81.6% agreed or strongly agreed that their leaders maintain transparency. However, responses were more mixed regarding accountability and transparency, with 38.8% being neutral. Similarly, while 56.9% agreed that leaders involve church members in decision-making, a notable percentage (32%) remained neutral.

The responses indicated a generally positive perception of leadership qualities among the church ministers, particularly in terms of transformative leadership and transparency in communication. However, the mixed responses regarding accountability and the involvement of church members in decision-making highlight areas that could benefit from further development. Enhancing these aspects could lead to more robust and effective leadership practices, ultimately fostering a more engaged and satisfied congregation.

The data regarding the impact of church leadership on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of church programs reveals mixed perceptions. Only 1% of respondents felt their leadership was very ineffective, and 14.7% rated it as ineffective. A notable 40.2% remained neutral, while a combined 44.2% found their leadership effective or very effective in facilitating M&E processes, indicating a generally positive perception with room for improvement. In terms of the leadership's commitment to continuous improvement and learning, 5.9% felt it had no influence, 20.6% believed the influence was slight, and 31.4% saw a moderate impact. However, a majority, 42.1%, indicated significant positive influence, with 34.3% saying it influences very much and 7.8% saying it influences extremely. This underscores the importance of fostering a culture of continuous improvement and learning within church leadership to enhance the effectiveness of M&E processes in church programs.
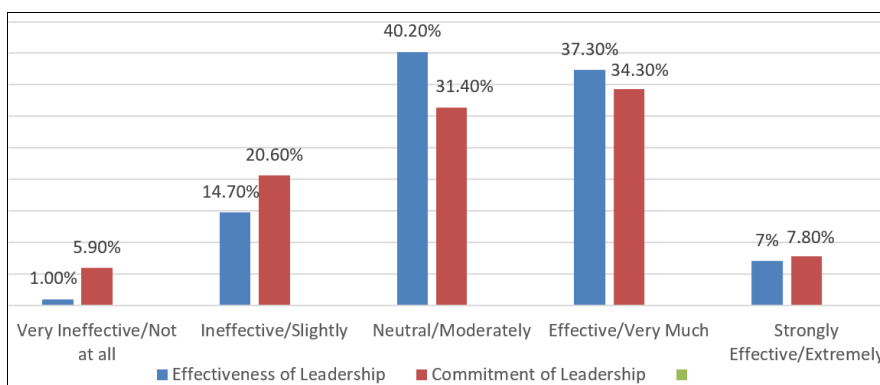

Fig 3: Impact of church leadership on monitoring and evaluation (M&E)

In conclusion, the analysis of hypothesis 1 suggested that church leaders play a crucial role in facilitating effective M&E processes within church programs. The majority of respondents perceive their leaders positively in terms of

transformative leadership, transparency in communication, and to some extent, participative decision-making. These leadership qualities are essential for enhancing program effectiveness, fostering stakeholder engagement, and promoting sustainable development within congregations.

4.3.2. Hypothesis 2: Integration of M&E Practices
Regarding the integration of M&E practices, the data revealed varying levels of adoption and effectiveness. While 20.6% of respondents conducted improvement analysis based on evaluation findings, a larger portion (41.2%) disagreed that leaders actively promote M&E integration.
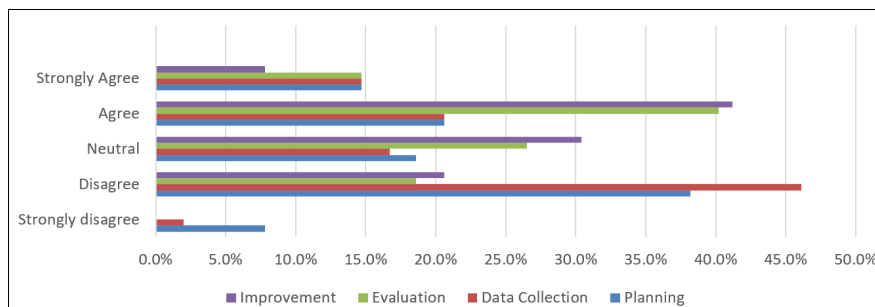
Fig 4: Integration of M&E practices

When evaluating the impact of M&E integration on church programs, opinions were split; around a third of respondents believed it improves planning, implementation, and data collection, but a significant portion remained neutral or disagreed.
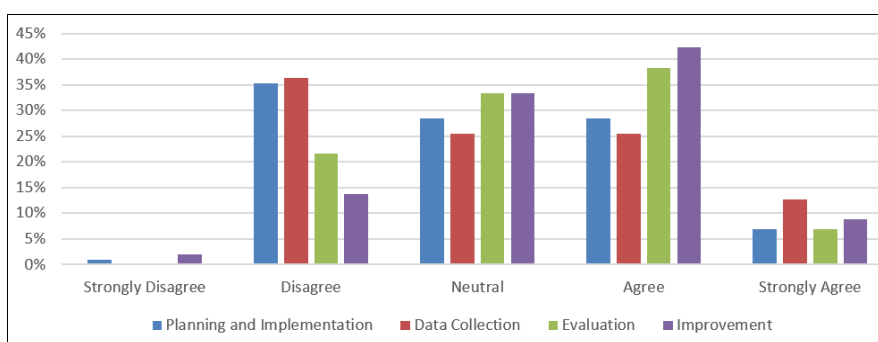
Fig 5: Impact of the integration of M&E practices in church programs

The survey responses revealed varied perceptions among church leaders regarding the integration of M&E processes in church program planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. Many leaders see the value in incorporating M&E processes into planning and implementation stages, though a notable minority remain sceptical. Data collection practices during program implementation are not widely adopted, indicating potential gaps. There is moderate acceptance of the importance of evaluation, with many leaders recognising its significance, though some remain neutral or disagree. Improvement analysis based on evaluation findings has a considerable level of support, yet a significant portion of leaders are unsure or disagree with its importance. Additionally, there is a reluctance or lack of emphasis on promoting M&E integration among a substantial portion of the leadership.

4.3.3 Hypothesis 3: Use of Logframes
For the use of logframes, only a small fraction of churches (10.7%) had dedicated M&E committees, with limited use of logframes in planning and evaluating programs. Most respondents from these churches did not utilise logframes effectively, as reflected by the 93.3% who found them ineffective. Additionally, the majority had a poor understanding of logframes, and most were dissatisfied with their training. Despite this, a subset of respondents (40%) showed a willingness to recommend logframes, indicating the potential for improvement with better training and understanding. The graphs below indicate the responses towards the use and perception of logframe.
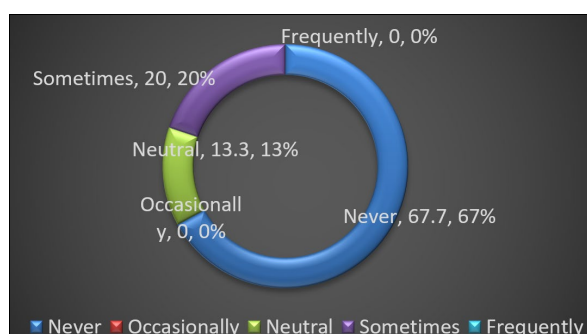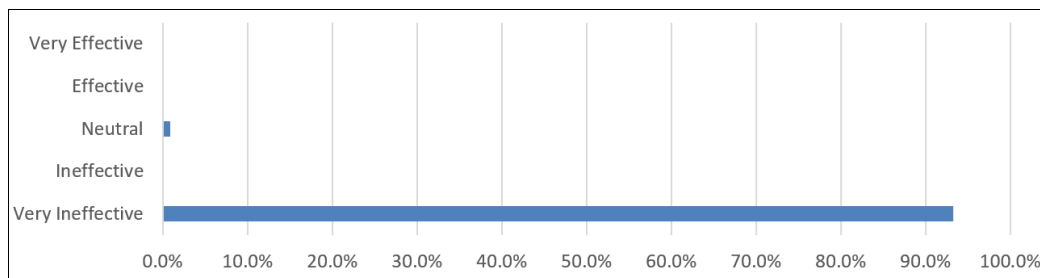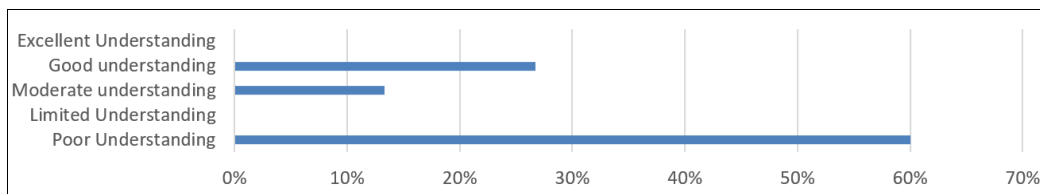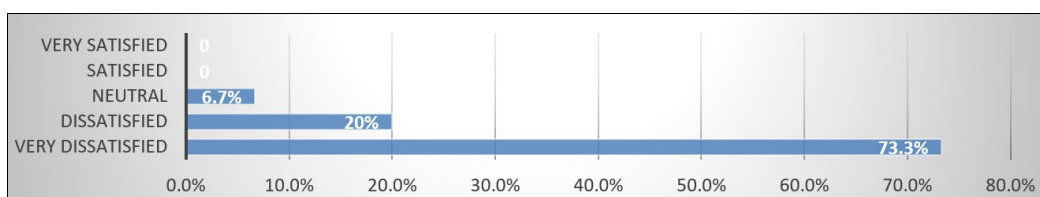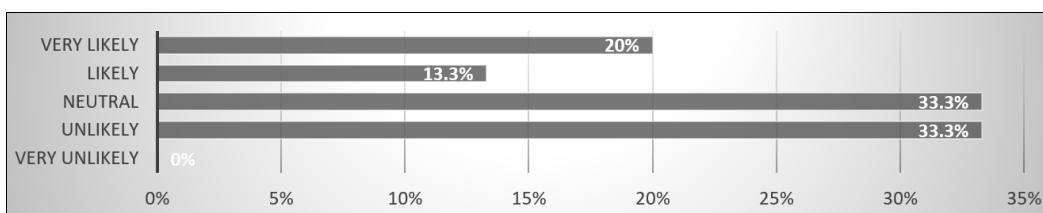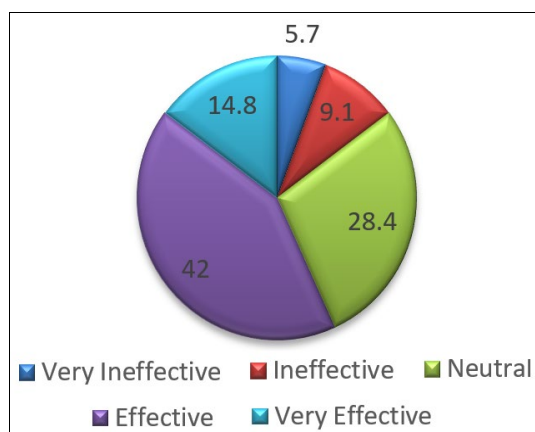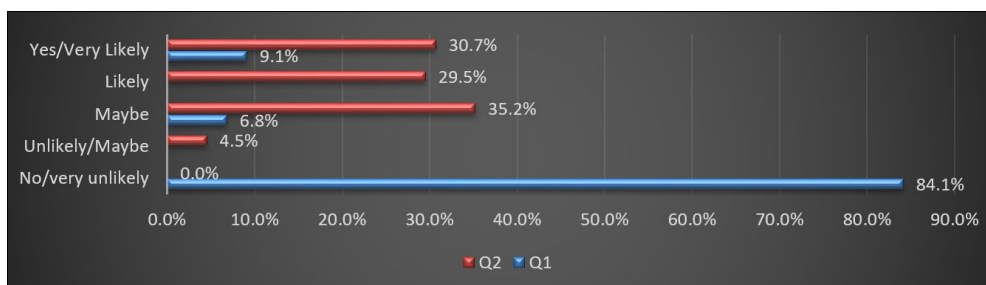

Fig 6: Use of Logframes for Planning, Data Collection, Evaluation, and Improvement of Church Programs

Fig 7: Impact of Logframes

Fig 8: level of understanding

Fig 9: Training satisfaction

Fig 10: Recommend the use of logframes

Fig 11: Effective Planning, Implementation, Evaluation and Improvement of Church Programs for Congregations without M&E Committees

Fig 12: Committees' Perception towards Monitoring and Evaluation Processes and its adoption.
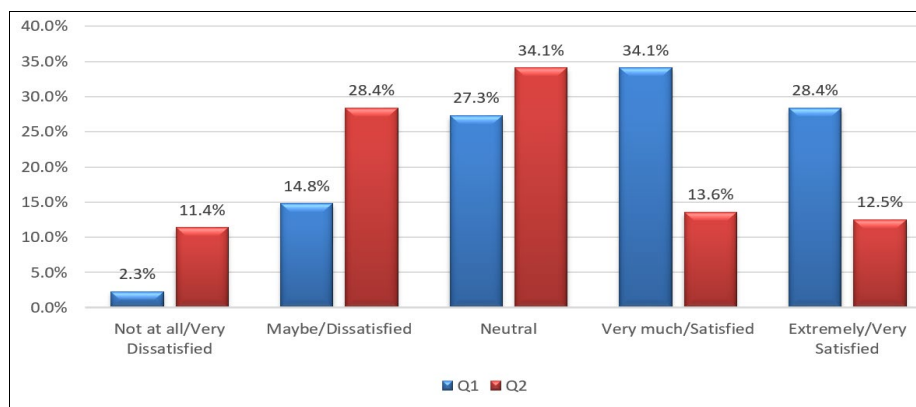
Fig 13: Impact of the Research on the Respondents' Views on Planning, Implementation, Evaluation, and Improvement of Church Programs

## 4.4. Qualitative Data Presentation

Qualitative insights from follow-up interviews further enriched the understanding of these challenges and highlighted different perspectives. Stakeholders expressed concerns over the lack of training and expertise in M&E practices among church members, citing these deficits as impediments to accurate data collection and meaningful program evaluation.

They also emphasised the importance of organisational support, leadership commitment, and cultural alignment in overcoming these challenges and fostering a conducive environment for M&E adoption.

4.4.1 Leadership Traits for Effective Adoption and Implementation of M&E in Church Programs

The key leadership traits that respondents perceived were participative, consultative, communicative and approachable, responsible, committed, democratic, accountable and transparent, and visionary. The responses are summarised in the graph below.
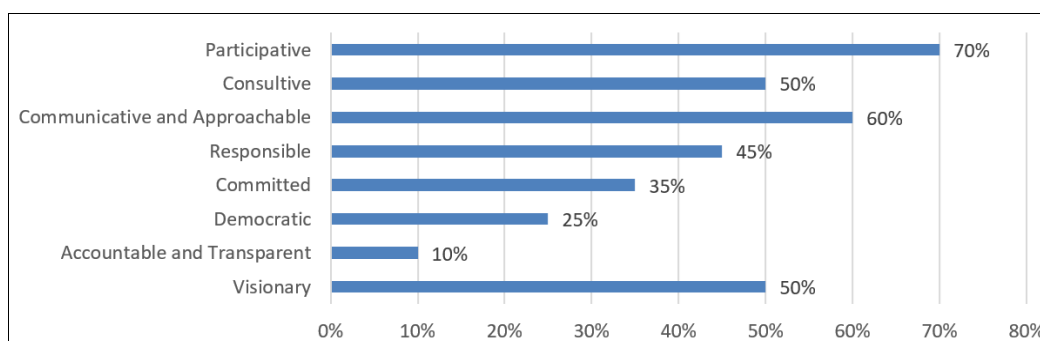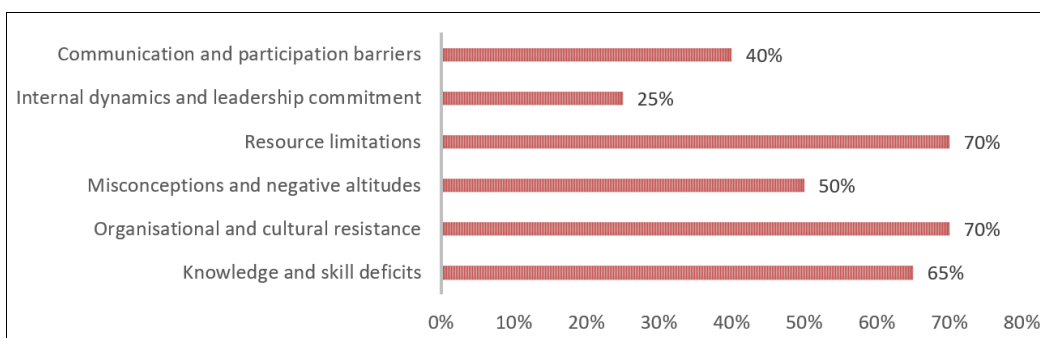

Fig 14: Summary of Leadership Traits

4.4.1. Challenges in Adopting and Implementing M&E Practices in Church Programs

The research uncovered several challenges that have hindered the congregations to adopt and implement M&E systems in their church programs. The challenges were coded as presented in the graph below.

Fig 15: Summary of Challenges Hindering Adoption and Implementation of M&E in Church Programs

4.4.2. Recommendations to Enhance Adoption of M&E in Church Programs

The church leaders who were the respondents of this research recommended several initiatives to enhance the adoption and implementation of M& practices in church programs. These were allowing youth in leadership positions, changing policy from the church's headquarters, funding M&E operations, mass sensitisations, special training for church ministers, and training of church leaders.
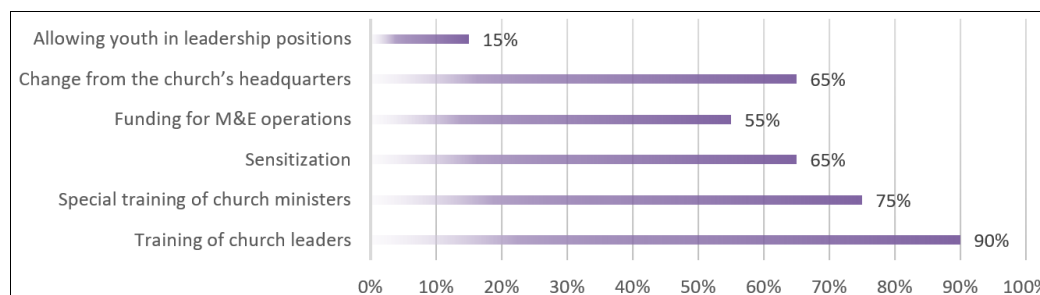
Fig 16: Summary of Recommendations to Enhance Adoption and Implementation of M&E Processes in Church Programs

4.5. Document Inspection

Lastly, a document checklist was used to assess the presence and quality of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plans across three congregations with established M&E committees, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement. Firstly, it was observed that clear objectives aligned with the church program goals were defined in two out of the three congregations, indicating a relatively strong start in setting the direction for M&E activities. However, appropriate indicators to measure outputs, outcomes, and impact were absent in all three congregations, revealing a significant gap in the ability to systematically track and assess the effectiveness of programs. Baseline data, crucial for monitoring progress, was collected and documented in only one congregation, and reliable data collection methods and identified data sources were also available in just one congregation each. Moreover, procedures to ensure data quality assurance were missing across all congregations, raising concerns about the validity and reliability of any collected data.

The analysis of collected data to generate insights and assess program performance was not outlined in any of the congregations, and mechanisms for regular reporting to stakeholders were also absent. This lack of structured data analysis and reporting frameworks hinders the ability to make informed decisions and communicate findings effectively to church leadership and program managers. Additionally, only one congregation had a provision for feedback loops to facilitate learning and adaptation based on M&E findings, indicating limited opportunities for continuous improvement. Resource allocation and budgetary plans to support M&E activities were not available in any congregation, highlighting a critical barrier to implementing robust M&E practices. Timelines and milestones, important for tracking progress and ensuring timely completion of activities, were defined in just one congregation. Similarly, clear roles and responsibilities were assigned to individuals or committees involved in M&E activities in only one congregation, pointing to potential issues with accountability and clarity in roles.

The document checklist results indicate several key areas where the congregations' M&E practices are lacking. Despite having defined objectives in two congregations, the absence of appropriate indicators, comprehensive data collection methods, and quality assurance procedures severely limits the effectiveness of M&E activities. The lack of baseline data in most congregations further complicates efforts to monitor progress and evaluate changes over time. The findings also reveal significant gaps in data analysis, reporting mechanisms, and feedback loops, which are essential for generating insights, making informed decisions, and fostering continuous improvement. The absence of dedicated resources and budgetary plans underscores the financial and logistical challenges faced by these congregations in implementing robust M&E frameworks. Overall, while some foundational elements of M&E plans are present, there is a critical need for comprehensive training, resource allocation, and strategic support from church leadership to enhance the adoption and effectiveness of M&E practices. Addressing these gaps will be crucial for improving the planning, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement of church programs.

Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from this research illuminate critical gaps and opportunities in the integration of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices within church programmes. The following twelve conclusions were drawn;

There's a significant Shortfall in M&E Integration as only 58% of church leaders do not incorporate M&E practices during planning stages and as there is a lack of formal M&E committees or departments within congregations.

There's a widespread lack of knowledge among church leaders as 60% of respondents have a poor understanding of M&E practices and only 15% possess a moderate level of knowledge. This knowledge gap hinders effective program planning, implementation, and evaluation

There is potential for transformational leadership as this leadership within Nkhoma Synod congregations can inspire the adoption of M&E processes. The most critical challenges to deal with include misconceptions and resistance to change.

Accountable leadership has emerged as a crucial factor in the adoption and implementation of M&E in church programmes. 66.7% of respondents identify accountability as key to successful M&E integration. They also emphasised transparent and ethical data collection, analysis, and reporting.

Participative leadership, which involves church members in the M&E process, is vital for creating an inclusive environment and fostering a sense of ownership. 70% of respondents highlight the importance of involving church members in the M&E process. This type of leadership indeed fosters an inclusive environment and a sense of ownership.

There is a limited utilisation of logframes in church programme planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement. 67% of participants never use logframes. The primary reasons for this include lack of knowledge and training as an average of 60% of respondents indicate a poor understanding of logframe use.

Seventhly, negative perceptions towards M&E practices significantly impede their adoption. 93% of church leaders believe logframes and similar tools are ineffective for church programming. This is driven by knowledge deficits and strong preference for traditional methods.

Despite the challenges, there is a notable positive attitude towards the potential benefits of M&E among church leaders. Over half of the participants (51%) acknowledge that systematic evaluation using M&E practices can improve church programs.

Literacy levels concerning M&E techniques among church leaders significantly limit the effective integration of data collection during programme implementation. 75% of leaders

lack adequate knowledge to skilfully conduct surveys, observations, and other data collection methods.

Most church leaders remain satisfied with traditional, non-formal programme planning and evaluation methods. 57% of leaders are satisfied with traditional, non-formal program planning and evaluation methods. This contributes to resistance against adopting systematic M&E practices.

There is lack of lack of proactive promotion of M&E practices by church leaders as evidenced by 42% of church leaders not actively promoting M&E integration and 25% of being neutral, likely due to a lack of understanding of M&E principles.

There is significant potential for improving accountability within church programmes through enhanced M&E practices. 68.6% of respondents agree on the importance of transparent and ethical data management. This can foster trust and engagement among stakeholders.

Lastly, the effective integration of M&E practices requires robust organisational support and resources. The lack of formal M&E structures and dedicated committees indicates a need for organisational changes. Providing adequate resources, including training, financial support, and personnel dedicated to M&E, is essential for establishing a culture of continuous improvement and accountability within church programmes.

Recommendations
Based on the findings and conclusions of this research, several recommendations are proposed to improve the integration of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices within church programmes.

i) Comprehensive Training and Awareness Meetings
Church ministers should be trained in contemporary management skills like monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, comprehensive training on M&E practices, including the use of tools such as logframes, should be provided to church leaders and members. This training will enhance their understanding and capacity to implement M&E effectively, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. These trainings are to be done in both English and vernacular language to make sure that every church leader is assisted.

ii) Establishment of M&E Committees in Churches
Churches should establish dedicated M&E committees or departments responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating programmes. These committees should be composed of members with relevant skills and knowledge to ensure effective M&E processes.

iii) Encouraging Church Leaders to Adopt Transformational Leadership Styles
Transformational leaders inspire and motivate their congregations to embrace M&E practices by setting a visionary direction, fostering a sense of shared purpose, and encouraging innovative approaches to programme evaluation. In conjunction with this, church leaders should prioritise transparency and integrity in all M&E activities. Ethical data collection, accurate analysis, and clear reporting of findings to stakeholders will build trust and credibility within the congregation

iv) Foster Participatory Leadership
This participatory approach ensures that diverse perspectives are considered, enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of church programmes and fostering a sense of ownership among members. Furthermore, integrating M&E activities into the initial planning stages of church programmes is crucial. This includes setting clear objectives, identifying success indicators, and planning for data collection and analysis from the outset to facilitate more efficient and effective programme implementation.

v) Implementing Mechanisms for Real-Time Data Collection During Programme Implementation
Real-time data collection will provide timely feedback and enable church leaders to make informed decisions and adjustments, improving the overall impact and success of church programmes. These recommendations aim to address the current gaps in M&E practices within church programmes and promote a more systematic and effective approach to monitoring and evaluation in faith-based organisations.

vi) Integrating Technology in Data Collection
Using new technologies like Google Forms to collect data, excel sheets and other statistical packages to analyse data, social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook for feedback, and other technologies can help make M&E easy and effective in church programs.

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