



Strengthening Local Action in Humanitarian Response: Exploring Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Systems of National Organisations in North-East Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Background: Locally led humanitarian response is increasingly recognised as essential for effective humanitarian aid delivery. Robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems are central to enabling national non-governmental organisations (NNGOs) to generate evidence, support decision making, and ensure program accountability. Strengthening these systems requires a clear understanding of existing gaps and actionable opportunities for improvement.

Objective: This study examined the structure and performance of MEL systems within NNGOs responding to the North-East Nigeria armed conflict, identifying gaps and opportunities to strengthen locally led humanitarian action.

Method: A qualitative, cross sectional design was used, drawing on purposive sampling of MEL focal persons from NNGOs and INGOs. Data were collected using semi structured questionnaire and key informant interviews, then thematically analysed against recognised humanitarian MEL standards and localisation commitments.

Results: Results show that most NNGOs are operating below minimum MEL standards. Key weaknesses include overstretched staffing, weak governance and documentation systems, inconsistent use of MEL frameworks, outdated digital tools, and insufficient MEL budgets. These gaps limit timely data collection, analysis, and use, ultimately undermining accountability, adaptive programming, and organisational learning.

Conclusion: MEL systems within NNGOs in Northeast Nigeria operate below required standards and remain chronically under- resourced, significantly limiting their ability to generate and use timely evidence. As a result, these system gaps weaken the effectiveness, accountability, and adaptability of humanitarian responses in the region.

Unique Contribution: This study provides empirical insight into MEL readiness among local humanitarian actors and identifies clear opportunities for strengthening organisational systems, thereby contributing directly to ongoing debates on localisation and organisational development.

Key Recommendations: Predictable and dedicated MEL financing, along with strong leadership commitment within NNGOs, needs to be strengthened by integrating MEL performance indicators into organisational systems so that MEL becomes more than a compliance requirement. Governance should also be enhanced through the development of MEL policies, frameworks, and tools, supported by donor mentoring and peer- learning opportunities.

Keywords: Monitoring and Evaluation; Localisation; Humanitarian Action; National NGOs; North-East Nigeria



INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian assistance has existed throughout human history; however, the modern concept of humanitarianism is commonly traced to the nineteenth century, with Henry Dunant's role in the establishment of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions (McFarland, 2017). Humanitarian aid across the globe since then have been essential in providing lifesaving and life sustaining interventions following the occurrence of emergencies which can be man-made or naturally occurring. Effective humanitarian response requires not only rapid action but also adherence to principles, policies, and standards that guide decision making and protect affected populations and responders alike (Nwafor et al., 2024).

Decision making in humanitarian contexts is often complex, occurring within volatile and resource constrained environments. To support informed decision making across the humanitarian program cycle, a range of laws, principles, coordination mechanisms, and operational frameworks have been developed. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems have emerged as a core management function within this ecosystem, providing mechanisms to assess progress, ensure accountability, and facilitate learning and adaptation. Over time, MEL has developed into a core management function across multiple sectors where it has become key to assess progress, ensure accountability, and facilitate learning and adaptation. Consequently, MEL has been institutionalised across humanitarian, development, governmental, and private sector organisations due to its central role in improving effectiveness and desired outcomes (Toscano, 2013).

Following series of conflict and crisis in different regions across Nigeria, there have been large scale displacements, loss of lives, and damage to property and social infrastructure. Consequently, the need for humanitarian interventions became underlined to provide lifesaving and life preserving aid. Since 2016, humanitarian organisations have been working to support of the Government of Nigeria in providing humanitarian and early recovery interventions at scale. In 2023, the Humanitarian Needs Overview of Nigeria published by the United Nations estimates that there are about 8.3 million people in need of humanitarian aid (UNOCHA, 2023). The protracted nature of this crisis, which has continued for years, has made the contribution of local actors ever more important. It is imperative that if the affected regions of the country dependent on humanitarian aid are going to shift to early recovery and development, local actors will have a key role to play (Omu-Ngebo et al., 2024).

Despite growing recognition of the importance of localisation, humanitarian response in Nigeria remains largely driven by international organisations that control most resources and decision making. While efforts to strengthen the role of local actors have increased, progress remains uneven and below desired levels. Limited attention has been paid to strengthening core systems such as MEL, that are essential for ensuring quality, accountability, and learning within localised responses.

Many national organisations continue to face challenges in designing and implementing MEL systems that meet international standards. As responsibilities are increasingly transferred to local actors, insufficient MEL capacity risks undermining program quality and reversing gains made through localisation efforts. Despite the centrality of MEL to humanitarian effectiveness,



empirical evidence on the state of MEL systems within national NGOs remains limited. This study addresses this gap by evaluating the design, implementation, and effectiveness of MEL systems among selected national NGOs responding to the humanitarian crisis in Northeast Nigeria. By comparing these systems with those of international NGOs, the study identifies strengths, gaps, and opportunities for strengthening MEL capacity in support of more effective and accountable localised humanitarian response.

This study addresses the following questions:

- i. How are MEL systems structured within national NGOs operating in North-East Nigeria?
- ii. How do the MEL systems of national NGOs compare with those of international NGOs operating in North-East Nigeria?
- iii. What system level gaps constrain effective localisation and what priorities should guide MEL strengthening?

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical approach, drawing on organisational theory and systems theory to conceptualise and analyse MEL systems. Organisational theory provides an analytical lens for understanding how formal structures, governance arrangements, decision rights, incentives, and resource dependencies shape MEL performance and organisational learning (Pinto, 2017; Basten & Haamann, 2018). Complementing this perspective, systems theory foregrounds the dynamic interactions among interdependent components, the role of feedback loops, international aid community, donors and the adaptive behaviours that emerge within complex environments such as in a protracted humanitarian context (Adams et al., 2013). Together, these theoretical orientations support a whole systems view of MEL, treating it as an integrated organisational capability rather than a discrete function. From this standpoint, MEL effectiveness is understood to depend on four mutually reinforcing pillars: people and roles, processes and governance, tools and infrastructure and financing and resourcing.

These pillars function as the core components of a resilient and coherent MEL system. Their performance is shaped by cross cutting enablers including leadership commitment, resource availability, and strategic partnerships that enhance the stability, legitimacy, and uptake of MEL practices. Conversely, contextual constraints such as MEL staff limitations, budget shocks, and resource gaps can disrupt system functionality and undermine performance. The analytical framework therefore examines not only the operational strength of each MEL pillar, but also the interplay between enablers, constraints, and overall system functionality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Localisation as articulated across humanitarian policy and research, seeks to shift power, resources, and decision making authority closer to crisis affected communities. It extends beyond participatory approaches to emphasise the development of durable institutional capacities that enable locally led actors to consistently deliver high quality and accountable interventions. Within this shift, the functionality of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) systems has emerged as a critical determinant of organisational performance, influencing the credibility, adaptability, and accountability of humanitarian action. Nightingale (2012) and Nwafor et al.,



(2020) argues that strengthening local systems, including their evaluative capacities saves lives and accelerates recovery by enabling communities to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to crises more effectively.

As the humanitarian sector increasingly prioritises locally led responses, attention has turned to the organisational systems that underpin sustained performance. Frameworks such as the Nigeria Localisation Framework emphasise the need for strengthened national and local technical capacity across governance, leadership, strategic planning, research, monitoring and evaluation, and proposal development (NGO Coordination, 2019). These priorities reflect a growing recognition that locally led action is viable only when supported by robust internal systems capable of delivering accountable and evidence based programming.

Despite these policy commitments, the evidence base on effective strategies for strengthening core institutional systems; particularly MEL systems remain limited. Organisations employ diverse capacity strengthening frameworks, yet few comparative or empirically grounded studies examine what constitutes effective MEL system strengthening in practice. Albakour (2024) notes that the absence of shared benchmarks and limited documentation of organisational learning contribute to fragmented approaches, leaving practitioners without clear guidance on how to build sustainable MEL capabilities. This gap underscores the need for analytical studies that interrogate how MEL systems operate within local organisations and how enablers and constraints shape system functionality within localised humanitarian contexts.

METHODS

Study Design

This study adopted a qualitative, exploratory design given limited prior research on MEL systems among NNGOs in the study area. An exploratory approach was well suited to capturing the complexity of MEL practices, organisational processes, and contextual factors shaping system performance in the study setting.

Guided by a pragmatic research orientation, the study prioritised methods that generate actionable insights for practitioners while remaining attentive to participants' interpretations, experiences, and organisational contexts. Pragmatism allowed flexibility in data collection and analysis, enabling the study to draw from diverse sources of evidence to address the practical decision making needs of humanitarian actors.

Study area

This study area is the North-Eastern region of Nigeria and covers humanitarian organisations active in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states of the country which are the most affected by the protracted conflict and hence recorded the most humanitarian interventions. The aftermath of conflict and crisis in Nigeria led to massive displacements and the need for humanitarian interventions became underlined. Since 2016, humanitarian organisations have been working to support the Government of Nigeria in the response to diverse needs of the affected population. In the year 2021 alone, about 5 million people received humanitarian assistance in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states (UNOCHA, 2023).



Participant sample and recruitment

Purposive and snowball sampling identified eligible national and international organisations operating within the study area. One MEL focal person or technical lead represented each participating organisation. International NGOs were included to provide a benchmark for comparison and to illuminate differential capacities and practices across similar operating environments.

Inclusion Criteria

National NGOs (NNGOs), included in the study met the following criteria.

- Be a Nigerian founded and led humanitarian organisation duly registered with the regulating bodies.
- Be currently operational in at least one of the core North-Eastern Nigeria states affected by the humanitarian crisis (BAY states).
- Have been implementing humanitarian projects in the region from 2020 or earlier.
- Currently have a donor funded humanitarian project being implemented in the region.

National organisations that do not meet these criteria or have affiliations with international arms were excluded from this study.

International NGOs (INGOs) included met the following criteria.

- Be an international organisation operational in multiple countries, with at least 20 years of experience implementing humanitarian projects.
- Be currently operational in at least one of the core North-Eastern Nigeria states affected by the humanitarian crisis.
- Have been implementing humanitarian projects in the region from 2020 or earlier.
- Currently have a donor funded humanitarian project being implemented in the region.

International organisations that do not meet these criteria were excluded from the study.

Data collection and Analysis

Data were collected from individuals with direct responsibility for MEL functions within humanitarian organisations operating in northeastern Nigeria. A combination of semi-structured questionnaires and follow up qualitative interviews was used to elicit detailed accounts from key personnel across both international and national humanitarian organisations involved in the crisis response. This multimodal approach enhanced the depth and credibility of the data by enabling clarification, elaboration, and triangulation of emerging themes.

Semi structured questionnaires were administered electronically using Google Forms. Follow up interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams calls to clarify and validate responses. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarise organisational characteristics in Microsoft Excel 2024. Qualitative data were analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework, supported by NVivo version 15. Thematic analysis employed a hybrid deductive-inductive approach aligned to the four MEL pillars in the conceptual framework while allowing emergent codes. Instruments covered organisational characteristics, MEL staffing and structures, documentation and frameworks, digital infrastructure, budgeting and financing, data quality assurance, learning routines and perceived constraints.



Ethical Considerations

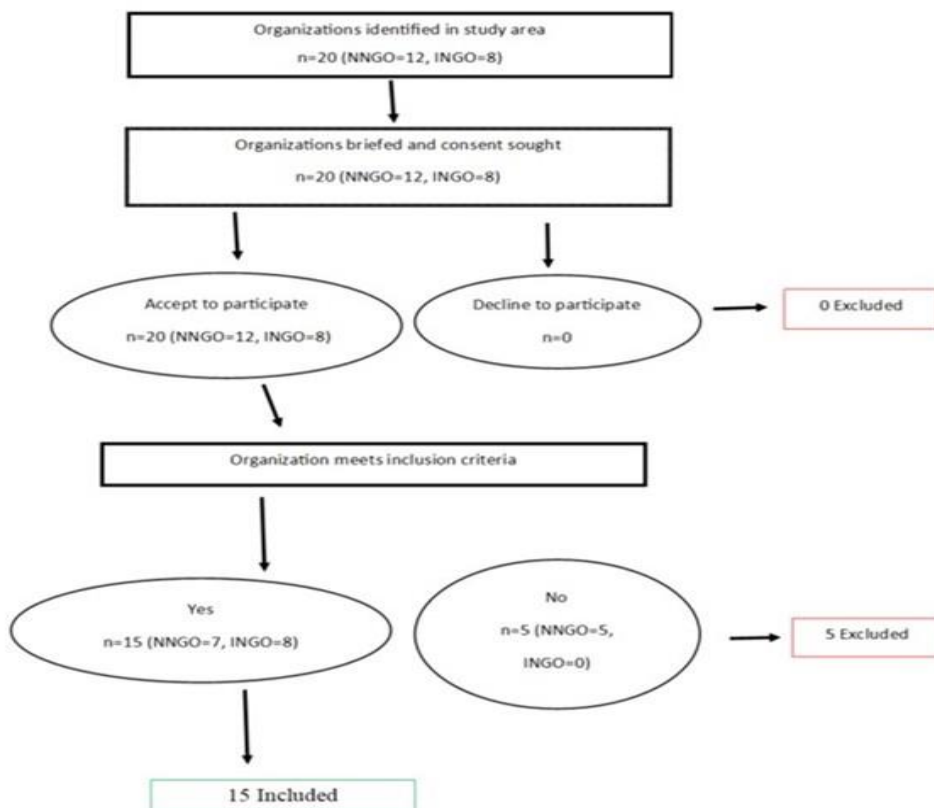
This research adhered to established ethical principles to ensure the protection of participants and the organisations they represent. Participants were informed of the study objectives, and organisational and individual consent was obtained prior to participation. The questionnaire avoided sensitive topics; interviews were conducted respectfully; and all data were anonymised, stored securely, and used solely for research purposes.

RESULTS

Inclusion and Profiles

Twenty (20) organisations active in North-East Nigeria were approached for participation (12 NNGOs and 8 INGOs). Following consent and an initial debriefing with prospective respondents, the organisation profiles were screened in line with the study inclusion criteria, five (5) national organisations were excluded. The final sample comprised 15 organisations: seven NNGOs and eight INGOs (Figure 1). Respondents represented director, manager, and technical specialist levels across both groups.

Figure 1. Flow diagram of organisational inclusion





Human Resources

Significant differences in MEL staffing were observed between international and national humanitarian NGOs. INGOs reported an average of 10 dedicated MEL staff, while NNGOs had an average of 3 staff. All INGOs (100%, n=8) indicated that every project had at least one dedicated MEL personnel, whereas only 57% (n=4) of NNGOs reported the same, with 43% (n=3) lacking dedicated MEL staff per project.

Regarding organisational MEL staff structure, all INGOs (100%) had formal organograms, compared to 71% (n=5) of NNGOs. Capacity building opportunities were reported as limited across both groups: 63% of INGOs and 57% of NNGOs indicated regular MEL training. Participants cited the fast paced nature of emergency projects as a barrier to specialised training.

Staff attrition emerged as a critical issue, particularly among NNGOs, where 71% (n=5) reported losing experienced MEL personnel, compared to 50% (n=4) among INGOs. Respondents highlighted that attrition negatively impacts program quality, reporting, and decision making. NNGOs noted greater difficulty replacing skilled staff due to smaller budgets and limited talent pools. One participant highlighted an issue faced with staff attrition:

Replacing the MEL staff (departing) is always difficult and most of the applicants have little or no experience – Participant 4

Equipment/Hardware and software

Implementing MEL activities requires appropriate hardware, the basic ones being laptops, tablets/smartphones, digital cameras and mobile phones/tablets. All organisations reported access to laptops for MEL activities. However, INGOs had broader access to additional hardware such as tablets, smartphones, and cameras. Hardware conditions varied: 88% of INGOs rated their equipment as good, while only 43% of NNGOs did so, with 14% reporting poor condition. NNGOs frequently relied on outdated equipment donated by partners, citing funding constraints as the main reason for inadequacy. Quoting a key informant:

A lot of the laptops were received as donations from international partners when they were upgrading theirs, which meant at the time they were already outdated, but for us it is what we have to use – Participant 9

Access to MEL related software was uneven. 75% of INGOs considered their software adequate, compared to 57% of NNGOs. Both groups identified gaps in specialised tools such as STATA, NVivo, and GIS software. INGOs attributed these gaps to discontinued licenses following staff turnover, while NNGOs cited inability to afford annual subscriptions, with some admitting to using unlicensed software.

Planning, documentation and budget

All INGOs (100%) reported having operational MEL policies, frameworks, or SOPs guiding their systems. In contrast, only 43% of NNGOs had such documentation, leaving 57% without



formal MEL guidelines, which limit standardisation, strategic alignment and planning to ensure appropriate MEL support for humanitarian activities.

Budgetary constraint for MEL was a recurring theme across the respondents from both groups. Half of INGOs (50%) had dedicated MEL budgets, while 57% of NNGOs reported no earmarked funds. Furthermore, 71% of NNGOs indicated MEL staff were not involved in budget preparation, compared to full inclusion (100%) among INGOs. Perceptions of adequacy were low across both groups: 75% of INGOs and 86% of NNGOs considered MEL budgets insufficient to cover essential needs such as hardware, software, and staffing. The following are quotes from participants highlight these points:

Although best practices states that 5-10% of a project budget should be set aside for MEL activities, it is not usually so. Most times we are told there are no funds for new licenses or additional tablets for data collection. This limits our ability to carry out efficient monitoring and evaluation of activities – Participant 11

We have difficulty securing funds for projects, most of the money we received are sub granted from INGOs. When we receive funds, there is none earmarked for M&E, they are to implement activities – Participant 2

Challenges to effective MEL

The most frequently reported barrier to effective MEL system implementation was limited and inconsistent funding, cited by 86% of NNGOs and 75% of INGOs. Funding shortfalls constrained organisations' ability to recruit qualified MEL personnel, invest in data management tools, and conduct routine monitoring activities. This finding is consistent with broader sectoral evidence indicating that MEL functions are among the first to be deprioritised when financial resources are scarce, especially within crisis affected settings.

A second set of constraints to MEL implementation are related to organisational leadership and management buy-in. Respondents noted that while MEL is often recognised rhetorically as important, senior managers and leadership did not always allocate the resources, time, or strategic attention needed to operationalise MEL frameworks. Limited buy in affected the integration of MEL into program design, constrained efforts to institutionalise learning, and hindered the adoption of evidence based decision making. The absence of sustained leadership commitment resulted in MEL being perceived as a donor compliance activity rather than a strategic organisational function.

Human resource limitations were also widely reported across both NNGOs and INGOs. Many organisations struggled with understaffing, high staff turnover, and insufficient technical expertise among existing MEL personnel. For NNGOs, these challenges were more acute due to lower salary scales and greater instability in funding flows, which undermine staff retention. In several cases, organisations relied on program officers to fulfil MEL responsibilities in addition to their core duties, resulting in inconsistent data collection and reduced analytical quality.

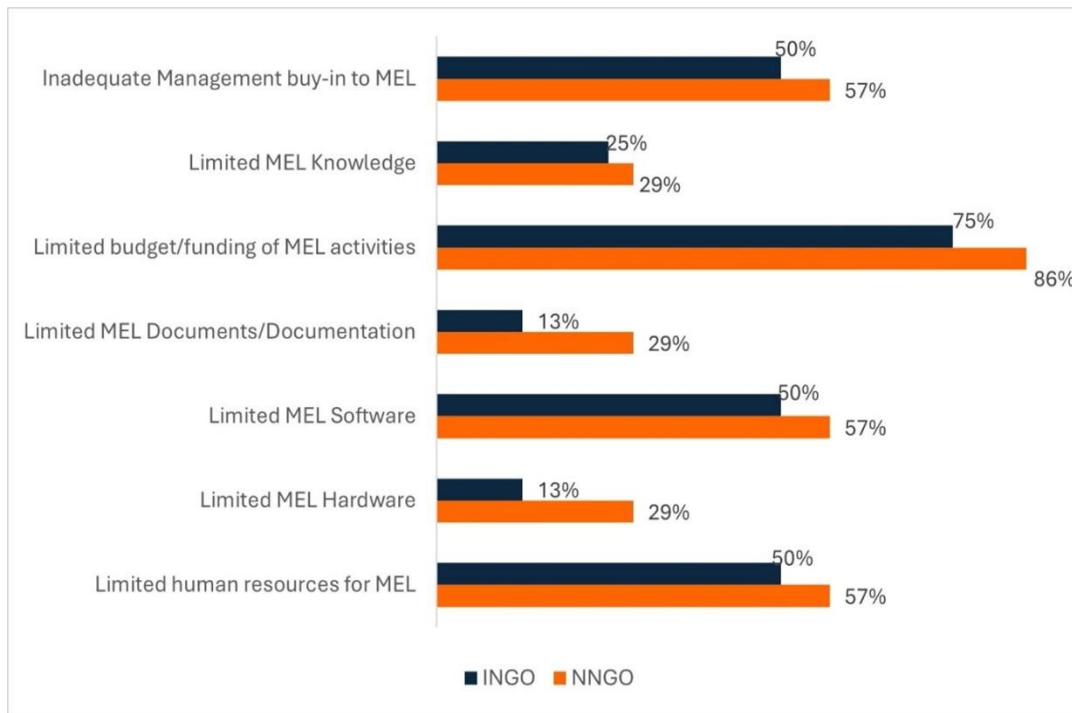
Another prominent barrier was insufficient MEL software and digital infrastructure. Respondents highlighted challenges such as the use of basic spreadsheets for complex data sets, lack of



organisational access to secure cloud-based systems, and limited interoperability across platforms used by different partners. These constraints reduced efficiency, complicated data validation processes, and inhibited timely reporting.

Collectively, these constraints weakened the reliability, timeliness, and strategic use of MEL data. When viewed together, they illustrate the interconnected nature of MEL system challenges where financial limitations contribute to staffing gaps, which in turn influence data quality and the perceived value of MEL within organisations. Figure 2 presents a comparative summary of the challenges reported across the two organisational groups, illustrating the systemic nature of these constraints.

Figure II. Key challenges to MEL system effectiveness



Approaches to Strengthen MEL Systems

Respondents emphasised capacity building and mentorship as the most critical strategies for strengthening MEL systems in national NGOs. Additionally, providing earmarked funds for MEL was identified as key to ensuring strengthened systems. These points are captured in quotes across both groups as below:

Donors should include partnership and capacity building of national NGO MEL systems as a requirement for seeking funds – Participant 8

There should be a focus on building MEL staff capacity through regular MEL training for not just MEL staff but other program staff also – Participant 5



DISCUSSION

Defining Effective MEL Systems in Humanitarian Response

The efficacy of a MEL system is determined by its ability to adequately support humanitarian response in line with global standards, organisational demands, learning and accountability to affected populations. It has been established that for the systems to be effective, there must be the required components for MEL systems put in place and functional (Otundo, 2019). In practice, this requires an appropriate mix of components: (i) qualified human resources and clear organogram structures, including management and advisory responsibilities, (ii) fit for purpose hardware and software to enable MEL activities; (iii) codified guidance (policies/SOPs/frameworks) that enable strategic planning; and (iv) earmarked financing to operationalise MEL across the project cycle. Studies by Amai and Ruguru (2022) and Letsolo *et al.*, (2022), underline resources earmarked for MEL as key in achieving its objectives. Findings from this study reinforce this evidence, demonstrating that limitations in any component of the MEL system generate compounding constraints that weaken the overall system performance. This underscores the interdependent nature of MEL components and the need for holistic strengthening to achieve effective, accountable humanitarian programming.

Disparity in structure equals disparity in results

The ability of a MEL system to perform optimally depends on the availability and functionality of the components of a MEL system put in place. Across the different areas of the MEL system explored in this study, there was a highlighted limitation in the ability of NNGOs to implement MEL activities at optimum levels when compared to standards set by INGOs. A pronounced disparity was observed between MEL of national and international actors around human resources as INGOs reported an average of 10 dedicated MEL staff, and having at least 1 MEL personnel per project. In contrast, NNGOs averaged 3 MEL staff, and only 57% reported dedicated MEL personnel per project. The consequence of this inadequacy leads to MEL responsibilities being diluted across program teams and results in inadequate technical MEL support and hence degrade program quality and accountability. This aligns with the findings of Blaser Mapitsa and Khumalo (2018), who emphasise that adequate monitoring and evaluation support paired with the necessary technical capacity is essential for achieving program objectives.

Munkvold and Rustenberg (2024) underlined the importance of a well drafted and implemented framework or standard operating procedure in emergency response in ensuring a coordinated and effective implementation of project activities. Additionally, MEL systems require the right resources to implement directly implies that organisations with limited financial, technical and human resources will struggle to have a MEL system that meets the required performance levels (Clark and Apgar, 2019). The results from this study further indicate that MEL systems within local organisations operating across North-Eastern Nigeria are still behind with regards to policy, guidance, tools and financing when compared with set standards. These limitations were also documented by the NGO Coordination (2019), Amai and Ruguru (2022) and Mbogo and Mirara (2022). This study goes further to highlight the implications of these being deficiencies in program monitoring and evaluation inadequacy as a result of MEL staff and structure



unavailability, reduced fidelity of data due to absence of hardware or software, and weak evidence for learning and accountability as a cumulative effect.

Areas for Improvement for National Organisations MEL Systems

Christoplos (2004) and Aligwe (2017) highlighted the essential role of institutional capacity building amid humanitarian action, emphasising that capacity building is a wholesome process that encompasses more than a single approach to ensure that local capacities can provide humanitarian response at all stages of an emergency or disaster. The importance of having adequate MEL personnel to support project implementation cannot be underemphasised, especially due to the crucial nature of humanitarian programming. Richard (2024) in his study put forward that technical M&E skills and resource allocation had the strongest positive influence on project performance as the application of MEL ensured projects were adapting effectively to achieve project objectives. In addition to having the required dedicated MEL staff to support the project, an organogram that facilitates both managerial and technical support is also necessary.

Specialised functions such as quantitative and qualitative analysis, secure electronic data collection, visualisation and communication require the appropriate hardware and software to function. Chukwudi *et al* (2022) asserted that training which facilitates learning and development is key to ensuring organisational productivity which is in line with findings from this study that call for increased training of staff for better humanitarian actions.

Limitations in documentation of national organisations is another area earmarked by findings that need improving. Effective M&E frameworks ensure efficacy, accountability, enhance transparency, and foster learning within development and humanitarian organisations (Michael *et al.*, 2012). Adequate budgeting remains a key area for improvement across national humanitarian organisations. Results from this study identified adequate budgetary allocation as the most critical factor in strengthening the MEL systems of national organisations. This finding aligns with Amai and Ruguru (2022), who emphasise that dedicated MEL financing is often the key determinant in achieving effective monitoring and evaluation outcomes. Building on this, the present study provides additional empirical evidence demonstrating that not only is MEL financing essential, but predictable and sustained financing is particularly vital. Predictable MEL funding enables organisations to plan and implement MEL activities consistently across the project cycle, invest in necessary tools and human resources, and institutionalise learning and accountability practices. Without such stable financial provisions, MEL functions become fragmented and reactive, limiting their ability to meaningfully contribute to program quality and adaptive humanitarian response.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A possible limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size compared to the total number of humanitarian organisations operating in Nigeria, which may limit the generalisability of findings. This limitation is partly due to the qualitative and exploratory nature of the research and the application of strict inclusion criteria to ensure coherence and comparability among organisations. Another potential limitation is response bias, as focal persons may present their



organisations in a more favourable light. To mitigate this, anonymity was emphasised, and follow up interviews were conducted to ensure clarity and consistency in response provided.

CONCLUSION

This study suggests that MEL systems among National NGOs in Northeast Nigeria display interlinked capacity and resource gaps that suppress systematic production of quality evidence for learning and accountability. The discussion highlights a coherent pattern: resource and institutional deficits lead to inadequate performance. Addressing financing for MEL first, while concurrently strengthening human resources, documentation, and required tools, will yield the greatest gains in design integrity, implementation quality, and effectiveness. The results show a consistent call for capacity building and earmarked MEL financing, paired with management buy in, these steps can move MEL systems in national organisations closer to the standards demonstrated by international counterparts, improving accountability and adaptive decision making in North-East Nigeria's humanitarian response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Unpredictable MEL funding and inadequate resources: NNGO leadership and program leads should allocate a clearly defined proportion of project budgets to MEL activities, in line with recognised best practices and sector standards. INGO and donor agencies should provide multi-year, ring fenced MEL funding within grants and sub grants to stabilise systems throughout the project cycle. Additionally, donors should streamline minimum MEL standards and capacity indicators as part of funding eligibility criteria.
2. Limited leadership buy in, reducing MEL to a compliance function rather than a strategic one: Strengthen leadership commitment by embedding key performance indicators related to MEL system functionality into organisational performance management systems and strategic decision making processes. This will reinforce MEL's role as a strategic driver rather than a purely compliance-focused activity.
3. Weak governance, documentation, and absence of MEL policies or guidance documents: Develop and institutionalise MEL policies, frameworks, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and standardised tools to promote consistency, quality, and accountability. INGOs and donors should support this through targeted mentoring, structured peer learning opportunities, and the responsible sharing of practical resources.
4. Limited evidence on MEL systems performance in protracted conflict: Further research should be undertaken to generate empirical evidence on how NNGOs in protracted crisis settings are using data and evidence to inform sustainable humanitarian action. This will strengthen the knowledge base and guide future investments in MEL system strengthening.



Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

Acknowledgements

I extend my appreciation to all participating organisations and individuals whose insights, cooperation, and support made this study possible. I also honour the memory of my late father, Professor Mark Attah, for his mentorship and unwavering support throughout my academic journey. My heartfelt thanks go as well to my mother, Mrs Elizabeth Attah, and my sister, Dr. Martha Orendu Attah, for their continual encouragement and support.

Sources of funding

The study was not funded.

Conflict of Interest

The author declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

The author was solely responsible for the study's conception, including the design, data collation, analysis and interpretation. The author has critically reviewed and approved the final draft and is responsible for the content and similarity index of the manuscript.

Data availability statement

The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

Citation

Attah, J. O. (2026). Strengthening Local Action in Humanitarian Response: Exploring Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Systems of National Organisations in North-East Nigeria. *International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research*, 4(1), 207-223. doi:10.5281/zenodo.18924881

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