



# A results-based monitoring and evaluation system for the Namibian Child Support Grant programme



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**Background:** Robust results-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems allow government to track the progress and impact of development programmes. This article focused on the current M&E system as adopted for the Child Support Grant (CSG) programme of the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare (MGEPEWSW) in Namibia.

**Objectives:** The article examined whether the adopted M&E processes and arrangements for the MGEPEWSW sufficiently track the outcomes for beneficiaries of the CSG programme to enable strategic decisions by the MGEPEWSW.

**Method:** A desktop review of available literature on M&E systems was complemented by a review of strategic reports and programme documentation of the MGEPEWSW that sets out the current M&E arrangements. Further interviews with senior, middle and programme managers responsible for the implementation of the CSG programme assessed the suitability and gaps of these arrangements as well as the proposed recommendations to strengthen the existing M&E arrangements.

**Results:** The research found several gaps in current practice that hinders the MGEPEWSW and decision-makers in assessing the outcomes for child beneficiaries.

**Conclusion:** Recommendations were offered to improve the current M&E system to better track the outcomes of the CSG programme. This included a refined theory of change, revised indicators and strengthened institutional arrangements.

**Contribution:** The improved results-based M&E system for the MGEPEWSW offers a comparative base for the implementation of results-based M&E systems for child-focused cash transfer programmes in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** M&E system; Child Support Grant; outcomes; indicators; theory of change.

## Introduction

The Government of Namibia is committed to improving the welfare of children through various acts, including the *Combating of the Rape Act (Act 8 of 2000)*, the *Education Act (Act 16 of 2001)*, the *Combating of Domestic Violence Act (Act 4 of 2003)* and the *Child Care and Protection Act (Act 3 of 2015)* (Republic of Namibia 2000, 2001, 2003, 2015). The Sustainable Development Goals as adopted by the United Nations recognise the prevailing role of poverty and inequality as challenges impeding the improvement of the livelihoods of underprivileged populations and children specifically (United Nations 2016). One of its strategies for sustainable development is to eradicate poverty under the 'no poverty' goal (United Nations 2016). The national governments must develop contextualised strategies to assist poor and vulnerable populations (United Nations 2016). Cash transfer programmes play a critical part in the global agenda to alleviate poverty in developing and underdeveloped countries (Bastagli et al. 2016; Devereux et al. 2017; Owusu-Addo, Renzaho & Smith 2018; Roelen et al. 2017; UNICEF 2017). Child Support Grants (CSGs) typically provide financial assistance to eligible children to ensure that the basic development needs of children are met (UNICEF 2021). The specific goals and objectives of such programmes may differ between contexts and focus on reducing child poverty, improving child health and nutrition, providing access to education, or other development outcomes (Global Development Network 2018; ILO 2017).

Namibia has a comprehensive social protection system with a solid financial commitment (Schade, La & Pick 2019). The national budget for the CSG programme, called 'child state grants', has increased from N\$55.2 million in 2003–2004 to N\$1054.2m in 2017–2018

(Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare 2018), with the programme reaching around 30% of the child population (UNICEF 2017). The CSG programme is aligned with the National Development Plan to prioritise reducing child poverty and enhancing children's well-being, particularly for the vulnerable.

While social assistance programmes strive to reduce poverty and improve the living conditions of the beneficiaries (Roelen et al. 2017), monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that specifically track the socioeconomic impacts and results for beneficiaries are often inadequate. In Namibia, the outcomes of the CSG programme were demonstrated to be based explicitly on household data through the National Household Income Expenditure Survey (Levine, Van der Berg & Yu 2011). However, such an analysis is likely to underestimate the welfare of the poorest and is not a suitable tool to apply in developing countries (Levine et al. 2011). A study conducted on Namibia's child welfare regime from 1990 to 2017 also confirmed that there was limited useful documented information on the provision of CSGs and the effect of the CSG programme on the beneficiaries (Chinyoka 2019). Although there are substantial expenses, social protection benefits do not reach beneficiaries efficiently and effectively (Tjivikua, Olivier & Likukela 2018). The sluggish progress in the development of social protection in Namibia is attributed to a deficiency in feedback information needed to assess the effectiveness of the SP programmes (Tjivikua et al. 2018). These challenges remain despite reforms' provision of general support to poor families with children (Chinyoka 2019). In fact, it was confirmed that the Namibian public service emphasises activity measurements rather outcomes and impact, and funds will be spent without expected results by executive state institutions (Mutumba 2021).

Similarly, despite efforts at the global level to strengthen M&E systems (Kusek & Rist 2004; Mackay 2007; Segone 2010), the information delivered by such systems often focuses on activities and budget expenditure rather than on the achievement of outcomes. The findings of a CLEAR study in 2013 show that such deficiencies also exist in the adopted M&E practices in the government of Namibia, including the lack of a government M&E framework, inadequate utilisation of M&E and performance management information, lack of information on the roles of government and civil society organisations, and insufficient skills building in M&E (CLEAR 2013).

The identified research problem is that a lack of systematic M&E data to monitor and report on the outcomes of the CSG programme limits the ability of the programme to promote child welfare in Namibia effectively.

This article endeavours to answer the following research questions:

- What are the gaps in the M&E processes and arrangements adopted by the Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty

Eradication and Social Welfare (MGEPESW) that prevent informed decision-making to maximise the outcomes for beneficiaries of the CSG programme?

- How can the results-based M&E system of the MGEPESW be strengthened to better track the Namibian CSG programme and similar CSG programmes?

The article will commence with a brief overview of the focus of cash transfer programmes and the requirements of results-based M&E systems before describing the current case in Namibia.

## Measuring the results of cash transfer programmes

Cash transfer is described as regular noncontributory payment, in cash or in kind (e.g. food or vouchers), made by government or nongovernment organisations (NGOs) to individuals or households, to decrease chronic shock due to poverty; and addressing social risk and reducing economic vulnerability (Devereux et al. 2017). Cash transfers as a social protection strategy aim to provide poor and vulnerable members of society with monetary assistance to reduce poverty and inequality (National Planning Commission 2017; Schade et al. 2019; UNICEF 2018). Cash transfers often target households within particular population groups that are considered vulnerable, including older people, persons with disabilities and children (DFID & UK Aid 2011). Cash transfers can be unconditional and meant to actively fulfil human development responsibilities such as education, health and nutrition, or they can be dependent on recipients' providing labour in compliance with a work requirement (Samson, Van Niekerk & Mac 2010).

The purpose of cash transfers for children is to ensure that parents and caregivers of children living in poverty or possessing other vulnerabilities can access income to meet their children's basic needs (Dinbabo 2011). Child Support Grants create potential economic benefits that increase beneficiaries' ability to cope with potential risks and insecurities and lessen recipients' exposure to shocks (Neves et al. 2009, cited in Matuku 2015). Cash transfer programmes aim to increase access to children's critical services, namely health, education and nutrition. In addition, the programmes support realising the human rights of children and their families (Kgawane-Swathe 2017; UNICEF 2016).

Cash transfer programmes are sometimes questioned regarding their success, with critiques including the careless use of funds or increased dependency by beneficiaries on the state (Sellars 2021). However, there is also evidence of increased nutrition, education, health and productivity following such assistance (Beegle, Honorati & Monsalve 2018; Garcia & Moore 2012; Sellars 2021). Table 1 presents a range of outcomes that may be the intended focus of improved child well-being through a child support programme. The wide range of alternative outcomes makes it more challenging to define the intended results of a child support programme and when the programme would be regarded as

**TABLE 1:** Domains and outcomes for measuring the child's well-being.

Domains	Outcomes
Nutrition	Wasting
	Stunting
	Underweight
Health	Immunisation coverage
	Under-five mortality rate
Education	Attendance to early childhood development
	School readiness
	Net intake rate in primary education
	Net attendance ratio
	Gross intake
	Completion rate
Water and sanitation	Use of improved drinking water sources
	Use of basic drinking water services
	Availability of drinking water
	Handwashing facility with water and soap
	Use of improved sanitation facilities
Protection from violence and exploitation	Birth registration
	Violent discipline
	Child labour
	Child marriage
Shelter	Main material of the floor and roof
Equitable chance in life	Coverage by social cash transfers
	Health insurance coverage

Source: Adapted from Samson, M., Van Niekerk, I. & Mac, K., 2010, *Social transfer programmes*, Economic Policy Research Institute, Cape Town; Rubio, G.M., 2012, *Building results frameworks for safety nets projects*, Social Protection and Labor Discussion Paper, No. 1218, World Bank, Washington, DC; Ben-Arieh, A., Casas, F., Frønes, I. & Korbin, J.E., 2014, *Handbook of child well-being: Theories, methods and policies in global perspective*, viewed 14 June 2023, from <https://link.springer.com/referencework/10.1007/978-90-481-9063-8>; Harvey, P. & Pavanello, S., 2018, *Multi-purpose cash and sectoral outcomes: A review of evidence and learning*, United Nations Refugee Agency, Geneva; Byegon, I.K., Kabubo-Mariara, J. & Wambungu, A., 2021, 'The link between socio-economic factors and multiple child deprivations in Kenya', *Cogent Economics & Finance* 9(1), 1938378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322039.2021.1938378>; Carraro, A. & Ferrone, L., 2023, 'How effective are cash transfers in mitigating shocks for vulnerable children? Evidence on the impact of the Lesotho CGP on multiple deprivation', *Journal of Rural Studies* 97, 9–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.11.015>

successful. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to ensure that the M&E system of the MGEPSW tracks the specific outcomes of the CSG programme to reflect on the results of the CSG programme. Table 1 presents the domains and related outcomes for measuring the child's well-being in different social protection programme intervention contexts.

Monitoring and evaluation systems provide credible, continuous information on the progress to achieve development results and outcomes (Rabie 2011). Results-based M&E systems measure the extent to which programmes or policies change situations and are essential milestones in any country's developmental plans (Chirau, Dlakavu & Masilela 2022; Chirau et al. 2020; Lopez-Acevedo, Krause & Mackay 2012; Markiewicz & Patrick 2016; Morkel & Sibanda 2022; UNESCO 2016). Information from such systems plays an important role in providing critical information to various stakeholders, including government policymakers, implementing ministries, departments or agencies, donors, programme managers, and stakeholders and enables more informed decision-making and coordinated planning between social protection institutions and agencies to improve the success of the programmes (ILO 2017; UNICEF 2021). Improved M&E systems improve accountability and transparency for achieving desired outcomes and enable stakeholders to monitor progress against indicators and targets.

Placement of the M&E system within the organisation is essential to ensure functionality and sufficient authority within the organisation. The system is supported by line managers who appreciate the benefits of the M&E system and consistently produce and use M&E information for decision-making and improvement processes. Managers create an enabling environment by making financial and other resources available to build and maintain the M&E system and capacitating staff to collect, collate, analyse and interpret data, ensuring that the system can function optimally (Mackay 2007; Matsiliza 2019; De Coning & Rabie, cited in Cloete, Rabie & De Coning 2014). Internal capacity is complemented and enhanced when external beneficiaries and stakeholders are capacitated to provide feedback that can improve performance and learning (Stofile 2017).

In order to determine the outcomes of the programmes, it is crucial to include the theory of change and the logic model. The theory of change is an approach to theoretical thinking on why and how the programme will produce the desired results by connecting the goals, objectives and outcomes (Auriacombe 2011; Ghate 2018). At the same time, the logic model extends the theory of change by detailing how the intended results will be measured (Stofile 2017). The logic model also clarifies processes, related indicators and data collection to measure the performance and results (Rubio 2012). Thus, this article proposes an improved M&E system for the MGEPSW with a specific focus on the Namibian CSG programme.

## Methodology: The Namibian case

This study employed qualitative explorative, descriptive and explanatory methods to analyse the existing M&E system of the MGEPSW as it enables monitoring of the results of the CSG programme in Namibia. Ethical clearance was attained from the Research Ethics Committee of Stellenbosch University (project reference number 23867). Data were collected in three phases:

Phase 1: Secondary data were drawn from the literature and document reviews. A keyword search on various databases was used to identify relevant academic books, discussion papers, journal articles, working papers and research papers. Additionally, reports from reputable international institutions such as the World Bank, reports from government institutions and insights from specialists and practitioners in M&E were incorporated to enhance the discussion. A targeted search yielded the key documents sharing M&E in the Namibian context, including Namibia Vision 2030, the Fifth National Development Plan, the Harambe Prosperity Plan I and II, medium-term expenditure frameworks, the Blueprint on Wealth Redistribution and Poverty Eradication, the M&E Plan for the Child Welfare Directorate programmes, the National Agenda for Children, annual reports and reviews, and the social assistance database. The literature review informed the identification of themes and subthemes that constitute an effective M&E system. This informed the

analysis of the CSG programme and established the basis for collecting further primary data.

Phase 2: Primary data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with purposively selected senior, middle and programme managers of the MGEPEWSW responsible for data collection or using M&E data for strategic and operational decision-making. Respondents were selected as experts on the M&E system of the MGEPEWSW and the CSG programme in particular. A total of 12 interviews were conducted. The respondents comprised one executive director, two directors, two deputy directors and seven programme officers. The respondents were from the directorates of Social Protection, and Policy Planning and Research. The seven programme officers included five from the CSG programme administration and two programme officers from the Directorate of Policy Planning and Research responsible for M&E and planning functions. Open-ended questions allowed the opportunity to probe for more information and to seek clarification on some of the responses from the respondents. Ethical protocols, including the protection of confidentiality and identities, governed the empirical data collection process.

Phase 3: Secondary and primary data informed an assessment of the current M&E practices employed by the MGEPEWSW for the CSG programme. A set of recommendations was prepared, including a new revised theory of change, indicators for outcomes, and recommendations for strengthening data collection and governance, data demand and use, building M&E capacity and creating appropriate institutional support. A follow-up workshop with the study participants provided an opportunity to validate and further refine the findings from the study and to better align the recommendations to the context of the MGEPEWSW and Namibia.

## Findings on the current monitoring and evaluation system for the Child Support Grant programme

The first research question focused on whether current M&E processes and arrangements adopted by the MGEPEWSW sufficiently tracked the results for beneficiaries to inform strategic decision-making. The detailed document review and interview data presented a comprehensive understanding of the inner arrangements and focus of the M&E system for the MGEPEWSW and the CSG programme specifically. It also revealed differences in the opinions of staff familiar with the system. A brief synopsis of Nshimiyimana's (2023) comprehensive findings is presented as follows.

Monitoring of the CSG programme is informed by the strategic plan of the MGEPEWSW that outlines a comprehensive social assistance programme to improve the well-being of children, older adults and people with disabilities, ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment and uplifting marginalised communities (MGEPEWSW 2020). The following four strategic objectives in the MGEPEWSW strategic plan

guide the M&E practices of the CSG: SO3, which aims to strengthen and expand social protection; SO5, which focuses on improving care and protection for children's well-being; SO7, which focuses on developing integrated management information systems; and SO8, which aims to enhance the enabling environment for high-performance culture and service delivery (MGEPEWSW 2020). Respondents agreed that guidelines for monitoring the CSG included the ministerial strategic plan, the social protection policy and the indicators employed by the Directorate of Social Protection:

'There is no guideline specifically for planning, monitoring, budgeting for the CSGs alone. These roles and functions are embedded in the Ministerial Strategic Plan.' (Respondent 11, 2022)

'[T]he social protection policy is the guideline that coordinates planning and monitoring for the social protection programme, including the CSGs.' (Respondent 10, 2022)

While some respondents identified aspects of a theory of change and logic model within the Child Welfare Directorate M&E plan, others believed that an explicit theory of change and logic model for the CSG programme did not exist:

'The document with the Theory of Change and Logic Model is the M&E plan for child welfare services. But, it does not focus on the CSGs programme, but on the entire directorate programmes.' (Respondent 2, 2022)

'[I]t is not meant for the CSGs programme, but for the Child Welfare directorate programme.' (Respondent 5, 2022)

'I can think of the Social Protection Policy that was just launched, but I am not sure if there is the Theory of Change or a logic model.' (Respondent 9, 2022)

An in-depth review of available programme documents revealed that while there was a theory of change and logic model for child welfare across programmes, there was no specifically dedicated change theory for the CSG programme. A further in-depth review of available documents did not render a dedicated M&E framework for the CSG programme.

Monitoring and evaluation for child welfare resides under the Social Protection Directorate and includes planning support in terms of the 5-year ministerial plan and annual work plan; monthly data capturing, verification and approval for payment purposes; monthly reporting on the number of new children receiving grants; and quarterly and annual reporting per the performance management system guideline (Office of the Prime Minister 2011) for public sector institutions. Respondents disagreed on the principal custodian for M&E, with responses citing the Directorate of Social Protection, the Directorate of Policy Planning and Research, or both directorates as the primary custodian for M&E activities and reporting. The following quotes reflect the diversity of responses:

'The Directorate of Social Protection is responsible for the M&E of the CSG.' (Respondent 10, 2022)

'The Directorate of Policy Planning and Research is responsible for all M&E activities in the Ministry, including for the CSGs programme.' (Respondent 11, 2022)

'Each Directorate is responsible for their M&E activities, including reporting [*but there are*] no clear functions and guidance on expected outcomes for staff members to perform M&E activities.' (Respondent 1, 2022)

While some agreed that the Office of the Prime Minister and the Directorate of Policy Planning and Research Planning acted as external and internal champions of the M&E system, others disagreed on a strong, identifiable custodian:

'I can't think of any one and I have never heard a person who is championing M&E activities.' (Respondent 9, 2022)

Respondents identified the following indicators as most relevant to measure the CSG programme:

'Indicators we can report on our expenditure of CSGs, numbers, and percentages of the beneficiaries. We are also able to calculate the coverage of the grants by region.' (Respondent 7, 2022)

'Numbers of children receiving different types of grants by region, sex and age.' (Respondent 3, 2022)

'Coverage of children by region and number of recipients.' (Respondent 6, 2022)

'[C]heck if the child is staying with the person who is receiving the money if the child still exists, and if the child is still at school.' (Respondent 6, 2022)

An in-depth database review revealed that the system tracked the number of children added or deleted from the system. Those numbers were aggregated by region, type of grant and constituency; the accumulative number of children on the Social Assistance System by region, constituency, sex and type of grant; and total expenditure of the grants by region, constituency and month (Social Assistance System, MGEPEWS). No evidence was found of the monitoring of the health, nutrition or education outcomes of beneficiaries of the CSG programme. This is also confirmed in Table 2 which includes a review of national policies and frameworks that include indicators related to the CSG programme.

Child welfare is however measured through the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (Namibia Statistics Agency 2021) using data from the National Household Expending Survey implemented by the National Statistics Agency. Child-specific dimensions and indicators are depicted in Table 3.

Respondents agreed that there were several requests for data on the programme for planning, reporting and decision-making, which includes requests from the following stakeholders:

'Development partners such as UNICEF request data to conduct budget review analysis and assess the state's assistance to vulnerable children. Students also request data for their studies, while political office bearers request data to monitor social assistance for their constituents and use it during campaigns.' (Respondent 2, 2022)

'National and international NGOs, line ministries for planning purpose and programme development.' (Respondent 6, 2022)

'[The] Office of the President, Office of the Prime Minister, and NGOs; they use it for development and planning.' (Respondent 7, 2022)

Respondents agreed that available data on the CSG programme did not directly influence policy and budget decisions and that political priorities and national budget considerations determined further assistance to additional beneficiaries:

'Data is not used to influence policy and budget allocation. This makes it difficult to hold staff members accountable.' (Respondent 1, 2022)

'The number of children to add on the grants system for a specific financial year is based on the budget allocation, not on the results from the programme implementation.' (Respondent 10, 2022)

Respondents mostly agreed that the available budget for the M&E activities was inadequate, with low to moderate investment in strengthening the M&E capacity of staff members, as reflected below:

**TABLE 2:** Namibian policy frameworks with child support grant indicators.

Policy framework	Related area	Indicator
5th NDP, 2017/2018	Social protection	Number of eligible children receiving a grant Percentage of vulnerable children receiving a grant Percentage of children receiving a disability grant
MTEF 2021/2022	Child protection	Percentage of eligible children receiving a grant
National Agenda for Children 2018–2020	Strengthen social protection of children from poverty	Child poverty rate Percentage of eligible children receiving a grant
Children and Namibian Budget Brief 2017/2018	Social assistance and welfare	Beneficiaries of the CSGs Monthly CSGs amount Child grants as a share of the total national budget
Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare Strategic Plan 2020/2025	Strengthening and expansion of social protection	Percentage coverage of OVCs accessing CSGs

Source: Nshimiyimana, B., 2023, 'Developing a results-based monitoring and evaluation system for the Child Support Grant Programme in Namibia', PhD dissertation, Stellenbosch University CSG, child support grant.

**TABLE 3:** Child-specific dimensions and indicators of the multidimensional poverty index for Namibia.

Dimensions	Indicators
Health	Child nutrition
	Food security
	Access to clinics or hospital
Education	Years of schooling
	School attendance
Living standards	Housing
	Toilet
	Drinking water
	Cooking and lightening energy
	Transportation assets
	Information and communications technology

Source: Namibia Statistics Agency, 2021, *Namibia Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Report 2021*, Namibia Statistics Agency, Windhoek

'The Ministry does not budget for M&E activities and the management does not seem to understand the value of M&E and related budget.' (Respondent 6, 2022)

'Budget is available in terms of monitoring the use of child grants at the community level, but there is no budget available for bigger M&E exercises.' (Respondent 11, 2022)

'[E]ven though staff members might have been sensitised on the M&E, the modalities are not in place to capacitate and institutionalise the system effectively.' (Respondent 7, 2022)

'The current system is highly centralised, and only a few can access it.' (Respondent 5, 2022)

Some respondents regarded a recent adoption of technology to support M&E as a prioritisation of funding to strengthen M&E activities:

'[T]he ministry is working on upgrading the database for grants and link it to other databases of key service providers such as the Ministry of Home Affairs and Immigration for vital registration, Ministry of Finance.' (Respondent 10, 2022)

## Discussion

The review of the current system identified several weaknesses stemming from a lack of shared understanding of the system, no dedicated theory of change that specifies results, indicators that focus only on reaching the beneficiary rather than the results for the beneficiary, and limited resources and capacity to expand organically.

The study found that there is no independent M&E unit responsible for the M&E of the CSG programme. The findings indicate that the Policy Planning and Research Directorate performs M&E roles and responsibilities but does not seem to have the mandate to ensure that M&E-related activities are performed across the different directorates in the MGEPEWS. While different directorates contribute to the supply of information to monitor the performance of their respective directorates, it is essential to have an independent unit and/or directorate responsible for producing information and reporting on the overall performance of the MGEPEWS's implementation of the strategic plan and its key programmes.

While the MGEPEWS has an M&E system with procedures and indicators, the current system does not optimally focus on the outcomes of the CSG programme. This is further exasperated by the lack of annual or multiyear evaluation plans and dedicated budget for evaluations and limited trained evaluators within the public sector (National Planning Commission 2021). The current focus of monitoring is on programme implementation, tracking transfers to beneficiaries rather than the effect of the grants. Limited resources and capacity-building initiatives may limit the expansion of M&E activities to areas of further interest to the various decision-makers within the executive and legislative arms of government, as well as beneficiaries and other members of the public.

The review of the current MGEPEWS M&E system found an insufficient focus on the results of the programme.

The assessment of the current M&E arrangements of the CSG programme failed to find an explicit theory of change or logic model for this programme that may inform the monitoring framework and evaluation strategy. A theory of change helps to explain the rationale behind the expected results and why and how a programme will produce the desired results by connecting the goals, objectives and outcomes (Auriacombe 2011; Ghate 2018). A logic model complements the theory of change by clarifying how the intended results would be measured by specifying the indicators, data sources and responsibilities (Stofile 2017). While indicators should measure progress across the results chain, from inputs to outcomes and impact, the study finds that the existing indicators are mainly limited to tracking the transfer of the grant to recipients.

The study finds that there is not an M&E framework of M&E roles and responsibilities in the MGEPEWS. The M&E framework should outline the key components necessary to monitor and evaluate a policy and programme in the MGEPEWS. It should also comprehensively define the scope of M&E efforts, the resources required, the key stakeholders and the performance indicators that will be used to measure progress towards achieving the intended outcomes of the programmes of the MGEPEWS, including the CSG programme. As the CSG programme is associated with several strategic objectives of the MGEPEWS, that is, to strengthen and expand social protection, to improve care and protection for children's well-being and to enhance an enabling environment for high-performance culture and service delivery (MGEPEWS 2020), developing a monitoring framework for the CSG programme offers useful insight relevant for other programmes of the MGEPEWS and similar CSG programmes in similar contexts.

It is important to cultivate the culture of the demand and use of M&E information. An M&E system should support decision-making, accountability, transparency and optimal resource allocation (Görgens & Zall Kusek 2009; Stofile 2017). The interviews showed that while CSG programme data are being requested and used by external and internal stakeholders, no standardised methodology exists for disseminating information to encourage use and access to data. Information produced by the MGEPEWS M&E system needs to respond to the needs of users at various levels. Executive managers seek information on the attainment of the objectives of specific programmes and delivery of the mandate of the ministry. Ministers and parliamentarians require information on the attainment of the objectives, the distribution of benefits to the public. Programme managers and directors require data on the attainment of operational targets, client satisfaction and the correct implementation of procedures. Beneficiaries, taxpayers, social justice advocates and other members of the public require information related to the quality and value of outputs and related outcomes (Nshimiyimana 2023).

A functional M&E system is expected to produce accurate, reliable and timely information through established standards.

Available information is not routinely shared with relevant stakeholders or via available platforms, such as the website of the MGEPEWSW or related media platforms. The study finds that the current M&E system is paper-based with limited security measures to protect paper-based records. In most cases, the parents or guardians of children are the applicants, and their details are captured on the system. Some verification of the beneficiaries and quality checks are in place for the CSG database, but there were no formal guidelines entailing the processes of verification procedures or documented guidelines to inform data collection methods, sources and reporting.

Thus far, the study on the effectiveness of child welfare grants in Namibia was conducted (Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare 2010). No formal evaluation has been conducted on the CSG programme driven by the Ministry of Government (Nshimiyimana 2023). Evaluations use a combination of evidence and standards to judge the merit of a programme or a policy (Peersman 2014) and inform decisions on adjusting the programme to improve efficiency and effectiveness (Holman et al. 2019).

## Recommendations for an improved results-based monitoring and evaluation system

A robust results-based M&E system for the MGEPEWSW and a results-based M&E framework for the CSG programme are essential to measure the progress and effectiveness of the grants in responding to the needs of beneficiaries, improving their lives and furthering the overall goal and objectives of the social protection intervention. The following recommendations are offered in response to the second research question that focused on strengthening the results-based M&E system for the

MGEPEWSW and the M&E framework for the Namibian CSG and similar child support programmes.

## Monitoring and evaluation framework with responsibilities

The study proposes the adoption of a framework that sets out the M&E processes, roles and responsibilities to ensure that the M&E activities in the MGEPEWSW are well coordinated, efficient and effective. The framework will help to clarify the specific tasks and responsibilities of those involved in data collection, analysis, reporting, and decision-making for the MGEPEWSW and the CSG programme, reducing the likelihood of confusion, duplication of efforts or gaps in the M&E process.

Table 4 presents the proposed components and descriptions of an M&E system applicable to all programmes of the MGEPEWSW.

## Theory of change

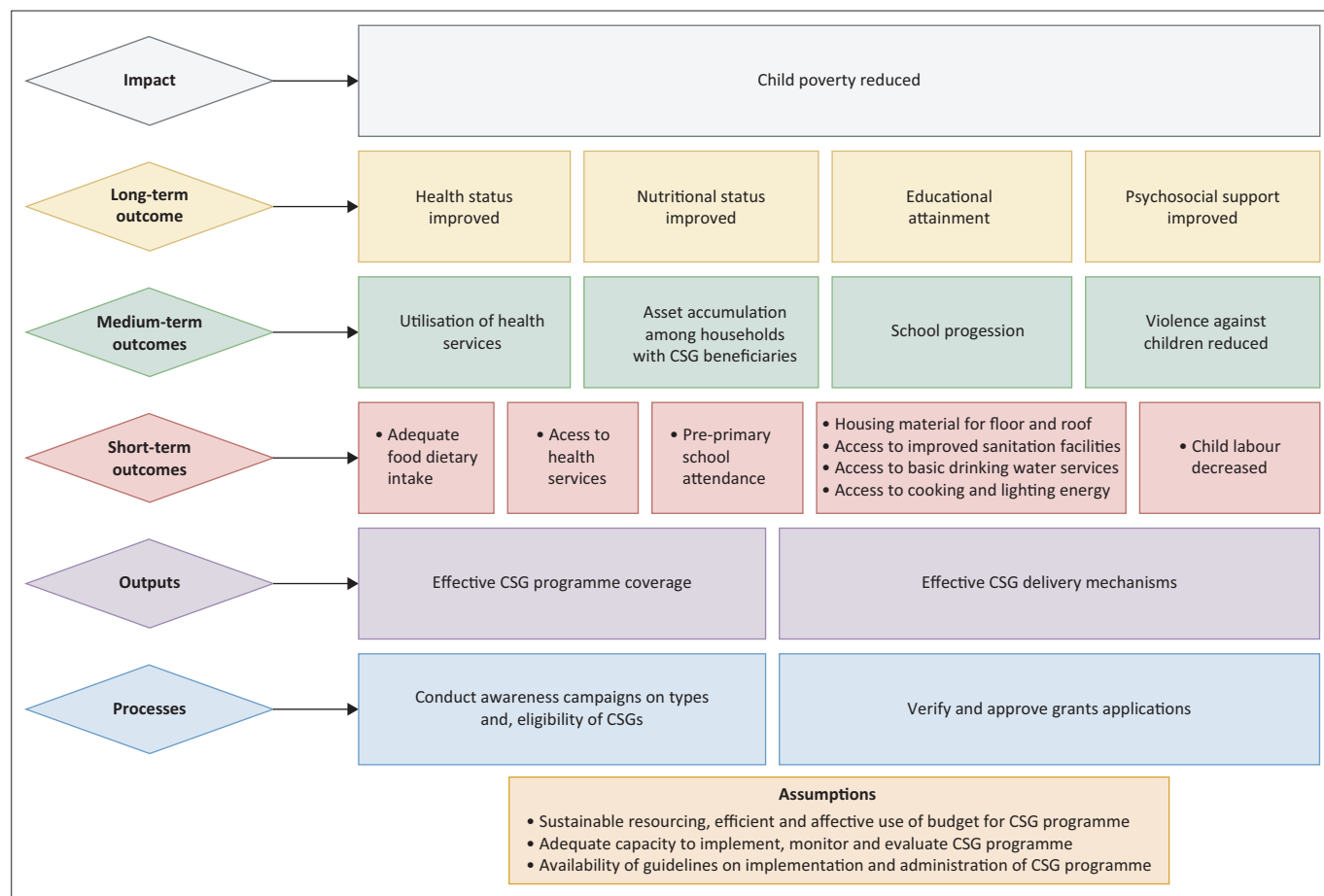
The adoption of a theory of change serves to focus M&E efforts on results. An initial theory of change was developed and refined in consultation with programme staff. The revised theory of change aligned to the objectives of the CSG programme, which includes improving primary household consumption and nutrition and access to healthcare, psychosocial support, school attendance and complementary services, including reducing child poverty as an impact. Figure 1 presents the proposed improved theory of change for the CSG programme.

The assumptions identified in the theory of change for the CSG programme are a sustainable, adequate and sufficient budget for the CSG programme, proper capacity to implement the CSG programme, and favourable legislation and policy frameworks on equity and nondiscrimination for children

**TABLE 4:** Proposed components of the monitoring and evaluation system for the ministry of gender equality, poverty eradication and social welfare.

Components	Description
Introduction to the framework	Includes the vision, mission and values of the framework; the purpose of the framework; principles underpinning the framework; M&E legislative frameworks; M&E in the context of the performance management system; and the process of developing the framework.
Theory of change	Theories of change should be formulated for programmes aligned with the strategic objectives of the MGEPEWSW. These theories of change reflect the expected causal connections and relationship between the efforts and the expected results as captured in the strategic objectives of the Ministry.
Evaluation criteria	Outline the areas of investigation that will structure the M&E functions which will mostly tend to focus on the criteria of evaluations, which are appropriateness, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.
Monitoring plan	Covers what should be monitored and how against the agreed evaluation criteria and questions.
Evaluation plan	An annual evaluation plan should outline the approach, design and methods for formal evaluations, that is, process, outcome, impact evaluations and other types of assessments would provide in-depth insights into the effectiveness and efficiency of various programmes of the MGEPEWSW. Evaluations should focus on the design implementation, outcomes and sustainability of programmes to support the monitoring framework.
Data collection, management and analysis	Entail a data collection plan, a data management plan, and data analysis and presentation guidance. The system should be able to provide data on key performance indicators such as coverage rate, timeliness of grant distribution, reduction in child poverty, health and nutrition improvements, school enrolment and attendance.
Reporting and communication strategy	Provides the approach to producing and disseminating M&E information, reports or data for accountability and learning to provide the direction for programme implementation and informed decisions. Therefore, the section provides information on how M&E findings are conveyed to different stakeholders. It covers the purpose, frequency and communication channels. It emphasises the importance of tailor-made content for different audiences, including assigning responsibilities for communication tasks and establishing a feedback mechanism. It also addresses concerns relating to data visualisation, security and confidentiality, including the strategy of a firm commitment to learning and adapting based on evaluation outcomes. Further, it contains a provision for regular reviews and updates to ensure ongoing improvement and alignment with the objectives of the institution.
Implementation plan	Shows how the framework will be implemented by developing a work plan. It covers a plan for continuous monitoring activities as per programme, the frequency, and data collection methods, responsibilities, and means of verification, and related budget.
Data collection and reporting formats	Comprise the tools for data collection and reporting for different programmes.

Source: Adapted from Markiewicz, A. & Patrick, I., 2016, *Developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA  
M&E, monitoring and evaluation; MGEPEWSW, ministry of gender equality, poverty eradication and social welfare.



CSG, child support grant.

**FIGURE 1:** Proposed improved theory of change for the Child Support Grant programme in Namibia.

eligible for CSGs. The processes for this model of the CSG programme include verifying and approving CSG applications, identifying beneficiaries, managing the information management system for the beneficiaries, processing payments to beneficiaries and implementing financial control mechanisms. Monitoring activities include sensitisation, targeting and registration, enrolment with financial service providers, delivery/receipt of transfer and feedback mechanisms (UNICEF 2018). The outputs of the CSG programme are adequate coverage, an effective payment delivery system, a helpful information and monitoring system, and efficient and proper use of grants. The short-term outcomes of the CSG programme are increased household-level human capital investment, household-level consumption and school readiness. The medium-term outcomes of the CSG programme are asset accumulation, utilisation of health services, school enrolment, attendance and retention, adequate food intake, dietary diversity and food security. Finally, the long-term results of the CSG programme are reduced child poverty, improved nutrition and health status, and improved educational attainment.

## Logic model and indicators

Current monitoring concentrates on implementation of the programme, rather than the benefits for beneficiaries. The initial literature review informed the development of a

generic logic model and indicators which was subsequently validated and refined with the CSG programme staff. Programme staff emphasised the importance of the Integrated Social Assistance System (ISAS) and the child-focused Multidimensional Index (MDI) which demonstrated relatively strong data availability for a more comprehensive M&E system focused on child well-being. The ISAS ensures that eligible individuals, including children, can access various social assistance programmes and services for poverty alleviation, reduced inequality and social inclusion. These are crucial additional process indicators relevant to the CSG programme. The child-focused MDI provides specific insight into the nature of child poverty in Namibia from 0 to 17 years.

The child-focused MPI and selected child well-being outcomes were used to develop an expanded list of child well-being indicators for the CSG programme aligned with the Namibian context. The logic model also includes data collection methods adapted based on different existing procedures at the programme, facilities and population level. The proposed indicators also include protection from exploitation and violence, for example, enhanced civil registration, reduced child labour and reduced child marriage (see Table 5).

The proposed monitoring framework does not reflect an exhaustive set of indicators. Rather, it includes the most important process, short-, medium- and long-term outcomes



that the MGEPSW should track for the CSG programme. A more focused set of indicators ensures attention on the most important changes and reduces the burden of data collection and analysis on staff and the budget. It also facilitates efficient reporting, promotes accountability and learning and reduces the opportunity to hide nonperformance within a granular report. It is acknowledged that adding modules to the proposed data collection instruments (beneficiary survey, internal monitoring data and national surveys) has a cost implication. However, these additional data will support subsequent evaluation studies.

Preferably, data collected for the indicators in Table 4 should be disaggregated on gender, age, race and geographic region

to enable the comparison of developmental results across demographic attributes and between regions. While process and output indicators should be monitored quarterly or even monthly, outcome indicators should be measured annually, every 2 years and sometimes every 3–5 years. The monitoring frequency of the CSG programme will depend on the information needed for decision-making and the availability of such information.

It is recommended that standards be established to ensure the reliability, credibility and protection of personal information on the CSG database and that appropriate verifications be implemented from the point of registration to the end of data entry into the software or database.

**TABLE 5:** Proposed logic model and indicators for the Child Support Grant programme.

Results	Indicators	Possible data source(s) in the Namibian context	Data collection frequency
<b>1. Impact</b>			
Child poverty reduced	Child poverty rate	National Housing Income Expenditure Survey	Every 5 years
<b>2. Long-term outcomes</b>			
Nutrition status improved	Stunting prevalence Underweight prevalence	Namibia Demographic and Health Survey	Every 2–3 years
Health status improved	Under-five mortality rate Vaccine-preventative childhood diseases incidence rate	Namibia Demographic and Health Survey	Every 2–3 years
Educational attainment improved	Primary and secondary school completion rates Transition to secondary school rate	Education Information Management System	Every 2–3 years
Psychosocial support improved	Perceived psychosocial support	Beneficiary survey	Every 2–3 years
<b>3. Medium-term outcomes</b>			
Utilisation of health services	Incidence of vaccine-preventable childhood diseases	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
School progression	Percentage of primary school CSG beneficiaries who attended early childhood education programme Transition rate to the next grade for beneficiaries of the CSG programme	Beneficiaries survey Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years Every 2 years
Asset accumulation among households with CSG beneficiaries	Percentage of households with CSG beneficiaries that acquired physical assets in the last two years	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
Reduced violence against children	Percentage of CGS beneficiaries subjected to violence in the past two years	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
<b>4. Short-term outcomes</b>			
Adequate dietary intake	Percentage of households with CSG beneficiaries reported having two meals daily Percentage of children 6–23 months who receive a minimum acceptable diet according to the World Health Organization guideline	Beneficiaries survey Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years Every 2 years
Access to health services	Percentage of children aged 24–35 months who have received all recommended vaccinations	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
Pre-primary school attendance and enrolment	Percentage of CSG beneficiaries attending Early Childhood Development, primary or secondary school as informed by their specific age School attendance rate of the CSG beneficiaries	Beneficiaries survey Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years Every 2 years
Housing material of floor and roof	Percentage of households with CSG beneficiaries who reside in formalised structures	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
Access to improved sanitation facilities	Percentage of CSG beneficiaries with access to appropriate sanitation facilities	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
Access to drinking water	Percentage of households with CSG beneficiaries with access to clean drinking water	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
Access to cooking and lighting energy	Percentage of households with CSG beneficiaries that have access to sufficient cooking and lighting energy	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
Child labour decreased	Percentage of CSG beneficiaries who engage in income-generating employment	Beneficiaries survey	Every 2 years
<b>5. Outputs</b>			
Effective CSG programme coverage	Percentage of CSG programme coverage	Administrative data	Every year
Effective CSG delivery mechanisms	Number of turnaround days (time) to process CSGs	ISAS	Quarterly
<b>6. Processes</b>			
Conduct awareness campaigns on the types and eligibility of the CSG programme	Number of eligible children receiving CSGs	CSG programme report	Yearly
Capture approved CSG applications in the ISAS	Percentage of approved applications captured in the ISAS	Programme report and ISAS	Monthly
Process payments of the CSG	Percentage of CSG beneficiaries receiving grants every month	CSG payment registry	Monthly

Source: Adapted through validation workshop from prior work by Rubio, G.M., 2012, *Building results frameworks for safety nets projects*, Social Protection and Labor Discussion Paper, No. 1218, World Bank, Washington, DC; Devereux, S., Roelen, K., Béné, C., Chopra, D., Leavy, J. & McGregor, J.A., 2013, *Evaluating outside the box: An alternative framework for analysing social protection programmes*, vol. 431, viewed 15 August 2021, from <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2040-0209.2013.00431.x>; Harvey, P. & Pavanello, S., 2018, *Multi-purpose cash and sectoral outcomes: A review of evidence and learning*, United Nations Refugee Agency, Geneva; UNICEF, 2017, *Making cash transfers work for children and families*, UNICEF, New York, NY; UNICEF, 2019, *UNICEF's global social protection program framework*, UNICEF, New York, NY; Namibia Statistics Agency, 2021, *Namibia Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) Report 2021*, Namibia Statistics Agency, Windhoek; Byegon, I.K., Kabubo-Mariara, J. & Wambungu, A., 2021, 'The link between socio-economic factors and multiple child deprivations in Kenya', *Cogent Economics & Finance* 9(1), 1938378; Carraro, A. & Ferrone, L., 2023, 'How effective are cash transfers in mitigating shocks for vulnerable children? Evidence on the impact of the Lesotho CGP on multiple deprivation', *Journal of Rural Studies* 97, 9–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.11.015>; UNICEF (2015)

CSG, child support grant; ISAS, integrated social assistance system.

Paper-based systems should be replaced by electronic systems with appropriate security measures to protect sensitive information. Figure 2 proposes data sources for the proposed indicators for the CSG programme.

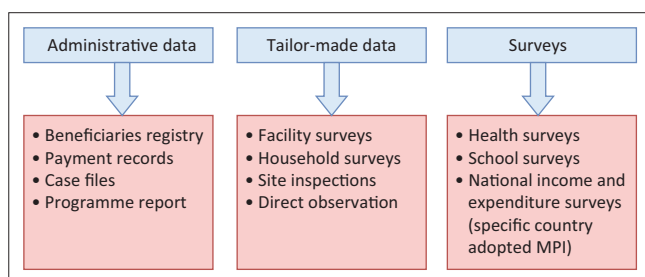
## Routine evaluations

The absence of regular evaluations prevents deeper analysis of the outcomes of the CSG programme. It is recommended that formal evaluations complement the routine monitoring to determine the extent to which the CSG programme has achieved its goals and objectives. Evaluations should focus on both the programme and policy levels. Evaluations at the programme level will provide information regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of delivery mechanisms and the appropriateness of the CSG programme. At the policy level, evaluations can provide more in-depth information on improving the functionality of the child-sensitive social protection system and the merit and worth of the CSG programme to decide whether to expand, downscale, phase out or redesign. Evaluations should be tailored to problem areas identified during routine monitoring. Furthermore, evaluations should assess the outcomes of the CSG programme by comparing development results of beneficiaries to those who qualify, but are not registered on the CSG programme (counterfactual designs), tracking development results over long time periods (longitudinal studies) or across contexts (realist evaluation studies).

It is recommended that a formative evaluation be initiated as a starting point so that future summative evaluations can benefit from the findings of the baseline assessment. Further summative assessments can focus on specific aspects of the CSG programme, including expenditure, coverage and exclusion, accessibility, adequacy, appropriateness, accountability, participation and outcomes for beneficiaries. Ideally, internal staff should regularly complete process evaluations, while an independent evaluator should carry out the outcome evaluation. Ensuring that the costs of evaluations are included in the total budget of the programme and that staff are capacitated to take on additional M&E tasks is imperative.

## Reporting and use

The following activities are recommended to improve the demand and use of M&E information. Stakeholder needs should be analysed to ensure that the CSG programme



MPI, multidimensional poverty index.

**FIGURE 2:** Proposed data sources and data collection instruments for Child Support Grant programme indicators.

collects information for their specific needs. Important stakeholders include the Ministry of Finance, National Planning Commission, cabinet, parliament, United Nations Agencies, academic institutions, civil society organisations, regional and constituency councils and public including tax payers. There is a need to develop standardised formats for reports and a strategy to disseminate information on the CSG programme, with a clear and enforced timetable for collecting and reporting CSG programme information. Staff should be educated and trained, supported by ongoing advocacy that stimulates demand for information to ensure that the information is perceived as a tool for learning to support performance and decision-making processes, rather than simply a control mechanism. There should be regular performance review meetings between the executive director, directors and programme managers to share performance information and concerns. Finally, the Ministry should introduce incentives such as carrots, sticks and sermons to support the effective nationalisation of the M&E system for the CSG programme by the Ministry of Finance and higher offices other than the MGEPSW. Earmarked funds for dedicated M&E positions, access to additional funding for evaluations or greater scrutiny on performance results by Parliament can incentivise ministries and departments to strengthen their M&E capacity.

## Strengthening the supportive environment for monitoring and evaluation

To ensure dedicated capacity for M&E, the current M&E division should ideally be placed in the Office of the Executive Director<sup>1</sup> to oversee all programme functions. The unit should have sufficient M&E staff with sufficient capacity to ensure that all directorates produce results-based information relating to the strategic mandate of the directorates and the entire MGEPSW. The MGEPSW will significantly benefit from the presence of an influential champion for M&E, ideally placed at the strategic leadership level. Such a champion should also be a visionary leader who understands why an effective M&E system is essential at the institutional level. An M&E champion at the ministerial level can play a critical role in promoting the institutionalisation of M&E within the MGEPSW and across the government and ensuring that M&E is used effectively to inform policy and decision-making (Mackay 2007). The champion can promote the importance of M&E through speaking at can, for the importance of M&E through speaking at high-level meetings, participating in media interviews and engaging with other key government officials, promote M&E in policy making (Kusek & Rist 2004).

Lastly, it is important to consider budget implications to develop and sustain a well-functioning M&E system. A dedicated budget for M&E activities should be included in the annual budget of the MGEPSW and provide critical activities to develop and sustain a results-based M&E system.

<sup>1</sup>The Office of the Executive Director is the equivalent of a Permanent Secretary in other contexts.

## Conclusion

Strengthening the M&E system to track the results and benefits for beneficiaries supports more informed decision-making, both by government actors and other agencies that support child development. An outcomes-based approach acknowledges the complexity of child development, in supporting both immediate physical needs and longer-term health and educational development goals, within a safe context that protects and empowers children. The recommendations in this study demonstrate that the data sources for measuring outcomes are potentially available in the Namibian context. Strengthening the M&E systems for the CSG programme and the MGEPEWSW to focus more explicitly on the intended goals of the CSG and other priority programmes within the context of national development programmes will support improved decision-making towards improved child welfare. The adoption of the proposed system may face delays due to factors like insufficient knowledge, capacity and budget for M&E activities. However, gradual implementation is achievable by providing capacity-building initiatives for senior management and designated M&E staff, fostering a deeper understanding of the M&E system's value and in return acting as an advocate for securing the necessary budget to operationalise the M&E system in the Ministry.

Sustainability of these changes requires improved data management systems, dedicated capacity, high-level commitment and financial resources for monitoring and more in-depth evaluation studies. Strengthening of the internal system should be complemented by dedicated activities to encourage the demand and use of produced evidence by various stakeholders, thereby enabling a coordinated and integrated response to child welfare by multiple stakeholders in the public and development sectors. The findings and recommendations from this study offer useful guidance for the development of results-based M&E systems for cash transfer support programmes in similar contexts. Further research is needed to develop an M&E framework that measures child development beyond the mandate of the MGEPEWSW.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

## Authors' contributions

B.N. was responsible for data collection and analysis of primary data. B.N. and B.R. were responsible for conceptualisation and design of research instruments, drafting the article, including the literature review, findings and recommendations.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Stellenbosch University Social, Behavioural and Education Research Ethics Committee (REC: SBE) (No. 23867).

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## Data availability

This article is based on the PhD research of B.N. The full dissertation will be available on the SUNScholar database: <https://scholar.sun.ac.za/>, from 15 December 2023.

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings, and content.

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