
STAKEHOLDER COMMUNICATION AND PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR PROJECTS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: The purpose of the study was to determine the role of stakeholder communication in the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya.

Statement of problem: In the Kenyan context, persistent challenges such as delayed implementation, budget overruns, and unsatisfactory project outcomes have been closely associated with communication gaps among key actors. Reports from the Office of the Auditor General and the Parliamentary Health Committee confirm that public health projects in Kenya continue to experience delays of 6 to 14 months and budget overruns of 5% to 50%. A major contributing factor identified is insufficient engagement of critical stakeholders during crucial project phases such as planning, execution, and evaluation.

Research Methodology: The study employed a mixed-methods research design guided by pragmatism to investigate how stakeholder communication impacts project performance. The research focused on 108 ongoing public health projects in Kenya, with stratified sampling applied to organize projects by category, followed by purposive sampling to select

key respondents. Using Yamane's formula with a 5% margin of error, 97 projects were selected for detailed study. Primary data were collected using self-administered questionnaires containing both closed and open-ended questions, administered by trained research assistants over two weeks.

Findings: Results demonstrated a strong positive correlation between stakeholder communication and project performance, with communication accounting for approximately 80.8% of the variance in project success. The correlation coefficient revealed a high positive association, while ANOVA results confirmed the model's statistical significance. Regression coefficients indicated that improved communication leads to better timeliness, budget adherence, and quality outcomes.

Conclusions: The study concludes that stakeholder communication significantly impacts the performance of public health projects in Kenya. Projects with well-structured communication channels, early stakeholder engagement, and robust feedback mechanisms are more likely to achieve their objectives within planned timelines and budgets.

Recommendations: The study recommends that project managers should prioritize developing structured communication plans that engage stakeholders consistently throughout the project lifecycle. Organizations should establish early and continuous engagement mechanisms, implement robust feedback systems, develop detailed communication strategies, and invest in capacity-building programs for project teams.

Keywords: *Stakeholder Communication, Project Performance, Public Health Projects, Kenya, Regression Analysis, Project Management*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The success of public health initiatives largely depends on effective management throughout every phase of the project. Coordinating these efforts is inherently challenging, requiring careful balancing of various factors that influence sustainability and outcomes. Early and meaningful involvement of stakeholders is essential to establish transparency, accountability, and shared ownership of project goals. Kamau and Njoroge (2019) highlight that project teams should be composed of forward-thinking members who are capable of

adapting to and guiding multifaceted processes to fruition. Engagement of stakeholders plays a critical role in determining project success. A comprehensive understanding of the socio-political and economic landscape is necessary to address potential obstacles and leverage opportunities effectively. Project managers must navigate competing stakeholder interests, resource limitations, and regulatory requirements, demanding flexible leadership and clear communication to steer projects toward their intended results (Mutua & Wekesa, 2018).

Stakeholders contribute resources, articulate community needs, and influence project direction, making their participation vital. Their involvement is shaped by cultural and social values unique to both the stakeholders and the communities involved. Establishing well-structured communication channels that respect these diverse perspectives enhances decision-making and aligns project activities with local expectations. Projects with active stakeholder participation are more likely to maintain timelines and achieve quality standards (Karanja, 2017). In Kenya, delays and budget overruns are common challenges in health-related projects, often stemming from weak stakeholder coordination and communication, especially during critical project phases. Strengthening collaboration between institutions and stakeholders is crucial for improving project performance and securing community support (Njuguna et al., 2022). These partnerships also offer valuable feedback on the social impact and long-term success of health interventions.

Communication serves as the foundation for all stakeholder interactions and directly influences how effectively project objectives are achieved. The quality and frequency of communication determine whether stakeholders remain aligned with project goals and whether emerging issues are addressed promptly. Research by Ma and Wang (2021) demonstrates that effective communication can overcome project obstacles, while poor communication often leads to misunderstandings and project failures. Understanding this relationship between communication practices and project outcomes is essential for developing better project management strategies in the health sector.

The relationship between stakeholder communication and project performance has received limited attention in the Kenyan health sector context. While previous studies have examined various factors affecting project success, few have specifically investigated how

communication quality influences performance outcomes. This gap in knowledge presented an opportunity to explore how different communication approaches impact project delivery, resource utilization, and stakeholder satisfaction. Addressing this knowledge gap could provide valuable guidance for improving project management practices in Kenya's health sector.

Given the persistent challenges of delays and budget overruns in Kenyan health projects, examining the role of stakeholder communication became particularly important. This study sought to determine how communication practices influence project performance outcomes, with the aim of identifying specific communication strategies that could improve project success rates. By focusing on the relationship between stakeholder communication and performance, this research addressed a critical need for evidence-based approaches to project management in Kenya's public health sector. The findings could inform policy recommendations and practical interventions to enhance the delivery of health services through better project management practices.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to Muriithi (2019), project failures remain prevalent across various sectors globally, resulting in substantial financial losses annually. In the context of Kenya's health sector, projects frequently miss critical deadlines, exceed budgets, and fail to meet quality standards (Kamau, 2021). Research by Otieno (2022) found that delays in health projects can extend from approximately 7 to 14 months, while cost overruns range between 5% and 50%. These issues significantly undermine the intended impact of such initiatives. A study by Wambugu (2021) on the influence of stakeholder involvement in project outcomes within Kenya revealed that active participation of key actors is vital for enhancing transparency, accountability, and overall project success. Projects with well-engaged stakeholders tend to achieve better implementation results and sustainability.

Reports from the Office of the Auditor General (2020) and the Parliamentary Health Committee (2023) confirm that public health projects in Kenya continue to experience delays of 6 to 14 months and budget overruns of 5% to 50%. These challenges not only drain resources but also stall progress in improving healthcare delivery. A major contributing

factor identified is insufficient engagement of critical stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, financiers, and healthcare providers, during crucial project phases such as planning, execution, and evaluation. The absence of robust mechanisms for stakeholder coordination and communication hampers project efficiency and effectiveness. Consequently, there is a pressing need for further research focused on enhancing stakeholder collaboration, tailored to Kenya's socio-economic dynamics, financial constraints, and political landscape, to mitigate recurrent delays and cost escalations and improve health project performance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to determine the role of stakeholder communication in the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The null hypothesis is that stakeholder communication has no significant influence on the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Understanding project performance requires a grounding in relevant theories that explain the dynamics between project management processes and stakeholder involvement. One foundational framework is the Stakeholder Theory, originally developed by Freeman (1984), which emphasizes the importance of identifying and managing the interests of all parties affected by a project. This theory argues that successful projects depend on effectively balancing and integrating the diverse expectations of stakeholders, including community members, funding agencies, and project teams. Recent adaptations of this theory highlight that meaningful stakeholder engagement fosters trust, accountability, and better resource utilization, which collectively contribute to improved project outcomes (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997).

Complementing this, the Theory of Constraints (TOC), introduced by Goldratt (1984), provides insight into how bottlenecks within project processes limit overall performance. In health projects, constraints such as limited funding, bureaucratic delays, or inadequate

stakeholder communication often hinder timely completion and budget adherence. TOC suggests that identifying and systematically addressing these constraints can significantly enhance project efficiency and effectiveness (Mabin & Balderstone, 2003). Additionally, Systems Theory offers a holistic perspective by viewing projects as complex systems comprising interconnected components that must function in harmony for success. This approach stresses the need for integrated stakeholder collaboration and information flow throughout the project lifecycle (Checkland, 1981). It implies that isolated actions or poor communication among stakeholders may disrupt system balance, leading to project delays or failures.

Conceptual Model and Hypothesis

This study's conceptual framework sought to demonstrate the relationship between stakeholder communication and the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya. The conceptual framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

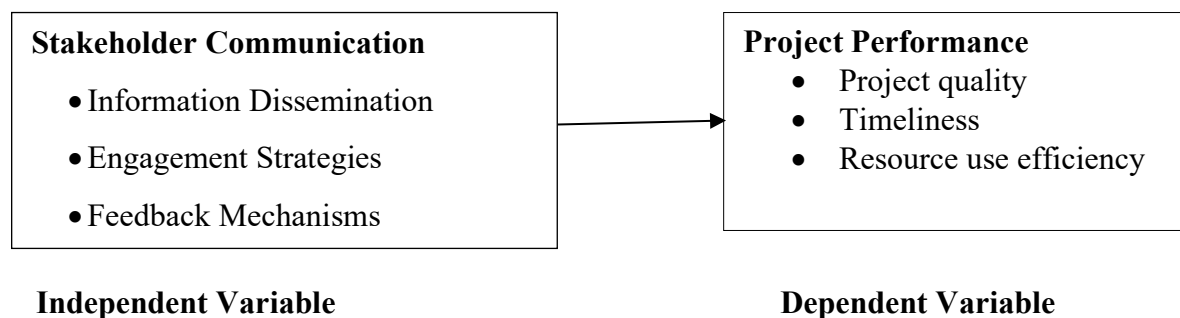


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

A qualitative study by Ahmed and Qureshi (2021) examined how stakeholders perceived the role of communication in public-private partnerships (PPPs) for healthcare service delivery in Sindh province, Pakistan. The research aimed to understand stakeholders' attitudes toward the adoption of PPPs, the motivations behind these initiatives, and the challenges faced during their implementation. Using purposive sampling, 15 key informants, including representatives from the private sector, district health administrators, and government officials, were interviewed through semi-structured methods. Thematic analysis revealed

that public sector employees often viewed private sector management styles with skepticism due to their accustomed bureaucratic routines, highlighting difficulties in harmonizing operational efficiencies across sectors.

In South Africa, Mokoena and Dlamini (2018) studied the effects of community engagement on public infrastructure projects, focusing on the construction of a pedestrian bridge in Hammanskraal. The study participants included project professionals, the main contractor, and municipal officials responsible for the project. Attention was given to the interactions between local community leaders and the engineering and management teams. Findings indicated that stakeholders wielded considerable influence, with the community having the strongest impact on project progress (relative importance index, RII = 0.79), followed by the project manager (RII = 0.77) and technical engineers (RII = 0.74). This finding pointed to the critical role of community involvement in steering public projects.

In Rwanda, Nyiransabimana (2019) explored how stakeholder involvement affected the success of public projects in Musanze District, particularly in water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs. Respondents included donors, implementing agencies, project implementation committees, and beneficiaries. Although most respondents (over 80%) confirmed active beneficiary participation, a minority expressed disagreement regarding stakeholder engagement's effectiveness. Approximately 32% regarded planning as highly influential on project outcomes, while around 22% felt it had little effect. Similarly, about one-third perceived project execution as a key determinant of success, whereas roughly 15% rated it as having low impact. These results underscored the mixed perceptions about the influence of stakeholder communication and participation on project performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed-methods design guided by pragmatism to investigate how stakeholder communication impacts project performance. Pragmatism allows the researcher to select methods best suited to addressing the research problem by combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021). The quantitative strand adopted a positivist philosophy, which emphasizes structured data collection and hypothesis testing through measurable and objective analysis (Cooper & Schindler, 2014).

The research focused on 108 ongoing public health projects in Kenya, categorized into thematic groups such as maternal health, child health, immunization, HIV/AIDS, and other priority areas as per the Ministry of Health project status reports. Stratified sampling was first applied to organize these projects by category, after which purposive sampling was used to select key respondents, including project managers and supervisors, who were considered experts involved in project execution.

The sample size was determined using Yamane's formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 97 projects selected for detailed study, ensuring representativeness and reliability of the findings. Primary data were collected using self-administered questionnaires containing both closed and open-ended questions. Closed questions facilitated quantitative analysis through Likert scales, while open-ended questions provided qualitative information about stakeholder communication dynamics. Data collection was supported by trained research assistants who administered and retrieved the questionnaires over two weeks. Before the main study, a pilot test was conducted on 10% of the sample to assess the instrument's validity and reliability. Necessary revisions were made based on the pilot feedback to enhance clarity and measurement precision. Finally, collected data were cleaned, coded, and analyzed using statistical software to test hypotheses and explore relationships between stakeholder communication and project performance.

RESULTS

Stakeholder communication and its effect on the performance of public health projects in Kenya were examined in this study. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for various aspects of stakeholder communication.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Stakeholder Communication

Aspect of Communication	% Agree	% Disagree	% Undecided	Mean	Std. Deviation
Collection of diverse perspectives	67.7	14.0	18.3	3.85	1.109
Availability of relevant progress information	63.1	18.3	18.6	3.58	1.187
Effective communication among project users	64.3	17.0	18.7	3.64	1.175
Communication needs analysis performed	50.0	21.3	28.7	3.52	1.142
Stakeholder feedback mechanisms	48.7	22.9	28.4	3.43	1.215
Stakeholder attendance at project kick-off meetings	67.7	14.5	17.8	3.84	1.102
Communication with external stakeholders	78.9	9.4	11.7	4.08	1.002
Timely communication of project outcomes	57.3	31.5	11.2	3.44	1.265

The descriptive statistics revealed a composite mean of 3.66 with a standard deviation of 1.238, indicating that participants generally agreed that effective stakeholder communication positively influences project outcomes. This finding aligns with Binder (2016) and Ma and Wang (2021), who emphasize the importance of communication in project success. The results showed that 67.7% of respondents agreed that diverse perspectives were collected during the project lifecycle, supported by a mean score of 3.85. This finding is consistent with Guo and Kapucu (2019), who emphasize the importance of sharing varied viewpoints in project management.

Regarding the availability of relevant progress information, 63.1% of respondents agreed, while 18.3% disagreed, resulting in a mean of 3.58. This finding matches Wandabwa and Yusuf's (2019) research on the role of stakeholder feedback in project success. Effective communication among project users was acknowledged by 64.3% of respondents with a mean of 3.64, supporting Maak, Pless, and Voegtlin's (2016) assertions about managing expectations through dialogue. Half of the respondents agreed that communication needs

analysis is conducted, with a mean of 3.52, aligning with Hill (2017), who stresses the importance of understanding communication requirements in project management.

Feedback mechanisms showed less consensus among respondents, with 48.7% agreement and 28.4% undecided, reflected in a mean of 3.43. This finding suggests that while feedback systems exist, their effectiveness varies across different projects. Butt, Naaranoja, and Savolainen (2016) highlight that robust communication routines encourage stakeholder involvement, which supports the need for stronger feedback mechanisms. Strong agreement (67.7%) was reported for stakeholder attendance at kick-off meetings, with a mean of 3.84, consistent with Kerzner (2017), who underscores the importance of early stakeholder involvement in project success.

Communication with external stakeholders received the highest rating, with 78.9% of respondents considering it reliable and a mean of 4.08. This finding supports Mjahed Hammami, Chtourou, and Al Moosa's (2018) view on unified communication strategies in public projects. However, timely communication of project outcomes showed mixed results, with 57.3% agreement and 31.5% disagreement, resulting in a mean of 3.44. This finding reflects some uncertainty about dissemination practices, as noted by Tipili et al. (2014), who emphasize the importance of effective information management in health sector projects.

Regression Analysis: Stakeholder Communication and Project Performance

Regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between stakeholder communication and project performance in Kenya's public health sector. Table 2 presents the model summary for stakeholder communication as a predictor of project performance.

Table 2: Model Summary for Stakeholder Communication

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.869	0.808	0.803	0.389

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder communication

b. Dependent Variable: Performance of public health projects

The regression analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between stakeholder communication and project performance in Kenya's public health sector. The correlation coefficient ($r = 0.869$) demonstrates a high positive association between the two variables. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.808$) indicates that stakeholder communication explains approximately 80.8% of the variance in project performance, suggesting that communication practices are a major determinant of project success. Table 3 summarized the ANOVA for Stakeholder Communication

Table 3: ANOVA for Stakeholder Communication

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	50.568	1	50.568	16.795	.000
Residual	12.081	39	0.310		
Total	62.649	40			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of public health projects

b. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder communication

The ANOVA results confirm that the relationship between stakeholder communication and project performance is statistically significant ($F = 16.795$, $p < 0.05$). This finding indicates that communication practices substantially impact project outcomes and that the regression model provides a good fit for the data. The significance level demonstrates that the observed relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. Table 4 includes the regression coefficients for stakeholder communication

Table 4: Regression Coefficients for Stakeholder Communication

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	0.992	0.158		6.279
Stakeholder communication	0.802	0.196	0.869	4.099

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of public health projects

The fitted regression model is expressed as:

$$\text{Performance of public health projects} = 0.992 + 0.802\text{Stakeholder communication}$$

The regression coefficients show that an improvement in stakeholder communication is associated with a corresponding significant increase in project performance ($\beta = 0.802$). The standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.869) indicates a strong positive relationship between the variables. The t-value (4.099) with a significance level of $p < 0.001$ confirms that stakeholder communication is a statistically significant predictor of project performance. This regression equation suggests that for every unit increase in stakeholder communication effectiveness, project performance increases by approximately 0.802 units. The constant term (0.992) represents the baseline level of project performance when stakeholder communication is at its minimum level. These results provide strong statistical evidence supporting the hypothesis that stakeholder communication significantly influences the performance of public health projects in Kenya.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship between stakeholder communication and the performance of public health projects in Kenya.

Hypothesis Tested:

Ha: Stakeholder communication has a significant effect on the performance of public health

projects in Kenya.

The regression results at a 95% confidence level reveal that $F\text{-calculated}(1, 39) = 16.795$ is greater than the $F\text{-critical}(1, 39) = 4.08$, with a $p\text{-value} < 0.05$, indicating the model is a good fit and communication is a strong predictor of project performance. The $t\text{-calculated}(4.099)$ exceeds the $t\text{-critical}(2.022)$, leading to rejection of the null hypothesis and acceptance of the alternative hypothesis. These results support Binder's (2016) view on communication as a key facilitator of coordination and teamwork, as well as Ma and Wang's (2021) emphasis on communication for removing obstacles. The mean scores reflect broad agreement that diverse perspectives are incorporated and timely information is shared, which is crucial for project guidance (Guo & Kapucu, 2019). While feedback mechanisms showed less uniformity, the overall high mean scores and strong external communication reliability underscore the vital role of open dialogue, as highlighted by Maak, Pless, and Voegtlin (2016). The importance of communication needs analysis and early stakeholder engagement resonates with Hill (2017) and Kerzner (2017), respectively. The study also aligns with Tipili et al. (2014), who recommend clear communication plans and timely updates to improve information flow and problem-solving.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that stakeholder communication significantly impacts the performance of public health projects in Kenya. The findings demonstrate a strong positive relationship between effective communication practices and project success, indicating that communication serves as a fundamental determinant of project outcomes rather than merely a supportive function. Projects with well-structured communication channels consistently outperformed those with weak or fragmented communication systems. The research revealed that effective stakeholder communication enhances transparency, builds trust among project participants, and facilitates better coordination of resources and activities. Furthermore, the study established that communication quality directly influences project timeliness, budget adherence, and the achievement of quality standards. The evidence suggests that communication breakdowns often lead to misaligned expectations, delayed decision-making, and resource misallocation, which ultimately contribute to the persistent

challenges of project delays and cost overruns in Kenya's health sector. These findings underscore the critical importance of treating communication as a strategic project management function that requires dedicated attention, resources, and expertise throughout the project lifecycle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that project managers should prioritize developing and implementing comprehensive communication strategies that engage all stakeholders consistently from project inception to completion. Organizations should establish early and continuous engagement mechanisms that actively involve stakeholders in project planning, implementation, and evaluation phases, ensuring that diverse perspectives and local knowledge inform critical decisions. Project teams should implement robust feedback systems that not only gather stakeholder input but also demonstrate how this feedback influences project adjustments and improvements. These systems should be designed to facilitate two-way communication, allowing stakeholders to express concerns, provide suggestions, and receive timely responses to their queries. Project managers should develop detailed communication plans that specify clear channels, frequencies, and methods for information sharing, emphasizing transparency, accessibility, and cultural appropriateness. Additionally, organizations should invest substantially in capacity building programs that equip project teams with advanced communication skills, including conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, and community engagement techniques. Training programs should be tailored to address the specific challenges of working in Kenya's diverse cultural and linguistic landscape, ensuring that communication approaches respect local customs and values while maintaining professional project management standards.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest

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