

STAKEHOLDER BUY-IN AND PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC HEALTH SECTOR PROJECTS IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem: Public health projects in Kenya have frequently experienced delays, cost overruns, and underperformance. A key contributor to these persistent challenges is the insufficient involvement of stakeholders during critical project phases, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Despite its importance, stakeholder engagement remains underemphasized, leading to limited project success.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of stakeholder buy-in in determining the performance of public health initiatives in Kenya. The study explored how involving stakeholders early and consistently can influence the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of these projects.

Research Methodology: The research utilized a mixed-methods design that combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Data were collected from a broad range of project stakeholders through structured questionnaires and interviews. Statistical analysis was employed to assess the strength of the relationship between stakeholder involvement and project performance.

Results: The study found a strong positive correlation between stakeholder buy-in and project success ($r = 0.958$), with stakeholder involvement explaining 90.1% of the variation in project

performance ($R^2 = 0.901$). The data suggest that when stakeholders are actively engaged, particularly in the early stages of the project, there is a significant improvement in both project delivery and outcomes.

Conclusion: The findings emphasize that stakeholder engagement is not just a supportive function but a central component of successful public health project implementation. Active involvement fosters ownership, enhances decision-making, and contributes to more sustainable outcomes.

Recommendation: The study recommends that project managers prioritize stakeholder inclusion from the outset. Strategies should focus on empowering participants, fostering collaboration, and institutionalizing stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle to ensure lasting impact and improved performance of public health programs in Kenya.

Keywords: *Buy-in, Project Performance, Public Health, Kenya, Stakeholder Participation, Health Sector, Project Management*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Project performance is a project cycle's defining characteristic, confirming the viability of interventions and enhancing the process's overall sustainability. In addition to being difficult, project management comes with unavoidable difficulties that are frequently underestimated. The viability and effectiveness of interventions made throughout the project lifecycle are determined by accountability, transparency, and acceptance, especially in the early stages of project creation. This is becoming more widely recognized. According to Wambui, Okech, and Olweny (2020), the team must include critical thinkers qualified to drive and sustain ideas through performance and possess a solid understanding of the project's multiple aspects.

Project performance and success depend heavily on stakeholder participation (Aupe & Sagwa, 2020). Success or failure is largely determined by an extensive understanding of technological obstacles, socioeconomic trade-offs, political foundations, financial appropriations, and the competence and capability to direct projects (O'Brien, Phelan, & Smits, 2020). Project managers have to deal with issues such as identifying possibilities and problems brought about by globalization, addressing conflicting stakeholder opinions about development, and concentrating on time-consuming elements that might not entirely satisfy stakeholder needs (Williams, 2017).

Stakeholders are important to projects because they express their wants and expectations, provide resources, and offer assistance. According to Musau (2020), their cultural background and the culture of the project region impact their concerns. Musau (2020) goes on to emphasize that better decision-making throughout the project cycle and meeting the varying expectations of stakeholders depend on a well-structured stakeholder participation plan. It is crucial to evaluate the significance and impact of stakeholders on project performance since quality management systems are more likely to be implemented on schedule in organizations where stakeholders participate directly.

In Kenya, delays and overspending are frequent, particularly in projects related to health. These delays negatively impact the country's development and the communities where the projects are intended. Project performance is greatly impacted by the effectiveness of stakeholders' participation, who play critical roles throughout the project lifecycle (Wood et al., 2021). Additionally, interactions between institutions and stakeholders can be used to assess their social performance.

Given the established importance of stakeholder engagement in project success, this study aimed to examine the relationship between stakeholder buy-in and performance outcomes of public health sector projects in Kenya. The objective addresses a critical gap in empirical evidence quantifying this relationship within the Kenyan context, where public health projects consistently experience delays and cost overruns. Understanding the extent to which stakeholder buy-in influences project performance is essential for developing evidence-based strategies to address these persistent challenges.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Horning (2018) argues that regardless of the industry, projects continue to fail at an alarming pace, costing billions of dollars yearly. Regarding timeliness, budget, and quality, health-related projects in Kenya have fallen short of expectations (Nduthu, 2018). Research by Onyango (2020) revealed that throughout health projects, time overruns ranged from 10.6 percent to 63.9 percent and cost overruns ranged from 6.0 percent to 34 percent. Health project delays range from 6 to 13 months, and cost overruns may vary from 6% to 53%, according to Ministry of Health data. Omondi (2020) reviewed a study on the effect of stakeholder participation on project performance in Kenya. The

study highlighted that stakeholder participation is essential for ensuring accountability and transparency in fulfilling organizational duties. According to the study's findings, stakeholders involved in implementation projects were successful and performed well.

According to reports from the Auditor General, the Ministry of Health (2019), and a parliamentary report (June 2022), public health sector projects in Kenya are subject to cost overruns of 6% to 53% and delays of 6 to 13 months. These problems consume resources and hinder improvements in public health. One of the main causes of these difficulties has been found to be the under-engagement of stakeholders, such as communities, governmental bodies, funders, and medical professionals, in the stages of planning, implementing, and monitoring. Project performance is adversely affected by the lack of efficient frameworks for stakeholder engagement and interaction. Further investigation is required to determine ways to improve stakeholder involvement to address constant delays and cost overruns and improve project outcomes, given Kenya's unique problems, which include sociocultural variables, budgetary limits, and political instability.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

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

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The null hypothesis (H_0) is that stakeholder buy-in has no significant influence on the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Theoretical frameworks are essential for understanding, predicting, and evaluating phenomena related to research problems. They help clarify the relationships between variables and provide a foundation for explaining phenomena, establishing connections, and contributing to knowledge development. Freeman (1984) developed Stakeholder Theory, which emphasizes the importance of stakeholder participation in decision-making processes. The theory defines stakeholders as any person or organization affected by project decisions. According to this theory, effective stakeholder management requires identifying affected parties, understanding their needs, and addressing their concerns to ensure project success (PMI, 2013). Freeman (1984) argued that stakeholder management is vital for organizations to meet diverse group requirements and navigate changing business environments. Yee-Chin (2014) further argued that stakeholder power

assessment is essential for achieving positive outcomes, particularly in public sector projects. This theory is relevant because it demonstrates the critical role of active stakeholder participation in ensuring successful health project completion.

Resource dependency theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) posits that organizational operations are shaped by their reliance on stakeholders and external forces for essential resources. The theory suggests that organizations must effectively manage relationships with external stakeholders to secure necessary resources. Stakeholders who control resources vital to the organization are considered particularly valuable. Effective resource management is fundamental to project success because resource utilization directly affects project performance and organizational survival (Mukhongo, 2021). This study applied this theory to identify the resources necessary for optimal project performance.

Stakeholder engagement theory (Freeman, 1984) examines how organizations interact with and manage their stakeholders through three distinct perspectives: instrumental, normative, and descriptive. The normative approach emphasizes equity and justice in stakeholder relationships, while the descriptive perspective focuses on stakeholder characteristics and behaviors. The instrumental view maintains that organizational success can be achieved through effective stakeholder involvement. This study utilized this theory to understand how stakeholder engagement influences decision-making and outcomes across different phases of health project lifecycles (Preston, 1990).

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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

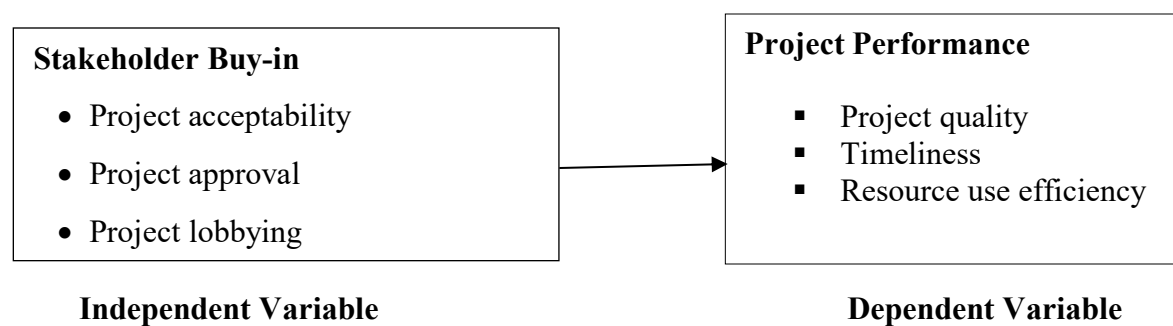


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Stakeholder perspectives on the effectiveness of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the provision of healthcare services in Pakistan's Sindh province were investigated in a 2019 study by Khan and Puthussery. The study sought to comprehend stakeholders' perspectives regarding PPP adoption in the healthcare industry, the justification for such policies, and the difficulties related to putting them into practice. Purposive sampling was used to choose 13 stakeholders for semi-structured in-depth interviews as part of the study's qualitative methodology. Among these attendees were representatives from the private sector working on PPP implementation, district administrators, and government officials. The data was analyzed using a thematic method. The results showed that because they were used to less effective work procedures, public sector employees frequently saw private sector management engagement as a cause for concern. This demonstrated the difficulties in incorporating the efficiency of the private sector.

Rathenam and Dabup (2017) conducted a study on the influence of community involvement on public projects, using the South African Hammanskraal pedestrian bridge as a case study. With a focus on the construction of the Hammanskraal Pedestrian Bridge over the R101 in Hammanskraal, Pretoria, the study investigated the influence of local communities on public-sector building projects. The study also looked at the interactions between the project steering community and professional engineers and project managers. The study found that stakeholders had a significant impact on the project, with an overall significance rating of 0.656. The stakeholders with the greatest influence on the project were similarly determined to be the Hawker Committee (RII = 0.704), the community (RII = 0.796), the project manager (RII = 0.778), and the structural engineer (RII = 0.741). Notably, the results of the study indicate that the community has more influence over the project than any professional team member.

The significance of stakeholder buy-in for project success is emphasized by Bazimya's (2018) study on stakeholder participation and public project performance in Rwanda. The study focused on the effects of stakeholder participation in project selection and

implementation on Musanze District performance. Three donors, the implementing agency, the PIC, and the project beneficiaries were among the respondents. 19.5% of respondents disagreed, despite 80.5% reporting beneficiary involvement in the WASH effort. 31.7% of respondents rated planning as extremely impactful, while 22% said it had a very low influence. These respondents believed that planning had a major impact on project performance. According to 31.7% of respondents, implementation had a very high impact, while 14.6% said it had a very low impact.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach informed by pragmatism to investigate the influence of stakeholder participation on project performance through both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Pragmatic thinking enables flexibility in selecting approaches that best address the research problem (Dawadi, Shrestha & Giri, 2021). The study employed a positivist paradigm, emphasizing objective data measurement and hypothesis testing through instruments such as surveys and questionnaires. The target population comprised 108 ongoing health sector projects in Kenya. A stratified sampling technique was used to categorize projects based on health focus areas including HIV/AIDS, maternal health, and child health. Project experts were selected using purposive sampling, and Yamane's formula was applied to determine a sample size of 97, ensuring adequate precision for statistical analysis.

RESULTS

Stakeholder buy-in and the performance of public health sector projects are significantly correlated, according to the regression findings' coefficient of determination (R^2) and correlation coefficient (r). Table 1 presents the model summary for stakeholder buy-in

Table 1: Model Summary for Stakeholder buy-in

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.958 ^a	.901	.903	.2580

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder buy-in

b. Dependent Variable: Performance of public health sector projects

The model summary results reveal an exceptionally strong correlation coefficient ($r = 0.958$) between stakeholder buy-in and project performance, indicating an almost perfect positive linear relationship. This correlation suggests that as stakeholder buy-in increases, project performance improves proportionally. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.901$) demonstrates that stakeholder buy-in explains 90.1% of the variation in public health sector project performance, leaving only 9.9% of the variation unexplained by other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R-square value of 0.903 confirms the model's reliability even when accounting for the number of predictors, indicating that the relationship remains robust. The standard error of the estimate (0.2580) is relatively low, suggesting that the model's predictions are accurate and that the data points cluster closely around the regression line.

Table 2: ANOVA for Stakeholder buy-in

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	77.753	1	77.753	142.359	.000b
	Residual	99.404	83	1.196		
	Total	177.157	84			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of public health sector projects

b. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder buy-in

The ANOVA results demonstrate that the F-statistic value of 142.359 substantially exceeded the critical threshold, confirming the model's statistical significance. This F-value indicates that the variance explained by the regression model is significantly greater than the variance that remains unexplained, providing strong evidence that stakeholder buy-in is a meaningful predictor of project performance. The significance level of 0.000 confirms that there is virtually no probability that the observed relationship occurred by chance, establishing the reliability of the findings with the highest level of statistical confidence.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients for Stakeholder buy-in

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.040	.074		.549	.574
	Stakeholder buy-in	.944	.020	.948	45.983	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of public health sector projects

Based on these coefficients, the regression model can be expressed as:

$$\text{Project Performance} = 0.040 + 0.944\text{Stakeholder Buy-in}$$

The regression coefficients reveal critical information about the relationship between stakeholder buy-in and project performance outcomes. The constant term has an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.040, representing the baseline project performance level when stakeholder buy-in is zero. However, this constant is not statistically significant, as evidenced by the t-value of 0.549 and significance level of 0.574 (> 0.05), indicating that the intercept does not significantly differ from zero. This suggests that meaningful project performance is largely dependent on stakeholder engagement rather than baseline factors.

The stakeholder buy-in variable demonstrates a strong positive relationship with project performance, with an unstandardized coefficient (B) of 0.944. This coefficient indicates that for every one-unit increase in stakeholder buy-in, project performance increases by 0.944 units, representing an almost one-to-one relationship between stakeholder engagement and project success. The t-value of 45.983 is exceptionally high, demonstrating the statistical robustness of this relationship. The significance level of 0.000 confirms that this coefficient is statistically significant at the highest confidence level, providing overwhelming evidence that stakeholder buy-in is a critical predictor of project performance.

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The findings demonstrate a significant positive relationship between stakeholder buy-in and the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya.

H_{a1}: Stakeholder Buy-in has a significant effect on the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya.

The regression results at a 95% level of confidence show that the F-Calculated (1, 182) = 142.359 was greater than F-Critical (1, 182) = 3.893 and the P-value (.000) < 0.05 indicated that Stakeholder Buy-in is good and fit in explaining the change in the performance of public health sector projects in Kenya. The t-Calculated (7.011) was greater than the t-Critical (1.970), and the p-value < 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected and was concluded that Stakeholder Buy-in has a significant effect on the Performance of public health sector projects in Kenya.

The purpose of the study was to look into how stakeholder buy-in influenced Kenyan public health sector projects' performance. With a composite mean of 3.73, the results showed that stakeholder buy-in significantly affects project performance. In line with Anne and Paul's (2019) findings on the significance of stakeholder buy-in in affecting project outcomes, most respondents agreed that stakeholder participation is crucial for gaining the public and ensuring project success. Although there were a few differences over the importance of the initiative, the majority agreed that stakeholder involvement was crucial.

The study's mean score of 3.93, which denotes a high degree of agreement, further suggested that stakeholder buy-in enhances acceptance of public health projects. These results are consistent with those of Rathenam and Dabup (2017), who highlighted the importance of community involvement for project approval and success. The study also found that, with a mean score of 3.54, stakeholder involvement is essential to the successful completion of health projects. This demonstrates the significant impact stakeholders have on the approval and implementation of public health projects.

Based on a mean score of 3.93, the study's analysis of the role of lobbying revealed that

stakeholders actively engage in lobbying activities to support project performance. This is in line with the study by Anne and Paul (2019), which found that stakeholder involvement is a critical component of project performance. Senaratne and Ruwanpura (2016) highlighted the significance of managing stakeholder expectations to reduce disruptions, and 77.6% of respondents felt that stakeholder participation is crucial for project success. With an average score of 3.57, the study's conclusion emphasized the critical role stakeholders play in recognizing and resolving problems that affect project performance, further demonstrating the significance of stakeholder engagement in guaranteeing effective project outcomes.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the study's findings, stakeholder buy-in has a significant effect on project outcomes and has a major impact on how well public health sector projects in Kenya perform. Project managers must concentrate on encouraging active stakeholder participation, rapidly resolving challenges, and keeping lines of communication open throughout the project lifecycle in order to guarantee successful project execution. The research by Anne and Paul (2019), which emphasized the significance of stakeholder involvement in influencing project success, is consistent with this finding. In line with the viewpoints of Zarewa (2019) and Jayasuriya, Zhang, and Yang (2020), who states that successful project performance and obstacle-overcoming depend on the efficacy of stakeholder engagement, the study also emphasizes the critical role of early identification and resolution of potential problems. According to the research, the sustainability and long-term success of a project can be greatly enhanced by including stakeholder expectations and concerns in the project planning process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that project managers should prioritize obtaining and retaining stakeholder support from the project's inception. To achieve this, it is essential to include stakeholders in critical decision-making processes, maintain open communication, and engage them during the early planning stages. Project outcomes can be improved by ensuring stakeholders understand the project's objectives and benefits, which encourages their commitment and active participation throughout the implementation process. Moreover,

project managers should concentrate on granting stakeholders more power and responsibility within the project by giving them decision-making authority. A sense of ownership and ongoing participation are promoted by this empowerment. In actuality, this could entail giving community leaders a say in the planning process, getting their input, and encouraging pride in the project's accomplishment. This strategy not only improves project performance but also helps public health efforts last over time since stakeholders are more likely to stay committed to the project's continued success.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interests

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