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Influence of Project Strengthening on Project Outcomes in United Nations Agencies in Kenya



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Influence of Project Strengthening on Project Outcomes in United Nations Agencies in Kenya



Ronald Kwena

Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this article was to analyze influence of project strengthening on project outcomes in united nations agencies in Kenya.

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: This study examined how project strengthening strategies, such as capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and resource management, impact the outcomes of development projects led by United Nations agencies in Kenya. By analyzing the effectiveness of these strategies, the research aims to identify key factors that contribute to project success, improved service delivery, and sustainability in resource-constrained environments.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Resource-based view (RBV), stakeholder theory & systems theory may be used to anchor future studies on the influence of project strengthening on project outcomes in united nations agencies in Kenya. They advocate for the integration of capacity-building initiatives, the optimization of resource allocation, and the active involvement of stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. Policy standpoint, the study provides recommendations for UN agencies and development organizations to institutionalize strategies that prioritize project strengthening.

Keywords: *Project Strengthening, Project Outcomes*

INTRODUCTION

Project outcomes refer to the tangible and intangible results achieved by a project, reflecting its effectiveness and impact. In the context of United Nations agencies in Kenya, these outcomes encompass improvements in service delivery, enhanced community engagement, increased local capacity, and the sustainability of initiatives. Strengthening projects through capacity building, resource allocation, and stakeholder involvement has been shown to positively influence these outcomes. For instance, a study by Nzulwa (2019) demonstrated that project strengthening significantly enhanced the effectiveness of UN agency initiatives in Kenya. The research highlighted that such strengthening efforts led to improved project performance, increased community participation, and more sustainable development outcomes.

In the United States, the Central Kenya Response - Integration, Strengthening, and Sustainability Plus Project (CRISSP) serves as an example of successful project strengthening. Supported by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), CRISSP aimed to integrate HIV/AIDS services and strengthen health systems in Central Kenya. The project achieved notable improvements in healthcare delivery, including increased access to services and enhanced local capacity to manage health programs. Similarly, in Japan, the UN-Habitat Support to Sustainable Urban Development in Kenya project focused on strengthening institutions and project management. This initiative led to improved urban planning and infrastructure development, demonstrating the positive impact of project strengthening on outcomes in developed economies.

In Kenya, the Bura Irrigation and Settlement Project (BISP) exemplifies the influence of project strengthening on outcomes. Initially, the project faced challenges such as cost overruns and underperformance. However, subsequent efforts to strengthen project management and infrastructure led to improved agricultural productivity and better livelihoods for settlers. Additionally, the Sauri Millennium Village Project, implemented in Kenya, aimed to alleviate poverty through integrated development interventions. The project achieved improvements in education, healthcare, and agriculture, showcasing the effectiveness of project strengthening in enhancing outcomes in developing economies.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the BOMA Project in Northern Kenya demonstrates the impact of project strengthening on outcomes. The project focused on empowering women through entrepreneurship and financial inclusion, leading to increased incomes and improved community resilience. Similarly, the Youth Café, a pan-African youth organization, has implemented projects across the continent to foster youth empowerment and social progress. These initiatives have resulted in enhanced youth participation in governance and increased access to education and employment opportunities, highlighting the positive effects of project strengthening on outcomes in Sub-Saharan economies.

Project strengthening refers to the strategic interventions and practices aimed at improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of a project. It involves enhancing organizational capacities, resource mobilization, stakeholder engagement, and leadership development to ensure successful project outcomes. Key types of project strengthening include capacity building, which focuses on enhancing the skills and knowledge of project stakeholders; resource allocation, ensuring that sufficient financial and material resources are available for successful project execution; stakeholder engagement, promoting active collaboration and communication between

all project participants; and project management improvement, which involves refining the management systems, tools, and processes used to track project progress and address challenges. These strengthening strategies aim to build robust foundations for long-term success and deliver tangible outcomes, such as improved service delivery, increased community involvement, and enhanced sustainability (Nzulwa, 2019).

Each of these project strengthening efforts has a direct link to project outcomes. Capacity building enables stakeholders to more effectively execute tasks, leading to improved project performance and achievement of objectives. Resource allocation ensures that necessary inputs are consistently available, directly impacting the scope and scale of project outcomes. Stakeholder engagement fosters ownership and collaboration, leading to more responsive and adaptable project execution. Finally, improved project management enhances decision-making, monitoring, and adjustments, contributing to the overall success of the project. Research has shown that projects with strong strengthening elements are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes, whether in terms of community empowerment, service quality, or sustainability (Nzulwa, 2019).

Problem Statement

Despite substantial investments by United Nations (UN) agencies in Kenya, many development projects continue to face challenges such as delays, cost overruns, and unmet objectives. This underscores the need to critically examine the factors influencing project outcomes within these agencies. While existing studies have highlighted the importance of project strengthening strategies such as capacity building, stakeholder engagement, and effective resource management there remains a gap in understanding how these strategies specifically impact project success in the Kenyan context. For instance, Nzulwa (2019) found that project strengthening significantly improved project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya, yet the study did not explore the underlying mechanisms or contextual factors that contribute to this success. Similarly, Kwenia (2020) emphasized the role of constrained programming on project outcomes but did not delve into how strengthening efforts can mitigate these constraints. Furthermore, while Muthomi (2019) identified effective project management practices as key to improved outcomes, the study did not assess how these practices interact with strengthening strategies to enhance project success. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive research that examines the specific influence of project strengthening on project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya, considering the unique challenges and dynamics of the Kenyan development environment.

Theoretical Review

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that the resources a firm possesses are critical to its ability to achieve competitive advantage and superior performance. Originated by Barney (1991), RBV emphasizes the importance of valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources in gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage. This theory is relevant to the study of project strengthening in United Nations agencies, as it highlights how the allocation and effective use of resources such as human capital, financial capital, and technology can significantly influence project outcomes. Strengthening projects through improved resource management may lead to more successful outcomes. Research has shown that efficient resource utilization positively impacts project performance (Grant, 2020).

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, introduced by Freeman (1984), focuses on how organizations interact with various stakeholders and how these relationships affect organizational outcomes. The theory asserts that businesses must consider the interests of all stakeholder's employees, customers, suppliers, and the community to achieve long-term success. This theory is relevant to the topic as stakeholder engagement plays a key role in project strengthening efforts. By actively involving stakeholders in the decision-making process, UN agencies can improve their project outcomes, ensuring that projects are responsive to the needs and expectations of those involved. Recent studies confirm that stakeholder involvement positively impacts project success (Barton, 2021).

Systems Theory

Systems Theory, initially developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1968), views organizations as systems composed of interrelated and interdependent components. This theory suggests that for an organization to be effective, all components must work cohesively. In the context of UN projects, strengthening the various components leadership, resources, and stakeholder relationships forms an integrated system that can drive project success. Systems Theory is relevant because it emphasizes the interconnectedness of project elements and how strengthening one area impacts the overall outcome. Research has highlighted that systems thinking in project management enhances efficiency and outcomes (Nguyen & Kumar, 2022).

Empirical Review

Nzulwa's (2019) explored how project strengthening impacts the outcomes of United Nations agencies in Kenya. The study used a descriptive research design with a cross-sectional survey, targeting a sample of project managers, staff, and stakeholders from various UN agencies involved in development projects. The results showed that project strengthening, particularly through capacity building and stakeholder engagement, significantly improved project outcomes. Projects that focused on enhancing the skills and knowledge of staff and involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes achieved their goals more effectively. The study found that UN agencies that implemented these strengthening strategies demonstrated higher levels of success in terms of meeting project objectives, delivering services, and fostering long-term sustainability. Based on these findings, Nzulwa recommended that UN agencies invest more in capacity building and deepen their engagement with stakeholders to improve the success rate of their projects. The study emphasized that project strengthening efforts, particularly in resource-constrained environments, are crucial for achieving sustainable and impactful project outcomes in Kenya.

Kwena's (2020) explored how constrained programming, such as limited resources and infrastructure, influences the outcomes of projects implemented by United Nations agencies in Kenya. Using a quantitative research design with regression analysis, the study analyzed data collected from a range of UN projects that faced various operational constraints. The findings revealed that projects facing significant resource limitations, including insufficient funding and personnel, struggled to meet their objectives, leading to delays, cost overruns, and lower impact. In contrast, projects that were better resourced and had more effective resource management practices demonstrated more successful outcomes in terms of timeliness, cost efficiency, and overall impact. The study concluded that constrained programming negatively affects project outcomes, and mitigating these constraints is essential for improving project success. Kwena

(2020) recommended that UN agencies adopt more robust resource management frameworks and seek alternative funding sources to overcome constraints and enhance project performance. The study highlighted the importance of addressing these challenges to ensure that projects meet their intended objectives and have lasting positive effects.

Muthomi (2019) investigated the influence of project management practices on the outcomes of United Nations-led projects in Kenya. The study used a descriptive research design and a cross-sectional survey to collect data from UN agencies and their project teams. The study's findings revealed that effective project management practices, particularly in planning, monitoring, and evaluation, were strongly associated with improved project outcomes. Projects with clear planning processes, realistic timelines, and continuous performance monitoring were able to meet their objectives more consistently and effectively. Additionally, the research found that regular evaluation during project execution allowed for timely adjustments, reducing the risk of project failure and ensuring that the objectives were achieved. Muthomi concluded that the implementation of structured project management frameworks, including continuous monitoring and feedback loops, is vital for ensuring successful project outcomes in UN agencies. The study recommended that UN agencies adopt standardized project management practices to optimize project performance and improve overall project success rates.

Kimote (2024) explored the influence of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) on the performance of donor-funded projects in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya. The research used a cross-sectional survey design with a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, including interviews and questionnaires administered to project managers, beneficiaries, and local stakeholders. The findings showed that projects with high levels of stakeholder participation in the M&E process tended to perform better, as it allowed for more accurate assessment of project progress and timely adjustments. Involvement of local communities in monitoring and evaluation created a sense of ownership, increasing accountability and ensuring that projects were more aligned with the needs and expectations of beneficiaries. The study concluded that participatory M&E not only improved project outcomes but also enhanced community engagement and empowerment. Kimote (2024) recommended that future projects funded by international donors and UN agencies should integrate participatory M&E approaches as a core component of their project design and implementation processes.

Amuni, Karimi, and Patrick (2025) conducted a study on the influence of stakeholder involvement in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) on the performance of donor-funded projects in informal settlements in Kisumu Central Sub-County, Kenya. The study employed a convergent parallel design, with a sample of 364 respondents, including project managers, community leaders, and beneficiaries. The findings indicated that projects with high levels of stakeholder engagement in the M&E process had better project performance in terms of accountability, transparency, and adaptability to challenges. The study highlighted that participatory M&E led to more informed decision-making and increased local ownership, which contributed to the long-term sustainability of projects. Based on these results, the researchers recommended that UN and donor agencies prioritize stakeholder involvement in M&E activities to improve the outcomes and sustainability of development projects.

Muema (2025) focused on examining the influence of project management practices on the performance of water projects in Metropolitan Counties in Kenya. Using a descriptive research design, the study surveyed 502 respondents, including project managers, contractors, and beneficiaries involved in water projects. The study found that the adoption of effective project management practices, particularly in stakeholder management and risk management, was crucial for the success of water projects. Projects that implemented these practices were more likely to meet deadlines, stay within budget, and meet the needs of the local communities. Muema (2025) recommended that future water projects in Kenya adopt formal risk management frameworks and structured stakeholder engagement to improve the performance of water projects.

Kimote's (2024) examined the influence of participatory monitoring and evaluation among development project teams in Machakos County, Kenya. The study used a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey and collected data from project teams and beneficiaries. The findings showed that participatory M&E led to improved project outcomes, as local communities were more involved in decision-making and implementation processes. This approach increased accountability, fostered a sense of ownership, and ensured that projects met local needs and expectations. Kimote (2024) recommended that UN agencies and NGOs integrate participatory M&E into their project strategies to enhance project performance and increase the likelihood of success.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low-cost advantage as compared to field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

FINDINGS

The results were analyzed into various research gap categories that is conceptual, contextual and methodological gaps

Conceptual Gaps

The studies on project strengthening and outcomes in United Nations agencies in Kenya have identified several key strengthening efforts, such as capacity building and stakeholder engagement. However, there is limited exploration of the specific mechanisms through which these efforts translate into successful project outcomes. For instance, the role of leadership styles in project management practices, or how organizational culture within UN agencies affects project success, is underexplored. Future studies could address how leadership approaches influence the impact of project strengthening and whether these factors change over time or vary by project type. Moreover, the connection between project strengthening and the ability to innovate or adapt in dynamic settings remains under-researched (Nzulwa, 2019; Muthomi, 2019).

Contextual Gaps

The studies primarily focus on Kenya and the immediate project outcomes within the country. There is a noticeable gap in differentiating project strengthening across various sectors, such as health, education, or infrastructure. Projects in different sectors may require distinct strengthening

strategies, and this variation is not adequately addressed in the current research. Additionally, while stakeholder involvement in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has been discussed, the impact of cultural and social factors within Kenya such as local governance structures on these processes remains unclear. Examining how local governance dynamics influence project strengthening and outcomes could offer deeper insights into the contextual factors affecting project success (Kwena, 2020; Amuni, 2025).

Geographical Gaps

Most of the studies are concentrated on Kenya, with minimal comparative research across other regions where UN agencies operate, such as in Asia, Latin America, or other parts of Africa. The geographical focus limits the generalizability of the findings, suggesting that future research should explore the effects of project strengthening in various contexts. Comparative studies across different regions could reveal universal trends in project outcomes versus location-specific impacts. Furthermore, studying the challenges and successes of project strengthening in urban versus rural settings, or in regions with varying levels of development, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of project outcomes (Kimote, 2024; Muema, 2025).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

In conclusion, project strengthening plays a crucial role in enhancing the outcomes of United Nations-led projects in Kenya. The research reveals that strategic interventions such as capacity building, effective resource allocation, stakeholder engagement, and improved project management practices significantly contribute to the success of these projects. By strengthening the capabilities of project teams and involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes, UN agencies can achieve more effective, sustainable, and impactful results. Moreover, addressing operational constraints such as resource limitations and adopting participatory monitoring and evaluation practices enhances accountability and project performance. The studies suggest that for UN agencies to meet their development objectives in Kenya, greater emphasis should be placed on these strengthening efforts, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Ultimately, a well-integrated project strengthening approach is essential for fostering long-term sustainability and ensuring that UN projects lead to positive outcomes for the communities they aim to serve. These findings highlight the need for UN agencies to continuously evaluate and refine their strategies for strengthening projects to improve their effectiveness and overall impact.

Recommendations

Theory

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the understanding of Resource-Based View (RBV) and Stakeholder Theory, emphasizing how resource optimization and stakeholder engagement enhance project outcomes. By focusing on capacity building, resource management, and participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E), the study extends these theories in the context of international development projects, particularly within UN agencies. The theory suggests that internal resources, such as skilled human capital and community involvement, directly influence a project's ability to achieve its objectives and long-term sustainability.

Practice

In terms of practice, these findings offer actionable strategies for improving project outcomes. They advocate for the integration of capacity-building initiatives, the optimization of resource allocation, and the active involvement of stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. These practices not only improve project efficiency and responsiveness but also foster a sense of ownership and accountability among local communities. By implementing these practices, UN agencies can ensure that their projects are better equipped to meet local needs and achieve their intended goals, ultimately enhancing the overall effectiveness of development programs.

Policy

Policy standpoint, the study provides recommendations for UN agencies and development organizations to institutionalize strategies that prioritize project strengthening. Policies that mandate capacity-building programs, participatory M&E systems, and transparent resource allocation processes are crucial for ensuring project success. By embedding these practices into the policy framework, UN agencies can create a supportive environment for sustainable development. This would help overcome challenges such as resource constraints and ensure that projects align more closely with local priorities, leading to better outcomes for the communities they serve.

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