INFLUENCE OF PROJECT STRENGTHENING ON PROJECT OUTCOMES IN UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES IN KENYA

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Abstract

Purpose: This study addressed how project strengthening influenced project outcomes in United Nations’ Agencies in Kenya. UN agencies have valid interests in using capacity building amid humanitarian action as a means to deliver project outcomes more efficiently. They also have a responsibility to ensure that local and national actors are ultimately better able to take charge of their own work. Difficulties arise because these short- and long-term goals generally require different strategies, partnerships and funding mechanisms. These differing and sometimes conflicting goals need to be managed better if the sector is to match its rhetoric with on-the-ground programming choices.

Methodology: The study adopted a descriptive research design guided by cross sectional survey. The study findings showed a great influence of project strengthening to the Project outcomes in UN agencies.

Results: The results indicated a regression analysis value of t – Calculated which was greater than 2 (i.e. 6.855) and P Value is 0.018 at 95% level of significance that is less than 5%. The null hypothesis was subsequently rejected and it was concluded that project strengthening had a significant positive influence on project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya.

Unique Contribution to policy, practice and theory: The study recommended that there is need to enhance project financing mechanisms for sustainability of project outcomes as it reduces budgetary constraints, reduces cost overruns, reduces interference with implementation of the project schedule, and reduces insufficient capital to run project activities. The internal controls such as record keeping and ensuring sufficient funds are offered for the sustainability of the project outcomes.

Keywords: Project Strengthening; Project Outcomes; Project team Deployment; Private sector engagement; Project Environment; Project Management
1.0 INTRODUCTION

The 2013 assessment of humanitarian results by UNDP show that project outcomes of the previous humanitarian programmes were relevant to the Kenya country context and that UNDP interventions supported the establishment of a critical foundation for development (Nadig, 2012). Keleckaite and Meiliene (2015) cited that the assessment further notes that areas requiring strengthening include the need for a more strategic approach to programming to improve effectiveness of project outcomes, as well as continued emphasis to scale up efforts on issues related to humanitarian project outcomes. UN Agencies need to re-examine its project outcomes framework and overall progress reporting systems for improved demonstration of results and greater accountability to the beneficiaries (Kemuma, 2010).

Achievement of planned humanitarian project outcomes remain the ultimate goal of any project or programme managers, as well as project stakeholders and beneficiaries. This notwithstanding, humanitarian project outcomes have been a disappointment to the stakeholders and beneficiaries. Dissatisfaction with the results along with outcomes of projects dates back to the year 2000. The rate of project outputs failure in Africa was over 50% until 2010 (IFAD, 2012). Khan (2013) noted that humanitarian projects frequently fail to achieve the desired outcomes as a result of a problems that could be categorized as programming, precisely poor stakeholders’ management, organizational imperfect project design, interruptions in project identification as well as start-up, postponements in the course of project implementation, budget overruns and organization failure.

There is a need to be much clearer about the question of ‘capacity building for what?’ The supply-side, media-driven, short-term and neutrality-focused orientations of response are unlikely to change, even though these are all major impediments to a stronger emphasis on local institutional capacity building. Some of these factors relate to the composition of the system, others to principles (Knudsen, 2011).

The key point here, regarding capacity building, is that donors, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) and other stakeholders need to fit capacity-building initiatives into the existing system. The institutional imperatives of running an organization are just as real as the needs of disaster-affected people. The search for practical means to optimize combining capacity building with providing assistance and protection requires that the ‘needs’ of higher-level sectoral stakeholders be assessed, analyzed and respected (Kituku, 2014).

A radical handover of responsibilities to local partners is unlikely to occur as long as international organizations are being held accountable for their ultimate operational performance and are reliant on funding structures and media exposure that emphasize what they themselves have achieved. This review asks whether it is possible for the sector to perform better in its engagements with local organizations, even if much of the overall architecture of the system is accepted as a problematic fact of life (Lattimer & Berther, 2016)

1.1 Research Objectives

a. To establish project strengthening influenced project outcomes in United Nations’ Agencies in Kenya.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

The study tested the following hypotheses:
There was a no significant positive relationship between project strengthening and project outcomes in United Nations’ Agencies in Kenya.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Theory of Constraints and Project strengthening

The Theory of Constraints (TOC) developed by Goldratt (1990) is a “process aimed at identifying and removing constraints in organizational processes that are standing in the way of organizational goals. TOC judgment outlines major segments of the organizations’ philosophy of continuous improvement. “It is applied to identify what factors limit an organization from achieving its goals, developing a solution to the problem and getting individuals in the process to invent the requisite changes”.

According to Blackstone (2010), TOC has been applied to “production planning, production control and project management practices” and it helps to identify the most critical bottlenecks in the process and systems, so that performance can be improved. The basic premises of the Theory of Constraints assumes that people can think, they are good and systems are simple (Kweyu, 2013). Yet, there must be something missing. Why do good, thinking people have so much trouble with projects? After all, projects are simply a set of tasks which must all be done within some precedence order before the project is complete.

Theory of Constraints argues that an organization facing challenges in cost management, poor performance and chronic conflicts is as a result of poor management practices and lack of necessary intervention. Eliyahu developed the theory of constraints in the early 1980s to help organizations decide what to change, identify a desirable new condition and how to trigger the change.

He recommended first identifying the main factors affecting budget estimates in an organization. He then suggested that the managers figure out how to handle the constraints or barrier to success within prescribed budget. By focusing on fixing the main problem, overall performance could be improved (Maxwell et. al, 2015). Additionally, Lattimer and Berther (2016) observed that most organizations fail to examine their operations as a whole when developing cost estimates (Belliveau, 2015). By focusing only on short-term goals, long-term success becomes jeopardized so he suggested establishing a long-term view. According to this theory, all systems operate in an environment of cause and effect. One event causes another to happen thus prompting for factors analysis as a measure.

Adherence to cost estimates is either a constraint or has the potential to become a constraint. This cause-and-effect relationship can be very complex, especially in complex systems such as those of construction projects. Capturing the essence of cause and effect within the system and identifying factors that emulate these relationships are the keys to system performance and excellent adherence to cost estimates (Bradbury, 2011).

The Theory of Constraints (TOC) approach focuses on successful on-time completion of the entire project. According to TOC, the main constraint in any project is the time taken for completion of the critical chain. Therefore emphasis is laid on completing activities in the critical chain without wasting any time. Hence, cutting safety time from individual activities eliminates the major cause of time wastage, thereby removing the constraint. However, this does not mean that the project is
to be left unprotected against any unforeseen delays in any individual activity. The project is to be guarded against delays by providing time buffers (Nadig, 2012).

Projects involve a high level of uncertainty and depend heavily on the contributions of individuals. Project manager needs to work with different departments involved in the project to estimate lead times so that they meet the needs of the critical chain. The critical chain concept starts with a set of talented and driven project managers and assumes that the resource constraints are within the scope of the project but not in its leadership (Soriano, 2013). This theory provides the foundation upon which projects need to operate within preexisting constraints. It helped with analysis of the constraints that the projects face in order to achieve the desired outcomes and therefore, supported the need for project strengthening within humanitarian projects.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

A cross sectional survey is a method that involves the analysis of data collected from a population, or a representative subset, at one specific point in time (Orodho, 2011). This design is used to gather data on more than one case at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative data in connection to the variables. The study picked data for projects and sought to investigate the concept trends and status of project outcomes at a particular period (2014-2018). These designs were successfully used in similar studies by Kirimi and Njeru (2018), Muma, Nzulwa and Ombui (2018), Muchelule, Iravo, Noor and Odhiambo (2018) and Hassan, Gathenya and Iravo (2018)].

The study respondents included Project managers (total=233) in charge of realization of the fourteen project outcomes as shown in Appendix 2 within the UN Agencies’ thematic areas. The study used a census since the population was less than 400. To determine the sample size, the study factored in sampling adequacy which ensured a sufficient size was selected. The study selected all the 233 respondents for the study since this is a small number (David et al., 2010).

4.0 RESULTS

Descriptive Results

The study sought to assess the influence of project strengthening on project outcomes as a means of measuring central tendency. Table 1 shows the summary of results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std.dev</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgetary allocation directly determines the number of projects completed on time</td>
<td>4.987</td>
<td>.987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgetary allocation enables the overall success of the projects</td>
<td>4.875</td>
<td>.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Capacity of projects depends on budget</td>
<td>3.670</td>
<td>.453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation enables capacity gap identification</td>
<td>4.215</td>
<td>.543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and evaluation provides corrective actions for project</td>
<td>3.902</td>
<td>.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope planning strengthens capacity</td>
<td>4.934</td>
<td>.321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.4305</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.5835</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study findings in Table 1 indicate that the respondents indicated to a great extent that the Budgetary allocation directly determines the number of projects completed on time (4.987);
Budgetary allocation enables the overall success of the projects (4.875); The Capacity of projects depends on budget (3.670); Monitoring and evaluation enables capacity gap identification (4.215); Monitoring and evaluation provides corrective actions for project (3.902); Scope planning strengthens capacity (4.934). The study findings corroborates with literature review by Homes (2016) who observed that project strengthening improves efficiency, yields better projects, better outcomes as well as greater transparency and accountability enhances sustainability of these projects. The average for all the measures indicated a mean of 4.4305 which implied that project strengthening influenced project outcomes to a greater extent.

Regression Results

The linear regression analysis models the relationship between the dependent variable which is project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya and independent variable which is Project Strengthening. The correlation coefficient R= .888 showed that there was a strong positive significant influence between project strengthening and project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya. The results of the linear regression indicated that R²=.789. This implied that 78.9% of variability in project outcomes is explained by project strengthening in UN agencies in Kenya (See Table 2). The remaining 20.2% is explained by other factors not included in this study.

Table 2: Model fitness Project Strengthening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Summary</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>.888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R Square</td>
<td>.789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R Square</td>
<td>.675</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This implied that an increase in project strengthening factors such as availability of funds leads to an achievement of project outcomes in UN agencies. Kisia et.al (2016), found that project strengthening as measured positively influenced the project outcomes in UN agencies. Cohen and Kaimnenakis (2017) found that project strengthening is an important element of constrained programming in UN agencies as found by UN agencies tend to limit variations in project scope. It can be inferred that Project outcomes in UN agencies are associated with availability of funds, monitoring and evaluation structures, compliance to scope and schedule variations management.

As indicated in Table 3, the results of ANOVA test revealed that project strengthening had a significant effect on Project outcomes in UN agencies. Since the P value is actual 0.045 which is less than 5% level of significance. This is depicted by linear regression model Y=B0+B₁X₁+E where X₁ is the project strengthening the P value was 0.045 implying that the model Y=B0+B₁X₁+E was significant.

Table 3: ANOVA: Project Strengthening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>6.131</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.131</td>
<td>4.321</td>
<td>.045b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>285.199</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>1.419</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>291.330</td>
<td>202</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results indicate that there was positive gradient which implied that an increase in project strengthening led to increased project outcomes in UN agencies as indicated in Table 4. Acimovic and Goentzel (2016) indicate that project strengthening includes aspects such as time, schedule and cost. Inferences can be drawn from the findings and literature that UN agencies should strengthen projects in order to realize successful outcomes.

Table 4: Model: Project Strengthening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Coefficients</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 (Constant)</td>
<td>3.332</td>
<td>.165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Strengthening</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.036</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in Figure 2.1 shows the results of Project Strengthening on the project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya. In a scatter diagram. The scatter diagram indicated a positive gradient which is an indicative that project strengthening influenced the project outcomes in UN agencies.

Figure 2.1: Scatter Diagram on Project Strengthening
Hypothesis Results

The results indicated a regression analysis value of $t = \text{Calculated}$ which was greater than 2 (i.e. 6.855) and P Value is 0.018 at 95% level of significance that is less than 5%. The null hypothesis was subsequently rejected and it was concluded that project strengthening had a significant positive influence on project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya.

4.1 Discussion

The study sought to establish the influence of project Strengthening on project outcomes in United Nations Agencies in Kenya. The findings revealed that project Strengthening positively influenced project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya. Results of the inferential statistics such as ANOVA showed that availability of project funds which is a component of project strengthening had a major positive significance to the project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya. They further indicated that monitoring and evaluation structures, a component of project strengthening had a significant effect on project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya.

The study established that compliance to scope and schedule variations management influenced project outcomes in humanitarian projects as it reduced budgetary constraints, reduced cost overruns, reduces interference with implementation of the project schedule, reduces insufficient capital to run project activities and enhances compliance to statutory and regulatory obligations.

The findings are in agreement with findings from other relevant studies that put emphasis on the significant influence of availability of funds, monitoring and evaluation structures, compliance to scope and schedule variation management as components of project strengthening on project outcomes in humanitarian programmes. The indication therefore is that the projects need to consider project strengthening as one of the key success factors.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that project strengthening influenced project outcomes in UN agencies to a very large extent. The components of project strengthening; availability of funds, monitoring and evaluation structures, compliance to scope and schedule variation management are crucial aspects in relation to project outcomes in UN agencies in Kenya and humanitarian projects at large.

The study also concluded that increasing levels of project strengthening increased the levels of achievement of project outcomes. Further, the study concluded that project resources were an important factor influencing project outcomes. The regression coefficients of the study showed that project resources had a significant positive influence on project outcomes. This implied that increasing levels of project resources could increase the influence on project outcomes.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, it is recommended that there is need to enhance project financing mechanisms for sustainability of project outcomes as it reduces budgetary constraints, reduces cost overruns, reduces interference with implementation of the project schedule, and reduces insufficient capital to run project activities. The internal controls such as record keeping and ensuring sufficient funds are offered for the sustainability of the project outcomes.
The study further recommends that effective monitoring and evaluation to project outcomes be embraced. The staff working on monitoring and evaluation should be dedicated to the function. The roles and responsibilities of monitoring and evaluation personnel should be well specified at the start of the project. The monitoring and evaluation system should be in place to ensure it raises timely feedback of the progress in the UN Agencies.

References


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