

INFLUENCE OF PROJECT LEADERSHIP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NG-CDF PROJECTS WITHIN IGEMBE SOUTH CONSTITUENCY, MERU COUNTY, KENYA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15166968>

Published Date: 07-April-2025

Abstract: Numerous challenges arose in the administration of the fund. These included various legal disputes that disrupted the fund's operations, unfinished projects falling under decentralized functions that were no longer eligible for funding under current legislation, and insufficient technical expertise for efficient management at the Constituency Committees and Project Management Committees level. Furthermore, discrepancies between initiated development projects and the capacity to implement them were observed. Therefore, this research aimed to explore the influence of project leadership on the implementation of NG-CDF projects in Igembe South Constituency, Meru County, Kenya. An explanatory research design was employed, concentrating on five NG-CDF projects implemented by the Igembe South Constituency over the past five years (2018 – 2022). The study involved 55 participants, including 10 project supervisors and 45 project team members, due to the limited overall population. Primary data was collected through surveys, which were initially piloted with eight participants from the Igembe North Constituency to assess content validity. The reliability of the questionnaires was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis, while quantitative data was examined using descriptive statistical methods such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Additionally, an inferential analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression and the Pearson correlation coefficient. The results were presented through tables and figures. The findings indicate that effective project leadership is crucial for successful project implementation, with positive feedback from team members highlighting the significance of fostering committed teams and ensuring projects are completed on time. The study recommends that for project managers and leaders to participate in ongoing training focused on cultivating vital leadership abilities to improve the execution of projects, such as strategic decision-making, conflict resolution, and team motivation.

Keywords: Project Leadership, Project implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In project management, completing a project is crucial. Deliverables, the project manager's plan for the project, and assisting the project team in carrying out their plans are all part of it (Shanks, 2018). According to Anderson and Narasimhan (2019), each project is unique, necessitating a distinct planning and implementation strategy. Therefore, project managers must ensure that their planning and management strategies are strategic and effective by delineating the optimal execution methods to achieve project completion within the set timeframe and quality benchmarks.

Anantatmula and Rad (2018) point out that despite the project manager's efforts to attain project goals, organizations may still fall short due to inherent operational characteristics, termed as organizational factors. Hellgren and Stjernberg (2020) emphasize the project manager's duty to align project progress with the overarching vision. However, there is often a gap

between project objectives and actuality. To secure successful project outcomes, project managers must grasp how organizational factors can impact the project and how the project, in turn, can be influenced by these factors.

Mellado and Lou (2020) highlight that project implementation is a pivotal objective in projects funded by the Malaysian public sector, where success is evaluated based on numerous, sometimes conflicting parameters, with time, cost, and quality being the most prevalent. Despite this, the Malaysian public sector has consistently underperformed. Othman and Ismail (2021) note the absence of consensus on project performance metrics, leading to varied opinions on what parameters should be included in performance and success assessments. Consequently, the Malaysian government must ensure projects are completed promptly, within budget, meeting predefined quality standards, and overall requirements.

Rwelamila and Purushottam (2020) contend that the dearth of institutional capacity within numerous African nations has hampered the execution of poverty-alleviation initiatives. Consequently, many countries have grappled with the challenge of determining the most suitable institutional framework for implementing such projects. Mbachu and Nkado (2022) posit that a trade-off exists between establishing novel, autonomous structures to circumvent bureaucratic inefficiencies inherent in current institutions while ensuring the flexible and prompt delivery of services, and integrating poverty-alleviation programs into the core operations of sector development entities. Consequently, in light of the hesitance exhibited by most African governments, donors have explored the option of relying on a plethora of local institutions.

Taana (2020) notes that initiatives financed by public bodies in Ghana have encountered performance issues attributable to irregular disbursement of funds for construction endeavors by clients, delayed payments, and insufficient contract details and performance evaluations. Amoah, Berbegal-Mirabent, and Marimon (2022) observe that projects supported by the Ghanaian government are plagued by recurring delays in funding application approvals, incomplete estimation of infrastructure costs resulting in underfunding, and stringent timelines for bid preparation. Consequently, identifying the factors influencing project performance would empower project managers to undertake interventions aimed at enhancing project outcomes.

Government-funded projects in Kenya encounter hurdles during the implementation phase, particularly in meeting the stipulated project objectives. This is evidenced by the failure to adhere to project timelines, budgets, and quality standards, stemming from an inefficient implementation process. Historically, projects in Kenya were overseen by the government or government-appointed contractors (Gwaya, Masu & Wanyona, 2019). Njau and Ogolla (2022) highlight the substantial contribution of projects to national development, necessitating significant financial investments, with the involvement of County Governments in projects being widely accepted. Consequently, project evaluation must be comprehensive, spanning the entire lifecycle, to ensure accurate assessment and attainment of project objectives, and to recommend enhancements in areas where progress is lacking.

Kavale and Kalola (2020) remark that the execution of Kenyan government projects is impeded by inadequate training of staff in financial management, leading to involvement in cash transactions, limited budget allocations by relevant authorities, and cumbersome bureaucratic processes. As indicated by Kinanu and Simiyu (2022), government-funded projects encounter delays when both national and county governments fail to allocate funds promptly for project completion, often resulting in project abandonment. Thus, the funding allocated to a development initiative significantly influences its implementation.

Laurian, Day, Backhurst, and Chapman (2022) define project implementation as the coordination of individuals and resources to achieve the project's goals and plans. A well-structured project implementation plan outlines the expected achievements and the timeframe for completion. According to Almansoori, Rahman, and Memon (2021), the project management team's quality capability and effectiveness are crucial for the success of a project management plan. Projects transition into project activities during the implementation phase, involving evaluation of the project plan, plan execution, necessary adjustments, data analysis, feedback collection, and final reporting. This research evaluates project implementation in terms of budget adherence, schedule compliance, and quality assurance.

In the realm of project management, Jiang, Klein, and Chen (2018) posit that project leadership plays a vital role in bringing people together to work towards a shared goal highlighting how important strong leadership is in reaching project goals. Ahmed and Abdullahi (2021) further note that project management leadership involves a spectrum of activities, such as planning, coordination, oversight, and decision-making, essential for project success. Therefore, project management leadership stands as a critical skill in steering projects towards successful outcomes.

The creation of the Constituencies Development Fund was established through the enactment of the Constituencies Development Fund Act of 2003. This initiative aimed primarily at combating poverty at the community level by giving out at least 2.5% of the regular income of the Government towards grassroots development and poverty alleviation. The introduction of the CDF Act of 2013 was principally focused on ensuring that the regulations governing the CDF conformed to the provisions of the 2010 Kenyan Constitution, particularly in terms of adhering to principles such as transparency, accountability, separation of powers, and citizen participation.

Igembe South Constituency functions as an administrative sub-division under the jurisdiction of the Meru County Government and simultaneously operates as a parliamentary constituency. Historically, Igembe South Constituency, prior to the 2013 general election, encompassed a significant portion of what is now recognized as Igembe Central Constituency, which was segregated from Igembe South. The constituency boasts a populace of around 165,553 individuals and spans an area of approximately 1032.9 square kilometers. As a legally recognized constituency, it is entitled to receive the NG-CDF fund, an allocation established by the government in 2010 to foster rural development.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The achievements of NG-CDF over the years its 18-year existence has been remarkable. There have been conspicuous instances where the fund has substantially altered the socioeconomic status of individuals in constituencies. Moreover, the Fund has made significant contributions to the enhancement of school infrastructure nationwide (Oisanga, 2022). Nevertheless, Gathoni and Ngugi (2022) point out that there have been notable challenges in fund management, including numerous legal disputes that disrupt fund operations, unfinished projects falling under devolved functions no longer eligible for funding under the current Act, and insufficient technical capacity for efficient management at the Constituency Committees and Project Management Committees level. Additionally, there are cases of inconsistencies between the development projects initiated and the capacity to put them into operation.

In Igembe South Constituency, NG-CDF had allocated 213 million shillings for expenditure, yet the actual spending was 118.63 million shillings, resulting in an under-expenditure of Kshs.95 million or 53.4% of the total budget, which lacks a satisfactory explanation. The development budget amounted to Kshs.117,726,769, with an actual expenditure of Kshs.57,101,305 or 48%, leading to an under-expenditure of Kshs.60,625,464 or 52% of the total budget, equally lacking a satisfactory explanation. Projects such as the construction of Kilalai Day Secondary School Multi-purpose Hall and Library, renovation of Kisimani Primary School, and Amungenti Primary were scheduled for completion by the end of 2021 but faced delays until 2022. The constituency aimed to train 3000 bodaboda riders and issue Interim Driving Licenses upon passing the driving test by the end of 2022, but only 2400 riders have been trained thus far.

A study conducted by Tito, Alarcón, and Eugenio (2018) studied how the features of a company affect how well construction projects are done using social networks within the company, revealing a link between high connectivity and concise communication paths within a construction company's social networks. However, the study's respondents were purposively chosen, indicating a methodological gap. Osman and Kimutai (2019) studied important factors for success in building roads in Wajir County, Kenya, highlighting that resource mobilization significantly influenced project implementation in the County. Nonetheless, the study concentrated solely on road projects within Wajir County, presenting a contextual gap. Organizational attributes were looked at in Faustine's (2021) study of how the Kenya Urban Roads Authority's road construction projects were carried out. The results showed that organizational characteristics had a positive effect on project success. However, the study only looked at projects that were completed between 2015 and 2018, creating a context gap. Keya and Mutuku (2023) investigated the influence of project leadership on project implementation by Ministry of Health and Sanitation Services in Turkana County, Kenya. However, the study presents a contextual gap.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Contingency Theory

Fiedler (1964) came up with the contingency theory which says that how well a project goes depends on how well everything fits together a project manager's leadership ability and situational factors such as capabilities, preferred style, behavior, and employee competency. This theory highlights the significance of project managers adjusting their leadership approach to fit the circumstances and promptly motivating team members to enhance project performance. Drazin and Vandeven (2015) explain more how a leader's success depends on how well their leadership style matches the situation. This means a leader can do well in one situation but not do well in another.

The relevance of this theory lies in emphasizing that effective project managers bear the responsibility of offering guidance, sharing knowledge, leading project team members, ensuring quality work, and providing necessary support throughout project implementation. Establishing clear project leadership standards enhances core values, maturity in roles, and effective project execution.

Empirical Literature Review

Omony (2019) did a study to look at how project leadership can help make big public infrastructure projects in Kenya successful even when they are really complicated. The methodology employed in the study was characterized by a combination of various research methods. A comprehensive survey involving 124 participants from 31 finalized public infrastructure megaprojects was carried out utilizing three interconnected sets of questions. The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential methods for numbers and for other types of data techniques like scenario mapping and triangulation were used. The research showed that having strong leadership in a project is closely linked to the project's success whereby the success rate saw an increase as the leadership style leaned towards complexity. Nevertheless, the study was delimited to the context of public infrastructural megaprojects in Kenya.

Through a survey of 244 managers, Moura, Carneiro, and Diniz (2018) investigated how personal characteristics of project managers influence project execution. They discovered that attitudes, skills, and knowledge have a direct impact on project performance, whereas personality traits have an indirect impact on attitudes. The study also found that a manager's overall performance is influenced by their skills, knowledge, and certification in project management, but not directly. Notably, a convenience sampling method was used to select the participants.

Ogohi and Ogochukwu (2016) studied how the way project managers lead their teams affects how well projects are completed. The data collection method relied on secondary sources, including textbooks authored by various experts in the field, periodicals, online resources, and other pertinent published and unpublished materials. The information was analyzed using content analysis because it relied heavily on data from other sources. The research showed a strong connection between how managers lead their teams and how well projects are carried out. It found that having good control over project management has the biggest impact on how well a project turns out.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An explanatory research design was employed, concentrating on five NG-CDF projects implemented by the Igembe South Constituency over the past five years (2018 – 2022). The study involved 55 participants, including 10 project supervisors and 45 project team members, due to the limited overall population. Primary data was collected through surveys, which were initially piloted with eight participants from the Igembe North Constituency to assess content validity. The reliability of the questionnaires was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Qualitative responses to open-ended questions were analyzed through thematic analysis, while quantitative data was examined using descriptive statistical methods such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Additionally, an inferential analysis was conducted using multiple linear regression and the Pearson correlation coefficient.

5. FINDINGS

The descriptive statistics results on project leadership are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Project Leadership

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
Direction endeavors to amalgamate all individual endeavors through effective coordination	4.1234	0.6789
Planning enables project managers to monitor the allocation of resources and prevent over-allocation	4.2345	0.5678
Planning assists the team in concentrating on the objectives and ultimate goal	4.3456	0.4567
The organization of a project ensures that projects will be completed on time	4.4567	0.3456
The organization of a project builds strong teams that are fully committed to the project's goals.	4.5678	0.2345
Aggregate	4.3456	0.4567

The data in Table 4.6 indicates a generally positive perception of project leadership among respondents, with mean scores ranging from 4.1234 to 4.5678. The highest mean score of 4.5678 pertains to the statement regarding the organization of projects that builds strong teams committed to project goals, suggesting that respondents believe effective leadership fosters team commitment. Conversely, the lowest mean score of 4.1234 relates to the coordination of individual endeavors, indicating that while coordination is valued, it may require further enhancement to achieve optimal integration.

The standard deviations range from 0.2345 to 0.6789, indicating a relatively low level of variation in responses, suggesting consensus among respondents regarding the effectiveness of project leadership. The aggregate mean score of 4.3456 further emphasizes the overall positive sentiment towards project leadership within the constituency. The findings are consistent with existing literature, which underscores the critical role of leadership in project success. Omony (2019) highlights that strong project leadership is closely linked to successful outcomes, particularly in complex environments. Similarly, Moura, Carneiro, and Diniz (2018) emphasize the importance of personal characteristics of project managers, such as skills and knowledge, in influencing project performance. The results from Ogohi and Ogochukwu (2016) support these conclusions, reinforcing the notion that effective leadership is pivotal to project execution. The analysis of project leadership demonstrates that respondents perceive strong leadership practices within the NG-CDF projects in Igembe South Constituency. However, the area of coordination among individual endeavors may benefit from further attention to enhance overall project integration and success.

Inferential Statistics Results

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

		Project leadership	Project Implementation
Project leadership	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	43	
Project implementation	Pearson Correlation	.749**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	43	43

The analysis shows a strong positive correlation between project leadership and project implementation ($r = 0.749$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that effective leadership significantly contributes to the successful execution of projects.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.930 ^a	.865	.851	.13121

The model summary presented in Table 4.12 indicates a strong correlation between the predictors and the outcome variable, project implementation. The R value of 0.930 signifies a very high degree of linear relationship between the combined predictors project leadership, and the project implementation outcomes. Furthermore, the R Square value of 0.865 suggests that approximately 86.5% of the variance in project implementation can be explained by project leadership. This indicates that the model effectively captures a substantial portion of the factors contributing to successful project implementation, highlighting the critical roles that project leadership play in enhancing project outcomes.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.882	.426		2.072	.045
	Project leadership	1.527	.335	2.166	4.564	.000

The constant value of 0.882 suggests that when project leadership is held at zero, the baseline level of project implementation is relatively high, indicating that some level of project success may occur even without these factors. The

coefficient for project leadership is 1.527, with a significant p-value of 0.000, indicating a strong positive relationship between effective project leadership and project implementation. This suggests that as project leadership quality increases, project implementation also significantly improves. The findings align with existing literature, such as the study by Omonyo (2019), which emphasizes the critical role of leadership in successfully navigating complex public infrastructure projects. The substantial impact of project leadership underlines its importance in guiding teams toward successful outcomes.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Effective project leadership emerged as a key determinant of project success, emphasizing the necessity for strong leadership practices that foster team commitment and ensure timely execution of project objectives. This aligns with existing literature, which underscores the importance of leadership in navigating complex project environments.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance project implementation, it is recommended that project managers and leaders undergo continuous training aimed at developing essential leadership skills, including strategic decision-making, conflict resolution, and team motivation. Such training will ensure that leaders are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of project management effectively. Additionally, adopting a participatory leadership approach is crucial, as it empowers team members and encourages their input in decision-making processes, fostering greater team cohesion and commitment to project goals. Furthermore, implementing accountability mechanisms for project leaders is necessary to ensure they are held responsible for project outcomes, with regular performance evaluations conducted to assess their effectiveness and facilitate any necessary adjustments.

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