

INFLUENCE OF STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION APPROACH ON THE PERFORMANCE OF UMAA DAM PROJECT IN KITUI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: The performance of the project has consistently demonstrated a significant correlation with Monitoring and Evaluation. As evident on a global scale, both private and public sectors have embraced M&E systems in their projects, leading to commendable project achievements. While M&E approaches are not new in Kitui County, the performance of certain key county development projects leaves much to be desired. Therefore, this study aimed to examine the influence of stakeholder participation approach on the performance of the Umaa dam project in Kitui County, Kenya. A descriptive research design was implemented to carry out this study. The focus of the study was on the Umaa dam project in Kitui County, and a total of 45 respondents were selected from various sectors and organizations involved in the project, including county and national government, contracting, and consultation organizations. The study participants were provided with semi-structured questionnaires to collect primary data. Descriptive analysis was used to calculate frequencies, means, and standard deviations, while inferential statistics such as correlation and regression analysis were employed to assess the strength of relationships between variables. The study findings revealed that stakeholder participation approach had a positive and significant influence on the performance of the Umaa dam project in Kitui County, Kenya. The study concluded that stakeholder participation in M&E activities can ensure that all relevant stakeholders have a clear understanding of the evaluation process's objectives and purpose. The study recommended that project managers should engage with stakeholders during the planning stages, involve them in the data collection process, and share the findings of M&E with them.

Keywords: Stakeholder Participation Approach, Project Performance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of dam projects has seen a significant increase on a global scale, as observed by Thieme et al. (2020). Famose and Olajuyigbe (2023) further emphasize the importance of dam projects in empowering local communities by improving their access to safe and reliable water supply, thereby alleviating the burden of water scarcity and related health issues. These projects primarily aim to provide a dependable source of clean water for various purposes, including drinking, irrigation, and livestock, as highlighted by Famose and Olajuyigbe. Additionally, Hadlos, Opdyke, and Hadigheh (2022) argue that dam projects play a role in leveraging local resources and expertise, fostering social cohesion and collaboration, and promoting community ownership. Kabeyi (2019) reports that the effective implementation of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches has contributed to the success of many dam projects worldwide. These M&E mechanisms provide a systematic framework for assessing project progress, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and making informed decisions for improvement. Consequently, the implementation of robust M&E mechanisms ensures performance tracking and accountability by the management.

For example, in China, there are more than 22,100 large dam projects, as stated by Tang et al. (2020). The government has allocated significant funds to finance the planning, construction, and maintenance of these projects, as noted by Chen, Vanclay, and Yu (2021). The budget allocated to dam projects varies depending on their scale and complexity. Notably, dams such as Baihetan and Goupitan in China have played a crucial role in providing reliable water supply for domestic and agricultural purposes, even in arid regions. Additionally, these projects contribute to electricity generation through hydropower, reducing reliance on non-renewable energy sources and promoting sustainability. Moreover, the implementation of dam projects has facilitated irrigation systems, enhancing agricultural productivity and supporting rural economies. However, Chen et al. caution that these projects have faced criticism due to the relocation of communities, which disrupts livelihoods and cultural heritage. Yang et al. (2020) attribute the success of dam projects in China to factors such as abundant water resources, strategic location, government support, technological expertise, a multi-purpose approach, and collaboration with international partners.

Similarly, Hashiru and Tüfekçi (2022) report that the United States and India occupy the second and third positions, respectively, in terms of the number of large dam projects with 6,390 and 4,000 projects. Dam projects in these countries have not only brought communities together through employment creation, community participation, and infrastructure development, but have also resulted in increased economic independence and self-reliance among individuals. These projects have contributed to improved household income and financial stability, enhanced social status, and increased decision-making power for the community. Since 1997, dam projects have actively engaged community members in addressing local issues, promoting long-term climate change sustainability, and fostering entrepreneurship development. Moreover, these projects have established connections to public services and social security programs, as highlighted by Seddon et al. (2021). The success of many dam projects can be attributed to the high level of engagement among relevant stakeholders, efficient resource utilization, and the implementation of a result measurement system.

Regionally, nations such as Egypt, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Kenya in Sub-Saharan Africa have initiated dam projects with the aim of regulating water flow, enhancing crop production and food security, and stimulating economic growth by creating job opportunities, attracting investments, and supporting various sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism (Peña-Ramos, José López-Bedmar, Sastre et al., 2022). The governments of Egypt, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Kenya have made substantial investments to ensure the success of these dam projects, although only a few have achieved a success rate of 50 percent or more (Gelb, Ramachandran, Meyer et al., 2020). Presently, South Africa has allocated 1.7 billion US Dollars towards the construction of dams and water tunnels, while Egypt has invested over 2.9 billion US Dollars in the construction of the Julius Nyerere dam in Tanzania, which will provide Egypt with hydroelectric power supply from Tanzania. Approximately 70 percent of the over 20 dam projects in South Africa since 1988 have been successful, owing to the valuable input from diverse stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, and technical experts. As noted by He, Xu, Wang et al. (2021), this iterative feedback process has played a crucial role in identifying potential issues at an early stage and implementing corrective measures, thereby leading to improved project outcomes and increased stakeholder satisfaction. Furthermore, community members and other stakeholders actively participate in overseeing the implementation of project activities.

In Kenya, several counties have taken the lead in implementing dam projects (Odende, Ogello, Iteba et al., 2022). According to Musyoka (2021), Kitui County, in particular, embarked on a journey to implement dam projects back in 2008, with the aim of addressing water scarcity and promoting irrigation for agricultural development in the region. The concept of sand dams has been embraced by NGOs, community projects, and the county government alike. The county government has emphasized the importance of harnessing irrigated agriculture among the local population as a means to improve their livelihoods and mitigate the challenges of food scarcity resulting from unpredictable rainfall patterns in the county. The idea for dam projects emerged from the increasing unpredictability of rainfall, leading to frequent crop failures. Consequently, the government advised the community to utilize the available water resources for small-scale irrigation. This approach not only helps address issues of hunger but also provides opportunities for food production and income generation. The government specifically highlighted the cultivation of kale and tomatoes as viable crops, underscoring the need to leverage water resources for both agricultural purposes and livestock rearing. According to the Kitui County government, dam projects have the potential to significantly alleviate hunger and offer sustainable solutions for the local community (Ertzen & Ngugi, 2021). The construction of the Umaa Dam, initiated by the Kitui County government in 2009 with an expected completion period of 2 years, faced a setback a few months into the project, resulting in a loss of Ksh 575

million, which had already been paid to the contractor Draft and Develop Engineers Ltd, leaving the implementation progress at approximately 68% as reported by Tanathi (2017).

Performance measurement serves as a valuable tool for assessing the effectiveness of projects and aiding organizations in comprehending both the successes and failures of past endeavors (Shamim, 2022). This understanding can then be utilized to strategize for future enhancements and progress. Moreover, project performance measurement plays a vital role in facilitating benchmarking within organizations. Through comparing project performance against benchmarks, organizations can identify areas for improvement, such as reducing project duration, minimizing project costs, and meeting project scope objectives. Okudan, Budayan, and Dikmen (2021) emphasize the importance of accurately categorizing projects based on similar criteria and characteristics in order to effectively measure and enhance project performance.

According to Wambua (2019), the involvement of stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process is crucial for achieving program objectives. This is because the monitoring and evaluation activities encompass all stages of initiative implementation, allowing for corrective measures to be taken and ensuring the success of programs that align with their intended purpose. Stakeholders play a significant role in formulating pertinent interview questions, collecting and analyzing data, and making informed decisions. Munene and Kinoti (2020) highlighted that stakeholder participation involves stakeholders as sources of information, their engagement in consultation meetings and workshops, their input being considered before decisions are made, and their collaboration with advisory teams to influence decision-making processes. Stakeholders can delegate decision-making authority to local councils and community development groups or function as self-managed individuals and community groups. Moreover, the study examined stakeholders who are affected by interventions and actively monitor the progress of these interventions to facilitate decision-making and draw conclusions.

Kitui County, located in arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), faces the challenge of unreliable and unpredictable rainy seasons. Climate change has exacerbated this issue, resulting in more severe floods during wet seasons and prolonged dry spells thereafter. Despite the pre-existing geological conditions being conducive for sand and earth dams, they are not reliable during sunny periods. Consequently, the government decided to embark on a mega dam project with increased the ability to store enough water to meet the needs of the large community. In 2009, during the tenure of the late President Mwai Kibaki, the county government of Kitui initiated the construction of the Umaa Dam with a projected height of 28 meters and a storage capacity of 870,000 cubic meters of water. However, the project has been at a standstill for over a decade, although the government has expressed its commitment to revive it and launch similar projects in the region.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The correlation between the project's performance and monitoring and evaluation approaches has been evident since Nasri, Hubban & Nurman et.al.'s (2022) research. M&E are essential to a project's success because they as observed globally in both the private and public sectors. Kitui County also embraces M&E approaches; however, the project performance of several key county development projects falls short. One such example is the Umaa dam project, which was scheduled to commence in 2009 with a two-year timeframe and a substantial budget allocation from the government. Unfortunately, the project faced a setback within a few months, resulting in a loss of Ksh 575 million that had already been paid to the contractor, Draft and Develop Engineers Ltd. According to Eng Kaluku, the project encountered a contractual dispute in its second year due to a redefinition of the scope of works. The dispute arose from the need to review rates for specific items that were not adequately defined, as well as the grouting process, which presented significant variations due to unforeseen physical ground conditions (Nyaga, 2019). Moreover, an unapproved request for an extension of time further complicated matters, leading to the suspension of construction works in 2010. Consequently, the former contractor was discharged, and the project authority will initiate the procurement process to engage a new contractor for the dam's construction (Koren, Bagozzi et al., 2020). The overall implementation progress of the Umaa dam construction stands at approximately 68% according to CDICC. To ensure the structural soundness of the dam, the government has allocated Ksh 202 million to a geotechnical consultant for conducting investigations. Besides budget allocation, the Kitui County Government implemented control processes, effective change management strategies, and M&E approaches (Koren, Bagozzi et al., 2020). However, there is limited evidence on the usage of these approaches, resulting in a significant gap in understanding how they contribute to the overall performance of county projects. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation approaches in ensuring successful project outcomes.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Results Based Management Theory

In the year 1990, the theory of results-based management (RBM) was developed by the OECD with the aim of improving the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of programs or projects. This theory encompasses the entire management cycle, from planning to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, and provides organizations with a logical framework to align their efforts, measure their performance, and demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, as depicted by Hendrickson and Henrysson (2023). Nevertheless, there have been criticisms regarding RBM's ability to accurately capture the multidimensional and interconnected nature of development outcomes, as argued by Khan, Tsutsumi, Yairi, et al. (2021). They highlight the narrow focus on predefined targets and indicators, which can lead to a fixation on short-term gains and the neglect of long-term sustainability, potentially hindering innovation and adaptive management. Similarly, Govender (2022) raises concerns about the potential manipulation and gaming of data to meet performance targets, as well as the limited emphasis on learning, context-specific approaches, and the inclusion of marginalized voices in RBM.

Despite the aforementioned critiques, RBM holds significant relevance in this study. It places great importance on feedback systems, which play a crucial role in gathering information and data on the progress of projects, identifying areas for improvement, and making necessary adjustments in order to achieve the desired results, as stated by Khan, Begum & Razak (2020). Furthermore, RBM recognizes the importance of stakeholder engagement and involvement throughout the project cycle. It emphasizes the active participation of stakeholders to ensure that their perspectives, needs, and concerns are taken into account during decision-making processes. This incorporation of stakeholder participation enhances project performance through increased ownership, accountability, and the alignment of project objectives with stakeholders' expectations. Finally, RBM places a strong emphasis on measuring and assessing project results and outcomes. This results measurement approach is aligned with RBM's focus on setting measurable indicators and targets to track progress and evaluate project performance.

Ultimately, RBM aims to enhance project performance by ensuring the effective and efficient utilization of resources, achieving the desired results, and maximizing the impact of interventions, as emphasized by Hendrickson and Henrysson (2023). Through the incorporation of feedback systems, stakeholder participation, the logical framework approach, and results measurement, RBM provides a comprehensive framework for enhancing project performance and achieving the desired outcomes of the Umaa dam project in Kitui County, Kenya.

Empirical Literature Review

Waikenda (2020) carried out research to find out how stakeholder participation affected Kenyan county governments' operational efficiency. The study's goal was to evaluate the impact of stakeholder participation on county governments and how inclusive it is. 354 county officials completed questionnaires to provide data, which was then analyzed using SPSS. The findings showed that stakeholder involvement significantly improved Kenyan county governments' performance. It emphasized that stakeholder involvement contributed to the reduction of corruption, influenced project selection, and promoted transparency and responsible utilization of resources. The conclusions of the study highlighted the importance of inclusiveness in stakeholder participation in improving Kenya's county governments' performance. However, it is important to note that the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all counties as each county faces unique challenges. Therefore, this study focused specifically on the Umaa dam project in Kitui County.

In order to investigate the role of stakeholders and their network of participation in the urban renewal decision-making process in Chongqing, China, Zhuang, Qian, Visscher et al. (2019) carried out a study. The study employed a combination of qualitative interviews, surveys, and quantitative social network analysis. The study's conclusions showed that stakeholders were heavily involved in the decision-making process for Chongqing's urban renewal projects. The study identified different stakeholder groups, including government agencies, developers, residents, and community organizations, and analyzed their participation patterns and network connections. It was observed that stakeholders with stronger connections and higher centrality in the network had a greater influence on decision-making outcomes. The study underscored the importance of collaboration and communication among stakeholders in shaping the urban renewal process. However, the study did not address the inclusion of representatives from marginalized and vulnerable groups in the decision-making process, raising concerns about the fairness and inclusivity of urban project initiatives.

Lehtinen and Aaltonen (2020) conducted a qualitative study to explore the organization of external stakeholder engagement in inter-organizational projects in Northern Europe. Semi-structured interviews with project managers and other important stakeholders in interorganizational projects were used in the study. The findings of the study revealed that organizing external stakeholder engagement in inter-organizational projects is a complex and challenging process. The study identified three key organizational mechanisms that facilitate stakeholder engagement: project initiation, project design, and project execution. These mechanisms involve activities such as identifying relevant stakeholders, establishing communication channels, and incorporating stakeholder perspectives into decision-making processes.

The study also identified several key findings regarding stakeholder engagement in inter-organizational projects. Firstly, the level of stakeholder engagement varied depending on the specific project and its objectives. Secondly, power dynamics, resource dependencies, and perceived benefits influenced the engagement of external stakeholders. Lastly, the study emphasized the importance of project managers in facilitating stakeholder engagement and managing relationships with external stakeholders. However, a comprehensive understanding of how stakeholder engagement was organized and managed throughout the different phases of the project lifecycle was not addressed.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design was implemented to carry out this study. The focus of the study was on the Umaa dam project in Kitui County, and a total of 45 respondents were selected from various sectors and organizations involved in the project, including county and national government, contracting, and consultation organizations. The study participants were provided with semi-structured questionnaires to collect primary data. Descriptive analysis was used to calculate frequencies, means, and standard deviations, while inferential statistics such as correlation and regression analysis were employed to assess the strength of relationships between variables.

5. FINDINGS

The descriptive statistics results on stakeholder participation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Stakeholder Participation

Statement	M	SD
When a wide range of stakeholders are brought together to share needs, information sources help to foster consensus	4.27	1.130
Information sources give all interested parties the chance to express their opinions and gain insight into the functioning of the project.	4.08	0.744
Collaboration with the advisory team allows for more reactivity and versatility in cases of sudden change within the project	3.64	1.361
Working with the advisory team fosters a culture of cooperation and mutual aid among individuals with diverse backgrounds and experiences	4.72	0.776
Consultation in meetings and workshops helps in identifying and tracking their needs and expectations.	4.53	1.219
Consultation in meetings and workshops helps in identifying and tracking their perceptions and attitudes	4.12	1.001

The participants strongly concurred with the notion that collaborating with the advisory team fosters the involvement of individuals from diverse backgrounds and experiences, leading to cooperative efforts and mutual assistance (M=4.72, SD=0.776). Furthermore, it was found that consulting with stakeholders in meetings and workshops aids in the identification and tracking of their needs and expectations (M 4.53, SD 1.219). This discovery aligns with the findings of Wambua (2019), the engagement of stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process is crucial for achieving program objectives. This was determined by the individual or group who initially recognized that monitoring and evaluation encompass all activities and actions carried out during the implementation of initiatives. By doing so, it enables the implementation of necessary corrective measures, leading to the successful execution of programs and initiatives that align with their intended purpose.

The respondents expressed agreement with the statements that information sources facilitate consensus-building through sharing the needs of a wide range of stakeholders in one place (M=4.27, SD=1.130). They also agreed that information sources give all parties involved plenty of chances to voice their opinions and share their expertise about how well a project is going (M=4.08, SD=0.744). Additionally, the respondents recognized that collaboration with the advisory team enables

greater adaptability and flexibility in response to sudden changes within the project (M=3.64, SD=1.361). This corroborates the findings of Munene and Kinoti (2020), who observed that the stakeholder participation approach encompasses the role of stakeholders as sources of information. Stakeholders are actively involved in consultation meetings and workshops, their voices are heard prior to decision-making, and they collaborate with advisory teams to exert influence on the decision-making process.

Regression Analysis Results

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.845 ^a	.714	.706	1.152

According to the model summary in Table 2, the adjusted R² value is 0.706, which corresponds to a 70.6% deviation in project performance caused by stakeholder participation approach. Consequently, it can be inferred that the remaining 29.4% account for other variables M&E approaches.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	101.941	1	101.941	142.163	.001
	Residual	30.117	42	.717		
	Total	132.058	43			

The significance level of 0.001 indicates that the model's influence on project performance, as studied through, stakeholder participatio, is statistically significant, with a significance level of less than 0.05. Additionally, the findings demonstrate that, at a 5% significance level, the computed F value is higher than the mean value (142.163 > 101.941), thereby reinforcing the model's significance

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.792	.191		4.147	.001
Stakeholder participation	0.770	.415	1.134	1.855	.001

Based on the data presented in Table 4, it was found that by keeping the stakeholder participation approach constant, the performance of the Umaa dam project in Kitui County, Kenya is estimated to be at 0.792 (79.2%).

This was the regression equation that was determined;

$$\text{Project performance} = 0.792 + 0.770(\text{stakeholder participation})$$

The t values (t=1.855, p=0.001) in the study showed a significant and positive correlation between the performance of the Umaa dam project in Kitui County, Kenya, and the stakeholder management approach. This finding is consistent with Waikenda's (2020) study on stakeholder engagement and how it affects Kenyan county governments' operational efficiency. The results of the study indicated that improving the performance of Kenyan county governments was significantly influenced by the inclusivity of stakeholder participation.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that stakeholder participation in monitoring and evaluation is crucial for enhancing project performance because involving stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process helps to ensure that their perspectives and feedback are taken into account, leading to more accurate and comprehensive assessments of the project's progress and impact. This

can help to identify potential challenges or areas for improvement early on, allowing for timely adjustments to be made to the project plan. Additionally, stakeholder participation in monitoring and evaluation can help to build trust and buy-in among those affected by the project.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that there should be a clear communication channels with stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle. This can include regular meetings, progress updates, and feedback sessions to keep stakeholders informed and engaged in the monitoring and evaluation process. Involve stakeholders in the design and implementation of monitoring and evaluation activities. Using participatory methods such as participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) can help enhance stakeholder engagement in monitoring and evaluation. PM&E involves actively involving stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process, including them in data collection, analysis, and decision-making.

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