

PROJECT EVALUATION AS A DETERMINANT OF COMPLETION OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT PROJECTS IN KITUI COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of management practices on the completion of projects initiated by the county government of Kitui, Kenya. Although several studies have been undertaken to examine project completion in Kenyan counties, very few have looked at the management practices that lead to the completion of the projects in Kitui county. The study examined the effects of project evaluation practices on the completion of county government of Kitui projects. The study was guided by the Theory of Constraints and the Stewardship Theory. The study was descriptive with the goal of examining the real status of administrative practices by staff of Kitui County using purposive sampling done on a study population of 300 people, who include Kitui county staff closely involved in projects at various levels, contractors, and other residents closely working in projects. The sampling was through stratified sampling to identify a sample size of 102 participants drawn from Mwingi West sub county, Kitui County, Kenya. Data was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire instrument. The data was analyzed using SPSS version 26.0 and the inferences represented using tables, graphs and diagrams. Findings regarding evaluation practices indicated that it has a positive and significant effect on the completion of the project ($B=0.623$; $p=0.000$). This study recommends that Kitui County Chief Officer for Planning and Development should work with sub-county administrators to ensure mandatory quarterly training workshops on dynamic planning approaches for project managers and staff are carried out, incorporating Gantt charts and SWOT analysis to ensure flexibility in resource management and risk planning.

Keywords: Project Evaluation, County Government Projects, Kitui County, Kenya.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, governments initiate projects in order to meet their citizens' needs. Successful project completion in accordance with set specifications is thus the main goal at the initiation of government projects. The benefits anticipated by both the government and the citizens to accrue from a project can only become available to each party after completion of the project. According to Volden and Welde (2022), governments undertake public investments for three main aims: meeting peoples' essential needs and ensuring availability of public goods; investments to facilitate economic development through transport, communication and energy; and investments for national pride and prestige.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2015) states that the main rationale for public provision of infrastructure is based on the concept of public goods and market failures. Kenya adopted a new constitution in the year 2010, which enabled the transfer of some government functions from the national headquarters in Nairobi to the 47 counties. This involved the transfer of authority for decision making, finance and management to the counties. Globally, decentralization is meant to

allow decentralized systems to take control of developmental issues on the premise that they are better placed to collect information concerning local needs, have knowledge of available local resources and are more motivated to address local issues.

The county government of Kitui has consistently launched projects across the whole county since 2013 at the start of the implementation of the Constitution of Kenya, 2010. The main aim has been to improve the socioeconomic status and living standards of the residents in the whole county (Kitui CIDP, 2020), but many of the projects are left incomplete with no tangible report explaining the reason. According to Magagan and Ngugi (2021), project failure is rated to be very high with about 50% of projects proven to have failed in Africa. This study therefore seeks to establish the managerial practice determinants of completion of county government projects in Kitui county.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The triple iron constraints of project management including time, cost and scope, have been the main basis of looking at project success. Hussain, Uddin, Uddin, and Ali (2022) state that projects generally fail as a result of poor planning, constant changes in scope, and the lack of monitoring control. Kenya as a developing country has myriad challenges faced by its citizens. According to the report of the Auditor General on the county government of Kitui for the year ended June 2022, several projects have stalled, including construction of multi-storey maternity ward at Kitui county referral hospital; construction of outpatient block at Mutomo in Kitui south sub county hospital; construction of mortuary at Mwingi level IV hospital; and construction of maternity ward at Nuu sub county hospital. By December 2024, the non-performing project rate had risen significantly, reducing investor confidence and limiting the county's ability to deliver on its mandate.

Jawuor has investigated the threats to timely completion of CDF funded school projects in Kenya, and identified it to be evaluation, Head-teachers' management skills, Community participation, and Political influences. He then concluded that the most important threats to timely completion of CDF funded school projects to be financial management followed by political interference, while head-teachers' management skills posed the least threats. He then states that "as long as the school facilities remain incomplete the learners will continue to lack essential facilities needed to support learning" (Jawuor, 2017). To curb the problem of such delays and abandonment of projects calls for optimization of available resources both human, technical, monetary, and material wise in order to meet basic needs of the populace. To manage these resources requires administrators to have project managerial practices that conform to internationally acceptable standards since projects generally are difficult to implement even for experts. This study therefore examines how planning, monitoring and evaluation as practices of the county management team determine project completion in Kitui county.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Empirical Review

A successful project delivers stated outputs and contributes to fulfilment of agreed objectives that are consistent with needs and priorities in the society and viable long-term benefits, requiring a plan prepared before-hand (Samset & Volden, 2015). Project success criteria includes time, cost, technical requirements, customer satisfaction and objectives achievement, while critical success factors include scope control, top management, team engagement, resource availability, risk management and financial resources (Gomes & Romao, 2016); however, failure arises from resource scarcity, poor communication and change in scope, alongside stakeholder concerns such as cost estimation, front-end management and myopic decisions (Eja & Ramegowda, 2019). A combination of the various critical components that includes Top management commitment, effective project implementation structure as well as evaluation is thus very important to the success of any project.

Top management utilizes techniques and skills in leadership to ensure project success, with county project managers coordinating, supervising and managing initiatives from initiation to completion within the administrative structure under the governor (Constitution of Kenya, 2010), and expected to coordinate developmental activities, maintain service delivery standards and prepare progress reports (Murang'a County Public Service Board, 2022). However, political interference, political change and replacement of leaders influence project management processes and determine progression and completion, with new administrations initiating new projects rather than completing former projects, leading to delays and low completion (Williams, 2017).

Project implementation translates plans into action, requiring effective communication to ensure resources are utilized, quality is assured and corrective action is taken (Gitonga, 2010; Satyendra, 2017). Decentralized units rely on line ministry personnel for monitoring (Naddock, 1990), while county project implementation committees evaluate progress, materials and milestones and support implementation (County Government of Taita, 2020). However, large data volumes and shortage of evaluation experts lead to low value data and challenges in timely reporting, contributing to low quality, uncompleted projects and raising questions on effectiveness of evaluation in project completion.

Evaluation is a systematic appraisal of design, implementation, outcomes and impact to inform decisions and improve future projects (Waithera & Wanyoike, 2015; Volden, 2018), using criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability (OECD, 2002; OECD, 2021), and providing evidence on outcomes and causality (World Bank, 2013). Evaluation frameworks such as Cost Benefit Analysis and Cost Effectiveness Analysis focus on efficiencies but are limited in dynamic environments (Green book, 2022). Evaluation occurs at different stages including ex-ante and ex-post (Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, 2022), supports planning and decision making (Samset & Christensen, 2017), and complements monitoring by addressing causality and project design issues (World Bank, 2004). Systems such as NIMES and CIMES support monitoring and evaluation but face challenges of weak M&E culture, inadequate capacity and low data utilization (Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy, 2022), while political climate and sensitivity of information can affect effectiveness of M&E systems (World Bank, 2004).

2.2 Theoretical Review

The Theory of Constraints (TOC), first created by Eliyahu M. Goldratt beginning around 1980, states that the strength of a chain, process or system is only as good as its weakest point (Goldratt, 1984). Watson, Blackstone and Gardiner (2007) explain that the principal tenet of TOC is that within each system at least one constraint exists that limits the ability of the system to achieve higher levels of performance relative to its goal. Constraints may be resource constraints such as a person or department that cannot keep up with market demand, policy constraints, or dummy constraints (Blackstone, 2010). The theory helped the researcher identify the presence of constraints affecting project evaluation and conclusion.

Stewardship Theory, developed by Donaldson and Davis (1991; 1993), assumes goal congruence and that relations between principals and executives are based on trust rather than strong hierarchical control. In the context of this study, principals are the county governments as the funding organization and the community residents as ultimate owners and beneficiaries. Executives are officers working in the county government offices responsible for project effectuation. Stewardship theory assumes that executives are motivated to act in the best interest of their principals by putting pro-organizational goals above self-interests. It helped the researcher in assessing the relationships between executive actions and personal interests and whether they interfere with project completion in Kitui county, Kenya.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The researcher used a descriptive survey design with mixed structured and semi-structured type questions to produce both quantitative and qualitative answers, which was used to establish how managerial practices act as determinants of completion of county government projects in Kitui county. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2008), descriptive survey design determines and reports the way things are and also helps a researcher describe a phenomenon in terms of attitude, values and characteristics. The explanatory orientation of the study allowed the investigation of cause-and-effect relationships between project management practices and project completion outcomes.

3.2 Target Population

This study utilized all 46 licensed commercial banks in Kenya. The target population was 300 persons from the 4 wards that make up Mwingi West sub county, Kitui county (CBK, 2023). The target population comprised county government of Kitui staff members (240), ward development committee members (26), contractors (26), Members of County Assembly (4) and MCA staff (4), totaling 300 participants.

3.3 Sampling Design

The researcher used purposive sampling that allowed selection of respondents possessing the required information with respect to the objectives of the study (Mugenda, 2013). Purposive sampling was used to create a sample population of 102 participants because they are directly or indirectly involved in planning, implementation, monitoring or reporting of

projects in the sub county. A census approach was not used due to the size of the population; Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) stipulate that a sample size of 30 and above is sufficient for such a study.

3.4 Data Collection Tool and Procedure

A Google form questionnaire was prepared and respondents given rights to fill without editing. The link was emailed to those 102 respondents able to fill it independently, accompanied by an introduction cover letter. For respondents unable to fill the form, the questionnaire was printed and issued for filling in the presence of the researcher. The questionnaire had three sections: section A had demographic information, section B had both YES/NO and open-ended questions, and section C had Likert scale questions. Secondary data was collected from county publications, books and journals.

A pilot data collection was undertaken targeting 11 responders in neighboring Mwingi Central sub county, approximately 10% of final target respondents, who are not part of subjects earmarked for study, to guide improvement of the research questionnaires and ensure accuracy, suitability and clarity. Validity is a measure that determines how well an instrument accomplishes its goal and refers to the meaningfulness and accuracy of inferences based upon results (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999), and in this study was assured through a well-designed semi-structured questionnaire and rigorous examination by supervisors in charge of project development. Reliability is the indicator of how stable and consistent an instrument is towards the measure of a concept and enables determination of its suitability (Sekaran, 2016).

3.5 Data Analysis and Presentation

The study was descriptive and utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Descriptive statistics to used was frequency counts, percentages and also arithmetic means and presented using frequency distribution tables, line graphs bar charts and so on. The data was categorized according to themes and analyzed using SPSS version 26.00. The results were presented in tables, charts and graphs for interpretation.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is the estimation of the magnitude of one variable out of another. This is the calculation or approximation of the impact of the explanatory variables(s) on the elucidated variable(s). Thus, under the eyes of this research, the impact of the project management practises of evaluation is determined on the government completion of projects of County. Further, the model summary, analysis of variance and coefficients were ascertained.

Table 4.1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.829 ^a	.688	.675	.33303

Source: Field Survey (2025)

Table 4.1 indicates the role of evaluation in the completion of projects within the study context; R-value is high (R = 0.829), indicating a high correlation between the explanatory variables and the dependent variable. The value of R² is 0.688, indicating the variables' ability to explain 68.8% of the project completion, an event reflected through the adjusted R² value due to the number of variables relative to the number of samples polled. The findings imply that proper execution of the variables would provide significant additional value to the stakeholders through improved completion rates in arid and semi-arid lands due to the associated benefits.

Table 4.2 Model Summary

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	18.068	3	6.023	54.305	.000 ^b
	Residual	8.207	74	.111		
	Total	26.275	77			

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The ANOVA table for the regression analysis is depicted in Table 4.2, and it is clear from the table that the result is statistically significant ($p = .000$), with an F-value of 54.305. It is apparent from the result that the influence of project evaluation practices on the completion of projects is not due to chance, and therefore, the results can be utilized at the policymakers' level. The high value of F statistics revealed that by improving such project management practices, better results can be expected.

Table 4.3 Coefficients Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.566	.348		4.499	.000
Evaluation	.623	.056	.788	11.128	.000

Source: Field Survey (2025)

The findings presented in Table 4.3 show that, assuming that the coefficient does not change, the model shows that the completion rate of the project in the absence of saturation of the analyzed factors is not only positive but also significant. This also supports the significance of this group of variables in elucidating the improvement in timely delivery, resource productivity and stakeholder satisfaction in initiatives by the county government in Kitui County, Kenya.

The evaluation practices also played out positive and significant effect in the completion of the project ($B=0.623$; $p=0.000$). It is important to note that this result suggests an increase in the evaluation practices would lead to the improvement of the project completion. This implies that comprehensive relevancy, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, and sustainability appraisals, carried out throughout project phases, significantly contribute to completion rates, organizational learning and accountability in the county projects of Kitui, therefore, refuting the null hypothesis since evaluation is found to have a significant impact. These findings are consistent with Waithera and Wanyoike (2015), who assumed that assessment determines achievements and setbacks to inform the forthcoming interventions, improve performance in community-based projects, and with Samset and Christensen (2017), who argued that ex-ante evaluation is required to clarify options and maximize gains at the initial stage of complicated projects. On the other hand, they are opposite to the challenges mentioned in the Kenya National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy (2022), which emphasised poor M&E cultures and insufficient capacities that prevent successful evaluation in systems like NIMES and CIMES, which may reduce impacts, and Musyoka (2020), who, exploring the topic of project management within the Mwingi West, suggested additional research on M&E without confirming strong direct impacts on completion within the given context.

5. CONCLUSION

The investigation revealed that evaluation practices have a statistically significant positive effect on the completion of county government projects in Kitui county. This finding aligns with Planning Theory, suggesting that systematic assessment fosters broader perspectives and organizational learning, which drive superior project outcomes. Consequently, the study concludes that evaluation is an essential management practice that markedly boosts project completion rates and contributes to accountability in the county. Unlike other less impactful management practices, these results emphasize the strategic importance of systematic evaluation and support policies that promote comprehensive evaluation frameworks to enhance project completion outcomes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survey findings, recommendations were developed to correspond closely with the observed results. Given the significant positive contribution made by evaluation practices to project completion ($p < 0.000$), it is recommended that capacity-building programs be initiated by the County Director of Public Administration. Six-month mentorship programs designed would see senior staff members train their juniors in tasks such as pre-evaluation, mid-evaluation, and post-evaluation of projects using a model such as the National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES). The goals are specifically designed to train at least 100 staff members per year in relevance, impact, and sustainability aspects, thereby ensuring quick appraisal and application of these elements towards better design and objective completion.

7. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE & SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study contributes to knowledge by clarifying the management practice and performance nexus in Kitui county government projects, revealing that evaluation significantly enhances project completion ($p=0.000$). These findings refine understanding by isolating evaluation as a pivotal factor in a devolved governance context, challenging the traditional overemphasis on structural planning approaches and formal monitoring quotas. Theoretically, the research enriches the theory of constraints and stewardship theory by highlighting the role of systematic assessment in resource provision and decision-making efficacy, providing a targeted framework for improving project completion outcomes through evaluation-focused policies.

Despite these insights, the study faces limitations such as a reliance on quantitative survey data from a single sub-county, which may overlook qualitative dynamics like meeting quality or interpersonal behaviors. The findings are specific to the Kitui county context, meaning caution is necessary when extending these conclusions to different institutional or cultural environments. The research addressed these constraints through robust statistical testing and diagnostic procedures, ensuring the results remain a reliable empirical foundation for the specific regulatory landscape of Kenya.

Future research should employ qualitative or mixed-methods approaches to investigate why planning practices negatively affect completion, potentially focusing on the nature of planning protocols and their fit with local conditions. Additionally, longitudinal designs could explore whether specific thresholds of evaluation activity further amplify project completion rates. Future studies may also investigate the addition of more variables such as political interference, community participation, and funding mechanisms to better explain project management practices and project completion in the counties.

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