

Stakeholders Engagement Practices and Performance of Humanitarian Non-Governmental Organizations Projects in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract: The study examined the effect of stakeholder engagement practices on the performance of humanitarian NGO projects in Nairobi City County, Kenya. It was motivated by persistent challenges in project performance, including declining quality, cost overruns, delays, and low beneficiary satisfaction. The study specifically investigated how stakeholder identification, stakeholder involvement, communication processes, and feedback handling influence project performance. Guided by stakeholder theory, communication theory, and human capital theory, an explanatory research design was used. Data was collected from 273 respondents across 21 NGO projects, with a sample of 7 projects selected randomly and respondents within them studied through a census approach. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis. Findings revealed that all stakeholder engagement practices positively and significantly influence project performance. Stakeholder identification was the strongest predictor, followed by involvement, communication, and feedback handling. Although implementation of these practices was generally moderate, projects with stronger and more systematic stakeholder engagement achieved better outcomes in quality, timeliness, cost efficiency, and beneficiary satisfaction. The study concludes that effective stakeholder engagement is critical for improving humanitarian project performance. It recommends that NGOs formalize stakeholder engagement through policies and standard operating procedures, and invest in staff and volunteer training to strengthen identification, involvement, communication, and feedback systems across projects.

Keywords: Stakeholder engagement, Humanitarian NGO projects, Project performance, Nairobi City County, Feedback management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humanitarian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in delivering essential services such as food aid, healthcare, shelter, education, and protection to vulnerable populations affected by conflict, disasters, and poverty, particularly in fragile contexts such as Somalia and other parts of Africa (Herring et al., 2020; UN OCHA, 2022). Beyond emergency response, these organizations contribute to long-term recovery, resilience building, and community development. Increasing demands for accountability, transparency, and measurable impact have heightened the need for effective project management systems capable of ensuring efficient and sustainable humanitarian interventions (World Bank, 2021; ACAPS, 2023).

Globally, humanitarian projects continue to face challenges related to cost efficiency, quality outcomes, and timely implementation. In Germany, increased humanitarian funding improved refugee aid and healthcare services, although rapid expansion created coordination and implementation difficulties (Hein, 2019; Kreidler et al., 2023; Masiulytė, 2025). Similarly, humanitarian NGOs in Nigeria expanded interventions in conflict-affected regions, providing shelter, healthcare, and psychosocial support to internally displaced populations. However, insecurity, damaged infrastructure, logistical

constraints, and fluctuating funding negatively affected service quality, timeliness, and cost management (Okunade & Ogunnubi, 2022; Theophilus, 2022). Despite these constraints, stakeholder engagement enhanced transparency, coordination, and ownership of humanitarian initiatives, improving the responsiveness of interventions to community priorities (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023).

Project performance in humanitarian organizations is commonly assessed through cost efficiency, quality outcomes, and timely completion of activities. Effective performance reflects the ability of projects to achieve intended objectives while maximizing resource utilization and maintaining accountability and inclusiveness (Ahmed et al., 2023; Ambatsa & Mutwiri, 2024; Seferis et al., 2024). Cost performance focuses on efficient utilization of limited resources and financial discipline, particularly important in unstable funding environments (Candio, 2024; Lozano-Ramirez et al., 2023). Quality performance measures user satisfaction, equity, inclusiveness, and adherence to expected service standards (Longo & Saadati, 2025; Shah et al., 2023). Timely performance refers to completing project activities within planned schedules despite operational disruptions such as insecurity, supply chain interruptions, and workforce shortages (Ndei & Mutuku, 2021; Faundez et al., 2023; Lehtimaki et al., 2023).

Stakeholder engagement practices have increasingly been recognized as critical determinants of project success and sustainability. Stakeholder engagement encompasses structured processes used to identify, involve, communicate with, and obtain feedback from individuals or groups affected by a project (Bernat et al., 2023; Kujala et al., 2022; Gichimu & Mutuku, 2022). Effective engagement improves collaboration, trust, accountability, and responsiveness, particularly in donor-funded humanitarian initiatives (Dwivedi & Dwivedi, 2021; Ochieng & Juster, 2021). Previous studies emphasize that stakeholder identification, participation in decision-making, communication, and feedback handling contribute significantly to project sustainability and implementation effectiveness (Gregory et al., 2020; Matsika et al., 2022; Kamau et al., 2024).

In Nairobi City County, humanitarian NGOs complement government efforts in addressing urban poverty, forced displacement, social vulnerability, and challenges associated with informal settlements. Their operations are guided by frameworks such as the Public Benefit Organizations Act (2013), Sphere Standards, and Core Humanitarian Standards (UN OCHA, 2024; Sphere Association, 2022). However, humanitarian projects in Nairobi continue to experience declining quality outcomes, cost overruns, and implementation delays. For instance, World Vision Kenya projects recorded declining quality compliance rates from 56% in 2023 to 52% in 2024, alongside average annual cost overruns of 42% between 2021 and 2024 (MoH Kenya, 2024; USAID, 2024). Similarly, the International Rescue Committee's Re:BUiLD programme reported beneficiary satisfaction levels averaging 61%, below the recommended 85%, while project costs increased significantly between 2022 and 2024 (World Bank, 2024; UNHCR, 2024). Other humanitarian programs implemented by SHOFCO and the Danish Refugee Council also experienced escalating operational costs, quality challenges, and delays in service delivery (DRC, 2024; SHOFCO, 2024).

Empirical studies have demonstrated the importance of stakeholder engagement in improving project sustainability and performance. Studies conducted in Kenya and Zimbabwe found that stakeholder identification, involvement, and communication significantly influence donor-funded project outcomes (Bukhala et al., 2025; Cheluget & Ngari, 2020; Matsika et al., 2022). However, most existing studies focused on public health or agricultural projects and paid limited attention to humanitarian NGO projects operating in complex urban informal settlements. In addition, some studies relied primarily on descriptive approaches, leaving methodological gaps regarding the relationship between stakeholder engagement practices and project performance outcomes. Consequently, there remains a need to examine how stakeholder identification, involvement, communication, and feedback handling influence cost efficiency, quality outcomes, and timely completion of humanitarian NGO projects in Nairobi City County.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded on three key theories: Stakeholder Theory, Communication Theory, and Human Capital Theory, which collectively explain how stakeholder engagement practices influence the performance of humanitarian NGO projects. Stakeholder Theory, developed by R. Edward Freeman, emphasizes the importance of involving all stakeholders, including beneficiaries, donors, employees, government agencies, and local communities, in project decision-making and implementation processes. The theory suggests that effective stakeholder identification, involvement, and management improve accountability, sustainability, resource allocation, and project success (Dwivedi & Dwivedi, 2021; Greenwood et al., 2020). Empirical studies support this view, indicating that stakeholder engagement enhances sustainability and project

outcomes in development and humanitarian projects (Ainomugisha et al., 2024; Micheni et al., 2023a). However, the theory has been criticized for difficulties in balancing conflicting stakeholder interests and challenges in stakeholder prioritization (Bernat et al., 2023).

Communication Theory, advanced by Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver, explains how effective communication and feedback mechanisms support coordination, decision-making, and project implementation. The theory highlights the importance of clear information flow, feedback systems, and stakeholder interaction in improving project performance (Karimi et al., 2024; Zwikael et al., 2023). Studies have shown that effective communication enhances transparency, stakeholder satisfaction, and project coordination, particularly in donor-funded and humanitarian projects (Ramadhan, Chege, & Maingi, 2023). Despite its usefulness, critics argue that traditional communication models oversimplify communication processes and fail to adequately consider social and cultural influences on message interpretation.

Human Capital Theory, introduced by Theodore Schultz and later developed by Gary Becker, emphasizes that investments in education, training, and staff competencies improve organizational performance and service delivery. The theory suggests that skilled and knowledgeable employees contribute to operational efficiency, innovation, and sustainability in organizations (Saputra et al., 2024; Candio, 2024). Empirical studies indicate that staff training and professional development positively influence project implementation, coordination, and beneficiary satisfaction in NGOs and healthcare organizations (Burudi, 2024; Boppana, 2024). However, critics note that the theory tends to overemphasize formal skills while overlooking contextual and motivational factors that also affect performance.

Empirical literature further demonstrates that stakeholder engagement practices significantly influence project performance and sustainability. Studies by Wanjala and Nyaberi (2024), Matsika et al. (2022), and Lemlem et al. (2025) established that stakeholder identification positively influences project implementation, ownership, and sustainability. Similarly, Juster et al. (2022), Micheni et al. (2023), and Cheluget and Ngari (2020) found that stakeholder involvement improves sustainability, transparency, and effectiveness of donor-funded projects. Research on communication processes by Bukhala et al. (2025), Loparimoi and Ng'eno (2023), and Matsa et al. (2023) showed that communication enhances stakeholder participation, ownership, and coordination in project implementation. Additionally, studies on feedback handling by Mutinda et al. (2025), Karimi et al. (2024), and Ademiloye (2023) revealed that feedback systems improve accountability, adaptive decision-making, and overall project performance. Despite these findings, most previous studies focused on sustainability rather than broader project performance indicators such as cost efficiency, quality outcomes, and timely completion. Furthermore, many studies were conducted in sectors such as construction, irrigation, healthcare, and agriculture, limiting their applicability to humanitarian NGO projects operating in urban informal settlements. Methodological limitations, including reliance on descriptive approaches and narrow sectoral focus, also create gaps in understanding the relationship between stakeholder engagement practices and humanitarian project performance. Therefore, the current study seeks to address these contextual, conceptual, and methodological gaps by examining how stakeholder identification, involvement, communication processes, and feedback handling influence the performance of humanitarian NGO projects in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used an explanatory research design and a quantitative approach to examine the relationship between stakeholder engagement practices and the performance of humanitarian NGO projects in Nairobi City County (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The target population consisted of 21 humanitarian NGO projects with 273 respondents, including project managers, field implementers, community representatives, and direct beneficiaries. A sample of 7 projects and 91 respondents was selected using simple random sampling and a census approach. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions measured on a five-point Likert scale. The questionnaire covered stakeholder identification, stakeholder involvement, stakeholder communication, feedback handling, and project performance indicators such as cost, quality, and timeliness. A pilot study was conducted in Kiambu County to test reliability and validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, while face, content, and construct validity were also established (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994; Taherdoost, 2016). Data collection was conducted after obtaining approval from Kenyatta University and relevant authorities. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analysis to determine the influence of stakeholder engagement practices on project performance. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were observed throughout the study.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

4.1.1 Stakeholder Identification

The study examined the influence of stakeholder identification on the performance of humanitarian NGO projects in Nairobi City County. The findings revealed a moderate implementation of stakeholder identification practices, with an aggregate mean score of 3.22 and a standard deviation of 1.40, indicating varying perceptions across respondents and projects.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholder Identification

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Dev
The project has a clearly documented stakeholder identification process	3.25	1.255
All relevant stakeholders are mapped before the project starts	3.19	1.321
The project uses structured criteria to classify stakeholders	3.25	1.354
Stakeholder identification is conducted jointly with community representatives	3.22	1.599
Identified stakeholders are updated throughout the project cycle	3.15	1.451
Stakeholder needs and expectations are assessed during identification	3.16	1.418
Stakeholder identification influences project planning and resource allocation	3.33	1.403
Aggregate Mean Score	3.22	1.40

The findings suggest that stakeholder identification practices were present but inconsistently implemented across projects. Although stakeholder identification influenced project planning and resource allocation, gaps existed in documentation, mapping, updating stakeholder records, and participatory involvement. These inconsistencies may contribute to delays, cost overruns, and reduced beneficiary satisfaction in humanitarian NGO projects.

4.1.2 Stakeholder Involvement

The study assessed the level of stakeholder involvement in humanitarian NGO projects and established a moderate level of involvement with an aggregate mean score of 3.19 and standard deviation of 1.46.

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholder Involvement

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Dev
Stakeholders actively participate in project planning	3.19	1.537
The project involves beneficiaries in decision-making processes	3.19	1.415
Stakeholders are involved in project implementation activities	3.20	1.399
The project encourages collaboration among stakeholder groups	3.13	1.444
Stakeholders are given opportunities to express opinions	3.27	1.482
The project incorporates stakeholder inputs into activities	3.20	1.471
Stakeholder involvement is monitored for effectiveness	3.13	1.444
Aggregate Mean Score	3.19	1.46

The results indicate that stakeholders were moderately involved in project planning, implementation, and decision-making. However, inconsistencies in participation, collaboration, and monitoring of involvement limited effective stakeholder engagement. These shortcomings may negatively affect project ownership, implementation efficiency, and beneficiary satisfaction.

4.1.3 Communication Processes

The study evaluated communication processes in humanitarian NGO projects and found a moderate level of effectiveness, with an aggregate mean score of 3.23 and standard deviation of 1.46.

Table 4.3: Descriptive Statistics for Communication Processes

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Dev
Communication channels with stakeholders are clearly defined	3.34	1.386
Communication is timely across all project phases	3.22	1.465
Project information is shared transparently	3.14	1.474
Communication tools used are effective	3.20	1.409
There is regular reporting on project progress	3.18	1.526
Communication builds trust between project teams and stakeholders	3.18	1.599
Communication reduces conflicts and misunderstandings	3.34	1.376
Aggregate Mean Score	3.23	1.46

The findings indicate that communication processes were moderately effective in supporting stakeholder engagement. While projects utilized communication channels and reporting systems, weaknesses in timeliness, transparency, and consistency limited effective coordination and trust-building among stakeholders.

4.1.4 Feedback Handling

The study further examined feedback handling practices within humanitarian NGO projects. The findings showed a moderate level of feedback management with an aggregate mean score of 3.22 and standard deviation of 1.44.

Table 4.4: Descriptive Statistics for Feedback Handling

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Dev
The project provides clear channels for feedback	3.29	1.322
Feedback is collected consistently throughout the project cycle	3.24	1.538
Feedback is analyzed promptly by the project team	3.22	1.491
The project gives timely responses to stakeholder issues	3.24	1.487
Feedback influences project improvements	3.20	1.445
Feedback mechanisms are accessible to all stakeholder groups	3.18	1.328
Stakeholders are satisfied with feedback handling processes	3.16	1.463
Aggregate Mean Score	3.22	1.44

The findings demonstrate that feedback handling mechanisms existed but were inconsistently implemented. Although projects provided channels for stakeholder feedback and response mechanisms, weaknesses in accessibility, responsiveness, and integration of feedback into decision-making limited effectiveness.

4.1.5 Performance of Humanitarian NGO Projects

The study assessed project performance based on timeliness, cost management, quality standards, resource utilization, beneficiary satisfaction, and community impact. The findings revealed a moderate-to-high level of performance with an aggregate mean score of 3.40 and standard deviation of 1.45.

Table 4.5: Descriptive Statistics for Performance of Humanitarian NGO Projects

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Dev
The project is completed within the planned timeline	3.22	1.384
Project activities stay within the approved budget	3.20	1.531
The project meets required quality standards	3.61	1.363
Beneficiary needs are adequately addressed	3.39	1.463
The project has long-term positive effects on the community	3.35	1.528
Resources are used efficiently throughout the project	3.61	1.363
The project meets stakeholder satisfaction levels	3.39	1.514
Aggregate Mean Score	3.40	1.45

The results indicate that humanitarian NGO projects achieved moderate success in project performance. Projects generally performed well in quality standards and resource utilization, though challenges remained in budget control, timeliness, and stakeholder satisfaction.

4.2 Inferential Statistics

4.2.1 Correlation Analysis

The study used Pearson correlation analysis to examine relationships between stakeholder engagement practices and project performance.

Table 4.6: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Stakeholder Identification	Stakeholder Involvement	Communication Process	Feedback Handling	Project Performance
Stakeholder Identification	1				
Stakeholder Involvement	.464**	1			
Communication Process	.463**	.355**	1		
Feedback Handling	.362**	.466**	.354**	1	
Project Performance	.886**	.890**	.871**	.898**	1

Correlation significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings revealed strong positive and statistically significant relationships between all stakeholder engagement practices and project performance. Feedback handling had the strongest relationship with project performance ($r = 0.898$), followed by stakeholder involvement ($r = 0.890$), stakeholder identification ($r = 0.886$), and communication processes ($r = 0.871$). This indicates that effective stakeholder engagement significantly enhances project outcomes in humanitarian NGO projects.

4.2.2 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the combined effect of stakeholder engagement practices on project performance.

Table 4.7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
1	.881	0.776	0.764	0.51449

The model explained 77.6% of the variation in project performance, indicating that stakeholder engagement practices significantly influence project outcomes.

Table 4.8: ANOVA Results

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	67.858	4	16.964	64.089	.000
Residual	19.588	74	0.265		
Total	87.446	78			

The ANOVA results confirmed that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 64.089$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that stakeholder engagement practices collectively predict project performance.

Table 4.9: Multiple Regression Coefficients

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.689	0.178		3.878	.000
Stakeholder Identification	0.335	0.077	0.393	4.332	.000
Stakeholder Involvement	0.192	0.079	0.204	2.418	.018
Communication Process	0.185	0.085	0.206	2.178	.033
Feedback Handling	0.157	0.078	0.189	2.017	.047

The regression findings indicate that all stakeholder engagement variables positively and significantly influenced project performance. Stakeholder identification emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.335$, $p = 0.000$), followed by stakeholder involvement, communication processes, and feedback handling. The findings demonstrate that effective stakeholder engagement enhances project efficiency, quality, sustainability, and stakeholder satisfaction in humanitarian NGO projects.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

The study concluded that stakeholder engagement practices are moderately implemented within humanitarian NGO projects in Nairobi City County, although their application remains inconsistent across projects. Gaps were identified in stakeholder documentation, comprehensive mapping, participatory engagement, continuous updating, and integration of stakeholder processes into project planning and implementation. These weaknesses contribute to challenges in project performance, including delays, cost overruns, reduced quality compliance, and lower stakeholder satisfaction.

The findings further established that stakeholder engagement practices significantly influence project performance both individually and collectively. Stakeholder identification emerged as the strongest predictor of project performance, followed by stakeholder involvement, communication processes, and feedback handling. Projects that systematically identify, involve, communicate with, and respond to stakeholders demonstrated improved outcomes in terms of quality, timeliness, cost efficiency, resource utilization, and beneficiary satisfaction. Overall, the study confirms that effective stakeholder engagement is a critical determinant of successful humanitarian NGO project performance.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends that humanitarian NGOs strengthen stakeholder engagement practices across all phases of project implementation. NGOs should develop comprehensive stakeholder identification frameworks that include systematic mapping, classification, and regular updating of stakeholder information throughout the project cycle. Beneficiaries, community representatives, and partners should be actively involved in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation activities through participatory forums and collaborative decision-making structures.

The study also recommends that NGOs establish clear, transparent, and timely communication strategies using multiple communication channels such as meetings, SMS, emails, and digital platforms. Effective communication will enhance stakeholder trust, reduce conflicts, and improve coordination during project implementation.

Further, humanitarian NGOs should establish accessible and structured feedback mechanisms to allow stakeholders to provide input and raise concerns. Feedback should be analyzed promptly, integrated into project decision-making, and followed by regular reporting on actions taken. Finally, NGOs should adopt formal stakeholder engagement policies and standard operating procedures, accompanied by regular staff training on stakeholder engagement best practices to ensure consistent implementation across all projects.

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