

## The Influence of Project Management Practices on the Sustainability of Water Projects Funded by Non-Governmental Organizations in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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### Abstract

In Kenya, 41 million people lack access to proper sanitation, with slum dwellers in Nairobi being the most severely affected. Approximately 60-70% of Nairobi's residents have access to piped water; however, the consistency and quality of this water supply vary significantly among different neighbourhoods and settlements within the city. NGOs such as USAID, Kenya Integrated WASH, Kenya Resilient Arid Lands, and UNICEF have funded water projects to increase access to safe and clean water and sanitation through various programmes. The county has implemented measures such as drilling boreholes to reduce operational costs and improve water accessibility; however, the sustainability of these projects is regarded as poor and does not meet standards. Against this background, the study aims to analyse the impact of management skills as a component of project management practices on the sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs in Nairobi County, Kenya. Project management theory underpins the study variables. A descriptive research design supports the study objectives. The target population comprises 1270 households, including technical staff, senior managers, and project supervisors. A sample size of 304 respondents was determined using simple random sampling with a stratified approach. Primary data was collected through structured and semi-structured questionnaires. The researcher conducted an in-depth analysis using statistical packages in social science after coding and cleaning the collected data. A simple regression model was employed to assess the influence of management skills on the sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs in Nairobi County. Analysis of variance confirmed the relevance of the regression model, indicating significant variation caused by the independent variables. Pearson's correlation matrix was used to determine the relationships among the variables studied. Findings highlight the importance of effective management in enhancing sustainability, while also exploring additional variables to improve the model's explanatory power. The analysis of the regression model and ANOVA results reveals a more substantial influence of management skills as a significant predictor of project sustainability. Overall, the results provide valuable insights for NGOs and stakeholders to optimise their strategies and ensure the long-term success of water projects.

**Keywords:** *Project management practices, management skills, project sustainability*

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## 1. Introduction

In Kenya, access to clean water and sanitation is becoming a persistent problem, affecting a population of 53 million (Mwakajo & Kidombo, 2017). Besides other challenges, such as the effects of climate change, approximately 28 million Kenyans lack access to clean and safe water. While 41 million lack access to proper sanitation. The worst affected are the urban slum dwellers in Nairobi. Nairobi, Kenya's capital city, is estimated to have a population of approximately 4.4 million people (Zada, Yukun, & Zada, 2021). According to information provided by the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company (NCWSC) and various NGOs operating in the area, roughly 60-70% of Nairobi's residents have access to piped water (Masinde & Nzuki, 2020; Kariaga, 2020). However, the consistency and quality of this water supply do vary significantly among different neighbourhoods and settlements within the city. The county has implemented measures such as drilling boreholes to reduce operational costs and enhance water accessibility.

According to Article 43 of the Kenyan Constitution 2010, the government is committed to protecting the right to clean, safe water and sanitation for all Kenyans (Cheluget & Morogo, 2017). While the Kenyan government aims to increase water project growth by 6.1% in Nairobi alone, it also acknowledges the need to expand water provision by 10% annually (Tarifi, 2021). However, despite the government's good intentions to improve the water sector, it remains a challenging task due to the uncontrolled population growth witnessed in recent years, along with other issues. Nairobi County is increasingly involving Public Private Participation (PPP) to promote Water Sectoral Growth (WSG). Yet, despite this commitment, the County faces challenges related to institutional and project management risks, including corruption and issues with structural quality and quantity (Muiruri & Mutiso, 2021). It is in this context that NGOs oversee most water projects in Nairobi County. Nevertheless, these NGOs also face their own challenges that have been unaddressed by policymakers, practitioners, academics, and researchers.

Existing literature indicates that most NGO water projects have not been delivering quality outcomes to their target groups in a timely manner (Gregg & Ana, 2016). This is due to inadequate resources, external pressures, and unforeseen circumstances (Malusi, 2023). Although various studies have been conducted on project management practices and project sustainability by different researchers like Sam (2018) and Doreen, Kule, and Eugene (2017), who focus on stakeholders' participation in public projects, he did not specifically focus on NGO projects. Omapariola and Windapo (2019) researched the effect of funding on project sustainability but only focused on construction projects. In addition, Tarifi (2021) conducted research on project strategic planning and sustainability; however, the study was a review of secondary data, ignoring the target groups' perceptions, which are very important in evidence-based research, which this study will address. Due to these gaps, this study aims to investigate the effect of management skills as an aspect of project management practices on the sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs in Nairobi County, Kenya.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

The formalization of modern project management practices is often credited to the work of Henry Gantt, Henri Fayol, and Frederick Taylor in the early 20th century. The development of formal project management standards and methodologies, such as the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) by the Project Management Institute (PMI), has played a significant role in shaping the theory. Project Management Theory states that the successful

completion of projects depends on the effective application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities (Shala et al., 2021). It emphasises the importance of defined processes, clear goals, systematic planning, resource management, risk management, stakeholder engagement, and continuous monitoring and control throughout the project lifecycle. The theory incorporates various elements from strategic planning, operational efficiency, and human resource management to achieve project objectives.

Project management theory has gained widespread support through empirical research and practical implementation across various industries. It offers a structured approach to managing complex projects, which has demonstrated effectiveness in enhancing project outcomes. The creation of standardised methodologies such as PMBOK and PRINCE2 has equipped project managers with comprehensive frameworks and best practices, increasing the predictability and success rates of projects (Maimuna & Kidombo, 2017). Research indicates that organisations with mature project management practices tend to perform better in terms of meeting project timelines, budgets, and objectives (Shala et al. 2021; Doreen, Kule, & Eugene, 2016; Cheluget & Morogo, 2017). Conversely, Saragih and Saluy (2021) contend that it can be excessively rigid and bureaucratic, resulting in a focus on process compliance rather than project outcomes. The one-size-fits-all approach of some methodologies might not suit all project types, notably smaller or more innovative projects that demand flexibility.

The theory plays a crucial role in explaining the management skills variable in this study. Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for the sustainability of water projects. Project management theory stresses the importance of identifying all relevant stakeholders, understanding their needs and expectations, and involving them in the project planning and implementation stages (Zada, Yukun, & Zada, 2021). The theory supports detailed resource planning and allocation to ensure projects receive the necessary inputs to achieve their objectives. In water projects, this involves ensuring the sustainable use of water resources and maintaining infrastructure.

## **2.2 Empirical Review**

Nandasinghe (2020) explored leadership and organisational sustainability through a review of various theoretical and empirical perspectives. The researcher examined different journal articles, websites, case studies, eBooks, and books written by professionals in the field. The study established that organisational leadership is crucial for achieving significant change in an organisation's sustainability. The influence of leadership was found to affect workers, as well as the outcomes of organisational sustainability changes. The previous study was conducted in Sri Lanka; meanwhile, Kenya will be the location for the current research.

Sanusi and Johl (2021) analyzed top management commitment and its role in the implementation of risk management in projects. The methodology employed was a narrative technique that involved reviewing the literature. The review of literature focused on highlighting the critical essence derived from the high commitment of those in top management positions. The review was guided and supported by information from existing articles and publications. It has been shown that management commitment is demonstrated through job automation and effective communication. It was further noted that top managers have the responsibility of guiding, directing, and controlling the activities aimed at meeting the project goals in an organization.

Leksono, Siagian, and Oei (2020) examined top management commitment and its role in operational sustainability. Information was obtained from firms operating in Java classified as medium and large entities. In total, 55 participants were included in the study. Analysis

revealed that highly committed top managers significantly enhance the operational sustainability of an entity. In fact, the implication of the commitment of those in management positions to sustainability is a direct one. This means that any effort demonstrated by managers to remain committed would enhance sustainability.

Karanja, Kahuthia, and Muraguri (2020) conducted an analysis focusing on the commitment of senior management and its impact on the performance of schools owned by churches. The adopted design was descriptive, and a total of 192 participants were targeted and included in the inquiry. Information was sought from primary sources guided by a questionnaire. The analysis was that those in senior positions empowered their staff, provided training, and offered better rewards to enhance their performance. The study focused on quantitative analysis but failed to incorporate qualitative data. The current research will complement the findings with the opinions of respondents, which will be analysed to provide context for the quantitative analysis.

Saragi and Saluy (2021) established the link between organisational leadership and its sustainability. A descriptive method was adopted, as all employees of Sukaputra Graham Cemerlang were selected as respondents. A total sample size of one hundred and forty-one (141) was chosen from the total population of one hundred and seventy-one (171). The data obtained were analysed using the Structural Equation Model and SmartPLS 3.0. The results revealed a significantly positive influence of leadership style on customer satisfaction. The study examined organisational sustainability, whereas this study will focus on project sustainability.

Karacsony (2021) evaluated leadership style and organisational sustainability in Hungary using a quantitative survey methodology. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to middle-level and operational managers from 2020 to 2021. Three hundred and seventy-six (376) questionnaires were returned and deemed useful after distributing six hundred and ninety-six (696) using a simple random sampling method. The data was processed using MS Excel. The findings indicated a significantly positive relationship between leadership style and the firm's sustainability. Although the study's results pertain to Hungary, this research will be conducted in a Kenyan context.

***H<sub>0</sub>: There is no relationship between management as an aspect of PMP and the sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs in Nairobi City County, Kenya.***

### **3. Methodology**

According to Kothari and Garg (2016), research design is a structure that includes the process of conducting a research investigation. The study employed a descriptive research design. Its choice is based on its unique ability to use descriptions to establish relationships and associations between study variables (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2022). It addresses the question of a given concept; it descriptively presents all its characteristics (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2013).

The total of a given element for a study is known as the target population (Kothari & Garg, 2016). The target population of the study will be 1270 personnel from the 24 NGOs overseeing the water projects in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The unit of analysis included project managers, project finance managers, technical staff, project supervisors, senior managers, water metre readers, as well as partners/stakeholders and NGOs. The respondents are apportioned as follows: 152 questionnaires were distributed to respondents across 24 Water Projects in Nairobi City County, using simple random stratified sampling from NGOs in Nairobi City. This included project managers, project finance managers, technical staff, project supervisors, senior managers, water metre readers, as well as partners, stakeholders, and NGOs.



Questionnaires were completed by 117 respondents, resulting in a response rate of 76.97 per cent. The remaining 23.03 per cent of questionnaires were not returned. A response rate of 76.97 per cent is considered sufficient for the study, as Kothari and Garg (2016) suggest that anything above 70 per cent is adequate for analysis. This high response rate enhances the reliability of the findings. County, Kenya. The study sample from which questionnaires were administered was obtained through stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. According to the Nairobi County Integrated Development Plan 2022-2023, there are 24 Water Projects in Nairobi City County, and all of them were distributed using a simple random stratified sampling to obtain the sample. Key informant interviews were administered to the purposively selected respondents.

A simple regression model illustrating the relationship between variables for a statistical analysis was developed. The model included management skills, regressed with and on the sustainability of water projects in Nairobi City County, as shown below:

$$\text{Sustainability} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{ Management skills} + \varepsilon$$

The pilot study aimed to assess whether the questionnaire accurately reflected respondents' answers in relation to the research questions. It was conducted on five randomly selected project managers working on a borehole project not included in the study's target population. The questionnaire was administered to evaluate its effectiveness and to identify and correct any ambiguous questions. Accordingly, the constructs of the variables were examined using SPSS to determine the Cronbach alpha value, specifically the reliability of the research tool. If the value is less than 0.70, the variables are deemed unreliable; values above this threshold indicate the research tool is dependable enough to proceed with the main study. Management skills had a Cronbach alpha of 0.756 and sustainability scored 0.717, both meeting the required threshold.

Ethical issues in a study are essential to protect the rights, dignity, and safety of research participants, ensure the credibility of findings, and maintain the integrity of the scientific process. The first step before collecting data is for the researcher to obtain all necessary approvals and permits from both the graduate school and NACOSTI. Afterwards, the researcher proceeded with data collection and distributed the questionnaires to project managers, technical staff, project supervisors, and senior managers. The researcher ensured all questionnaires were distributed and that the data collection process adhered to principles of respect, confidentiality, and patience. The questionnaires were distributed and collected using a drop-and-pick-later approach. The study was conducted with propriety and confidentiality. During the administration of the questionnaires, the research aim was explained to respondents, along with what was expected of them, with respect and gentleness. Additionally, non-disclosure and anonymity were maintained by the researcher.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Sample Measures**

This section presents the descriptive statistics on the impact of management skills on the sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs in Nairobi City County. The overall average score of 3.4341 indicates strong agreement on the significance of management skills in enhancing the sustainability of water projects. The statement that received the highest mean score was about clear promotion opportunities that motivated staff to improve their service delivery, at 3.8471. This was followed by the agreement that management skills developed through training enhanced service delivery, at 3.4384. Respondents strongly agreed that competitive rewards contribute to a reliable water supply at 3.4365. This was followed by strong agreement that experienced staff boost customer satisfaction at 3.3892, with moderate

variability in responses of 1.11694. Lastly, respondents moderately agreed that competent staff improve service delivery at a mean of 3.4341, although the high standard deviation of 1.36304 suggests variability in opinions. This is illustrated in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Table showing the effect of management skills on the sustainability**

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
Management skills in water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government are demonstrated through staff training for improved service delivery	15%	11%	17%	26%	31%	3.4384	1.00011
Competitive reward provided to the staff of water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government has resulted in a reliable water supply to beneficiaries	16%	8%	19%	29%	28%	3.4365	1.39065
The existence of competent staff has enhanced the service delivery of the water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government	10%	15%	20%	33%	21%	3.0594	1.36304
The availability of experienced staff has improved customer satisfaction with the water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government	7%	15%	8%	38%	32%	3.3892	1.11694
Clear promotion opportunities have motivated staff working in water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government to improve service delivery	7%	5%	13%	34%	41%	3.8471	1.24920
<b>Aggregate Score</b>						<b>3.4341</b>	<b>1.22399</b>

The highest mean score (3.8471) for promotion opportunities highlights the vital role of career growth in motivating staff and enhancing service delivery. This aligns with theories of employee motivation (e.g., Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs) and a study by Malusi (2023) that stresses the importance of clear career pathways in retaining skilled personnel. However, the high standard deviation suggests that the effectiveness of promotion opportunities may differ across projects or contexts. The second-highest mean score (3.4384) for staff training emphasises the significance of management skills in improving service delivery. This finding supports research linking capacity building and training to better project outcomes (Mkutano, 2018; Saragih & Saluy, 2021). The relatively low standard deviation indicates agreement on the value of training. The third-highest mean score (3.4365) for competitive rewards implies that incentivising staff contributes to a dependable water supply. This aligns with a study by Biondi and Russo (2022), which highlights the role of extrinsic rewards in boosting staff performance.

The fourth-highest mean score (3.3892) for experienced staff highlights the value of expertise in improving customer satisfaction. This finding supports research that emphasizes the role of professional staff in delivering quality services (Chepkosgei & Atambo, 2018). The lowest mean score (3.0594) for competent staff indicates moderate agreement that competence enhances service delivery. The high standard deviation suggests that the impact of competent

staff may vary across projects, possibly due to differences in roles or project environments. The emphasis on promotion opportunities, staff training, and competitive rewards aligns with studies that highlight the importance of management practices in improving project outcomes (e.g., Mkutano, 2018; Omopariola & Windapo, 2018). Similarly, the role of experienced and competent staff in enhancing service delivery is consistent with research on workforce management by Tarifi (2021).

**4.2 Sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs**

The overall aggregate score (3.8195) reflects strong agreement on the sustainability of the water projects. However, the variability in responses (standard deviation = 0.91502) suggests that, while the projects are generally successful, there may be areas where further improvements are needed. The highest mean score (4.0189) was recorded with customer satisfaction. This was followed by sustainability attributed to efficient service delivery (3.8852), a reliable water supply (3.7904), and, lastly, reduced costs for beneficiaries (3.5833). Table 2 below shows the means and standard deviations of statements displaying the sustainability of water projects.

**Table 2: A table showing the sustainability of water projects**

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is efficient service delivery among water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government	10%	15%	20%	33%	21%	3.8852	0.98960
I'm satisfied with the services from the water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government	2%	8%	11%	44%	35%	4.0189	0.87479
There is a reliable water supply from the water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government	6%	9%	14%	33%	38%	3.7904	0.79194
Water projects funded by the Nairobi City County government reduced the costs incurred by beneficiaries to access water	13%	15%	13%	32%	27%	3.5833	1.00374
<b>Aggregate Score</b>						<b>3.8195</b>	<b>0.91502</b>

The findings highlight the strong sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs in Nairobi City County, particularly in terms of customer satisfaction, efficient service delivery, and reliable water supply. The highest mean score (4.0189) for customer satisfaction highlights the positive impact of the water projects on beneficiaries. This aligns with studies that emphasize the importance of user satisfaction as a key indicator of project success (e.g., World Bank, 2004). The second-highest mean score (3.8852) for efficient service delivery underscores the effectiveness of the water projects in meeting community needs. This finding supports research that links efficient service delivery to improved project outcomes (Malusi, 2023). The third-highest mean score (3.7904) for reliable water supply indicates that the projects are successful in providing consistent access to water. This is a critical factor for sustainability, as reliability is often a key challenge in water projects. The lowest mean score (3.5833) for reduced costs indicates that, although the water projects have made progress in lowering costs for beneficiaries, there is still room for improvement. The high mean scores for customer

satisfaction, efficient service delivery, and reliable water supply align with studies by Muema and Ngugi (2021) and Karacsony (2022) that highlight the importance of these factors in project sustainability. Similarly, the emphasis on cost reduction is consistent with research on the affordability of water services (Kariega, 2020). On the other hand, the moderate mean score for reduced costs contradicts a study by Masombe and Onwenga (2020) that emphasizes the challenges of making water services affordable for low-income communities. This discrepancy may be due to differences in project design or implementation.

### 4.3 Test of Hypothesis

Simple regression analysis was utilized to perform a statistical test to establish the relationship between the study variables. Management skills were regressed on the sustainability of water projects, as shown by the coefficients in Table 3.

**Table 3: Regression Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.497	.266		9.699	.000
Management skills	.462	.059	.216	2.748	.007

#### a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability

Table 3 above provides the regression coefficients for the predictors in relation to the dependent variable, sustainability. The constant of 0.497 represents the expected value of sustainability when all predictors are zero. The positive coefficient (0.216) and relatively high standardized coefficient (Beta = 0.216) indicate that management skills have a substantial positive impact on sustainability. The regression model extracted from the SPSS analysis of the data is as follows:  $Y = 0.497 + 0.216X_1$ , where Y represents sustainability and  $X_1$  represents management skills.

Also, the p-value (0.000) indicates that the intercept is statistically significant, meaning it plays a meaningful role in the model. The p-value (0.007) confirms that management skills are a statistically significant predictor of sustainability. Therefore, management skills are a statistically significant predictor of sustainability, as indicated by a p-value that is less than 0.05 ( $P < 0.05$ ). Thus, the most substantial and influential variable was management skills, as shown by a lower coefficient of 0.007.

### 5. Conclusion

The objective was to examine the role of management skills in the sustainability of water projects funded by NGOs in Nairobi City County. The research found that strong management skills are directly linked to improved sustainability outcomes. Effective leadership, decision-making, and problem-solving by project managers have been essential in guiding projects through challenges and maximizing their impact. Projects with experienced and skilled management teams demonstrated greater adaptability to changing conditions, improved risk management, and more efficient resource utilisation. Strengthening management capacity within water projects is vital for ensuring their long-term success.



## 6. Recommendations

Strengthening management skills among NGO staff is vital for improved service delivery. Career growth opportunities serve as a key motivator, making it essential to establish transparent promotion frameworks and communicate the criteria regularly to staff. Training programs should be tailored to address technical, managerial, and soft skills gaps, ensuring that staff are well-equipped to meet project demands. Competitive rewards enhance performance and can be achieved by benchmarking salaries against industry standards and introducing performance-based incentives. Additionally, experienced staff should be retained through mentorship programs and recognition initiatives, ensuring knowledge transfer within teams. Additionally, examining the relationship between management training, staff retention, and overall project performance could provide valuable insights into workforce development.

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