

## THE IMPORTANCE OF TOP MANAGEMENT SUPPORT TO DONOR FUNDED HEALTH PROJECTS

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**Abstract:** This study provides an empirical investigation on the effect of top management support: involvement, policies and strategies, and provision of resources on the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya. The study adopted explanatory and descriptive research designs. A census of all the sixty-nine ongoing donor funded health projects initiated between 2008 and 2018 was conducted. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to managers of the donor funded health projects and the heads of donor funded projects at the Ministry of health. Regression results indicate that top management support had a positive significant effect on the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya. The study recommends top management involvement in projects from the onset, besides developing appropriate policies and strategies for the projects, and providing resources to the projects to ensure they perform well.

**Keywords:** top-management support, macro-environment, performance, donor-funded, projects.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Governments just like business organizations are increasingly using projects in their work to provide services to their citizens (Hyvari, 2016). The projects cover a wide range of areas which include health, water and sanitation, agriculture, education, security, energy, infrastructure, and tourism. The Kenya Vision 2030 categorizes the government projects into economic, social and political projects which it calls the pillars of Vision 2030. Vision 2030 in Sessional paper 10 of 2012 identified flagship projects which will directly address priorities in key sectors such as agriculture, education, health, water, and the environment. According to Vision 2030, health projects are critical to the attainment of all the other pillars of Vision 2030 because they ensure the availability of healthy and sufficient manpower.

Many high-cost projects undertaken world over tend to have performance and

sustainability challenges which is a concern for key donors including the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, as well as bilateral aid agencies (Mugambi, 2014). According to Kiprop et al. (2017), little development has taken place in Sub-Sahara Africa despite donor funding for over a half a century. High levels of unemployment, indebtedness, poverty, poor health and poor economic performance are still prevalent in most of the sub-Saharan countries (Kiprop et al., 2017)

According to The Project Management body of Knowledge (PMBOK) guide, project performance is measured in terms of budget or cost, time and quality which are the three constraints of project performance (PMI, 2013, p. 1). According to Gaturu and Muturi (2014) time is a critical factor and measure of project performance. The Bostock Marketing Group (BMG) Research (2015) also observed that budget and quality standards are critical measures of project performance.

The performance of a project is good if it is completed within the planned timelines. World over, many projects are experiencing time overruns. According to Memon et al. (2012) 79.5 percent of public projects and 66.25 percent of private projects experience time overruns in Malaysia. The 2017 edition of Deloitte Africa Construction report indicated that 87 percent of projects in Kenya experienced time overruns. Solis-Carcano, et al. (2015) observed that prolonging the project execution time will result in cost overruns due to the extra expenses on materials, personnel, financial costs and contract penalties.

Cost is a measure of the total of what has been spent on the project to the current level. It is dynamic and not static (Adejo, 2012). According to PMI (2013) cost is one of the measures of the performance of projects alongside time and quality. Memon et al. (2012) concur that cost is a critical measure of the performance of a project. In Malaysia, 53.2 percent of public projects and 62.8 percent of private projects experience cost overruns with an overrun of between 5 – 10 percent of project cost (Memon). In Kenya, 48 percent of the projects experience cost overruns (Labuschagne, 2017). Cost overruns are caused by inflation on materials (Olawale & Sun, 2018), time overruns (Solis-Carcano et al., 2015) and rework (Hwang, et al., 2009)

Every project has an anticipated level of quality based on the details and specifications set out by the users (Stojcetovic, et al., 2013). According to Ng and Anuar (2011) quality performance is concerned with the quality of the project's final outcome and the quality objectives of the project. Mortaheb, et al. (2012) observed that a project outcome has quality if it satisfies the client's overall expectations and if it achieves the technical specifications. Quality is a key measure of the performance of a project.

Akanni, et al. (2014) observed that the social-cultural environment consists of customs, lifestyles, and values that characterize a society. Further, the researchers opined that population demographics, rising educational levels, norms and values, language and attitudes toward social responsibilities are

examples of socio-cultural variables. Gudiené, et al. (2013), and Musa, et al. (2015) observed that social factors concern culture, health consideration and the general lifestyle of people. These variables have the potential to affect organizations that operate within the society. Community hostilities towards a medical initiative will, for example, hinder the uptake and success of the project.

Endemic corruption and poor reporting structures in the public sector in Kenya are causes of delays in donor funded health projects (Department of International Development (DFID), 2015). Gaturu and Muturi (2014) observed that delays plague the delivery of donor funded projects in many developing countries. The consistent delays in the completion of projects and cost overruns in Kenya just like in most parts of the developing world calls for research to determine the factors that are causing poor project performance.

### 1.1 Top management support

For project managers to successfully complete their projects, the top management must be actively involved (Zwikael, 2008). Top Management should determine the various involvement processes which will affect the performance of the projects. Zwikael identified the six main involvement processes; develop project procedures, involve the project manager during the initiation stage, support ongoing project management training programmes, establish a project management office, develop a supportive project organizational structure, define clear project performance measures and support projects in quality management.

Top Management support is an essential factor in project performance (Khan, et al., 2014). For some projects, it is a critical performance factor. Kandelousi, et al. (2011), indicated that top management support in projects includes; helping teams in dealing with hurdles, encouraging workers and creating a sense of commitment to work. Khan et al also opined that top management support takes the form of providing timely financial resources, allocation of human and physical resources and delegation of power and authority to project

leaders necessary for the successful completion of projects.

The performance of projects is affected by top management support both directly and indirectly (Intakhan, 2014). Direct effects include; top management playing a vital role in enabling projects to achieve their objectives, directing and motivating workers, providing projects with materials, equipment and enhancing commitment to work. Intakhan identified the indirect involvement of top management in projects in planning, controlling, checking, evaluating and making decisions about training, performance evaluation and determining policy.

According to Iqbal, et al. (2015), top management support is a key factor in attaining project performance. Top management is the joining glue between the project manager's transformational leadership behaviours and project performance factors in construction projects in Pakistan. According to Iqbal et al, top management should enable the project managers to execute their roles by providing them with the required power and authority. Project managers may fail to deliver successful projects even with excellent skills due to the lack of top management support (Meredith, & Mantel, 2010).

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Kenya's vision 2030 has identified health as a key factor in the attainment of the vision objectives. This explains the many donor funded projects implemented in the country's health sector. However, the Wolfensohn Center for Development working paper 8 of 2009 observed that donor funding has not produced the desired results in Kenya (Mwega, 2009). The poor performance of health projects dates back to the 1950s (Ika, et al., 2011). According to Muchungu (2011) 58 percent of donor funded projects in Kenya show poor performance as measured by time, budget, scope and client satisfaction. According to the 2017 edition of Deloitte Africa report, approximately 48 percent of all projects report cost overrun and 87 percent of the projects have a time overrun in Kenya. Furthermore, many health projects initiated in Bomet County have stalled (Kirui, & Moronge, 2016).

According to the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI, 2014) DFID programmes underperformed as compared to the global and regional averages since the level of child mortality in Kenya is still high. ICAI, (2014) further observed that the Global Fund's monitoring system judged the performance of the main grant for malaria to Kenya during the period 2013 – 14 as below expectations. An independent donor review concluded that the delays for implementation of Global Fund grants in Kenya typically ranged between 6 and 24 months (ICAI, 2014) implying that the projects failed.

A study by Kirui and Moronge (2016) recommends that further studies should be carried out to determine the effects of corruption and politics on the performance of health projects in Kenya. Due to the empirical evidence on the poor performance of donor funded health projects, and the existing gaps in research, this study aimed at determining the importance of top management support to donor funded health projects in Kenya.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Theoretical review

The study was underpinned on the theory of constraints. The theory of constraints was developed by Dr. Eliyahu M. Goldratt in his 1984 book "The Goal". According to the theory, a very small number of constraints limit any manageable system in achieving more of its goals (Chowdhary, 2009). The attainment of project goals is affected by both internal and external constraints. If these constraints are not managed well, projects are bound to fail (Kisilu, et al., 2016). The theory provides for ways of identifying the key factors that limit (constraint) the achievement of goals. It also provides for ways of ensuring that the constraint is not a limiting factor by improving it in a well-organized manner. In this study top management support was introduced as a moderating variable in the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya. Kiprop, et al., (2017), and Maina and Gathenya (2014) suggested that the overall performance of a project could be improved by focusing on fixing the main problem (constraint). The theory of constraint provides a good basis for determining the most limiting

constraint to the attainment of project goals. This was applied in this study to determine the effect of the top management support on the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya.

## 2.2 Top management support and project performance

Moderating variables determine how strongly the dependent and independent variables relate. This study analyzed the effect of the top management support on the macro environment factors and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya.

Khan et al. (2014) in their study on top management support, a potential moderator between project leadership and project success; a theoretical framework found out that, top management support is a glue between project leadership behaviours and project success that can strengthen or weaken the proposed relations. Khan et al, conceptualized top management support as a potential moderator. In their study Iqbal et al. (2015) concluded that a project's top management support had a link in the moderating effect between the transformational leadership and the success of construction projects in Pakistan. Top management support can lead a project towards success or failure.

In their study on the effect of the top management's support on the relationship between factors affecting employees and performance in the Al-Zawiya University of Libya, Dukhan, Mohamad and Ali (2017) found out that top management plays a vital role in achieving synergy between the activities and operations of an organization. Dukhan et al. further revealed that top management ensures that workers understand the organizational goals and provides the necessary conditions for achieving them. The top management also meets the employee's needs, empowers them and motivates them to be initiative and creative (Dukhan et al., 2017).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study applied explanatory and descriptive research designs. The combined designs have the potential to offer a more robust research

(Caruth, 2013). A combination of explanatory and descriptive research designs will provide more insights into the subject of investigation and capture information that could have been left out when using only one study design.

## 3.1 The moderating effect model

The moderating effect of top management support on the relationship between the macro environment factors and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya, was determined by using the regression model below as recommended by Fairchild and Mackinnon (2010).

$$Per = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 Z + \beta_3 X_i Z + \mu_i$$

Where

$Per$  = Performance of donor funded health projects

$\beta_0$  = The constant term

$Z$  = Top management support

$X_i$  = Composite index representing the macro environment factors

$\beta_1$  = Coefficient of the macro environment factors

$\beta_2$  = Coefficient of the effect of top management support on the performance of donor funded health projects

$\beta_3$  = Coefficient measuring the moderating effect of top management support on the relationship between macro environment factors and the performance of donor funded health projects.

If  $\beta_3$  is statistically different from zero, a significant moderation effect of top management support on the relationship between macro environment and performance of donor funded projects in Kenya is concluded.

## 3.2 Sampling and sampling techniques

According to Open Data Africa .org there were sixty-nine donor funded health projects which were initiated between 2008 and 2018 and were ongoing at the time of the study. The projects were in building and construction, capacity development, nutrition and care as well as in treatment and prevention. The heads of each project and 6 heads of the various donor

funded health projects at the Ministry of Health formed the population, providing an estimated 75 respondents. Since the population of the projects was small, a census of all the projects was conducted.

### 3.3 Data collection instruments

Data was collected by use semi-structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were made up of open and closed ended questions. The closed ended questions were measured on a Likert scale of 1-5. The open-ended questions were used to collect more details on the respondent's perspectives on certain topics. Questionnaires were sent to all the 75 respondents and those filled in were collected.

## 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Descriptive statistics

This study investigated the top management support variable to determine if it moderated the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects. Out of the 75 questionnaires that were distributed 42 of them were returned from the respondents translating to a 56 percent response rate.

### 4.2 Top management support involvement

The study investigated the top management support in the initiation, planning, implementation and support and the findings were as in the table below.

**Table 1: Rating Top Management Support**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Involvement	42	4.02	0.924
Policies and strategies	42	4.00	1.012
Provision of resources	42	3.74	0.989
<b>Overall</b>		<b>3.92</b>	<b>0.975</b>

Source: (Survey data, 2019)

The study found out that the donor funded health project's top management were involved in project planning and implementation with an average of 4.02 and a standard deviation of 0.924. They developed appropriate policies and strategies with an average of 4.00 and a standard deviation of 1.012, and they provided adequate resources for the project with an average of 3.74 and a standard deviation of 0.989. The top management support factors had a mean rating of 3.92 by the respondents which approximated to 4 on the Likert scale, which implies the top management support to the donor funded health projects was very good. This suggests that top management support had a high effect on the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya.

Moreover, the study revealed that a proportion of 78.5 percent agreed or strongly agreed that the project top management were involved in project initiation. Only 11.9 percent were neutral, while 9.5 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. On whether top management were involved in project planning and

implementation 71.5 percent agreed or strongly agreed, 19 percent were neutral, while 9.5 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Of the 42 respondents, 76.2 percent held that project top management provided adequate human resources to the project, while 9.6 percent disagreed and 14.3 percent were neutral. This means that project top management supported the implementation of projects. On whether project top management provided adequate support in the execution of project plans, 35.37 percent strongly agreed, 33.3 percent agreed, 16.7 percent were neutral while 9.5 percent disagreed as 4.8 percent strongly disagreed. Further, 76.2 percent held that project top management policies adequately supported project implementation, 16.7 percent were neutral and 10.2 percent disagreed.

The statement on whether project top management develops workable project strategies was highly supported with 66.7 percent of the responses either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement. A proportion of 21.4 percent were neutral on this statement while 7.1 percent and 4.8 percent

either disagreed or strongly disagreed respectively. Regarding whether project top management plays their liaison roles well with donors, 45.2 percent agreed while 31 percent strongly agreed. A proportion of 11.9 percent gave a neutral rating, while 11.9 percent disagreed. Three quarters of the responses received indicated that top management fully supported monitoring and evaluation activities, while 66.6 percent confirmed that top

management adequately motivated project team members.

### 4.3 Regression analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to establish how project top management support affected the strength of the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya. The findings are as shown in the table below.

**Table 2:** Moderating effect

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Correlations		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1 (Constant)	2.848	1.431		1.991	0.001			
Macro Environment Factors (X)	0.130	0.503	0.213	0.258	0.03	0.020	0.042	0.039
XZ	0.022	0.117	0.196	0.190	0.00	0.185	0.031	0.029
Top Management (Z)	0.196	0.342	0.285	0.575	0.00	0.362	0.093	0.087

*a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Donor Funded Health Projects*

*Source: Survey data, 2019*

The effect of top management support moderation on the relationship between the macro environment factors and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya was determined using a regression model as recommended by Fairchild and Mackinnon (2010). According to Andersson, et al. (2014), moderation variables modify the theoretical mechanisms between the independent and the dependent variables. Moderation is confirmed when the influence of a predictor variable (X) on a predicted variable (Y) changes across levels of a moderating variable (Z) (Andersson et al., 2014).

The coefficients of all the variables based on the moderating model were found positive and significant at 5 percent significance level as summarized in the table above. From the table, the direct effect of the macro environment on the performance of donor funded health projects had a coefficient of 0.130, while the combined effect of the macro environment and top management support on the performance of donor funded health projects had a reduced coefficient of 0.022. This was found significant at 5 percent significance level (p value = 0.00<0.050). According to Andersson et al. (2014), a moderator variable changes the nature or strength of the relationship between a predictor variable and a predicted variable.

Thus, the impact of the macro environment on the performance of donor funded health projects is weakened when top management support is introduced (Andersson et al., 2014).

The fitted model after the moderating effect was:

$$Per = 2.848 + 0.13X + 0.196Z + 0.022XZ$$

Per = Performance of donor funded health projects

Z = Top management support

X = Composite index representing the macro environment factors

From the research results, the null hypothesis that top management support has no significant effect on the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects was not accepted. Instead, the alternate hypothesis that top management support has a significant effect on the performance of donor funded health projects was accepted. This is in line with the suggestions by Ahmed, et al. (2014) and Ahmed (2016) that top management support is a key success factor that adversely affects the performance of projects in organizations.

## 5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Summary

The top management support was found to have a moderating effect on the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects. Majority of the respondents acknowledged that the project top management were involved in project initiation. A small portion of the respondents were neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed that the project top management were involved in the project initiation. The study further established that project top management were involved in project planning and implementation to a great degree. It was also revealed that, project top management provided adequate human resources, support in the execution of project plans as well as adequate support in the implementation of donor funded health projects.

### 5.2 Conclusions

Top management involvement in project initiation, planning and implementation has an influence on the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya. From this study, all respondents held that top management support has an effect on the performance of donor funded health projects in Kenya. Majority of the respondents indicated that the top management was committed to ensure the projects were completed as scheduled. The study findings confirmed that top management support is a significant moderating variable when it is rated very good and excellent. Thus, this study concludes that top management support is a significant moderator of the relationship between the macro environment and the performance of the donor funded health projects.

### 5.3 Recommendations

The findings from this study indicated that top management support had a significant effect on the performance of donor funded health projects. This will motivate the top management of the health agencies in Kenya and the implementing agencies of the donor funded health projects to enhance their support

to further improve on the performance of the donor funded health projects. The study revealed areas in the top management support that requires improvement. With this in view, the top management of the health agencies are better guided and, thus will be guided in seeking for ways of improving on those particular areas so as to enhance their level of support.

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