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Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to find out the influence of stakeholder engagement on the sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya.

Methodology: This study used a mixed method research design where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, then analyzed, and conclusions drawn. The research design used was explanatory. The target population was 700 employees drawn from various stakeholders in the health sector. The study adopted stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques to select a sample of 230 respondents. The study used questionnaires to collect primary data. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were computed. The data was presented using Tables.

Findings: The study found out that there exists a relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. The statistical results of coefficients showed that the legal and regulatory framework moderates the relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. The study therefore concludes that an improvement in stakeholder engagement will lead to an improvement in sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study was anchored on Ladder of Participation Model. The study therefore recommends that the health sector in Kenya should work towards strengthening the frameworks for stakeholder engagement in the health-related projects if sustainability of the projects must be attained. There is great need to review and ensure stakeholder relationship management, stakeholder participation in decision making of key activities as well as ensure avenues to enable stakeholders actively participate in project activities across the entire project life cycle. The study recommends stakeholder mapping to be done based on meritocracy. The study recommends that the legal and regulatory framework around the stakeholder engagement should be strengthened to ensure compliance.

Keywords: *Stakeholder Participation, Sustainability, Donor Funded Projects, Health Sector*

INTRODUCTION

A stakeholder is an institution, individual or group of people with interests or is affected by the implementation of a given project (Schwermer, Barz, Zablotski, 2020). Stakeholders in public projects may be beneficiaries or citizens, donors, contractors, suppliers, evaluators, county government, media, etc. Project stakeholders have dynamic needs, interests, and expectations for the project (Kilonzo, & George, 2017 Schwermer, *et al*, 2020). The way managers allow stakeholders to participate and integrate needs during implementation determines both performance and sustainability of projects. Thus, effective stakeholder participation processes should allow parties with stake to freely express their views, opinions, thoughts, and ideas on the most sustainable project decisions (Ratnayake, Wickramaarachchi, & Wattege 2017).

A stakeholder has interest in a project intervention, directly or indirectly. It is imperative that project strategic planning is done in consultation with both primary and secondary stakeholders, in a transparent and accountable manner of prioritizing interventions in the light of limited resources. To do this it is important to engage major stakeholders including donor community, strategic government ministries, the community, and cultural leaders (UNAIDS, 2020).

Public health programs that focus on health improvement have been shown to deliver positive health outcomes, however, the maintenance of these programs over long periods and beyond the funding lifecycle has often been a challenge (Scheirer 2018). At the centre of this sustainability are the health systems that need to be well maintained for optimal output and health outcomes. The provision of financial resources from a particular funder only lasts for a defined period, after which funding is expected to be received from other sources (Schell, Luke, Schooley, Elliott, Herbers, Mueller, Bunger, 2017).

The key to effective project cycle management and sustainability is to ensure that the stakeholders have a voice in project decisions, and that project decisions are based on relevant and sufficient information that will allow sufficient contribution at all stages (Späth & Scolobig, 2016). Regardless of the institutional differences, the principles of project management remains so that all project cycles will share the common characteristics where a project cycle defines key decisions, information requirements and responsibilities at each phase in a participatory manner (Späth & *et al*, 2016).

The sustainability of a program is influenced by various elements, such as the content of project activities, partnerships at community level, organizational practices, and perceived benefits of the project (LaPelle, Zapka, Ockene ,2019). These elements termed sustainability outcomes reflect the sustained continuation of a project or program to meet its intended results beyond the externally funded project cycle. In the health sector, there are also support functions that hold a high premium to the success of programmes and projects. These could include procurement, equipment maintenance, systems, and capacity building among others.

The success of a project is achieved when the set project goals are realized but it is deemed sustainable if its objectives continue to be realized long after the project has ended and more, so when external funding has ended (Tak, Seo & Roh 2019). External donor agencies utilize projects as a common mechanism to deliver intended actions, objectives, and goals. While the value of donor support is undisputable, with visible or evident short-term benefits, uncertainty remains on whether or not donor funding results in sustainable benefits long after the donor financing has ended. Sustainability would imply that systemic benefits are conferred to both

present and future generations through resilient health structures, practices, and systems for effective service delivery (Potluka & Svecova, 2019).

Each phase of the project cycle has specific priorities and requires stakeholder's inputs to produce relevant outputs for assuring sustainability (Combaz & Mcloughlin, 2014). The implication here is that a successful project is the result not only of the accuracy of the technical solution, but also of the acceptance by all the parties involved, hence their participation. Experience has shown that too many decisions concerning projects have been taken without sufficient consultation with beneficiaries and stakeholders, and without the necessary information hence projects becoming unsustainable (Nyaguthii & Oyugi, 2013). The key to good project cycle management is to ensure that the stakeholders have a voice in project decisions and that project decisions are based on relevant and sufficient information (IFAD, 2012; Baum 1978; PMBOK, 2008 & Shikuku, 2012). For purposes of this study stakeholder engagement was operationalized through indicators including stakeholder relationship management, level of involvement, and avenues of engagement.

Phillips, Dalziel and Sjogren (2021) emphasized that a lot of funds globally have contributed to enhancing peoples' standards of living. One critical obstacle however has been the inability for projects to persist after an external donor exits due to reduced participation and ownership role of beneficiaries largely resulting from reduced or no further direct monetary benefits. Without project ownership by the community which is the main contributor to success or failure of community-based projects, sustainability becomes a mirage. This is in addition to other factors internal or external to a project, such as institutional, technical, economic, social, and financial factors and more so, if these factors are not considered well in the project management cycle.

All over the world, there is an emerging trend in the adoption of public or stakeholders' participation policies in project development. For example, a study conducted in the United States on 90 project designers and managers in local health facilities in Dalas Texas, revealed that they were adopting systematic approaches that integrate stakeholders in decision making during project implementation (Langrafe, Barakat, Stocker & Boaventura, 2020). The study concluded that stakeholder engagement was key to effective project implementation.

A study conducted in Malaysia revealed that, interests of stakeholders are addressed through collaborative engagements in the project cycle to promote sustainable impacts (Varral, 2020; Panneer, Kantamaneni, Pushparaj, Shekhar, Bhat & Rice, 2021). This study was conducted in companies involved in the distribution of pharmaceuticals on a sample size of 55 companies. The respondents included supervisors and operational staff. Questionnaires were used to collect data and the data was analysed using excel and e- views.

In a comparative analysis research done in West and South African countries, governments were observed to institute appropriate public participation laws and guidelines in order to optimize stakeholders' capacities in bolstering sustainability of projects. For instance, public organizations were observed to be employing structured cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholders' approaches for integrating governments, international players, donors, business players, and local communities in sustainable decision making (Goll, Uhl, & Zwiers, 2019). The variables used in this study included decision making, consultation, and the level of participation. The South African Countries seemed to uphold stakeholder engagement better than the West African Countries.

Warinda, Nyariki, Wambua, Muasya and Hanjira (2020) conducted a study within the East African region on sustainability of investment projects. The respondents included project managers, investment partners and regulators. Online surveys were done to collect data from a sample size of 90 respondents. The findings indicated that governments were incorporating sustainable development strategies through stakeholder involvement with an aim of promoting long-term positive impacts of investment projects (Warinda, *et al,* 2020).

In Kenya, participation of the public and stakeholders in development projects is not only anchored in the Constitution of Kenya 2010 but also guided by the public participation Act of 2019. Furthermore, stakeholders' mapping and partnerships is recognized as the ultimate vehicle towards sustainable realization of the Kenya's Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (Government of Kenya, 2019). This indicates that stakeholders` participation is a core element for project sustainable impacts.

Stakeholder and public participation in public projects are necessitated by law in Kenya. However, reports and studies have attributed poor delivery of government projects to inadequate stakeholder participation (IGRCK, 2019; IISS, 2018; Musau & Kirui, 2018; Matu, Kyalo, Mbugua & Mulwa 2020; Moulid, Muchelule & Wechuli, 2021). While successful projects are implemented collaboratively, not all projects are effective in rendering sustainable benefits. For instance, the International Monetary Fund (2020) alleges that half of all Kenya`s Big Four Projects have stalled due to over ambition and manipulation to appease electorates, while key elements like stakeholder engagement were overlooked.

In support, Odhiambo (2020) attributes failure of Kenya's mega projects to poor implementation decisions that fail to adopt collaborative decision making that would lead to sustainability. Examples of stalled projects include the construction of the Arror-Kimwarer Dam Projects at a cost of US$ 630Million (Rutto, 2020) and Galana Kulalu Irrigation Project at a cost of US$4.5Billion (Odhiambo, 2020). Other projects that have stalled indefinitely include the UHC, the National Housing Development Fund, and the Nairobi Commuter Railway project (Odhiambo, 2020). Since 2002, all stalled public projects in Kenya are valued at US$ 90Billion (Guguyu, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Ladder of Participation Model

The model Ladder of Participation by Arnstein (1969) was first employed in the concept of community participation. Arnstein's framework suggests there are various levels of participation and engagement in programmes, projects and activity decision making processes. For example, the level of 'informing' may present significant differences in the quality, type and detail of information conveyed. The ladder signifies more control being better than less control, yet in practice, increased control is not likely desired by the community. Moreover, control should be increased alongside the necessary support so as not to result in failure.

The importance of this model comes from the recognition of the existence of different participants and their different levels of participation. These range from manipulation, through consultation and genuine participation. This determines the levels of partnership with citizens. Practically however, participation levels often present a complex continuum instead of the desired or expected simple series of steps. This model presents eight levels and types of

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stakeholder participation including manipulation and therapy which is considered non-participative, the third is informing- which is one way flow of information.

The fourth level is consultation- done through surveys, meetings, and public inquiry, while the fifth level is placation where citizens only advise but that's how far it goes. The sixth level is partnership where there is power re-distribution, while the seventh level is delegated power where stakeholders have the power to make decisions and assure accountability. The last level is citizen control-where participants can handle the entire job and manage programs, projects and given activities. This model supports the independent variable on stakeholder engagement as a variable that influences sustainability of donor funded projects.

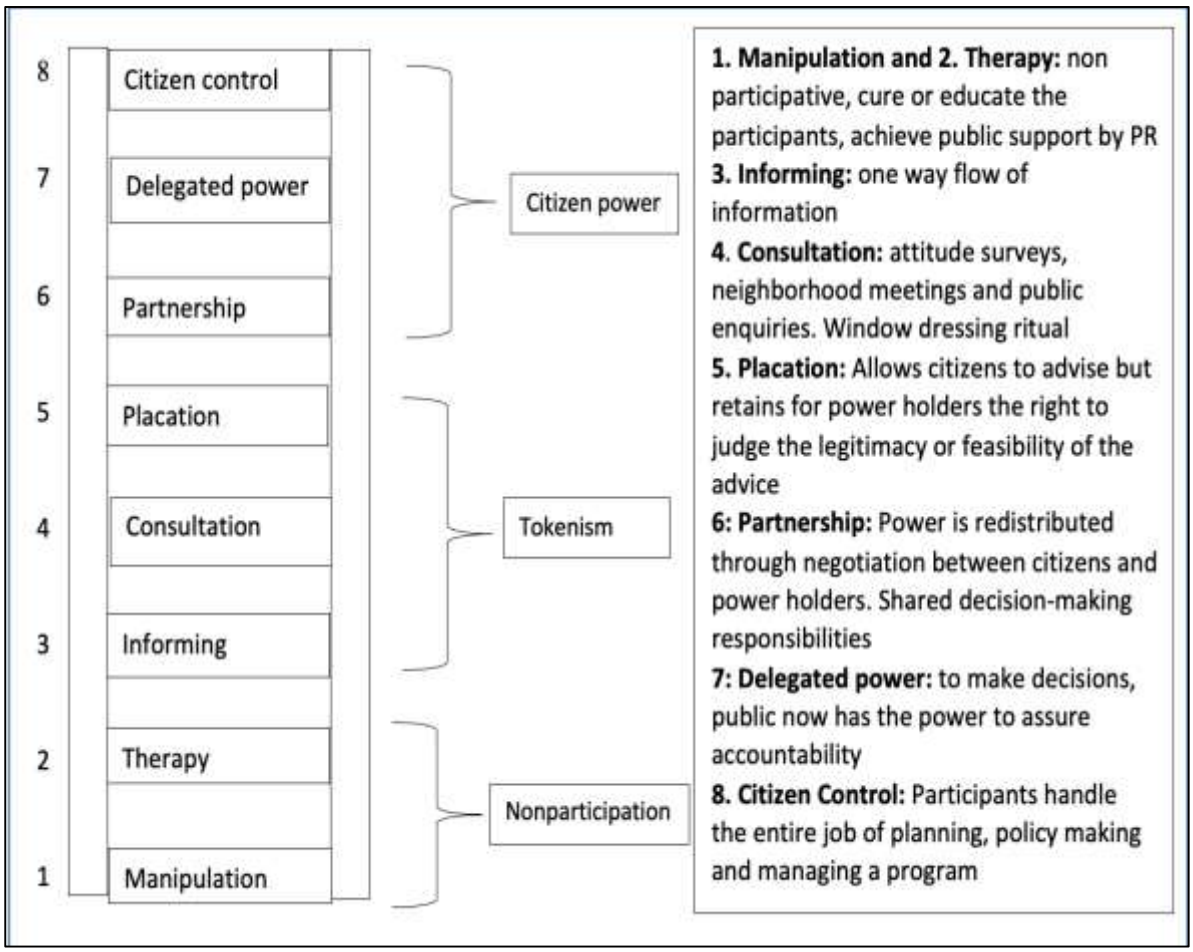

Figure 1: The Ladder of Citizen Participation Model

Critique of Literature Review

The Ladder of Citizen Participation Model articulates eight levels of participation that are beneficial in project sustainability, however critiques argue that not all levels contribute to sustainability. For instance, the levels of manipulation and therapy could be counterproductive once the stakeholders discover this. Even at the placation level stakeholders may advise but their advice may not necessarily be considered.

Most of the other studies conducted on similar variables like sustainability were carried out on governments and not specific institutions. Some were carried out on governments in South Africa, others on West African countries, while others in East African country governments.

This is a very broad scope that would hinder generalization of results. This current study was guided by a smaller scope being the health sector in Kenya.

Research Gaps

Past research studies indicate that many donors funded projects provide short- and medium-term benefits to the targeted beneficiary but lack in-built mechanisms to ensure sustenance of project benefits after donors have terminated their support. Literature reviewed has shown that most studies on project sustainability have been carried out for other sectors rather than health, yet those undertaken on the health sector were largely service delivery or treatment-oriented, lacking specific focus on systems approach or sustainability.

Further, relatively few studies done on the health sector emphasize continuation of project benefits, rather continuation of the project itself through additional/increased donor funding. In terms of technical focus, most past studies have addressed the subjects of project success and project sustainability rather separately. Nonetheless, initiatives to integrate the two themes are picking up hence the need to refocus research along these lines. This study ties the two together by showing the correlation between sustainability indicators and the eventual sustenance of benefits/outcomes as a critical success factor (Martens *et al.*, 2014).

With sustainability being highly influenced by contextual factors, further study is proposed on applicability, functionality, and efficacy of sustainability monitoring models as well as how leadership influences sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector. Further, many past studies have utilized qualitative approaches in population surveys, largely using participatory rapid appraisals for data collection. Future research invoking quantitative approaches is proposed, for generalization of findings and to move this widely researched area to another level of testing of previously developed models, away from determining sustainability indicators and developing models.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the positivism research philosophy. This study used explanatory survey design. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Consequently, the data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods (content analysis). The unit of observation was 700 members and/or employees working in institutions. Information was also collected from project beneficiaries. Some of the donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya target the maternal, neonatal and child health programs for child welfare, antenatal, post-natal and primary health care services. The study adopted stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques to ensure that the sample size was representative of the population. A sample size of 230 was used in the study. The study used a questionnaire to collect data. The questionnaire had both open ended and closed ended questions. The study used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 to analyze the research findings. Data was interpreted based on the study objectives and hypotheses and presented in distribution tables, graphs, and charts. Both descriptive and statistical modeling were done, and statistics generated through SPSS version 27.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the study findings as guided by the Five Point Likert Scale questions used in this study. Frequencies, means(M) and the standard deviations (SD) were used to interpret

the study findings. The study used a 5- point Likert Scale where 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3-neutral, 4- agree and 5- strongly agree. Based on the response scale given by the respondents, frequencies, means, and standard deviations were computed and used to interpret the results.

When placed on a continuous scale, values above 3.5 show that respondents agreed on the statement while values below 3.5 show that respondents disagreed. The values of standard deviations were used to determine convergence and divergence of views expressed by respondents on the statements. Low values of standard deviations show that respondents shared common views on the statements and higher values of standard deviations show that respondents had divergent views.

Stakeholder Engagement

The respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements on stakeholders' engagement. The findings as presented in table 4.8 show that 58.2% of the respondents disagreed that there was good stakeholder relationship management in their institutions at (M= 3.344, SD=1.342); while 48.1 % disagreed that various stakeholders are involved in the decision making of key activities, hence support sustainability efforts at (M= 3.293, SD=1.441).Another 45.7% disagreed, while 43.9% agreed that their institutions had proper avenues for stakeholder engagement at (M= 3.181, SD=1.475).

Findings also show that 56.8% agreed that the input from stakeholders influences project activities at (M= 3.762, SD=1.674). A total of 44.5% of the respondents agreed that stakeholders were involved in the entire project life cycle at (M= 3.507, SD=1.251), while 62.1% agreed that their institutions map stakeholders to identify beneficial stakeholders at (M=3.817, SD=1.142). The results also show that 68.3 % of the respondents agreed that stakeholder engagement influences sustainability of projects at (M= 3.902, SD=1.235).

The findings indicate that there were mixed opinions on the variable stakeholder engagement, with some of the respondents disagreeing with the statements on stakeholders' engagements, while others agreed with the statements. These findings concur with those of other scholars. A study by (Ratnayake, *et al*. 2017) show that stakeholders participate at different levels and hold different opinions, views, and ideas. Thus, effective stakeholder participation processes should allow parties with stake to freely express their different views, opinions, thoughts, and ideas on the most sustainable project decisions.

Qualitative data as guided by the statement 'how else does stakeholder engagement influence sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya?' The respondents suggested that stakeholders provide project requirements and constraints that could help reduce risks in the project life cycle. Respondents also mentioned that stakeholders help an organization to meet its strategic objectives by contributing their experience and perspective to a project. Hence there is a need for good collaboration and agreement. Stakeholder mapping should be all inclusive to ensure the diversity criterion is met.

On the statement- suggest ways by which stakeholder engagement can be used to enhance project sustainability in the health sector in Kenya, findings revealed that there is need for standardization in the way stakeholders are brought into projects. Other respondents also suggested meritocracy as opposed to interests that are likely to be politically instigated could be applied in stakeholder mapping and engagement to ensure full benefit from stakeholder engagement.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics on Stakeholder Engagement

Statements	1 %	2 %	3 %	4 %	5 %	Mean	Std. Dev.
There is good stakeholder relationship management in my institution	22.1	36.1	3.8	24.8	13.2	3.344	1.342
Various stakeholders are involved in the decision making of key activities, hence support sustainability efforts	23.8	24.3	15.9	21.3	14.7	3.293	1.441
My institution has proper avenues for stakeholder engagement	22.5	23.2	10.4	15.4	28.5	3.181	1.475
The input from stakeholders influences project activities	11.2	10.0	22.1	34.7	22.1	3.762	1.674
Stakeholders are involved in the entire project life cycle	10.2	12.1	33.2	33.6	10.9	3.507	1.251
My institution maps stakeholders to identify beneficial stakeholders	14.7	14.7	8.5	48.9	13.2	3.817	1.142
Stakeholder engagement influences sustainability of projects	3.5	13.2	16.5	53.6	13.2	3.902	1.235

Stakeholder Engagement and Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects

Linear Regression

The first hypothesis of the study was **H_{01}** stakeholder engagement has no significant influence on sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. To test this hypothesis, the study carried out regression between stakeholder engagement and sustainability. The findings as presented in Table 2, show the value of adjusted R^2 was 0.329 which implies that 32.9% of variations in sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya can be attributed to changes in stakeholder engagement. The remaining 67.1% variations in sustainability can be attributed to other variables other than stakeholder engagement. The findings also show that there is a moderate positive relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability as indicated by a coefficient (R) value of 0.577.

Table 2: Model Summary for Stakeholder Engagement and Sustainability

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.577[a]	.333	.329	.110222

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder Engagement

Analysis of Variance

F-values are used to determine the significance of a group of variables. From the ANOVA findings, the p-value obtained was 0.00 which is less than 0.05, an indication that the model was significant. The findings also show that the f-statistic value (16.594) is greater than the F-critical value ($F_{1,213}$=3.885). Since the f-statistic value is greater than the f-critical value it can be deduced that there was goodness of fit of the model fitted for this study and therefore stakeholder engagement can predict sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya.

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Table 3: ANOVA for Stakeholder Engagement and Sustainability

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	0.211	1	0.211	16.594	.000[b]
	Residual	2.556	208	0.012		
	Total	2.767	209			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability
b. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder Engagement

Beta Coefficients

From the equation below, when stakeholder engagement is held at a constant zero, sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya will be at a constant value of 1.491. The findings further revealed that a unit improvement in stakeholder engagement will lead to a 0.427-unit improvement in sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. The findings reveal the t-statistic (5.010) and a p-value (0.00) which is less than the study's level of significance (0.05). Therefore, the study rejects the null hypothesis ($\mathbf{H_{01}}$), and fails to reject the alternative hypothesis ($\mathbf{H_{A1}}$). The study therefore posits that stakeholder engagement has a positive significant influence on sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya.

The study findings concur with those of other scholars. Langrafe, (2020) observed that stakeholder participation is an interactive process that entails communication, listening, consulting, collaboration and merging with the community ho act as a partner and will participate to give consent and opinions regarding the decision-making process. Empowering stakeholders in terms of the ability to influence the decision-making processes and taking into consideration the ideas generated by the community impacts positively on project sustainability.

Table 4: Coefficients for Stakeholder Engagement and Sustainability

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.491	0.108		13.954	.000
	Stakeholder Engagement	0.427	0.101	0.848	5.010	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability

From the coefficients table, the following model was fitted;

$$\mathbf{Y= 1.491 + 0.427\ X_1 + \mathcal{E}}$$

SUMMARY, CONCLUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Stakeholder Engagement

The study examined the influence of stakeholder engagement on the sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. Various tests were carried out to determine the relationship that existed between the two variables. The study found out that stakeholder engagement had a strong positive correlation with sustainability r = .637, p = .000. Linear regression and ANOVA statistic were carried out to test the hypothesis.

The results indicated that 32.9% of variations in sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya can be attributed to changes in stakeholder engagement. Further there was a positive significant relationship and goodness of fit of the model fitted between stakeholder engagement and sustainability. The results of coefficients of the model estimates were significant at the 0.05 level of significant since the p value was 0.012. This implied that the study rejected the null hypothesis and therefore held that there is a positive significant relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health in Kenya.

A regression analysis was also done to determine the influence of the legal and regulatory framework on the relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability. The regression coefficients showed that stakeholder engagement interception with the legal and regulatory framework was significant since it had a p value of 0.001 which was less than 0.05 (β = .492, t = 5.713, p =.001). Since the coefficient of interception was significant, this implies that the legal and regulatory framework had a moderating effect on the relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya.

Conclusion

The study found out that there exists a relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. The statistical results of coefficients showed that the legal and regulatory framework moderates the relationship between stakeholder engagement and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. The study therefore concludes that an improvement in stakeholder engagement will lead to an improvement in sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. This relationship will further be enhanced if the variable legal and regulatory framework is strengthened.

Recommendations of the Study

The study findings indicated that there exists positive relationships between stakeholder engagement, resource mobilization, process execution & leadership practices and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. The findings also revealed that the legal and regulatory framework has a moderating effect on the relationship between stakeholder engagement, resource mobilization, process execution & leadership practices and sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya.

The study therefore recommends that the health sector in Kenya should work towards strengthening the frameworks for stakeholder engagement in the health-related projects if sustainability of the projects must be attained. There is great need to review and ensure stakeholder relationship management, stakeholder participation in the decision making of key activities as well as ensure avenues to enable stakeholders actively participate in project activities along the entire project life cycle. The study recommends stakeholder mapping to be done based on meritocracy. The study recommends that the legal and regulatory framework around the stakeholder engagement should be strengthened to ensure compliance.

Based on the summary and conclusions above, the study recommends that the health sector unit that is concerned with implementing donor funded projects should review the instruments of leadership to ensure proper networking and collaborating in projects, and that leaders

facilitate coaching to all team members. Communication and more specifically timely feedback came out as a key contributor to the project process execution success.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the empirical evidence of this research, the study recommends that policy makers, the Republic of Kenya, donors, and other interested stakeholders should design policies that support all-inclusive stakeholder engagement.

Suggestions for Further Studies

This study therefore recommends further studies on other variables that influence sustainability. Some of these would include environment (political, social, technical, ecological, political), and prevailing trends in the health sector among others. This current study focused on donor funded projects in the health sector, future studies should be carried out with a focus on other sectors like agriculture, environment, energy education, manufacturing etc. The study also recommends further studies that are longitudinal in nature as opposed to the cross-sectional nature of this current study.

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