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Effect Of Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, And Learning Practices On The Project Success: A Case Of Green Gicumbi Project In Rwanda (2019-2023)

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the effect of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) practices on the success of the Green Gicumbi project in Rwanda (2019-2023). The study was guided by the Theory of change, Stakeholder theory, and Decision theory. The study adopted a descriptive and correlational research design. The study population of 30,028 has been considered within a sample size of 395 respondents comprising project stakeholders (8), project implementors (20), and beneficiaries (367). The researcher used a closed-ended questionnaire, and interview guide to collect data, and a response rate of 96% was obtained (378 respondents). A purposive sampling technique was applied in this research to determine the number of respondents. The researcher analyzed the results with the help of SPSS version 27.0 whereas correlation analysis was used to define the relationship lying between the research variables. The study findings revealed an R-value of 0.902 indicating a strong positive relationship between the predictors and the outcome variable, and R Square value of 0.813 indicating that approximately 81.3% of variability in the outcome variable could be explained by the predictors in the model. The coefficients of the predictors indicate their individual effects on the GGP performance. The regression model is presented as follow: $Y= 0.977+ .045X_1 + .094X_2 + 0.132X_3+ 0.819X_4$. The correlation analysis indicated that there is a positive and significant relationship between project MEAL practices and the success of GGP. The study concluded that the predictors of theregression model had the effect on the GGP performance in Gicumbi district, Rwanda. The researcher recommends in the form of policy-making and planning that project stakeholders and implementors should put more effort into mainstreaming to ensure the beneficiaries have the same understanding of the effect of MEAL components on the project's success and to promote effective stakeholders' engagement in all project stages of green related project in Rwanda. Regarding the issue of sustainability, the National Fund for Environment-FONERWA should plan to have in place a team during and after project completion for project post-evaluation to measure the impact and the sustainability of the project as well as the strategy for project maintenance.

Keywords: *Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Learning, and Project Success.*

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1. Introduction

A project is an effort that involves a series of activities and resources to achieve a certain output, considering some constraints such as time, cost, and quality which often introduces a change for existing or non-existing products or services (Bahadur, 2020). In 2018, Canada would move to legalize and regulate the non-medical use and supply of cannabis. Since this would be based on data including pre-legalization data and post-legalization to remain valuable, yet the implementation to be comprehensive it should include a focused monitoring and evaluation practice for the significant impact (Benedikt, Russell, Jürgen, & Pamela, 2019). In Europe (Switzerland), for project/program success MEAL practice should be based on stakeholder needs and expectations to ensure ownership, understanding, and effective use of MEAL information (International Federation of Red Cross, 2019) In China, Monitoring and evaluation practice is the critical component of project development, it serves as an essential tool to ensure the project's success. The M&E framework enables on-time tracking of project progress, identification of deviations, and potential threats to allow timely corrective actions or adjustments (Borisch, Chong, & Jahaf, 2023)

In Nigeria, it has been revealed that M&E might have a direct influence on project performance and sustainability to the extent of M&E being more comprehensive to lead to successful project performance and sustainability of the project (Emmanuel, 2019). It was revealed that in Ghana, public workers and executioners of public projects are not as committed to the work as their private counterparts, and they therefore fail to monitor government projects accordingly. This leads to the payment of 10% of the contract sum to the officials and the middlemen, and therefore, consultants; who are government officials were unable to monitor the contractors accordingly (David, 2020). In Zambia, M&E is not optional for project success but a must-practice. M&E plays a crucial role in ensuring successful project implementation, it helps to optimize the proper resource use and allocation to prevent cost overrun and drive efficiency (Chanda, 2024)

In Kenya, the Influence of monitoring and evaluation on the performance of construction projects, such as the case of the Mombasa-Nairobi pipeline construction project," has observed that the presence of a functional M&E department and implementation M&E activities on development projects enhances project success (Lekamparish, 2017). In Tanzania, the high failure rate in public projects could be due to the failure to undertake clear monitoring and evaluation (Paul, 2020). In Uganda, the M&E plan logical framework plays a crucial role in project success and performance since it serves as a reference document for project targets, project indicators, methods, data collection frequency as well as accountability along the project processes (Sulaiman, Charles, & Frank, 2023)

Project monitoring and evaluation play a significant role in project success, which gives a clear understanding of what is to be done by project implementors to successfully perform the planned activities of the project and achieve the intended objectives (Didace & Claude, 2020)
By 2050, Rwanda expects to have the majority (70%) of the citizens living in urban areas and 30% of the population in rural areas. This 30% will need to thrive from rural areas, and the GoR should keep supporting such rural communities to thrive and supporting them to reduce the effects of climate change that lead to a variety of disasters and hazards (MoE, 2022)
Rwanda is very sensitive to climate change since the related effects are so numerous, and the northern province has been identified to be at high exposure to climate change effects within the Gicumbi district (FONERWA, 2018). GGP has started and faced various challenges during implementation that have been addressed through MEAL practices to enhance its success.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Projects are crucial for economic growth since development is based on infrastructures and facilities that are executed through different projects. However, projects are so important, that the attention given to them during their execution is unlikely little which drives most of them to fail. Around $1 million is wasted every 20 seconds or roughly $2 trillion wasted per year, collectively by organizations across the globe due to ineffective implementation of business strategy or through poor project management practices (PMI, 2018). Projects failure or missing the deadlines as planned is the core problem in many countries including African countries (Ahmed, 2019). About 52% of projects experience scope creep and roughly half 48% are not completed on time and complex projects are likely to be delivered without satisfying all the stakeholders' expectations (Dago, 2018)

Different projects across the world failed to realize their goals and some causes have been expressed such as poor planning, unclear goals, lack of leadership, conflict of interest, resource-related issues, technology challenges, and expectations not well set and managed (Michael, 2024). Despite various studies carried out to enhance projects' performance and success, still projects are collapsing surprisingly with no comprehensive reasons.

In Rwanda, the audit report for the year ended June 30, 2021, the auditor general Alexis Kamuhire presented to the Parliament that at least 37 contracts worth Rwf201 billion in 28 public entities and projects were delayed for a period of up to six years (Johnson, 2022). The Hackan peat power plant known as the Gishoma peat power plant, a project of $400million in the Gisagara district has delayed full operation because of climate change affecting the status of peat due to flooding, COVID-19 affecting the procurement process with other constraints including lack of MEAL practice have led to losses of Rwf160 million for staff wages only (Michel, 2022).

Over 5000 out of 9647 biogas plants constructed in Rwanda since 2007 have become white elephants due to poor workmanship and recruitment of staff with no required technical capacity to implement the project (Christophe, 2022). Nevertheless, various studies have been carried out on GGP none of them focused on the effect of MEAL practices on the success of the GGP. Therefore, this study intended to fill the existing gap of knowledge about the effect of MEAL practices on the success of the GGP.

1.2 Objective of the study

The general objective of this study was to assess the effect of monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) practices on the success of the Green Gicumbi Project (GGP) in Rwanda (2019-2023) with the following specific objectives:

- To assess the effect of MEAL planning on the success of the Green Gicumbi project
- To examine the effect of stakeholders' participation on the success of the Green Gicumbi project
- To investigate the effect of MEAL technical expertise on Green Gicumbi project's success.
- To assess the effect of the baseline survey on the success of the Green Gicumbi project

1.3 Research Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant effect of MEAL planning on the success of the GGP

H_{02}: There is no significant effect of stakeholder engagement on the success of the GGP

H_{03}: There is no significant effect of MEAL technical expertise on the success of the GGP

H_{04}: There is no significant effect of baseline survey on the success of the GGP

2. Literature review

This section reviews previous research and studies by scholars carried out on the effect of MEAL practices on the success of projects in Rwanda. It covers the conceptual review, theoretical review, empirical review, and conceptual framework diagram.

2.1 Conceptual Review

In this section, the conceptual review synthesizes the existing literature to identify key theories, concepts, and their interrelationships to identify gaps in knowledge and suggestions for future research.

2.1.1 Project Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

Projects in the 21st century are becoming increasingly more complex and require a monitoring, measuring, and control system that is dynamic to embrace the level of complexity present in most innovation projects nowadays. It has become clear that to measure project success effectively, project managers require tools and techniques that are very accurate in terms of measuring tasks performed to detect deviation by considering the project plan and taking appropriate actions forward on time as well as recording for future reference (Budeli, 2020). Accountability refers to the process of "giving an account" or being answerable or capable of being accounted for something or simply the ownership (Marvin & Christina, 2024).

2.1.2 Project MEAL Planning

In the 21st century, projects have been increasingly getting more complex and dynamic, so it requires much more attention to achieve the respective goals and objectives monitoring and measuring during the project lifecycle is very critical for project managers to keep everything planned on track to meet expectations of any project undertaken (Budeli, 2020)

2.1.3 Project Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder participation or engagement is a process of involving all individuals, groups, or organizations that may be directly or indirectly affected by or can influence a project, or decision. It is a key component in project management, business operations, and policy-making, looking to enhance effective communication, build trust, and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered to achieve project-set deliverables (Alan, 2017).

Stratford Peer Reviewed Journals and Book Publishing
Journal of Entrepreneurship & Project Managemen
Volume 8||Issue 7||Page 92-105 ||December||2024|
Email: info@stratfordjournals.org ISSN: 2716-8464

2.1.4 Project MEAL Technical Expertise of Staff

The absence of periodical discussion on M&E lessons, less focus on a field visit to the project sites, low level of IT skills to support related activities, lack of training for employees, and inadequate expertise to improve the M&E system have created a burden on the expertise that finally led to project failure (Lamesgin, 2021)

2.1.5. Project Baseline Survey

A baseline survey is a critical initial step in project planning and evaluation. It is for collecting data about the initial state of the project before project initiation and the collected data serves as reference information or baseline against which project progress and impact would be measured (MEAE, 2023)

2.2.5. Project Success

Project success is defined differently by authors, it's defined based on criteria related to the project management, stakeholder satisfaction, product quality, benefits of the project, and the impact or effects, and different definitions may be due to the great difficulty of variables measurement (Carmen & Sussy, 2020).

2.3 Theoretical Review

This study was guided by the theory of change, decision theory, and stakeholder theory.

2.3.1 Theory of Change (ToC)

ToC would improve the evaluation process by giving a comprehensive set of indicators to assess all stages of the causal pathway through which a mediation accomplishes impact, combining assessments of intercession adequacy with detailed process assessments into one theoretical framework (De Silva, et al., 2014).

For evaluation purposes, ToC should be done in parallel with practices of change. Since the ToC focuses on theorizing change from policies, and guidelines, the idea of practices of change emphasizes that change is initiated from strategies to be put into action and shaped by human engagements (Arensman, Waegeningh, & Wessel, 2018).

The myth of stability must be forgotten by the organizational leadership and begin to progress comfortably in situations with chaos. The authors indicate that organizational goals can not be always stable in this current and ongoing dynamic environment. The myth of stability & control should be erased from organizational leadership (Linda, David, Teresa, & Thea, 2014).

2.3.2 Decision Theory

Decision theory is a field of study dealing with the principles and models used to make proper decisions, especially under conditions of uncertainty or risk. It encompasses various frameworks and methodologies to evaluate and choose among alternative courses of action.

Nowadays, global crises and unstable economies are affecting social-economic development systems. It's important to provide tools for management which is the development of the models, methods, and information technologies optimization for better decision-making in conditions of risks, danger, and mixed chaotic environment (Ramazanov & Stemplewska, 2020)

Crucial to the decision theory is the concept of "satisficing" behavior of achieving acceptable economic objectives with risks and complications optimization to maximize profits. The theory offers a way to consider the psychological aspects of decision-making that the classical economists had tendance to ignore (Simon & Ellsberg, 2024)

2.3.3 Stakeholder Theory

The fundamental basis of stakeholder theory is to incorporate acceptance of some ideas such as that the stakeholders are individuals or groups with legitimate interests in procedural and/or substantive aspects of corporate activity and they are identified by their interests in the organization (Donaldson & Preston, 2017).

In the mid-1980s, the stakeholder theory appeared. It builds on the recognition of the role of stakeholders in the development of the corporation and it's interested in what happens outside it, which includes other stakeholders such as personnel, customers, banks, suppliers, the state, local authorities, trade unions, and others (Keremidchiev, 2021).

2.4. Empirical Review

Stakeholder participation or engagement is a process of involving all individuals, groups, or organizations that may be directly or indirectly affected by or can influence a project, or decision. In Arlington-Illinois State, projects with stakeholder involvement are more likely to end successfully while numerous projects would suffer from low stakeholder engagement (Alan, 2017). Several ministries in India continued to treat evaluation as an exercise in accountability, the Department of Expenditure (DoE), is responsible for the efficient and effective use of public resources with partner engagement to ensure program and project success (Vijay & Alok, 2020)

A survey of 115 companies and foundations in 15 countries in Latin America was carried out in 2019 and M&E was seen to be crucial for tracking program and project objectives rather than for making strategic and innovative decisions to enhance project success (Yanina & Frank, 2020).

A baseline survey is a critical initial step in project planning and evaluation. It is for collecting data about the initial state of the project before project initiation and the collected data serves as reference information (MEAE, 2023)

.5. Conceptual Framework

This study assessed whether MEAL practices affect the success of Green Gicumbi project

Stratford Peer Reviewed Journals and Book Publishing
Journal of Entrepreneurship & Project Managemen
Volume 8||Issue 7||Page 92-105 ||December||2024|
Email: info@stratfordjournals.org ISSN: 2716-8464

Independent Variables:

Project MEAL

Dependent Variable:

Project Success

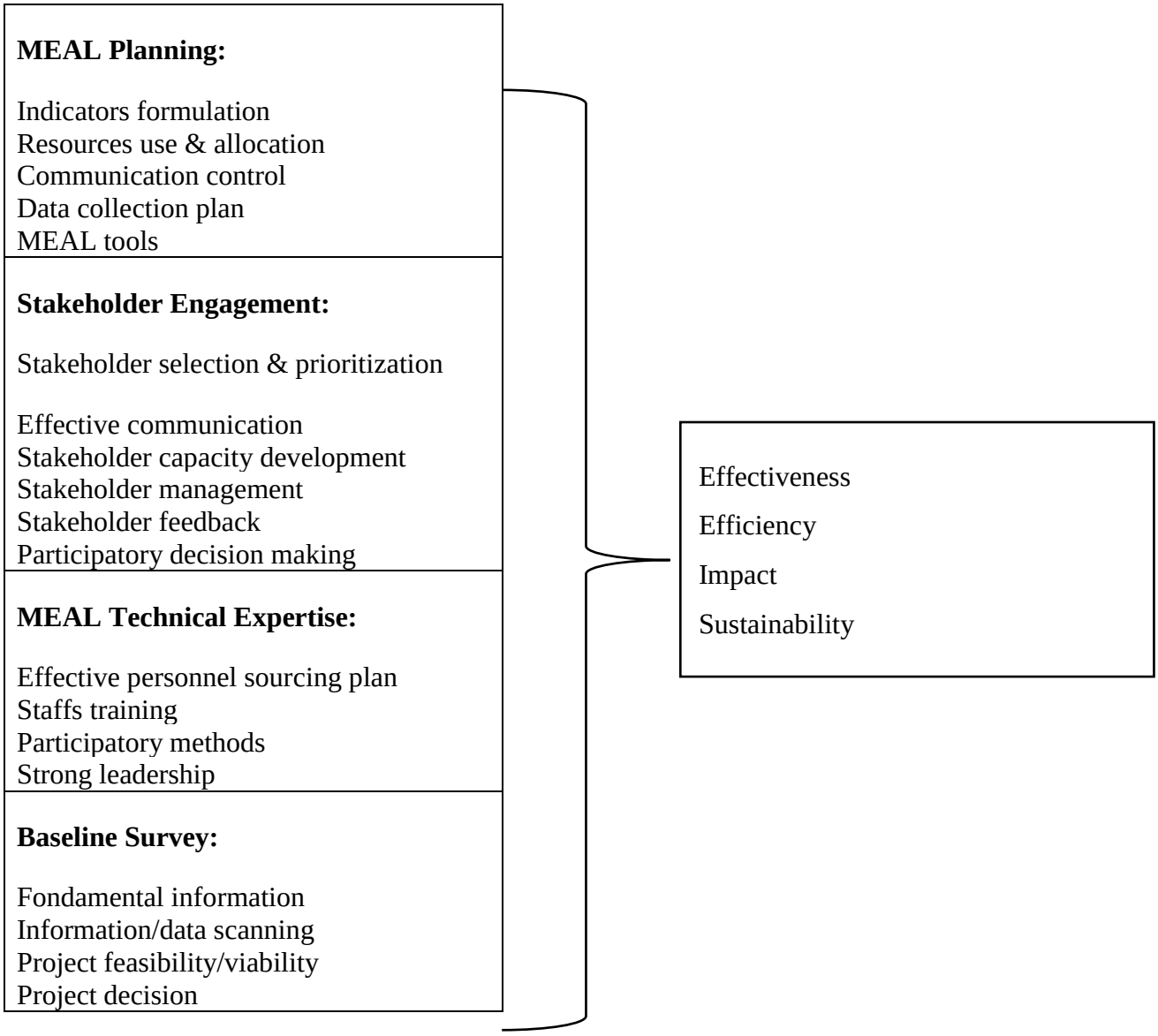

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework

Source: Researcher design (2024)

Stratford Peer Reviewed Journals and Book Publishing
Journal of Entrepreneurship & Project Managemen
Volume 8||Issue 7||Page 92-105 ||December||2024|
Email: info@stratfordjournals.org ISSN: 2716-8464

3. Research methodology

This section aims to show the methodology approaches and techniques, It includes the research design, population of the research, methods and techniques used in sampling and data collection. It explains how information is collected, processed, and analyzed to determine the implications of the findings.

Research design is defined as logical and systematic planning to direct any research study to specify its objectives, methodology, and techniques to achieve the goals (Khanam & Sumbl, 2019). A study population is a set of populations, objects, or events that the researcher or investigator ultimately wishes to generalize the results, The target population of this research was 30028 within a sample size of 395 respondents comprising project stakeholders, implementors, and beneficiaries.

The collected data were analyzed with the help of the software known as Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 27.0

4. Findings

This chapter contains the findings on data collected for the effect of MEAL practices on the success of GGP in Rwanda (2019-2023). The results were presented according to the research objectives as they were set in chapter one. Questionnaires were administered to 395 respondents and 378 respondents were able to successfully respond which is equal to 96% of response rate which promising the data accuracy to be considered.

4.1 Inferential Statistics (Research Hypothesis Testing)

During project implementation, understanding the real impact of MEAL practices on the project's success is very important. To explore the influence of MEAL practice on the success of GGP, four hypotheses (H_{01}, H_{02}, H_{03}, and H_{04}) have been crafted to scrutinize the significance of MEAL planning, stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise of staff, and baseline survey on the success of the Green Gicumbi project. By subjecting these four hypotheses to rigorous statistical examination, such investigation aims to reveal whether these elements play a pivotal role in enhancing the project's success or not.

The outcomes of the inferential analyses will not only deepen our understanding of MEAL's effect but will also provide valuable insights for the informed decision-making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects in Rwanda.

Table 1: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.902[a]	.813	.811	.09235

a. Predictors: (Constant), Baseline survey, Meal planning, Stakeholder engagement, Meal technical expertise
b. Dependant Variable: Project Success

Stratford Peer Reviewed Journals and Book Publishing
Journal of Entrepreneurship & Project Managemen
Volume 8||Issue 7||Page 92-105 ||December||2024|
Email: info@stratfordjournals.org ISSN: 2716-8464

Table 1 shows findings in Model Summary which provides important statistical information about a regression model. In our case, the model is used to predict the success of GGP (the dependent variable) based on several predictors, which include a constant and various components related to MEAL activities. R is the correlation coefficient, which indicates the strength and direction of the linear relationship between the dependent variable (GGP success) and the independent variables (predictors). An R-value of 0.902 suggests a strong positive correlation.

R-Square is also known as the coefficient of determination, this value (0.813) represents the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables. In our case, approximately 81.3% of the variability in GGP success can be explained by the predictors (dependent variables) while 18.7% of the variation in GGP success is due to other factors. Adjusted R Square is a modified version of R Square that adjusts for the number of predictors in the model. It gives an estimate of the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that is explained by the independent variables while accounting for model complexity.

An adjusted R-Square of 0.811 is close to the R-Square and suggests that the model is a good fit. Std. The error of the Estimate represents the standard deviation of the residuals, which are the differences between the actual and predicted values of the dependent variable. A lower value (0.09235 in our case) indicates a better fit of the model to the data. In brief, the model appears to have a strong positive relationship between the predictors (MEAL-related activities) and Green Gicumbi project success.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	13.825	4	3.456	405.243	.000[b]
	Residual	3.181	373	.009		
	Total	17.007	377			

a. Dependent Variable: Project Success

b. Predictors: (Constant), Baseline survey, Meal planning, Stakeholder engagement, Meal technical expertise

Table 2 provides the results of an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for the regression model used to predict GGP success. The ANOVA helps to assess whether the independent variables (MEAL planning, stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise of staff, and baseline survey) have a significant effect on the dependent variable (GGP success).

The sum of Squares is the total variance in the dependent variable that is partitioned into two components: Regression (explained by the model) and Residual (unexplained by the model), df (Degrees of Freedom) represents the number of categories within the predictor variable.

In our case, there are 4 degrees of freedom for the regression component and 373 degrees of freedom for the residual component.

Stratford Peer Reviewed Journals and Book Publishing
Journal of Entrepreneurship & Project Managemen
Volume 8||Issue 7||Page 92-105 ||December||2024|
Email: info@stratfordjournals.org ISSN: 2716-8464

Mean Square is the Sum of Squares divided by the corresponding degrees of freedom. The F-statistic tests whether the model's explanatory power is statistically significant. A high F-statistic (405.243 in our case) suggests that the model is statistically significant. Sig. (Significance) is the p-value associated with the F-statistic. A p-value of .000 (or close to 0) indicates that the model is statistically significant. The ANOVA results indicate that the model is highly significant, suggesting that at least one of the predictors (independent variables) significantly influences GGP success.

H_{01} stated, "There is no significant effect of MEAL planning on the success of GGP." The ANOVA shows that the model is highly significant (p-value = .000), which means that there is a significant effect of at least one of the predictors. Therefore, the hypothesis H_{01} is supported. H_{02} stated, "There is no significant effect of stakeholder engagement on the success of GGP." contrary to H_{01}, the model is highly significant (p-value = .000), indicating that at least one predictor has a significant effect.

Therefore, the hypothesis H_{02} is not supported. H_{03} said, "There is no significant effect of MEAL technical expertise of staff on the success of GGP." Again, the model is highly significant (p-value = .000), indicating the presence of a significant effect.

Therefore, the hypothesis H_{03} is not supported. H_{04} said, "There is no significant effect of the baseline survey on the success of GGP." Moreover, the model is highly significant (p-value = .000), indicating there is a significant effect. Therefore, the hypothesis H_{04} is not supported.

In summary, the ANOVA findings support three research hypotheses, suggesting that stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise of staff, and baseline survey all have significant effects on the success of Green Gicumbi project.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.977	.148		6.618	.000
	Meal planning	.045	.027	.045	1.651	.100
	Stakeholder engagement	.095	.030	.094	3.169	.002
	Meal technical expertise	.144	.044	.132	3.262	.001
	Baseline survey	.697	.034	.819	20.347	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Project Success						

Table 3 indicates Regression Coefficients presents the coefficients for each predictor in the multiple linear regression model used to predict Green Gicumbi project success.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4$$

From the results presented in Table 3, the established regression equation was:

GGP Success (Y) = β_0+ β1MP (MEAL planning) + β2SE (Stakeholder engagement) + β3MTE (MEAL technical expertise) + β4BS (Baseline survey) + ζ

Y = 0.977 + 0.045 (MP) + 0.094 (SE) + 0.132 (MTE) + 0.819 (BS) + 0.148

Based on the regression equation and findings presented in Table 3, it was revealed that

holding MEAL planning, Stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise, and baseline survey to a constant zero, project success would be 0.977. Indeed, this constant called y-intercept is not realistic but it is a needed parameter in the model. As per the findings, there is a positive and significant effect of MEAL planning on the success of GGP (β = 0.045; t-test = 1.651; p-value greater than 5%). This implies that a unit increase in MEAL planning would lead to an increase in success by a factor of 0.045. Likewise, there is a positive and significant effect of stakeholder engagement on the success of GGP (β = 0.094; t-test = 3.169; p-value < 5%). This implies that a unit increase in stakeholder engagement would lead to an increase in project success by a factor of 0.094.

Furthermore, there is a positive and significant effect of MEAL technical expertise on the success of GGP (β = 0.132; t-test = 3.262; p-value < 5%). This implies that a unit increase in the MEAL technical expertise of staff would lead to an increase in project success by a factor of 0.132. Finally, there is a positive and significant effect of the baseline survey on the success of GGP (β = 0.819; t-test = 20.347; p-value < 5%). This implies that a unit increase in baseline survey would lead to an increase in GGP success by a factor of 0.819. From these presented regression analysis results, each component as a predictor would contribute to GGP success by a significant range, this proves that all the variables were statistically significant.

4.2 Verification of hypotheses

The researcher concluded that there was a strong positive and significant effect among the research variables as shown by the regression analysis since they indicated a positive effect of project MEAL practices in terms of stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise, baseline survey on the success of GGP. Therefore, the study's independent variable has a significant effect on the study's dependent variable. This revealed that three hypotheses were rejected and accepted one.

5. Conclusion

The researcher's interest was to assess the effect of MEAL practices on the success of Green Gicumbi project in Rwanda (2019-2023). The findings gave a picture that MEAL practices in terms of MEAL planning, stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise of staff, and baseline survey were well practiced by the management of the Green Gicumbi project.

The model exhibits a strong positive relationship between the predictors (MEAL planning, stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise of staff, and baseline survey) and the success of GGP, as indicated by the higher correlation coefficient (R) of 0.902. Furthermore, approximately 81.3% of the variability in GGP success can be explained by these predictors (independent variables), defining a significant influence.

In conclusion, the model effectively supports all four research hypotheses, proving the significant impact of MEAL planning, stakeholder engagement, MEAL technical expertise of staff, and baseline survey on the success of GGP in Rwanda. It reveals that all four research objectives have a significant and positive effect on the success of GGP, and exhibit a strong and highly significant positive relationship with GGP success. These findings highlight the crucial role of MEAL practices in ensuring the success of the green Gicumbi project in Rwanda.

6. Recommendations

Based on the research findings, the following are the suggestions and recommendations:

concerning the issue of sustainability, the project management team should have in place a team during and after project completion for project post-evaluation to measure the impact and the sustainability of the project.

Education, the part of mainstreaming and mobilization before and during project implementation should be highly taken into account for the stakeholders (beneficiaries) to support and ensure project success.

Accountability, the raci matrix should be embraced for any project to increase and improve the accountability and responsibility in all project activities and everyone would be fully engaged to ensure project success.

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