

**SUCCESS FACTORS FOR AGRICULTURE-BASED INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT (ID) PROJECTS: INSIGHTS FROM GHANA FOR AFRICA**

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ABSTRACT

Reports of donor funding agencies such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) on their operations in Ghana indicate that the delivery, in terms of performance and results, of agriculture-based International Development (ID) projects is poor and shows little or no signs of improvement. This continuous poor delivery despite the availability of research results on the success factors of projects, years of individual and collective experience of managing projects and rapid growth in membership of project management bodies suggests a need to look into the success factors of agriculture-based ID projects from organizational control-an essential component of the managerial process that utilises before, during and after mechanisms to ensure that deviations from standard are corrected so as to achieve set goals and effective performance outcomes. Thus, dwelling on work experience on some ID projects in Ghana and literature, this paper identifies two (2) key success factors for agriculture-based ID projects for Africa. This work is an add-on to the limited literature on the success factors of projects evident from developing countries. It also enriches the balance of control literature which indicates that the application of multiple control modes outperforms that of a single control mode.

Keywords: Success factors, Agriculture-based International Development (ID) projects, Project team, Control modes

INTRODUCTION

Most developing countries are food insecure. Achieving it remains a critical issue. Governments, development banks, donor agencies, etc. have recognised this problem. Accordingly, various agriculture development projects have been implemented and are being implemented to boost developing countries' capacity to attain food security. But from literature and experience, the performance of these projects have been unsatisfactory and shows little/or signs of significant improvement even with the availability of results of researches done to uncover the factors that lead to successful projects ([1]; [2]; [3]; [4]; [5]). However, in spite of the availability of these results, despite decades of individual and collective experience of managing projects [6] and an increase in the membership of project management professional bodies, the performance and results of agriculture-based ID projects continue to disappoint stakeholders and beneficiaries ([7]; [8]). It is thus not uncommon to hear that most of these projects have not succeeded and continue not to succeed (see, for example, [9]). What, then, are the factors critical to the success of agriculture-based ID projects?

Through a review of some selective literature and dwelling on practical personal experience on the Inland Valleys Rice Development Project, a defunct African Development Bank (AfDB) funded agriculture infrastructure development project and other development projects in Ghana, an appropriate project team and the application of multiple control modes (output, input, behaviour and clan) are two (2) key factors critical to the success of agriculture-based ID projects in Africa.

APPROPRIATE PROJECT TEAM

The problem of unsuccessful agriculture-based ID project delivery stems, to a large extent, from the use of inappropriate project team, ie. the unsuitable and insufficient number of people with the requisite knowledge, expertise and commitment to steer affairs of the projects. The issue of staffing affecting project success from literature [7] and experience includes, but is not limited to, *project staff not enough, not as experienced/skilled as required, not available full-time, as well as project staff reporting late to work*. A right project team will share congruent objectives with the project; it will also be committed to the course of the project and ensure that no matter the odds, the objective(s) are achieved as much as possible.

As indicated by O'Connor and Reinsborough [7], projects try to run with part-time people or fewer people than required until the project runs into trouble. Then, somehow, the required people become available for the project to get it “back on track”, a clear indication that an appropriate project team is key to ensuring the success of projects.

Staffing has long been identified as key to ensuring project success, as far back as 1976 by Martin [10] when he included selecting a project team to his list of critical project success factors. This was reiterated by Baker *et al.* [11] as well as Pinto and Slevin [12] when they included the project team in their list of critical project success factors. Furthermore, in terms of frequency or severity, a review of projects in the 1990s revealed staffing as the number two concern (out of over 10 concerns) of over 90 projects [7].

From experience, even with competent and dedicated professionals who are committed to ensuring that project activities are executed satisfactorily on projects, agriculture-based ID projects' performance and results are not far from being unsuccessful. What will therefore be the case when projects are staffed with non-committed and non-dedicated professionals? Undoubtedly, the performance and results will be worse-off.

APPLICATION OF MULTIPLE CONTROL MODES

Careful selection and training of the project team alone can't ensure the successful delivery of agriculture-based ID projects as problems, which when not detected and solved early affect project performance, are likely to occur during project implementation. This thus makes control and more importantly, organizational control, a key factor to the success of

agriculture-based ID projects. As indicated by Jaeger and Baliga [13], organizational control is an important component of the managerial function which is responsible for ensuring that the organization's strategic goals are met and that deviations from standards are corrected for effective performance outcomes. The need for organizational control mechanisms is thus generally unquestioned [14]. Experience from IVRDP proves beyond doubt that successful execution of agriculture-based ID projects is almost impossible without the adoption of a control mix viz. behaviour control (based on direct personal surveillance), output control (mechanisms that ensure that output is delivered), input control (mechanisms for the selection of inputs) and clan control (regulation of goals, values and norms of project team).

Each control mode has its own strengths and weaknesses as well as conditions/situations under which they can perform best. Applying a single mode at all times is therefore not effective and efficient enough to ensure successful project performance/delivery owing to how volatile the environment can be. For example, output control is said to conserve organizational resources better than behaviour control but it is less flexible and less adaptable to particular needs [15]. Also, according to Ouchi [16], behaviour control or output control are best for organizations in relatively stable industries whereas clan control is best for organizations in the public sector, service industries and fast-growing technologies. Accordingly, the application of multiple control modes in project delivery is more effective and efficient for agriculture-based ID projects than using individual control modes. This balance of control concept (the use of multiple control modes outperform using a single control mode), was put forward by Cardinal *et al.* (see [17]). It has been supported by studies such as that of Long *et al.* [18], who conducted a study to determine which theory of organizational control implementation provides the most effective method for managing tasks and came to the conclusion that managers can improve organizational performance by focusing attention on multiple control modes. Thus, selecting competent staff for a project, having regular meetings with project stakeholders and/or clients, undertaking monitoring and supervision missions, undertaking periodic project reviews (multiple control modes), etc. will ensure the success of agriculture-based ID projects far more than just relying solely on reports (a single control mode).

CONCLUSION

As O'Connor and Reinsborough [7] put it, better project management disciplines and skills are required by project team members in order for projects to succeed in this present age as projects are bigger and more formally ran than they used to be done in the past. Accordingly, an appropriate project team and the application of multiple control modes are key factors necessary to avert or minimize the occurrence of problems in the implementation of agriculture-based ID projects which will help enhance their success. As this paper sheds light on these factors, it is a good resource for practising project managers and implementing/management units of agriculture-based ID projects as well as all forms of development projects in Africa, the developing world and the world at large.

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