Effect of Project Communication Practices on Performance of the International Non-Governmental Organizational Projects in Rwanda

Marc Singirankabo & Dr. Catherine Wanjiku

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*1Marc Singirankabo & 2Dr. Catherine Wanjiku

1Masters student, Business Administration, Mount Kenya University

2Lecturer, Business Administration, Mount Kenya University

*Email of correspounding author: singirmarc01@gmail.com

Abstract

Project communication is one of the most important factors that contributes to the success of projects. The International Non Governmental Organizational (INGOs) in Rwanda has highlighted the significant role of communication in the management and success of its projects. This study examined the effect of project communication practices on the performance of INGOs projects in Rwanda. The specific objectives of the study were to assess the effect of participatory communication, results-driven communication, and multi-channelled communication on the performance of INGOs'projects. The study was guided by four theories: participatory communication theory, gratifications theory, goal-oriented communication theory, and implementation theory. The study used a descriptive design with a correlational regression effect, and both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study targeted 170 workers involved in the various projects implemented by INGOs project in Rwanda. Stratified sampling was used to choose the sample. The researcher collected primary data using structured questionnaires and interview guides. The data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results of the study showed that participatory communication was significantly correlated with dialogue and consultation and project schedules. Results-driven communication was associated with feedback on cost efficiency, project schedules, and project quality. Multi-channelled communication was significantly correlated with cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages and project schedules. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends that INGOs' project managers should adopt effective project communication practices and use project communication strategies to encourage the attainment of expected goals. The researcher also suggests that further studies should gather data from project team members and stakeholders to enrich empirical literature.

Keywords: *Project, Communication Practices, Performance, INGOs Projects*

1.1 Background of the Study

In the past three decades, institutions worldwide have proven that project communication management can improve project performance for selected non-governmental organization (NGO) results. Project communication management has been shown to be beneficial all over the world, and most projects have attempted to incorporate it into their operations (Melzner et al., 2015). In the United States, a growing body of literature indicates that many project managers (PMs) lack effective communication skills. This lack of communication skills can have a negative impact on project team engagement, productivity, and overall profitability (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2018). In Europe, the nature of projects often requires teams to work on complex projects from remote locations. However, there is limited research on the best practices and techniques that PMs can use to improve communication. This lack of research is problematic because many managers lack the necessary expertise to improve employee communications (Muszynska, 2015). In Africa, specifically in Nigeria and South Africa, concerns about the efficiency of communication within project teams have continued to attract the attention of researchers (Cheung et al., 2013). The lack of communication between these entities resulted in a housing bubble that consequently led to high rates of foreclosures and defaults (Culo & Skendrovic, 2010).

In the East African Community (EAC), poor communication practices can often affect project team members' understanding of various objectives. According to Browne et al. (2016), team members of global businesses with advanced communication practices are more likely to complete their projects successfully. The majority of the population in the EAC, such as Rwanda, relies on agriculture as the main economic activity. In Rwanda, eighty percent of the population relies on agriculture directly or indirectly as their major source of income and activity. Helping small farmers to access finance depends on communication and collaboration between various stakeholders and teams, as well as all life-sustaining resources. Therefore, communication is critical in the access finance to small-scale farmers' programs. With successful projects emerging to have been project managed, communication capabilities are an important factor in the success of the project (Too & Patrick, 2014). Joslin and Ralf (2015) described communication as live communication that responds and supports others, motivates staff and audience, and builds accessibility. Goetsch and Stanley (2014) stated that in order to eliminate barriers to managing a diverse workforce, a thorough investigation of effective communication is needed to improve employee outcomes that positively affect organizational outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore how communication affects project performance.

1.2 Problem Statement

Poor communication has been recognized as a key challenge within the non-governmental organization (NGO) sector (Shava & Maramura, 2016). Despite the need for strong communication to increase project efficiency and reduce distrust between NGOs and communities, projects often fail due to poor communication, both between NGOs and between NGOs and local communities as beneficiaries (Beatty, 2017). Communication is the heart of implemented projects in the construction industry, where project managers spend 90% of their time communicating with project participants. According to the Project Management Institute, the lack of communication leads to project failures over 30% of the time. Previous studies, such as Altomare (2017), have examined the effect of participatory communication in India using a case study design. The study found that the application of participatory communication enhanced the successful completion of the project. The study also noted that multi-channelled communications ensured that project teams

were sufficiently informed, which led to minimal mistakes, quality decision-making, and efficient delivery of the project tasks.

While these studies were relevant to the current study, they were carried out in a different context. The study by Luthra and Dahiya (2015) assessed the link between leadership and effective communication in firms drawn from different sectors in India. This was a desktop study based on a literature review. The study found that communication needed to be focused on delivering results and move away from being activity-based. Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) conducted a study on the impact of effective communication on organizational performance in service and non-service sectors in Nigeria. The study was based on a review of existing journals. The study found that results-oriented communication was a means to ensuring that the organization's efforts were focused on improving the quality of its services. These studies only provided a general discussion of this communication practice and did not link it to project performance. The studies used a desktop study approach, which was a different methodology from the one that was adopted in this study. These studies showed that contradictory findings existed on the efficiency of the different communication practices considered in this study. Thus, from the reviewed literature, various conceptual, contextual, methodology, and findings-related gaps were identified. Overall, insufficient studies exist that assess the effect of the three communication practices when combined on project performance. This study, therefore, sought to fill these research gaps by establishing the effect of communication practices on the performance of the International Non-Governmental Organizational (INGOs) in Rwanda.

1.3 Objectives of the study

To assess the effect of participatory communication practice on the performance of International Non-Governmental Organizational projects in Rwanda.

To examine the effect of results-driven communication practice on the performance of International Non-Governmental Organizational projects in Rwanda

To determine the effect of multi-channeled communication practice on the performance of International Non-Governmental Organizational projects in Rwanda.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

2.1 Empirical Literature

Previous studies conducted on project communication practices and project performance of project activities have been revised according to the specific objectives of the present research study. The empirical literature comprises the effect of project participatory communication, results-driven communication, and multi-channeled communication practices on project performance.

2.1.1 Effect of Participatory Communication Practice on Project Performance

Globally, a study was carried out by Joslin and Müller (2015) on project communication, personal commitment, social networks, and perceived performance of the project. The study used a correlational research design on a sample of 345 respondents. The results of the study showed that there are notable positive associations between project communication, distinguished performance of the project, personal commitment, and social networks. Effective project communication, social networks, and personal commitment have led to the conclusion that conditions and social networks for better performance of citizenship schemes in commercial banks in Uganda. In Asia, a study by

Mangali (2013) on projects managed by respondents varied in size and complexity. The study used an exploratory research design on a sample size of 288. The study findings demonstrated that, with budgets ranging from $250,000 to over $10 million and numbers of stakeholders ranging from 10 to over 100 people or groups actively involved in the project, there is a slight imbalance towards smaller projects among the responses. Therefore, the survey results can be recognized as reliable to show how project communication planning process is performed in practice.

Aminahi (2016) assessed the adoption of participatory communication when executing the small farmers' empowerment project in Eastern Indonesia, which was undertaken by the government in cooperation with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). A case study design was employed. The low adoption of participatory communication led to minimal cooperation and dialogue between the small farmers and the other stakeholders. This resulted in constrained exchange of information and knowledge required in decision-making phases of the project, leading to its poor implementation. Reaching a consensus on the ideal situation and priority areas was constrained, leading to poor coordination in decision-making processes, which adversely affected the success of the program.

In Africa, especially in Nigeria, Elegbei and Ibikunle (2015) assessed the effectiveness of communication and participatory decision-making in selected organizations in Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. A mixed methods research design was adopted. The study found that participatory communication ensured employees' involvement in the decision-making processes, which motivated them to work towards contributing to the success of the organizations. The study found that participatory communication enhanced the trust between the management and employees, which led to sustained management-employee relations and eventual organizational productivity and commitment. In the East African region, such as in Kenya, Mulaei (2014) on the other hand assessed the effectiveness of participatory communication in the implementation of land conflict resolution projects implemented by Makueni County Land Management Board. A case study design was applied. The study found that participatory communication was used to involve people in the resolution of land conflicts in the county, hinging on the ability to share perceptions, views, knowledge, and a common purpose within and across the community. These exchanges fostered trust and helped reduce the social distance among the stakeholders, which empowered them to influence the land conflict resolution processes, which supported collective decision-making processes. Participatory communication helped to secure the ownership of the action plans agreed upon and the commitment of the parties involved, which enhanced the successful implementation of these projects.

2.1.2 Effect of Project Results-Driven Communication Practice on Project Performance

Globally, a study done by Kernbach (2015) on communication skills found that they are the most important skill since project managers are constantly involved in formal or informal communication at each stage of the project. The study established that construction project managers spend 76% of their time on the project communicating verbally. The study indicated thje consideration of listening in project manager's communication skills. It indicated the building a good network of communication, the project manager needs to create trust and understanding of relationships with project team members. In Asia, Luthra and Dahiya (2015) examined the connection between leadership and effective communication in firms drawn from different sectors in India. This was a desktop study based on a literature review. The study noted that the main drive of teams in any organization is getting the work done and the leadership must uphold the focus of

the team to achieve the organization's objectives. According to the study, communication needs to focus on delivering results and move away from being activity-based. Organizational leadership as emphasized by the study should encourage communication, provide feedback on progress, and signal team victories. By providing feedback, there is a need to improve the quality of decision-making. The study concluded that organizational leaders ought to communicate assignment goals and desired results to various teams within the organizations so that tasks can be effectively completed towards achieving results.

In sub-Saharan African countries, Ngozi and Ifeomai (2015) assessed the role of effective communication on the performance of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, Nigeria. A survey research approach was employed. The study found that a result-driven communication had a positive impact on performance. This approach gave room to measuring results and performance which in turn impacted the quality of decisions made and problem-solving. The study emphasized that it was important for the management to communicate successes, including cost savings realized, lessons learned, and acknowledge the contributions of the employees to improvements throughout their organization to provoke the productivity of employees. The study concluded that the communications function was highly efficient when the main drive was to produce results, for example, enhanced stakeholder relations. The tactics used according to the study were important, however, they were less important compared to the prime configuration of the communications function towards concrete results.

In the region, Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) conducted a study on the impact of effective communication on organizational performance in service and non-service sectors in Nigeria. The study was based on a review of existing journals. The study observed that organizational communications ought to have an impact on the growth and success of the organization. The study argued that meetings held in any organization should encompass result-driven communication where discussions involving the management and various teams on the ways to improve results and their implementation are undertaken. The study also underscored that result-oriented communication fostered collaboration and teamwork, which in turn improved productivity. According to the study, result-oriented communication is a means to ensuring that the organization's efforts are focused on improving the quality of its services. Electronic and written communications are the most effective communication methods to use. The two methods both imply a written format, because a fax and email, although sent electronically, is written (Kiradoo, 2017). The deduction can be made that written communication is the most effective communication method that the project manager can use during the execution of a project and that oral communication is the second most effective communication method to use.

2.1.3 Effect of Project Multi-Channelled Communication Practice on Project Performance

At the international level, a study of Kiradoo (2017) done on phase of the project, details related to the project objectives, priorities, customer needs, issues, details and more are needed to make a complete development of trustworthy and trustworthy. The study demonstrated that communication provides more than just data transfer". It provides an opportunity for various project teams within the program to voice their concerns and concerns. Research suggests that when people are free to learn from others, their relationships can be strengthened and effective communication within the program management team can be seen as a sign of readiness and trust within the program management team. In Europe, in the process of communication planning, if there is information communication, the existing technology infrastructure should be available to

facilitate the dissemination in project organizations. For example, in rural projects, internal servers and Internet access should be considered must be considered (Zhengy 2018). In their research, they emphasize the necessary networks and information, the transfer of in- formation and the amount of information that must flow among team members.

In Asia, Ilieva-Koleva and Kasamska (2017) examined the creation of effective practices in communication management in the context of project work under the European Union. The study focused on four international projects, realised with the financial support of the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Project (FP7) across 18 Et countries. The study noted that given that a project had several internal and external stakeholders, all of whom needed to be able to convey diverse kinds of information in diverse ways, it was crucial for implementing agencies to plai and exploit various communication channels. Multi-channelle and multi-voiced communication was helpful in obtaining autonomous participation and a free flow of information throughout the project implementation process. The study concluded that different channels differed in the number of cues they could convey, the timeliness of feedback, and the capacity of parties involved to express themselves. Hence, greater efficiency in communication was attained when multiple channels were considered.

In East African region, Mulili (2018) has explored the effect of communication on management practice on the performance of Turnkey Africa Kenya Ltd. The study applied a case study research design. The study found that multi-channelled communication approach affected the sustainability of change projects which in turn impacted the achievement of business objectives in the firm. Using multi-channelled communication approach had cultivated a broad base of interactive opportunities that opened the ability to impact the lives of all stakeholders at different touch points in their organizational life. With the multi-channel approach, repetitive messages from different channels and perspectives were easier to process and understand which enhanced the efficiency of strategic communications in the firm. The study found that the organized use of the several channels led to active information and feedback gathering.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research used three relevant theories that are participatory communication theory, the uses and gratifications theory goal-oriented communication, and theory implementation theory

2.2.1 Participatory Communicationi Theory

This theory was advanced by Freire (1970). Participatory communication theory hinges on the premise that the success of development projects depends on their ability to ensure that people involved in decision-making process. Participatory communication theory calls for inclusivity and dialogue in decision making as the only sure means to attaining sustainable projects and projects where all relevant parties appreciate the need and own the project. Participatory communication theory provides a communication framework based on dialogue and empowerment. This theory proposes that dialogue facilitates balanced sharing of knowledge which leads to the creation of new knowledge and the discovery of the best option for change (Mefalopulos, 2008). This theory, lays the foundation for examining the level of adoption of participatory communication practice and its effect on project success. It informe the assessment of communication openness and transparency, dialogue and consultation, knowledge and information sharing, shared decision making and freedom to opinion expression were cultivated across operations of INGOs' projects to ensure that the organization's projects are successfully implemented. This is because the

theory centred on the principles of participation, dialogue, empowerment, and mutual understanding of exchanging views where communication is involved.

2.2.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

This theory was developed by Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) in order to assume that communication users make active, rational choices between alternatives to maximize the gratification obtained. The theory assumes that using communication channels if they provide sufficient gratification. It is assumed that they choose which channel to use based on gratification obtained, avoiding those which less are gratifying. In principle, the needs satisfied by one channel could be satisfied in other ways or through other channels (Carey & Kreiling, 1974). Thus, if one communication channel does not offer sufficient gratification obtained, users seek out alternatives. According to the theory, although the alternatives are numerous and ever expanding, users must choose which channel is most effective for the message that needs to be sent. According to the theory, alternatives may also be chosen if the original purpose of the message changes. This theory will be relevant to this study since it informed the assessment of the adoption of multi-channelled communication practice in a bid to enhance the INGOs project success. The researcher used this theory to show how INGOs exploit alternative communication channels to increase efficiency likely to affect the project success. Given that there was a likelihood that the original purpose of the messages can adjust, this theory assisted in understanding how INGOs can integrate multiple communication channels and enhance the cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages so that messages send within or outside the organization could be successfully communicated to parties to produce acceptable gratification for the senders.

2.2.3 Goal-Oriented Communicationi Theory

Goldreich, Juba, and Sudan (2012) focuced on goals provides a framework on problem potential misunderstanding during communication, where the misunderstanding arises from lack of initial agreement on what protocol and/or language is being used in communication. In this context, reliable communication means overcoming any initial misunderstanding between parties towards achieving a given goal. This theory anchored the results-driven communication practice, which focused on achieving measurable results. This theory emphasizes on the use of communication as a means of achieving some goals of the communicating parties and a framework that ensures that any misunderstanding likely to derail the achievement of this goal are dealt with. The theory clarified the need for use of communications in enabling INGOs to attain its performance goals where the success of the implementation of its projects was among these goals given the nature of its operations. Hence, through the articulation of performance expectations, provision of performance feedback, task communication and use of information in problem solving, the management of the organization could ensure that no misunderstanding occurred pertaining what project teams or its staff in general needed to do in order to ensure that its projects were successfully implemented.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

This part of the study is the researcher's understanding of how to link specific variables in a study. In this way, it indicates their necessary changes in their investigative process. It is their researcher's map in carrying out their investigation (Creswell, 2013). Figure 1 shows how independent variables can affect dependent variables.

Independent variables

Project Communication Practices

Dependent Variable

Performance of INGOs' Project

Participatory communication
- Communication openness and
- Transparency
- Dialogue and consultation
- Knowledge and information sharing
- Shared decision making

Results-driven communication
- Articulation of performance expectations
- Provision of performance feedback
- Task communication
- Use of information in problem solving

Multi-channeled communication
- Number of channels used in delivering messages.
- Efficiency in integrating multiple channels
- Cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages.

- Cost efficient
- Project schedules
- Project quality
- standards/specifications
- Level to which projects
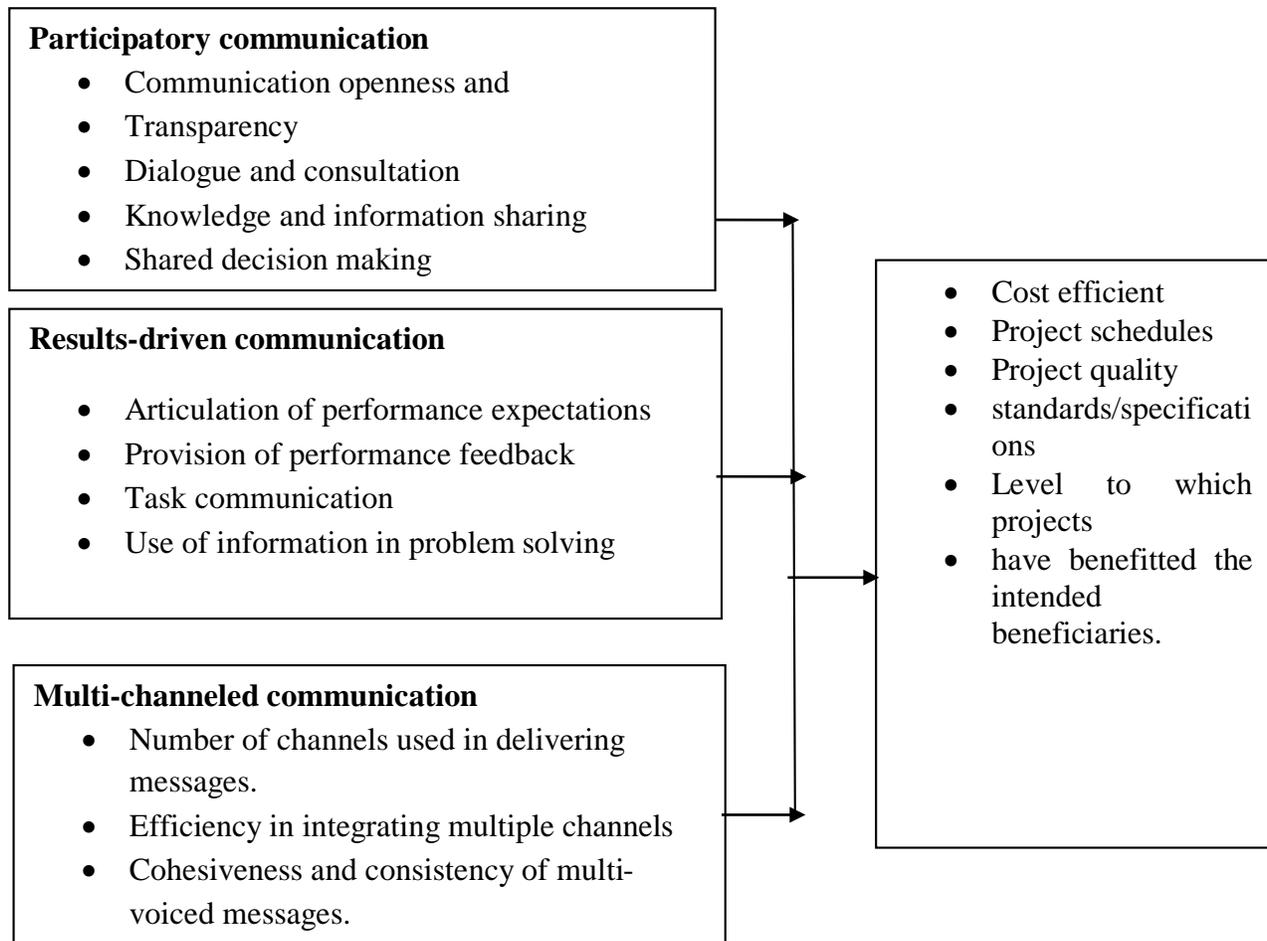- have benefitted the intended beneficiaries.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Model

3.0 Researchi Methodology

The researchers used a descriptive research design. The target population for this study was all 170 workers who are responsible in the day-to-day running of various INGOs projects in Rwanda (INGOs, Rwanda Human Resource Database, 2023). The sampling frame consisted of all the 170 employees involved in the day-to-day running of various INGOs projects in Rwanda. The sample size 120 employees were grouped in five regions in Rwanda. The researchers used both primary and secondary data that was obtained using a structured questionnaire, an interview guide, and desk review. The researchers presented the results of data analysis in cross-tabulation using standard deviations, mean, and frequencies to analyze statistical data. For inferential statistics to establish the link between variables, multiple linear regression models were used. The regression model was adopted to establish the influence between variables.

4.0 Research Findings and Discussion

The study was carried out according to three specific objectives: to assess the effect of participatory communication practice on the performance of International Non Governmental Organizational (INGOs) projects in Rwanda; to examine the effect of results-driven communication practice on the performance of INGOs projects in Rwanda; and to determine the effect of multi-channeled communication practice on the performance of INGOs' projects in Rwanda.The first objective established the effect of participatory communication practice on the performance of INGOs projects in Rwanda. The participatory communication practice on the performance of INGOSs projects was assessed descriptively in terms of communication openness and transparency, dialogue and consultation, knowledge and information sharing, and shared decision-making. Moreover, regression effect size for each objective was established using inferential statistics. In this regard, descriptive results found that 43.0% agreed and 38.3% strongly agreed that employees participated in the communication openness and transparency. Furthermore, 34.2% and 37.6% participated in dialogue and consultation. However, the respondents have been involved in the knowledge and information sharing as (34.2% agreed, and 34.2% of them strongly agreed with the statement). Finally, 34.2% strongly agreed and 34.2% strongly agreed that they participated in shared decision-making.

In addition, results from correlational analysis demonstrated the significant correlation between dialogue and consultation and project schedules (r=0.206; p-value=0.000). This was statistically correlated given that the p-value was <0.005, proposing that an increase in dialogue and consultation by the project has led to improved project schedules. The study's second objective assessed the results-driven communication practice on the performance of INGOs' projects in Rwanda. Results-driven communication practice was assessed using articulation of performance expectations, provision of performance feedback, task communication, and use of information in problem solving. Results showed that 27.9% agreed while 38.6% strongly agreed that INGOs has applied articulation of performance expectations. Furthermore, provision of performance feedback was adopted to implement INGOs projects as agreed by 47.7% and strongly agreed by 38.6%. This was demonstrated by an agreement from 36.2% and a strong agreement from 20.1%. The research demonstrated that 34.6% agreed and 40.9% agreed that the use of information in problem solving was applied during the implementation of project communication. Results demonstrated that the effect of provision of performance feedback on cost-efficiency, project schedules, and project quality, the study ascertained that provision of performance feedback is statistically significant with cost-efficiency (r=0.122*; p-value=0.035). Since the p-value was 0.05, meaning that cost-efficiency is significantly correlated with an increase in provision of performance feedback. Task communication felt that it is significantly correlated with an increase in cost-efficiency (r=0.123*; p-value=0.034).

The third research objective determined multi-channeled communication practice on the performance of INGOs' projects in Rwanda. Different parameters of multi-channeled communication were assessed: the number of channels used in delivering messages, efficiency in integrating multiple channels, cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages, and reporting data. Results demonstrated that the number of channels used in delivering messages was used as agreed by 33.9% and strongly agreed by 35.2%. Results on whether the efficiency in integrating multiple channels was adopted in INGOs' projects was agreed by 25.5% and strongly

agreed by 38.6%. It has been demonstrated that 36.9% agreed while 31.5% strongly agreed that there was the cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages (agree=36.9; strongly agree=31.5). Whether data was timely reported, 36.6% of respondents and 30.5% strongly agreed. Results show asignificant correlation between cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages and project schedules (r=0.105, p-value=0.071). All the correlations were statistically significant given that the p-value was <0.05, proposing that an increase in cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages is significantly correlated with improved project schedules.

5.0 Conclusion

This section concludes the key findings in connection to the research hypotheses and objectives of the study. The study variables (indicators) were participation communication, result-based communication, and multi-channel communication. The specific objectives were to assess the effect of participatory communication practice on the performance of the International Non Governmental Organizational (INGOs) project in Rwanda, to examine the effect of results-driven communication practice on the performance of the INGOs project in Rwanda, and to determine the effect of multi-channel communication practice on the performance of the INGOs project in Rwanda. Regarding the first objective, the study concludes that in participatory communication of the INGOs' Project, the following practices were applied: communication openness and transparency, dialogue and consultation, and knowledge and information sharing, as well as shared decision-making. Furthermore, results from correlational analysis demonstrated a significant correlation between dialogue and consultation and project schedules (r = 0.206, p-value = 0.000). This correlation was statistically significant, given that the p-value was < 0.005, suggesting that an increase in dialogue and consultation by the project has led to improved project schedules.

Regarding the second objective, the study concludes that in managing the result-driven communication for the INGOs' project, the INGOs used articulation of performance expectations, provision of performance feedback, task communication, and the use of information in problem-solving. Results demonstrated that the effect of provision of performance feedback on cost efficiency, project schedules, and project quality was statistically significant, as ascertained by the significant correlation with cost efficiency (r = 0.122*, p-value = 0.035). Since the p-value was 0.05, it means that it is cost efficient. Task communication was found to be significantly correlated with an increase in cost efficiency (r = 0.123*, p-value = 0.034). Regarding the third objective, the study concludes that the parameters of multi-channel communication assessed were the number of channels used in delivering messages, efficiency in integrating multiple channels, and cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages and reporting data. Results show a significant correlation between cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages and project schedules (r = 0.105, p-value = 0.071). All the correlations were statistically significant, given that the p-value was < 0.05, suggesting that an increase in cohesiveness and consistency of multi-voiced messages was insignificantly associated with the quality of services offered by the INGOs' project, increased cost efficiency, project schedules, and project quality, and vice versa. Insignificant correlation was found between timely report of information or data in the INGOs project and cost efficiency (r = 0.021, p-value = 0.720), timely report data reported and project schedules (r = 0.045, p-value = 0.440), timely report of data and project quality (r = 0.037, p-value = 0.524).

6.0 Recommendations

This research recommends that project managers should continuously adopt effective project communication practices from the conception to the execution. The study recommends an assumed communication strategy for effective provision of project services. The study recommends that project team members should use project communication strategies to encourage the attainment of expected goals. Project managers should know that decisions made are based on the outcomes from all stakeholders. Therefore, effective communication skills in project management would lead to suitable public image and reputation for project to be implemented.

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