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# Project Planning and the Performance of Study Visit Programmes at Rwanda Cooperation

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## Abstract

This study examined the effect of project planning on the performance of study visit programmes at Rwanda Cooperation, the Rwandan institution that coordinates international study visits under the country's South-South and Triangular Cooperation agenda. Since 2018, the institution has handled 845 delegations and 9,790 delegates, yet its records report volumes rather than results, and activity fell from 2,184 delegates in 2024 to 1,728 in 2025. A descriptive and analytical design was used. A census of all 58 employees across five departments was conducted, and 56 completed questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 96.6%. Project planning was measured through work plan development, resource allocation and scheduling of activities (seven items, Cronbach's alpha = .886). Data were analysed in SPSS Version 23 using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression at the 5% significance level, and were triangulated with institutional documents. Respondents agreed that planning supports performance (mean = 4.10, SD = 0.90). Planning was strongly correlated with programme performance ($r = .794$, $p < .01$) and remained a significant predictor when stakeholder engagement and monitoring and evaluation were controlled ($B = 0.361$, $\beta = .372$, $t = 4.457$, $p < .001$), and the null hypothesis was therefore rejected. Respondents rated risk planning and the realism of schedules lowest, and institutional records show that delays of three to five working days arose mainly from delegates' travel, visa processing and institutional availability. The study recommends that Rwanda Cooperation continue to standardise its plans and add contingency and risk-planning mechanisms and outcome indicators to them.

**Keywords:** *Project Planning, Study Visit Programmes, Programme Performance, South-South Cooperation, Rwanda Cooperation*

## 1.0 Background to the Study

Study visits are widely used in international development cooperation as a way of transferring knowledge, benchmarking practice and building institutional relationships between countries. Their results, however, are uneven. Reports from the World Bank (2023) and the OECD (2023) indicate that although most knowledge exchange programmes meet their short-term learning objectives, a much smaller share lead to lasting policy or institutional change. Studies from several African settings point the same way, and scholars increasingly attribute the gap to weaknesses in how such programmes are planned, coordinated and monitored (Mugisha, 2024; United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2021). Rwanda has made study visits a strategic instrument for positioning itself as a hub for development learning. Rwanda Cooperation, established in 2018, coordinates the programme. Its consolidated records show 845 delegations handled between 2018 and January 2026 (807 physical visits, 32 in-person trainings and 6 virtual exchanges), reaching 9,790 delegates from 66 countries and five regional organizations across 25 areas of interest, including public finance management, education sector development and tax administration (Rwanda Cooperation, 2026). Annual delegations rose from 24 in 2020 to 164 in 2023, then fell to 160 in 2024 and 139 in 2025. Delegates peaked at 2,184 in 2024 and fell by about 21% to 1,728 in 2025.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of study visit programmes in facilitating knowledge exchange and institutional capacity building, concerns remain regarding their planning and overall performance. Evidence from the programme's institutional statistics indicates a 21% decline in the number of delegates in 2025, suggesting a reduction in programme reach. Furthermore, the available performance records focus primarily on the number of delegations, delegates, participating countries and technical topics, without measurable outcome indicators to assess whether the visits lead to policy adoption, institutional improvements or practical application of acquired knowledge. This limits the institution's ability to determine the programme's actual effectiveness and demonstrate its contribution to institutional development.

Weak project planning may contribute to these performance challenges through inadequate needs assessment, unclear objectives, insufficient coordination of stakeholders, ineffective resource allocation and limited monitoring and evaluation. Such weaknesses can affect the relevance, organisation and delivery of study visits, while the absence of outcome-based monitoring makes it difficult to identify gaps and implement timely improvements. Consequently, the programme risks prioritising the number of visits conducted over their actual outcomes and long-term impact. Although previous studies have examined capacity building and training programmes, limited empirical attention has been given to how project-planning practices influence the performance of study visit programmes in this institutional context (Mugisha, 2024). It is against this background that this study seeks to examine the effect of project planning on the performance of the study visit programme.

### 1.2 Research Objective

The objective of the study was to examine the effect of project planning on the performance of study visit programmes at Rwanda Cooperation.

### 1.3 Research Hypothesis

$H_{01}$: Project planning has no statistically significant effect on the performance of study visit programmes at Rwanda Cooperation.

## 2.0 Literature Review

This section presents the theories that anchor the study, reviews empirical studies on project planning and project performance, and sets out the conceptual framework.

### 2.1 Theoretical Framework

Two theories frame the study. Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968) treats an organisation as a set of interrelated components working towards a common purpose, so that a weakness in one component affects the whole. Applied to study visits, planning is the input that coordinates the programme, logistics, finance and management units into one working system, and it has been used in African development programme research to explain how interconnected planning and feedback influence performance (Munyoki & Muli, 2020). The Theory of Project Performance Management holds that performance is a function of clear objectives, structured processes and control systems that are built into the whole project life cycle rather than added at the end (Atkinson, 1999; Kerzner, 2017). On this view, a plan sets the measurable targets and implementation standards against which performance is later managed. Both perspectives lead to the expectation that stronger planning improves programme effectiveness, efficiency and impact.

### 2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical studies consistently link planning quality to project outcomes. Kyalo and Kising'u (2024) found that planning practices significantly influenced the performance of road construction projects in Kwale County, Kenya, with well-defined work breakdown structures, accurate resource scheduling and adherence to timelines improving results. Amuni et al. (2025) examined participatory planning in donor-funded projects in Kenya and concluded that involving stakeholders at the planning stage improved sustainability and impact because local insight reduced rework and misalignment. Practitioner sources reach similar conclusions. The Project Management Institute (2021) notes that effective planning establishes realistic objectives, allocates resources efficiently and reduces implementation risk, and Kerzner (2022) describes planning as the roadmap that coordinates resources, schedules and stakeholder expectations. In international development programmes, the World Bank (2023) reported that projects with detailed planning frameworks were about 40% more likely to achieve their intended outcomes than those without.

Most of this evidence comes from construction, infrastructure and community development projects. Evidence on study visit programmes specifically, and on Rwanda Cooperation as an institution, is limited, and that is the gap this study addresses.

### 2.3 Conceptual Framework

Project planning is the independent variable, defined by three dimensions: work plan development, resource allocation and scheduling of activities. Programme performance is the dependent variable, defined by programme effectiveness, efficiency and impact. Stakeholder engagement and monitoring and evaluation, the other two project management practices examined in the wider study, were included in the regression model as control variables.

## 3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component examined current planning practices and perceptions of programme performance, and the analytical component tested the effect of project planning on programme performance, with stakeholder engagement and monitoring and evaluation as additional predictors (Habineza, 2021). It was conducted at the headquarters of Rwanda Cooperation in Kigali and covered programmes implemented between 2020 and 2025. The target population was all 58 employees across Senior Management (3), Training and Study Visits (22), Research, Advisory and Project Implementation (15), Communication and Logistics (10), and Finance and Accounts (8). Given the small population, a census was conducted (Adeyemi & Oladipo, 2022), and 56 of the 58 questionnaires were returned usable (96.6%). Primary data were collected with a structured questionnaire using five-point Likert items (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), with seven items for each of four constructs: project planning, programme performance (effectiveness, efficiency and impact), stakeholder engagement, and monitoring and evaluation. The survey was complemented by interviews with senior management, programme coordinators and logistics staff, observation checklists applied during study visits, and a review of programme reports, strategic plans and summary statistics, which allowed triangulation. The questionnaire was piloted with 13 staff of a comparable government agency, and only minor editorial changes were needed. Cronbach's alpha from the pilot was .886 for project planning, .917 for programme performance, .903 for stakeholder engagement and .894 for monitoring and evaluation, all above the .70 threshold (George & Mallery, 2019). Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS Version 23 using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, ANOVA and multiple regression at the 5% significance level, with multicollinearity checked using variance inflation factors. The model was $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$, where Y is programme performance, $X_1$ project planning, $X_2$ stakeholder engagement, $X_3$ monitoring and evaluation, $\alpha$ the intercept and $\varepsilon$ the error term. Interview data were analysed thematically, and observation records and documents were used to corroborate the survey findings. Permission was obtained from Rwanda Cooperation's management, and ethical clearance from Mount Kigali University, before data collection. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Data were used strictly for academic purposes.

## 4.0 Findings and Discussion

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study. Of the 58 questionnaires distributed, 56 were returned complete and usable, a response rate of 96.6%, which is well above the 70% threshold commonly recommended for survey research. The respondents were 55.4% male and 44.6% female; 64.3% held a master's degree and a further 8.9% a doctorate, 82.1% had worked at the institution for three years or more, and most were project officers (35.7%) or coordinators (26.8%). The respondents were therefore directly involved in planning and delivering the programmes and were well placed to assess them.

### 4.1 Descriptive Statistics on Project Planning

**Table 1: Respondents' Assessment of Project Planning**

| Statement | Agree or strongly agree (%) | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| Detailed work plans were prepared before every study visit programme | 85.7 | 4.21 | 0.83 |
| Resources were allocated according to programme priorities | 80.4 | 4.09 | 0.95 |
| Programme schedules were realistic and achievable | 76.8 | 3.98 | 0.98 |
| Activity sequencing enhanced programme implementation | 82.1 | 4.14 | 0.86 |
| Planning reduced implementation delays | 82.1 | 4.05 | 0.91 |
| Risk planning enhanced programme implementation | 75.0 | 3.96 | 0.97 |
| Planning contributed to successful achievement of programme objectives | 85.7 | 4.27 | 0.81 |
| **Overall** | | **4.10** | **0.90** |

Note: Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.

Respondents generally agreed that planning supports programme performance, with an overall mean of 4.10 (SD = 0.90). The highest-rated statements were that planning contributed to achieving programme objectives (mean = 4.27) and that detailed work plans were prepared before every programme (mean = 4.21). The lowest-rated were risk planning (mean = 3.96) and the realism of schedules (mean = 3.98), where about a quarter of respondents did not agree. The standard deviations are below 1.0 on every item, which indicates reasonable consistency across departments.

### 4.2 Correlation and Regression Analysis

Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationships among the variables (Table 2). Planning was strongly and positively correlated with programme performance ($r = .794$, $p < .01$), as were stakeholder engagement ($r = .748$, $p < .01$) and monitoring and evaluation ($r = .821$, $p < .01$). The three practices were also strongly correlated with one another: planning with stakeholder engagement ($r = .621$), planning with monitoring and evaluation ($r = .683$), and stakeholder engagement with monitoring and evaluation ($r = .648$), all at $p < .01$.

**Table 2: Pearson Correlation Matrix**

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Project planning | 1 | | | |
| 2. Stakeholder engagement | .621** | 1 | | |
| 3. Monitoring and evaluation | .683** | .648** | 1 | |
| 4. Programme performance | .794** | .748** | .821** | 1 |

*Note: ** p < .01 (2-tailed*).

Because the predictors overlap and the sample is small, multicollinearity was checked before the regression was interpreted. Variance inflation factors ranged from 1.92 to 2.21 and tolerance values from .45 to .52 (Table 4). These are well within the accepted limits (VIF below 10, tolerance above .10) and below the stricter VIF cut-off of 5. The coefficients can therefore be interpreted as the effect of each practice with the others held constant.

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 52) = 61.78$, $p < .001$. The three practices together explained about 78% of the variation in programme performance ($R = .882$, $R^2 = .778$, adjusted $R^2 = .765$; Table 3). Adjusted $R^2$ is only slightly below $R^2$, so the high explanatory power is not an artefact of the number of predictors.

**Table 3: Model Summary**

| R | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ | Std. error of the estimate |
|---|---|---|---|
| .882 | .778 | .765 | .421 |

*Note: Predictors: project planning, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and evaluation. Dependent variable: programme performance.*

Table 4 reports the coefficients. With the other two practices held constant, project planning had a significant positive effect on programme performance ($B = .361$, $\beta = .372$, $t = 4.457$, $p < .001$). Stakeholder engagement ($B = .284$, $\beta = .309$, $t = 3.737$, $p < .001$) and monitoring and evaluation ($B = .402$, $\beta = .431$, $t = 5.089$, $p < .001$) were also significant. Monitoring and evaluation had the largest standardised effect, followed by planning and then stakeholder engagement. Planning therefore contributes to programme performance independently of the other practices. Because the data are staff perceptions from a single organisation at one point in time ($n = 56$), the results show association rather than proven causation.

**Table 4: Regression Coefficients and Collinearity Statistics**

| Variable | B | Std. error | β | t | p | Tolerance | VIF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Constant) | .482 | .274 | | 1.759 | .084 | | |
| Project planning | .361 | .081 | .372 | 4.457 | < .001 | .479 | 2.09 |
| Stakeholder engagement | .284 | .076 | .309 | 3.737 | < .001 | .520 | 1.92 |
| Monitoring and evaluation | .402 | .079 | .431 | 5.089 | < .001 | .452 | 2.21 |

### 4.3 Hypothesis Testing

$H_{01}$: Project planning has no statistically significant effect on the performance of study visit programmes at Rwanda Cooperation.

Project planning had a significant positive effect on programme performance ($\beta = .372$, $t = 4.457$, $p < .001$; Table 4). As the p-value was below the 0.05 significance level, $H_{01}$ was rejected. This means that, holding stakeholder engagement and monitoring and evaluation constant, better planning is associated with better programme performance.

### 4.4 Evidence from Institutional Documents

Institutional documents are consistent with the survey results. Rwanda Cooperation's Strategic Plan 2021–2025 introduced standardised planning templates, annual operational plans, implementation schedules and budget allocation frameworks (Rwanda Cooperation, 2021). Internal implementation reports show that about 91% of planned activities were completed within the approved schedule and that resource utilisation exceeded 88%. The same reports record minor delays of three to five working days, caused by changes in delegates' travel arrangements, visa processing and institutional availability. These are factors that planning alone cannot fully control. The documents record inputs and outputs only, with no post-visit outcome indicators (Rwanda Cooperation, 2026), so they corroborate the planning and efficiency findings but cannot confirm whether the visits achieved their intended results.

### 4.5 Discussion of Findings

The central finding is that project planning significantly improves the performance of study visit programmes at Rwanda Cooperation. This agrees with Kyalo and Kising'u (2024), who found a significant effect of planning on project performance in Kenya, and with Amuni et al. (2025), who showed that well-structured, participatory planning improves sustainability and impact. It is also consistent with the Project Management Institute (2021) and Kerzner (2022), who treat planning as the foundation on which resources, schedules and risks are managed. The study extends this literature to a setting where evidence was scarce, the management of international study visits.

The result is consistent with both theoretical perspectives. Under Systems Theory, planning is the mechanism through which the Training and Study Visits team, the research and advisory staff, communication and logistics personnel, finance officers and senior management operate as one system rather than as separate units (von Bertalanffy, 1968). Under the Theory of Project Performance Management, structured plans set the targets and standards against which performance is managed (Atkinson, 1999; Kerzner, 2017). The significant coefficient, together with the document evidence of high on-schedule completion and resource utilisation, supports both.

The pattern across the individual items is also informative. The strongest agreement concerns having detailed work plans and the contribution of planning to objectives, which reflects the standardised templates and annual operational plans the institution has introduced. The weakest

agreement concerns risk planning and the realism of schedules, and the documents show why. The delays that do occur come from factors largely outside the institution's control, namely delegates' travel, visa processing and the availability of host institutions. This suggests that Rwanda Cooperation's planning is strong at the level of internal activities and weaker at anticipating external contingencies. Because delegations come from 66 countries and span 25 areas of interest, these contingencies are likely to grow with the programme's scale. This reading is an interpretation of the survey and document evidence rather than a tested result, and it deserves direct study. Finally, planning was the second-strongest of the three practices studied. This indicates that planning matters but works alongside monitoring and evaluation and stakeholder engagement, which is what Systems Theory would predict. Strengthening planning alone is unlikely to be sufficient. An institution that records only volumes cannot tell whether better plans are producing better results, so plans should be linked to outcome indicators that can be tracked after the visit.

## 5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that project planning has a positive and statistically significant effect on the performance of study visit programmes at Rwanda Cooperation. Detailed work plans, resource allocation aligned to priorities and realistic scheduling are associated with better programme effectiveness, efficiency and impact, and the effect holds when stakeholder engagement and monitoring and evaluation are controlled. Planning is strongest at the level of internal activities and weakest in anticipating external contingencies such as travel changes, visa processing and the availability of host institutions. These conclusions should be read in light of the study's limitations: the data are self-reported and cross-sectional, so they show a predictive relationship rather than causation, and the study covers a single institution with 56 respondents, with performance measured by perceptions rather than independently recorded outcomes.

## 6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that Rwanda Cooperation continue to standardise its planning templates and implementation schedules and apply them consistently to every study visit programme. Planning should be extended to include explicit risk registers and contingency buffers in schedules, covering travel changes, visa processing and the availability of host institutions, which are the main sources of delay, and a planning protocol should be agreed with delegations and host institutions early in the cycle so that these issues are identified before the visit. Each plan should specify post-visit outcome indicators, such as policy adoption and the application of knowledge, so that planning quality can be linked to programme impact, and management should invest in staff training in planning and risk management methods. Future research should use longitudinal designs that track programme outcomes for several years after the visits, compare planning practice across cooperation agencies in Rwanda and East Africa, and test whether risk and contingency planning in particular improves delivery.

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