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Abstract

Progress evaluation remains a critical determinant of infrastructure project performance; however, the strength of this relationship may depend on the regulatory environment in which monitoring practices operate. This study examined the relationship between progress evaluation and the performance of Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA) road construction projects in the North Rift Region, Kenya, and assessed the moderating effect of government policies on this relationship. Using a correlational research design, the study conducted a census of 129 KeNHA technical and supervisory staff involved in monitoring and implementing road construction projects in the North Rift Region. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple and moderated linear regression in SPSS Version 29. The findings revealed that progress evaluation practices were perceived as moderately implemented but were weakly translated into corrective action, with an overall mean of 2.99 (SD = 1.320). Government policies recorded the highest mean among all constructs (mean = 3.80), reflecting a strong and consistently perceived regulatory influence. Correlation analysis established significant positive relationships between progress evaluation and project performance ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.01$), government policies and project performance ($r = 0.462$, $p < 0.01$), and progress evaluation and government policies ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis further confirmed that progress evaluation had a statistically significant positive influence on project performance and that the interaction between progress evaluation and government policies was statistically significant, indicating that government policies moderated the relationship between progress evaluation and project performance. The study concludes that progress evaluation is positively linked to project performance and that this relationship is strengthened when progress evaluation is aligned with a supportive regulatory environment. The study recommends that KeNHA institutionalize structured milestone tracking and corrective action mechanisms and that regulatory agencies streamline approval processes to reinforce the benefits of progress evaluation rather than dilute them.

Keywords: Progress evaluation, government policies, project performance, moderating effect, road construction, North Rift Region

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1.0 Background of the Study

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices are essential for tracking progress, controlling costs, and maintaining quality in infrastructure projects (Kerzner, 2022). Globally, more than USD 2.5 trillion was invested in road infrastructure in 2023, with structured M&E systems supporting timely and cost-effective project delivery (World Bank, 2023). Evidence from Africa also shows that systematic monitoring improves road project outcomes, although its effectiveness depends on the institutional and regulatory environment (African Development Bank, 2022). In Kenya, the Kenya National Highways Authority (KeNHA), established under the Kenya Roads Act (2007), manages more than 6,830 km of national trunk roads. The Authority uses milestone tracking, performance audits, and progress reporting to monitor project implementation (KeNHA, 2024). Njeru and Kirui (2022) found that progress evaluation improved KeNHA project performance by 20 percent in Nairobi County. However, Gatitu et al. (2020) showed that regulatory compliance also influences M&E outcomes, suggesting that government policy may shape how monitoring translates into project performance.

This concern is especially relevant to KeNHA projects in the North Rift Region, which comprises Uasin Gishu, Elgeyo Marakwet, Trans Nzoia, Nandi, West Pokot, and Turkana counties. Despite ongoing progress monitoring, 60 percent of projects reportedly experienced cost overruns averaging Ksh 1.2 billion, while 55 percent were delayed by about 12 months in 2023 (Office of the Auditor General, 2023). These challenges suggest that progress evaluation alone may not guarantee improved project performance. Accordingly, the study examined the relationship between progress evaluation and project performance and tested whether government policy moderates this relationship among KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region, Kenya.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- i. To analyze the relationship between progress evaluation and the performance of KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region.
- ii. To determine the moderating effect of government policies on the relationship between progress evaluation and the performance of KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

- H0₁:** Progress evaluation has no significant relationship with the performance of KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region.
- H0₂:** Government policies do not significantly moderate the relationship between progress evaluation and the performance of KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review was done in sections.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two theoretical perspectives: the Theory of Change and Program Theory.

2.1.1 Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC), developed by Weiss (1995), holds that achieving long term change in complex systems requires clarification of the causal pathways and assumptions linking activities to outcomes, using backward design from the desired outcome to the conditions and inputs required to achieve it. In relation to progress evaluation, the theory suggests that monitoring activities such as milestone reviews and performance audits translate into performance gains only when the enabling or constraining contextual conditions surrounding them, including government policy, are considered (Davies, 2023). A recognized critique of the theory is that it assumes largely linear causality within implementation environments that are often dynamic and unpredictable (Valters, 2020). Nevertheless, the theory remains useful for examining how progress evaluation, shaped by contextual policy conditions, influences project performance.

2.1.2 Program Theory

Program Theory, developed by Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004), holds that programs achieve results through an internal logic that connects inputs and activities to outcomes within specific contexts and that this logic must be mapped, monitored, and tested as the program operates (Funnell & Rogers, 2021). Applied to this study, Program Theory suggests that progress evaluation functions as the mechanism through which monitoring work plans, milestone reports, and schedule reviews are translated into measurable improvements in road construction performance. A critique of Program Theory is that its application requires substantial analytical skill, can be time consuming in large scale projects, and may be undermined by flawed assumptions that misdirect the evaluation structure (Mayne, 2021). Nevertheless, the theory provides a strong basis for examining how progress evaluation, as a structured practice, influences KeNHA road project performance in the North Rift Region.

2.2 Empirical Review

Njeru and Kirui (2022) examined M&E practices in KeNHA road projects in Nairobi County using a descriptive explanatory design and regression analysis. They found that milestone reviews and performance audits improved project performance by 20 percent and reduced rework by 15 percent, but they did not examine government policy as a moderator. Maendo et al. (2018) investigated progress evaluation among local road contractors in Uasin Gishu County and found that timeline reviews improved project quality by 18 percent; however, the study excluded regulatory factors and KeNHA projects. Wambua et al. (2021) and Ochieng and Wanyoike (2019) examined infrastructure projects in Mombasa and Kisumu counties, respectively, and found that

performance audits improved cost compliance by 22 percent while timeline evaluation reduced delays by 17 percent. Neither study examined regulatory moderation. Bergstrom et al. (2024) examined regulatory governance in banking and found that strong oversight improved efficiency, stability, and reputation, while Gatitu et al. (2020) studied environmental compliance in KeNHA projects and found a 13 percent reduction in variation orders. Collectively, these studies did not test government policy as a moderator, leaving a gap that the current study addresses within KeNHA's North Rift operations.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

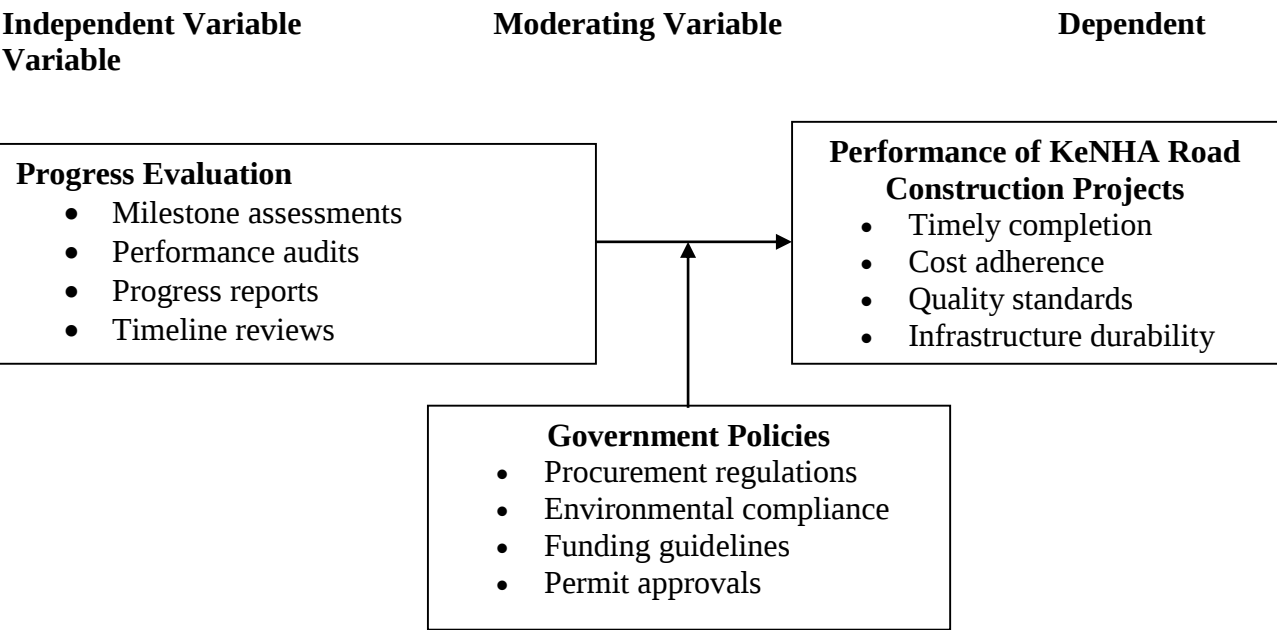


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Researcher (2026)

3.0 Research Methodology

This study adopted a correlational research design to examine the relationships among progress evaluation, government policies, and the performance of KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region. The design was appropriate because it enabled the study to examine existing monitoring and regulatory dynamics and their relationships with performance without manipulating the variables (Creswell, 2018). The target population consisted of 129 KeNHA technical and supervisory staff, including engineers, project managers, inspectors, M&E officers, budget and finance officers, stakeholder engagement coordinators, and regional supervisors involved in road construction project monitoring and implementation in the North Rift Region. A census approach was used, whereby the entire target population of 129 respondents was included because it was small, finite, and manageable. The study used structured questionnaires with closed ended items to collect quantitative data on progress evaluation, government policies, and project performance using a five point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The

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questionnaires were administered in both hard copy and electronic formats. Authorization was obtained from the Kabarak University Research Ethics Committee (KUREC) and NACOSTI before data collection. The data were then entered into IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29 for cleaning and analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize respondents' perceptions. Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression analyses were used to examine the relationships among progress evaluation, government policies, and project performance and to test the moderating effect of government policies. The direct effect model was specified as follows: Model 1: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + e$. The moderated model, incorporating the interaction between progress evaluation and government policies, was specified as follows: Model 2: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 M + \beta_3 (X \times M) + e$.

Where: Y = Performance of KeNHA road construction projects;

β_0 = Constant term;

β_1 = Coefficient of progress evaluation;

β_2 = Coefficient of the interaction term;

X_1 = Progress evaluation;

M = Government policies (moderator);

$X_1 \times M$ = Interaction between progress evaluation and government policies; e = Error term.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The results and discussion are presented in sections.

4.1 Response Rate

Of the 129 questionnaires administered, 103 were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 79.84 percent. This response rate was above the 70 percent threshold considered acceptable for inferential analysis (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019).

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

Of the 103 respondents, 74 (71.8 percent) were male and 29 (28.2 percent) were female. The largest experience category comprised respondents with 6 to 10 years of experience (34.0 percent), followed by those with less than 5 years of experience (23.3 percent). Inspectors formed the largest professional group (30.1 percent), followed by engineers (21.4 percent). This distribution indicates a technically experienced respondent base capable of providing informed views on progress evaluation and regulatory dynamics.

4.3 Descriptive Results

The descriptive results are presented below to provide an overview of the key characteristics of the study variables. The analysis summarizes the responses using relevant descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, where applicable. These

results provide a basis for understanding the distribution and general patterns in the data before proceeding to further statistical analysis.

Table 1: Descriptive Results for Progress Evaluation

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Each project has measurable milestones tracked systematically	11.7	18.4	14.6	35.0	20.3	3.33	1.298
Project reviews are aligned with set milestone targets	14.6	22.3	13.6	32.0	17.5	3.14	1.327
Audit reports are generated to assess project team performance	9.7	14.6	11.7	37.9	26.2	3.53	1.264
Performance evaluations are used to make course corrections	28.2	25.2	15.5	21.4	9.7	2.60	1.342
Progress reports provide timely updates on implementation status	13.6	20.4	15.5	33.0	17.5	3.19	1.305
Reports submitted reflect actual accomplishments on the ground	30.1	28.2	13.6	18.4	9.7	2.50	1.358
Supervisors regularly evaluate whether project timelines are met	12.6	19.4	14.6	35.9	17.5	3.25	1.286
Adjustments are made when project activities lag behind schedule	35.9	27.2	12.6	14.6	9.7	2.38	1.376
Overall Average						2.99	1.320

As shown in Table 1, 55.3 percent of respondents agreed that audit reports are generated to assess project team performance (mean = 3.53, SD = 1.264). This item recorded the highest mean in the section, indicating that documentary monitoring is relatively well established. Similarly, 55.7 percent agreed that projects have systematically tracked milestones (mean = 3.33, SD = 1.298). Together, these observations suggest a progress evaluation process that is procedure driven but limited in corrective action. This finding is consistent with Njeru and Kirui (2022), who found that although progress evaluation systems are in place in KeNHA projects, their influence on corrective action is minimal, especially in less accessible project areas. Only 31.1 percent of respondents agreed that performance evaluations are used to make course corrections (mean = 2.60, SD = 1.342). An even smaller proportion, 28.1 percent, agreed that adjustments are made when project activities lag behind schedule (mean = 2.38, SD = 1.376), which was the lowest mean in this section. These findings are consistent with Maendo, James, and Kamau (2018), who found that

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progress reporting was erratic in rural North Rift road projects, thereby undermining the practical value of otherwise well documented monitoring. The second lowest mean concerned whether submitted reports reflect actual accomplishments on the ground (mean = 2.50, SD = 1.358), with only 28.1 percent of respondents agreeing. This suggests a gap between reported and actual progress that may reduce the corrective value of the progress evaluation system. The overall mean for progress evaluation was 2.99 (SD = 1.320), indicating that although progress evaluation systems are applied and documented, their corrective and feedback functions are not consistently implemented. Similar observations were reported by Njeru and Kirui (2022) in the Nairobi KeNHA context and by Maendo, James, and Kamau (2018) in the North Rift Region.

Table 2: Descriptive Results for Government Policies

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
National procurement laws influence supplier selection timelines	7.8	9.7	11.7	39.8	31.1	3.74	1.152
Bureaucratic tendering processes slow down project kickoff	4.9	7.8	9.7	37.9	39.8	3.98	1.089
Environmental clearance is mandatory before construction begins	3.9	5.8	7.8	41.7	40.8	4.08	1.012
Environmental audits guide the use of eco-friendly materials	9.7	13.6	14.6	35.9	26.2	3.52	1.242
Public funding access follows strict legal frameworks	7.8	11.7	13.6	37.9	29.1	3.66	1.185
Disbursements depend on meeting regulatory thresholds	11.7	15.5	14.6	34.0	24.3	3.40	1.278
Government permits are required before site occupation	5.8	8.7	10.7	39.8	35.0	3.87	1.106
Approval delays disrupt scheduled construction activities	3.9	5.8	7.8	35.9	46.6	4.14	1.002
Overall Average						3.80	1.133

Table 2 shows that 82.5 percent of respondents agreed that approval delays disrupt scheduled construction activities (mean = 4.14, SD = 1.002), which was the highest mean across all constructs in the study. Similarly, 82.5 percent agreed that environmental clearance is mandatory before construction begins (mean = 4.08, SD = 1.012), while 77.7 percent agreed that bureaucratic tendering processes slow down project kickoff (mean = 3.98, SD = 1.089). Together, these findings indicate a strong and consistently perceived regulatory presence. This pattern aligns with Gatitu, Kabubo, and Ajwang's (2020) finding that environmental compliance materially shapes the implementation of M&E in KeNHA projects nationally and with Bergstrom, Lindqvist, and Osei's

(2024) assertion that regulatory governance can enhance organizational performance through operational discipline.

A further 74.8 percent of respondents agreed that government permits are required before site occupation (mean = 3.87, SD = 1.106), while 74.7 percent agreed that national procurement laws influence supplier selection timelines (mean = 3.74, SD = 1.152). These results extend Mulyungi's (2018) finding that clear government policy improved M&E linked project outcomes among NGOs in Rwanda by illustrating how regulatory processes also shape day to day project monitoring in Kenya's road sector. Finally, 58.3 percent agreed that disbursements depend on meeting regulatory thresholds (mean = 3.40, SD = 1.278), which was the lowest mean in this section and indicates comparatively less friction in the funding release dimension of regulation. The government policies index recorded the highest mean among all constructs at 3.80 (SD = 1.133), indicating a strong and consistent regulatory influence on road construction in the North Rift Region despite delays associated with tendering and approvals, as also noted by Gatitu, Kabubo, and Ajwang (2020).

Table 3: Descriptive Results for Project Performance

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std. Dev.
Projects finish within the timelines agreed in the contract	28.2	30.1	13.6	18.4	9.7	2.52	1.352
Project delays are minimized through strict scheduling	32.0	28.2	14.6	15.5	9.7	2.43	1.364
Projects do not exceed approved budgets	35.0	30.1	14.6	12.6	8.7	2.30	1.338
Any cost variations are justified and approved	25.2	28.2	15.5	20.4	10.7	2.64	1.342
All completed roads meet required technical specifications	14.6	20.4	15.5	31.1	17.5	3.16	1.318
Project teams uphold quality assurance throughout implementation	18.4	22.3	14.6	30.1	14.6	3.02	1.342
Newly constructed roads remain usable for extended periods	22.3	26.2	15.5	24.3	11.7	2.78	1.348
Durability is confirmed through post-construction evaluations	28.2	24.3	15.5	20.4	11.7	2.64	1.370
Overall Average						2.69	1.347

Table 3 shows that 48.6 percent of respondents agreed that completed roads meet the required technical specifications (mean = 3.16, SD = 1.318). This item recorded the highest mean in the table, indicating a comparatively stronger technical quality outcome than the time and cost

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dimensions. Quality assurance was also comparatively well rated, with a mean of 3.02 (SD = 1.342) and 44.7 percent of respondents agreeing. In contrast, only 21.3 percent agreed that projects do not exceed approved budgets (mean = 2.30, SD = 1.338), which was the lowest mean in the section, while 25.2 percent agreed that delays are minimized through strict scheduling (mean = 2.43, SD = 1.364). These findings are consistent with the Office of the Auditor General (2023), which reported that 60 percent of North Rift projects exceeded their budgets by an average of Ksh 1.2 billion, and with Ochenge (2022), who found that 65 percent of road projects in the Lake Basin Region were delayed because of poor M&E planning.

Finally, 36.0 percent of respondents agreed that newly constructed roads remain usable for extended periods (mean = 2.78, SD = 1.348), while 32.1 percent agreed that durability is confirmed through post construction evaluations (mean = 2.64, SD = 1.370). These findings indicate a need for stronger long-term performance verification. The overall project performance mean was 2.69 (SD = 1.347), indicating that although completed roads achieved comparatively acceptable technical quality, performance on time and cost dimensions was weaker. This pattern reflects the implementation gap identified in Section 4.3, where progress evaluation was found to be well documented but weak in triggering corrective action.

4.4 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to determine the strength and direction of the relationships between the study variables. Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient was used to establish whether the variables were positively or negatively associated and the magnitude of these relationships. The correlation results are presented below.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

	Progress Evaluation	Government Policies	Project Performance
Progress Evaluation	1.000	0.487	0.684
Government Policies	0.487	1.000	0.462
Project Performance	0.684	0.462	1.000

Correlations are significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed), N = 103.

All three variables showed positive, moderate to strong, and statistically significant correlations. Progress evaluation had the strongest association with project performance ($r = 0.684$, $p < 0.001$), which was notably stronger than the association between government policies and project performance ($r = 0.462$, $p < 0.001$). This pattern is consistent with the more direct predictive role of progress evaluation relative to the supportive and contextual role of government policy. The moderate correlation between progress evaluation and government policies ($r = 0.487$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the two constructs, although related, are sufficiently distinct to justify testing

government policy as a moderator rather than treating them as overlapping measures of the same underlying construct.

4.5 Regression Coefficients

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable. The regression coefficients indicate the direction and magnitude of the effect of each predictor while holding the other variables constant. The results also provide the corresponding significance levels used to determine whether each predictor had a statistically significant influence on the dependent variable.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model	Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Model 1	(Constant)	0.412	0.118	—	3.492	.001
	Progress Evaluation	0.298	0.064	0.326	4.656	.000
Model 2	(Constant)	0.856	0.152	—	5.632	.000
	Progress Evaluation × Government Policies	0.254	0.061	0.302	4.164	.000

The results indicate that progress evaluation has a positive and statistically significant direct effect on project performance ($B = 0.298$, $\beta = 0.326$, $t = 4.656$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, a one unit increase in progress evaluation was associated with a 0.298 unit increase in project performance. This finding suggests that consistent milestone tracking and performance reviews improve project success by enabling the early identification of issues and timely adjustments. The result is consistent with Njeru and Kirui (2022), who found progress evaluation to be a significant predictor of project performance in KeNHA's Nairobi projects. The interaction term between progress evaluation and government policies was also positive and statistically significant ($B = 0.254$, $\beta = 0.302$, $t = 4.164$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the relationship between progress evaluation and project performance becomes stronger when progress evaluation is aligned with a supportive government policy environment. This finding supports the Theory of Change proposition that enabling contextual conditions determine how effectively interventions translate into outcomes. It is also consistent with Mulyungi (2018), who found that project M&E practices positively moderated the relationship between government policy and project performance among NGOs in Rwanda. The moderated regression equation was expressed as $Y = 0.856 + 0.254(X \times M)$, where Y = performance of KeNHA road construction projects, X = progress evaluation, and M = government policies.

Table 6: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Variable	β	p-value	Decision
H0 ₁	Progress Evaluation	0.326	0.000	Rejected
H0 ₂	Progress Evaluation × Government Policies	0.302	0.000	Rejected

Because both p values were below the 0.05 significance threshold, both null hypotheses were rejected. The results therefore indicate that progress evaluation significantly influences project performance and that government policies significantly moderate this relationship among KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region, Kenya.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concludes that progress evaluation has a positive and statistically significant influence on the performance of KeNHA road construction projects in the North Rift Region, supporting Program Theory's proposition that structured monitoring processes connect activities to program outcomes through ongoing feedback and adjustment. The descriptive findings indicate that this potential is only partly realized in practice because, although milestone tracking and audit reporting are consistently conducted, the translation of evaluation findings into corrective action and the accuracy of ground level reporting remain weak. The study further concludes that government policies significantly moderate the relationship between progress evaluation and project performance, supporting the Theory of Change proposition that enabling contextual conditions shape the effectiveness of interventions. Overall, KeNHA projects that align progress evaluation with regulatory compliance requirements are better positioned to convert monitoring activities into measurable performance gains than projects that treat regulation and progress evaluation as separate processes.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that KeNHA integrate regulatory compliance considerations into the design of its progress evaluation systems rather than manage monitoring and regulatory reporting as separate processes. Specifically, KeNHA should institutionalize standardized milestone tracking tools to reduce inconsistencies between documented progress and actual accomplishments on the ground, strengthen corrective action mechanisms to close the gap between evaluation findings and implementation decisions, and improve procedures for verifying the accuracy of progress reports submitted from remote North Rift sites. Government agencies should streamline procurement, environmental clearance, and permit approval processes because approval delays and bureaucratic tendering were the most strongly endorsed regulatory concerns in the study. Future studies should test this moderating relationship using longitudinal designs to determine how it evolves as regulatory frameworks change and extend the investigation to KeNHA projects outside the North Rift Region to assess the generalizability of the findings.

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