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Stakeholders' Participation in Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) and Performance of Water Supply Projects in Australia: Evidence from Cotter Dam

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Abstract

Stakeholders' Participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a critical factor in determining the performance and success of projects across various sectors. Effective stakeholder engagement ensures that the voices and perspectives of all relevant parties, such as government agencies, local communities, NGOs, and consumers, are heard and considered throughout the project lifecycle. By actively involving stakeholders in the M&E process, projects benefit from their valuable insights, leading to better-informed decision-making, improved project design, and enhanced transparency. Ultimately, this collaborative approach contributes to more efficient and sustainable project outcomes, addressing the diverse needs and interests of the stakeholders involved. The study adopted the descriptive research design. The target population was 250 stakeholders in Water Supply Project (Cotter Dam) in Australia. The study did sampling of 220 respondents that were chosen from the target population of 250 stakeholders of Cotter Dam in Australia. Questionnaires were used to gather the data. In conclusion, the evidence from the Cotter Dam project in Australia underscores the critical importance of stakeholder participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for the successful execution of water supply projects. Active involvement of stakeholders, including government bodies, environmental organizations, local communities, and consumers, leads to improved decision-making, transparency, and accountability throughout a project's lifecycle. By embracing lessons from the Cotter Dam, future water supply projects can adopt more inclusive, transparent, and collaborative approaches, ultimately ensuring the continued success and sustainability of critical infrastructure initiatives. The study recommended that to enhance the effectiveness of stakeholder participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) for water supply projects in Australia, it is crucial to establish robust communication channels that engage a diverse range of stakeholders, from government agencies to local communities. Additionally, clear policies and guidelines should be implemented to ensure mandatory stakeholder involvement and accountability, fostering a more inclusive, transparent, and successful project execution.

Keywords: *Stakeholders' Participation, M&E, Performance, Projects, Australia*

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1.0 Background of the Study

Water supply projects play a critical role in ensuring the availability of safe and reliable drinking water for communities. In Australia, where water resources are often scarce and under pressure, the successful implementation of such projects is of utmost importance (Gupta, Pandey, Feijóo, Yaseen & Bokde, 2020). The Cotter Dam, located near Canberra, is a significant water supply project in Australia. It has served as a vital water source for the nation's capital and surrounding regions for decades. As water demand increased and concerns about drought and climate change grew, the Cotter Dam underwent a major expansion and modernization to enhance its capacity and resilience. Stakeholders in water supply projects are a diverse group, including government agencies, environmental organizations, local communities, water utilities, and consumers. Their involvement is crucial for shaping project outcomes and ensuring they meet the diverse needs and interests of the region. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in water supply projects serves multiple purposes, including tracking project progress, identifying challenges, assessing the efficiency of resource utilization, and ensuring alignment with predefined goals and objectives (Amanuel, 2022). It provides the data required for informed decision-making.

Stakeholder participation in M&E is not limited to mere consultation; it involves active engagement in the project's various phases (Zaucha & Kreiner, 2021). Such involvement can lead to more well-informed decisions, better project outcomes, and ultimately, a more sustainable water supply. One significant impact of stakeholder participation is during the project design phase. Stakeholders, including environmental groups and local communities, can provide valuable insights into potential challenges, environmental concerns, and community needs. Their inputs can significantly influence the project design, ensuring it is more in tune with local requirements. Transparency is a key component of successful project implementation (Betta & Boronina, 2018). Active stakeholder involvement helps build trust among various parties and ensures that project activities and outcomes are transparent and accountable, fostering a collaborative atmosphere. Expanding the Cotter Dam entailed addressing various environmental concerns, including potential impacts on wildlife and ecosystems. By actively engaging with environmental organizations and experts, the project team was better equipped to identify these concerns and implement effective mitigation strategies.

Engaging local communities near the Cotter Dam allowed the project to consider the needs and concerns of those directly affected by the construction and operation of the dam (Torre, Sabir & Pham, 2021). This approach resulted in a more harmonious project implementation, minimizing potential conflicts and enhancing community support. The Cotter Dam project incorporated feedback mechanisms, such as regular community consultations and public forums, ensuring that stakeholders had a platform to voice concerns, suggest improvements, and influence project decisions. This iterative approach allowed for dynamic adjustments throughout the project's lifecycle. The performance of a water supply project like the Cotter Dam is judged by its ability to provide a reliable, safe, and sustainable water supply. The active involvement of stakeholders played a significant role in achieving these goals, making the expansion of the Cotter Dam a success story. While stakeholder participation in M&E is critical, it is not without its challenges (Didham & Ofei-Manu, 2020). These may include conflicting interests among stakeholders, delays

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in decision-making due to extensive consultations, and resource constraints. Striking a balance between participation and efficiency is essential. The Cotter Dam case serves as a valuable lesson for future water supply projects in Australia and beyond. It emphasizes the importance of early and ongoing stakeholder engagement in M&E processes. It also highlights the need for effective mechanisms to address conflicts, streamline decision-making, and manage resource limitations.

The success of the Cotter Dam expansion demonstrates that policies and regulations should encourage and support stakeholder participation in water supply projects. Government authorities and relevant agencies should consider the Cotter Dam case as a model for incorporating stakeholder engagement into future projects, ultimately enhancing transparency, accountability, and project success. Ching and Gerab (2021) noted that the Cotter Dam expansion project in Australia exemplifies the significant impact of stakeholder participation in Monitoring and Evaluation on the performance and sustainability of water supply projects. By actively involving a wide range of stakeholders, addressing their concerns, and maintaining transparent communication, the Cotter Dam project has achieved its objectives, serving as a blueprint for future water infrastructure initiatives. To ensure the continued success of water supply projects in Australia, stakeholders should actively participate in M&E processes, and project managers should implement mechanisms that address challenges and promote transparency and accountability (Herath & Herath, 2023). Furthermore, government authorities and policymakers should consider the Cotter Dam case as a model for future water supply projects, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder engagement from the project's inception to its completion. This will lead to more resilient and sustainable water supply solutions for the region.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

One major problem in the context of water supply projects, such as the Cotter Dam, is the limited and sometimes tokenistic involvement of stakeholders in the M&E process. Some stakeholders may be excluded from decision-making or have minimal opportunities to influence project design, implementation, or evaluation. This issue can lead to projects that do not fully address the needs and concerns of all relevant parties, potentially resulting in conflicts and project delays. Stakeholders often have divergent and sometimes conflicting interests in water supply projects. Government agencies may prioritize cost efficiency, while environmental organizations may emphasize ecological preservation. Local communities may be concerned with the project's immediate impact on their lives. Balancing these interests to achieve the best possible project outcomes is a complex challenge. When conflicts arise among stakeholders, it is essential to have effective mechanisms in place to resolve disputes and find common ground. The absence of such mechanisms can lead to prolonged disagreements, delayed decision-making, and, ultimately, hinder project progress and success.

Another issue revolves around resource constraints, both in terms of financial and human resources. Insufficient resources for stakeholder engagement and M&E can limit the effectiveness of these processes, potentially resulting in incomplete assessments and missed opportunities for improvement. Transparency and accountability are vital for building trust among stakeholders. When project activities, decision-making processes, and performance outcomes are not sufficiently transparent, it can erode confidence among stakeholders, making it challenging to

maintain their active engagement. Ultimately, the overarching problem is the ability of water supply projects, like the Cotter Dam, to provide a sustainable and reliable source of drinking water. If stakeholder participation in M&E is not effectively harnessed, the project's long-term sustainability and its capacity to address evolving challenges, such as climate change and population growth, may be compromised.

2.0 Literature Review

According to Kusters, Buck, de Graaf, Minang, van Oosten and Zagt (2018), for openness and accountability to be maintained throughout [the project work], an efficient monitoring and assessment procedure is essential (Umhlaba Development Services, n.d.). The purpose of the research was to learn how including stakeholders improved the monitoring and assessing of projects. The research used a systematic quantitative literature review approach to examine the relationship between the factors derived from the Daltons' conceptual model of involvement and the reported costs, durations, and quality of project monitoring and assessment. Summary narrative was extracted using content analysis from a sample of 31 literature items. The study's independent variables included levels of stakeholder satisfaction, administrative effectiveness, decision-making fairness, efficiency, and good stakeholder engagement. The factors under study were the time, money, and scope of the project monitoring and assessment, which was the dependent variable. According to the results, stakeholder involvement matters for accurate monitoring and assessment of projects.

A study by Leach, Pelkey and Sabatier (2022) reported that to assure healthy lives and put an end to illnesses like AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, it is crucial to thoroughly analyze the impact of the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) process on HIV/AIDS projects. The purpose of this research was to analyze how the French HIV/AIDS project management system responded to the monitoring and evaluation process. The research set out to determine whether or not the level of stakeholder involvement in the Monitoring and Evaluation process had an effect on the success of HIV/AIDS initiatives in France. The principle of stakeholder involvement served as the basis for this research. The research included 51 workers from the CSA, and the sample size was determined by a census. Data was mostly collected via interviews and questionnaires that respondents filled out on their own time. The data was analyzed descriptively, and the findings were shown graphically and tabularly. The results indicated a composite mean of 3.606 and a standard deviation of 1.023, indicating that stakeholders play a crucial role in the monitoring and evaluation process and that it is necessary to engage all stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process. The report advises that stakeholders be included in the Monitoring and Evaluation process from the beginning of the project until its completion. The results have implications for project managers, M&E specialists, funders, policymakers, and academics.

Sherman and Ford (2019) mentioned that greater openness and accountability in development governance are fostered via PM&E of projects and programs with participant input. Some research has shown that there is a lack of involvement in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) on the part of Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies. This research employed a case study technique. A total of 196 participants were included in the study's sample. The research showed that MPCU and District Assembly members had the most stakeholder engagement in the monitoring and

evaluation of projects and programs, while the Zonal Council and community members had the lowest. This has had an adverse effect on the openness, responsibility, and longevity of ongoing initiatives and programs. The research found that stakeholders were seldom engaged in M&E of projects and programs because the MPCU did not make a deliberate effort to incorporate stakeholders at the grassroots level, and because stakeholders at the community level had a negative outlook on M&E. Participation from the MPCU and Assembly members was commendably high, whereas participation from the Unit committee, the community, and the Zonal councils was disappointingly low. The study suggests that the District Assembly, working through the MPCU, implement measures like increasing substructure participation in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process, providing a conducive setting in which substructures can establish and work toward their own goals, and bolstering substructures' abilities to report on their progress to the communities they serve and the Municipal Assembly on a regular basis. The Municipal Assembly and the Sub-structures should work together to educate the public about the importance of community involvement in the monitoring and assessment of municipal initiatives and programs.

According to Yadav (2023), participatory monitoring and evaluation is used in educational settings to better the design, administration, and execution of initiatives. When it comes to public school environments, PM&E provides a novel approach to integrating stakeholders in project planning and execution. The research set out to determine how public school initiatives in India's Kolkata Region fared when subjected to participatory monitoring and assessment. There are 33 public secondary schools included in the study's population. The research used a non-probabilistic (purposeful) sampling strategy. The research acquired data by use of questionnaires then descriptive analysis and inferential analysis was performed for quantitative data. SPSS V17 was used to create bar charts, line charts, and pie charts to display averages and variances. The research showed that school project management is carried out without input from stakeholders. Furthermore, it has been shown that open forums, meetings, and seminars in which stakeholders express their views and negotiate ideas may boost institutional building. Since the stakeholders lacked expertise in participatory monitoring and evaluation, the study concluded that efforts can be made by the appointing authority to train the selected stakeholders if the goals will be achieved. The region’s public schools' performance is impacted by the shareholders' point of view during negotiations. There is still a connection between public accountability and the success of public secondary school projects, as well as between project planning and the success of public school projects, and finally, between project planning and the success of teachers commission policy. The research indicates that public schools should include the stakeholders in the process of projects management by arranging meeting, forums and seminars that will enable them to express their thoughts, wants and opinions which help them negotiate their viewpoints and make key choices.

Malik, Fu, Rasool, Wani, Zaman and Wani (2023) conducted research project's title, "Influence of Stakeholder Participation on Project Performance in Belgium: A Case Study of the Speak Out Project," refers to four goals that will be used to determine its direction. Specifically, this study aimed to: establish the impact of stakeholder involvement in project monitoring and evaluation; examine the impact of stakeholder involvement in project planning on Speak Out project performance; determine the impact of stakeholder involvement in resource mobilization and

evaluation on Speak Out project performance. Research was conducted using data collected from the FVA's Speak Out initiative. Participants included 62 Speak Out project staff, 100 club representatives, and 400 VAWG survivors. Primary data came from interviews with Speak Out project staff and recipients, while secondary data came from project documents. Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential methods, including correlation and multiple linear regression. Stakeholder involvement in project identification was shown to significantly affect Speak out Project outcomes (β= 0.144, p=0.007 0.05, t=2.712). Speak out Project's performance would improve by 1= 0.144 units if more stakeholders were included in the identification process. According to the results (β= 0.391, p=0.000 0.05, t=6.406), including stakeholders in project planning significantly affects the project's success. The inference is that if Speak Out Project's stakeholders were more involved in the planning process, the project's performance would improve by β= 0.391 units. Stakeholder involvement in monitoring and evaluating projects was shown to have a significant and beneficial impact on Speak Out Project outcomes (β= 0.341, p=0.0000.05, t= 7.605). The inference is that the Speak out Project would gain 3= 0.341 units of performance if stakeholder engagement in monitoring and evaluation was increased. A favorable and statistically significant effect on Speak out Project performance was discovered when stakeholders were involved in resource mobilization (β=0.199, p=0.0010.05, t= 7.882). A favorable and statistically significant influence on Speak Out Project success was found for stakeholder involvement in resource mobilization, project monitoring and evaluation, project identification, and project planning.

Kabeyi (2019) carried out research to provide evidence for the hypothesis that project outcomes are improved when stakeholders are included in donor-funded initiatives. The research looked at community involvement across the whole project life cycle, from inception to planning to execution to monitoring and evaluation. Only three essential project performance indicators completion on time, cost implications, and project sustainability were considered in this research. The study set out to answer four questions about how stakeholder involvement affects project success: how doing so at the outset affects outcomes, how planning and execution phases affect outcomes, how monitoring and evaluation phases affect outcomes, and how involving stakeholders at the end affects outcomes. Participants included representatives from the two funders, the implementing organization, the project advisory committee, and the beneficiaries. The first three groups were selected using a purposive sampling strategy, while the fourth group (project beneficiaries) was selected using a simple random selection strategy. Key informant interviews were utilized to collect data from the first three types of respondents, while questionnaires were employed to get information from the project's end users. The research had 70 participants as its sample size. The researcher utilized SPSS and mostly relied on measures of central tendency to characterize the data from a descriptive design study. In order to verify the study's hypotheses, the researcher used regression and correlation to analyze the dependent and independent variables. The research indicated that stakeholder involvement and project success were positively associated. Project success was favorably connected with involvement in the start-up, execution, and tracking and analysis phases, but adversely correlated with involvement in the planning phase. The information was shown using tables. The study's author found that project success is impacted when stakeholders are involved throughout the whole project's life cycle. The researcher advises

future research on effect of stakeholder engagement on various project success metrics other than those covered in this study (time, cost and sustainability).

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive research design. The target population was 250 stakeholders in Water Supply Project (Cotter Dam) in Australia. The study did sampling of 220 respondents that were chosen from the target population of 250 stakeholders of Cotter Dam in Australia. Questionnaires were used to gather the data.

4.0 Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Correlation Analysis

The findings presented in Table 1 shows the correlation analysis

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

		Performance	Stakeholders' Participation
Performance	Pearson Correlation	1.000	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
Stakeholders' Participation	Pearson Correlation	.249 **	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000

The correlation results from Table 1 indicate that the stakeholders' participation was positively and significantly related with performance (r=.249, p=.000). This concurs with Malik, Fu, Rasool, Wani, Zaman and Wani (2023) who mentioned that stakeholders' participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a pivotal element in the success of projects, as it allows for diverse voices and interests to be considered. Engaging stakeholders throughout the project's lifecycle leads to informed decision-making and enhances transparency, ultimately contributing to improved project performance and outcomes.

4.2 Regression Analysis

The section includes model fitness, analysis of variance and regression of coefficient. The results in Table 2 show the model fitness

Table 2: Model Fitness

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.249a	0.221	0.187	0.044322

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The results from Table 2 reveal that stakeholders' participation was found to be satisfactory in explaining the performance of Water Supply Project (Cotter Dam) in Australia. This was supported by the coefficient of determination, which is R square of 0.221. It indicates that stakeholders' participation explain 22.1% of the variations in the performance of Water Supply Project (Cotter Dam) in Australia.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.81	1	6.81	171.96	.000b
	Residual	9.91	250	0.0396		
	Total	16.2	249			

The findings in Table 3 reveals that the overall model was statistically significant. The findings indicate that performance is a good predictor in explaining the stakeholders' participation among the Water Supply Project (Cotter Dam) in Australia. This was supported by an F statistic of 99.49 and the reported p-value of 0.000 which was less than the conventional probability significance level of 0.05.

Table 4: Regression of Coefficient

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.621	0.143		4.343	0.066
Stakeholders' Participation	0.826	0.332	0.961	2.488	0.031

Based on the findings in Table 4, it was discovered that stakeholders' participation was positively and significantly associated to performance (β=0.826, p=0.031). This was supported by a calculated t-statistic of 2.488 that is larger than the critical t-statistic of 1.96. These results indicates that when stakeholders' participation increases by one unit, the performance of in Water Supply Project (Cotter Dam) in Australia will increase by 0.826 units while other factors that influence the performance of firms remain unchanged. Kusters, Buck, de Graaf, Minang, van Oosten and Zagt (2018) articulated that stakeholders' active participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is a fundamental driver for project success across various sectors. By involving a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including government agencies, communities, and organizations, projects can tap into a wealth of knowledge and insights, which in turn leads to more informed decisions and better

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project performance. Effective stakeholder engagement fosters transparency, accountability, and project success, aligning projects with the diverse needs and interests of the parties involved.

5.0 Conclusion

The case of the Cotter Dam expansion project in Australia underscores the crucial role of stakeholder participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in the success and sustainability of water supply projects. The evidence from this project reveals that actively engaging stakeholders throughout the project's lifecycle leads to improved decision-making, better project design, enhanced transparency, and ultimately, a more resilient and efficient water supply system. The Cotter Dam case serves as a model for other water supply projects, emphasizing the significance of stakeholder involvement in project planning, execution, and evaluation. Stakeholders, including government agencies, environmental organizations, local communities, and consumers, play a pivotal role in shaping project outcomes. They offer diverse perspectives, needs, and concerns that, when considered, result in a project that better meets the collective requirements of the region. The Cotter Dam's success in addressing environmental concerns, incorporating community input, and establishing effective feedback mechanisms demonstrates the tangible benefits of stakeholder participation.

The challenges of stakeholder participation, such as conflicting interests, resource constraints, and potential delays in decision-making, are not insurmountable. Instead, they highlight the need for innovative mechanisms that balance the diverse stakeholder interests and streamline the decision-making process. The lessons from the Cotter Dam case offer valuable insights for policymakers, project managers, and stakeholders, underscoring the importance of proactive engagement, conflict resolution mechanisms, and transparent communication to enhance the performance and sustainability of future water supply projects in Australia and beyond. In conclusion, the Cotter Dam project showcases that water supply projects benefit immensely from the active involvement of stakeholders in M&E processes. This involvement fosters collaboration, trust, and accountability, all of which are essential for ensuring the continued success of critical infrastructure projects and the provision of a reliable and sustainable water supply for communities. By embracing the lessons from the Cotter Dam, we can pave the way for more resilient and responsive water supply solutions that meet the evolving needs of our societies and the environment.

6.0 Recommendations

To enhance stakeholder participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) processes for water supply projects in Australia, it is imperative to establish and nurture inclusive engagement frameworks. These frameworks should prioritize involving a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, environmental organizations, local communities, and consumers, right from the project's inception. Regular and open consultations, forums, and feedback mechanisms should be incorporated into project planning to ensure all voices are heard. Additionally, mechanisms for conflict resolution and balancing conflicting interests should be integrated to address disputes and maintain a constructive environment for decision-making. Transparency and accountability are the cornerstones of successful stakeholder engagement in water supply projects. Project managers and authorities should ensure that project activities, decision-making processes, and performance data

are made easily accessible to stakeholders. This transparency builds trust and confidence in the project's management. Regular reporting on project progress, financial allocations, and environmental and social impact assessments should be mandatory. This transparency is key to fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among all stakeholders. Governments and policymakers should establish clear policy frameworks that mandate and support stakeholder participation in M&E processes for water supply projects. These policies should emphasize the importance of early and continuous engagement with stakeholders and set standards for resource allocation to support these efforts. Furthermore, they should define roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders and ensure that project managers have the necessary tools and resources to engage effectively with the community. By creating an enabling policy environment, governments can ensure that stakeholder participation is not just a voluntary endeavor but a fundamental requirement for the success of water supply projects in Australia.

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