

Enhancing Project Quality Management Practices to Improve Project Delivery Performance: A Comparative Study of Best Practice in Selected NGOs Sector

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Abstract

The research aims to explore how Project Quality Management (PQM) practices can be enhanced to improve project delivery performance within locally selected NGO sectors in Juba, South Sudan, which is a fragile context characterized by political instabilities and institutional weaknesses. The study employed a qualitative design and conducted a systematic review of secondary data, involving the exploration of global and regional best practices, organizational reports, and peer-reviewed literature. The thematic analysis was used to recognize meaningful patterns and challenges, similarly to how Braun and Clarke (2006) explain. Results indicate that although the components of the PQM are theoretically identified as planning, assurance, and control, they cannot be implemented due to a lack of adequate funding, institutional barriers, and donor constraints. A significant gap existed between theory and practice, which led to the proposed adaptive PQM framework focusing on stakeholders, risk-based planning, and community integration. The study offers a contextualised PQM model sensitive to the work reality of conflict-affected environments. It is summed up by strategic guidelines on capacity building, elastic governance, and continued learning to achieve effective PQM in fragile environmental NGOs. These need to inform policy and practice to achieve better humanitarian outcomes and sustainable development activities.

Keywords

Project Quality Management, NGOs, Adaptive Frameworks, project delivery performance, Fragile Environments, Juba, South Sudan

1. Introduction

Project Quality Management (PQM) is useful in achieving the success of

development initiatives, especially in fragile settings. In Juba, South Sudan, NGOs experience considerable PQM difficulties because of political insecurity, resource shortage, and poor institutional mechanisms (Lado, 2021; Kiden, 2021). Although the ISO 9001 and Total Quality Management (TQM) models are effective in stable environments, they lose power in conflict-stricken areas (Kerzner, 2019; Oakland, 2014). One often-presented challenge to PQM implementation is the low capability of local human resources and donor-led systems (Nyang, 2020; UNDP, 2022). This paper examines adaptive PQM models that are locally responsive and seek to enhance the results of projects in Juba.

Within a project framework, PQM is important regarding the degree to which the deliverables meet the technical standards and expectations of all the stakeholders. PMI (2017) focuses on the importance of quality planning, assurance, and control in the success of projects, whereas Kerzner (2019) talks about the economic efficiency of PQM and its effect on stakeholder satisfaction. In the case of NGOs in difficult environments, it is complicated to implement PQM because of a lack of funding, governance, and technical deficiencies.

The principles of PQM have worked elsewhere. The most popular of them, used in construction, is ISO 9001 and Six Sigma, and in healthcare, Lean and TQM were applied (Goetsch & Davis, 2014). NGOs have also started developing these approaches, although their use is regularly limited by funding insecurity and weak institutional backing. To many nonprofit organizations, quality remains an ambition rather than an organized process due to poor centralized governance and turbulence in operations.

According to Oakland (2014), leadership, development of staff, and effective governance are needed to sustain project quality improvement. This is, however, problematic for fragile states like South Sudan. This study will facilitate the improvement of PQM processes in relation to the adjustment to local challenges.

The study of PQM normally draws on the experience of stable organizations in developed economies, ignoring conflict-ridden NGOs. Adeleke et al. (2018) believe that PQM is also to be pliant to persevere through disturbance in South Sudan. With an active presence of donors and poor regulations, these issues have not been critically evaluated in most studies. The proposed research paper bridges the gap by suggesting locally viable PQM practices to NGOs based in Juba.

Most donor-funded programs in South Sudan are driven by compliance, rather than effectiveness. According to Lado (2021), the widely used quality controls are hardly adapted to local demands. In the absence of capacity-building, as Nyang (2020) cautions, quality systems fail within months after the withdrawal of donor support. This paper aims to find sustainable PQM structures that are combined with donor expectations and local reality.

Western PQM frameworks, like PMBOK (2021) and the model proposed by

Juran (1999), traditionally underperform in fragile states because they are based on notions of stability and the availability of credible data. In Africa, the level of cost-related economic and institutional preparedness differs significantly. Despite the benefits of ISO and TQM in enhancing services in Nigeria and South Africa (Maruta et al., 2024), implementation is uneven as a result of regulatory gaps and the absence of expertise.

This study assesses how PQM systems are most capable of being contextualized to the realities of NGOs in South Sudan to increase the long-term effectiveness of humanitarian and development efforts.

1.1. Statement of the problem

In South Sudan, NGOs use Project Quality Management (PQM) to reach their project goals and earn the trust of stakeholders. Still in Juba, PQM frameworks are not fully implemented due to problems with planning, monitoring, and a lack of proper staff capacity training (World Bank, 2021). If organizations do not have a proper PQM system, they may waste resources and produce results that are not always of the required standard, requiring them to repeat their efforts (Gurtong, 2023). According to the UNDP (2022) report revealed that 60% of NGO projects in Juba faced quality issues that led to poor outcomes and made many stakeholders dissatisfied.

If organizations do not have strong Project Quality Management (PQM) standards, they may lose the trust of donors because of poor use of resources and inadequate service delivery. The South Sudan NGO Forum (2023) reports that 40% of NGO projects in Juba did not meet their objectives because there was not enough quality assurance. Because of these scarcities, projects may not work as well and may not last long. The researcher asserts, “Because of the unstable economy, it is crucial to enhance PQM to ensure that projects continue and succeed, especially in South Sudan.”

With the help of effective frameworks, NGOs can follow global standards and still address local needs. It examines how PQM is carried out in Juba, South Sudan, and how projects are completed there, suggesting practical steps for researchers, managers, and policymakers to improve PQM in similar areas. The research design allows for studying how well PQM works in situations of conflict. By following this approach, decisions are taken correctly and projects are carried out successfully in humanitarian situations.

This research aims to analyze the major obstacles to the implementation of PQM in the NGO environment in Juba, test the efficiency of the existing elements of PQM, and provide adaptable models on how to optimize the delivery of a project.

1.2. Three main research questions are:

- 1) What are the major barriers to PQM and project success in the NGO sector in Juba, South Sudan?

- 2) How do PQM components drive project delivery in NGOs in Juba, South Sudan?
- 3) What adaptable PQM model applies to unstable environments such as Juba?

The paper is presented as follows: Chapter One presents the background of the study, its objectives, and its significance. Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature and possible gaps in theory. Chapter Three describes the research methodology, including the data source and data analysis. Chapter four reports the findings, and chapter five discusses the findings and implications, respectively. Chapter Six ends with considerations and suggestions for future research and practice.

2. Literature Review

The practice of Project Quality Management (PQM) has become a critical factor in the provision of positive outcomes in development and humanitarian activities, especially those working in fragile and unstable environments. PQM is interconnected with the investigation of how to include in every step of a project the concept of quality planning, quality assurance, and quality control (PMI, 2021). PQM in the NGO sector, especially in conflict zones, such as Juba, South Sudan, has several issues, such as weak institutions, little funding, and failure to meet the demands of donors (Lado, 2021; Nyang, 2020).

The well-structured methods of improving quality are provided by traditional PQM models such as ISO 9001, Total Quality Management (TQM), Lean Six Sigma, and the PMBOK Guide. However, their rigid nature and presumption that they can operate in the same business environments consistently undermine their performance in conflict areas (Kerzner, 2019; Oakland, 2014). Compared to TQM, which forms its principles based on the constant improvement of practices and engagement of stakeholders (Juran, 2016), Lean Six Sigma focuses on efficiency related to the data-driven processes (George, 2002). However, such models must be adjusted to the region, such as South Sudan, where statistics are usually incomplete or inaccurate (Muller & Jugdev, 2012).

The need for more flexible and responsive PQM frameworks to contexts is revealed by comparative studies of the work of NGOs in the same fragile environment. As an example, the adaptive model used in Haiti by Oxfam and risk-based quality management strategies implemented in East Africa by CARE International have exemplified a positive change in the sustainability and responsiveness levels of the projects (PMI, 2021; Turner, 2016). And equally, World Vision and Save the Children have used Six Sigma and Lean to enhance the service delivery and minimize waste in humanitarian programs (Juran, 2016; George, 2002).

Nonetheless, they do not eliminate a form of a steady gap in the research on how PQM may be efficiently localized to suit the needs of NGOs in South Sudan. Existing literature is mainly developed within a stable environment,

and empirical studies targeting addressing unique constraints affecting organizations operating in conflict areas (Adeleke et al., 2018). Moreover, how community and digital tools might facilitate PQM processes is not explored (ISO, 2015).

This paper helps in bridging those gaps by offering an adaptive PQM framework to fragile contexts. It has combined the lessons of best practices around the world and adapted them to the socio-political realities of the NGOs in Juba. In this way, in addition to contributing to the body of theoretical knowledge regarding PQM, it also provides practical guidelines on how project delivery in conflict-affected areas can be enhanced.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed qualitative research designed based on the interpretivist philosophical approach to examine Project Quality Management (PQM) practices of NGOs in Juba, South Sudan. The research methodology was based on a systematic review of secondary data such as peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational reports, policy documents, and international case studies of relevance to PQM in fragile contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saunders et al., 2019).

3.1. Research Design

The use of qualitative approaches allowed investigating in detail the contextual and organizational behaviours, which cannot be easily captured through a quantitative approach. This method was necessary because of the limited availability of primary data and the intricacies surrounding the research process of carrying out field research in war-torn locations (Bryman, 2016). The interpretivist approach was determined by the study to shed light on the perception and application of PQM practices that NGOs have in the unique context of their work.

3.2. Data Analysis

Data were obtained through a systematic search approach of different databases: Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science, Scopus, and ProQuest. The refining of search terms like project quality management AND NGOs, PQM in conflict areas, and NGOs AND Quality assurance in Juba was done using Boolean operators. Expected keywords were provided by filtering the sources to contain only peer-reviewed articles, NGO reports, and donor assessments that were published between 2015 and 2024. Sources that have either speculatively focused on only corporate sectors or lacked any empirical data were not included.

3.3. Data Reliability and Validity

Data evaluation of reliability and validity was performed based on the Critical

Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist to facilitate methodological rigor of data assessment and to reduce biases. Braun and Clarke (2006) mention a six-stage pattern of thematic analysis (i.e., familiarization, coding, theme development, reviewing themes, defining themes, and reporting) that was used to extract the themes and analyze them. Triangulation was accomplished by cross-referencing results received by various sources to increase accuracy and minimize potential bias on the part of the researcher (Patton, 2015).

3.4. Ethical Consideration

There was strict adherence to ethical considerations. No consent of the participants is needed because the study used purely secondary data. Nonetheless, academic honesty was guaranteed with the help of references and compliance with plagiarism checks through Turnitin. Data were obtained responsibly by exploring open-access and publicly available material, thus maintaining privacy and ethical data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This methodological approach facilitated an in-depth study of PQM practices among NGOs working in fragile contexts and enabled credible lessons to be learned that could be relevant in other conflict-ridden environments.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings of this research are arranged based on the three core research questions, which are: the identification of obstacles to Project Quality Management (PQM), the empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of PQM components on project performance, and the recommendation of adaptive PQM models that can be applicable in a weak environment like Juba in South Sudan. The information was collected by a systematic study of secondary sources and presented thematically.

4.1. Objective 1: Barriers to PQM Implementation

Thematic analysis revealed three broad domains of barriers to PQM: institutional, technical, and financial. Weak governance, the fragmentation of the quality policies, leadership turnover, and the absence of national PQM standards were also characterized as institutional challenges (Lado, 2021; South Sudan NGO Forum, 2023). Constrains that were technical were associated with the limited staff capacity, lack of training, and poor-quality control mechanisms (Nyang, 2020). Illegal donor financing and excess reliance on externally imposed quality standards, which did not focus on implementing anything sustainable, were the financial constraints (World Bank, 2022).

Table 1*Frequency of Themes Across Reviewed Sources:*

Theme	Number of Sources	Sample Sources
Institutional Barriers	5	Lado (2021), NGO Forum (2023), Nyang (2020)
Capacity and Technical Constraints	4	Nyang (2020), Kiden (2023), Oxfam (2019)
Donor Influence & Resource Limits	4	World Bank (2022), Researcher, NGO Forum (2023)
PQM Planning & Assurance	4	NGO Forum (2023), World Bank (2022)
Quality Control Mechanisms	3	Lado (2021), Oxfam (2019)
Effect on Project Outcomes	4	Nyang (2020), Researcher, World Bank (2022)
Trainings from Top Performance	3	UNDP (2021), WHO (2020), Oxfam (2019)
Adaptive PQM Framework Proposal	1	Researcher + Best Practice Insights

The Description of Table 1 Frequency of Themes Across Reviewed Sources

Table 1 indicates the frequencies with which secondary data emerges. The most frequently reported problem was institutional barriers (5), which means that it is challenging to prescribe PQM into governance and policy. Moreover, there was a high level of capacity constraints and donor influence; local authorities showed a structural constraint in funding malleability and access to qualified human assets (World Bank, 2022; Nyang, 2020). Locally grounded solutions are absent, which is suggested by the low frequency of adaptive PQM frameworks (1 source only). This pattern confirms the claim by George (2022) that context-sensitive frameworks are not as developed as they should be, yet they are essential in establishing fragile environments like Juba. The research concludes that meaningful PQM is highly constrained by structural/institutional deficiencies as opposed to mere technical design.

4.2. Objective 2: Effectiveness of PQM Components

The PQM quality planning, quality assurance, and quality control components were found to be conceptually acceptable at the workplace and were not applied consistently. The top-down planning of quality tended to ignore community contribution, and results were not necessarily aligned (Muller & Jugdev, 2012). Quality assurance practices were inconsistent, and NGO workplaces were following different donor regulations, which caused inefficiencies in the administration (PMI, 2021). Some attempts at quality

control, including KPIs and checklists, tended to be ad hoc with no staff trained and no tools for monitoring (Kerzner, 2017).

Figure 1.1

Effectiveness of PQM Practices in Enhancing Project Delivery



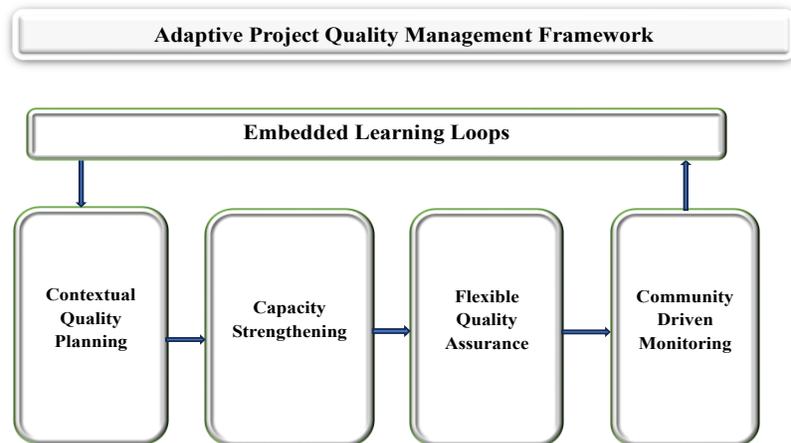
The relative severity of Project Quality Management (PQM) planning and assurance practices among the NGOs within Juba, South Sudan, is manifested in Figure 1.1. Weak planning quality (8) and the emphasis on donor-driven compliance (7) are the most critical challenges identified and point towards the idea that most of the time, planning is treated as a formal requirement rather than a performance-enhancing mechanism. The other weaknesses are the absence of institutionalization (6), reactive risk detection (6), and delayed assurance mechanisms (5), which curb the delivery of projects effectively. On the contrary, community scorecards (3) are one of the good but not utilized practices that encourage participation and accountability. In general, the figure demonstrates the systemic lack of balance when weaknesses overpower such aspects as innovations in quality assurance.

4.3. Objective 3: Development of Adaptive PQM Frameworks

The research findings are in support of the development of a context-sensitive PQM design in Juba as applied to NGOs. Among the major themes was the retention of the community-based approach in planning, risk-based monitoring of quality, and digital platforms to facilitate real-time monitoring. Examples of such comparisons between Oxfam, CARE International, and Save the Children demonstrated the necessity of using adaptive models capable of including elasticity, involvement of the local players, and the use of continuous feedback information that impacts project delivery better (George, 2002; Turner, 2016).

Figure 1.2

The Adaptive PQM Model is a Theoretical Advance, Developed by Daniel Lodinya Stephen (2025).



In the figure Adaptive PQM Framework (Figure 1.2) is discussed as the primary contribution of the study. Developed by Daniel Lodinya Stephen (2025), the framework combines five interconnected elements, such as staff capacity building, flexible quality assurance, community-based monitoring, and learning loops. Each of the components aims to address some of the challenges encountered within the NGO sector in Juba, which include rigid donor requirements and limited technical expertise (World Bank, 2022; NGO Forum, 2023). Since all these elements are interconnected, NGOs can continually improve. Kerzner (2017) supports this by indicating that feedback is valuable in the current dynamic world. In contrast to models that remain fixed or inflexible, this framework assists NGOs in adapting their working practices to global and local demands; thus, it is very appropriate in a situation such as South Sudan. As a result, the utility of the framework in practice and theory is expressed and outlined in the primary findings of the research.

5. Discussion

This paper studies how Project Quality Management (PQM) could be improved to enhance project delivery performance in NGOs in Juba, South Sudan. The discussion explains the findings regarding the research aims and relates them to the literature. It also has theoretical and practical implications, unexpected insights, limitations, and recommendations relating to future studies.

Objective one, the identification of obstacles to PQM implementation, identified institutional inefficiencies, a shortage in technical skills, and financial incompetencies as the highest barriers. The results contribute to earlier studies by Lado (2021) and Nyang (2020), which emphasized that the

absence of national PQM policies, volatility in leadership, and personnel constraints have a devastating impact on the level of quality practices implementation. These barriers not only separate quality enforcement, but they also provide unequal monitoring systems. The absence of a consistent quality structure among the NGOs was a major striking point in that donor-dominated models tend to be inconsistent with local demands.

In the context of the second objective, PQM Components such as quality planning, quality assurance, and quality control are theoretically implicit in the operations of NGOs, but are represented in reality in an inconsistent and disconnected way. This aligns with the finding by Müller and Jugdev (2012) that PQM systems in fragile environments tend to run as silos, as donors have differing requirements. It was also noted that quality planning was more centralized with minimal input from the local communities or beneficiaries, thus affecting contextual relevance. The quality assurance systems in projects were not standardized well, and the quality control systems were more based on the decisions of the project managers as opposed to any specific, standardized KPIs or tools. These findings support the idea expressed by Kerzner (2017) that ineffective training of personnel and a disjointed system are obstacles to fulfilling PQM strategies successfully.

The third objective was concerned with the formulation of adaptive PQM frameworks in fragile settings. The model created in the study included contextualized quality planning, capacity strengthening, flexible quality assurance, community-driven monitoring involvement, and embedded learning loops. It is associated with the effective adaptive practice in NGOs such as CARE International and Oxfam, where stakeholder involvement and responsiveness played a role in sustainability (Turner, 2016; George, 2002). The framework is proposed to fill the divide between the inflexible international standards on PQM and the dynamic requirements of the conflict-affected regions.

Unexpectedly, the research revealed the magnitude of how donor-designed quality standards repress local innovation and contextual flexibility. Although donors insist on adherence to the international standards, these standards tend to ignore local contexts, leading to ineffective use. This discovery introduces a contradiction between accountability and contextual pertinence, which is not completely explored in the previous literature.

The study has limitations in that it only used secondary data that may not reflect on-the-ground realities and the opinions of the stakeholders. Access to recent primary data was restricted in South Sudan by political and security limitations, and some of the reviewed sources could be biased, as a result of donor influence or insufficient transparency in reporting. Such limitations, however, were offset by data triangulation and the use of peer-reviewed and organizationally validated reports.

In the future, participatory action research, which directly involves NGOs and the local communities in South Sudan, is recommended. Studies with a

combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches offer a possibility of adding additional depth to the concept of PQM effectiveness in fragile environments. In addition, the digital quality management tools and their potential in low-resource environments can be exposed to testing.

In theory, the study can contribute to the body of knowledge in PQM because it proposes a context-specific and adaptive framework that suits unstable environments. In practice, it offers a system by which NGOs and policymakers can mix global best practices and local needs. The paper presents viable solutions to improve the outcomes of projects in war-torn areas like Juba through flexibility, community involvement, and risk-based planning.

5.1. The Implications of the Research Study for Theory and Practice

This research adds to the development of Project Quality Management (PQM) by implementing the existing frameworks in weak and conflict-affected settings. The researcher explains, "Weak oversight, financial problems, and unpredictability are problems in Juba, which make it necessary to adjust the PQM approach since conventional models assume stability and the availability of institutions."

The study is a review of current PQM frameworks and the presentation of a new Adaptive PQM Framework. It is a loose combination of planning, assurance, control, community monitoring, and lifelong learning. The researcher observes that "The standard framework developed does not fit in the unstable environment of Juba. Indeed, we require a system that can adapt since the scenario varies. It enhances how the communities assume responsibility, which is lacking in most of the standard models."

The results imply a set of feasible steps that NGOs can undertake to deal with the problem of high staff turnover and the mismatch between the goals of NGOs and donors. Turner (1999) developed the key stakeholder model that enables participatory monitoring to establish trust and participation. Donors are advised to move away from output measurements to core system consolidation. According to the arguments presented by the researcher, it is more significant to invest in the core systems than in one-time projects.

Finally, the research uses PQM theory in practice, which provides a dynamic, sustainable solution to dynamic environments.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined how Project Quality Management (PQM) practices could be improved to enhance the delivery performance of projects within NGOs operating in Juba, South Sudan. The findings revealed that institutional, financial, and technical obstacles present a real barrier to the implementation of PQM in fragile settings. Although quality planning, assurance, and control have been theoretically identified, their practical implementation is uneven

because of poor governance systems, poor staff capacity, and donor-driven standards, which fail to reflect local realities.

The study contributes to the current body of knowledge by filling the gap in understanding how PQM frameworks can be modified to work in conflict-affected, resource-constrained settings. The proposed adaptive PQM model, which emphasizes stakeholder engagement, adaptive governance, and community-based quality planning, offers practical suggestions that are applicable to international best practices and local working conditions. The model applies to practitioners and policymakers who would like to enhance project delivery in comparable fragile environments.

The research further admits to using secondary data, which constrained the capacity to capture primary views of the local practitioners and beneficiaries. The quality of the methodology was maintained through data triangulation, systematic thematic analysis, and critical source validation.

In future research, it is desirable to conduct mixed-method or participatory action research to advance the understanding of applying PQM to real-life project contexts. The research could be expanded by studying ways to combine digital tools, stakeholder-based quality indicators, and long-term organizational development of NGOs.

In summary, this paper indicates the importance of context- and adaptive quality management systems among NGOs in volatile regions. The paper facilitates the academic and practical aspects of PQM to achieve improved project results, stakeholder satisfaction, and sustainable development even in fragile settings by intertwining theories with realities on the ground.

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Conflict of Interest

I, Daniel Lodinya Stephen, do not have any conflicts of interest. The author declares that there are no financial interests, personal relationships, or affiliations with an organization that could have influenced the content, analysis, or conclusions of this research. This is said to make everything clear and keep the academic process pure.

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