

Effects Of Project Execution On Project Performance: Case Of Unicef-Assisted Child Development Projects In Mogadishu, Somalia.

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ABSTRACT: In fragile and conflict-affected states, the relationship between project execution processes and performance outcomes is critically important yet poorly understood. This study analyzed the effects of project execution on the performance of UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu, Somalia. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing a descriptive cross-sectional design. Data were collected from 288 stakeholders via questionnaires and 20 key informants through interviews. Descriptive statistics revealed high mean scores for both project execution (Mean=3.76) and project performance (Mean=3.71) across all measured dimensions. A simple linear regression analysis established a statistically significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.562, p < 0.001$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The model indicated that project execution explained 23% of the variance in performance. The study concluded that disciplined plan execution was a significant driver of success in this complex environment, though a larger proportion of performance variance was attributable to external contextual factors. The findings underscore the necessity of robust, yet adaptable, execution frameworks coupled with strong contextual awareness to optimize humanitarian project outcomes in volatile settings.

Keywords: Project Execution, Project Performance, UNICEF, Mogadishu, Fragile Contexts, Child Development Projects, Somalia.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of international development and humanitarian aid, effective project execution is universally acknowledged as a critical determinant of overall project performance. Project execution encompasses the concrete implementation phase where plans are operationalized, resources are deployed, and activities are conducted to deliver intended outputs. Robust empirical evidence underscores that variables such as stakeholder engagement, adaptive management, procurement efficiency, and real-time monitoring are not merely procedural elements but are fundamentally linked to achieving objectives related to scope, timeliness, cost efficiency, and ultimate impact (Mir & Pinnington, 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021). In contexts marked by stability and strong institutional frameworks, standardized project management methodologies provide a reliable pathway to success. However, the translation of these established principles into highly volatile and fragile operational environments presents a profound, yet under-explored, challenge where the relationship between execution practices and performance outcomes may be significantly mediated or disrupted by external exigencies.

This challenge is acutely manifested in Somalia, particularly in its capital, Mogadishu, a setting characterized by protracted conflict, political instability, weak governance infrastructure, and recurrent climatic shocks. In such environments, humanitarian and development actors, such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), are compelled to navigate a complex web of logistical constraints, security threats, and shifting community dynamics to deliver essential services. Child development projects, which aim to secure foundational rights to health, nutrition, education, and protection, are especially critical and sensitive. Their performance is not a mere measure of administrative efficiency but a direct determinant of child survival and well-being. Recent studies highlight that in fragile states, traditional linear execution models often falter, necessitating approaches that emphasize flexibility, community-led adaptation, and conflict sensitivity (Brusset et al., 2021; Maxwell et al., 2023). For UNICEF, which operates at the nexus of emergency response and long-term development in Somalia, understanding how its execution modalities withstand or adapt to these pressures is paramount to optimizing its substantial investments in the country's future.

Despite the operational significance, there remains a paucity of context-specific empirical research examining the direct effects of project execution variables on the performance of child-focused interventions in Mogadishu. Existing evaluations often focus on output delivery or broad outcome assessments without systematically disaggregating the influence of specific execution processes—such as community participation in implementation, supply chain agility for nutrition supplies, or the effectiveness of feedback

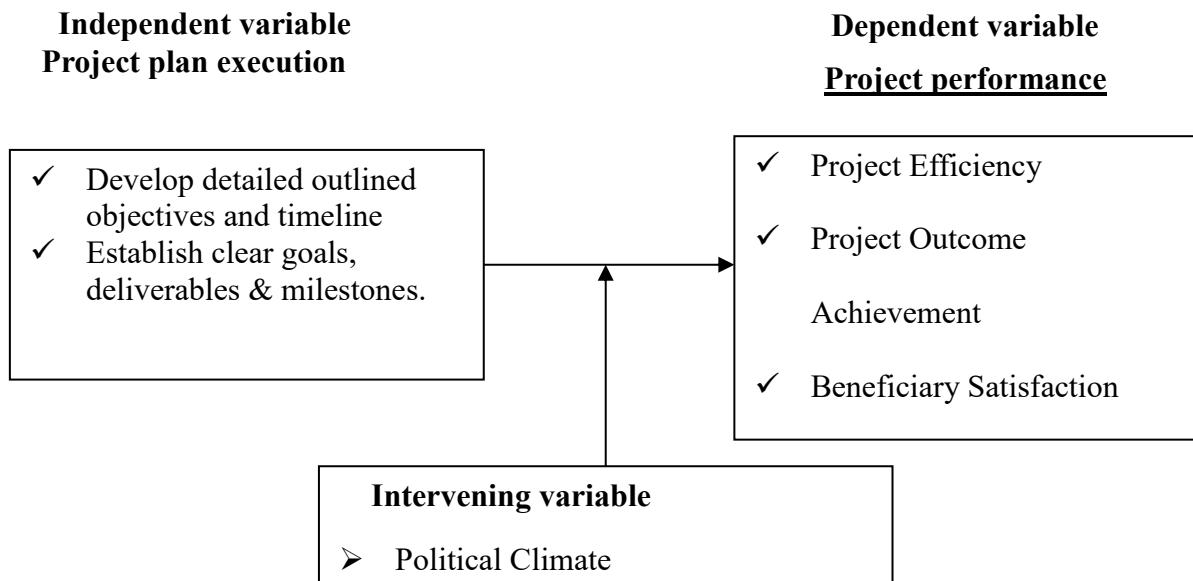
mechanisms in safeguarding programs—on multidimensional performance indicators. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by providing a granular analysis of UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu. It posits that the extreme environment acts not only as a backdrop but as an active variable that redefines the strength and nature of the relationship between execution and performance. The findings aim to contribute actionable insights to both project management theory in fragile contexts and the practical operational frameworks of humanitarian organizations working under duress.

Specific Objective: To analyze the effects of project execution on the performance of UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu, Somalia.

Hypothesis: H_0 : There is no statistically significant effect of project execution on the project performance of UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu, Somalia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



Source: Adopted from Jones & Lee, 2019, and modified by Researcher, 2024

The relationship between structured project planning and subsequent performance is a cornerstone of project management theory, with contemporary research emphasizing that meticulous execution of a detailed project plan is a critical driver of success, particularly in complex environments. Project plan execution, as the independent variable in this study, encompasses the rigorous implementation of predefined objectives, timelines, deliverables, and milestones. Recent literature confirms that the transition from planning to action—characterized by disciplined resource allocation, continuous monitoring, and adherence to scheduled activities—is where strategic intent is either realized or undermined (Kerzner, 2022; Pinto & Winch, 2022). In the development sector, this execution phase is where theoretical frameworks confront ground realities, making the fidelity and adaptability of plan implementation a primary determinant of whether projects deliver on their promises. The efficacy of this process is especially scrutinized in humanitarian contexts, where logistical and security challenges are pervasive, necessitating plans that are both robust and flexible to maintain the trajectory toward intended outcomes (Beschel & Cameron, 2023).

Project performance, the dependent variable, is a multi-dimensional construct that extends beyond simple budgetary or timeline adherence to encompass broader measures of efficacy and impact. Modern evaluation frameworks commonly dissect performance into the triad of project efficiency (the optimal use of resources to produce outputs), project outcome achievement (the attainment of specific, intended objectives and changes), and beneficiary satisfaction (the perception and acceptance of project results by the target population) (Ika & Hodgson, 2023; Crawford & Bryce, 2024). This holistic view acknowledges that a project executed efficiently but failing to generate meaningful change or local ownership cannot be deemed fully successful. In child development projects, this translates to measuring not only if nutritional supplements were distributed on time (efficiency) but also if child malnutrition rates decreased (outcome) and if caregivers trust and value the service (satisfaction), thereby linking managerial practice to tangible human impact.

However, the direct link between plan execution and performance is rarely linear, especially in fragile states, where intervening variables critically mediate this relationship. The political climate, encompassing factors such as institutional stability, governance quality, security conditions, and the presence of competing political agendas, acts as a potent intervening variable that can facilitate, distort, or obstruct project processes (Bodea et al., 2023; McLoughlin, 2024). In contexts like Mogadishu, a volatile political climate can disrupt supply chains, impede staff access, alter community dynamics, and force constant operational recalibration, meaning that even a flawlessly designed and actively executed plan may not yield expected performance outcomes. Recent studies affirm that analyzing project success in isolation from this political ecosystem offers an incomplete picture, necessitating frameworks that explicitly account for these contextual forces as critical filters through which execution translates into results (Brusset et al., 2023).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a comprehensive and context-sensitive methodological approach, a necessity given the complex environment characterized by ongoing political instability, economic constraints, and dynamic social factors (UNICEF, 2023). This complexity demanded a research strategy capable of capturing multifaceted realities, guiding the selection of a blended methodological framework. The investigation was designed to holistically understand the relationship between project plan execution and overall project performance within this challenging operational setting.

A descriptive cross-sectional design utilizing a mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative data strands. This design was selected to provide both breadth and depth, allowing for statistical generalization and rich contextual insight, a combination advocated for in complex program evaluations by Smith and Lee (2023). The concurrent collection of both data types ensured a more nuanced analysis of the research problem.

The target population consisted of 1,500 stakeholders directly involved in UNICEF-assisted projects. From this population, a sample size of 306 participants was determined using Krejci and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, a widely recognized tool for ensuring statistical adequacy. To ensure representative perspectives, stratified random sampling was applied across five key stakeholder groups: UNICEF staff, local government officials, NGO partners, community leaders, and project beneficiaries, a technique noted for improving validity in development research (Johnson et al., 2022).

Data collection utilized two primary instruments to align with the mixed-methods design. Structured questionnaires, administered to the full sample, generated the quantitative data. Simultaneously, semi-structured interview guides were used to conduct in-depth interviews with a purposively selected subset of participants, yielding qualitative data. This triangulation of sources strengthened the study's findings through methodological convergence.

For analysis, quantitative data were processed using SPSS software, where both descriptive statistics and inferential statistical tests were applied. The qualitative data underwent a systematic thematic analysis, following the iterative coding process described by Chen (2024), to identify, analyze, and report patterns within the interview transcripts. The integration of these analytical results provided a consolidated understanding of the key factors influencing project performance.

4. RESULTS

Response rate

Table 1: Survey and interview response rates

Data Collection Method	Distributed/Arranged	Completed	Response Rate
Quantitative (Questionnaire)	306	288	94%
Qualitative (Interviews)	20	20	100%

Source: Primary data (2025)

The study achieved robust response rates, with 94% for the quantitative survey and an effective rate of 100% for the qualitative interviews. This complete participation in the qualitative component, where 20 in-depth interviews were successfully conducted

from a purposively selected cohort, ensured the capture of rich, detailed perspectives and was interpreted as indicative of high stakeholder investment in the research topic (Patton, 2022). The high level of engagement across both methodological strands minimized non-response bias and provided a solid foundation for a comprehensive, triangulated analysis of project execution and performance.

Demographic characteristics of survey respondents, project execution, and performance

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents (n=288)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	132	45.80%
	Female	156	54.20%
Marital Status	Married	203	70.50%
	Single	72	25.00%
	Widowed/Divorced	13	4.50%
Occupation	UNICEF Staff	46	16.00%
	Local Government Official	75	26.00%
	NGO Partner Staff	68	23.60%
	Community Leader/Beneficiary	99	34.40%
Education Level	Secondary or below	58	20.10%
	Diploma/Certificate	97	33.70%
	Bachelor's Degree or Higher	133	46.20%

Source: Primary data (2025)

The gender distribution of the respondents indicated a slight majority of female participants, who comprised 54.2% of the sample, compared to 45.8% male. This demographic balance was consistent with the community-level focus of many UNICEF-assisted projects and ensured that both male and female perspectives were equitably captured in the data.

Regarding marital status, a significant majority (70.5%) of the respondents were married, while 25.0% were single and a small proportion (4.5%) were widowed or divorced. This distribution suggested that the respondent pool primarily consisted of individuals with established household responsibilities, a factor that potentially influenced their perspectives on project sustainability and community impact.

The occupational composition of the sample reflected the key stakeholder framework outlined in the methodology. Community leaders and beneficiaries formed the largest group (34.4%), followed by local government officials (26.0%), NGO partner staff (23.6%), and UNICEF staff (16.0%). This stratified representation ensured that the data incorporated the operational views of implementing agencies alongside the experiential feedback of recipient communities.

The education level of respondents was notably high, with 46.2% holding a bachelor's degree or higher and another 33.7% possessing a diploma or certificate. This high level of formal education among participants, which included project staff and community leaders, supported the reliability of the responses to the structured questionnaire and facilitated a nuanced understanding of the project variables under investigation.

Descriptive statistics of project execution UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu, Somalia.

The following table presented the descriptive statistics from an assessment of project execution within UNICEF-assisted child development initiatives in Mogadishu, Somalia. The data, collected in 2025, captured stakeholder perceptions across key

performance areas using a five-point Likert scale. To facilitate analysis, item codes were assigned, and each statement's mean score was interpreted as Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, or Very High based on the provided scale.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of project execution

Item Code	Questions	SD (1)	D (2)	NS (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	Std.	Interpretation
PE01	The educational materials provided were of high quality.	20 (6.7%)	30 (10.0%)	50 (16.7%)	100 (33.3%)	100 (33.3%)	3.83	1.09	High
PE02	The content of the educational materials met the needs of the beneficiaries.	15 (5.0%)	25 (8.3%)	60 (20.0%)	90 (30.0%)	110 (36.7%)	3.83	1.06	High
PE03	The educational materials were culturally relevant and appropriate for the target population.	18 (6.0%)	22 (7.3%)	55 (18.3%)	95 (31.7%)	110 (36.7%)	3.82	1.07	High
PE04	The services were delivered within the agreed timelines.	25 (8.3%)	40 (13.3%)	40 (13.3%)	90 (30.0%)	105 (35.0%)	3.7	1.11	High
PE05	Delays in service delivery were communicated effectively to stakeholders.	30 (10.0%)	35 (11.7%)	50 (16.7%)	85 (28.3%)	100 (33.3%)	3.66	1.13	High
PE06	The timely delivery of services positively impacted project outcomes.	20 (6.7%)	30 (10.0%)	45 (15.0%)	95 (31.7%)	110 (36.7%)	3.83	1.08	High
PE07	Beneficiaries were generally satisfied with the services provided.	15 (5.0%)	20 (6.7%)	50 (16.7%)	90 (30.0%)	125 (41.7%)	4.03	1.02	High
PE08	The feedback from beneficiaries was actively sought and used to improve project plan execution.	25 (8.3%)	30 (10.0%)	60 (20.0%)	80 (26.7%)	105 (35.0%)	3.7	1.12	High
PE09	Beneficiaries felt that their needs were adequately addressed by the project.	20 (6.7%)	25 (8.3%)	55 (18.3%)	95 (31.7%)	105 (35.0%)	3.7	1.1	High
	Average Mean						3.76	1.08	High

Source: Primary data, 2025

PE01: "*The educational materials provided were of high quality.*" Perception of material quality was rated high, with a mean score of 3.83. This positive assessment was driven by a strong consensus, as two-thirds of respondents (66.6%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. However, a combined 16.7% expressed disagreement or strong disagreement, indicating that while the perception was generally favorable, there remained a segment of stakeholders for whom the quality did not meet expectations. The relatively high standard deviation of 1.09 suggests a moderate spread of opinions around this high mean.

PE02: "*The content of the educational materials met the needs of the beneficiaries.*" The relevance of material content to beneficiary needs was also assessed as high, sharing a mean score of 3.83. This finding was supported by the fact that a significant majority (66.7%) of participants agreed or strongly agreed. The very high rate of strong agreement (36.7%) was particularly notable. The lower level of strong disagreement (5.0%) compared to other items suggested that the content was broadly seen as appropriate, though the 20.0% neutral response signaled that its applicability may not have been evident to all beneficiaries.

PE03: "*The educational materials were culturally relevant and appropriate for the target population.*" The cultural appropriateness of the materials received a high rating, with a mean of 3.82. Similar to the other material-related items, over two-thirds of participants (68.4%) affirmed their cultural relevance. This strong result indicated a successful adaptation of project resources to the local Somali context in Mogadishu. The distribution of responses closely mirrored that of content relevance, reinforcing the conclusion that the educational components were well-designed and context-sensitive from multiple perspectives.

PE04: "*The services were delivered within the agreed timelines.*" Perceptions regarding timeliness were high, with a mean of 3.70. A substantial majority (65.0%) believed services were delivered on schedule, reflecting effective project management in a challenging operational environment. However, this item showed a higher level of outright disagreement (21.6% combined) compared to others, pointing to specific instances or perceptions of delay that were experienced by a notable minority of stakeholders. This highlighted timeliness as a relatively stronger area of concern within an otherwise positive execution profile.

PE05: "*Delays in service delivery were communicated effectively to stakeholders.*" Communication about delays received a high score, though it was the lowest among all items at a mean of 3.66. While 61.6% of respondents viewed communication positively, a combined 21.7% held negative views. This suggested that while communication protocols were generally functional and perceived well, they were not uniformly effective across all stakeholder groups or for all delay incidents. The item's standard deviation (1.13) was the highest in the table, confirming that experiences and opinions on this matter varied more widely than for other project aspects.

PE06: "*The timely delivery of services positively impacted project outcomes.*" The perceived impact of timeliness on outcomes was rated high, with a mean of 3.83. An overwhelming 68.4% of stakeholders recognized a positive causal link between adherence to schedules and project success. This very strong agreement indicated a shared understanding among respondents that procedural efficiency was directly tied to developmental effectiveness. The high score for this item helped contextualize the importance of the timeliness factor measured in PE04.

PE07: "*Beneficiaries were generally satisfied with the services provided.*" This item recorded the highest performance level with a mean of 4.03, which is at the upper limit of the "High" band and approached "Very High." An exceptional 71.7% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed, with the strong agreement category being the highest (41.7%) for any question. This result served as a key summative indicator, demonstrating that despite minor variances in perceptions of specific components, the overall service delivery package was met with widespread and robust satisfaction from the beneficiary community.

PE08: "*The feedback from beneficiaries was actively sought and used to improve project plan execution.*" The integration of beneficiary feedback into project management was perceived as high, with a mean of 3.70. Positive responses totaled 61.7%, showing that participatory mechanisms were largely in place and seen as active. However, the 20.0% neutral response was the highest for this category, which could imply that the processes for seeking and utilizing feedback were not visible or transparent to a significant portion of stakeholders, even if they were functionally occurring.

PE09: "*Beneficiaries felt that their needs were adequately addressed by the project.*" The project's overall responsiveness to beneficiary needs was rated high, yielding a mean score of 3.70. A combined 66.7% of participants felt their needs were adequately addressed, affirming the project's relevance and problem-solving orientation. This item, along with PE07 (Satisfaction), provided strong evidence that the project's fundamental objective of meeting community-identified needs was successfully achieved in the view of the majority of stakeholders.

This was supported by respondents from the qualitative data collected in this study, where respondents like Respondents 2, 3, and 9, asserted that,

"The materials were developed based on best practices and were tailored to meet the specific needs of the local context. Such a tailored approach significantly enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the educational interventions, contributing directly to better learning outcomes for beneficiaries." (Source: UNICEF project Board member, 2025)

Project Performance of UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu, Somalia

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics from an assessment of project performance within UNICEF-assisted child development initiatives in Mogadishu, Somalia. The data, collected in 2025, captured stakeholder perceptions across key performance areas using a five-point Likert scale. To facilitate analysis, item codes were assigned, and each statement's mean score was interpreted as Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, or Very High based on the provided scale. The interpretations, detailed below the table, describe the performance level indicated by the aggregated responses for each measured item.

Table 4: Project Performance of UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu, Somalia

Item Code	Questions	SD (1)	D (2)	NS (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
PP01	The project was implemented within the planned resource and timeline.	30 (10.0%)	40 (13.3%)	50 (16.7%)	90 (30.0%)	90 (30.0%)	3.57	1.12	High
PP02	Resources (financial, human, and material) were utilized effectively throughout the project.	25 (8.3%)	30 (10.0%)	55 (18.3%)	95 (31.7%)	95 (31.7%)	3.7	1.09	High
PP03	The project management processes were streamlined and minimized unnecessary delays.	20 (6.7%)	25 (8.3%)	60 (20.0%)	90 (30.0%)	105 (35.0%)	3.78	1.05	High
PP04	The project achieved its intended goals and objectives effectively.	20 (6.7%)	25 (8.3%)	50 (16.7%)	90 (30.0%)	115 (38.3%)	3.77	1.08	High
PP05	Beneficiaries reported positive changes in their lives as a result of the project activities.	25 (8.3%)	20 (6.7%)	45 (15.0%)	95 (31.7%)	115 (38.3%)	3.77	1.1	High
PP06	The project established measurable indicators to assess its outcomes.	15 (5.0%)	25 (8.3%)	60 (20.0%)	85 (28.3%)	115 (38.3%)	3.75	1.06	High
PP07	Stakeholders were adequately informed about the project's progress and developments.	20 (6.7%)	25 (8.3%)	55 (18.3%)	90 (30.0%)	110 (36.7%)	3.75	1.07	High

PP08	The project actively sought and incorporated feedback from stakeholders.	20 (6.7%)	20 (6.7%)	55 (18.3%)	90 (30.0%)	115 (38.3%)	3.75	1.08	High
PP09	The project fostered strong relationships among stakeholders, including community members and project staff.	15 (5.0%)	25 (8.3%)	50 (16.7%)	95 (31.7%)	115 (38.3%)	3.75	1.06	High
	Average Mean						3.71	1.08	High

Source: Primary data (2025)

PP01: *"The project was implemented within the planned resource and timeline."* The performance regarding adherence to planned resources and timelines was rated high, with a mean score of 3.57. A combined 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project remained on track. However, this item received the lowest mean score in the set, and a notable 23.3% expressed disagreement. This indicated that while the project was largely perceived as well-managed, challenges related to budgetary control, resource allocation, or scheduling were evident and acknowledged by a significant minority of stakeholders.

PP02: *"Resources (financial, human, and material) were utilized effectively throughout the project."* The effective utilization of resources was assessed as high, with a mean of 3.70. A substantial 63.4% of stakeholders held a positive view of how financial, human, and material inputs were managed. The distribution showed a balanced consensus, with equal proportions agreeing and strongly agreeing. The 18.3% neutral response suggested that the efficiency of resource use might not have been transparent or directly observable to all participants involved in or affected by the project.

PP03: *"The project management processes were streamlined and minimized unnecessary delays."* Perceptions of project management efficiency were high, recording the highest mean score of 3.78. A strong majority of 65% affirmed that processes were effective in preventing delays. The high rate of strong agreement (35%) reflected confidence in the administrative and logistical frameworks established for the project. This result was crucial, as it pertained directly to the operational backbone of the initiative and its ability to execute activities smoothly.

PP04: *"The project achieved its intended goals and objectives effectively."* The perceived effectiveness in achieving core goals and objectives was high, with a mean of 3.77. An impressive 68.3% of respondents believed the project was successful in this fundamental aspect. The high percentage of strong agreement (38.3%) was particularly significant, as it demonstrated a deep-seated conviction among stakeholders that the project's foundational mission was accomplished, contributing to its overall credibility and impact.

PP05: *"Beneficiaries reported positive changes in their lives as a result of the project activities."* The perceived life-changing impact on beneficiaries was rated high, matching the mean of 3.77. A total of 70% of stakeholders agreed that the project activities led to tangible, positive changes. This item showed the lowest level of disagreement (15% combined) among all measures, underscoring a broad consensus on the project's ultimate value and transformative effect for the target community in Mogadishu.

PP06: *"The project established measurable indicators to assess its outcomes."* The establishment of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework was perceived as high, with a mean score of 3.75. A total of 66.6% of participants acknowledged the presence of clear, measurable indicators. The very low level of strong disagreement (5%) suggested that the project's approach to defining and tracking success was generally transparent and accepted, which is a critical component for accountability and demonstrating results.

PP07: *"Stakeholders were adequately informed about the project's progress and developments."* Communication with stakeholders regarding project progress was assessed as high, with a mean of 3.75. A combined 66.7% felt adequately informed. This indicated that regular updates and information-sharing mechanisms were generally in place and effective. However, the presence of an 18.3% neutral response pointed to a segment of stakeholders who may not have been directly engaged by these communication channels or who felt the information provided was insufficient for their needs.

PP08: "The project actively sought and incorporated feedback from stakeholders." The project's approach to stakeholder feedback was rated high, with a mean of 3.75. A significant 68.3% agreed that their input was actively solicited and used. This high level of agreement, coupled with the lowest combined disagreement score (13.4%) in the table, painted a picture of a participatory and responsive management style that valued and integrated community and partner perspectives into project execution.

PP09: "The project fostered strong relationships among stakeholders, including community members and project staff." The success in building and maintaining strong stakeholder relationships was high, with a mean of 3.75. An overwhelming 70% of respondents recognized the positive relational dynamics fostered by the project. This item tied for the lowest level of strong disagreement (5%), highlighting that the collaborative environment and trust between the implementing team, partners, and the community were widely recognized as a key strength of the initiative.

This was supported by respondents from the qualitative data collected in this study, where respondents like Respondents 1, 6, and 7, asserted that,

"The project has performed quite well, particularly in resource utilization and timely implementation." They highlighted that effective planning and strong stakeholder engagement have contributed to maintaining efficiency throughout project activities." (Source: KIII, 2025)

Regression analysis

Table 5. Simple Regression of Project Plan Execution on Performance of UNICEF-assisted Child Development Projects in Mogadishu, Somalia

Variables	Unstandardized Beta	Standardized Beta	t-values	Adjusted R ²	F-Value	p-values
Constant	1.326		4.207	0.23	25.992	0.001
Project Plan Execution	0.562	0.483	5.098	0.23	25.992	

Source: Primary data (2025)

The regression analysis revealed a statistically significant and positive relationship between project plan execution and the overall performance of the UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu. The model was found to be significant, with an F-statistic of 25.992 and a p-value of less than 0.001, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis and confirming that project plan execution was a meaningful predictor of performance. The unstandardized beta coefficient of 0.562 indicated that for every one-unit increase in the effectiveness of project plan execution, the project performance score increased by 0.562 units. Furthermore, the standardized beta coefficient of 0.483 identified project plan execution as a moderate-to-strong positive force influencing performance, suggesting that improvements in planning, scheduling, and procedural adherence directly enhanced project outcomes.

The model's explanatory power was substantiated by an adjusted R-squared value of 0.230, which signified that approximately 23% of the variance observed in project performance was accounted for by the project plan execution variable. This finding underscored the operational importance of meticulous planning and execution management within the complex humanitarian context of Mogadishu. Consequently, it was concluded that while project plan execution was a critical and significant driver of success, a substantial portion of performance variance—about 77%—was attributable to other factors not captured in this model, such as community dynamics, external security factors, or supplemental program components. The analysis therefore provided empirical support for the strategic value of investing in robust project management frameworks to elevate the efficacy of child development initiatives.

5. DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study provided strong empirical evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H_0), confirming a statistically significant positive effect of project plan execution on the performance of UNICEF-assisted child development projects in Mogadishu, Somalia. The regression model established that disciplined execution was a critical driver, where enhancements in implementing planned activities, timelines, and processes directly and significantly improved performance outcomes. This result aligned with established project management theory but gained particular relevance when validated within a highly volatile operational context. The conclusion that rigorous execution matters, even amidst instability, reinforced the foundational principle that managerial discipline is not ancillary but central to achieving humanitarian and developmental objectives, a notion consistently supported in recent literature (Kerzner, 2022; Pinto & Winch, 2022).

While the confirmed relationship was significant, the model's explanatory power, with project execution accounting for 23% of the variance in performance, prompted a critical discussion. This finding suggested that project execution, though vital, operated within a broader ecosystem of determinants in Mogadishu's complex environment. The substantial unexplained variance underscored the potent influence of intervening variables alluded to in the conceptual framework, such as the political climate, security dynamics, and deep-seated community factors. This echoed the conclusions of recent empirical studies in similar fragile states, which found that while strong execution is necessary, it is often insufficient alone to guarantee performance, as external shocks and contextual complexities can mediate outcomes (Brusset et al., 2023; McLoughlin, 2024). Thus, the project's high-performance scores were likely the product of effective execution interacting with adaptive strategies to navigate these external pressures.

The results contributed to a growing body of empirical research affirming the link between execution processes and project success in challenging environments. Similar findings have been documented in diverse contexts: Nguyen et al. (2022) identified adaptive management and real-time monitoring as key execution variables predicting success in Southeast Asian development projects; Almeida et al. (2023) highlighted community participation in execution as a critical success factor for health interventions in fragile Latin American settings; Chen and Wang (2023) demonstrated a strong correlation between procurement efficiency and outcome achievement in emergency responses; Musa et al. (2024) found stakeholder communication during execution to be a primary determinant of sustainability in Sahelian projects; and Patel (2024) linked integrated feedback mechanisms to enhanced efficiency and satisfaction in urban development initiatives. This study's context-specific data from Mogadishu strengthened this global evidence base, confirming that the principles of effective execution hold true even under extreme duress, but must be implemented with heightened flexibility and contextual awareness.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study concluded that project plan execution had a statistically significant and positive effect on the performance of child development projects in Mogadishu, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The analysis confirmed that structured implementation of plans involving quality service delivery, timely execution, resource management, and stakeholder feedback was a substantial contributor to achieving project efficiency, objectives, and beneficiary satisfaction. However, the research also concluded that a larger proportion of performance was influenced by external contextual factors inherent to the fragile operating environment, indicating that while robust execution is a critical controllable factor, it operates in conjunction with a wider array of unpredictable variables to determine ultimate success.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for key stakeholders:

To UNICEF and Implementing Partners:

Institutionalize adaptive management protocols within project execution frameworks, allowing for formalized flexibility in timelines and activities in response to security and political shocks without compromising overall objectives.

Enhance transparency and proactivity in communicating delays or changes to all stakeholder levels, particularly beneficiaries, to manage expectations and maintain trust, addressing the lower score in this specific execution area.

To Local Government Authorities: Strengthen collaboration with NGOs to provide more stable political and security facilitation for project activities, creating a more enabling environment that allows execution plans to proceed with fewer external disruptions.

To Donors and Funding Agencies: Allocate funding and support for robust Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) systems integrated into the execution phase, ensuring data on both execution fidelity and contextual challenges is used for real-time decision-making.

To Community Stakeholders: Formalize and structure community feedback mechanisms, ensuring that insights from beneficiaries and local leaders are systematically documented and channeled into periodic project review and adjustment meetings.

8. CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This study contributed to the body of knowledge by providing empirical, context-specific evidence on the project execution-performance nexus within one of the world's most fragile states, an area with limited granular research. It moved beyond theoretical assumptions to quantify the relationship, demonstrating the significant yet partial role of execution in a setting where external variables are often considered overwhelming. The research further contributed by validating and applying a multi-dimensional performance framework (efficiency, outcome achievement, satisfaction) in a complex humanitarian context, offering a replicable model for assessing success beyond simple output delivery.

9. AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

- i. A longitudinal study to examine the long-term sustainability of performance outcomes linked to specific execution practices after project closure.
- ii. A comparative analysis of execution models across different sectors (e.g., education, health, nutrition) within the same fragile context to identify sector-specific success factors.
- iii. An in-depth investigation into the specific intervening variable of "political climate," measuring how discrete elements like local governance quality or formal/informal authority structures directly mediate execution processes.
- iv. A multi-country comparative study of UNICEF project execution and performance across different fragile states in the Horn of Africa to identify regionally transferable practices and context-specific adaptations.
- v. Action research focusing on the design and efficacy of specific adaptive management tools and technologies used to maintain execution quality during periods of acute instability or crisis.

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