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Project Management Practices and Performance of an Agricultural Project: A Case of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District, Rwanda

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Abstract: *This study investigated the effect of project management practices on the performance of agricultural projects in Rwanda, with a focus on the Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District. A descriptive and correlational research design was employed to capture both current practices and the relationships between variables. The target population comprised 1,035 individuals, including 1,065 project beneficiaries, project staff, and local leaders. Using Slovin's formula, a sample size of 291 respondents was determined. Stratified sampling ensured representation across groups, while purposive sampling identified individuals with specific characteristics relevant to the study. Data collection methods included questionnaires, interviews, and documentation analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation and regression analysis, conducted through SPSS software. Regarding the individual predictors, one-unit increase in Project Planning (β = 0.256, t= 3.942, p = 0.000<0.05) is associated with a 0.256 increase in project performance. Similarly, one-unit increase in project implementation (β = 0.205, t=3.685, p = 0.000<0.05) leads to a 0.205 increase in project performance. Additionally, one-unit increase in Participatory risk management (β = 0.233, t=4.571, p = 0.000<0.05) results in a 0.233 increase in project performance. one-unit increase in Project monitoring and evaluation (β = 0.214, t= 5.189, p = 0.000<0.05) is associated with a 0.214 increase in project performance. All predictors show statistically significant effects on performance, with p-values less than 0.05. This indicates strong evidence that project planning, project implementation, project risk management, and project monitoring and evaluation each have a significant positive effect on the performance of the Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District. Value Chain Development Project management team should focus on improving transparency in resource allocation.*

Key words: *Project Management Practices, Project Planning, Project Implementation, Risk Management, Monitoring and Evaluation, Performance of Agricultural Projects*

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1. Introduction

Agriculture is a vital driver of Rwanda's economy, contributing about 25% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employing more than 70% of the population (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2024). In rural areas like Gakenke District, agricultural projects, such as the Value Chain Development Project, are central to enhancing productivity and improving livelihoods. However, despite the importance of agriculture, these projects face significant challenges due to weak project management practices, which hinder their success and sustainability. In Gakenke, issues like inadequate project planning, poor risk management,

inconsistent implementation, and limited monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems undermine the effectiveness of agricultural initiatives (Mukamana, *et al*., 2022).

A lack of effective project planning results in unclear objectives, inefficient resource allocation, and missed timelines. Similarly, without robust project implementation strategies, many agricultural projects struggle to achieve their goals or deliver expected benefits (Tenywa, *et al*., 2021). The sector is also vulnerable to external risks, such as climate change and market fluctuations, but project risk management in Gakenke is often insufficient, leaving these initiatives exposed to unforeseen setbacks (Niyonsaba, *et al*., 2020) Monitoring and evaluation practices are another area of concern; the absence of effective M&E frameworks reduces transparency and the ability to track progress, hindering improvements and accountability.

The evolution of Value Chain Development Project (VCD) has been influenced by various economic, social, and environmental factors. In the 1990s, organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) began promoting VCD to enhance agricultural productivity and sustainability. VCD projects identify bottlenecks and inefficiencies in production processes, aiding in the optimization of resource allocation and reducing wastage (Ladegaard, 2020).

Despite few studies that were conducted on related topics including Akech (2021), Niyonsaba et *al.* (2020) and (Mukamana *et al*., 2022). There is a lack of empirical studies that explore how structured project management practices impact the performance of agricultural projects at the district level, particularly in Gakenke. This gap in research calls for a deeper investigation into how effective project management practices, such as planning, implementation, risk management, and M&E, influence the outcomes of projects like the Value Chain Development Project.

This study aimed to fill this gap by examining the role of project management practices in the performance of agricultural projects in Gakenke. Through this research, the study provided insights into how these practices can contribute to the success and sustainability of agricultural initiatives, offering practical recommendations for policymakers, development organizations, and local stakeholders to improve project outcomes.

The general objective of the research is to assess effect of project management practices on the performance of agricultural projects in Rwanda.

The following are the specific objectives of this study

1. To assess the effect of project planning on performance of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District, Rwanda.
2. To analyze the effect of project implementation on performance of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District, Rwanda.
3. To evaluate the effect of project risk management on performance of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District, Rwanda.
4. To examine the effect of project monitoring and evaluation on performance of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District, Rwanda.

2. Literature Review

2.1Theory of Constraints (TOC)

The Theory of Constraints (TOC), introduced by Eliyahu Goldratt in 1984, asserts that every project or system has at least one constraint that limits its ability to achieve its goals (Goldratt, 1984). In the context of project management, TOC helps identify the most critical factor that could obstruct a project from meeting its performance targets. The principle is simple: if a constraint is not properly managed, it can result in inefficiencies, delays, or resource misallocation, ultimately affecting the project's scope, cost efficiency, quality, and timeliness.

For project planning, TOC emphasizes the identification of constraints early in the planning process. Projects must be planned around these constraints to ensure smoother execution. By recognizing potential bottlenecks in terms of resources, schedules, or skills, managers can devise strategies to mitigate their impact. This process aligns with the role of project planning in your study, where careful planning of scope and resources is vital for success.

During project implementation, TOC becomes even more critical. Goldratt (1984) suggests that constraints often arise during execution, and project managers must continually monitor project activities to identify and address any emerging limitations. If, for instance, resource allocation proves insufficient or a risk eventuates, the project manager must adapt quickly. TOC's focus on continuous improvement and mitigation mirrors the importance of flexibility and decision-making in effective project implementation.

TOC also strongly aligns with risk management practices. According to Goldratt's theory, risk events can be seen as potential constraints. Identifying risks early allows project managers to focus on the critical path and potential disruptions. This view corresponds directly with this study's emphasis on risk management, as projects facing unmanaged risks often experience delays, budget overruns, or compromised quality.

2.2 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) was first introduced by Birger Wernerfelt in his 1984 article "A Resource-Based View of the Firm," published in the Strategic Management Journal. Wernerfelt argued that firms could achieve sustained competitive advantage by focusing on their internal resources rather than external market conditions. His work laid the foundation for what would later become a central theory in strategic management (Barney, 1991).

The Resource-Based View (RBV) is a strategic management theory that emphasizes the importance of internal resources in achieving superior performance and competitive advantage. According to Barney (1991), resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable play a central role in driving success. In this research, the RBV provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how project management practices influence the performance of agricultural projects. The key dimensions of project management practices project planning, implementation, risk management, and monitoring and evaluation are considered critical internal resources that align with the principles of the RBV.

Project planning reflects strategic resource allocation through clear objectives, detailed work plans, and stakeholder engagement. These practices ensure efficient use of financial, human, and material resources, reducing waste and fostering alignment with project goals. Project implementation translates plans into action, focusing on timely execution, resource optimization, and quality control. These operational competencies are essential for maintaining project timelines, cost efficiency, and quality, aligning with the RBV's focus on leveraging internal capabilities.

Project risk management represents an organization's ability to anticipate and address uncertainties through risk identification, assessment, and mitigation. These practices enhance resilience, safeguard project objectives, and align with the RBV's emphasis on protecting valuable resources. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) contribute to continuous improvement by tracking performance, reporting progress, and implementing corrective actions. These knowledge-based processes are critical, non-substitutable resources that ensure accountability and stakeholder satisfaction.

The performance of agricultural projects measured through timely completion, budget adherence, quality, impact, and stakeholder satisfaction reflect the effective management of these internal resources. For instance, efficient planning and implementation ensure cost efficiency and timely completion, while robust risk management and M&E safeguard quality and enhance project sustainability.

By integrating the RBV, this research highlights how strategic management of internal capabilities within project management practices drives the success of agricultural projects. This perspective underscores the importance of managing resources effectively in addressing challenges specific to the agricultural sector, particularly in resource-constrained environments.

2.3 Theory of change

The Theory of Change is a strategic framework widely used in project management to map out how and why a particular change is expected to happen within a specific context. Originally brought to prominence by Carol H. Weiss, the approach has gained traction in international development, social innovation, and community-based initiatives. By focusing on long-term goals and identifying the necessary actions and assumptions required to achieve those goals, the theory of change helps organizations navigate complex projects. The framework not only aids in clarifying the steps needed for success but also helps identify the assumptions that underlie each phase of the project, offering a structured path for evaluation and adaptation (Connell & Kubisch, 2020)

In this study on the Project Management Practices and Performance of Agricultural Project: A Case of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District, Rwanda, the Theory of Change can serve as a valuable tool to understand how project management practices such as planning, implementation, risk management and monitoring and evaluation affect overall project outcomes. For instance, the ToC framework could be applied to map the logical steps between the project's planning phases and the realization of key performance indicators such as timely completion of project, budget adherence, project quality, project impact and stakeholders' satisfaction.

By doing so, you can systematically identify the role that project management practices play in achieving desired outcomes, as well as the underlying assumptions, such as the availability of resources or stakeholder involvement, which are critical to project success.

Moreover, ToC's emphasis on clear linkages between activities and outcomes can also be applied to evaluate the performance of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District. Through this framework, you can track how well project management practices, such as risk management, contribute to project performance metrics. If, for example, the ToC reveals that comprehensive project planning leads to improved cost efficiency and timeliness in the Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District, these findings can offer insights into which management practices should be prioritized in future initiatives. In this sense, ToC not only provides a method for understanding the effectiveness of project management practices but also creates an evaluative lens

through which ongoing project performance can be continuously monitored and enhanced.

2.4 Empirical Review

Project planning is foundational for the success of agricultural projects, as it sets the direction, objectives, and resource allocation necessary to achieve desired outcomes. According to Kerzner (2019), effective project planning includes goal setting, timeline development, budgeting, and identifying resource needs, all of which contribute to enhanced project performance by aligning resources and stakeholders with project goals. In agricultural contexts, these elements of planning are especially important due to the complex interplay between environmental conditions, local communities, and resource constraints. A study by Liu *et al*. (2020) in small-scale farms showed that agricultural projects with detailed plans and clear objectives improved crop yields by over 30% compared to those with less structured planning, underscoring the role of planning in achieving efficient resource use and meeting production goals.

In rural settings, the importance of adaptable project plans is highlighted. Williams *et al*. (2021) found that projects with flexible planning mechanisms were better able to respond to unpredictable factors like weather changes and supply chain issues. For instance, in their study of rural African agricultural projects, they observed that projects that incorporated contingency plans saw a higher completion rate and reduced resource wastage. This adaptability is crucial, as it helps projects maintain continuity and achieve outcomes even in the face of external shocks, a frequent issue in agricultural work.

Project implementation is critical to translating plans into tangible results in agricultural projects. Effective implementation ensures that all project phases, from procurement to fieldwork, align with the set objectives. As observed by Kassa *et al*. (2019), agricultural projects in Ethiopia that adhered closely to their planned implementation schedules achieved better outcomes, such as higher yields and improved farmer incomes. Timely implementation, they argue, is essential in agriculture, where timing can impact planting and harvesting schedules, directly affecting productivity.

The role of capacity-building in implementation is also significant. According to a study by Turner *et al.* (2021), when farmers and local staff are trained in relevant agricultural practices, project implementation runs more smoothly and sustainably. In Rwanda, for example, Turner et al. found that projects focusing on training local farmers in modern techniques saw an improvement in yield and crop quality, as participants were more equipped to adopt best practices. This training component contributes to the project's long-term success by creating local expertise that persists beyond the project's duration.

Risk management is indispensable in agricultural projects, where factors like climate variability, pests, and price fluctuations create significant uncertainties. According to Bansal *et al.* (2020), a well-defined risk management strategy in agricultural projects includes identifying potential risks, developing contingency plans, and monitoring these risks consistently. Projects that prioritize risk assessment and management are often better able to adapt to challenges, safeguarding productivity and ensuring the longevity of the project.

Climate risk is particularly relevant in agriculture. As for Gupta and Chowdhury (2021), agricultural projects that incorporate climate risk management strategies such as drought-resistant crops and water conservation practices tend to have a higher success rate. Their study in Southeast Asia showed that these strategies helped reduce crop losses by 25% in areas prone to drought, demonstrating how tailored risk management practices contribute to project resilience in vulnerable regions.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) play a pivotal role in tracking project performance and ensuring that agricultural projects achieve their intended outcomes. M&E enables project teams to identify issues early and make necessary adjustments, enhancing project effectiveness and accountability. A study by Li and Wang (2020) emphasizes that projects with robust M&E frameworks achieved better outcomes in terms of yield and sustainability. Their research in African agricultural projects found that frequent monitoring allowed for real-time adjustments, reducing resource wastage and improving overall productivity.

The use of technology in M&E has further enhanced its effectiveness. According to research by Torres and Brown (2021), mobile and satellite technology in agricultural projects has significantly improved M&E capabilities, especially in remote areas. These technologies allow for accurate tracking of crop growth, soil quality, and resource use, enabling data-driven decision-making. Their findings show that projects using such technologies reported a 30% improvement in meeting targets due to timely interventions based on monitoring data.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research employed a descriptive and correlational design. Descriptive methods provide a snapshot of current practices and perceptions without altering the study environment, while correlational analysis tests relationships between variables, establishing patterns and associations (Creswell & Creswell, 2021). Inferential analysis further delved into these

relationships, evaluating the significance, strength, and direction of observed effects.

3.2. Population and sample size of the study

Target population of this study was 1065 participants of Value Chain Development project in Gakenke mainly in Kivuruga sector where the project is being implemented.

The Slovin's formula was employed to calculate the appropriate sample size, as it offers a simple and effective method for estimating the number of participants needed for the study.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

In this formula, n represents the size of the sample, N the number of participants, and *e* the margin of error (0.05).

Sample size in our population = $\frac{1065}{1+1065(e)^2}$

$n = \frac{1065}{1+1065(0.05)^2} = \frac{1065}{1+2.6625} = \frac{1065}{3.6625} \approx 290.7$

n =291

Stratified sampling was used for selecting groups, or clusters, of participants from the population. The clusters chosen based on position and categories of population in Value Chain Development projects.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

To ensure the thorough completion of this research, precise questions were used to explore each target area. The following instruments were utilized to gather data: questionnaires, interview and documentation analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to assess the effect of project management practices and performance of agricultural project in Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District. Inferential statistics analyze sample data to draw conclusions about a population. Techniques like correlation, regression, and hypothesis testing were used in this study to assess relationships between variables and address the research objectives.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Prior to participation, all participants provided informed consent after receiving detailed information about the research objectives, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, enabling them to make informed decisions. The study upheld high standards of confidentiality and anonymity by not requesting personal identifiers in the questionnaire. All responses were aggregated to protect individual identities. Strict data protection measures were implemented to safeguard the collected information, which was securely stored and accessed solely by the researcher for academic purposes. Furthermore, participants received a formal letter from the University of Kigali (UoK), affirming that their data would be used exclusively for academic research purposes. This measure ensured transparency and reinforced the ethical integrity of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

This section comprises data presentation, interpretation and analysis. Data analysis was targeted to addressing the aim of the study which was to assess the influence of project management practices on performance of agricultural projects.

4.1 Response Rate

The concept of the response rate in research relates to the level of people in each population who consented to participate in a research study out of the total number of people who were selected at random or contacted.

Table 1: Response rate

	Frequency	Rate
Returned	289	99.3
Unfilled	2	0.7
Total questionnaire	291	100.00

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Table 1 presents the response rate of the survey for the completed questionnaires collected from responding participants: total number of distributed questionnaires is 291, while the number of completed questionnaires is 289, consequently, the rate equals 99.3 percent. On the other hand, two questionnaires were left uncompleted, that is 0.7 % of the total number of questionnaires used. For these reasons, these results suggest that the survey successfully elicited the opinions of most of the sampled individuals.

4.2 Inferential statistics

Inferential statistics primarily involve drawing conclusions about populations from sample data. Two common methods used within inferential statistics are correlation and regression analysis.

4.2.1 Correlation Analysis

This section indicates the relationship between independent variables and dependents variable and correlation analysis between variables.

Table 2: Correlation analysis

		Project Planning	Project Implementation	Project Risk Management	Project Monitoring and Evaluation	Performance of Agricultural Projects
Project Planning	Pearson Correlation	1	.783**	.751**	.674**	.773**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N		289	289	289	289
Project Implementation	Pearson Correlation		1	.730**	.478**	.710**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000
	N			289	289	289
Project Risk Management	Pearson Correlation			1	.578**	.736**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000
	N				289	289
Project Monitoring and Evaluation	Pearson Correlation				1	.658**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.000
	N					289
Performance of Agricultural Projects	Pearson Correlation					1
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N					289

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Pearson correlation analysis revealed that the overall confirmed that there is a significant positive relationship between project management practices and performance of agricultural projects in Gakenke district. As indicated by multiple correlation analysis in the table above. Each variable indicated positive significant, project planning ($r=0.773^{**}$ $p=0.000<0.05$), project implementation ($r=0.710^{**}$ $p=0.000<0.05$), project risk management ($r=.736^{**}$ $p=.018<0.05$) and monitoring and evaluation ($r=0.658^{**}$ $p=0.000<0.05$). According to Simiyu, (2018) asserted that the significant positive influence of project management practices and performance of agricultural projects, the researcher continued explaining about the impact of project management practices such project risk management, monitoring and evaluation, project stakeholders and the influence of government and finally, this had contributed to the performance of most of projects as witness by most of the respondents during the researcher process.

4.2.2 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis estimates the relationships among variables. It allows researchers to model the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.831[a]	.691	.687	.28419

a. Predictors: (Constant), Project Monitoring and Evaluation, Project Implementation, Project Risk Management, Project Planning

Source: Primary Data, 2024

In Table 3, the Model Summary presents valuable insights into the overall influence of the predictors (monitoring and evaluation, project risk management, project planning, project implementation) and the dependent variable (Project performance). The correlation coefficient (R) of 0.831 indicates a strong positive linear influence of these predictors on project performance. This signifies that as these project management skills improve collectively, there's a strong tendency for project sustainability to increase. The coefficient of determination (R squared), which is 0.691, reveals that approximately 69.1% of the variability in the dependent variable (Project performance) can be explained by variations in the combined effect of the predictor variables. According to Kerzner (2019) project management practices are the standardized methods and techniques used to plan, organize, lead, and control project activities. These practices aim to optimize the use of resources and ensure that the project delivers the desired outcomes within predefined constraints such as time, budget, and scope.

Table 4: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	51.257	4	12.814	158.668	.000[b]
	Residual	22.936	284	.081		
	Total	74.193	288			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Agricultural Projects
b. Predictors: (Constant), Project Monitoring and Evaluation, Project Implementation, Project Risk Management, Project Planning

Source: Primary Data, 2024

The ANOVA table 4 provides significant insights into the influence of the combined project management practice (monitoring and evaluation, project risk management, project planning, project implementation) and project performance. The calculated F-statistic of 158.668 indicates that there is a statistically significant overall influence of these project management practices on project sustainability. The p-value associated with the F-statistics is shown as .000, which is less than the common threshold of 0.05, highlighting the strong significance of the influence. Meredith and Shafer (2020) define project management practices as the set of structured actions and best practices that guide the management of projects. They involve the effective use of tools and techniques to ensure project objectives are met, including the management of resources, risks, stakeholders, and performance metrics within time and budget limits.

Table 5: Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.331	.140		2.363	.019
	Project Planning	.256	.065	.260	3.942	.000
	Project Implementation	.205	.056	.211	3.685	.000
	Project Risk Management	.233	.051	.248	4.571	.000
	Project Monitoring and Evaluation	.214	.041	.238	5.189	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Performance of Agricultural Projects

Source: Primary Data, 2024

Table 5 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the influence of project planning, project implementation, project risk management, project monitoring and evaluation on performance of agricultural projects. Regarding the individual predictors, one-unit increase in Project Planning (β = 0.256, t= 3.942, p = 0.000<0.05) is associated with a 0.256 increase in project performance. Similarly, one unit increase in project implementation (β = 0.205, t=3.685, p = 0.000<0.05) leads to a 0.205 increase in project performance. Additionally, a one-unit increase in Participatory risk management (β = 0.233, t=4.571, p = 0.000<0.05) results in a 0.233 increase in project performance. one-unit increase in Project monitoring and evaluation (β = 0.214, t= 5.189, p = 0.000<0.05) is associated with a 0.214 increase in project performance. All predictors show statistically significant effects on performance, with p-values less than 0.05.

Multiple regression, the variables can be modeled using the equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where; β_0 is coefficient of the constant term, β_1 is coefficient of the predictor (Project Planning), X_1 is the predictor (Project Planning), β_2 is coefficient of the predictor (Project Implementation), X_2 is the predictor (Project Implementation), β_3 is coefficient of the predictor (Project Risk Management), X_3 is the predictor (Project Risk Management), β_4 is coefficient of the predictor (Project Monitoring and Evaluation), X_4 is the predictor (Project Monitoring and Evaluation) and ε is the error term.

Thus, replacing the coefficients, the equation becomes:

$$Y = 0.331 + 0.205X_1 + 0.256\,X_2 + 0.233X_3 + 0.214X_4$$

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

From the analysis it has been clear that the execution of the Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District requires effective planning to improve performance. The positive association signifies that effective planning plays a major role in meeting performance targets and suggests that targets should be set out clearly and with stakeholders' input.

The study reveals that project implementation efficiency is a significant factor in improving the performance of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District. The positive correlation identified indicates that as the implementation strategies are developed and the

execution is optimized, the outcomes improve emphasizing the need for converting plans to work.

The assessment of the risk management in the project reveals that the management of the likely risks has a direct bearing on the performance of Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District. The positive association underscores that developing strategies for recognizing, evaluating, and managing risks is beneficial and results in better balance and management of the framework that shapes projects.

This has indicated that proper monitoring and evaluation is an essential component in the improvement of performance in Value Chain Development Project in Gakenke District. A strong credibility proves that constant evaluation and feedback mechanisms serve not only as indicators of how far the process has progressed but as enhancers of overall improvement of the status of the project and thus yielding better results.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the study, the researcher recommends the following:
Management of Value Chain Development Project should enhance communication strategies with the view of elaborating the goals of the project. Organizing the workshops and the community meetings would entail establishing effective objectives for the project and therefore all the stakeholders would understand the objectives that have been set.

Value Chain Development Project leaders should enhance the involvement of stakeholders in risk management processes. A series of workshops that involve the community in identifying possible risks will also improve the applicability and utility of the risks management strategies.

5.3 Suggestion for further studies

This study concentrated on agriculture focused projects, but the same research can be done on other projects such as farming and in financial institutions. Further study can be on analyzing the effect of project management practices on expending livestock farming in eastern province, Rwanda.

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