Chapter XVIII

Using the Web for Enhancing Decision-Making: UN Project Failures in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the use of the Internet to improve the reliability of information supplied to the United Nations (UN) from official sources in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA). The focus of the chapter is that aid project failures in SSA need efficient project management, effective communication, and information openness to achieve socio-economic growth. The use of the Internet’s potential(s) in a way that will benefit society at large and in particular vulnerable groups needs critical examination within a wider framework of the actual needs and existing facilities of these communities. An interpretive evidence data collection method is used through questioning and interviews with stakeholder groups, validated by observation where possible. The importance of aid project performance, assessment, and monitoring in
SSA is emphasised. The significance of public participation in decision-making processes is explored. This research also highlights the pragmatics of giving local people an international voice.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is two-fold: (1) managing projects and (2) flow of public information. The framework and environment of managing projects have huge influence on the outcome of project work, and on how positively the management team experiences the entire process. The author stresses both the need and the opportunities of utilizing innovative environments and techniques to promote effectiveness in project management in SSA. This issue has become more topical by the increasing number of project works and management failures in these countries.

Another concern is that Sub-Sahara Africa needs good two-way flow of public information. This derives from a deeper concern about the lack of effective use of aid monies in SSA. This problem has also been identified in the UNDP Human Development Report (1998) and also announced in the World Bank Development Report (1987, 1999). This author argues that the Internet can be used to provide broader-based feedback essential for the effective use and allocation of aid monies on projects in SSA.

Kouzes and Posner (1987) claim that project management is essentially a problem-solving activity; yet, too often, the less experienced project manager is hindered rather than helped by the rules handed down. Though these authors have highlighted an important problem, this author also believes that an inexperienced project manager is not the only underlying issue. First, there is a need for both the donor organisations and the public to be involved in project works (see Figure 2); and secondly, ignored issues like corruption contribute to project failures. The chapter explores the circumstances and criteria for considering these factors to achieve project success. Major aspects considered include effective management risks, process, and techniques. This chapter also focuses on issues critical to achieving project objectives for socio-economic development, including project manageability; information reliability, and project decision-making. This section of the chapter amplifies these lessons with examples drawn from project management literatures and will appeal particularly to those project managers who have faced the gathering storm and wondered whether to bend or stand firm. Though the chapter is aimed at project management in general, the author is explicitly concerned with projects in the SSA.
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