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STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT: ISSUES TO RESOLVE FOR SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE OF SUGAR MILLS IN WESTERN REGION, KENYA

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ABSTRACT: *The Kenyan sugar industry suffers from poor performance linked to corruption, mismanagement, reduced cane production, overreliance on imports and growing long maturing cane variety. These problems can be resolved by engagement of different stakeholders. This article is on stakeholder engagement and effect on sustainable performance in the sugar mills in western Kenya. The paper adopted the stakeholder theory, balanced scorecard model and human relations theory of management, as its theoretical framework. The descriptive research design was employed. The respondents included managers in the sugar mills, the permanently employed staff, government officials handling the industry in the region and representatives of cane farmers from the farmer blocs. Simple and stratified sampling technique was used and respondents filled the structured questionnaire from which descriptive, regression and correlation analyses were conducted. The findings revealed that respondents agreed that stakeholder relationship management increased sustainable performance of sugar mills. The correlation analysis results showed that stakeholder communication at (r =0.852), capacity building (r =0.551), stakeholder relationship management (r =0.742) and stakeholder control processes (r =0.641) were all closely associated with the dependent variable on sustainable performance. From the regression analysis, the results showed that 70.9% of change in sustainable performance in the sugar mills was influenced by stakeholder engagement. The beta coefficient results indicate that the four means of stakeholder engagement influenced performance of the sugar mills. The study concluded that aspects of stakeholder engagement improved performance as measured in terms of high-quality products, profit margin, sales volume and increased market share. It is recommended that the government as a key stakeholder of the sector should have policies to ban sugar free imports, enhance competencies of stakeholders through training, research on best cane variety and engage stakeholders to monitor and control activities in reducing corruption, mismanagement and misappropriation of resources. Engagement of stakeholders is important when seeking to grow and establish the industry.*

KEYWORDS: Stakeholder communication, Capacity building, Control process, Managing stakeholder relations, Sales volume, Market share, Profit margins, Employee satisfaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations adopt several strategies to attain their goals, survive and thrive in their respective sectors. Some of the strategies are used singularly while many are combined to have a bigger effect on organizational outcomes. To attain performance in organizations, Aké and Boiral (2023) noted that it needed the inclusion of all stakeholders since each party played a different role. Therefore, in the recent past, stakeholder engagement has been frequently adopted as the main driver of productivity, survival, and sustainability of operations. Improving organizational performance is unattainable without effective engagement with stakeholders (Kimutai & Kwambai, 2018; Onsongo *et al*., 2020). All the stakeholders need to come on board, get a central position on the decision-making table and share their views. The stakeholders, both internal and external, are pertinent in achievement of organizational goals and mandate. Some play a complementary role or supplementary one or the engagement can be minimalist or encompassing (Gupta, Crilly & Greckhamer, 2020).

In the sugar industry, the internal stakeholders include the farmers, the customers, employees and management. Conversely, the external stakeholders cover the government - who make policies and regulatory framework, the suppliers, creditors and local community and society. Both the internal and external stakeholders play an integral role in organizations as they help the firm attain its goals through provision of their finances, other resources, materials, efforts and perspectives. Kumar, Batra and Boesso (2021) cautioned that unless the organizations find a way to build healthy and balanced relationships with all its stakeholders, they can be a stumbling block to the attainment of the firm's objective. Active engagement of stakeholders is vital for organizations to determine needs and demands and set means of meeting them. At the same time, engaging stakeholders makes it possible to convert challenges into drivers for improved productivity.

Stakeholder engagement is about bringing different people either as individuals or a group together and their resources to work as a team and deliver on the organizational goal. Merrilees, Miller and Yakimova (2021) confirm that is not possible without an efficient stakeholder communication system that allows regular exchange of information that helps reduce conflicts and disagreements and enable the alignment of interests. Communication entails channels to reach all stakeholders including calls, emails, video calls and text messaging; the communication method as verbal, written or visual and feedback mechanisms. Engagement of stakeholders is also based on capacity building inclusive of enhancing staff competencies, training of farmers and educational programs for all stakeholders. Wanyonyi (2016) shares that training cane farmers can improve quality and quantity of cane production and additionally, there is need to improve capacities by giving farmers farm inputs such as cutters for growing, fertilizers and transportation of produce.

Engagement also entails sustaining and managing a good stakeholder relationship for the commitment and support of all stakeholders towards the success of the firm. Lemuna and Muathe (2021) mention that better results are found when stakeholders take part in planning, resource mobilization and budgeting for its consumption, reviewing processes to enhance innovations and change management. Ferro-Soto, Macías-Quintana and Vázquez-Rodríguez (2018) argue that the best way of managing the stakeholders is through building integrated strategies and personally aligning individual interests with that of the organization. The integrated strategies allow for joint decision making, collaboration when conducting research

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and information sharing. It is also about the control process, which Boaz et al. (2018) noted that without it, the stakeholders can hamper the firm's growth process because of conflicting interests and disagreements. The control process helps in streamlining needs, expectations and interest between what stakeholders want and what the firm wants. There is also need for monitoring the activities of the stakeholders and the firm to check that it keeps to the strategic plan

The aim of an effective stakeholder engagement is to improve performance of the organization, which will be measured in terms of volume of cane production based on the farming processes, transport to the mill and milling speed to get the final product –sugar and molasses. Efficiency in the production process by using modern equipment and technologies will ease the process and yield higher returns for the milling company and even the cane farmers in terms of earnings. Ongombe and Mungai (2018) share that the number of tons of cane crushed per day in any mill can attest to the performance rating of the mill. It is also a measure of the quality of products like sugar for both industrial and commercial consumption purposes, molasses, and brewing alcohol. Performance is also a measure of satisfaction levels of both employees and customers and sales volume obtained each financial year and market share command for a specific brand. Performance is a critical element in the sugar milling companies as it dictates whether it continues operations or collapses (Mbithi, 2017).

In this study, sustainable performance was measured through use of both financial/monetary and non-financial or non-monetary constructs. This included sales volume based on the number of tons of production units for sugar and other products sold to different consumers and earnings generated. It is also about the market share that each sugar mill commands and profit margins calculated as the differences between earnings and expenses. The non-financial metrics included quality of products made in the sugar mills and satisfaction rates of employees working at the sugar mills. According to Parhi et al. (2023) and Kimiti et al. (2020), performance measurement is done after a specified timeframe to inform the decision making process on sustainability of operations and value gained; and this is done on a monthly basis and reported generated every quarter.

Kenya has sugar mills that are government owned and run like Muhoroni, Chemelil, Mumias, Nzoia and South Nyanza and privately owned sugar mills like West Kenya, Soin, Kibos, Butali, Transmara, Sukari industries, Kwale International sugar and Busia Sugar. The country has 15 sugar factories and combined processing capacity of 44,450 tons of cane per day but sugar self-sufficiency has remained an elusive agenda since the supply is less than what is demanded. Of the 15 sugar factories, 8 are in the Western Kenya region and they are of interest to the research in the current study (https://sugar.agricultureauthority.go.ke/).

The sugar industry employs approximately 0.5 million people and directly supports about 8 million people; it contributes to the GDP of the country and engages in social and economic development and provides raw materials for other sectors (Mati & Thomas, 2019). But the sector faces some challenges including low production for instance in 2017 production was at 376,111,000 metric tons while demand was 997,944,000. The deficit is filled through importation from other COMESA countries including Egypt, Malawi, Zambia, and Uganda. The government-owned mills have reported delayed payments to cane farmers, low production of cane and few zones to collect cane from and high production costs. In seeking to resolve

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these challenges, the paper set out to assess the stakeholder engagement issues that should be addressed for improvement in sustainable performance.

Statement of the Problem

The Kenyan sugar industry employs millions of people and supports many smallholder farming households including 170,000 families in western Kenya which is also the largest sugar production region in the country. In recent years, production has decreased due to redistribution and fragmentation of land in Western Kenya. Mati and Thomas (2019) reported that the sugar sector suffers from corruption, mismanagement of resources, low operation capacity and inefficient processes that make the mills fall into debts. There is also high cost of sugar production, overreliance on sugar imports, growing sugarcane variety that takes longer to mature at 18-24 months while the variety grown in Sudan and Malawi takes 14 months and high cost of farm inputs including fertilizers.

Resolving these challenges and revitalization of the sector, according to Waswa, Mukras and Oima (2018), may include taking these actions: revamping of extension services, growing better cane varieties, educating the farmers, use of modern equipment and timely payments of the cane farmers. These solutions demand incorporation of the government, employees, agricultural extension officers, markets and farmers, as stakeholders. Hence, the need for effective stakeholder relationship management practices for their participation in reviving the once vibrant sugar sector. Karimi, Mulwa and Kyalo (2020) revealed that committed stakeholders at organization level, practices and values have the capacity to enhance production and performance levels.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

i. To determine how stakeholder communication management affects sustainable performance of sugar mills in Western Region, Kenya;

ii. To assess how capacity building of stakeholders affects sustainable performance of sugar mills in Western Region, Kenya;

iii. To evaluate stakeholder relationship management effect on the sustainable performance of sugar mills in Western Region, Kenya; and

iv. To determine how control processes affect the sustainable performance of sugar mills in Western Region, Kenya.

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REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The section reviews literature based on the theories that anchor and support the study objectives. Additionally, the review is about past empirical literature that was later linked to findings of the current research, either to disapprove or approve the findings.

Theoretical Review

Stakeholder Theory

The stakeholder theory development is credited to Freeman (1984) and its main concept is based on firms not operating as an island. The success of these firms largely depends on different stakeholders and each stakeholder has interests and demands in working with the firm. The concept thus implies that firms must identify the stakeholders and their needs and create strategies that align stakeholder's needs, interests and wants with that of the firm. The stakeholders are identified as individuals or groups of people that can be affected by firm activities and operations or affect the firm (Freeman, 2015). Gaining success at firm level is based on effective management of the stakeholders by formulating strategies to meet the interests of the stakeholders and incorporate their viewpoints in plans for the entire organization. Thus, the organizations must identify the stakeholders that match with their values, practices, and culture such that they work together to meet the interests of each other.

The organizations must be able to differentiate between internal and external stakeholders and craft strategies that can attend to their needs and meet the planned goals and objectives. In the case of sugar mills, the management must develop strategies that fit the needs of internal stakeholders including employees and supervisors and the external stakeholders such as cane farmers, government officials, distribution lines, markets, and customers. Strengthening the stakeholder relationships is possible through employing clear communication lines to learn of stakeholders' needs and interests and inform them on the expectations of the sugar mill for its success. Jones and Wicks (1999) shared that it helps in forming collaborative and convergence points and hence working together to attain the individual or group interests and that of the organization.

The theory explains how organizations can identify, inform the stakeholders of their roles and responsibilities and craft strategies and schemes that will benefit both stakeholders and organization. This helps in explaining the main study's variable on building effective stakeholder relationship management that can influence performance of the sugar mills in western Kenya region.

Balanced Score Model

The model was developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992) as a tool to measure four key aspects of any enterprise or business unit. The four elements include learning and growth, the business processes, customers and finances and their findings are compiled into one report to inform the management on improving its efficiency. The BSC model covers aspects of performance including financial and non-financial metrics that inform organizational strategy formulation and implementation. The model helps organizations translate their visions and goals in action plans and operational strategic planning for improvement of performance. Kori et al. (2020) shared that to realize the goal of the organization, the management team is tasked with

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converting the goal to strategic plans and executing them to gain high performance. Furthermore, as a performance measurement system and tool, it informs the management in the organizations on the progress and deliverables at each phase and life cycle (Pramod & Banwet, 2011). The sugar mills can improve their performance, by translating their visions and goals into strategic plans and measuring their implementation.

The model is divided into four perspectives; firstly, the financial perspective is an important element to all stakeholders by looking at returns made, profit margins and benefits to be shared out to the stakeholders. The attractiveness of an organization is based on operational management and sustainability aspects, hence the need for value addition, increase profits and earnings. The sugar mills must consider their finances to attract more investors, pay farmers on time and efficiently run their operations. The second is on customer perspective through niche marketing, targeting specific segments, quality of products to attract and retain loyal customers and meeting customer's expectations. Karisa and Wainaina (2020) noted that making products that nobody is willing to purchase leads to collapse of the business. Therefore, the management of sugar mills should assess customer needs and find means of meeting their expectations since its sustainability is based on its customer base.

The third aspect of the BSC model is on the internal business process by considering the value of each process and individual productivity. This informs the decisions made at firm level on the process, the activities, and outcomes and thus, organizations seek to do activities that can satisfy the customers, staff, markets, shareholders, and financiers (Tibbs & Langat, 2016). On learning and growth aspects, organizations can only enhance their competencies and innovative capacities through information sharing and acquiring new knowledge. For the sugar mills to experience continuous improvement, then learning and growth must be part of its culture and structure. Since the operating environment is dynamic, then to be able to handle the changes, the mills must keep learning and growing their operations.

Success of the balanced score model demands participation and involvement of all stakeholders, access to accurate data and adjusting it to fit the needs and expectations of an organization. But still through assessing the four aspects of the balanced scorecard model, the sugar mills can enhance their sustainability. The model will help in formulating better decisions on the growth of the firms and constantly measure performance.

Human Relations Theory of Management

The theory originates from the Hawthorne plant experiments done in a span of 8 years (1924-1932) in the Western Electric Company by Elton Mayo and his associates. It is a premise of organization psychology that works for employee productivity and their motivation. The social interactions at the workplace, the working conditions and opportunities for growth and advancement lead to increased production. Omodan, Tsotetsi and Dube (2020) noted that empowerment, participation, and good treatment at the workplace are elements that improve the performance of the firm, starting at individual and group level and covering the entire organization. Human relations contradict the scientific organizational management model that focused on production rates, division of labor and viewed employees as a part of machineries at the workplace. The feelings, interests, and aspirations of then employees were handled as non-necessities (Kidombo, K'obonyo & Gakuu, 2012).

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The Hawthorne experiments showed that even though the firm was progressive by giving the workers benefits, pensions, and allowances, production was still poor. But when considering the working conditions Mayo and his research assistant Fritz Roetlishberger revealed that work breaks, lightning and work hours and attention to details increased labor productivity (Warner & Busse, 2017). In the same manner, the management in the sugar mills can assess the working conditions and adjust to improve productivity. The declining productivity and imbalance between sugar supply and demand can be erased by productivity of the milling workers and attending to the needs of the cane farmers. Sugar mills through farmer blocs, extension services and meetings can learn issues affecting the farmers and the workers are key stakeholders; handle the issues and improve performance outcomes.

Just as Mayo and Fritz Roetlishberger discovered, the need for collaboration, recognition and participation led to improved productivity, so sugar mills should seek means of engaging their stakeholders for improved performance. Interests and needs of all parties must be aligned to avoid conflicts when the managers mostly concentrate on efficiency and cost reduction measures. Rose (2005) noted that to improve production, organizations must provide a conducive working environment, tools, systems and materials and competent workforce. One of the ways of having competency is through capacity building that covers training, experiments and information sharing with the employees and involvement of other stakeholders.

The human relations theory works to improve individual performance as informed by the efforts of the management. Through training, job rotations and information sharing, the theory exposes how sugar mills can improve their overall performance through exploiting its workers. The theory exposes the second variable on capacity building of the stakeholders and concentration is on employees of the sugar mills. Capacity building enhances employees' competencies, and a good working condition and environment elevates the performance outcome rates. Thus, the theory is associated with the second variable on capacity building of stakeholders as a means of enhancing performance of the sugar mills in western Kenya.

Empirical Review

This section reviews past literature on sustainable performance in organizations. The discussion involves stakeholder communication, capacity building, stakeholder relationship management and stakeholder control processes from the perspective of global, regional and local researchers.

Stakeholder Communication Management and Performance

Rajhans (2018) conducted a study on communication management that was effective in maintaining stakeholder relations in organizations. Communication management involves monitoring and controlling all communication channels, adoption of corporate communication strategies, planning and designing the internal and external communication systems and managing information flow. The researcher collected data using questionnaires and interviews with stakeholders in different project-based organizations. The results indicated that communication is a useful tool to manage stakeholder relations, avoid information distortion and miscommunication and build trust.

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Organization communication greatly influences organizational performance and as Haroon and Malik (2018) found that the same was realized when assessing public and privately-owned universities in Islamabad. The researchers concluded that to improve performance, the universities need to adopt effective organizational communication. It was thus recommended that universities facing problems like poor performance in academic and non-academic aspects should employ effective communication means. Additionally, Mugo, Muathe and Waithaka (2018) while reviewing the performance of Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies (SACCOs) in Kenya, also found that use of mobile communication services such as mobile texting, calls, emails, chatting and conferencing had a positive effect on performance of the DT-SACCOs. The mobile communication allowed for information flow to anyone across any geographical location thus saving time and costs and maintaining a good relationship. Customer loyalty improved through efficient communication hence recommendations to the SACCOS to invest more in mobile communication services.

Luhombo, Mukanzi and Senaji's (2019) research was on stakeholder communication and how it influences sustainability of TVETS in Western region in Kenya. The researchers noted that communication was a lubricant that ensures proper functioning and working of singular parts of an organization. The study results indicated that stakeholder communication significantly affected the sustainability of SCPs in the TVETs in Western-Kenya. Communication enhanced teamwork and participation of all stakeholders through sharing of knowledge and information. All stakeholders can understand their assigned responsibilities and tasks and the TVETS embraces monitoring of progress. Communication that was open, regular, and accurate allowed smooth functioning of operations through flow of instructions to the implementers.

Capacity Building of Stakeholders and Performance

Attaining high performance outcomes in organizations is associated with capacity building. In their study, George et al. (2012), and Nwankwo, Olabisi and Onwuchekwa (2017) mention that in recognition of the role of cooperative societies such as being in the forefront in generating employment opportunities, reducing poverty, rural growth, and development, and improving GDP; thus, the need to invest in capacity building initiatives. The research revealed that capacity building strongly influenced performance in terms of number of members, market share command, variety of products and volume of sales. Enhancing knowledge of employees of the cooperative societies improves outcomes and the recommendation is for the government to offer cooperative extension services.

Focusing on literacy and numeracy education programs in Nairobi City County, the researchers Karimi, Mulwa and Kyalo (2021 found that capacity building of the stakeholders resulted in improved effectiveness of the monitoring and evaluation activities. There was a direct link between investment in capacity building programs, involvement in monitoring and evaluation activities and improved performance in literacy and numeracy education programs. Concluding that capacity building, monitoring and evaluation delivers on the expected performance outcomes.

Lucrezi, Esfehani, Ferretti and Cerrano's (2019) study was on stakeholder education and capacity building and effect on protection of marine areas, case of Southern Mozambique. The study focused on marine education, ocean literacy and environmental monitoring initiatives based on the perspectives of the stakeholders in the community. The findings showed that the

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initiatives and training had a positive effect on conservation efforts and the livelihoods of the communities. The study showed the bilateral nature of capacity building through empowerment and steering management strategies through stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholder Relationship Management and Performance

Belyaeva, Shams, Santoro and Grandhi (2020) conducted a study on unpacking stakeholder relationship management in both private and public sectors. The focus was on present knowledge from wide streams on stakeholder relationship management and available opportunities for growth and expansion. Results indicated that stakeholder relationship management covers aspects of effective corporate governance, participation in corporate social responsibilities and expanding entrepreneurial elements and innovations. Both public and private sectors can gain from unpacking the concept of stakeholder relationship management and use it to elevate their operations to the next levels.

In seeking to link two perspectives on stakeholder relationship management in non-profit organizations in South Africa, the researchers Meyer and Barker (2020) confirm that managing stakeholder relations is based on strategic communication between modernist and post-modernist stakeholders. It was revealed that the meta-modern model demands constant negotiations with the two perspectives. Further findings show the need for formal training on stakeholder relationship management by identifying present issues, mapping all stakeholders involved and designing a training manual and communicating the same to help improve and manage the relationship among stakeholders.

Ontita and Kinyua (2020) researching on stakeholder management in its influencing role in firm performance, noted that success and survival of organizations is largely dependent on stakeholders. The stakeholders are especially needed and play an integral role in volatile sectors such as banking and focusing on commercial banks in Nairobi. Effective stakeholder management led to improved bank performance and the banks were asked to have policies and structures in involving and handling all stakeholders. In another aspect, the researchers Burgoyne and Mearns (2017) assessing management of stakeholder relations in Ololosokwan community conservancy in Tanzania, revealed that when benefits and monies from the conservancy were shared with stakeholders, there was success of the conservation efforts. Collaboration and engagement of all stakeholders, sharing common interests and communication reduces conflict and results in better managed stakeholder relationships.

Stakeholder Control Processes and Performance

Akisik and Gal (2017) research was on internal controls and corporate social responsibility based on stakeholder’s view of the organization and its financial performance. The study focus was assessing financial performance as influenced by internal controls and CSR activities as viewed by organization’s stakeholders –the customers and employees. It revealed that financial performance was affected by internal controls and CSR reports. When the customers and employees constantly review the CSR report and implement internal control measures, then financial performance will be achieved in the long run. The study’s implication is on the value of customers and employees on influencing the financial performance of organizations.

In the construction sector, the aspect of control measures is important and has a key impact on detection and elimination of defects, resulting in successfully completed projects. Yu, Man,

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Wang, Shen, Hong, Zhang and Zhong (2019) focused on developing a model and framework for setting a means of using stakeholders to control the processes. The research noted that evaluating the critical stakeholders, identifying their roles and responsibilities, and setting control measures helped in controlling the quality of the project and reduced defect rates.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive research design by allowing the respondents drawn from the 8 sugar mills in western Kenya to clearly describe their participation in the companies. The design was also adopted by Moga and Muathe (2020) as ideal in divulging information on the study subject. Musau, Muathe and Mwangi (2018) further noted that the design is suitable in giving features of elements and gives the researcher a chance to get the characteristics of the study element and test it. Thus, the respondents were able to describe how stakeholder relationship management affected performance and sustaining operations in the sugar mills in western Kenya region.

The population covers the entire group of the elements that have similar traits and concerns for the study (Elfil & Negida, 2017). The population included all the stakeholders such as 416 managers, 2,199 permanently employed staff, 172,000 cane farmers placed in 692 farmer blocs, and 42 government officials of the sugar mill products. The target population covered the 8 sugar mills located in western region in Kenya and the number was 3,349. There was use of stratified sampling technique by grouping the respondents as per role and function they handle resulting in diverse information. Simple random sampling was also used in selecting the people who took part in the study and sample size of 357 people. The Yamane (1967) formula assumed the 95% confidence level and 5% precision.

Primary data was collected using structured questionnaires, a similar method used by Hakizimana et al. (2023). The closed-ended questions applied the five-point Likert scale. The scale ranges from 1-5 where 1= no effect at all, while 5 = very large effect to assess the extent of agreement with each statement. The researcher got approval from the university, research permit and permission from the management team in the 8 sugar mills in western Kenya. There was use of two research assistants who helped in collecting the data by administering the questionnaires on a face-to-face interaction. All the collected data was entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v.25.0) and Ms. Excel for further analysis. Descriptive analysis was done to obtain means, percentages, frequencies and standard deviation and inferential statistics where the correlation and multiple regression analysis assessed the strength of the relationship between the variables and showed how each variable influences the dependent variable of performance. These findings were then presented in tables, figures, and discussions.

The regression model followed this format:

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

Y = Sustainable performance of sugar mills

β_0 = Constant value

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β_1 to β_4 = Coefficients for determination for aspects of stakeholder engagement

X_1 = Stakeholder Communication Management

X_2 = Capacity Building of Stakeholder

X_3 = Stakeholder Relationship Management

X_4 = Stakeholder Control Processes

ε = Error term

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher conducted descriptive, correlation and regression analysis and findings and discussions are presented in these sections:

Descriptive Analysis

In this study, descriptive analysis was conducted by applying the 5-point likert scale, where the rating scale: 1 =No effect, 2 = Little effect, 3 =Moderate effect, 4 =Large effect and 5 =Very large effect. The respondents marked the extent that they either agreed or disagreed with each of the statements and from it means and standard deviations were obtained as shown in these tables.

Table 1: Stakeholder Communication

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
Information sharing is encouraged at the sugar mill	3.85	1.14
An efficient communication system improves management of stakeholders	2.74	1.02
The communication is both verbal and written adopted to convey messages to the stakeholders	3.67	1.12
The communication channel is open for allowing free flow of information to all parties	3.8	1.09
Managers give instructions on work guidelines to employees	3.97	1.07
Upward communication entails feedback from employees to managers on key aspects in the sugar mill.	3.77	1.03
Communication has improved performance in the sugar mills	3.52	1.07
Aggregate	**3.76**	**1.08**

The table shows that in general the respondents agreed to high scores (M=3.76, SD=1.08) that stakeholder communication influenced sustainability performance of the sugar mills in western Kenya region. Just as Rajhans (2018) found that communication is an effective tool in maintaining relationships between any two or more parties and results in improved performance outcomes.

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Table 2: Capacity Building

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
The sugar mill offers regular trainings to its staff for improved competencies	3.7	1.06
The sugar mills offer apprenticeship and internships programs to staff to gain skills	3.61	1.08
The sugar mills have engaged agricultural extension officers to monitor cane growing process	3.59	1.16
The sugar mills give farm inputs to farmers including fertilizer and seeds to improve yield	3.89	1.16
The managers undertake performance reviews for all employees underneath them	3.69	1.09
The mill plans for benchmarking to learn from the best performers in the industry	3.63	1.12
Aggregate Scores	**3.68**	**1.02**

The findings shown in Table 2 note that capacity building at aggregate scores of (M=3.68, SD=1.02) in improving sustainable performance in the sugar mills. Capacity building through training, educational programs and provision of farming inputs which can improve performance outcomes. The researchers Ferrero et al. (2019) and Lucrezi et al. (2019) both confirmed that regular training enhanced competencies that had a positive impact on performance of the organization.

Table 3: Stakeholder Relationship Management

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
The sugar mills have different contracts with the various stakeholders (farmers, workers, financiers) dictating the interaction between the parties	3.67	1.09
The sugar mill has created integrated system to reach to all stakeholders	3.63	1.06
There policies guiding on joint decision-making process	3.76	.91
All stakeholders are involved when researches are conducted	3.68	1.10
Maintaining a good relationship with stakeholders involve sharing of pertinent information	3.81	1.00
There are regulations that dictate the terms of the relationship the mill has with different stakeholders	3.54	1.03
The sugar mill seeks to build a symbiotic relationship with gains to all stakeholders	3.42	1.02
Aggregate Scores	**3.64**	**1.03**

The results shown in Table 3 highlight the aggregate scores of (M=3.64, SD =1.03) on stakeholder relationship management influencing sustainable performance in the sugar mills in western Kenya. Belyaeva et al. (2020) argue that the private sector as well as the public sector can gain by unpacking the concept of stakeholder relationship management through effective governance, participation in social activities and innovation practices that improve performance outcomes.

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Table 4: Stakeholder Control Processes

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
The sugar mills avoid conflicts by aligning stakeholder interests with that of the firm	3.79	1.09
The mills frequently review the relationship with different stakeholders	3.77	1.07
All stakeholders are informed of their role to play in contributing to performance of the mill	3.95	.89
Managers communicate to the stakeholders on what is expected from them	3.82	1.05
There is regular monitoring of all stakeholder function to get value from them	3.86	1.01
The managers assess contribution of each stakeholder to overall performance of the sugar mill	3.69	1.08
Aggregate Scores	**3.81**	**1.03**

Table 4 results show that the respondents had high aggregate scores at (M =3.81, SD =1.03) on stakeholder control processes causing improved and sustaining high performance in the sugar mills in western Kenya region. Just as Abiodun (2020) mentioned that controls practices are linked to improve organizational success, an indication of the close association between the two concepts. Kanini and Muathe (2019) noted that networks created and sustained by effective management and control practices of organizations improve firm performance. Without proper management of stakeholders, the organization does not gain anything from the stakeholders (Boaz et al., 2018), hence the need for proper structures and practices geared towards managing and controlling stakeholder activities.

Table 5: Sustainable Performance

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.
The sugar mills report increased market share of their products	3.54	1.27
There is improved quality of products	3.8	1.24
There is increased profit margin in sugar mills	3.68	1.13
The employee satisfaction rates are high	3.25	1.32
The sugar mills have realized high sales volume	3.66	1.11
Aggregate Scores	**3.57**	**1.21**

The result shown on Table 5 shares that overall, the respondents noted a moderate improvement in performance as linked to stakeholder relationship management with an aggregate score of (M =3.57, SD =1.21). Ongombe and Mungai (2018) noted that performance is based on higher yield and returns from efficient and effective processes within the internal structure of the organization. Parhi et al. (2023) shared that performance is based on the differences between inputs and outputs and measured after some time period has elapsed.

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Correlation Analysis

Correlation as a bivariate analysis was conducted in seeking to find out if there is existence of any relationship between the study variables on sustainable performance and stakeholder engagement aspects. Kinyua, Muathe and Kilika (2015) were able to determine the magnitude and effect of the relationship between knowledge conversion and application and performance; thus, in the same manner, the correlation will assess the effect of stakeholder engagement on sustainable performance of the sugar mills.

Table 6: Correlation Analysis

		Sustainable Performance	**Stakeholder Communication**	**Capacity Building**	**Stakeholder Relationship Management**	**Stakeholder Control Processes**
Sustainable Performance	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	259				
Stakeholder Communication	Pearson Correlation	.852	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	259	259			
Capacity Building	Pearson Correlation	.551	.278	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	259	259	259		
Stakeholder Relationship Management	Pearson Correlation	.742	.414	.174	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.001	.000	.000	
	N	259	259	259	259	
Stakeholder Control Processes	Pearson Correlation	.641	.528	.209	.153	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	259	259	259	259	259

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*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows that there is a positive and strong association between indicators of stakeholder management and sustainable performance at the sugar mills in western Kenya. The r values were high such that stakeholder communication at (r =0.852 and p-value = 0.000 < 0.5) as also confirmed by Lopatta et al. (2017) noted that proper communication systems and channels allow information (instructions, views, suggestions and feedback) that draws all stakeholders together to pull efforts for higher performance. When there is open communication, the stakeholders form part of the decision-making organ and ultimately yield better performance. The results show that capacity building (r =0.551 and p-value = 0.000 < 0.5) affected sustainable performance in the sugar mills. The results align with Woldesenbet (2021) who stated that enhancing the capacity and competencies of stakeholders improves commitment and creates a sense of belonging that impacts on operations and performance outcomes.

The study also found that stakeholder relationship management at (r =0.742 and p-value = 0.000 < 0.5) improved sustainable performance at the sugar mills in western Kenya. Similar sentiments were shared by Kimutai and Kwambai (2018) that a proper structure of engaging and involving stakeholders helps in meeting each stakeholder's needs and extend the performance outcomes of the organization. Lastly, the study found that stakeholder control processes with values of (r =0.641 and p-value = 0.000 < 0.5) contributed to high sustainable performance in the sugar mills in western Kenya. Just as Karimi et al. (2020) noted that stakeholders should not only be involved in implementing programs and strategies but also take part in evaluating, monitoring and controlling the programs to meet the set objectives. The control processes ensure that resources are used properly, work is frequently reviewed and all stakeholders diligently handle their assignments, which result in improved performance.

Regression Analysis

In seeking to draw inferences on the population based on the study sample, the study adopted the regression model. Empirical analysis of the data was done through the regression model summary, which was also used in the studies by Haroon and Malik (2018) and Muathe (2010) who followed the same modeling but adopted the logit model. First the study did a model summary and analysis of variance to test and check for fitness of the regression model and secondly it conducted a beta coefficient to assess the extent to which each specific objective influenced the dependent variable. This helped in drawing inferences on how stakeholder engagement and its elements affected sustainable performance as the dependent variable.

Table 7: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.844a	.712	.709	.60379

Findings in Table 7 show that there was a strong and positive association between stakeholder relationship management practices and sustainable performance in the sugar mills based on correlation coefficient results where R =0.844. The regression model was found to be fit based on coefficient of determination scores where R square =0.712. The results found on the adjusted R square =0.709 imply that 70.9% changes in sustainable performance of the sugar mills is due to stakeholder relationship management practices. This echoes what Ontita and Kinyua (2020) found that improvement of firm performance is based on managing the

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relationship of the stakeholders. Managing and involvement of stakeholders results in increased sales volume, market share, effective and efficient production processes and high quality of products and services. This implies that improved performance of the sugar mills was caused by stakeholder relationship management.

Table 8: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	15.019	4	3.755	2.729	.000[b]
	Residual	349.602	254	1.376		
	Total	354.661	258			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Performance
b. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder Communication, Capacity Building, Stakeholder Relationship Management, Stakeholder Control Processes

The results in Table 8 on a test of ANOVA calculated at 0.05 significance level, showing that F calculated at 2.729 is greater than F critical, whose value is at 2.1318. The results indicate that the model is fit since F calculated is greater than F critical and hence the regression model is ideal for use in the present research paper.

Table 9: Coefficient of Beta

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	T	Sig.
1	(Constant)	11.023	2.927		3.766	.000
	Stakeholder Communication	2.214	.684	1.175	3.236	.011
	Capacity Building	.826	.629	.459	1.313	.000
	Stakeholder Relationship Management	1.004	.507	.502	1.981	.002
	Stakeholder Control Processes	1.92	1.486	.999	1.292	.043

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainable Performance

$$\mathbf{Y = 11.023 + 2.214X_1 + 0.826X_2 + 1.004X_3 + 1.92X_4}$$

The results show that the constant performance of the sugar mills in western Kenya is at (β_0 = 11.023), indicating that that is the sustainable performance when all other practices and factors are held constant. Further findings indicate that stakeholder communication positively and significantly affected sustainable performance of the sugar mills in western Kenya region. This is influenced by the beta results where ($\beta = 2.214$, $p = 0.011 < 0.05$). The results indicate that model was fit since the p-value of 0.011 was less than the standard of 0.05 and as such stakeholder communication contributed to improved performance in the sugar mills. As per Table 1, information sharing, open communication channels, instruction and feedback and use of verbal and non-verbal means of communication enhanced the aspect of communication in sugar mills, which resulted in improvement in performance. As shared by Haroon and Malik (2018) that to significantly impact organization performance, effective organizational communication is part of it. Similarly, Mugo et al. (2018) found that relationship of communication and performance of the DT-SACCOs was positive and significant and Rajhans

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(2018) advocated for planning internal and external communication systems, using corporate communication strategies and management of communication channels and flow of information, when seeking to enhance operations and performance outcomes.

Results also showed that there was a positive and significant effect between capacity building and sustainable performance due to ($\beta = .826$, $p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Just like in the study by Karimi et al. (2021) where it was revealed that capacity building of the stakeholders had a positive influence on performance of education programs. Nwankwo et al. (2017) revealed that aspects of capacity building such as benchmarking, mentoring, coaching, training and apprenticeship improved the performance of the cooperatives. The capacity building strongly and positively influenced performance outcomes in terms of high market share, sales volume and quality of the varied products. Lucrezi et al. (2019) results showed that training as an aspect of capacity building had a positive effect on the success of the conservation efforts. The results and its alignment with past studies confirm the value of capacity building and the need for organizations investing in initiatives to improve capacities. High capacities of human capital in organizations plays an integral role in enhancing individual and organizational performance.

The study findings were such that stakeholder relationship management had positive and significant effect on performance of the sugar mills as based on the beta coefficient results of ($\beta = 1.004$, $p = 0.002 < 0.05$). The finding is similar to what Ontita and Kinyua (2020) found that management of stakeholders resulted in improved bank performance. Similarly, Burgoyne and Mearns (2017) found that managing the stakeholder relationships resulted in higher performance outcomes for communication conservation efforts. Proper management of all stakeholders implies that efforts are drawn together and there is sharing of information and interests resulting in better yields. Thus, managing the relationship of all organizational stakeholders ensures it is productive and profitable to the organization. As per Table 3, having a clearly outlined contractual agreement with the different stakeholders, having a framework of inclusivity and participative decision-making process and sharing pertinent information with stakeholders, was impactful in performance of the sugar mills.

On stakeholder control processes, the findings showed there was positive and significant association to sustainable performance for the sugar mills in western Kenya region. This is based on beta coefficient results of ($\beta = 1.92$, $p = 0.043 < 0.05$), showing that stakeholder control processes led to improved sustainable performance. In this study, the control process entailed aligning stakeholder needs and that of the firm that avoided conflicts, assessing and evaluating the contribution of each stakeholder and constant review of the relationship. These as pictured in Table 4 show impact on performance of the sugar mills. Similar findings were noted by Akisik and Gal (2017) reporting that implementing stakeholder control measures improved financial performance. According to Abiodun (2020), the study findings showed positive association between internal control elements including audits, monitoring and evaluating risks and success of organization. Yu et al. (2019) further confirm that control measures help in detecting and preventing problems, which positively impact on quality of products, services and outcomes. This confirms that control processes are essential when seeking improvements in performance.

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CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the sugar sector plays an important role in socio-economic growth and development of the nation. Therefore, it is important for involvement of all stakeholders to review the sector through the government bailing out the sugar milling companies, banning sugar imports and growing quality and short-maturing cane variety. To attain and sustain high performance records in the sugar mills, the study recognizes the need for effective engagement of all stakeholders and maintaining a good relationship with internal and external stakeholders. Maintaining a good relationship with all the stakeholders is based on a good communication system with channels allowing information to flow in all directions. It is also made possible by considering the interests of both the stakeholders and the companies and involvement in making key decisions. The study also concludes that high corruption cases, mismanagement and misappropriation of resources and unproductivity in the sugar mills can be reduced through stakeholder engagement. The stakeholders take up roles in monitoring, controlling, evaluating and reporting instances of wastage, loss and poor use of resources in the sugar mills. This works by improving efficiency along the production and processing lines and delivery of quality products that meet and satisfy the needs of the markets and consumers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was seeking ways of sustaining performance of companies in the sugar sector in the long-term instead of the sporadic high performance reported after government bail-outs and change of management due to misappropriation of funds and mismanagement of the company. The study therefore recommends that the government puts in place policies to ban tax-free sugar imports in order to protect the sector by matching the local demand and supply of sugar products. Additionally, it is recommended that research organization like Kenya Agricultural Research Organization (KALRO), support farmers through the Ministry of Agriculture by developing the best cane varieties that have higher yields than what the farmers are currently using. The study also recommends that regulatory bodies such as Kenya Bureau of Standards (KBS) assess the sugar products for maintenance of high quality and remove harmful products to the markets.

The paper recognizes that engagement of stakeholders is a daunting task and there is need to consider some aspects such as communication system, channels and information flow; the capacities and competencies of all stakeholders and where there are gaps, the means to build it up, and the management of the relationship between different stakeholders and how best to control the link and process. These constructs are what informed the conceptualization of this research as communication management, capacity building, relationship management and control processes for all stakeholders of the sugar mills in a quest to improve and sustain high performance.

The sugar mills should conduct internal audits and assess its efficient levels to reduce cost of production and increase quality and quantity. This can be done through using internal assessors or external assessors such from accredited audit firms, health officials and agricultural extension officers. The study also recommends that the management of the sugar mills invest in communication systems that are digital to improve on information sharing and engagement

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with stakeholders. The HR department working with the training team, the finance department and the directors' office should plan, allocate and approve a budget for training to increase skills, competencies and capabilities of the workers as internal stakeholders. With improvement of skills, experiences and know-how, the sugar mills will be able to attain and sustain higher performance.

Maintaining a good relationship with stakeholders can be effectively done through organizing public forums, using digital and non-digital tools to reach all stakeholders. The stakeholders must be engaged and involved in all phases and in handling activities of the sugar mills. The study recommends inclusivity of all stakeholders in recognition of the value of the sugar sector in the economy, the local communities, in reduction of poverty and provision of social amenities.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The study was limited in terms of region, since the research covered only sugar mills located in western region parts of Kenya; therefore, future researchers can consider sugar mills in other regions/locations in the nation to compare findings; including Kisii and Trans Mara Counties for comparison purposes.

The study is limited in terms of scope as only stakeholder engagement was analyzed and hence other factors and practices can be the focus of future research. Other aspects such as strategic planning, strategy implementation have been found to influence performance, but not in the sugar sector and researchers can expand research in that.

Additionally, the study was done in the sugar sector, thus suggesting that other researchers can consider other sectors including tea, coffee, and other cash-crops grown in Kenya within the agricultural sector. Similar research can also focus on non-agricultural sectors such as financial, manufacturing and transport sectors in seeking the link between stakeholder engagement and performance.

The study was limited to collection of primary data using structured questionnaires, as such future researchers can conduct studies through the use of both primary and secondary data, and get views of key stakeholders in the sector through interviews with key informants and discussions with sector players.

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