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## Exploring the Association between Project Management Knowledge Areas and Sustainable Outcomes

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### Abstract

The popularity of sustainable outcomes has been recognized in development studies through the expression of terminologies including “sustainability” or “benefit sustainability” or “sustained benefits” or “sustainable benefits”. Despite benefits generated by development projects, funding termination is likely to bring the projects to an end. This incidence leads to discontinuity in initiated development. This paper investigates a linkage between project management knowledge areas (PMKA) and sustainable outcomes from four RHD projects in Thailand. Through quantitative data analysis using Chi-square and Cramer’s V association, different combinations of association between 10 PMKA and 11 targeted sustainable outcomes of the RHD projects are revealed.

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### 1. Introduction

Numerous reproductive health development (RHD) programs funded by both national and international agencies have been established in attempt to mitigate catastrophic reproductive health (RH) problems such as HIV/AIDS, maternal and child mortality, unsafe abortion, reproductive tract cancers, and sexually transmitted diseases. Many RH projects have been established in collaboration with international development agencies as they tend to consume considerable time and resources. Managing RHD projects with a focus on achieving long term benefits once initial funding is expended becomes a great challenge for developing countries [1]. It is believed that the achievement of RH

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sustainable outcomes could be assisted by recognized project management (PM) practices. In this study, project management knowledge is used as a lens to examine sustainable outcomes on four reproductive health development (RHD) projects based within Thailand. A Guide to Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide) developed by Project Management Institute [2] is employed to assist the investigation due to its global recognition in respect to PM best practice. The aim of this research was to identify project management application in the studied RHD projects. Furthermore, the research attempted to explore the association between sustainable outcomes and project management with particular emphasis on project management knowledge areas (PMKA) as developed in the PMBOK® Guide. This research was based on the implementation of four RHD projects in Thailand. The four projects were selected due their direct relevance to the research and assisted by the availability of documentation held by the Reproductive Health Bureau of Thailand. The research hoped to yield new directions for improved sustainable outcomes targeted by the RHD projects via applying project management ideology.

## **2. Literature Review**

Effective management is the key to successful development of RHD projects. The management related issues discovered in RHD projects generally include management planning and execution, human resources, communications, cost, activity design and scheduling, procurement and logistics, and standard practice to deliver the project outcomes. Different RH development projects contain their specific characteristics and requirements, and planning [1, 3]. The projects should be designed and planned individually to reflect unique strategies and to attain the utmost effectiveness [4]. Estimating current situations, conducting needs assessment, planning, implementing, monitoring and measuring the results are a recommended process for project achievement [5]. Furthermore, planning for project implementation requires needs prioritization and the project vision. Project activity scheduling is urged to be established on the basis of financial reality and soundness. Human resources, implementation capacity, stakeholders' perspectives, and management information systems need to be incorporated to the established strategic plan [6]. Relationships between project quality, monitoring and evaluation are frequently addressed as a vital part to project success [7]. Adequate monitoring and evaluation processes in healthcare projects lead to performance and quality improvement.

In Thailand, the recognition and practice of health project evaluation that includes project management knowledge is not substantial. Sullivan, Maung and Sophia [8] describe the difficulties in launching and maintaining a reproductive health project in Thailand. Although appropriate training in clinical services was provided, unfamiliarity in monitoring and evaluation concepts of the project members was an additional obstacle towards RH improvement implementation. Speizer, Magnani and Colvin [9] address the lack of recognition of program management tools in developing countries including Thailand. The deficiency is one influencing factors that leads to the paucity of effective RH evaluation. According to the study of Speizer, Magnani and Colvin [9], Khumsaen and Gary [10], Vlassoff et al. [11], Sriamporn et al. [12], Tangcharoensathien et al. [13] and Boonmongkon, Nichter and Pylypa [14], most RH evaluations undertaken in developing countries are conducted on medical-based evaluations whereas acknowledgement of the nonmedical-based evaluations is deficient.

## **3. Significance of Sustainable Outcomes**

The popularity and familiarity of sustainable outcome concepts have been recognized in development studies through the expression of terminologies including “sustainability” or “benefit sustainability” or “sustained benefits” or “sustainable benefits”. In health development studies, sustainable outcomes include the continuation of program activities within a new organization, the maintenance of health promotion by building community capacity, the maintenance of health benefits generated from an initial program and the maintenance of program services for ongoing prevention and treatment for a health problem after termination of funding and assistance from a donor [15, 16]. When the donor's funding is terminated and the health problems remain completely unsolved, the concepts of sustainable outcomes could be one of the best solutions to ensure that the benefits and the health interventions can be maintained [17, 18, 19]. Some studies which attempt to identify the benefits of sustained health programs. A study of Swidler and Watkins [20] indicates that having sustainable outcomes, not only benefits a country would from the sustained products and services provided to the nation's population but would also gain from knowledge and skills transfer. Previous

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