Stakeholder Involvement at Project Identification and Performance of Agricultural Projects in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder involvement during the project identification phase is a critical element of effective project management. While agriculture remains the backbone of Kenya's economy, the performance of agricultural projects continues to face significant challenges, including delays, cost overruns, weak coordination, and inadequate stakeholder participation, despite considerable investments. About 40% of these projects are completed on time, with many exceeding budget estimates and suffering inefficiencies largely due to minimal stakeholder engagement beyond the identification stage. The current research examined the influence of stakeholder involvement during project identification phase on the performance of agricultural projects in Kenya. The study was guided by stakeholder theory. A descriptive survey design was adopted, targeting 115 staff members from the project coordinating units, alongside five purposively selected farmer groups. Data were collected through structured questionnaire. The findings established a significant relationship between stakeholder involvement at the project identification and performance of agricultural projects (r = 0.711, p = 0.000). As per regression analysis results, the beta coefficient β=0.585, t-value t=10.006 with p=0.000 indicate a significant relationship. Therefore, the performance of agricultural projects was influenced by stakeholder involvement during project identification. The study concluded effective engagement of stakeholders enhances the transparency and significantly boosts the performance of projects. It is recommended that that policymakers and project managers embed participatory structures, incorporate stakeholder perspectives to fortify accountability and embrace flexible management approaches that drive improved project performance.

Key Words: Agricultural Projects, Project Identification, Performance, Stakeholder Involvement.

1. INTRODUCTION

Stakeholder involvement has been widely recognized as a central pillar within the broader project management (Nguyen, Skitmore, & Wong, 2022). It integrates diverse perspectives, balances competing interests, and strengthens legitimacy in decision-making. Engagement across the project life cycle improves planning and execution while fostering trust, transparency, and accountability. Adhi and Muslim (2023) opines that projects operate within complex social, economic, and institutional environments, making the inclusion of influential actors essential for shaping outcomes. Effective participation enhances knowledge sharing, supports risk anticipation, and increases adaptability to changing conditions. This reduces conflict and resistance that often hinder performance. It also aligns project objectives with broader societal expectations, ensuring outputs reflect the priorities of beneficiaries and reinforce institutional credibility (Prebanić & Vukomanović, 2023). The value of stakeholder involvement extends beyond procedural compliance by creating shared ownership, strengthening accountability systems, and promoting continuous learning that benefits the projects being undertaken. According to Adil, Syarief, Widiatmaka, & Najib (2022) effective engagement of stakeholders during project identification, enhances the refinement of objectives with greater precision. Diverse insights expose potential gaps, opportunities, and constraints that might otherwise remain obscured. As such, their participation promote credibility of the process by embedding legitimacy into decisions that guide resource

allocation and institutional commitment (Nguyen et al., 2022). This involvement facilitates the articulation of shared expectations, which supports the establishment of realistic baselines and measurable outcomes. Integrating such perspectives strengthens accountability from the outset, since responsibilities are clarified and performance benchmarks are co-constructed rather than imposed. Agricultural projects have been rolled out in Kenya over the past two decades with the objective of improving productivity, enhancing resilience, and expanding market opportunities for smallholder farmers. Supported by global partners such as the World Bank, FAO, IFAD, and JICA, these projects have introduced innovations in extension systems, value chain integration, and climate-smart agricultural practices. However, their overall effectiveness has often been undermined by weak coordination, delays in execution, and limited stakeholder participation, which restrict the achievement of intended outcomes (World Bank, 2021; Ministry of Agriculture, 2023). Initiatives such as the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) (2000–2011) expanded outreach at the grassroots level but fell short in embedding market linkages, thereby limiting technology adoption (Ministry of Agriculture, 2012).

The Kenya Agricultural Productivity Project (KAPP) (2004–2012) strengthened research-extension collaboration but struggled with implementation delays and a decline in stakeholder engagement following devolution (World Bank, 2013). Similarly, the Smallholder Horticulture Empowerment and Promotion Project (SHEP), with JICA support, promoted market-led approaches yet remained limited in scale and excluded key actors such as traders and county officials (JICA, 2017). Additionally, the National Agricultural and Rural Inclusive Growth Project (NARIGP) introduced participatory, community-driven mechanisms but faced bottlenecks in fund disbursement, technical gaps, and weak integration with county planning structures (World Bank, 2020). The Kenya Climate Smart Agriculture Project (KCSAP) supported sustainable practices but was constrained by uneven participation and inadequate exit strategies (FAO, 2022). Similarly, the Agricultural Sector Development Support Programme Phase II (ASDSP II) aimed to strengthen value chain coordination through stakeholder platforms but was limited by underfunding and weak mainstreaming into county frameworks (Republic of Kenya, 2021). A review of these agricultural projects reveals persistent issues including constrained institutional capacity, procurement inefficiencies, and tokenistic stakeholder involvement confined largely to design stages without substantive roles in implementation or monitoring (IFPRI, 2023).

Greater integration with county systems, inclusive participation mechanisms, and deliberate attention to scalability and sustainability are essential to improve the performance and long-term impact of agricultural projects in Kenya (Wambua & Tumuti, 2024). Given its central importance, the performance of agricultural projects remains critical for advancing inclusive economic growth, promoting rural transformation, and safeguarding food security. Yet, despite sustained investments in programs and initiatives across Kenya, performance outcomes have frequently been undermined by persistent delays, weak coordination mechanisms, and limited stakeholder engagement (Ministry of Agriculture, Kenya, 2023; Kamau, Queen, & Lango, 2024). Recent assessments indicate that fewer than 40% of agricultural projects reach completion within the planned timelines, while more than 40% encounter budget overruns and operational inefficiencies largely linked to poor alignment with local needs and priorities (Uwineza & Gitahi, 2023). A major concern is the sporadic and inconsistent engagement of stakeholders beyond the initial identification phase. Minimal involvement in subsequent stages of planning, execution, and monitoring reduces community ownership, weakens accountability structures, and constrains adaptive learning processes (Ntirenganya & Twesigye, 2022). These shortcomings significantly limit the ability of projects to deliver timely, cost-effective, and sustainable outcomes. Although participatory approaches are increasingly advocated, much of the existing scholarship narrows its focus to isolated cases or particular sectors, thereby overlooking the project cycle as a whole and neglecting the integration of real-time stakeholder feedback. The present study examined the influence of stakeholder involvement during project identification on performance of agricultural projects.

2. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY
To assess the influence of stakeholder involvement in the project identification phase on the performance of agricultural projects in Kenya.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Project identification vitally shapes the direction, feasibility, and legitimacy of a project (Santos & Fernandes, 2024). In particular, the involvement of stakeholders at this stage ensures that projects are not only technically sound but also socially responsive and politically acceptable. Active participation fosters contextual alignment by grounding project priorities in the lived realities of target communities rather than externally imposed assumptions (Aminah & Marhendra, 2025). When diverse actors are engaged from the beginning, the process generates shared ownership, mitigates risks of resistance, and strengthens accountability structures. This inclusivity also enhances the credibility of decision-making and facilitates the integration of local knowledge, which external experts often overlook. As Adil, Syarief, Widiatmaka, and Najib (2022) observe, the participatory orientation of project identification is a determinant of both effectiveness and sustainability, given its role in aligning project objectives with genuine needs and fostering long-term commitment.

MacLeod, Brandt, Collins, and Dicks (2022) asserts that a participatory needs assessment is central to stakeholder involvement during project identification as it anchors projects in evidence-based realities. This process involves systematic inquiry into the priorities, challenges, and aspirations of communities, with stakeholders directly contributing to the articulation of what should be addressed. According to Businge, Kityo, and Ninsheka (2024) needs assessments uncover latent issues and emerging vulnerabilities that top-down approaches might miss, such as localized environmental risks, socio-cultural sensitivities, or gender-specific constraints (Wanyonyi, Mokaya, & Lango, 2024). Engaging stakeholders in this process builds trust and generates valuable knowledge that cannot be captured through technical diagnostics alone. It also strengthens legitimacy by ensuring that the eventual project interventions resonate with the community's perceptions of urgency and importance.

Additionally, Santos and Fernandes (2024) noted that stakeholder analysis is instrumental in understanding the underlying power dynamics that affect participation. Through highlighting the roles of marginalized groups alongside dominant actors, stakeholder analysis prevents exclusionary practices that could compromise fairness and legitimacy (Bryson, 2004). It clarifies who stands to gain or lose from a project, thereby enabling strategies that accommodate diverse perspectives and reduce potential conflict. Conducting such analysis during project identification also strengthens collaboration by establishing early channels of communication and negotiation (Adil et al., 2022). Beyond inclusivity, stakeholder analysis facilitates proactive risk management, as it reveals potential sources of resistance and opportunities for alliance-building. In this way, it creates a balanced platform for decision-making where multiple interests are reconciled and aligned with the overarching project goals.

Moreover, Prebanić and Vukomanović (2023) pointed that project scoping fosters a realistic and context-sensitive framework that integrates both technical feasibility and social acceptability. Inclusive scoping prevents duplication of efforts by identifying overlaps with existing initiatives and detecting potential redundancies in resource allocation. It also ensures that risks, constraints, and opportunities are assessed collectively, creating a shared understanding of what the project seeks to achieve and how it will be delivered. Through participatory scoping, stakeholders contribute to the early definition of success indicators, which enhances transparency and enables joint monitoring in later stages. This shared vision not only minimizes downstream conflicts but also embeds a sense of accountability and commitment among stakeholders (Nguyen et al., 2022). Ultimately, participatory project scoping transforms project identification from a technical exercise into a collaborative process that lays a solid foundation for sustainable implementation.

Stakeholder theory underscores the importance of organizations acknowledging and integrating the expectations of all parties with vested interests (Freeman, Menghwar, & Grushka-Cockayne, 2025). It draws attention to three fundamental aspects: identifying relevant stakeholders, understanding their objectives, and assessing their level of influence and engagement. Stakeholder identification entails recognizing all actors directly or indirectly affected by projects, including farmers, government agencies, and NGOs. Their interests reflect diverse priorities, such as economic returns, environmental sustainability, and social equity (Corazza, Cottafava, Torchia, & Dhir, 2024). Power-interest dynamics examine the variations in influence and engagement, which often depend on resource capacity and relational networks. Within agricultural projects, the application of Stakeholder Theory has been central in advancing inclusive approaches to decision-making. For example, in Kenya, the active involvement of smallholder farmers in project identification has contributed to the development of more context-specific and sustainable initiatives (Ministry

of Agriculture, Kenya, 2023). Stakeholder theory is relevant to this study as it provides a conceptual lens for examining the role of diverse actors in project processes (Corazza et al., 2024). It highlights how the interests, expectations, and power dynamics of stakeholders influence decisions made during project identification. Their level of involvement at this stage ultimately shapes accountability structures, resource alignment, and the overall performance trajectory of projects. Figure 1 illustrate the association between the stakeholder involvement during the project identification and the performance of agricultural projects:
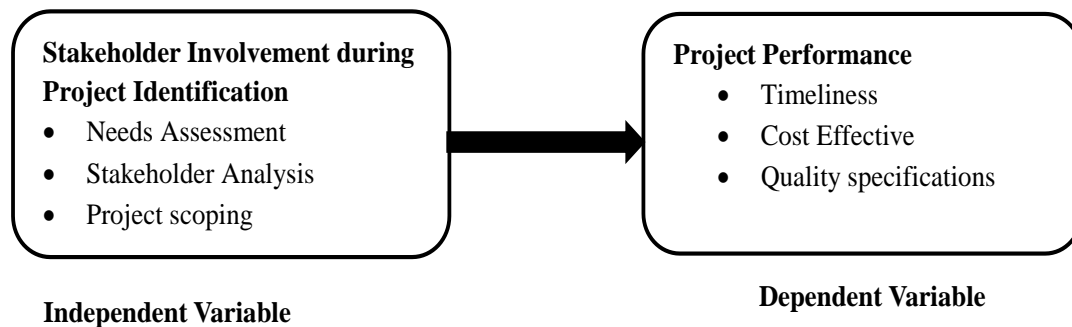

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Existing empirical highlights the link between stakeholder involvement and project performance. Munyaneza and Makhubele (2022) investigated the influence of early stakeholder involvement on project performance in Rwanda and established a clear link between inclusive identification processes and successful implementation. Drawing on both surveys and interviews with actors in agricultural projects, their study demonstrated that projects with robust stakeholder engagement during the identification stage achieved higher efficiency, improved adaptability, and long-term sustainability. Similarly, Alotaibi, Sutrisna, and Chong (2016), through a qualitative design based on in-depth interviews and document reviews, found that involving stakeholders at the outset significantly minimized delays, reduced resource wastage, and created a stronger alignment between project goals and beneficiary expectations. These findings reinforce the position that stakeholder participation in identification is not merely procedural, but a determinant of implementation outcomes and overall project performance.

Zhang, Chong, Zeng, and Zhang (2023) assessed the effective mediating role of stakeholder management in the relationship between BIM implementation and project performance. The findings showed that BIM adoption alone does not guarantee improved project outcomes unless it is complemented by effective stakeholder management practices. Specifically, the results indicated that stakeholder management plays a significant and positive mediating role, meaning that BIM enhances collaboration, communication, and decision-making only when stakeholders are actively engaged and managed throughout the project lifecycle. Projects with higher levels of stakeholder coordination achieved better performance in terms of cost, time, and quality. Talley, Schneide, and Lindquist (2016) examined practical frameworks of stakeholder involvement within natural resource settings in the USA, identifying five guiding principles for inclusive practice. Their review emphasized that while participatory approaches enhance legitimacy, relevance, and acceptance of projects, power imbalances and superficial consultation frequently erode meaningful engagement. They further highlighted the need for iterative, adaptive mechanisms, including repeated feedback loops, transparent decision criteria, and deliberate empowerment of marginalized groups, to move engagement beyond consultation into genuine collaboration.

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into the role of stakeholder involvement in project management, several gaps remain unaddressed in relation to project identification. Similarly, while stakeholder analysis is acknowledged as critical, few studies examine the ways in which power imbalances and influence asymmetries during the identification stage alter the trajectory of projects. Moreover, project scoping has been largely treated as a technical step, with little exploration of how participatory approaches at this stage contribute to reducing overlaps, aligning resources, and fostering accountability. The current research emphasizes broad stakeholder involvement during project

identification, by elaborating how specific elements such as participatory needs assessments, systematic stakeholder analysis, and inclusive project scoping directly shape efficiency and performance of agricultural projects.

4. METHODOLOGY

The current study employed descriptive research design. The target population comprised project staff and farmer groups under the National Agricultural and Rural Inclusive Growth Project (NARIGP). The staff population included 10 individuals from the National Project Coordination Unit (NPCU) and 105 from County Project Coordination Units (CPCUs), with each county contributing five technical and managerial staff. These officers, drawn from key domains such as planning, implementation, value chain development, and monitoring and evaluation, were well placed to provide insights on stakeholder involvement and project performance. In total, the population of interest was 115. A questionnaire with closed-ended items and a five-point Likert scale was used in data collection. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations summarized the characteristics of study variables. Inferential statistics were then applied to examine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The following linear regression model was applied:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$$

Where;

Y = Project Performance

β_0 = Constant

β_1 = Beta Coefficients

X_1 = Project Identification

ε = Error of Margin

5. RESULTS

This section outlines the study's findings, incorporating both descriptive and inferential analyses. It specifically includes discussions on how stakeholder involvement during project identification influences the performance of agricultural projects.

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

The study sought was to establish the influence of stakeholder involvement during the project identification on the performance of agricultural projects. Descriptive analysis was conducted the findings are presented in Tables 1 and 2:

Table 1: Influence of Stakeholder Involvement during Project Identification on Performance of Agricultural Projects

	N	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
				Percentage (%)				
A thorough needs assessment is conducted before project formulation.	100	37	47	11	5	0	4.16	0.813
Stakeholder analysis is carried out to identify relevant actors.	100	40	45	10	5	0	4.20	0.816
Stakeholders are consulted during problem identification.	100	28	51	19	2	0	4.05	0.744
Project scoping involves inputs from diverse community members.	100	19	32	29	11	9	3.41	1.181
Identified needs reflect community priorities.	100	17	34	17	20	12	3.24	1.288

The findings in Table 1 indicate that 37% of respondents strongly agreed and 47% agreed, totaling 84% in agreement, while 11% were neutral and 5% disagreed (Mean = 4.16; SD = 0.813) that a thorough needs assessment is conducted before project formulation. Conducting a comprehensive needs assessment ensures that projects are grounded in actual

community requirements and mitigates the risk of misaligned objectives. It highlights that careful pre-formulation analysis strengthens project relevance and sets a foundation for effective resource utilization and planning. A total of 85% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed (40% and 45% respectively), while 10% were neutral and 5% disagreed (Mean = 4.20; SD = 0.816) that stakeholder analysis is carried out to identify relevant actors. Identifying key stakeholders early ensures that all critical perspectives and expertise are considered in planning. This indicates that systematic stakeholder mapping enhances inclusivity, reduces potential conflicts, and facilitates coordinated implementation. Regarding stakeholder consultation, 28% strongly agreed and 51% agreed, making a total agreement of 79%, while 19% were neutral and 2% disagreed (Mean = 4.05; SD = 0.744) that stakeholders are consulted during problem identification. Engaging stakeholders during problem identification ensures that project challenges are accurately defined and contextually relevant. It suggests that participatory consultation fosters ownership and alignment between community needs and project objectives. Additionally, 19% of the respondents strongly agreed and 32% agreed, totaling 51% agreement, while 29% were neutral, 11% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed (Mean = 3.41; SD = 1.181) that project scoping involves inputs from diverse community members. Inclusion of multiple community perspectives during scoping improves the comprehensiveness of project plans and anticipates potential operational challenges. This implies that partial engagement may limit the scope's responsiveness to local realities, reducing adaptability during implementation. Moreover, 17% of the respondents strongly agreed and 34% agreed, totaling 51% agreement, with 17% neutral, 20% disagreeing, and 12% strongly disagreeing (Mean = 3.24; SD = 1.288) that identified needs reflect community priorities. Aligning identified needs with community priorities ensures that interventions are relevant and socially accepted. It indicates that overlooking some priorities could weaken community support and reduce the overall effectiveness of subsequent project activities.

Table 2: Performance of Agricultural Projects

	N	SA	A	N	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev
		Percentage (%)						
The project was completed within the planned timeframe.	100	39	47	12	2	0	4.23	0.737
Project costs were managed efficiently.	100	28	54	16	2	0	4.08	0.720
Outputs met the expected quality standards.	100	29	50	16	5	0	4.03	0.810
The project led to sustained benefits beyond implementation.	100	28	45	22	5	0	3.96	0.840
Stakeholder involvement enhanced the success and sustainability of the project.	100	25	38	27	10	0	3.78	0.938

As shown in Table 2, 39% of respondents strongly agreed and 47% agreed, indicating 86% overall agreement (Mean = 4.23; Std. Dev. = 0.737) that the project was completed within the planned timeframe. Regarding cost management, 28% strongly agreed and 54% agreed, resulting in a total agreement of 82% (Mean = 4.08; Std. Dev. = 0.720) that project costs were managed efficiently. 29% strongly agreed and 50% agreed, totaling 79% agreement (Mean = 4.03; Std. Dev. = 0.810), outputs met the expected quality standards. It was observed that 28% strongly agreed, 45% agreed, while 22% were neutral, and 5% disagreed (Mean = 3.96; Std. Dev. = 0.840) that the project led to sustained benefits beyond implementation. In total, 63% of the respondents agreed, while 27% were neutral and 10% disagreed (Mean = 3.78; Std. Dev. = 0.938), that stakeholder involvement enhanced the project's success and sustainability. The overall descriptive analysis findings indicate that stakeholder involvement during project identification significantly shapes the foundation and strategic direction of agricultural projects.

5.2 Inferential Statistics
The inferential analysis comprised correlation and regression techniques, aimed at examining the relationship between stakeholder involvement during project identification and the performance of agricultural projects.

5.2.1 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to assess the association between stakeholder involvement during project identification and performance of agricultural projects. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3: Correlation Analysis Results

		Project Performance
Stakeholder Involvement during Project Identification	Pearson Correlation	.711**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	100

The correlation analysis results presented in Table 3 indicate a strong positive relationship between stakeholder involvement during project identification and performance of agricultural projects (r = 0.711**, p = 0.000 < 0.01). This implies that an increase in stakeholder involvement during the project identification phase increases the performance. As per the result, active engagement of stakeholders in the early stages of identifying project needs ensures that interventions are grounded in the real priorities of the community and relevant local contexts. Through consultations with farmers, community leaders, and institutional actors, potential challenges and opportunities can be accurately defined, reducing the likelihood of misaligned objectives. Moreover, early involvement fosters a sense of ownership among stakeholders, which translates into stronger support and commitment during subsequent phases. Therefore, based on the correlation analysis results, the incorporation of diverse perspectives during problem identification enables project teams to anticipate resource requirements, identify potential risks, and design interventions that are both feasible and sustainable. This contributes to desirable performance in agricultural projects.

5.2.2 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was carried out to determine the association between stakeholder involvement during project identification and the performance of agricultural projects. The key results are summarized in Tables 4, 5, and 6, presenting model summary, ANOVA, and regression coefficients, respectively:

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.711[a]	.505	.500	.33904

a. Predictors: (Constant), Project Identification during Project Identification

As shown in Table 5, the coefficient of determination was R^2=0.505 indicating that 50.5% of the variation in project performance is explained by stakeholder involvement during project identification. These findings imply that effective involvement of stakeholders throughout the project identification significantly enhances the performance of agricultural projects.

Table 5: ANOVA[a]

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	11.509	1	11.509	100.125	.000[b]
Residual	11.265	98	.115		
Total	22.774	99			

a. Dependent Variable: Project Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Project Identification during Project Identification

The results show that the model is a strong fit, as reflected by the F statistic of 100.125 with a significance value of 0.000. This confirms that the model is statistically significant and that stakeholder involvement during project identification provides a reliable prediction of the performance of agricultural projects.

Table 6: Regression Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.784	.226		7.911	.000
Project Identification during Project Identification	.585	.059	.711	10.006	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Project Performance

According to the coefficients in Table 6, the model was presented as: $Y = 1.784 + 0.585X_1 + \varepsilon$. As per the results, one unit change in project identification during project identification contributes to a 0.585 unit change in the performance of agricultural projects. This demonstrate that the performance of agricultural projects is predictable from stakeholder involvement during project identification.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, stakeholder involvement in project identification plays a key role in determining the performance of agricultural projects. When needs are carefully assessed, projects begin with a clear understanding of community priorities, which reduces the risk of misaligned objectives and ensures interventions remain relevant. Equally, comprehensive stakeholder analysis strengthens inclusivity by integrating diverse perspectives, fostering collaboration, and enhancing ownership, which is vital for long-term commitment. Project scoping that incorporates the voices of multiple actors provides a broader and more realistic framework for anticipating risks, allocating resources, and designing interventions that are both practical and sustainable. Where these processes are neglected, projects often face coordination gaps, weak alignment with local realities, and reduced adaptability, which compromise their effectiveness. It can be concluded that the inadequacy of stakeholder involvement during project identification contributes to problems regarding agricultural projects in Kenya, including untimely completion, inefficient resource use, and outputs that do not fully meet quality specifications.

7. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that the State Department for Agriculture and the County Agriculture Department institutionalize structured needs assessments to ensure that project priorities are firmly grounded in community realities. Conducting comprehensive stakeholder analyses is equally important, as it integrates diverse perspectives, enhances inclusivity, and builds early ownership. It is through such approaches that project scoping becomes realistic, risk-aware, and capable of reducing misalignment in agricultural project delivery.

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