

Original Research Article

A critical analysis and appraisal of the world Bank Project of Healthcare System in Montenegro: An International Project Management Perspective

Abstract

International interventional projects exert great impact on the target countries. This study appraises the World Bank's healthcare system improvement project in the Republic of Montenegro. From the perspective of international project management appraisal of an overseas project, the study makes a systematic thematic review and a critical objective exposition of the Bank's publication on the project, drawing evidential insights from professional and experiential knowledge and methods. It also relied on relevant secondary data, sourced from the internet and several offline libraries. Based on the nature of the study, descriptive survey and qualitative analysis are employed alongside suitable analytic techniques. The analysis demonstrates that regardless of the inherent country-based challenges that confronted the project, its overall impact is huge and the attained success is satisfactory, though not very satisfactory. It concludes that the project has significantly and sustainably changed the narratives of the erstwhile healthcare system of Montenegro, as operations, practices and access to healthcare services in Montenegro got improved till date. The study calls on World Bank and other like institutions to do more for developing nations in dire needs of lifesaving projects. They are charged to have post-project completion monitoring mechanisms and programs that allow for sustenance and maintenance of the projects, such as that on healthcare system improvement in Montenegro.

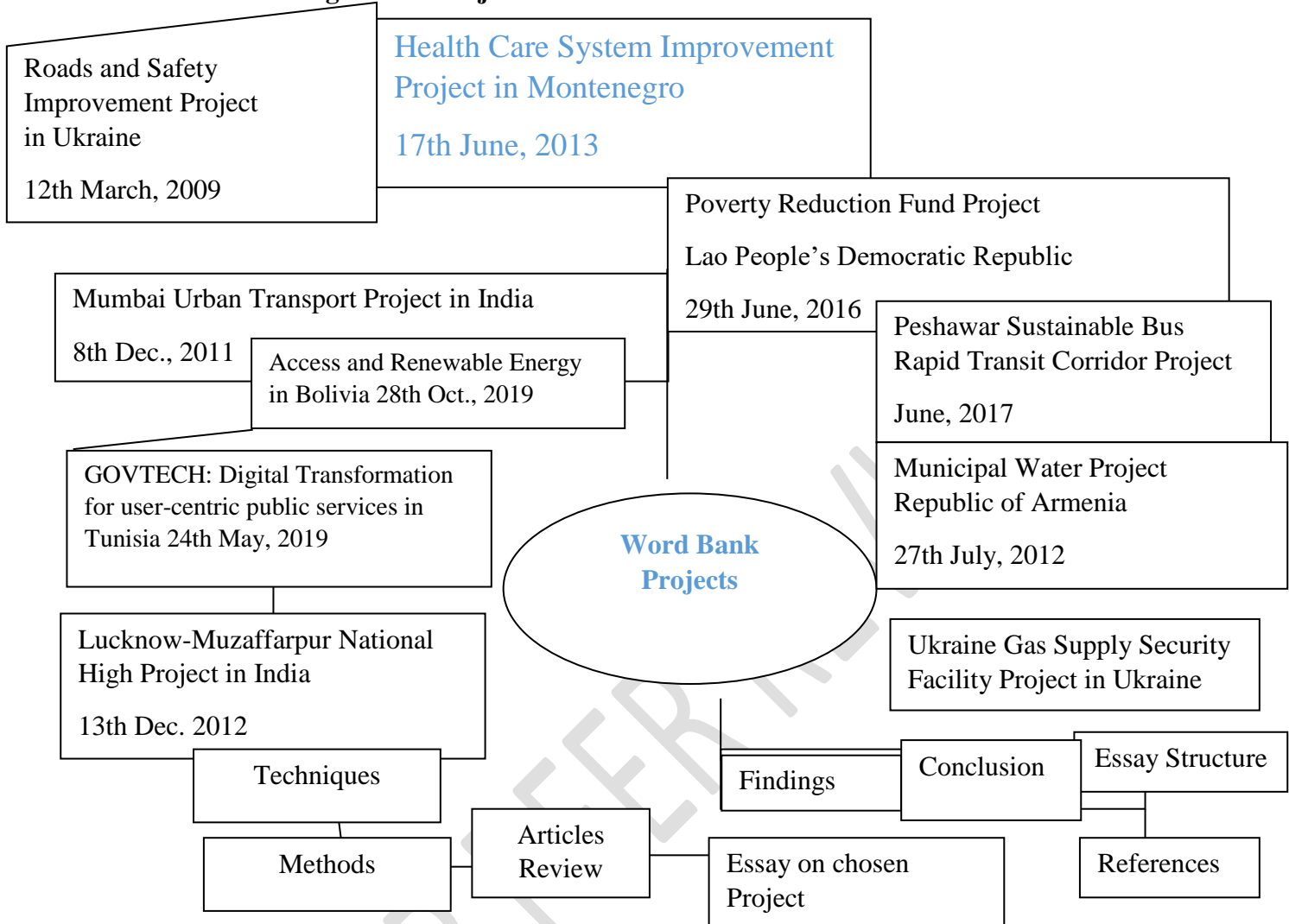
Keywords: Healthcare system, World Bank, International project, Appraisal, Montenegro

Introduction

All organizations and nations need and do rely on different projects for success in socio-economic, developmental and leadership activities, businesses, and various other spheres of life (Ogirri, 2024a&b; Ogirri & Adoromike, 2024; Zeshung, 2024; Elmezain et al., 2021). The healthcare system is one of the most critical spheres of life, which also needs and depends on projects. Elmezain et al. (2021) emphasizes the importance of project management in all spheres. The reliance on projects for success requires the deployment of concepts, techniques, theories and other elements of management.

Given the place of projects in different sectors, including the health sector, it is important to scholarly appraise the World Bank's healthcare improvement project in Montenegro. In other words, this essay is written to make a project management assessment of the World Bank-sponsored health care system project in Montenegro. This is one of the many international projects undertaken by the World Bank in different countries. The selected list of projects, from which its project on healthcare improvement in Montenegro is chosen for this essay, is captured in the Figure 1 diagram below. The choice of this particular project is informed by the criticality of the healthcare system across nations.

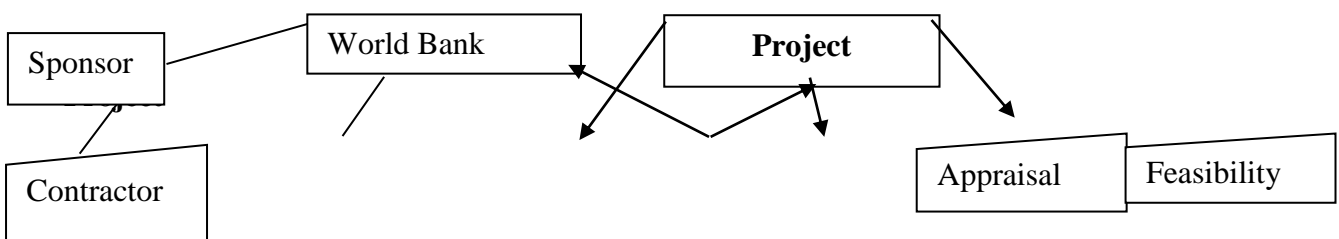
Fig. 1: WB Projects

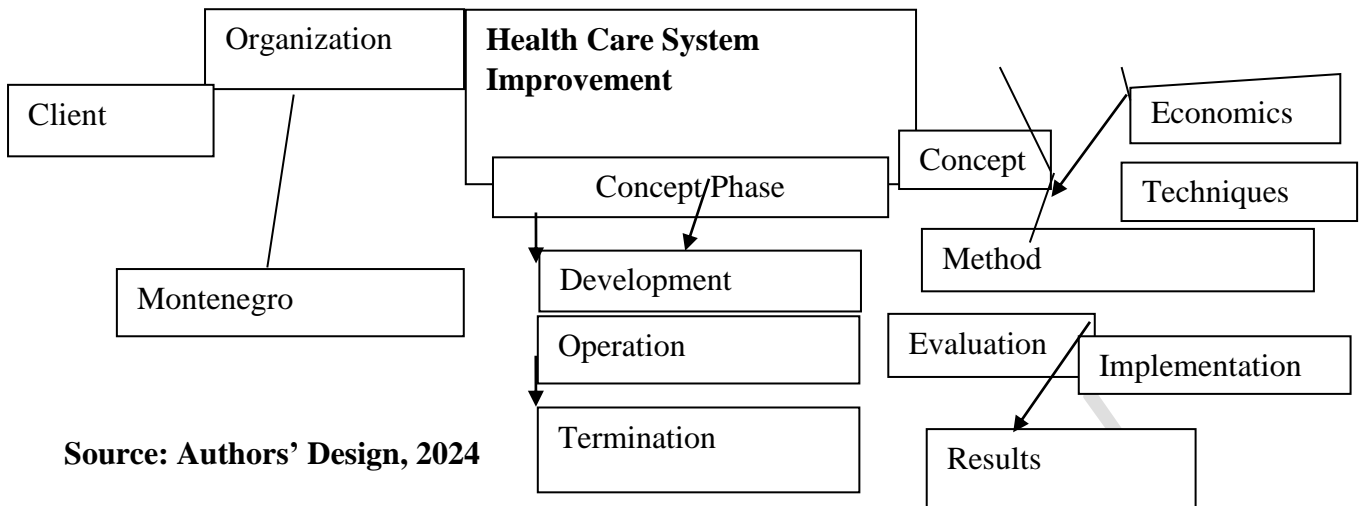


Health is one of the most significant concerns given priority by governments, organizations and individuals alike. The concerns border on issues relating to people’s well-being, the kind of healthcare service delivery obtained in a given health system, and the quality of life of the people (Nwangene, 2024). The study is aimed at making a scholarly appraisal of an international project, with a view to establishing the project’s success or failure, impact and challenges. An assessment or an appraisal is usually made to interrogate a given project from its concept to termination phases (Zeshung, 2024b).

Doing so herein entails making a critical evaluation of the World Bank project from both conceptual and theoretical perspectives. The analysis focuses on exploring the feasibility technique and its application to the several phases of the project, from concept to termination phases of the health care system improvement project of the World Bank in Montenegro. See Figures 2 below:

Fig. 2: Project Phases

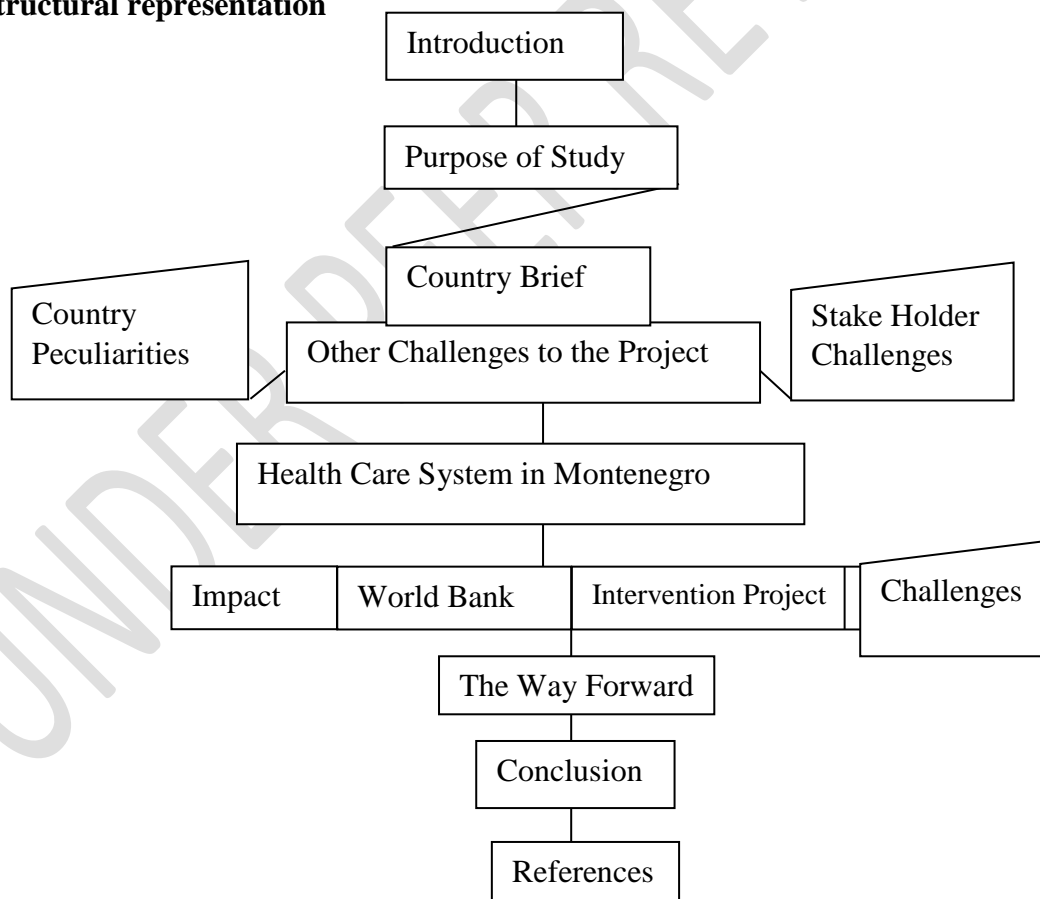




Source: Authors' Design, 2024

The paper takes cognizance of social, economic, financial and contractual factors that make or mar the project. It should be noted that where applicable, the essay shall make use of a few or no citations in order to make well-reasoned and substantial contributions to the discourse. The essay shall be written in several parts. See the essay outline below:

Fig. 3: Structural representation



Source: Authors' Design, 2024

Purpose of Study

The aim of this study is to appraise feasibility and viability of the World Bank sponsored health system project in Montenegro from the perspective of international project management. Its specific objectives are to:

- (i) Identify the project initiation, planning and strategic management factors for the successful timely execution of the project therein;
- (ii) Describe how geopolitical and socio-cultural factors, operation, maintenance and resource management, and systemic communication can either make or mar an international project, as in the World Bank's health system project in Montenegro;
- (iii) Suggest viable ways of mitigating the challenges to the project.

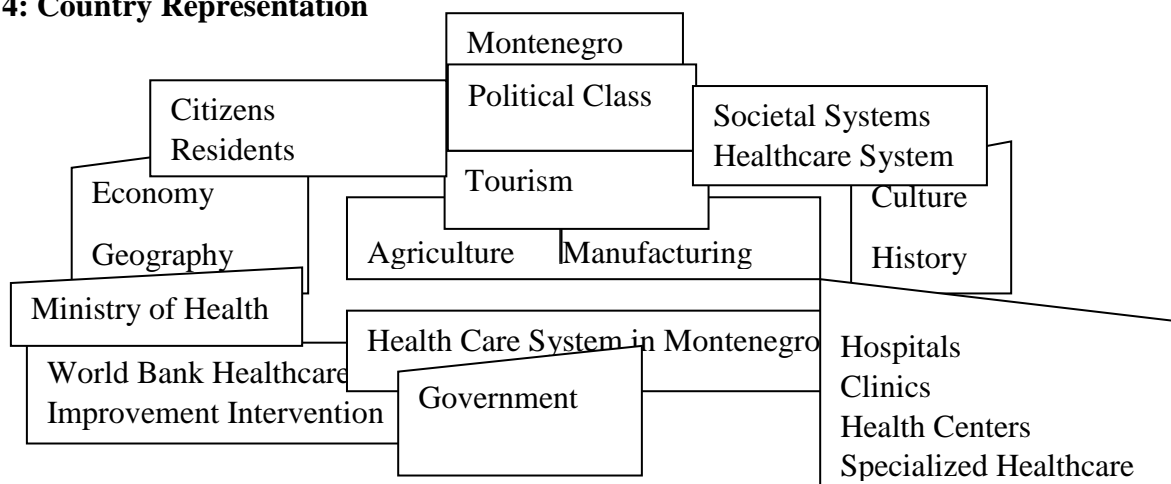
Country Brief

The present-day Montenegro is a small country of 620,000 amicable and hospitable people in Southeastern Europe. Until 2006, when it gained Independence, Montenegro was under Serbia. Its history had been influenced by the Romans, the Byzantines, and the Ottomans. Although Montenegro has been making efforts to get integrated into the European Union, it is yet to attain EU and NATO membership status. The country shares borders with six countries: Croatia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Kosovo, and Albania. Its Capital is Podgorica. Montenegrin is the official language of the country. Geographically, the country is characterized beautiful and rugged lakes, mountains, and beaches additional to the Adriatic Sea. A popular tourist center in Montenegro is the Bay of Koror, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site (World Bank, 2013).

Tourism is the base of Montenegro's economy, as it generates income from tourist visits and activities. Agriculture and manufacturing are its other significant economies. In attempts to diversify its economy, Montenegro has been investing significantly into infrastructure and renewable energy projects in recent times. In spite of being a small country, it has rich history and cultural heritage, with its dance, music and cuisine reflecting those of its aforementioned ancient influencers. Politically, the country operates parliamentary system of government, in which the President is the Head of State, while the Prime Minister is the Head of Government. Multi-party system obtains in the country. Elections are held every four years (World Bank, 2013).

Like other nations of the world, Montenegro has health systems that provide healthcare services for citizens and residents. The services are rendered by professionals in the field and sponsored by government, organizations and meaningful individuals. The proceeds from social health insurance also contribute to funding the services. The healthcare system of the country is overseen by the Ministry of Health, Montenegro. The healthcare system of the country comprises primary health centers, hospitals, and specialized health facilities that provide advanced and special medical services. The following diagram is an attempted structural representation of the country with its systems:

Fig. 4: Country Representation



Project Objectives, Design and Context

The approval of the Montenegro healthcare system improvement project was on 8 June, 2004. The credit was signed on 11 June, 2004 and took effect on 1 December, 2004. The project received US\$15.2 million from the World Bank, US\$7.0 million from IDA, US\$0.82 million from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), US\$0.45 million from the Policy and Human Resources Development Fund (PHRD), and US\$7.2 million loan from the IBRD (World Bank, 2013). The feasibility done in 2003 revealed a worrisome state of health therein, because of the poor economic conditions occasioned by the 1992-1996 and 1998-2000 conflicts along with the international sanctions and poor economic management. Trade and investment were affected, which led to the sorry-state of the economic situations in the country then.

Obviously, the economic conditions had harsh effects on the health system. Thus, it became imperative for the World Bank as well as any other donors to intervene. The intervention was timely and yielded positive impact on the health system of the country. Amidst internal (domestic) and external bottlenecks, structural reforms, including extensive economic reform, steps were taken in 2000 and much more in 2003. The efforts yielded positive sustainable results (World Bank, 2013). According to the World Bank (2013), Montenegro health system was facing severe issues of poor and inadequate health service delivery, financing and governance. The existing public health system in the country lacked adequate funding of services and projects. Of course, lacking the finance has several implications. Budgeting was affected. That was one of the serious implications.

Also, having quality healthcare facilities and services was hampered by the lack of finance. There was difficulty with collection. There was difficulty adjusting benefit package to offset the pitiable economic situations. Lack of finance also had negative impact on the government's capacity for policy development, planning, managing and monitoring the health system. Thus, the intervention of the World Bank was needed, and indeed a kind gesture to that effect. Access to the limited available primary health centers was a serious challenge to the health system of Montenegro. Staffing issues included shortage of manpower, poor training, and lack of motivation of health workers (World Bank, 2013). In the bid to improve the health system, the Government of Montenegro devised a health sector strategy— Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The strategy allowed for the World Bank involvement in the improvement of the health system of the country.

The Ministry of Health prepared a framework laws for health protection and insurance, as a statutory backing to the adopted reform strategy and steps. The pillars of health sector reform were root of the project concept. The intention was to help the government in developing policy and legislative priorities, building capacities, improving quality and efficiency and access to primary health care services and facilities, and devising and executing measures for achieving financial sustainability in the health system of the country. The World Bank's involvement was informed by the need for financial, material, policy, strategic and management supports. The Bank had put out its strategy, called Transitional Support Strategy

(TSS), in 2001 and updated it in 2002. The goals of TSS included poverty alleviation, human capacity development through improved health status, and ensuring quality and effectiveness in health services at all levels.

As part of its feasibility strategies or techniques deployed, the World Bank carried out a Public Expenditure Institutional Review (PEIR) in 2002 and a Poverty Assessment in 2003, which provided ground analytical preparation for the project. The project was aimed at prioritizing health matters and services, financing healthcare facilities, ensuring quality, efficient and accessible healthcare services, partnering with the government and its organs concerned with health matters, and increasing planning, stabilization, regulation, funding and improvement of primary healthcare service delivery.

Montenegro Healthcare System: An Appraisal

As a small growing country, there is need for the World Bank to intervene in its health care system improvement so as to make healthcare service delivery better, easy, accessible, qualitative and reliable for citizens. Although on its own, the country has been making significant efforts toward improving its health system, the intervention of the World Bank was a deserving kind gesture. Impressive and impactful as the intervention was, there were country-based factors that affected the extent of the project execution up to its termination period. It should be noted here that since this study is concerned with making an assessment, only a few citations will be made. This is to allow for logical contributions by the essay to knowledge. The essay argues that if the healthcare system of the UK, an old and advanced country, is affirmed to be faced with challenges up to date, it is not out of place for that of Montenegro to be faced with several challenges, which required the intervention of the World Bank. There is no doubt that the governments of all countries face the challenges of improving their state systems to ensure, enhance and attain efficiency, quality, and service delivery in the public sector.

Of course, the health (care) system of every nation is an essentially integral part of the public sector. In fact, the private sector phase of a country's health system depends on the public health system for regulations, legitimacy and permission to operate. The foregoing points reflects the above assertion advanced by this essay– that if the health system of the UK faces challenges, that of Montenegro is bound to face even more challenges. Also, the assertion is justified by NHS (2021), among others, which identify the different challenges facing the health systems of different countries, including the UK. The challenges include:

- ❖ Attitudinal factor and resistance to innovation by some healthcare professionals;
- ❖ The nature of health systems and inherent organizational complexities;
- ❖ Budgeting, planning and management issues, shortage of personnel and resources; Poor leadership, mismanagement of resources and corrupt practices;
- ❖ Poor monitoring and evaluation;
- ❖ Communication barriers;
- ❖ Lack of collaboration and clinical workflows;
- ❖ Poor or lack of technological integration and innovation;
- ❖ Stakeholder-posed challenges arising from clashing interests, politics of hierarchy and power tussle, among others.

Furthermore, the healthcare system of Montenegro faces peculiar challenges, such as unequal distribution of healthcare services, poor access to healthcare services and facilities by rural citizens and residents, shortage of personnel in some specialties, and low level or extent of technological adoption. That is, the existing technologies in the healthcare system of Montenegro are yet to be significant. The implication of the foregoing points is that the health of Montenegro suffers some country-based peculiar challenges and the generally shared or obtained challenges that apply to other nations. This study argues here that the concentration on urban development, to the near exclusion of rural areas, accounts for the plights of rural dwellers across the world, as in Montenegro.

The concentration also obtains in the health system of every nation, whereby rural dwellers suffer lack of healthcare facilities and services. While this is not what obtains in Montenegro alone, the extent differs from what obtains in many other countries of the world. Also, rural dwellers lack access to healthcare facilities and services. Thus, the World Bank's health improvement project in the country was a deserving and commendable timely intervention. The state of affairs in rural Montenegro, as in many other countries, is such that despite hard situations of life, citizens and residents have to carter for their medical needs. Meanwhile, most of them were/are incapable of affording the medical bills. That is why it is noted above that one of the challenges faced by Montenegro healthcare system is the inequality between the poor and the rich, whereby the former have little or no access to healthcare facilities and services, while the latter do.

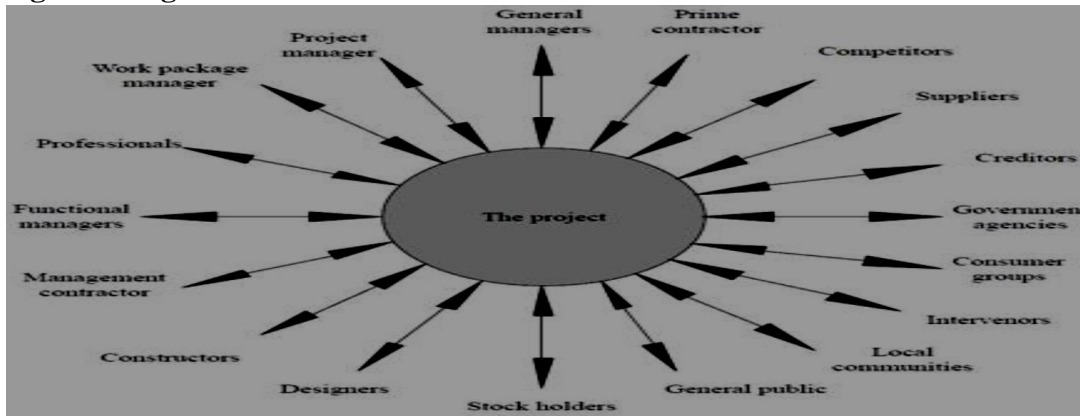
That is, socio-economic inequalities between the rich and the poor pose serious challenges to the healthcare system of Montenegro, as in the case of other like nations. In addition to the foregoing challenges, the lack of trained and skilled manpower poses serious challenges to healthcare service delivery to citizens and residents in the country, as in other developing nations across the globe. An international project, such as that of the World Bank in Montenegro, entails much more than healthcare intervention and mass health service delivery. It is also a development project that saves lives, improves wellbeing, set pace to other bodies, organizations and governments, and fosters innovations.

Country Peculiarities and Stakeholder Challenges

Geopolitical, socio-cultural, economic, technological and legal factors, among others, constitute the peculiarities of the Republic of Montenegro, which could adversely affect the World Bank's health system improvement project therein. The political class and the other sets of elite of the country along with other parties making up the stakeholders of this project undoubtedly posed some challenges to the successful execution of the project. Being a multi-party country, the politics among the party members making up the political class stakeholders poses threats to both national and international projects in the country. That of the World Bank under exploration herein was no exception. That is, the politics posed some constraints to its ideal success.

Stakeholders either make or mar performance, service delivery, cash flow, logistics availability, procurement method, legal legislations and risk management (Eke et al., 2015; Ogunde & Fagbenle, 2013). The parties making up stakeholders are captured in the diagram below, as adapted from Yang et al. (2009):

Fig. 5: Categories of Stakeholders



Therefore, there is the dire need to have the stakeholder-posed challenges to projects in view and consciously and concertedly work out modalities for dealing with the challenges. The challenges posed by stakeholders to projects are tabulated below:

Table 1: Stakeholder-Based Challenges

S/N	Challenges	Citations
1	Lack of capacity, skills shortage and quality standards	Ibrahim et al. (2014)
2	Obnoxious policies, regulations or legislations by government	Government Gazette Regulation Gazette (2014)
3	Proclamation or landscaping issues	Bob (2005)
4	Clashing interests and the delay of projects	Kamanga et al. (2013), Stead (2010)
5	Inadequate construction work programmes	Mashwama et al. (2018)
6	Resource shortage and poor resource control and management	Emuze & Smallwood (2012)
7	Poor contractor’s performance result in poor quality and low productivity	Aigbavboa and Thwala (2014)
8	Corruption, personality clash, cultural differences, expectations, poor monitoring, indecisiveness, poor support from the political class, unfavourable laws, political instability, conflict, and civil unrest	Li et al. (2013), Yang et al. (2009)
9	Issues of design	Kamanga et al. (2013), Ambe and Badenhourst-Weiss (2012), Fugar and Agyakwa-Baah (2010)
10	Ineffective communication	Nwachukwu and Emoh (2011)

Source: Author’s Compilation, 2024

While the above tabulated challenges are considered by this study to be strictly stakeholder-based challenges to projects right from concept to termination phases, there are other common challenges faced by projects such as World Bank project on healthcare system improvement in the Republic of Montenegro. The major ones shared among scholars are highlighted hereafter. High cost is a common challenge (Ogunde et al., 2017; Nwachukwu et al., 2010). Another common challenge is lack of clear objectives (Irefin, 2013). Yahaya et al. (2018) identifies the following common challenges:

- Socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical factors,
- Leadership and managerial lapses,
- Unaccountability, corruption, and misappropriation of fund
- Lack of committed and competent team members,
- Stakeholders' high expectations, low engagement with stakeholders,
- Poor risk management, inadequate monitoring, and lack of job motivation.

For Mashwama et al. (2018) and Aigbavboa and Thwala (2014), among others, the common challenges are:

- Poor planning
- High costs
- Lack of finance
- Shortage of manpower and logistics
- Project timeframe
- Delivery of materials
- Lack of specification details
- Unrealistic construction programme
- Poor performance by the contractor
- Corruption by officials
- Civil unrest and conflict
- Performance guarantees
- Land acts and property proclamation.

Drawing evidence from Kenya, Kanyora and Okello (2015) demonstrate that strategic management can be used to surmount in-country challenges to national and international projects. This point is also given credence by Ogirri (2024a), Oyefusi et al. (2024), De Carvalho et al. (2020), Nguyen et al. (2020), Balasubramanian and Shukla (2017), Etim-Robert (2016), and Salam et al. (2014), among others. They are of the view that staffing and training program and other aspects of resource management are critical to the success of projects and organizations. This implies that staffing and training are two of the management techniques as well as methods that would have aided the success of the project.

Challenges to the World Bank Project in Montenegro

Basically, the successful implementation of World Bank intervention is constrained by political, economic and socio-cultural factors, shortage of health infrastructure, health priorities, and challenges posed by legal frameworks and stakeholder engagement. Accordingly, the economic situations in the country affected the ideal or successful implementation of the project. The implication is that the economic factors are crucial to all projects right from initiation to processing, development and execution or implementation. Harsh economic conditions undoubtedly pose challenges to the project. Of course, not being able to meet the financial demands of the project implies that it is bound to be constrained by economic challenges.

Political factors, such as political instability, propaganda, bad leadership, misappropriation of fund and other forms of corruption among elite of the political class, etc. constitute the political challenges to the sustainable implementation of the World Bank healthcare improvement project in Montenegro. The political factors also include some obnoxious

policies, structural imbalance, managerial lapses, errors in project formulation and implementation, issues of unprofessionalism and quality assurance, and the commercialization of projects. Also, the existing healthcare facilities influenced the World Bank project. That is, the extent to which the project would have got implemented successfully and yielded high results got affected by existing healthcare facilities. Even the nature of the services rendered by healthcare professionals made many of them to be restrictive and unopened to the innovations that came with the World Bank project on health system improvement in the country.

The other challenges can be grouped into three: geopolitical challenges, socio-cultural and economic, and technological challenges. A brief on these three suffices. There are inherent geographical and political factors that pose challenges to the implementation of the project. It is observed that transformative change in any sector of a society is largely dependent on the leadership of the society (Peter et al., 2023; Saunders et al., 2023). That is to say how leaders influence organizational changes matters, as that determines the success or failure of a project. The culture of a people affects their attitude towards technology, its adoption, implementation and sustenance. The healthcare sector is associated with people's lives and wellness or health, it is somehow riskier to experiment new innovations in comparison to other sectors. The fear of such risks slows down adoption, implementation and sustenance technology-based healthcare system.

The changes brought by technologies could take a long time to implement, because as it might be complicated to change the attitude of the medical practitioners and clinical staff, the routine care system, and the overall culture in health care organization. This point reflects the socio-cultural and technological challenges noted above. Technological challenges concern the difficulties or challenges faced in adopting, implementing and sustaining technological innovation in the health sector, as in other sectors. Ude-Akpeh (2020) is of the view that technologies have socio-cultural implications that manifest on users. In the same vein, Nwode et al. (2019) observe that information and communication technology (ICT) exert adverse effects on users, especially youths, and influence their cultures, perception and behavior. Ogwo (2016) observe that values are affected by technologies and social networking sites—social media.

This study agrees to the foregoing thoughts. It adds to the foregoing that the erosion of cultural values and the clash between cultural practices and technological or universal orthodox medical or health practices constitutes another serious challenge. The global media and information technologies have substantially increased contacts between cultures, both in terms of intensity and of the speed with which these contacts occur (Nwode, 2022; Kraidy, 2013). The contact is characterized by a clash in values, ideologies, views, perceptions and worldviews. There are other issues, such as ethical governance and followership, moral responsibility, accountability, transparency, privacy, data protection, human welfare, redundancy, dismissal and unemployment, and violations of established laws, principles and codes of conduct (Farre et al., 2023; NHS, 2021; Meyer & Norman, 2020).

Impact of the Project

The impact of the project cannot be overemphasized. The project impacted positively on the health system of Montenegro. The goals of the project were pursued tenaciously and realized at a reasonable extent. The impact can be considered to be of four cardinal points. That is, the

project strengthened healthcare facilities and services in Montenegro. Enhancing the healthcare services in the country was another major impact. The financing of the country's healthcare system led to significant improvement. The fourth is attainment of strengthened information systems. These four identified and categorized areas of impact shall be given a brief hereafter.

Accordingly, with the project, Montenegro health system got upgraded and modernized. Hospitals, clinics, and primary health centers became modernized and digitalized. The quality of healthcare services rendered to the populace got improved. The training of some professionals impacted positively on the health system of the country. The quality services that came to place in the healthcare service delivery of Montenegro are traceable to the training of professionals. This is because trained personnel are bound to do better in the services they render (Zeshung, 2024a&c; Wambe, 2021; Etim-Robert, 2016). As Zeshung (2024c) affirms, the targeting as well as pursuit of quality services increased professional ethics that leads to or insists on the implementation of best practices. Thus, the professionals remain guided by standard and ethical practices, which provided patient satisfaction as a result of quality services and accessibility to services and facilities.

Besides, the financing of projects means a lot. This role played by the World Bank has huge positive impact and potentials on Montenegro's health system and economy. With the financing role played by the World Bank, internal projects were initiated, developed, executed, monitored and sustained. Efficiency, sustainability, improvement, quality and availability of resources in the health system of the country since the intervention of the World Bank have bearings to the financing. More so, the project has made it possible for the development of a sustained comprehensive information system in Montenegro, which has impacted positively on data collection, processing, evaluation, monitoring and retrieval. With this comprehensive information system in place, policymakers are able to make informed decisions and allocate resources evenly (World Bank, 2013).

Apart from the aforementioned and briefly discussed areas of impact, the other significant impacts of the project, as highlighted specifically by the World Bank (2013), are the following:

- Reduction of prices of drugs
- Increased right use of legitimate drugs
- Increased rates of utilization of healthcare facilities and services
- Attested patient satisfaction
- Increased healthcare services to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)
- A significant bridge of the gap between the poor and the rich in access to healthcare services
- Increased rates of immunization against measles and other inherent communicable diseases
- High utilization of day service care by elderly persons.

Conclusion

The overall performance of the Bank at the termination of the project is moderately satisfactory. Being so rather than very or completely satisfactory is traceable to the range of inherent challenges discussed in the essay. The success of any project is dependent on

different factors, including the kind of strategies deployed from the beginning or concept phase to the end or termination phase of the project. Strategy entails actions taken in socio-economic context to unfold the internal and external aspects of an organization. This means that during the feasibility phase of a project, actions are (supposed to be) taken to dissect and unfold the socio-economic and even political contexts of the project so as to ensure success. Of course, strategy is a pattern or a routine for doing what has to be done consistently to ensure success, growth, development and the realization of goals.

Strategic management involves formulating and implementing policies that help organizations to manage or control their resources well, rise above their competitors, realize their goals, and consistently assess external and internal environments for betterment. The enablers of project success include strategies, effective management, leadership styles, skills, experience, goals, financing, monitoring, appraisal, technology adoption, effective stakeholder engagement, and informed and effective decisions. Some other enablers of project success are collaboration, public compliance, individuals' state of health, research, training and development, effective communication and public relations, and provision of sufficient resources, facilities and personnel. These are recommended by the study to be deployed for the attainment of project successes at both national and international levels.

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COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests OR personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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