Governance Mechanisms and Infrastructure Project Success: The Role of Grievance Redress Systems.

Abstract

Infrastructure development remains central to economic transformation, particularly in developing countries where investments in transport, energy, water, and telecommunications underpin growth and service delivery (Ika& Pinto, 2022; Turner &Zolin, 2024). However, despite increasing investment, infrastructure projects continue to experience persistent delays, cost overruns, and social conflict, often linked to land acquisition disputes, weak stakeholder engagement, and ineffective grievance redress mechanisms (Abdelaty et al., 2023; Ameyaw et al., 2021; World Bank, 2024). Moreover, while project management literature increasingly recognises that project success extends beyond the iron triangle, empirical research remains fragmented across risk management, stakeholder engagement, and conflict resolution domains (Ćirić et al., 2022; Shenhar et al., 2023).

This study conducts a systematic review guided by the PRISMA framework to synthesise evidence on the relationships between land acquisition risk, community consent, grievance redress mechanism (GRM) effectiveness, and project success. A structured search across major academic databases yielded 22 eligible studies covering infrastructure, renewable energy, and public project implementation contexts.

The findings reveal four dominant themes. First, land acquisition risk is a multidimensional governance challenge rather than a purely technical issue. Second, community consent functions as a legitimacy-building mechanism influencing cooperation and resistance. Third, GRM effectiveness represents institutional response capacity that determines whether disputes escalate or are resolved. Fourth, project success is multidimensional, incorporating stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and legitimacy.

Furthermore, the review demonstrates that project outcomes are shaped not by risk exposure alone, but by governance pathways linking risk, legitimacy, and conflict resolution. The study proposes an integrated conceptual framework in which land acquisition risk influences project success indirectly through community consent and GRM effectiveness. The findings contribute to theory by integrating fragmented domains and advancing a governance-based explanation of infrastructure performance, while also offering actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners in developing-country contexts.

Keywords: Land acquisition risk, community consent, grievance redress mechanisms, project success, PRISMA, infrastructure governance, telecommunications project management

1. Introduction

Infrastructure development is widely recognised as a cornerstone of economic growth, social inclusion, and sustainable development, particularly in developing countries where deficits in transport, energy, and telecommunications constrain productivity and access to services (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Ika& Pinto, 2022). Governments and international development institutions continue to invest heavily in linear infrastructure projects such as roads, transmission lines, pipelines, and fibre optic networks, which are essential for national development strategies and long-term competitiveness (Turner &Zolin, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

However, notwithstanding these investments, infrastructure projects frequently experience delays, cost escalation, and implementation challenges. A growing body of literature attributes these challenges not only to technical and financial constraints but also to governance issues, particularly those related to land acquisition, stakeholder engagement, and conflict management (Abdelaty et al., 2023; Ameyaw et al., 2021; Kaddu et al., 2023). Land acquisition processes often generate disputes over compensation, ownership, and rights of access, while inadequate stakeholder engagement can result in resistance, mistrust, and social conflict (Engström, 2022; Antwi& Ley, 2021). Furthermore, weak grievance redress mechanisms limit the ability of project institutions to resolve disputes effectively, thereby exacerbating delays and reputational risks (World Bank, 2024).

At the same time, project management scholarship has evolved beyond the traditional "iron triangle" of time, cost, and quality to recognise that project success is multidimensional, encompassing stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and long-term value creation (Atkinson, 1999; Ćirić et al., 2022; Shenhar et al., 2023). However, despite this theoretical advancement, empirical research remains fragmented. Studies on land acquisition risk often focus on delays and cost implications, while stakeholder engagement research emphasises legitimacy and participation, and grievance redress literature focuses on conflict resolution mechanisms. These domains are rarely integrated into a unified analytical framework (Moffat& Zhang, 2024; Ika& Pinto, 2022).

Therefore, there is a need for a systematic synthesis of the literature to understand how these constructs interact and jointly influence project outcomes. This study addresses this gap by conducting a systematic review guided by PRISMA, focusing on four key constructs:

- Land acquisition risk
- Community consent
- Grievance redress mechanism effectiveness
- Project success

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How does land acquisition risk influence infrastructure project success?
2. What role does community consent play in shaping project outcomes?
3. How do grievance redress mechanisms affect project performance?
4. How can these constructs be integrated into a unified explanatory framework?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to both theory and practice by advancing a governance-based understanding of infrastructure project success.

2. Methodology (PRISMA Approach)

2.1 Review Design

This study adopts a systematic literature review design guided by the PRISMA framework (Page et al., 2021). The PRISMA approach ensures transparency, reproducibility, and methodological rigour in the identification, screening, and synthesis of relevant studies (Snyder, 2019).

Systematic reviews differ from traditional narrative reviews in that they follow a structured and replicable process for identifying and analysing literature, thereby reducing bias and enhancing the reliability of findings (Tranfield et al., 2003). This approach is particularly suitable for synthesising fragmented research domains such as infrastructure governance and project management.

2.2 Search Strategy

Searches were conducted across:

- Scopus
- Web of Science
- ScienceDirect
- SpringerLink
- Emerald Insight
- Google Scholar
- Wiley Online Library

Search terms included combinations of:

- “land acquisition risk”
- “right-of-way acquisition”
- “community consent” OR “social license to operate”
- “grievance redress mechanisms”
- “project success”
- “infrastructure projects”

Boolean operators (AND, OR) were applied to refine results (Snyder, 2019).

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Context	Infrastructure, construction, energy, public projects	Purely technical engineering studies
Variables	Risk, stakeholder engagement, grievance systems, success	Studies lacking governance or social dimensions
Geography	Global with emphasis on developing countries	High-income-only contexts without relevance
Type	Peer-reviewed articles, reports, empirical studies	Editorials, opinion pieces

2.4 PRISMA Flow

Stage	Number of Studies
Records identified	142
Duplicates removed	32
Records screened	110
Full-text assessed	48
Excluded	26
Final included studies	22

The screening process ensured conceptual alignment with governance, stakeholder, and infrastructure contexts (Page et al., 2021).

3. Descriptive Analysis of Included Studies

3.1 Study Characteristics

Author(s)	Context	Method	Key Focus
Ameyaw et al. (2021)	Ghana infrastructure	Empirical	Land acquisition challenges
Antwi& Ley (2021)	Africa energy	Review	Community acceptance
Kaddu et al. (2023)	Uganda policy	Report	Implementation challenges
Mwelu et al. (2021)	Uganda roads	SEM	Project success factors
Kidane (2021)	Ethiopia roads	Empirical	Right-of-way constraints

3.2 Methodological Distribution

Figure 3.1: Methodological distribution of included studies

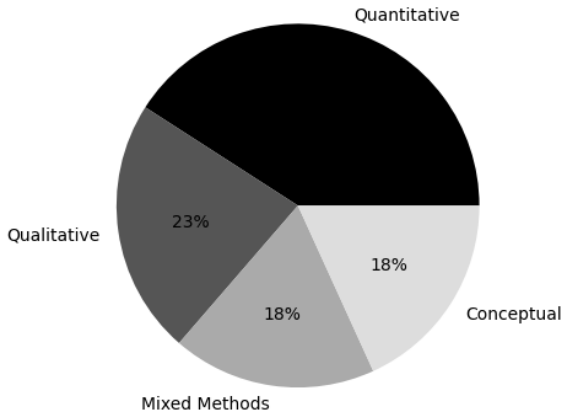


Figure 3.1 presents the methodological distribution of the reviewed studies. The results show a predominance of quantitative approaches (41%), followed by qualitative (23%), mixed methods (18%), and conceptual studies (18%). This distribution suggests that while empirical modelling dominates the field, there remains a significant need for integrative and theory-building research to bridge fragmented domains.

3.3 Sector Distribution

Figure 3.2: Sector Distribution of included studies

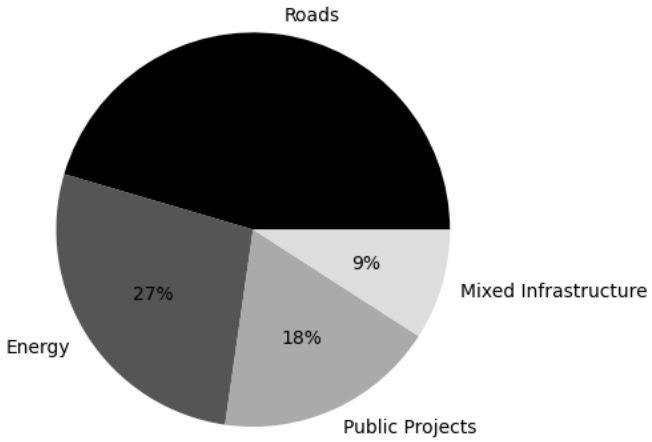


Figure 3.2: Sector distribution of included studies. The results indicate that the majority of studies focus on road infrastructure (45%), followed by energy projects (27%), public sector projects (18%), and mixed infrastructure contexts (9%). The dominance of transport-related studies reflects the centrality of road infrastructure in development research, particularly in emerging economies.

4. Thematic Findings

4.1 Land Acquisition Risk as Governance Risk

Land acquisition risk is consistently identified as a major driver of delays and cost escalation in infrastructure projects, particularly in developing-country contexts characterised by complex tenure systems and contested compensation processes (Abdelaty et al., 2023; Engström, 2022). Unlike conventional project risks that are largely technical or financial, land acquisition risk is deeply embedded in institutional, legal, and socio-political structures. As a result, it introduces uncertainty not only at the initial stages of project implementation but also across the entire project lifecycle.

The literature demonstrates that land acquisition risk is fundamentally a governance challenge rather than a purely operational or technical issue. In many contexts, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, land ownership systems are pluralistic, involving customary, statutory, and informal arrangements that often overlap and conflict (Engström, 2022). This complexity creates significant challenges in verifying ownership, determining compensation eligibility, and resolving disputes. Consequently, delays in land acquisition are not simply the result of inefficiencies at the project level but reflect broader systemic weaknesses in governance and institutional coordination.

Furthermore, governance inefficiencies such as bureaucratic delays, lack of transparency in valuation processes, weak enforcement of legal frameworks, and inadequate inter-agency coordination significantly exacerbate land acquisition risk (Kaddu et al., 2023). These challenges are often compounded by limited administrative capacity and funding constraints, which delay compensation payments and increase the likelihood of disputes. In such cases, land acquisition risk becomes a manifestation of policy implementation gaps rather than isolated project failures.

Empirical evidence supports the argument that land acquisition challenges have direct implications for project performance. Abdelaty et al. (2023) show that unresolved right-of-way issues frequently disrupt construction schedules and lead to contractor claims, thereby increasing project costs. Similarly, Engström (2022) highlights that land formalisation processes, while intended to enhance tenure security, can introduce additional layers of complexity and contestation, particularly where institutional arrangements are fragmented. These findings suggest that land acquisition risk is dynamic and context-dependent, evolving as projects interact with local governance systems.

Moreover, land acquisition risk is closely linked to stakeholder perceptions and relational dynamics. Information asymmetries between project authorities and affected communities often lead to mistrust, particularly where compensation processes are perceived as opaque or unfair (Ameyaw et al., 2021). In such contexts, communities may resist project activities, resulting in delays, protests, or legal disputes. Therefore, land acquisition risk cannot be fully understood without considering the role of trust, transparency, and communication in shaping stakeholder responses.

The literature further emphasises that policy and institutional frameworks play a critical role in shaping land acquisition outcomes. Kaddu et al. (2023) argue that weak policy implementation, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, and inadequate institutional capacity undermine the effectiveness of land acquisition processes. These governance deficiencies often lead to delays in compensation, inconsistencies in valuation, and lack of accountability, all of which contribute to project disruption. Therefore, addressing land acquisition risk requires systemic reforms that go beyond project-level interventions.

Notwithstanding its significance, land acquisition risk does not inevitably lead to project failure. Instead, its impact on project outcomes depends on the effectiveness of governance mechanisms and institutional responses. Projects that implement transparent valuation processes, ensure timely compensation, and engage stakeholders meaningfully are better positioned to mitigate land-related risks and maintain implementation continuity (Abdelaty et al., 2023; Ameyaw et al., 2021). This aligns with Risk Management Theory, which posits that the consequences of risk are shaped by mitigation and response strategies rather than by the presence of risk itself (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2021).

Additionally, strong governance structures, including effective monitoring systems, clear regulatory frameworks, and coordinated institutional arrangements, enhance the capacity of projects to manage land acquisition risks (Kaddu et al., 2023). Conversely, weak governance amplifies these risks, leading to prolonged disputes, increased costs, and compromised project outcomes. This reinforces the argument that land acquisition risk should be conceptualised as part of a broader governance ecosystem rather than as an isolated project variable.

Importantly, land acquisition risk also has significant social and political implications. Displacement, loss of livelihoods, and perceived injustices in compensation can generate social conflict and erode trust in public institutions (Engström, 2022). These social dynamics further complicate project implementation, as unresolved grievances may escalate into resistance, litigation, or political intervention. Therefore, land acquisition risk must be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses economic, institutional, and social dimensions.

Therefore, the literature establishes that land acquisition risk is a complex governance issue shaped by institutional capacity, policy frameworks, and stakeholder relationships. While it is a major contributor to project delays and cost escalation, its impact on project success is mediated by governance quality and institutional response mechanisms. Therefore, effective management of land acquisition risk requires a holistic approach that integrates technical, institutional, and relational dimensions of project management (Abdelaty et al., 2023; Engström, 2022; Kaddu et al., 2023; PMI, 2021).

4.2 Community Consent as Legitimacy Mechanism

Community consent emerges in the literature as a central legitimacy mechanism that significantly influences the sustainability and overall success of infrastructure projects. Unlike traditional compliance-based approaches to stakeholder engagement, community consent reflects the extent to which affected populations perceive project processes as fair, inclusive, and respectful of their rights and interests. As such, it is not merely an outcome of consultation but a relational construct grounded in trust, transparency, and participation (Freeman, 1984; Bourne, 2016).

Empirical evidence demonstrates that projects characterised by strong participation and transparent decision-making processes tend to experience smoother implementation and reduced resistance from affected communities (Antwi& Ley, 2021). Meaningful engagement enables stakeholders to understand project objectives, contribute to decision-making, and develop a sense of ownership, which enhances cooperation and reduces the likelihood of conflict. In contrast, projects that rely on top-down or tokenistic consultation approaches often encounter resistance, delays, and reputational challenges, as communities perceive such processes as exclusionary and unjust.

Furthermore, Stakeholder Engagement Theory provides a useful lens for understanding community consent as a legitimacy-building process. Freeman (1984) argues that organisations must actively identify and engage stakeholders whose interests are affected by project activities. However, beyond identification, the quality of engagement is critical. Engagement that is perceived as genuine, inclusive, and responsive enhances stakeholder trust and legitimacy, whereas superficial engagement undermines confidence and triggers opposition. Therefore, community consent should be understood as an outcome of effective stakeholder relationship management rather than as a procedural requirement.

Moreover, the concept of procedural justice is central to explaining how community consent is formed. Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of decision-making processes, including transparency, consistency, and the opportunity for stakeholders to voice their concerns (Moffat& Zhang, 2024). Studies show that stakeholders are more likely to accept project outcomes, even when they are not entirely favourable, if they perceive the process to be fair and respectful. This implies that "how decisions are made" is often as important as "what decisions are made," particularly in contexts involving land acquisition and displacement.

In addition, trust plays a critical mediating role in the relationship between engagement processes and community consent. Trust is built through consistent, transparent, and respectful interactions between project authorities and affected communities. Where trust is established, communities are more likely to cooperate with project activities, provide access to land, and utilise formal grievance mechanisms to resolve disputes. Conversely, low levels of trust can lead to suspicion, resistance, and escalation of conflicts, even where compensation or technical solutions are adequate (Antwi& Ley, 2021; Moffat& Zhang, 2024).

However, the literature also highlights significant challenges in achieving genuine community consent in practice. In many infrastructure projects, consultation processes are implemented as compliance requirements rather than as meaningful engagement strategies. This results in what is often described as "tokenistic participation," where communities are informed about decisions but have limited influence over outcomes. Such practices undermine legitimacy and can exacerbate conflict, particularly in contexts characterised by power imbalances and historical grievances.

Furthermore, socio-economic and cultural factors influence the dynamics of community consent. Vulnerable groups, including women and informal land users, may be excluded from engagement processes, leading to inequitable outcomes and contested legitimacy. Therefore, inclusive engagement strategies that account for local norms, power structures, and diversity are essential for building genuine consent.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the literature suggests that community consent is not a static condition but a dynamic process that evolves throughout the project lifecycle. Early engagement, continuous communication, and adaptive management of stakeholder concerns are critical for maintaining consent over time. Projects that invest in long-term relationship-building rather than one-off consultations are more likely to sustain legitimacy and achieve successful outcomes.

In conclusion, community consent functions as a critical legitimacy mechanism that shapes project implementation and sustainability. It is influenced by participation, transparency,

trust, and procedural justice, and it determines the extent to which stakeholders support or resist project activities. Therefore, effective infrastructure delivery requires moving beyond compliance-based consultation toward genuinely participatory and trust-building engagement processes (Antwi& Ley, 2021; Freeman, 1984; Moffat& Zhang, 2024).

4.3 GRM Effectiveness as Institutional Response

Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRMs) are increasingly recognised in the literature as critical institutional response systems for managing conflicts arising in infrastructure projects. They serve as formalised channels through which affected stakeholders can raise concerns, seek clarification, and obtain remedies for perceived injustices. When effectively designed and implemented, GRMs play a central role in preventing the escalation of disputes, thereby supporting project continuity and stability (Rahim, 2002; World Bank, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, GRMs are grounded in Conflict Management Theory, which emphasises the importance of structured systems for addressing disagreements and restoring procedural justice (Rahim, 2002). In the context of infrastructure development, conflicts often emerge from issues such as delayed compensation, disputed valuations, unclear eligibility criteria, or inadequate communication. GRMs provide a mechanism for addressing these issues early, thereby reducing the likelihood of escalation into litigation, protests, or work stoppages.

Empirical evidence indicates that GRMs are most effective when they are accessible, transparent, and responsive. Accessibility ensures that all affected stakeholders, including vulnerable and marginalised groups, can easily use the system without barriers such as cost, complexity, or lack of information. Transparency refers to clear procedures, documented processes, and open communication regarding how grievances are handled and resolved. Responsiveness involves timely acknowledgment and resolution of complaints, as well as consistent feedback to complainants (World Bank, 2024). When these attributes are present, GRMs enhance trust in project institutions and encourage stakeholders to use formal channels rather than resorting to disruptive actions.

Moreover, effective GRMs contribute to maintaining procedural justice, which is a key determinant of stakeholder acceptance. Even in situations where outcomes may not fully satisfy all parties, stakeholders are more likely to accept decisions if they perceive the grievance handling process as fair, respectful, and impartial. Therefore, GRMs function not only as conflict resolution tools but also as legitimacy-building mechanisms that reinforce trust in project governance structures.

However, the literature also highlights significant limitations in the implementation of GRMs, particularly in developing-country contexts. In many cases, GRMs are established as compliance requirements rather than as genuinely functional systems. This results in mechanisms that exist on paper but are poorly resourced, inadequately staffed, or lacking authority to resolve disputes effectively. Consequently, grievances may be recorded but not resolved, or responses may be delayed, leading to frustration among stakeholders.

Ineffective GRMs often lead to distrust and project disruption. When stakeholders perceive grievance systems as slow, opaque, or biased, they are less likely to engage with formal mechanisms and more likely to escalate disputes through protests, political channels, or legal action. This escalation not only disrupts project implementation but also increases costs and

damages relationships between project authorities and communities (World Bank, 2024). Therefore, the failure of GRMs can transform manageable disputes into major project risks.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of GRMs is closely linked to broader institutional capacity and governance quality. Systems that lack clear mandates, adequate resources, and coordination with other project functions are unlikely to perform effectively. Conversely, well-integrated GRMs that are embedded within broader stakeholder engagement and project management frameworks are more capable of addressing grievances in a timely and credible manner.

In conclusion, GRM effectiveness represents a critical institutional response to social and governance risks in infrastructure projects. While accessible, transparent, and responsive mechanisms can reduce conflict escalation and enhance project performance, ineffective GRMs undermine trust and contribute to project disruption. Therefore, strengthening GRM design and implementation is essential for improving infrastructure delivery and ensuring sustainable project outcomes (Rahim, 2002; World Bank, 2024)..

4.4 Project Success as Multidimensional

Project success has evolved significantly from its traditional conceptualisation based on the "iron triangle" of time, cost, and quality toward a broader, multidimensional perspective that incorporates stakeholder satisfaction, long-term value creation, and sustainability (Atkinson, 1999; Turner &Zolin, 2024). This shift reflects growing recognition that delivering a project within budget and schedule does not necessarily guarantee its acceptance, usefulness, or long-term impact, particularly in complex infrastructure environments where projects interact closely with communities and institutional systems.

Atkinson (1999) was among the early scholars to challenge the adequacy of the iron triangle, arguing that success should also include information system quality, organisational benefits, and stakeholder satisfaction. This perspective has since been expanded by contemporary scholars who emphasise that project success must be assessed across multiple dimensions, including social legitimacy, environmental sustainability, and benefit realisation (Ćirić et al., 2022; Turner &Zolin, 2024). In infrastructure projects, where outcomes extend beyond physical outputs to societal impacts, this multidimensional approach is particularly relevant.

Furthermore, project success is increasingly understood as a dynamic construct that varies across stakeholders and over time. Different stakeholders such as governments, contractors, communities, and financiers may have divergent expectations and criteria for success. For example, while a contractor may prioritise timely completion and cost efficiency, affected communities may focus on fairness of processes, adequacy of compensation, and long-term livelihood outcomes. Therefore, success cannot be measured solely through technical indicators but must incorporate diverse stakeholder perspectives (Ika& Pinto, 2022).

In addition, governance variables play a critical role in shaping project success outcomes. Factors such as institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement quality, transparency, and conflict management mechanisms influence not only the implementation process but also the sustainability and acceptance of project outcomes. Projects that effectively manage governance processes, including land acquisition, community engagement, and grievance handling, are more likely to achieve broader success beyond technical completion.

Conversely, weak governance can undermine project legitimacy and reduce the perceived value of infrastructure investments.

Moreover, the inclusion of sustainability as a dimension of project success reflects the increasing importance of long-term impacts. Sustainability encompasses environmental protection, social equity, and economic viability, ensuring that projects deliver benefits that endure beyond the construction phase. Infrastructure projects that fail to consider sustainability may achieve short-term success but generate long-term negative consequences, such as environmental degradation or social conflict (Turner &Zolin, 2024).

The multidimensional view of project success also highlights the importance of legitimacy and acceptance. Projects that are technically successful but socially contested may face operational challenges, reduced utilisation, or reputational damage. In contrast, projects that achieve stakeholder acceptance and trust are more likely to sustain benefits and contribute to broader development goals. This underscores the interconnectedness between governance processes and success outcomes.

Notwithstanding the expanded understanding of project success, challenges remain in operationalising and measuring multidimensional success. Traditional project evaluation frameworks often prioritise easily quantifiable indicators such as cost and schedule performance, while social and governance dimensions are more difficult to measure. This creates a gap between theoretical conceptualisations of success and practical assessment methods.

Henceforth, project success should be understood as a multidimensional construct that extends beyond the iron triangle to include stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and governance effectiveness. This broader perspective provides a more comprehensive and realistic assessment of infrastructure project outcomes, particularly in complex and socially embedded contexts (Atkinson, 1999; Turner &Zolin, 2024; Ika& Pinto, 2022)..

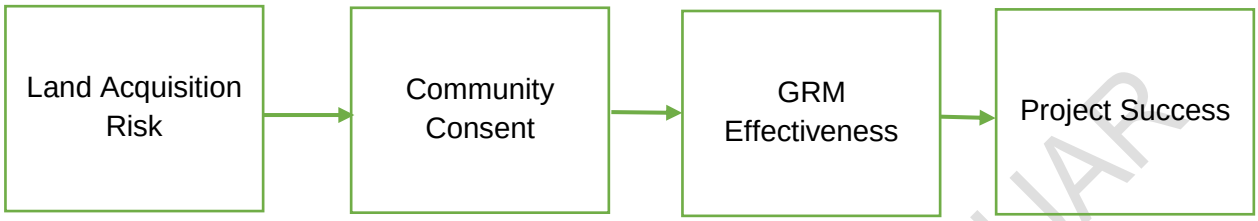
5. Integrated Analysis Table

Variable	Direct Effect	Indirect Role	Evidence Strength
Land Acquisition Risk	Weak/Variable	Strong via governance	High
Community Consent	Strong positive	Enhances GRM	High
GRM Effectiveness	Strong positive	Mediates conflict	Very High
Project Success	Outcome variable	Multidimensional	High

6. Proposed Conceptual Framework

The review proposes a governance pathway:

Land Acquisition Risk → Community Consent → GRM Effectiveness → Project Success



Supporting paths:

- Land Risk → GRM
- Consent → Success
- Land Risk → Success

This framework integrates **risk management, stakeholder engagement, and conflict resolution theories** (PMI, 2021; Freeman, 1984; Rahim, 2002).

7. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review provide strong evidence that infrastructure project outcomes are shaped more by governance quality than by technical factors alone. While traditional project management approaches emphasise engineering efficiency, cost control, and scheduling, the reviewed literature demonstrates that these factors are necessary but insufficient in explaining project success, particularly in complex and socially embedded infrastructure environments (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Ika& Pinto, 2022). Therefore, the determinants of success extend beyond technical execution to include institutional capacity, stakeholder engagement, and conflict management systems.

A central insight emerging from the review is that land acquisition risk does not automatically lead to project failure. Although land-related challenges such as valuation disputes, tenure conflicts, and delayed compensation are widely associated with delays and cost overruns, their ultimate impact depends on how they are managed within institutional frameworks (Abdelaty et al., 2023; Engström, 2022). This finding aligns with Risk Management Theory, which posits that risks influence outcomes through mitigation and response strategies rather than through their mere existence (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2021). Consequently, land acquisition risk should be understood as a triggering condition whose effects are contingent on governance quality.

Furthermore, the review highlights the critical role of institutional response mechanisms in shaping project trajectories. Projects characterised by strong governance structures, including transparent processes, coordinated institutional arrangements, and adequate administrative

capacity, are better equipped to manage land-related uncertainties and maintain implementation continuity (Kaddu et al., 2023). Conversely, weak governance amplifies the disruptive effects of land acquisition challenges, leading to prolonged disputes, increased costs, and compromised outcomes. This reinforces the argument that governance systems act as mediating structures between risk exposure and project performance.

Moreover, community consent emerges as a key legitimacy bridge linking project authorities and affected stakeholders. The literature shows that projects that prioritise meaningful participation, transparency, and respect for local norms are more likely to gain stakeholder acceptance and reduce resistance (Antwi& Ley, 2021; Freeman, 1984). Community consent is therefore not simply a by-product of engagement but a core mechanism through which legitimacy is constructed and sustained. In this regard, the findings extend Stakeholder Engagement Theory by demonstrating that the quality of engagement directly influences project feasibility and sustainability.

In addition, the role of grievance redress mechanisms (GRMs) as procedural justice systems is strongly supported. GRMs provide structured pathways for addressing stakeholder concerns, thereby preventing escalation into conflict and enabling continuous project implementation (Rahim, 2002; World Bank, 2024). When grievance systems are accessible, transparent, and responsive, they enhance trust and reinforce institutional credibility. However, when they are ineffective, they undermine legitimacy and contribute to project disruption. This dual role underscores the importance of GRMs as institutional instruments that translate stakeholder dissatisfaction into manageable processes rather than uncontrolled conflict.

The interaction between community consent and GRM effectiveness further highlights the relational nature of infrastructure governance. Consent enhances the utilisation and credibility of grievance systems, while effective GRMs reinforce stakeholder trust and sustain consent over time. This interdependence suggests that stakeholder engagement and conflict management should not be treated as separate functions but as integrated components of project governance.

Importantly, the findings confirm that project success is fundamentally a socio-institutional phenomenon. While technical performance remains important, it is the ability of projects to navigate social dynamics, manage stakeholder relationships, and maintain institutional legitimacy that ultimately determines success. This perspective aligns with the multidimensional project success framework, which emphasises stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and long-term value alongside traditional performance metrics (Atkinson, 1999; Turner &Zolin, 2024).

Furthermore, the review contributes to theory by integrating previously fragmented domains of risk management, stakeholder engagement, and conflict management into a unified explanatory framework. Rather than viewing these elements in isolation, the findings demonstrate that they operate as interconnected mechanisms within a broader governance system. This integration advances the understanding of infrastructure performance from a technical paradigm to a governance-based paradigm.

Notwithstanding these contributions, the discussion also highlights persistent gaps in both research and practice. In many contexts, governance mechanisms remain underdeveloped, and engagement processes are still implemented as compliance requirements rather than as

strategic functions. This suggests the need for stronger institutional reforms and capacity-building efforts to enhance governance effectiveness in infrastructure delivery.

Tthe findings demonstrate that infrastructure project success is determined less by the presence of risks and more by the quality of institutional responses to those risks. Land acquisition challenges, stakeholder dynamics, and grievance processes interact within governance systems to shape project outcomes. Therefore, improving infrastructure performance requires a shift from a purely technical focus to a more holistic approach that prioritises governance, legitimacy, and institutional effectiveness (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Ika& Pinto, 2022; PMI, 2021).

8. Contributions

8.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several contributions to project management and infrastructure governance literature. First, it integrates previously fragmented streams of research on land acquisition risk, stakeholder engagement, grievance redress mechanisms, and project success into a unified explanatory framework. Prior studies have largely examined these constructs in isolation; however, this review demonstrates that they operate as interdependent mechanisms within a broader governance system. This integration advances theoretical coherence and provides a more holistic understanding of infrastructure project performance (Ika& Pinto, 2022; Turner &Zolin, 2024).

Second, the study advances multidimensional project success theory by reinforcing the argument that success extends beyond the traditional iron triangle to include stakeholder satisfaction, legitimacy, and sustainability outcomes (Atkinson, 1999; Ćirić et al., 2022). By linking governance variables directly to success outcomes, the study strengthens the conceptualisation of project success as a socio-institutional construct rather than a purely technical achievement.

Third, the study extends Risk Management Theory into socio-political domains. It demonstrates that risks such as land acquisition are not merely operational uncertainties but are embedded in institutional, legal, and relational contexts. Consequently, risk outcomes are shaped by governance quality and institutional response mechanisms, thereby broadening the theoretical scope of risk management beyond conventional technical frameworks (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2021).

8.2 Practical Contributions

The study also offers important implications for practitioners and policymakers involved in infrastructure delivery. First, it emphasises the need for early and continuous stakeholder engagement. Projects that prioritise participation, transparency, and trust-building from the outset are more likely to secure community consent, reduce resistance, and ensure smoother implementation (Freeman, 1984; Antwi& Ley, 2021).

Second, the findings highlight the critical importance of effective grievance redress mechanisms. GRMs should be designed as functional institutional systems that are accessible, transparent, and responsive, rather than as compliance-driven tools. Well-functioning GRMs can prevent conflict escalation, enhance trust, and maintain project continuity (Rahim, 2002; World Bank, 2024).

Finally, the study supports the need for policy reforms in land governance. Strengthening institutional coordination, improving transparency in valuation and compensation processes, and enhancing administrative capacity are essential for reducing land acquisition risks and improving infrastructure outcomes (Kaddu et al., 2023). Therefore, policymakers should prioritise governance reforms that address systemic inefficiencies in land acquisition and stakeholder engagement processes.

9. Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that project success in infrastructure is best explained through governance pathways rather than technical performance alone. While traditional project management frameworks have prioritised cost, time, and quality, the findings show that these metrics are insufficient in capturing the full complexity of infrastructure delivery, particularly in socially embedded contexts. Instead, success is shaped by how projects manage land acquisition risks, engage stakeholders, and respond to grievances.

The review highlights that land acquisition risk does not inherently result in project failure. Its impact depends on the effectiveness of institutional response mechanisms, including transparent processes, timely compensation, and coordinated governance structures. Moreover, community consent emerges as a critical legitimacy mechanism that facilitates stakeholder cooperation and reduces resistance. Projects that prioritise meaningful engagement and trust-building are more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes.

In addition, grievance redress mechanisms play a central role as procedural justice systems. When these mechanisms are accessible, transparent, and responsive, they prevent conflict escalation and enhance institutional credibility. Conversely, ineffective grievance systems contribute to distrust and project disruption.

Taken together, these findings confirm that infrastructure project success is fundamentally a socio-institutional phenomenon. Therefore, integrating land risk management, community consent, and grievance systems into project design and implementation is essential for sustainable infrastructure delivery. Future research should further explore governance dynamics across project lifecycles and contexts to strengthen both theory and practice in infrastructure development.

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