

# Review of: "The Impact of Project Financial Subsidies on Project Achievement"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

Review of the paper The Impact of Project Financial Subsidies on Project Achievement

critique the abstract

Strengths:

1. **Clear Problem Statement:** The abstract effectively highlights the issue of improper allocation of development resources due to the practice of offering financial allowances to participants in conferences or workshops. It sets the stage for discussing the adverse effects of these allowances on project success and sustainability.
2. **Reference to Relevant Research:** By referencing the research financed by DFID Malawi on public expenditure assessment of travel, the abstract grounds the discussion in existing literature and provides a basis for further exploration of the topic.
3. **Comprehensive Scope:** The abstract outlines the scope of the paper, indicating that it will discuss different categories of allowances, their effects on project success and sustainability, the influence of per diems on the project cycle, and strategies to mitigate the detrimental impact of allowances. This comprehensive approach promises a thorough examination of the topic.
4. **Identification of Research Gap:** By stating that theoretical and conceptual reviews of per diems and related themes have not been specifically treated in existing literature, the abstract identifies a research gap and highlights the novelty and significance of the paper's contribution.

Weaknesses:

1. **Lack of Clarity on Methodology:** The abstract does not provide information about the methodology employed in the research, such as whether it is based on empirical data, literature review, or theoretical analysis. Without clarity on the research methodology, it is difficult for readers to assess the credibility and rigor of the study.
2. **Limited Detail on Theoretical Framework:** While the abstract mentions the existence of distinct theories and concepts related to per diems and allowances, it does not specify which theories or concepts will be discussed in the paper. Providing more detail on the theoretical framework would enhance the reader's understanding of the paper's analytical approach.

3. **Absence of Specific Findings or Conclusions:** The abstract does not preview any specific findings or conclusions of the paper, leaving readers uncertain about the potential insights or implications of the research. Including a brief summary of key findings or conclusions would help readers gauge the significance of the study.

4. **Potential for Bias:** The abstract mentions that the research was financed by DFID Malawi, raising questions about potential bias or conflicts of interest. While funding from external sources is common in research, transparently addressing any potential biases and ensuring independence in the research process is essential for maintaining credibility.

#### Improvement Suggestions:

1. **Clarify Research Methodology:** Provide a brief overview of the research methodology, including whether the study is based on empirical data, a literature review, or theoretical analysis. This will enhance transparency and enable readers to evaluate the validity of the research findings.

2. **Specify Theoretical Framework:** Offer more detail on the theoretical frameworks or concepts that will be explored in the paper. This could include references to relevant theories such as principal-agent theory, rent-seeking behavior, or incentive theory, providing readers with a clearer understanding of the analytical approach.

3. **Preview Key Findings or Conclusions:** Include a brief summary of the main findings or conclusions of the paper to give readers a preview of the insights generated by the research. This will help readers assess the relevance and significance of the study to their interests.

#### Critique of the article

##### Strengths:

**Theoretical Framework:** The article provides a comprehensive theoretical framework by integrating various economic theories such as incentive theory, economic theory, and the political patronage model. This theoretical foundation enriches the understanding of per diems in international development projects.

**Conceptual Clarity:** The article effectively explains complex economic concepts in a clear and understandable manner. It breaks down theories such as the principal-agent problem and the crowding out effect, making them accessible to readers from diverse backgrounds.

**Contextual Relevance:** By discussing the specific context of international development projects, the article adds relevance and practicality to the theoretical discussions. It addresses real-world challenges faced by project managers and staff, enhancing the applicability of the concepts discussed.

**In-depth Analysis:** The article offers an in-depth analysis of the motivations behind the use of per diems, considering factors such as moral hazard, adverse selection, and rent-seeking behavior. This thorough examination provides valuable insights into the complexities of decision-making in project implementation.

**Critical Reflection:** The article critically reflects on the potential drawbacks of relying solely on monetary incentives, highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation and the limitations of the rational economic model. This critical

perspective encourages readers to consider alternative approaches to motivation and behavior.

## Weaknesses

### 1. Limited Empirical Evidence:

Illustration: While the article extensively discusses economic theories and conceptual frameworks related to per diems, it lacks empirical evidence to support its arguments. For instance, it could benefit from including case studies or survey data from actual international development projects to illustrate the practical implications of per diem practices. (Revised for parallel structure)

#### Improvement Suggestions:

- Conduct empirical research: The authors could conduct surveys or interviews with project managers, staff, and beneficiaries of international development projects to gather firsthand insights into the use of per diems and their impact on project outcomes.
- Include case studies: Incorporating real-life case studies of projects that have implemented different approaches to per diem policies would provide concrete examples of the challenges and opportunities associated with these practices.
- Collaborate with practitioners: Collaborating with practitioners and organizations involved in international development projects could facilitate access to relevant data and ensure the practical relevance of the research findings.

### 2. Overemphasis on Economic Perspectives:

Illustration: The article primarily focuses on economic theories such as incentive theory and rent-seeking behavior, overlooking insights from other disciplines such as psychology and sociology. For instance, it could benefit from exploring psychological factors influencing motivation and behavior in the context of per diems.

#### Improvement Suggestions:

- Incorporate interdisciplinary perspectives: The authors could broaden the scope of the article by integrating insights from psychology, sociology, anthropology, and other relevant disciplines. For example, they could explore the role of social norms, cultural factors, and identity in shaping attitudes towards per diems.
- Engage with literature from diverse disciplines: Reviewing literature from diverse disciplines would enrich the theoretical framework and provide a more holistic understanding of the complexities surrounding per diems in international development projects.
- Collaborate with scholars from other disciplines: Collaborating with scholars from psychology, sociology, or anthropology could facilitate the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives and enhance the richness of the analysis.

### 3. Generalization of Context:

Illustration: The article predominantly discusses per diems in the context of international development projects, potentially overlooking variations in practices and challenges across different regions, sectors, and types of organizations. For example, per diem practices in humanitarian projects may differ significantly from those in government-led development initiatives.

#### Improvement Suggestions:

- Provide nuanced contextual analyses: The authors could acknowledge the diversity of contexts in which per diems are used and provide nuanced analyses that take into account variations in practices, norms, and institutional arrangements.
- Include comparative analyses: Comparing per diem practices across different regions, sectors, and types of organizations would highlight similarities and differences, enabling a more nuanced understanding of the factors shaping these practices.
- Acknowledge limitations of generalizations: Explicitly acknowledging the limitations of generalizations and highlighting the need for context-specific approaches would enhance the article's credibility and relevance.

#### 4. Limited Discussion on Policy Implications:

Illustration: While the article identifies challenges associated with per diems, it offers limited discussion on potential policy implications or recommendations for addressing these challenges. For instance, it could provide actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve the effectiveness and accountability of per diem practices.

#### Improvement Suggestions:

- Offer policy recommendations: The authors could conclude the article by offering practical policy recommendations based on the insights gained from the theoretical analysis and empirical evidence. These recommendations could focus on improving transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the use of per diems.
- Engage with stakeholders: Engaging with policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders throughout the research process would ensure that the policy recommendations are informed by real-world perspectives and priorities.
- Highlight implications for practice: Emphasizing the practical implications of the research findings for project management, organizational policies, and donor guidelines would enhance the article's relevance and utility for practitioners in the field.

#### 5. Complexity of Language:

Illustration: Some sections of the article utilize complex language and terminology, which may hinder understanding for readers with limited background knowledge in economics or related fields. For example, technical terms such as "principal-agent problem" and "rent-seeking behavior" may be challenging for non-specialist readers to grasp.

#### Improvement Suggestions:

- Simplify language without compromising depth: The authors could strive to communicate their ideas in clear, accessible language without sacrificing the depth of analysis. This could involve defining technical terms, providing examples, and using analogies to enhance comprehension.
- Use visuals and diagrams: Incorporating visuals such as diagrams, charts, and infographics could help illustrate complex concepts and enhance reader engagement. Visual representations can often convey information more effectively than text alone.
- Consider diverse audience needs: Recognizing the diverse backgrounds and expertise of the target audience, the authors could tailor the language and presentation style to accommodate readers with varying levels of familiarity with the

subject matter.

By addressing these weaknesses and implementing the suggested improvements, the article could enhance its credibility, relevance, and accessibility, thereby contributing more effectively to the discourse on per diems in international development projects.