



Effect of Stakeholder's Participation on Project Performance: A Case of Women in Informal Cross Border Trade Project, Rubavu District, Rwanda

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Abstract: *This study investigates the effect of stakeholder participation in project initiation on project performance, with a focus on informal cross-border trade projects in Rubavu District, Rwanda. Grounded in planning theory, the research employed a descriptive research design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. A total of 269 respondents were selected through stratified and simple random sampling methods, with data collected via structured questionnaires and interviews. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS Version 25, and the findings were presented through descriptive statistics. The results indicated a strong positive correlation between stakeholder participation in project initiation and overall project performance, with a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = 0.876$. Regression analysis further confirmed that stakeholder participation during project initiation is a significant predictor of project performance, with a standardized beta coefficient of 0.312 and a p-value of 0.000, highlighting the importance of early stakeholder involvement in ensuring project success. Based on these findings, the study recommends that project teams actively engage stakeholders from the onset of project planning, provide training on project management best practices, and ensure continuous communication throughout the project to maximize performance and outcomes.*

Keywords: *Stakeholder's Participation, Project performance, Women in Informal Cross Border Trade and Rubavu District*

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1. Introduction

Stakeholder participation is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone of successful project management across diverse sectors. It involves the engagement of individuals or groups who have an interest in a project's processes and outcomes (Ndirangu, 2021). This engagement is essential throughout all phases of the project lifecycle from initiation and planning to execution, monitoring, and evaluation. Engaging stakeholders from the outset ensures that their interests, concerns, and expectations are considered, helping to build trust and commitment. This not only

fosters a sense of ownership but also contributes to the long-term success and sustainability of the project (Mustafin, 2018).

Globally, the role of stakeholder participation in enhancing project performance is widely acknowledged. According to Bourne (2020), stakeholder engagement improves decision-making, aligns project goals with public expectations, and leads to better outcomes. For instance, in the United States, projects that incorporated stakeholder input especially in the environmental and infrastructure sectors reported a 20% higher success rate in terms of

staying within budget and achieving objectives compared to those that did not (PMI, 2021). This highlights how meaningful stakeholder involvement can significantly increase the likelihood of meeting strategic goals.

In India, stakeholder participation has become a critical factor in the success of urban development projects. Gupta (2019) observed that cities incorporating community feedback during the design phase experienced a 30% improvement in project completion times. Moreover, public satisfaction increased by 25%, underlining the benefits of involving local communities in planning and decision-making. Saini (2020) further emphasized that active stakeholder involvement contributes to reducing corruption and inefficiencies, as local stakeholders play a crucial role in monitoring progress and addressing potential issues early on.

Similar trends are observed in China, where stakeholder involvement in urban regeneration projects has been emphasized. Liu et al. (2022) explored how the inclusion of various community members and organizations in these projects helps address a range of perspectives and needs. While the perceptions of government and private sector professionals often align, they can differ significantly from those of citizens. The study highlighted discrepancies in participation practices and stressed the importance of improving inclusive engagement to ensure equitable outcomes in regeneration efforts.

In Africa, stakeholder engagement is vital for addressing the needs of communities impacted by development initiatives. In Ghana, Lawer (2019) found that stakeholder participation in environmental and social impact assessments (ESIAs) influenced port managers' values, encouraging co-creation, conflict avoidance, and inclusive growth. However, even with such participation, some cultural resources were lost, indicating areas for improvement. Other studies across Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania reinforce this notion. For instance, Kanyangi (2019) found a 20% increase in crop yields and a 25% reduction in delays in community-based agricultural projects when stakeholders were involved. Similarly, the Uganda Management Institute (2020) and Hassan (2021) report improved project outcomes and reduced implementation issues when local communities are actively engaged.

In Rwanda, stakeholder participation has become increasingly central to project success, especially in community-centered initiatives. Ndayishimiye (2020) observed that stakeholder engagement in rural development projects—particularly those targeting women's groups led to more sustainable and impactful outcomes. Donor-funded projects, like the Rwanda Digital Acceleration Project, also reflect this trend (World Bank, 2022). A notable example is the Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade (WICBT) project, launched by the National

Women's Council in 2019. Targeting 2,000 women in Rubavu and Rusizi Districts, this initiative supports women traders through formal trade facilitation, financial literacy, and improved market access. The WICBT program not only empowers women economically but also exemplifies how stakeholder participation enhances inclusivity and effectiveness in development projects.

1.1 Problem Statement

Despite the growing recognition of stakeholder participation as a critical factor in project success, many development projects continue to face significant implementation challenges. Globally, projects often fail due to poor planning, unclear objectives, weak communication, and inadequate stakeholder involvement (Hughes et al., 2017; Bourne, 2020). Saini (2020) notes that the absence of clearly defined goals and poor coordination can derail project progress, while Hassan (2021) adds that in Tanzania, ineffective stakeholder engagement and inexperienced management frequently contribute to project delays and underperformance.

In Rwanda, project performance issues remain prevalent. Mukiza, Hanbin, and Li (2021) reported that 68% of public construction projects experienced schedule delays. A relevant example is the Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade (WICBT) project, initiated by the National Women's Council. Although the project aims to economically empower women traders, it faced execution delays and had only achieved 83% of its planned activities by the end of the 2023/2024 fiscal year. Key challenges include limited access to finance, inactive Joint Border Committees (JBCs), non-harmonized trade policies, poor border infrastructure, and harassment of women traders. These issues suggest possible gaps in stakeholder engagement and coordination, which may be contributing to the project's underperformance.

The core problem is that despite the WICBT project's potential and national importance, its implementation has been hindered by operational and structural challenges, some of which may stem from inadequate stakeholder participation. Stakeholders including border committees, local government entities, women traders, and trade facilitators are essential to the project's success, yet their roles and influence on project outcomes have not been adequately examined. Although previous studies (e.g., Kobusingye et al., 2017; Ndayizeye & Munene, 2022; Nsengiyumva & Ogbe, 2022) have explored stakeholder involvement in Rwandan development projects, none have specifically addressed stakeholder participation in the context of the WICBT project. These studies focused on different sectors and locations, leaving a gap in understanding how stakeholder engagement impacts performance in projects targeting informal trade and women's economic empowerment.

This research gap underscores the need for a focused investigation into the relationship between stakeholder participation and project performance within the WICBT project. By exploring this connection, the study aims to provide actionable insights that can improve implementation efficiency, stakeholder coordination, and overall project outcomes in similar development initiatives across Rwanda.

This study sought to achieve the following Research objective:

- i. To assess the effect of stakeholder participation in project initiation on performance of Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade project

2. Literature Review

A conceptual review is a research method that involves analyzing and comparing various concepts to understand, interpret, and apply them within existing knowledge frameworks. It plays a critical role in clarifying the structure of a study by identifying key constructs and exploring the relationships among them (Hulland, 2020).

Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholder participation, as defined by Freeman (2020), refers to the active involvement of all relevant individuals, groups, or organizations in project decision-making processes. This inclusion ensures that their needs, interests, and expectations are addressed, ultimately enhancing project ownership, accountability, and outcomes. In development contexts, stakeholder engagement is particularly important for aligning project goals with community priorities. This study seeks to evaluate the impact of stakeholder participation during the key stages of the project lifecycle initiation, planning, implementation, and monitoring on the performance of the Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade (WICBT) project. It also examines how stakeholder involvement in project monitoring and evaluation influences the project's overall success (Freeman, 2020).

Effective stakeholder participation is particularly crucial in ensuring the project's relevance and sustainability. By engaging stakeholders from the early stages of project initiation and planning, the project team can better identify local needs, potential risks, and realistic opportunities. Involving stakeholders during implementation ensures that their insights are integrated into ongoing activities, which can help mitigate risks and refine approaches in real-time (Matu et al., 2020). Moreover, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes that include stakeholder feedback create an avenue for continuous improvement, allowing the project to adapt and respond to challenges and emerging

opportunities effectively. As a result, stakeholder participation throughout the project lifecycle increases the likelihood of successful outcomes, promotes transparency, and ensures that the project remains aligned with community priorities (Sulemana et al., 2018).

In the case of the WICBT project, effective stakeholder engagement can lead to several key benefits. It can help bridge gaps between the project implementers and the women engaged in cross-border trade, ensuring that their unique challenges are understood and addressed (Bourne, 2020). Furthermore, involving stakeholders, such as local governments, trade associations, and regulatory bodies, ensures that the project is aligned with broader policy goals and receives necessary support (O'Brien et al., 2021). By recognizing and incorporating the needs of these diverse groups, the project is more likely to foster long-term positive impacts on women traders and the wider community. Thus, examining the extent and quality of stakeholder participation within the WICBT project provides valuable insights into how inclusive and responsive project management practices contribute to successful project performance and sustainable outcomes (Matu et al., 2020; Freeman, 2020).

Project Initiation

Project initiation is a pivotal stage in the project management lifecycle, where the foundation for the project's success is laid. It involves defining the project's scope, goals, key stakeholders, and identifying potential risks, while obtaining the necessary approvals to proceed (Kerzner, 2017). During this phase, early engagement with stakeholders is essential to align the project with the needs and expectations of those who will be affected by its outcomes (Aaltonen & Sivonen, 2020). Engaging stakeholders from the start creates a shared understanding of the project's objectives and ensures that their concerns are addressed, leading to greater project support and ownership (Müller, 2018). This alignment between the project's goals and stakeholder expectations is particularly crucial for development projects, where community involvement can directly impact the success and sustainability of the initiative (Davis, 2014).

For the *Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade (WICBT)* project, the initiation phase is especially important to ensure that the perspectives of women engaged in cross-border trade are understood and addressed. Including local stakeholders, such as government officials, trade associations, and the women traders themselves, ensures the project's goals are relevant and feasible. During this phase, the project team can identify key challenges, such as legal barriers or market access issues, and incorporate these into the project design (Lester, 2019). Proper project

initiation also establishes clear goals, measurable outcomes, and robust tracking mechanisms, which are necessary for guiding the project through its lifecycle. By securing early support and input from all stakeholders, the WICBT project can build a strong foundation for success, avoiding potential pitfalls and increasing its chances for long-term sustainability (Turner & Müller, 2017).

Project Performance

Project performance refers to how well a project meets its objectives, timelines, budgets, and overall quality standards (Baker et al., 2019). It is commonly assessed through metrics like adherence to the schedule, budget control, stakeholder satisfaction, and the sustainability of the project's outcomes. Successful project performance is heavily influenced by effective project management and ongoing stakeholder involvement, which helps ensure the project stays on track and adapts to any emerging challenges. Engaging stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle, particularly in decision-making and monitoring, allows for early identification of problems and fosters shared responsibility for outcomes (Kloppenborg et al., 2019). Active participation also improves the transparency of processes and increases the chances of the project meeting its intended goals, leading to higher overall performance (Gido & Clements, 2019).

In the case of the *Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade (WICBT)* project, performance can be measured through tangible outcomes such as increased trade opportunities, enhanced financial literacy among women traders, and the reduction of barriers faced by these women in their business activities. Other key performance indicators might include the project's impact on the local economy, improvements in community engagement, and long-term sustainability (Görgens, 2020). Additionally, stakeholder involvement in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes ensures that the project stays aligned with its objectives, providing critical feedback to improve ongoing activities. The active role of stakeholders in M&E contributes to the project's adaptability and success, helping it achieve its goals and deliver lasting benefits to women engaged in cross-border trade (Olander & Landin, 2019).

2.2 Theoretical Review

The theoretical review in this study aims to explore and present key theories that provide a framework for understanding the relationship between stakeholder participation and project performance. These theories offer valuable insights into how planning, goal-setting, and implementation practices shape the success of

development projects. In particular, this review focuses on planning theory and its relevance to understanding the dynamics of stakeholder involvement in projects like the *Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade (WICBT)* project. By examining these theories, we can better assess how participatory practices during the project lifecycle influence overall outcomes and sustainability.

Planning Theory

Planning theory has evolved over time through the contributions of several key scholars, with Robert A. Beauregard being instrumental in structuring it around four core tasks: knowing, engaging, prescribing, and executing. These tasks explore the dynamic relationship between knowledge and action, particularly focusing on concepts of democracy, inclusion, and justice (Beauregard, 2018). Friedmann (2017) played a crucial role in further developing planning theory, distinguishing between "theory in planning" and "theory of planning." He emphasized that planning is not just a technical or managerial process but is deeply interwoven with social, political, and economic contexts. These intellectual foundations have shaped modern planning theory, which is influenced by diverse ideologies ranging from conservative to utopian or anarchistic visions of society. These frameworks are essential for understanding the complexities of urban and regional development, especially in contexts involving multiple stakeholders and competing interests.

Planning theory serves as a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between planning practices, processes, and institutions. It provides insights into both the normative (what planning should be) and explanatory (how planning operates) aspects of urban and regional planning (Fainstein & DeFilippis, 2016). The theory encompasses not only technical considerations but also addresses the socio-political dimensions of planning, advocating for inclusivity, justice, and the consideration of marginalized groups in the decision-making process. According to planning theorists, the process of planning should be adaptive and responsive to changing political, economic, and social conditions, ensuring that planning practices remain relevant and effective (Friedmann, 2017). In this context, planning theory underscores the importance of aligning plans with the needs and expectations of the communities they are intended to serve.

Planning theory is particularly relevant to this study as it highlights the critical role of stakeholder participation in shaping project outcomes. As the *Women in Informal Cross-Border Trade (WICBT)* project focuses on enhancing the socio-economic status of women engaged in informal trade, stakeholder engagement during the

planning phase is crucial to align the project's objectives with the needs and expectations of local communities. According to planning theory, involving stakeholders early in the planning process leads to better project ownership, increased accountability, and ultimately more successful outcomes (Beauregard, 2018). This is especially important in development projects where ensuring the active participation of those affected by the project enhances the sustainability and long-term impact. By applying planning theory, this study explores how involving local women traders in the planning phase of the WICBT project can improve its effectiveness and address the unique challenges they face in cross-border trade.

2.3 Empirical Literature

This section presents empirical studies examining the role of stakeholder participation in project implementation. Emphasis is placed on how early involvement—especially during the initiation phase—affects overall project performance. The review covers global, developed country, African, East African, and Rwandan perspectives.

Effect of Stakeholder participation in project initiation on Project Performance

Globally, stakeholder participation in the initiation phase of projects has been shown to significantly impact project success. Rajbhoj et al. (2022) examined how project managers often rely heavily on personal experience when identifying project requirements, leading to overlooked stakeholder concerns and misaligned expectations. To address this issue, they developed an AI-based model using Natural Language Processing (NLP) and Machine Learning (ML) to automatically extract relevant information from Request For Proposal (RFP) documents. The system demonstrated 76% accuracy in classifying questions and 41% relevance in project initiation information. This shows promise for enhancing stakeholder alignment in complex projects. However, the study's limited sample size and specific application context reveal a gap in broader applicability. Further research is needed to assess the effectiveness of such tools across diverse industries and global settings.

In developed countries, early stakeholder involvement is often supported by advanced technological tools and structured project management practices. These enable project teams to effectively gather input, set expectations, and align strategies before execution begins. Although various studies emphasize the efficiency gains of such systems, there is often less focus on the relational and participatory depth of stakeholder engagement. While digital platforms allow for quicker communication and

decision-making, the human dynamics of stakeholder involvement such as trust-building and inclusive dialogue—are less explored. This presents a research gap around how technology-driven stakeholder participation compares to more traditional, interpersonal models in terms of long-term project performance and stakeholder satisfaction.

In the African context, stakeholder participation has proven essential for infrastructure and development projects. Matu et al. (2020) examined urban road transport projects under the Kenya Urban Roads Authority (KURA), finding that early engagement led to improved planning, transparency, and reduced project delays. Using a mixed-methods approach with a large sample size, the study reported a strong positive correlation between stakeholder participation and project completion. Stakeholders who were consulted early contributed to more realistic timelines and budget estimations. However, the study was largely quantitative and did not delve deeply into the nuances of stakeholder relationships, leaving a gap in understanding the socio-cultural and political factors that influence participation outcomes across African countries.

In East Africa, stakeholder involvement has been particularly impactful in social and community development projects. Nyauncho (2024) emphasized that involving communities during the project identification phase led to stronger ownership and sustainability of women's development initiatives. When beneficiaries were included in defining goals and implementation strategies, project relevance increased. Similarly, Ndirangu (2021) found in the Kiserian Township initiative that early engagement helped build trust and clarified project objectives, contributing to successful execution. Despite these positive outcomes, both studies focus on specific projects or demographic groups. Broader regional studies are needed to determine whether these trends apply across sectors and population types in East African countries.

In Rwanda, stakeholder participation during project initiation has gained increasing attention due to the country's focus on decentralization and citizen engagement. Ndayizeye and Munene (2022) studied the AVEH Umurerwa project in Bugesera District and found strong correlations between consultative planning and improved quality, budget, and scheduling performance. Similarly, Bazimya (2018) noted that stakeholder involvement in the WASH project in Musanze District enhanced relevance and long-term impact. Mugabo and Mulyungi (2019), analyzing the Gisenyi Youth New Vision Project, also confirmed that inclusive planning directly contributed to success. While these studies validate the importance of early engagement, they tend to be project specific. There remains a need for more cross-sectoral and

nationwide studies in Rwanda to assess how institutional structures and local leadership influence stakeholder participation outcomes.

3. Methodology

This study employed both descriptive and correlational research designs to comprehensively explore the effect of stakeholder participation on project performance. Descriptive research provided detailed insights into the characteristics and behaviors of the study population without manipulation, while correlational research examined associations among variables. This dual approach enabled the researcher to understand the current state and detect patterns between stakeholder participation and project outcomes. A combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches was used: questionnaires gathered quantitative data, and interview guides provided qualitative insights, specifically focused on women in informal cross-border trade in Rubavu District.

The target population consisted of 1009 individuals, including 1000 women cooperative members in Rubavu District, one project manager, five project trainers, one financial support officer, and two monitoring and evaluation officers. This population shares similar demographic and professional characteristics, relevant to the study context. The selection ensured that both project beneficiaries and key stakeholders involved in project design and execution were represented, facilitating a holistic understanding of participation and its influence on performance.

To determine the sample size, the study applied Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, resulting in 286 respondents. These included 282 project beneficiaries and one individual from each of the other stakeholder categories. Stratified sampling was used to ensure each stakeholder group was adequately represented, with strata defined based on roles in the project. Within each stratum, simple random sampling was used to select participants, guaranteeing every individual an equal chance of selection and reducing bias.

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and interview guides. The questionnaire was divided into demographic questions and Likert-scale items assessing stakeholder participation and project performance. Interviews were conducted with the project manager to provide deeper qualitative context. These instruments allowed for a mixed-method analysis, enabling the researcher to triangulate findings and strengthen the validity of conclusions.

To ensure reliability and validity, a pilot study was conducted with 29 respondents, representing 10% of the total sample. The pilot helped identify and rectify ambiguous questions in the questionnaire. The instrument achieved a high Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.972, indicating excellent internal consistency. This rigorous pre-testing ensured the final data collection tools were both valid and reliable for capturing accurate, meaningful data related to the research objectives.

Data were processed through editing, coding, and tabulation, followed by analysis using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to summarize and interpret the data. Inferential statistics, including regression analysis, ANOVA, and model summaries, were employed to test relationships between stakeholder participation at different project phases (initiation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) and overall project performance. The regression model helped quantify the influence of each phase of participation on performance outcomes.

Several limitations were encountered during the research process. Scheduling interviews with key informants proved challenging due to their tight work schedules, and some respondents were reluctant to share information openly out of fear of leadership repercussions. Despite these constraints, the study adhered to strict ethical standards. Official permissions were obtained, and participants were informed about their rights, including the voluntary nature of their participation and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained, and all sources were properly cited to maintain academic integrity.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study, organized according to the specific objectives that guided the research. The findings are based on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from project beneficiaries and stakeholders involved in women-led informal cross-border trade initiatives in Rubavu District. The discussion integrates previous literature with the current study's results to interpret their significance in the broader context of project performance.

4.1 Response Rate

The response rate indicates the percentage of distributed questionnaires that were completed and returned by the respondents, which is critical in evaluating the reliability of the study's data. In this study, a total of 286 questionnaires were distributed, and the response rate was calculated

based on the number of completed and returned questionnaires.

Table 1: Response rate

	Frequency	Percent
Returned and complete	269	94.0
Returned and incomplete	8	2.8
Unreturned	9	3.2
Total	286	100.0

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 1. shows the response rate in a questionnaire. Out of 286 questionnaires given to the respondents, 269 questionnaires were filled, returned and completed. It signifies that the response rate is 94.0%. A response rate of 70% and above is considered adequate. Therefore, the obtained response rate of 94.0% was satisfactory for data analysis. Conversely, 8 questionnaires were returned but incomplete, constituting 2.8% of the total distributed while 9 questionnaires remained unreturned, constituting 3.2% of the total distributed.

This section presents an analysis of the research hypothesis and delves into the perceptions of respondents based on the survey questions. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize and present the data in a clear and meaningful way. A Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5, was utilized to gauge respondents' attitudes, with 5 indicating "Strongly Agree," 4 for "Agree," 3 for "Neutral," 2 for "Disagree," and 1 for "Strongly Disagree." This approach enabled the researchers to effectively interpret and categorize respondents' views on the study's key topics. The results of the descriptive analysis are provided in Table 2 below.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics of Stakeholder participation in project initiation

Table 2. Level of agreement of Stakeholder participation in project initiation

Statement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Stakeholders are participated in defining of project needs	269	3.75	1.310
Stakeholders are participated in identifying of project team members	269	3.77	1.335
Stakeholders are participated in identifying of project financing	269	3.68	1.182
Stakeholder are participated in defining of project deliverables	269	3.91	1.247
Overall	269	3.77	1.268

Source: Field data, 2025

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of stakeholder participation in the project initiation phase, highlighting the respondents' perceptions across various key areas. The survey employed a Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to gauge the level of agreement with statements related to stakeholder involvement during project initiation. By analyzing the mean scores and standard deviations, the study offers a comprehensive understanding of how stakeholders were perceived to contribute to the initiation phase of the projects in Rubavu District.

The first statement evaluated in the survey addressed stakeholders' participation in defining project needs. The mean score for this item was 3.75 (with a standard deviation of 1.310), indicating that respondents generally agreed that stakeholders were involved in this aspect of project initiation. This score suggests a positive level of engagement, although the relatively high standard deviation indicates that responses were diverse. Some respondents may have felt that stakeholders' input was

more substantial, while others believed their participation was more limited. Therefore, while the involvement in defining project needs was recognized, the variation in perceptions implies that the extent of this participation may have varied significantly across different projects.

Next, the study explored stakeholders' participation in identifying project team members. The mean score for this item was 3.77 (with a standard deviation of 1.335), reflecting a slightly higher level of agreement than for the project needs. This result suggests that there was generally positive recognition of stakeholder input in the selection of project team members. However, similar to the previous item, the standard deviation indicates that responses were somewhat varied, with a degree of uncertainty regarding the consistency of this involvement. While many respondents felt that stakeholders had a notable role in team selection, the differing perceptions signal that some projects may have had stronger or weaker engagement in this area.

When analyzing stakeholders' participation in identifying project financing, the mean score dropped slightly to 3.68 (standard deviation = 1.182). This lower score indicates that while some respondents acknowledged stakeholder involvement in financial decision-making during project initiation, the level of participation in this area was perceived as somewhat weaker compared to the other dimensions. The relatively low standard deviation suggests that this perception was more consistent among respondents, but it also implies that the involvement of stakeholders in project financing may have been limited in practice, or at least not as prominently recognized in the initiation phase.

Finally, the statement on stakeholders' participation in defining project deliverables received the highest mean score of 3.91 (standard deviation = 1.247). This result indicates strong agreement that stakeholders were actively involved in establishing clear project deliverables during initiation. The high mean reflects a broad consensus that defining deliverables was an area where stakeholder participation was particularly influential. The standard deviation, though still relatively high, suggests that there was some variability in how respondents perceived this engagement, but overall, it shows that stakeholders played an important role in shaping the project's outcomes from the very beginning.

Overall, the findings reveal that stakeholders were generally perceived as active participants during the project initiation phase, particularly in defining project deliverables, needs, and team composition. However, there was some variability in the degree of participation across the different projects, with financial involvement being the area of least engagement. These results underline the importance of understanding how the involvement of various stakeholders in different areas of project initiation may influence the project's overall success.

During the interview, the project manager emphasized the critical role of stakeholder involvement in the project initiation phase. According to the interviewee, engaging stakeholders early on allowed the project team to align the project goals with the community's needs, increasing the likelihood of project success. The manager also pointed out that the participation of key stakeholders, particularly in defining project deliverables and identifying project needs, was instrumental in setting realistic and achievable objectives. However, it was noted that stakeholder involvement in project financing was less pronounced, which echoed the survey results showing a slightly lower mean score for that aspect. Additionally, the interview revealed that while stakeholders were generally involved in identifying project needs and deliverables, there were challenges in ensuring consistent engagement across all phases of the initiation. The project manager acknowledged that, at times, constraints such as time and

resource limitations prevented full involvement from all stakeholders, particularly in more complex or resource-intensive projects. Despite these challenges, the overall sentiment was positive, with stakeholders seen as essential for the project's planning and early execution.

These findings are supported by existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of stakeholder engagement in the project initiation phase. Anderson et al. (2022) noted that involving stakeholders early in the project initiation process is critical for aligning project goals with stakeholder expectations, which in turn helps avoid conflicts during later stages of implementation. Their study found that a clear understanding of project objectives, defined collaboratively with stakeholders, leads to more effective execution and better project outcomes, which resonates with the positive feedback from the survey participants and the interview insights.

Similarly, Thompson and Roberts (2020) emphasized the role of early stakeholder participation in reducing delays and improving project transparency, which was reflected in the study's findings. Stakeholders who were actively involved in the identification of project needs and deliverables were more likely to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the project, ultimately enhancing its chances for successful completion. This aligns with the responses indicating that stakeholders in the Rubavu District cooperatives were largely involved in defining project deliverables and setting clear expectations at the initiation stage.

The findings also echo the perspectives of Williams (2024), who highlighted the importance of stakeholder participation in women's development initiatives during the initiation phase. The study found that early involvement helps ensure that the project is aligned with the community's needs, fostering a sense of ownership and increasing the likelihood of sustainable outcomes. This is consistent with the positive results observed in the current study, where stakeholder participation in project initiation was considered pivotal to the project's long-term success.

Additionally, the results are in line with Clark and Martinez's (2021) findings, which indicated that early stakeholder engagement builds trust and collaboration, particularly in community development projects. This study reinforced the idea that involving local community members from the very beginning of a project increases their understanding of the project goals and fosters a collaborative environment, a sentiment echoed by the project manager during the interview. This comprehensive involvement not only improves project planning but also enhances the overall project performance as evidenced in this study.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The findings of the correlations between the independent variables and the dependent variables are summarized and presented in Table 3

Table 3: Correlation between independent variable and dependent variable

		Stakeholder participation in project initiation	Project Performance
Stakeholder participation in project initiation	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	269	
Project Performance	Pearson Correlation	.876**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	269	269

Source: Primary data, 2025

The correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between stakeholder participation during project initiation and project performance. The findings are summarized in Table 3, which shows that there is a strong positive correlation between stakeholder participation in project initiation and project performance. The Pearson correlation coefficient for stakeholder participation in project initiation and project performance is 0.876, which is highly significant (p-value = 0.000). This indicates a very strong positive relationship, meaning that as stakeholder participation in the project initiation phase increases, project performance improves. The results suggest that effective involvement of stakeholders during project initiation plays a crucial role in ensuring the success and performance of the project.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of stakeholder participation during the project initiation phase on project performance. The objective was to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between stakeholder involvement in defining project needs, identifying team members, and setting deliverables, and the overall performance of the project. By applying regression models, the study aimed to quantify how changes in stakeholder engagement during the initiation phase influence project outcomes. This analysis provides valuable insights into the importance of early involvement of stakeholders in ensuring project success and achieving desired results throughout the project lifecycle. Table 4 shows the model summary of the results.

Table 4. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.901 ^a	.812	.809	.47156

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder participation in project initiation

Table 4 presents the model summary for the regression analysis, showing that the model has a strong explanatory power in predicting project performance based on stakeholder participation during the project initiation phase. The R-value of 0.901 indicates a very strong positive correlation between project initiation and project performance. The R Square value of 0.812 suggests that approximately 81.2% of the variance in project performance can be explained by stakeholder participation

during the initiation phase. The adjusted R Square value of 0.809, which accounts for the number of predictors in the model, further supports this strong relationship. Additionally, the standard error of the estimate is 0.47156, indicating a relatively small degree of error in the predictions. This model demonstrates that stakeholder engagement during the initiation phase plays a crucial role in enhancing project performance.

Table 5. ANOVA results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	253.868	4	63.467	285.412	.000 ^b
	Residual	58.706	265	.221		
	Total	312.574	269			

a. Dependent Variable: Stakeholder participation in project initiation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Project Performance

Table 5 presents the ANOVA results for the regression model, which assesses the impact of project initiation on project performance. The results show that the regression model is statistically significant, with an F-value of 285.412 and a corresponding p-value of 0.000. This indicates that the model explains a significant portion of the variance in project performance, and the relationship

between project initiation and project performance is not due to chance. The regression sum of squares is 253.868, while the residual sum of squares is 58.706. The mean square for the regression is 63.467, and for the residual, it is 0.221. These findings confirm that stakeholder participation in the project initiation phase has a substantial and statistically significant impact on project performance.

Table 6. Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.146	.110		1.327	.186
	Stakeholder participation in project initiation	.303	.054	.312	5.561	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Project Performance

Table 6 presents the regression coefficients for the relationship between stakeholder participation in project initiation and project performance. The unstandardized coefficient for stakeholder participation in project initiation is 0.303, with a standard error of 0.054, while the standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.312. The t-value for stakeholder participation in project initiation is 5.561, with a p-value of 0.000, which is statistically significant. This suggests that stakeholder participation in project initiation has a positive and significant impact on project performance. The constant term is 0.146, but it is not statistically significant (p-value = 0.186). Therefore, stakeholder participation in the initiation phase significantly contributes to the overall project performance.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section summarizes the key findings of the study, offers conclusions based on the analysis, and provides practical recommendations for enhancing stakeholder participation in project initiation

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrated that stakeholder participation during the project initiation phase plays a crucial role in enhancing project performance. The findings indicate that when stakeholders are actively involved in defining project needs, identifying team members, and establishing deliverables, the overall success of the project is significantly improved. The strong correlation and positive regression results confirm that early engagement of stakeholders helps in aligning project objectives, setting clear expectations, and fostering ownership, which ultimately leads to better project outcomes. Therefore, integrating stakeholders from the very beginning of a project is essential for ensuring effective planning, reducing risks, and achieving long-term success. This research emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement in the initiation phase as a key factor in driving successful project performance.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is recommended that project managers prioritize early and active involvement of stakeholders during the initiation phase. This can be achieved by organizing structured workshops or consultations to ensure that stakeholders' needs, expectations, and objectives are clearly defined and aligned with the project goals.
2. To improve the quality of stakeholder participation, organizations should invest in training programs that enhance stakeholders' understanding of project management processes, financial planning, and risk management. This will help stakeholders make more informed and effective contributions during the project initiation phase, ultimately improving project outcomes.
3. Regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms should be implemented to ensure that stakeholder input is effectively incorporated throughout the project lifecycle. This could involve periodic check-ins and performance evaluations with stakeholders to ensure the project stays on track and aligned with the objectives set during the initiation phase.

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