



Stakeholder Participation Driving the Sustainability of Safaricom Foundation Projects in Kilifi County, Kenya

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Abstract: Community-based projects in Kenya often face sustainability challenges, with nearly half failing to maintain outcomes beyond the donor funding period. Kilifi County mirrors this national trend. This study examined the influence of stakeholder participation on the sustainability of community-based projects in Kilifi County, focusing on 55 initiatives funded by the Safaricom Foundation between 2022 and 2024. These projects spanned education, health, environment, water, and economic empowerment, engaging a total population of 16,689 stakeholders. Given the impracticality of surveying the entire population, Taro Yamane's (1967) formula was applied to determine a representative sample of 391 participants. Data collection and analysis were conducted concurrently, employing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 to summarise findings and draw inferences. Results revealed a high overall perception of stakeholder involvement ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.638$), with 64% of respondents reporting participation across multiple phases of the project cycle, including initiation, planning, implementation, and sustainability monitoring. These findings underscore the critical role of active stakeholder engagement in fostering ownership, accountability, and long-term project resilience. The study concludes that sustained and inclusive participation throughout the project lifecycle significantly enhances the likelihood of community-based projects enduring beyond the donor funding phase.

Keywords: Stakeholder participation, Sustainability, Community-based. Projects, Population

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1. Introduction

The critical role of stakeholders in ensuring the longevity of community-based projects has garnered increasing scholarly attention. Stakeholder participation constitutes a foundational construct in contemporary project management, significantly fortifying sustainability outcomes. This participation typically encompasses several sequential phases: the identification of salient stakeholders and their concerns, assessment and strategizing around stakeholder needs, engagement design, execution of participatory processes, and subsequent

evaluation and reporting—thus forming a coherent engagement continuum (Silvius & Schipper, 2019).

Empirical findings on the relationship between stakeholder engagement and project sustainability vary. On one hand, Bernat et al. (2023) documented a positive linkage between stakeholder involvement and knowledge management vis-à-vis project management efficacy; on the other hand, Ferreira et al. (2023) observed that external stakeholders in construction contexts often influence project execution, particularly by steering change and market dynamics.

The theoretical underpinnings of stakeholder engagement derive from stakeholder theory, which posits that organizations are accountable to a broader array of individuals and groups affected by their operations, not merely shareholders. This framework emphasizes the dual role of stakeholder pressure and participatory engagement in enhancing organizational value creation and performance, as highlighted by a recent synthesis in the *Journal of Environmental Management* (2024). Additionally, Gilbert and Rasche (2008) articulate how stakeholder theory maps relationships between organizational actions and stakeholder welfare, while Fassin (2009) offers a tripartite classification of stakeholders—namely, “legitimated stakeholders,” “stakewatchers,” and “gatekeepers”—each varying in their claims, influence, and ethical obligations.

Beyond these conceptual advances, timely empirical research reinforces the actionable importance of stakeholder engagement. Mukhlis et al. (2025), examining waste management in peri-urban Indonesia, demonstrated how nuanced stakeholder dynamics critically impact sustainable outcomes. Similarly, recent findings from the *Journal of Applied Social Sciences in Business and Management* (2025) indicate that structured stakeholder management practices significantly enhance water project delivery in the Mt. Kenya region. These contemporary studies collectively underscore that meaningful stakeholder integration—via inclusive, well-designed engagement mechanisms—substantially elevates the sustainability of development interventions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Stakeholder participation has been widely promoted as a critical pathway to achieving sustainable development outcomes. Theoretical perspectives, particularly Sustainability Theory, argue that inclusive engagement fosters ownership, accountability, and adaptive capacity, enabling projects to endure beyond their initial funding cycles (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Yet, empirical studies across Africa highlight the uneven realities of participatory practice, where elite capture, tokenism, and structural inequalities often limit the extent to which communities meaningfully influence project design and implementation (Rigon, 2014; Sheely, 2015). In Kenya, despite policies that embed participatory approaches in development initiatives, many community projects continue to experience fragile sustainability, with benefits dissipating once donor support or external oversight is withdrawn (Kirigha, 2016; Omondi & Kinoti, 2020). This persistent tension between theoretical promise and empirical reality underscores the need for critical inquiry into the effectiveness of participatory strategies.

A key gap in the literature is the limited examination of corporate-led philanthropic interventions, such as those implemented by Safaricom Foundation, which have become increasingly prominent in Kenya’s development landscape. While the Foundation’s initiatives in education, health, and economic empowerment explicitly emphasize

stakeholder participation as a sustainability strategy (Safaricom PLC, 2021), few studies have systematically assessed how this approach translates into durable community benefits, particularly in marginalized contexts such as Kilifi County. Most existing research either evaluates outcomes in broad national terms or focuses on donor-driven and government programs, leaving corporate foundation projects relatively underexplored. This omission is notable given the growing influence of private sector actors in shaping local development trajectories.

Addressing this gap is both timely and significant. Kilifi County faces persistent socioeconomic challenges—including high poverty levels, limited infrastructure, and weak institutional capacity—that heighten the risk of project failure if sustainability is not effectively embedded. By critically examining the role of stakeholder participation in the sustainability of Safaricom Foundation projects, this study not only contributes to theory-building around participatory development but also provides evidence relevant to practitioners and policymakers seeking scalable, locally owned, and resilient solutions. The findings have the potential to inform corporate social responsibility strategies in Kenya and across Africa, where private foundations are increasingly positioned as key development partners.

2. Literature Review

A review of existing scholarship is essential to situate stakeholder participation within broader debates on project sustainability. The literature reveals two distinct but interconnected strands: theoretical perspectives that provide conceptual frameworks for understanding how and why participation influences sustainability, and empirical studies that test these assumptions in practice across diverse contexts. Theoretical contributions, particularly from Sustainability Theory and participatory development frameworks, highlight the mechanisms through which local involvement fosters ownership, resilience, and adaptive capacity. In contrast, empirical research demonstrates both the successes and shortcomings of participatory models, with evidence from African contexts—including Kenya—illustrating how socio-political dynamics, institutional arrangements, and power asymmetries shape outcomes. By examining both strands, this review establishes a foundation for analyzing the role of stakeholder participation in the sustainability of Safaricom Foundation projects in Kilifi County.

2.1 Theoretical Review

Sustainability has become a defining concept in development discourse, shaping both the design and evaluation of community projects. Sustainability Theory,

rooted in ecological and systems thinking, emphasizes that interventions must meet present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs (Brundtland, 1987). Applied to development projects, the theory highlights three interdependent dimensions: social sustainability (inclusivity and empowerment), economic sustainability (viable livelihoods and financial continuity), and environmental sustainability (resource stewardship) (Hopwood et al., 2005). Within this framework, stakeholder participation is not simply an ethical imperative but a functional mechanism to ensure that projects integrate these dimensions holistically. When stakeholders co-design, co-implement, and co-monitor interventions, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership that sustains benefits beyond the funding cycle (Mansuri & Rao, 2013).

Complementing Sustainability Theory, participatory development models such as Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation and Pretty's (1995) typology distinguish varying levels of community involvement. Both argue that sustainability outcomes correlate with the degree of empowerment granted to local actors. Passive participation, where communities are only informed, rarely yields lasting impacts. Consultative participation provides some input but risks tokenism if final decisions rest with external actors. In contrast, functional participation involves communities in project execution, and interactive participation allows them to share decision-making power, creating conditions for sustainability (Pretty, 1995). This theoretical lens is central to understanding variations in project longevity.

Critical scholars, however, caution against uncritical celebrations of participation. Research on elite capture demonstrates that participatory processes often reinforce existing inequalities, allowing influential actors to dominate decision-making and redirect resources (Platteau, 2004; Rigon, 2014; Sheely, 2015). In such contexts, participation can exacerbate marginalization instead of mitigating it. Sustainability Theory acknowledges these risks, emphasizing that projects must be designed with institutional safeguards and accountability mechanisms to prevent capture. The literature also suggests that participation without institutional embedding—such as integration into government systems, budgetary commitments, and regulatory frameworks—may generate short-lived enthusiasm but collapse once external support is withdrawn (Clever, 2001).

Together, these theoretical perspectives converge on three principles relevant to project sustainability: first, that genuine participation fosters ownership and continuity; second, that sustainability requires institutional embedding and systemic integration; and third, that without addressing power asymmetries, participatory processes may reproduce unsustainable outcomes. These insights provide a foundation for examining empirical

evidence from Kenya, Kilifi County, and comparative African contexts.

2.2 Empirical Review

Empirical evidence strongly supports the theoretical link between stakeholder participation and sustainability, though findings are nuanced and context-specific. In Kenya, research consistently demonstrates that interactive and functional participation enhances project outcomes. Kirigha (2016), studying the Kenya Coastal Development Project in Kilifi County, found that donor-funded youth projects that engaged communities throughout the project cycle were more sustainable compared to those where participation was minimal. Similarly, Wanjue (2023) documented that when stakeholders were involved in both planning and implementation, projects had greater continuity and capacity for self-management. These findings align with Omondi and Kinoti's (2020) study on road projects in Kilifi, where participation in monitoring and evaluation contributed to better accountability and long-term performance.

However, other Kenyan studies caution that mobilizing stakeholders does not automatically lead to sustainability. Sheely (2015) observed that while participatory forums in Kenyan counties increased citizen attendance, elites frequently dominated agenda-setting, diluting the substantive influence of community voices. Rigon (2014) reported similar dynamics in Nairobi's slum-upgrading programs, where entrenched power relations limited equitable benefit distribution. These findings highlight the dual nature of participation: it can foster ownership and sustainability but also reproduce inequalities if unchecked.

Safaricom Foundation's portfolio in Kilifi offers practical illustrations of these dynamics. Its partnership with Kilifi County Government to improve maternal, newborn, and child health services exemplifies how co-financing and institutional integration promote sustainability. By contributing KES 15 million alongside the county's KES 40 million, the Foundation ensured that the upgraded facilities were embedded in public health systems, with clear operational and maintenance responsibilities (Safaricom PLC, 2021). This aligns with Sustainability Theory's emphasis on systemic embedding and illustrates how corporate social investments can extend beyond philanthropy into long-term development partnerships.

In contrast, the Ndoto Zetu initiative provides insight into the challenges of smaller, community-driven projects. By supplying equipment to women's, youth, and disability groups in Kilifi—such as sewing machines, coconut graters, and solar pumps—the program empowers local actors to pursue income-generating activities (Biashara Leo, 2020; Safaricom Foundation, 2024). While these projects are highly participatory and responsive to local needs, the literature suggests that without market linkages, governance training, and post-grant monitoring, their

sustainability may be limited (Mansuri & Rao, 2013). Leadership turnover, internal conflicts, and lack of technical expertise are common risks documented in similar initiatives across Kenya and beyond.

Comparative evidence from other African countries reinforces these patterns. In Uganda, Mansuri and Rao (2013) found that participatory water projects achieved better maintenance outcomes when communities were involved in selecting technologies and trained in basic repairs. In Ghana, elite capture undermined participatory budgeting exercises, limiting the effectiveness of community voices in influencing resource allocation (Ayee, 2016). In Tanzania, Cleaver (2001) noted that while villagers participated actively in natural resource management projects, traditional hierarchies often shaped decision-making, raising questions about inclusivity and equity. These comparative insights underscore that while participation enhances sustainability, contextual factors such as governance structures, power dynamics, and institutional arrangements strongly shape outcomes.

Education-focused projects in Kilifi further illustrate the role of participation. Safaricom Foundation's construction of classrooms and ablution blocks at Chasimba Primary School relied on engagement with school boards and parents (Safaricom Foundation, 2011). Evidence suggests that when school management committees share responsibility for resource maintenance, education infrastructure projects are more likely to endure (Wanjue, 2023). Yet, outreach-based interventions such as medical camps in Kilifi—organized by Safaricom and M-PESA Foundations—highlight the limitations of short-term activities. While these reach thousands of beneficiaries, their sustainability is constrained unless linked to referral systems and integrated into county health planning (Kachwanya, 2023).

Synthesizing these insights, it becomes clear that the sustainability of Safaricom Foundation projects in Kilifi depends not only on stakeholder involvement but also on the quality of participation, the extent of institutional embedding, and the presence of safeguards against elite capture. Large-scale, co-financed projects embedded within public systems appear more sustainable than micro-grants or outreach programs that rely solely on community enthusiasm. Nonetheless, both models have value: the former ensures systemic continuity, while the latter fosters grassroots empowerment. The challenge lies in combining these approaches through robust monitoring, market linkages, and institutional partnerships.

Despite these advances, critical gaps remain. Few studies provide longitudinal evaluations of Safaricom Foundation projects beyond two to three years, limiting understanding of whether participatory gains are sustained over time. Moreover, comparative research across African contexts reveals persistent risks of elite capture and inequity, underscoring the need for transparent governance structures. Future research should

therefore prioritize long-term impact assessments, participatory monitoring frameworks, and cross-country comparisons to better understand how participation contributes to sustainability across varied contexts.

Sustainability of community-based projects refers to the ability of initiatives to maintain operations, services, and benefits beyond the cessation of external funding (Espinosa, 2000; World Bank, 2000). The Project Management Institute (2006) outlines key dimensions influencing sustainability, including continued facility operation, equitable benefit distribution, consistent monitoring, institutional stability, and environmental preservation. Addressing these dimensions holistically is critical, as the deterioration of any can jeopardize long-term outcomes (IFAD, 2006). Prior research highlights factors such as community capacity, technology appropriateness, policy support, and adequate training as vital to sustainability (Bhandari & Grant, 2007; Gizachew, 2005). Recent studies emphasize integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations into project outcomes (Orieno et al., 2024; Ozumba et al., 2020; Pirozzi et al., 2023).

Effective project design is a determinant of sustainability. Sustainable planning, encompassing management control, task allocation, and risk mitigation, has been positively associated with project success (Chow et al., 2021). Inadequate planning skills and limited adoption of project management principles hinder sustainability, underscoring the need for skilled managers or targeted capacity building (Muronga & Iminza, 2020). Early integration of sustainability principles in planning can mitigate delays and abandonment (Ozumba et al., 2020).

Communication and community participation are equally important. Active involvement of beneficiaries across all project stages enhances empowerment, problem-solving capacity, and project ownership (Ugwu & Aruma, 2019). However, participation is often undermined by top-down approaches (Ronoh, 2020). Empirical evidence shows that sustainability correlates with participant commitment and manageable project portfolios (Kayijuka, 2021; Yusuf et al., 2020).

Stakeholder engagement also plays a critical role. Best practices involve identifying key actors, assessing their needs, and fostering inclusive dialogue (Silvius & Schipper, 2019). While several studies report a significant positive link between engagement and sustainability (Bernat et al., 2023; Ferreira et al., 2023), others find the relationship statistically insignificant (Wu et al., 2023; Shaukat et al., 2021). Nonetheless, scholars advocate for active engagement of diverse stakeholders to enhance project outcomes (Osobajo et al., 2021).

Finally, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) ensure accountability, adaptive learning, and timely problem-solving (Njue & Mulwa, 2022; Smilka, 2019). Evidence from Kenya demonstrates that robust M&E systems significantly enhance project utility and sustainability

(Biwott et al., 2017; Nyaga, 2022). Recommendations include increasing monitoring frequency and strengthening M&E capacity through targeted training.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kilifi County, Kenya, focusing on fifty-five (55) community-based projects funded by the Safaricom Foundation between 2022 and 2024. These projects spanned five key sectors—education, health, environment, water, and economic empowerment—and were geographically distributed across the county. Kilifi County was selected as the study area due to its high prevalence of community projects coupled with the documented challenge of sustaining project outcomes beyond donor funding cycles.

3.2 Study Design

A descriptive survey design was adopted for three main reasons. First, it enabled the capture of real-world practices within the selected community projects without manipulating variables, thus reflecting the current state

of stakeholder participation and sustainability. Second, it facilitated the inclusion of a broad sample through simple random sampling, enhancing the representativeness of the findings. Third, the design supported the use of quantitative methods of analysis in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), enabling the generation of frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, and other descriptive statistics to explain how stakeholder participation influences project sustainability.

3.3 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The study employed stratified random sampling to ensure proportional representation of all stakeholder categories. The target population comprised 16,689 project beneficiaries, 11 project supervisors, 16 project managers, and 4 coordinating managers from the Safaricom Foundation. Due to the large population size, Yamane Taro’s (1967) simplified formula for sample size determination was applied at a 5% margin of error and a 95% confidence level, yielding a sample of 391 respondents. This aligns with Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) sample size recommendations for the given population. The sample was proportionally allocated across the four strata, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Size Distribution

Respondents	Population Size	Sample Size
Beneficiaries	16,689	360
Supervisors	16	16
Project Managers	11	11
Coordinating Managers	4	4
Total	16,720	391

Source: Researcher, 2024

3.4 Data Collection

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires tailored to capture both demographic information and variables related to stakeholder participation and project sustainability. The instruments were pre-tested for clarity and reliability before administration. Data collection targeted all four strata of respondents, ensuring that perspectives from both operational and managerial levels were captured.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data were coded, cleaned, and entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were generated to summarize stakeholder participation levels

and sustainability indicators. Cross-tabulations were used to explore relationships between variables, while the interpretation process focused on identifying patterns, trends, and implications for project management practices. The analytical approach ensured systematic condensation, summarization, and presentation of numerical data to support valid inferences.

4. Results and Discussion

The study assessed the influence of stakeholder participation on the sustainability of Safaricom Foundation-funded community-based projects in Kilifi County. Respondents rated six participation indicators on a five-point Likert scale. The highest mean score was recorded for the general level of stakeholder participation (M = 4.42, SD = 0.638),

followed by confidence in stakeholder commitment (M = 4.17) and regular input on project reports (M = 4.13), reflecting strong engagement practices. The lowest-rated item, “capable of driving the project without external donor support” (M = 4.01), indicated some uncertainty regarding self-reliance post-funding. The overall mean score of 4.15 and moderate variability (SD = 0.568–0.718) suggest consistently high, though slightly varied, perceptions of participation.

Analysis of involvement across the project life cycle showed that 64% of respondents participated in one or more phases—initiation, planning, execution, and sustainability monitoring—while 36% reported no involvement. This exclusion may limit community ownership and long-term sustainability, as literature

underscores the importance of consistent stakeholder engagement from planning through implementation (Chirenje et al., 2013; Wambui & Kisimbii, 2020).

Correlation analysis confirmed a significant positive relationship between stakeholder participation and sustainability ($r = 0.586$), with participation explaining 41.8% of the variance in sustainability outcomes. These findings align with stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010), emphasizing that inclusive, participatory processes enhance transparency, accountability, and mutual responsibility—critical factors for sustaining benefits beyond donor exit. However, the participation gap identified suggests that institutionalizing broader inclusion strategies could further strengthen the resilience and continuity of community-based projects in Kilifi County.

Table 2: Relationship between stakeholder participation and sustainability of community projects

Descriptive Analysis	Mean= 4.13	SD= 0.631	The results demonstrated consistent agreement
Linear Regression	R=0.757	ANOVA(P=0.000) Coefficient: (B= 0.418,P= 0.05)	Statistically significant: the study revealed that all p-values were below the threshold of 0.05
Multiple Regression	R2 = 0.573	ANOVA = (P = 0.000) Coefficient:(B=0.21,P=0.015) (B= 0.21, P=0.0.15)	

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The primary objective of the study was to examine how stakeholder involvement influenced the sustainability of community projects implemented by the Safaricom Foundation in Kilifi County. The findings of the study indicate that there was a considerable level of stakeholder participation, and their dedication and assistance played a crucial role in the sustainability of the projects. The respondents highlighted the importance of project social impact, negotiation, and ownership in shaping project sustainability. It was observed that stakeholder participation had a positive and substantial correlation with project sustainability, accounting for 41.8% of the overall project sustainability.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several strategic actions are proposed to enhance the sustainability of donor-funded community projects in Kilifi County and beyond.

1. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Systems

A well-designed and integrated M&E framework is essential for tracking project relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability. In line with the *Kenya Evaluation Guidelines* (Ministry of Planning, 2020) and the *National Integrated Monitoring and Evaluation System (NIMES)* (Government of Kenya, 2021), organizations should:

- Establish dedicated M&E units or appoint qualified M&E officers.
- Engage external experts to improve planning and assessment rigor.
- Enhance staff capacity through targeted

training, scholarships, and study leave opportunities (Mungai, 2020).

- Actively involve stakeholders in M&E processes to foster ownership (Chebet, 2021).

1. Develop and Implement a Project Communication Management Plan

Effective communication is critical for coordination, transparency, and decision-making (Wairimu, 2020; Ministry of ICT, 2024). Project managers should:

- Design communication plans detailing channels, frequency, and responsibilities.
- Review and update plans regularly to reflect changing contexts.
- Use both formal and informal communication methods to ensure message clarity (Karnja & Ochieng, 2021).

2. Institutionalize Inclusive Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholder engagement should begin at project identification and continue through needs assessment, planning, execution, financial management, and evaluation (Beratan, 2020; SDG Secretariat, 2020). Practical steps include:

- Ensuring fair and transparent selection of project participants based on merit (Mutiso, 2020).
- Consulting communities before project initiation to align with local priorities.
- Involving stakeholders in governance structures and decision-making processes.

4. Enhance Project Design Processes

Robust project design facilitates goal alignment, resource efficiency, and innovation (BellTower, 2020; Ministry of Planning, 2020). Project managers should:

- Utilize visual planning tools such as flowcharts, sketches, and prototypes.
- Incorporate innovative, context-specific solutions to address local challenges.
- Align design objectives with long-term sustainability and national development goals.

Implementation Outlook

Collectively, these recommendations are implementable within existing institutional frameworks if supported by adequate capacity building, policy alignment, and stakeholder commitment. Embedding these strategies into organizational practice will not only strengthen project sustainability in Kilifi County but also provide a replicable model for other regions.

Suggestion for Further Research

From the findings of the results, it is suggested that

additional research be carried out in community projects supported by various organizations throughout the country, including Kilifi County, considering different factors that could impact project sustainability. Finally, similar studies should be conducted in diverse types of organizations to better understand the broader implications of project sustainability in community-based initiatives

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