



# Role of Citizen Engagement on the Sustainability of County Development Projects in Chuka Municipality, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya

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**Abstract:** Inclusive governance is founded on the participation of citizens and is critical in maintaining county development projects. This paper has explored the role of citizen engagement in the sustainability of development projects within the Chuka Municipality, Tharaka Nithi County. A mixed-methods approach was employed guided by the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Ladder of Participation created by Arnstein. Stratified and random sampling were used to select a sample of 394 respondents comprising of the representatives of households, traders, county officials and community leaders in a population of 27,598. The data were gathered through questionnaire, interviews, and focus group discussion and analysed through descriptive statistics, Spearman Rank Correlation and thematic analysis. Results showed a high positive correlation with statistical significance between the citizen engagement and project sustainability ( $\rho = 0.623, p < 0.01$ ). Citizens who were actively engaged in designing, implementation, and monitoring of the project played their role in ownership, accountability, and mobilization of local resources to maintain the project. The early inclusion enhanced relevance of projects, whereas the participatory monitoring provided timely repair and functionality. The paper concludes that meaningful citizen engagement is a democratic practice and a realistic facilitator of sustainable outcomes. It suggests the incorporation of participation throughout the project cycle with the assistance of participatory budgeting, community forums, systems of citizen feedback, and online platforms that will lead to greater transparency and accountability.

**Keywords:** Citizen engagement, Sustainability, Project Ownership, Participatory Monitoring

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## 1. Introduction

Sound governance is essential to socio-economic and political growth all over the world (Gisserlquit, 2022). An essential aspect of good governance is citizen participation which is pertinent to the success and sustainability of development projects all over the world. SDGs, especially Goal 16 on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, highlight the importance of inclusive, participatory, and representative procedures in governance processes that guarantees successful development (United Nations, 2015). Citizen participation has been associated with better project

results around the world, because of additional project transparency, accountability and communal ownership (Kamau & Osumba, 2021). Indeed, a World Bank study (2018) indicated that the projects that implemented citizen feedback on a high level stood a higher chance of 60% of attaining their intended goals as opposed to low or non-engaged projects. Furthermore, the trend towards greater inclusion and more democratic processes is even more popular in Europe and North America where more than 70 percent of local governments adopted the policies to promote access of communities to a larger role in governance (Kimani, 2022).

The importance of citizen engagement as a key pillar of good governance and development is gaining prominence. The above recognition is informed by the fact that governance: it needs to be a bottom-up activity, whereby the people on whom it is to be exercised play a proactive role in the process. Engaged citizens can provide unique local knowledge, different points of views, and the feeling of ownership, which are essential features in ensuring the success of development programs (Putnam, 2020). Internationally, other governments and organizations have realized that participation of the citizenry in the decision making allows better delivery of a project, greater transparency and increased community ownership. These advantages are not only hypothetical; they have been proved in different settings. In one case study, the meta-analysis of 20 case studies demonstrated that the efficiency of resource allocation in public projects rose by 35%, and the level of corruption decreased by 25 percent because of citizen participation (De Vries et al., 2018). Besides, the Organisation of the Economic Co-operation and Development (2020) notes that cities with an active engagement approach have shown an average of 40% improvement in service delivery compared with those that have no practices of engagements.

This desire to have more involvement by the people in governance is a trend that has been witnessed in other parts of the world especially in Europe and North America where citizens are now involved in governance as a matter of course. These areas have been characterized by policies that embrace the idea of citizens' involvement in local governance, which is part of the larger strategy towards democratizing the governance process by embracing citizenship (Torfing & Sorensen, 2019). As an example, more than 80 percent of localities in Denmark and Sweden now have formal mechanisms of citizen engagement, e.g., neighbourhood councils and participatory budgeting, which have enabled the communities to make direct decisions about local matters (Wampler et al., 2021). This change is supported by the fact that there is increased awareness that democracy works best when it is participatory in nature with more inclusive governance resulting in more legitimate and sustainable decisions (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; Michels & De Graaf, 2017).

In Africa, citizen participation in projects has increasingly been identified as critical to project success and sustainability. This is because there is an increasing awareness that the participation of citizens in the governance process translates into more productive and accountable governance that provides people with better-suited public services (Chikulo, 2016). In South Africa, systems to promote the participation of people are applied, and some municipalities report that their service delivery efficiency has increased by 25 percent due to them (Awortwi, 2020). The same frameworks have been used in Ghana where the involvement of citizens has yielded a 40 percent increase in the levels of

accountability and transparency in local governance (De Vries & Nemec, 2019). The purpose of these frameworks is to institutionalize the engagement of the citizens by introducing a systematic way of citizen involvement in the processes of decision-making and as a result transparency and accountability will be improved. Nonetheless, the problem is that the implementation of these frameworks is also associated with numerous obstacles, such as scarcity of resources, political meddling, and insufficiency of local governments (De Vries & Nemec, 2019).

Tharaka Nithi County is one of the counties in Kenya that is trying to increase the participation of citizens in its developmental activities. County government has also established different engagements with the local community in terms of planning and realization of development projects such as construction and enhancement of Chuka Municipality (Tharaka Nithi County Government, 2020). These efforts however have been comparatively successful with other issues like inadequate infrastructure, underfunding, and socio-political factors being a barrier in the extent to which citizen participation is realized (Kamau & Osumba, 2021). These problems reflect the experimental nature of trying to realize meaningful citizen engagement in a scenario where it is difficult to have resources and capacity.

In Tharaka Nithi County the existing practices of citizen engagement are public forum, community meetings, and stakeholder consultations, with the scope of all of these activities unequally covering Tharaka Nithi County (Mutunga & Muendo, 2019). It is important to have an insight into the practices of the current citizen engagement to determine how engaged the local community has been in the development projects and what can be done to improve the situation. Moreover, it may be deemed beneficial to examine how the involvement of citizens affects the success and sustainability of such projects and offer beneficial recommendations to policymakers and development professionals (Mugambi & Mwaniki, 2020). Such insights hold essential clues in formulating interventions that will result in the improved performance of citizen engagement with the implication ensuring that citizen (people) needs are addressed in development projects.

Participation in Tharaka Nithi County could greatly improve with known barriers to participation identified and addressed. Some of these barriers are logistical, cultural, political interference, and resource constraints (Njiru, 2018). A multifaceted approach to developing strategies needs to overcome these barriers and take advantage of opportunities to make increased community involvement in county development projects possible. It is necessary to address the systemic barriers to citizen participation in the region such as an approach. To address these problems, there is need to have governance systems designed to suit the local condition of Tharaka

Nithi. In Tharaka Nithi County, much is done in terms of strengthening citizen engagement but there is more yet to be done. By addressing the issues raised and translating them to effective participation by all stakeholders, successful development projects in the county will have been achieved. With actions to deal with these concerns, Tharaka Nithi can achieve its development efforts not just in an effective manner but also in a sustainable way that may be more attuned to the needs and desires of its people.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Adequate citizen engagement ensures that communities are actively involved in decision-making, projects reflect local needs, and development initiatives are sustainable and inclusive. However, in Kenya, the practice of citizen engagement remains low despite supportive laws such as the Constitution of Kenya and the County Governments Act. National statistics indicate that only about 35 percent of Kenyans participate in local decision-making, with participation falling below 30 percent in Tharaka Nithi County. In Chuka Municipality, weak involvement has led to abandoned or poorly maintained projects, and in some cases, initiatives that fail to meet community needs. Many projects collapse because citizens are not adequately consulted, leaving them with little obligation to support or sustain outcomes. Although research has examined participation in Kenya broadly, little attention has been given to the specific rural and urban dynamics of Tharaka Nithi County. The involvement of marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities also remains poorly understood. As a result, citizen participation in Chuka Municipality is often hurried, underfunded, and ineffective, leading to project failures, community dissatisfaction, and wastage of public resources. This study therefore seeks to examine the relationship between citizen participation and the sustainability of county development projects in Chuka Municipality.

## 1.2 Objective of the Study

The study aimed to establish the role of citizen engagement on the sustainability of County Development Projects in Chuka Municipality, Tharaka Nithi County.

## 2. Literature Review

The active participation of citizens in the design, implementation, and operation of initiatives makes citizens feel like they own and are responsible, which encourages long-term commitment to the maintenance of projects (Kamau, 2024). This ownership feeling leads to a decrease in the reliance on external participants and fosters the efficient mobilization of the local factors, including labor, materials, and knowledge, which will enhance cost-effectiveness and performance results

(Adeleke and Chukwuemeka, 2023). Recent studies indicate that the direct community engagement promotes relevance, efficiency, and sustainability of the development interventions as it aligns them with the priorities and local realities (UNDP, 2021). As an example, African and Asian development initiatives that incorporated the community viewpoint via participatory budgeting, advisory boards, or consultative forums had a higher utilization rate and reduced abandonment than externally imposed ones (Rahman, 2022). Research also indicates that active participation by the citizens promotes continuous monitoring, response, and accountability, which enhances transparency and minimizes the chances of mismanagement or corruption (Kimenyi & Wanjiru, 2023). Community involvement in the project decision-making process leads to social cohesion and trust between the authorities and the citizens, which has a beneficial effect in future joint projects (Banza & Gaspart, 2022). When the inclusion of the participation is well integrated into the project instead of a token gesture, the development projects will be more resilient, effective, and well-accepted by society, which subsequently supports the idea that meaningful inclusion is not an additional feature but a central idea in sustainable development (Rahman, 2022).

The use of accountability loops defined through the persistent engagement and oversight of the communities and implementing authorities is one of the fundamental components of citizen participation (Fox, 2022). Participatory budgeting, citizen monitoring, and community consultations are among the mechanisms that allow citizens to recognize the challenges early and propose solutions to them and assess the responsiveness of leaders (Garcia & Patel, 2023). The strategies improve transparency, trust, and efficacy of the project hence minimizing the chances of failing the project. According to comparative studies, accountability mechanisms enhance the outcomes of projects across various settings such as participatory rural appraisals in Asia, ward-based consultations in Kenya and citizen scorecards in Latin America (Banza & Gaspart, 2022).

The implementation entails a sense of accountability, which makes communities no longer mere receivers but agents of the development of their own communities (Muturi, 2022). Furthermore, systems of accountability and participation can be used to make sure that development projects can be continued to be functional once external support is either cut off (World Bank, 2023). Participatory budgeting in Kenya includes small, but important projects funded by the citizens at the county level, including boreholes, feeder roads, and market infrastructure, which meet direct demands and collectively hold communities accountable (Kamau, 2024). According to recent research, there are not only communities that determine the decision but also communities that control the implementation of the project by detecting the misdirected funds or poor quality of work and helping to take corrective measures (Fung,

2023). It is reflected in a similar trend in surrounding countries of Tanzania and Uganda, where the presence of citizen control had led to better service delivery, maintenance, and accountability at the institution (Barnes, 2021). Such results indicate that the institutionalization of participatory practices, their inclusivity, and active support by communities will result in maximization of sustainability achievements (UNDP, 2021).

This has been highlighted by massive international and regional studies that disclose that citizen involvement is not just a democratic ideal but a strategic tool of improving relevancy, effectiveness and sustainability of development projects. When communities are actively incorporated into the process of designing, implementing, and monitoring, there are more likely to meet the needs of the local community and, thus, achieve higher utilization rates and fewer abandonment outcomes than externally imposed projects (Fox, 2015). Such a participatory method creates a feeling of ownership and responsibility in community members which is important in ensuring the development interventions are successful and sustainable in the long term (World Bank, 2023). The direct mobilization of the local resources like the labor force, land and the raw materials among others besides the participatory decision-making process plays a significant role in the sustainability of development projects. Communities in Kenya who donate resources such as stones, sand and timber to build schools, water points or health facilities get closer to the projects and tend to conserve and maintain them in the long run (Kimenyi & Wanjiru, 2023). This type of resource mobilization does not only decrease the costs of implementation but also enhances the level of self-reliance and resilience, this is due to the fact that this type of resource mobilization lessens the reliance on external actors within the community (Kibet, 2023).

Engagement of citizens has also been enhanced further through the integration of technology in the participatory processes. SMS / USSD codes, WhatsApp groups, bulky sms, interactive community dashboard, and similar tools have turned out to be efficient in increasing the level of inclusivity and ensuring the two-way communication of the local governments and their citizens (World Bank, 2023). These online channels are used as additions to the traditional tools, such as barazas and town-hall meetings, where people get the necessary information in time and have a chance to raise the issues or give recommendations at a distance (Chiumbu, 2019). Nevertheless, these technological tools should be integrated into a systematic, participatory, and open-ended system that would guarantee the relevant participation of citizens (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012). Underutilization, neglect and abandonment of projects are some of the challenges that may be encountered in the project that have not been well engaged by the communities. Without the buy-in of the citizens, it may create the impression of imposed projects, which lowers

usage, inefficient protection of resources, or vandalization (Mwangi, 2022). In Kenya, rural studies in counties have indicated that schools, health, and water facilities were not utilized or in a good condition, when the residents were not consulted during the planning and decision-making (Odhiambo, 2022). This underscores the need to have a structured and meaningful participation, which turns passive beneficiaries into active stakeholders, hence making them more accountable and mutually responsible. This grade of participation exposure proves that participatory development has not just gone beyond being a democratic ideal but a feasible means of promoting efficiency, accountability and sustainability.

The community-based development initiatives in Kenya, such as the example, demonstrate that the projects based on local funds are cheaper to sustain and encourage more collective responsibility than the ones run externally with little community engagement (Wanjala, 2024; Kamau, 2023). The same happened in Uganda and Tanzania, where communities volunteered in rural road building or rebuilding schools, and the results were similar, as they were cheaper, socially cohesive, and built stronger trust in the local government (Kimenyi & Wanjiru, 2023). Such contributions when incorporated into the processes of participation would make development initiatives capture the realities on the ground and stand better chance of sustaining even after the project cycle.

Meaningful and adequate citizen engagement in terms of public barazas or participatory budgeting, or community oversight committee, results in more sustainable, relevant, and effective projects than those applied without citizens' participation (Kimenyi & Wanjiru, 2023). An example is projects serving to supply water to Machakos County and schools to be built in Tharaka Nithi have remained active and managed well when communities were actively involved in planning and supplying labor or materials and even served in the local management committees (Wanjala, 2024). Projects that are initiated without a substantial level of community participation are usually poorly used, forgotten, or even abandoned (Mbaka, 2022). Poor usage, ineffective resource protection or vandalism may occur due to a lack of citizen buy-in, which causes communities to feel that their projects are forced upon them (Brown, 2019). In rural counties in Kenya, empirical evidence reveals underutilization or poor upkeep of schools, health institutions, and water facilities when the people were not part of important decision-making activities or consulted on the beneficiaries (Odhiambo, 2022; Kamau, 2024). This fact supports the fact that community involvement is not merely a procedural necessity but rather a feasible approach to improving the sustainability, accountability, and project performance (Fox, 2022; World Bank, 2023). Formally organized participation provides both instrumental, i.e. better efficiency, and transformative, i.e. empowerment, better social cohesion, and improved

relations with government actors (Chambers, 2012; Banza & Gaspart, 2022).

The framework that will be utilized in the study is the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) since it presupposes that intention to engage in a specific activity depends on three key factors: the attitude to the activity, the perceived social pressure / support of other individuals, and the belief that a particular person can make a change. When this theory is used in relation to community development, it would mean that individuals would be more than willing to participate in local projects when they are not negatively disposed of civic involvement, when they believe that their peers, leaders, or community organizations would push them to join them, and when they feel that their actions can bring visible changes. As an illustration, individuals in Kenyan counties, such as Tharika Nithi or Machakos, would be more cooperative to volunteer labor or attend a planning session when they feel that their input would be listened to and that would have an impact on the decision processes (UNDP, 2021). This demonstrates that motivation to get involved cannot just be simply due to availability but psychological and social factors that influence this motivation.

### 3. Methodology

The research design used in this study was a mixed-method research design by investigating the association between citizen engagement and sustainability of county development projects in Chuka Municipality, Tharaka Nithi County. This design was chosen due to the fact that it will integrate the advantages of both the quantitative and the qualitative methodology, which permitted a more in-depth study of the phenomenon. The quantitative approaches were used to provide quantifiable levels of participation, outputs, and trends, whereas the qualitative approach identified the experience lived, perceptions, and accounts of the stakeholders presenting the contextual dynamics of citizen engagement. This mix allowed conducting both statistical trends and the social and governance aspects of participation in a deeper manner.

The population to be targeted was made up of the 27,598 residents of Chuka Municipality who were directly or indirectly engaged in county development initiatives. The population was separated into five main categories of stakeholders who include 22,378 household representatives, 5,000 traders of Chuka town and Ndagani Market, 100 county government officials, 50 community leaders, and 70 other stakeholders, including project coordinators and technical officers of Tharaka Nithi County. The population matrix is summarized below:

**Table 1: Population Matrix**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Population Size</b>
Household Representatives	22,378
Traders (Chuka Town & Ndagani Market)	5,000
Government Officials	100
Community Leaders	50
Other Stakeholders	70
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,598</b>

To be representative, a multi-stage sampling plan was adopted which combined stratified, proportionate, purposive and simple random sampling. The population was stratified into the five groups of stakeholders, and all groups were represented. The proportionate sampling allocated sample sizes in proportion to the population whereas purposive sampling selected the key informants who had specialized knowledge regarding the county development projects. Household representatives and traders were sampled using simple random sampling to reduce selection bias.

The sample of 394 respondents was determined based on the 95 percent level of confidence and the 0.05 margin of error by using the formula provided by Yamane (1967). This was apportioned in proportion: 320

household representatives, 71 traders, 1 government official, 1 community leader and 1 other stakeholder and this gave a good cross-section of diverse participants.

The collection of data began with the ethical clearance of Tharaka University Ethics Review Committee and Post Graduate Committee. Structured questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data through the respondents (household representatives) who answered the questionnaires in 15 administrative units of Chuka Municipality that included Kiereni, Mugwe, Mwonge, Kibumbu, Rubati, Thuita, Ndagani, Raguti, Kirege, Njaina, Chuka Township, Kathigiririni, Kirubia, Kangorani, and Gituntu. The questionnaires contained closed-ended questions that could be analysed statistically and open-ended questions that could provide

qualitative information such as demographics, participation level among citizens and the obstacles to participation.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were used in the collection of qualitative data. Three key informants were interviewed which included a Municipal Manager of Chuka Municipality, Chairperson of Ndagani Market Traders Association and a project coordinator in Caritas-Tharaka Nithi County. There were 6 FGDs each involving traders from Chuka Town market and Ndagani market (each group had 6-10 participants) so that the discussions would lead to data saturation and reveal the themes that could not be detected in surveys. The interviews and FGDs were all tape recorded but accompanied by detailed field notes to capture non-verbal information and contextual information.

In Kathwana Municipality, a pilot study was used to experiment and refine the instruments on 39 participants, which was 10 percent of the sample. Clarity, relevance and reliability were enhanced using feedback. The expert reviews and pilot testing improved instrument validity, whereas test-retest, Cronbach's Alpha (=0.8) with quantitative data, and inter-coder reliability with qualitative coding with qualitative data improved reliability.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used in data analysis. The SPSS was used to code and analyze quantitative data, apply descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), and Spearman Rank Correlation to test the relationship between citizen engagement and project

sustainability. Thematic analysis of qualitative data was conducted according to the document of Braun and Clarke (2006) because the transcripts and field notes were coded in NVivo to produce some major themes that included early inclusion, participatory monitoring, trust-building, and resource mobilization. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative results had given an overall picture of dynamics of citizen engagement.

Ethical issues were strictly adhered to during the study. The Ethics Review Committee of Tharaka University informed the committee, and all the participants gave their consent before the data collection. The respondents were guaranteed voluntary participation, anonymity and the right to drop out at any point without being penalized. Ethical standards provided by the National Commission of Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) were observed during the study without compromising the local cultural norms and sensitivities. The anonymity of personal identifiers was guaranteed by secrecy in the course of transcription and reporting, and the safety of the information was ensured by the safe storage of information to avoid unauthorized access. Also, there was an effort to ensure that any possible psychological or social distress to the participants was minimized in case of interviews or focus group discussions.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Citizens' Perceptions on Sustainability and Impact of County Development

**Table 2: Summary of Citizens' Perceptions on Sustainability and Impact of County Development Projects (%)**

Project Indicator	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Long-Term Benefits of County Projects	9.3%	37.9%	25.9%	17.2%	9.7%
Improved Community Well-being	9.3%	33.8%	33.8%	13.4%	9.7%
Environmental Protection in Projects	8.3%	37.9%	35.5%	9.0%	9.3%
Leadership & Community Involvement	8.3%	37.9%	35.5%	9.0%	9.3%
Maintenance and Functionality	8.3%	35.9%	41.0%	7.9%	6.9%
Satisfaction with Long-Term Impact	9.3%	35.9%	34.1%	14.8%	5.9%

In all six indicators, most of the respondents were seen to be sceptical or not satisfied with the situation with the Disagree category having the highest number of respondents as the answer to all the six questions. The greatest dissatisfaction was also recorded in sustainability of environmental protection (37.9 %) and leadership/community participation (37.9 %). Conversely, the lowest perceived success was evident in the Agree and Strongly Agree answers on just about every inquiry and seldom would go beyond the 18% mark. The most positive perception (37.9%) was registered in Long-Term Benefits of County Projects whereas with maintenance and functionality, the combined agreement was lowest at only 14.8% (7.9%

Agree, 6.9% Strongly Agree). Also, the neutral responses were also quite high, particularly in the issues related to maintenance and functionality (41.0%) and keeping the environment (35.5%), which could signify doubt, perhaps apathy, or a gap in information among the general population.

All the above findings point to a deep insufficient trust and satisfaction in the process of planning, implementation, and long-lasting outcome of county development projects within Chuka Municipality. The inability to agree or stay neutral of the viability, inclusiveness, and effects of such projects among the majority of the citizens indicates failure on the part of

participatory planning, transparency, and project sustainability. This trend demonstrates a larger problem of governance wherein the exertions of the citizens are not satisfied and the whole development reflects into nonexistence and unslowed benefits of the local populations.

This issue correlates with the trends, mentioned by Kabuya and Mwaura (2022), who found that most of the county governments in Kenya experience problems in integrating sustainability in project structures. This gap between the citizens and the local authorities can be explained by inadequate follow-up mechanisms of the project after its implementation, the inability to empower the community and lack of in-place maintenance structure. As Onyango and Wamugo (2023) note, the essence of citizen participation, particularly, within the post-implementation phase, is critical in terms of developing a project sustainability and a feeling of ownership by the community. Public projects could not produce the desired long-term effects unless they are participated actively and continuously.

Additionally, the high neutrality of a number of indicators implies that most citizens might lack proper access to project performances or have limited knowledge of the results of developments. Kariuki and Mburu (2023) indicate that at times such apathy is as a result of poor communication strategies and hence the absence of monitoring and feedback mechanisms in the grassroots. The low score of environmental sustainability further highlights the possibility of a disregard of ecosystem benefits, which is also emphasized by Wamuyu and Mwangi (2023) who urge to consider environmental protection in every step of planning and execution of a project.

To address these challenges, however, the following measures need to be put into consideration. To begin with, the county government must institutionalize

maintenance budget and put in place clear asset management structures, where they are complemented with citizen oversight (Wanyonyi & Gikonyo, 2023). Second, transparency is required to be increased by developing regular feedback mechanisms to explain to society the progress and effect of projects (Otieno & Wanjala, 2023). Third, the focus on inclusive planning processes and capacity-building efforts must be prioritized, specifically, the efforts must be targeted at vulnerable and marginalized groups. Through this approach, equitable participation is encouraged. Finally, citizen scorecards and social audits, which have been effective in other counties when it comes to improving accountability, should be mainstreamed to assess and measure the performance of the project delivery (Ngugi & Kimani, 2021).

Filling the gaps in knowledge identified is not only crucial to enhancing the results of the county development projects but also helps to win the confidence of the population and create a real interest in participating in it. The sustainability of development activities in Kenya depends long-term on the active engagement of citizens in the development activities along with the transparency of government and well-organized methodology of maintaining and assessing maintenance of development activities. These are among the necessary elements of translating the inputs to the public resources into long-term social and economic development.

## 4.2 Quantitative Findings

The study examined the relationship between citizen engagement and the sustainability of county development projects in Chuka Municipality. Results from the Spearman’s Rank Correlation test are summarized in **Table 3**.

**Table 3: Spearman’s Rank Correlation Between Citizen Engagement and Sustainability**

Variable	Sustainability	Citizen Engagement
Sustainability	1.000	0.623**
Citizen Engagement	0.623**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
n	289	289

**Note:** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Study Findings

The correlation coefficient (0.623;  $p < 0.01$ ) indicates that there is a statistically significant relationship between sustainability of development projects and citizen engagement. This is in the sense that the more citizens are involved in the planning process, implementation, and monitoring, the more chances the project might survive and be utilized. The validity of these findings was confirmed when a z-test ( $z = 10.57$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) established that it was not possible as a result of chance. Out of the 289 valid responses studied, there is a

lot of evidence to support the thought that citizen participation is one of the primary triggers of project sustainability in Chuka Municipality.

## 4.3 Qualitative Insights

In addition to the statistical findings, qualitative data presented in the interviews and the focus group discussions presented added value to the understanding

of the contribution of citizen engagement to project sustainability. These themes were quite prominent and included early involvement, monitoring and feedback, local support, and trust and accountability.

- Early Involvement

According to respondents, citizens have a sense of ownership and responsibility of projects whenever they are consulted in the planning process. One of the community leaders discussed it in a KII:

*“Once we are consulted in providing our views prior to the commencement of a project, we feel that it is ours. We ensure that it works out because it is what we need, and not what the leaders believe we need.”*

This was echoed by another participant of an FGD:

*“The projects that involved people consultation such as the market sheds are still used. However, where there was no consultation, there are facilities that have not been utilized.”*

- Monitoring and Feedback

Monitoring was also found to be useful in the maintenance of functionality and timely repair. One of the traders during an FGD commented:

*“We tend to notice the cracks or leaks prior to the arrival of the officials. In case we are on the monitoring team, we report fast and repairs are executed. This makes the project continue running.”*

- Local Support

The results also indicated that citizens were eager to donate resources in case they felt as part of the American nation. One of the respondents, a household, stated:

*“In the water project, the people volunteered to work and even contributed to the restoration of pipes by giving small amounts. We didn’t wait for the county. It was so because we felt it was part of us”.*

- Trust and Accountability

Lastly, the participation of citizens enhanced the confidence between the communities and county officials. Openness and involvement instilled trust in the belief that the projects were in the interest of the people. Being a county officer admitted in a KII:

*“People have been more trusting of us when they realise that their voices are being counted. They do not fight projects they protect them.”*

These observations support the quantitative results: high citizen participation promotes the sense of ownership, fosters accountability and mobilization of the community support, all of which guarantee the sustainability of development initiatives in Chuka Municipality.

## 4.4 Discussion

This study has shown that citizen engagement is not a marginal activity but a fundamental pillar to the sustainability of development projects. Although technical knowledge is the basis of project designing and implementation, technical input is not a guarantee of success in the long term perspective. Social ownership in which communities feel that a project belongs to them came out as being equally important. When citizens are effectively involved in decision-making processes, they

provide ideas that make projects address the needs of the locals and they are at the frontline to protect such investments. Such twin strategy of integrating both technical input and social ownership has greater and more sustainable development effects.

These findings are in line with the past studies in the area. Nabatchi and Amsler (2020) claim that the creation of public value through the involvement of the population is the increased responsiveness of the services to the needs of citizens. Similar findings on project outcomes are offered by Ortieno and Ouma (2023) who reveal that counties with organized systems of citizen engagement have a better project outcome, both in terms of efficiency and sustainability. Muigua (2022), warns that development projects in Kenya fail or are not well used when the voices of the community are not heard, which supports the applicability of the results of Chuka Municipality. The results of the Chuka Municipality indicated that projects that were more engaging in terms of the extent to which they were engaged performed better in terms of accountability, on-time maintenance, and mobilization of local resources. As an example, faults could be reported fast by citizens monitoring a project, and it is possible to make repairs in time. Others volunteered work or donated, they have demonstrated that where people have a sense of ownership they will be ready to put money in maintenance of infrastructure. These findings do reaffirm that, development does not only concern the physical buildings but also the culture of being participative, transparent and accountable.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The paper finds that citizen engagement that is meaningful enhances sustainability of county development projects. A clear way to make design, implementation and monitoring more relevant, accountable and long term used is to have citizens actively participate.

### 5.2 Recommendations

Seek to increase maximum participation of the citizens at every project stage. The decision making, planning, implementation, and monitoring of the county development projects should involve all citizens irrespective of their social and economic status. This facilitates transparency, ownership and sustainability. County Government (Project Managers and Community Engagement Officers): Responsible parties. Local Community Leaders. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): responsible parties.

Implement participatory tools in order to improve citizens voice and accountability. Budgeting forums,

community score cards, and mechanisms of planned feedback should become part of the institution to enable the citizens to actively assess the performance of projects and shape policies. Responsible Parties County Government Finance and Planning Departments, Project Monitoring and Evaluation Units, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).

Utilize online platforms to reach out to more people and interact. Use online resources like SMS alerts, mobile applications and social media platforms to bring more awareness, feedback and involvement of the citizens in development projects. Agreements of the action: County ICT Department, County Communication officers, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that engage in digital access.

Enhance the ability of the citizens and the officials to participate meaningfully. It should be a regular training, workshops, and sensitization undertaking in order to form the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the citizens and the public officials in order to generate informed, constructive and sustained involvement. Parties to be Responsible: County Human Resource and Training Departments, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Community Development Officers.

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