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Effect of Project Management Practices on Sustainability of Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, Rwanda

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Abstract: *This study examined the effect of Project Management Practices on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, Rwanda. Specifically, the study examined effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. A descriptive and correlational research design was employed using quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study targeted 267 individuals involved in the project, from which a sample of 160 respondents was selected using sampling techniques. Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and simple linear regression analysis were used to analyze the data. The findings indicated that stakeholder involvement contributes positively to project sustainability through participation in planning and decision-making, stakeholder consultation, involvement of local leaders in implementation and monitoring, and communication between project management and stakeholders. The correlation analysis showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between stakeholder involvement and project sustainability ($r = .675, p < .001$). Regression analysis further established that stakeholder involvement significantly predicts project sustainability, explaining 45.5% of the variation in project sustainability. The study concluded that stakeholder involvement is an important factor in sustaining the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The study recommends that project management strengthen beneficiary participation in planning and decision-making, involve local authorities in monitoring and implementation, conduct stakeholder consultation meetings, improve communication mechanisms, and develop a sustainability plan before project closure to ensure continued project activities and benefits.*

Keywords: *Stakeholder involvement; Project sustainability; Rural youth employment; Project management; Stakeholder participation; Huye District; Rwanda*.

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1. Introduction

Project sustainability has become an important concern in development interventions because successful implementation of project activities does not necessarily guarantee that project benefits will continue after external support ends (World Bank, 2017). Globally, development projects increasingly emphasize inclusive stakeholder engagement as a mechanism for improving project relevance, ownership, accountability, and continuity. Stakeholder involvement enables beneficiaries, implementing organizations, government institutions, community representatives, and other interested actors to participate in project planning, implementation, monitoring, and decision-making. Recent international practice also emphasizes that youth should not only be recipients of development interventions but should actively participate in shaping programmes intended to improve their employment and livelihoods. The International Labour Organization (ILO), for example, emphasizes multi-stakeholder collaboration and the active participation of youth representatives in developing strategies for sustainable youth employment (ILO, 2024).

In developing countries, sustainability of development projects remains a challenge because many interventions depend on external financial, technical, and institutional support during implementation. Stakeholder involvement can help address this challenge by enabling beneficiaries and local institutions to contribute local knowledge, identify project needs, participate in decisions, and assume greater ownership of project outcomes. Recent evidence also emphasizes the importance of continuous stakeholder engagement throughout the project life cycle because early consultation alone may not be sufficient to maintain commitment and institutional support. Alnhari and Qureshi (2024), for example, emphasize continuous stakeholder identification, communication, and feedback as important mechanisms for improving project management and reducing implementation problems.

In Africa, youth employment interventions increasingly depend on collaboration among governments, development partners, private-sector organizations, civil society, youth organizations, and local communities. The African Union–ILO Youth Employment Strategy for Africa, endorsed in 2024, emphasizes a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, social partners, youth representatives, and development actors. The strategy recognizes that African youth require coordinated support for skills development, entrepreneurship, market access, and financing and calls for collaborative approaches to creating sustainable and inclusive employment opportunities (ILO, 2024). Recent African evidence further indicates that stakeholder participation can influence the sustainability of youth-oriented development projects. For example, Kasoli and Mutiso found that stakeholder engagement was among the factors significantly associated with the sustainability of youth empowerment projects in Machakos County, Kenya.

In East Africa, stakeholder involvement has become particularly important in youth livelihood and community development projects because such interventions require cooperation between beneficiaries, local government institutions, implementing organizations, and development partners. Recent evidence from Kenya demonstrates the importance of community participation for sustaining development projects. Mutheki and Kasembeli (2025), in their study of the Kenya Equity in Education Project in Turkana County, found a strong and statistically significant relationship between community stakeholder engagement during project implementation and operational sustainability. The study emphasized the importance of involving community members in project implementation and strengthening their participation in project management structures. Similarly, recent research on youth livelihood projects in Uganda reported that stakeholder engagement enhanced project relevance, stakeholder ownership, monitoring, resource mobilization, and decision-making, and concluded that effective stakeholder engagement was essential for project sustainability (Uster & Namatovu, 2024).

In Rwanda, youth employment has remained an important national development priority. The country's current Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Sector Strategic Plan 2024–2029 seeks to promote a competitive and resilient private sector capable of creating meaningful employment opportunities, particularly for young people (FAO, 2024). The strategy emphasizes firm productivity, sustainable value chains, innovation, and an enabling environment for employment creation (Ministry of Trade and Industry [MINICOM], 2024). The National Employment and Skills Strategy 2024–2029 also provides a framework for strengthening employment and skills development in Rwanda. These national strategies demonstrate that sustainable youth employment requires coordination among government institutions, employers, development partners, training institutions, and young people themselves. Recent developments in Rwanda further demonstrate the importance of stakeholder collaboration in youth employment initiatives. In 2024, the Global Conference on Decent Jobs for Youth was held in Kigali and brought together governments, employers' and workers' organizations, youth-led organizations, and other youth employment stakeholders to promote partnerships for skills development and job creation. The conference emphasized collaboration and partnerships as mechanisms for creating more and better employment opportunities for young people (ILO, 2024).

The importance of stakeholder involvement is also evident in emerging youth employment initiatives in Rwanda. For example, the Youth Entrepreneurship for the Future of Food and Agriculture project, implemented from 2024 to 2027, brings together several organizations to support youth employment opportunities in Rwanda's agri-food systems. The programme aims to mobilize and support young people through digital engagement, skills development, and incubation programmes, demonstrating the importance of partnerships in implementing youth employment interventions.

The Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District provides an important context for examining the effect of stakeholder involvement on project sustainability.

The project involves youth beneficiaries, project coordinators, and local authorities who are directly involved in or support project implementation. The dissertation identifies a target population of 267 individuals, comprising youth beneficiaries, project coordinators, and local authorities. Within the project, stakeholder involvement includes beneficiary participation in project planning and decision-making, participation of local leaders in implementation and monitoring, consultation before major project decisions, and communication between project management and stakeholders.

However, despite the growing emphasis on stakeholder engagement in youth employment and development programmes, there remains limited empirical evidence specifically examining the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of rural youth employment support projects at the district level in Rwanda. Recent studies in Kenya and Uganda have examined stakeholder engagement and project sustainability, with findings indicating that stakeholder participation, consultation, communication, and community involvement can strengthen project ownership and the continuity of project outcomes (Mutheki & Kasembeli, 2025; Uster & Namatovu, 2024). However, these studies were conducted in different institutional, socio-economic, and geographical contexts, and their findings cannot automatically be generalized to rural youth employment projects in Rwanda. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence exists on how stakeholder involvement contributes specifically to the ability of rural youth to maintain employment, apply acquired skills, expand enterprises, and remain economically active after external support ends. Therefore, this study sought to examine the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, Rwanda

1.1 Statement of Problem

In Rwanda, youth employment remains an important development concern despite continued government efforts to create employment opportunities and strengthen youth skills and entrepreneurship (Thomason, 2023). The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) reported that the annual unemployment rate was 17.2% in 2023, while unemployment among young people aged 16–30 years was considerably higher at 20.8%, compared with 14.6% among adults. Rural areas also recorded a higher unemployment rate of 18.0% compared with 15.8% in urban areas. These figures demonstrate that young people, particularly those living in rural communities, continue to face significant challenges in accessing employment opportunities (Government of Rwanda [GoR], 2020).

The challenge extends beyond unemployment because many young people remain outside both employment and education or training (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda [NISR], 2023). NISR's 2024 Labour Force Survey estimated Rwanda's youth population aged 16–30 years at approximately 3.67 million, of whom about 1.05 million were neither in employment nor in education or training, representing 28.4% of the youth population. The situation was more pronounced in rural areas, where the youth NEET rate was 31.2%, compared with 22.7% in urban areas. In addition, the 2024 survey reported that 35.8% of young people were unemployed within the NEET population. These statistics indicate that creating employment interventions alone may not be sufficient; mechanisms are also needed to ensure that employment and livelihood benefits are maintained over time (Lee & Ujwiga, 2024).

Youth employment support projects are therefore expected to provide sustainable benefits by strengthening beneficiaries' skills, employment opportunities, enterprise development, and capacity to continue economic activities after project support ends ((Innova, 2024). However, the continuation of such benefits may depend on how projects are managed and, particularly, on the extent to which beneficiaries, local authorities, project coordinators, and other relevant stakeholders participate in planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and communication. Inadequate stakeholder involvement may result in weak ownership, limited accountability, poor coordination, and difficulties in maintaining project activities after external assistance is reduced. The current manuscript identifies these issues but does not sufficiently quantify their magnitude at the district level (Habimana, 2022; Uwizeyimana & Mugiraneza, 2023).

Although previous studies have examined stakeholder involvement and project sustainability in Rwanda and other East African countries, there is limited empirical evidence specifically on how stakeholder involvement contributes to the sustainability of rural youth employment support projects in Huye District (Gasana, 2023). The existing literature has often examined broader development or skills projects, leaving a contextual gap concerning rural youth employment interventions and their ability to maintain employment opportunities, skills application, beneficiary participation, and institutional support beyond the implementation period. Therefore, this study examined the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, Rwanda.

The study was guided by the following specific objective:

i. To examine the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District.

2. Literature Review

A review of prior, relevant literature is an essential feature of any academic research. A comprehensive literature review provides the foundation for understanding the existing body of knowledge, identifying research gaps, and supporting the development of the study. It also enables the researcher to establish relationships between previous findings and the current study. This section reviews literature related to the research objectives

2.1.1 Project Management Practices

Project management practices refers to the intentional adoption and application of recognized project management principles, tools, and practices throughout the various phases of a project from initiation and planning to execution, monitoring, and closure (Heller, 2023). Projects that systematically incorporate project management frameworks are more likely to achieve defined objectives, stay within budget, and be completed on schedule compared to projects without such structures (PMI, 2021). Structured planning and control mechanisms, such as risk registers and performance metrics, help project teams anticipate challenges and allocate resources more effectively, while PMI (2021) highlights that inclusive project management practices improve alignment between project activities and organizational strategies (Brynne, 2024).

In addition to improving technical planning and control, project management practices enhances coordination and communication among project stakeholders (Schwalbe, 2023). Standardized methodologies provide a common language and expectations for team members, reducing ambiguity and improving accountability. Using formal project plans and schedules promotes shared understanding of tasks, deadlines, and responsibilities, while Turner (2024) argues that disciplined project governance strengthens decision-making and ensures that corrective actions are taken promptly when deviations occur. These factors contribute to more predictable project outcomes and stronger confidence among stakeholders in the project's capacity to deliver results (Terry, 2022).

In the context of this study, the practices of project management practices is particularly important for ensuring sustainability (Willis, 2024). Projects in rural and community settings often face complex challenges, such as limited resources, shifting stakeholder expectations, and environmental or social barriers. Integrating project management tools such as stakeholder analysis, structured monitoring and evaluation, and risk assessments can improve the project's ability to adapt to these challenges and maintain its intended outcomes beyond the implementation phase. For example, by embedding systematic planning and learning mechanisms, the Rural Youth Employment Support Project can better sustain employment initiatives for youth even after external funding or support decreases, thereby enhancing long-term community impact and resilience (Schipper, 2024).

2.1.2 Stakeholder Involvement

Stakeholder involvement refers to the participation of individuals, groups, institutions, and organizations that have an interest in or are affected by a project in activities such as planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Effective stakeholder involvement is important for project sustainability because it allows project beneficiaries and other relevant actors to contribute their knowledge, expectations, and resources to the project. Tumwebaze and Irechukwu (2022) examined stakeholder involvement and sustainability of a World Bank-funded Skills Development Project in Gasabo District, Rwanda, and established that stakeholder involvement was significantly associated with project sustainability. Their study emphasized that participation in decision-making, consultation, and stakeholder empowerment can strengthen ownership and contribute to the continuation of project benefits. Similarly, Uwamariya, Safari, and Kengere (2021) examined stakeholder participation and sustainability of a donor-funded project for deaf beneficiaries in Kicukiro District, Rwanda, and found a significant relationship between stakeholder participation and project sustainability.

Stakeholder involvement can also promote project sustainability by strengthening beneficiaries' ownership and commitment to project activities. When beneficiaries participate in identifying project needs, setting priorities, making decisions, and monitoring implementation, they are more likely to understand the objectives of the intervention and develop a sense of responsibility for its outcomes. Mugabo and Wanjiku (2023) examined stakeholder engagement and sustainability of an educational project in Ngoma District, Rwanda, and found a strong positive relationship between stakeholder engagement and project sustainability. Their study considered stakeholder participation in project planning, implementation, and monitoring and concluded that involving stakeholders in determining project activities and considering their feedback contributed to the sustainability of the intervention. Similarly, Tumwebaze and Irechukwu

(2022) found that stakeholder involvement was positively associated with sustainability in the Skills Development Project in Gasabo District, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder empowerment, consultation, and participation in decision-making.

In the context of rural youth employment projects, stakeholder involvement is particularly important because the sustainability of employment and livelihood outcomes depends on the continued participation of beneficiaries, local authorities, implementing organizations, and other relevant actors. Bukhala, Ekambi, and Kithandi (2025) found that stakeholder identification, involvement, and communication significantly contributed to the sustainability of donor-funded projects among non-governmental organizations in Kenya, indicating that maintaining effective relationships with stakeholders can support the continuation of project outcomes. Similarly, Muriithi and Gatumi (2025) established that the involvement of community members, government agencies, NGOs, and private-sector actors enhanced ownership, resource mobilization, and implementation of development projects in Baringo County, Kenya, thereby contributing to project sustainability.

2.1.3 Project Sustainability

Project sustainability refers to the ability of a project to maintain its activities, benefits, outcomes, and institutional support beyond the initial implementation period or after external assistance has been reduced. Sustainability therefore extends beyond the achievement of planned project outputs and focuses on whether the benefits generated can continue to serve intended beneficiaries over time. Shiferaw et al. (2024) emphasize that sustainability of development interventions depends on factors such as continued benefits, institutional capacity, local ownership, and the ability of implementing systems to maintain project activities. Similarly, International Labour Organization (2024) emphasizes that sustainable youth employment requires institutional and policy mechanisms that support young people to access and maintain productive employment opportunities. These perspectives indicate that project sustainability involves the continuation of project activities and benefits as well as the capacity of local institutions and beneficiaries to maintain project outcomes.

Project sustainability is particularly important for youth employment and livelihood interventions because their success depends on whether beneficiaries can continue applying the skills, knowledge, and opportunities acquired during implementation. African Development Bank (2024) emphasizes the importance of strengthening skills development, entrepreneurship, and employment systems to create lasting economic opportunities for young people. Similarly, Government of Rwanda (2024) identifies productive and sustainable employment as an important component of Rwanda's current development agenda and emphasizes the need to strengthen employment opportunities and skills development. These perspectives suggest that sustainable youth employment projects should generate benefits that extend beyond the period of direct project support, including continued employment opportunities, application of acquired skills, enterprise development, and institutional support for beneficiaries.

In the context of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, project sustainability concerns the continuation of project activities and benefits beyond the period of external support. The dissertation assesses sustainability through continued project activities, sustainable employment opportunities for youth beneficiaries, continued application of knowledge and skills acquired through the project, continued support from local institutions, and achievement of sustainable project outcomes. This understanding is consistent with Mutheki and Kasembeli (2025), who found that community stakeholder engagement was positively associated with operational sustainability of a development project in Kenya, and Uster and Namatovu (2024), who found that stakeholder engagement supported ownership, monitoring, resource mobilization, and sustainability of youth livelihood projects in Uganda. These findings suggest that the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project should be understood in terms of whether its employment and livelihood benefits, beneficiary capacities, project activities, and institutional support can continue over time

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework provides the foundation for explaining the relationship between the variables examined in a study. For this study, Stakeholder Theory provides an appropriate theoretical foundation because the study focuses on how stakeholder involvement influences the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The theory emphasizes that organizations and projects should consider the interests, expectations, and contributions of all stakeholders who can affect or be affected by their activities.

2.2.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory was developed by Freeman (1984) and argues that organizations should create value not only for their owners or managers but also for groups that have an interest in or can influence organizational activities. Freeman (1984) identifies stakeholders as individuals or groups who can affect or are affected by the achievement of organizational objectives. The theory therefore emphasizes the importance of identifying stakeholders, understanding their interests, maintaining relationships with them, and involving them in decisions that affect their interests. In project management, this perspective is relevant because projects involve multiple stakeholders whose cooperation, resources, knowledge, and support can influence project outcomes.

Stakeholder Theory assumes that organizations and projects achieve better outcomes when they establish meaningful relationships with stakeholders and consider their legitimate interests in decision-making. Rather than treating stakeholders as passive recipients of project benefits, the theory views them as active participants in value creation. Awa, Etim, and Ogbonda (2024) explain that stakeholder theory encourages organizations to respond to diverse stakeholder expectations and integrate social and economic concerns into organizational activities. In the project management context, Santos and Fernandes (2024) demonstrate that stakeholder prioritization is important for projects pursuing sustainability because different stakeholders possess different levels of influence and interests in project outcomes. Their study further shows that stakeholder management can be aligned with sustainability principles to help project managers identify and prioritize stakeholders whose participation is important for achieving sustainable project outcomes.

The theory is particularly relevant to project sustainability because sustainable outcomes require cooperation and commitment from stakeholders throughout the project life cycle. Stakeholders can contribute local knowledge, identify implementation problems, provide feedback, mobilize resources, and support decisions that influence the continuation of project activities. Fobbe (2024) explains that stakeholder engagement is grounded in stakeholder theory and involves continuous interaction, learning, and responsiveness between organizations and their stakeholders, rather than a one-time consultation process. Similarly, Shokouhi and Bachari (2025) identify stakeholder management as an important component of sustainable project management and emphasize that sustainability needs to be integrated into project processes rather than treated as an additional activity. These perspectives suggest that continuous stakeholder participation can strengthen the social and organizational conditions required for projects to generate and maintain long-term benefits

2.3 Empirical Literature

Empirical literature presents findings from previous studies that have investigated the relationship between financial innovations and SME performance in different contexts. Reviewing empirical studies helps to identify existing evidence, methodological approaches, major findings, recommendations, and gaps that require further investigation. This section focuses on previous studies related to financial product innovations and SME performance, highlighting how innovative financial solutions influence business efficiency, financial accessibility, profitability, and sustainability

2.3.1 Stakeholder Involvement and Project Sustainability

A study by Chen & Zhang (2022) examined the role of stakeholder engagement in rural employment projects in China. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys of 120 beneficiaries and interviews with 15 project coordinators. The findings revealed that projects with structured stakeholder participation through regular meetings, feedback sessions, and joint planning had significantly higher sustainability outcomes, including continued employment opportunities and community acceptance. The study concluded that active stakeholder involvement enhances project legitimacy and long-term success. The authors recommended implementing formal stakeholder engagement plans, ensuring beneficiaries participate in decision-making, and regularly updating stakeholders on project progress. However, the study focused only on Asian rural settings, leaving a gap regarding the applicability of these engagement strategies in African rural contexts, particularly in post-funding sustainability scenarios.

Hansen & Bauer (2021) conducted a case study of rural youth development projects in Germany to evaluate the impact of community leader involvement on project sustainability. Using qualitative interviews with 20 community leaders and 10 project managers, the study found that projects with strong institutional stakeholder support were more likely to achieve continued funding and maintain employment programs beyond the initial project phase. The study concluded that stakeholder legitimacy and institutional alignment are critical for sustaining projects. It recommended early engagement with institutional stakeholders and formalized partnerships with local authorities. A research gap identified was the limited empirical evidence on how youth themselves, as primary stakeholders, influence the long-term sustainability of employment projects.

In Japan, Tanaka & Weber (2021) conducted a longitudinal survey involving 200 youth beneficiaries across multiple rural employment initiatives to assess the impact of beneficiary participation on project outcomes. Findings indicated that active involvement of youth in planning and monitoring significantly increased program completion rates, skill retention, and employment continuity. The study concluded that beneficiary engagement directly enhances project sustainability and recommended integrating participatory approaches in all project stages. However, the research gap highlighted the lack of exploration into the combined effect of multiple stakeholder groups including government, community leaders, and NGOs on sustaining project outcomes, rather than focusing only on the beneficiaries.

A study by Fischer & Lang (2022) in Austria applied a quasi-experimental design to measure the effect of stakeholder communication channels on rural project sustainability. The study compared two sets of rural projects those with structured communication frameworks and those without. Results showed that projects with regular, transparent communication between stakeholders had higher continuity rates, fewer conflicts, and greater satisfaction among beneficiaries. The study concluded that effective stakeholder communication strengthens the sustainability of development initiatives and recommended formal communication strategies, including feedback loops and reporting protocols. The research gap identified was the need to explore how cultural context modifies the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement strategies, especially in non-European rural settings.

In a study of community-based employment projects in South Korea, Lee & Choi (2022) employed a survey research design, targeting 150 project participants and 20 coordinators, to evaluate stakeholder participation's effect on long-term project impact. Findings revealed that projects with inclusive stakeholder involvement demonstrated improved capacity-building, stronger community ownership, and continued vocational training initiatives. The study concluded that inclusive stakeholder engagement enhances project sustainability and resilience. Recommendations included establishing multi-stakeholder committees and encouraging youth leadership in project governance. The research gap highlighted the limited empirical evidence on how stakeholder involvement interacts with other project management factors such as resource allocation and team collaboration to influence sustainability outcomes.

A study by Niyonkuru & Uwase (2021) examined the role of stakeholder involvement in rural youth employment programs in Nyamagabe District, Rwanda. The researchers used a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys of 100 youth beneficiaries with interviews of 10 local government officials and 5 project coordinators. The findings revealed that projects where youth, local authorities, and community leaders were actively engaged experienced higher levels of program continuity, skill retention, and community support. The study concluded that stakeholder engagement is a key determinant of project sustainability in Rwandan rural contexts. The authors recommended establishing formal stakeholder committees, conducting regular participatory workshops, and ensuring that youth voices are integrated into planning and monitoring processes. The research gap identified was the limited understanding of how stakeholder involvement interacts with other project management practices, such as team collaboration and resource allocation, to sustain youth employment projects in Rwanda, particularly in Huye District.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive and correlational research design to examine the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, Rwanda. The descriptive aspect enabled the researcher to obtain detailed information regarding the extent to which stakeholders participated in project planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, consultation, and communication. The correlational aspect was used to establish the relationship between stakeholder involvement and project sustainability and to determine the extent to which stakeholder involvement contributes to the sustainability of the project.

The study was conducted in Huye District, Rwanda, focusing on the Rural Youth Employment Support Project. The project was selected because it was designed to support rural youth employment and livelihood opportunities and involves different categories of stakeholders in its implementation. The study focused on youth beneficiaries, project coordinators, and local authorities because they are directly involved in or affected by the project and possess relevant information regarding stakeholder participation and the sustainability of project outcomes. The inclusion of these groups enabled the researcher to obtain information from stakeholders with different experiences and responsibilities concerning the project.

The target population consisted of 267 individuals involved in the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. This population comprised 260 youth beneficiaries, 2 project coordinators, and 5 local authorities. Youth beneficiaries were included because they are the primary recipients of the project interventions and directly experience the benefits and challenges associated with project sustainability. Project coordinators were included because they are responsible for coordinating and managing project activities, while local authorities were included because they provide institutional support and participate in project implementation and monitoring. In this study, the sample size was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula, which is commonly used when the population size is known. The formula is expressed as:

$$\boxed{n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}}$$

Where:
n = sample size
N = total population (267)
e = margin of error (0.05)
Applying the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2} = \frac{267}{1 + 267(0.05)^2} = \frac{267}{1 + 267(0.0025)} = \frac{267}{1 + 0.6675} = \frac{267}{1.6675} \approx 160$$

Therefore, the study used a sample size of 160 respondents selected from the total population of 267 individuals involved in the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District**.**

The study employed stratified random sampling to select respondents from the different categories of stakeholders involved in the Rural Youth Employment Support Project. The population was divided into distinct strata comprising youth beneficiaries, project coordinators, and local authorities, after which respondents were selected from the respective categories. This approach was considered appropriate because it ensured that the major stakeholder groups involved in the project were represented in the study. The dissertation indicates that these categories were selected because they possessed relevant knowledge and experience concerning stakeholder involvement and project sustainability.

Data were collected using questionnaires and interview guides. Structured questionnaires were administered to the selected respondents to obtain quantitative information concerning stakeholder involvement and project sustainability. The questionnaire included statements addressing stakeholder participation in project planning and decision-making, stakeholder consultation, participation of local leaders in implementation and monitoring, and communication between project management and stakeholders. Interview guides were used to obtain qualitative information from key informants regarding stakeholder participation and the sustainability of project activities and benefits. The use of both questionnaires and interviews enabled the researcher to obtain quantitative evidence and additional explanations concerning stakeholder involvement and project sustainability.

Before the main data collection exercise, the research instruments were subjected to validity and reliability assessment to ensure that they were appropriate for collecting the required information. The questionnaire items were designed to capture the study variables and their respective indicators. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, while validity was established through review of the research instruments to ensure that the items adequately represented stakeholder involvement and project sustainability. The use of validity and reliability procedures helped ensure that the instruments generated consistent and relevant information for addressing the study objective.

The researcher obtained the necessary authorization before conducting data collection in Huye District. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and the nature of their participation before data were collected. Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process, including voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and responsible use of the information provided by respondents. Participants were informed that the information collected would be used for academic purposes and that their participation was voluntary.

After data collection, the completed questionnaires were checked for completeness, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive analysis was used to summarize respondents' views concerning stakeholder involvement and project sustainability. Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between stakeholder involvement and project sustainability. Simple linear regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which stakeholder involvement predicts project sustainability and to test the study hypothesis. Qualitative information obtained from interviews was analyzed thematically and used to provide additional explanations of the quantitative findings. The results were presented using tables and explanatory text to facilitate interpretation and draw conclusions regarding the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents, analyzes, and interprets the findings of the study on the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, Rwanda. The findings are presented according to the study objective, which was to examine the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The analysis focuses specifically on stakeholder involvement as the independent variable and project sustainability as the dependent variable.

4.1 Response Rate

The study targeted a sample size of 160 respondents. Out of these respondents, 156 questionnaires were administered to youth beneficiaries involved in the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, representing 97.5% of the total sample. Of the 156 questionnaires distributed, 136 were successfully completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 87.2%. However, 20 questionnaires were not returned, representing 12.8% of the distributed questionnaires. In addition, 4 key informants were interviewed, comprising 1 Project Coordinator and 3 Local Authorities. These key informants were purposively selected because of their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, coordination, supervision, and monitoring of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project.

Table 1: Response Rate of Respondents

Response Rate	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires Returned	136	87.2
Questionnaires Not Returned	20	12.8
Total	**156**	**100**

Source: Field Data, 2026

The response rate of 87.2% indicates a high level of participation among the selected respondents and provided sufficient information for the analysis of stakeholder involvement and project sustainability. The high response rate also reduced the likelihood that non-response would substantially affect the interpretation of the findings. The four key informants provided additional qualitative information concerning stakeholder participation and project sustainability. The combination of quantitative responses and qualitative information therefore provided an adequate basis for examining the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District.

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics of Stakeholder Involvement and Project Sustainability

Table 1 presents respondents' perceptions regarding stakeholder involvement in the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. A five-point Likert scale was used where 5 = Strongly Agree (SA), 4 = Agree (A), 3 = Neutral (N), 2 = Disagree (D), and 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD). The analysis was intended to assess how stakeholder involvement contributes to the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project.

Table 2: Level of Agreement on Stakeholder Involvement and Project Sustainability

Views of Respondents	N	Mean	SD
Beneficiaries are actively involved in project planning and decision-making processes.	136	4.3	0.78
Local leaders regularly participate in project implementation and monitoring activities.	136	4.1	0.83
Stakeholders are regularly consulted before major project decisions are made.	136	4.2	0.75
Effective communication exists between project management and stakeholders.	136	3.9	0.89
Stakeholder involvement has contributed to the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project.	136	4.4	0.71
Overall Mean		**4.18**	**0.79**

Source: Field Data, 2026- **Key:** M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

Table 2 presents respondents' perceptions regarding stakeholder involvement and project sustainability in the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The findings indicate that respondents strongly agreed that stakeholder involvement has contributed to the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project (M = 4.4, SD = 0.71). Respondents also agreed that beneficiaries are actively involved in project planning and decision-making processes (M = 4.3, SD = 0.78). These findings suggest that involving beneficiaries in planning and decision-making has enhanced ownership of project activities and strengthened the continuity of project outcomes after implementation.

The findings further reveal that respondents agreed that stakeholders are regularly consulted before major project decisions are made (M = 4.2, SD = 0.75) and that local leaders regularly participate in project implementation and monitoring activities (M = 4.1, SD = 0.83). This indicates that the project management team has promoted participatory management by engaging key stakeholders throughout the project cycle. Such involvement enhances transparency, accountability, and shared responsibility, which are essential for sustaining project benefits within the community.

The results also show that respondents agreed that effective communication exists between project management and stakeholders (M = 3.9, SD = 0.89). Although this item recorded the lowest mean score among the stakeholder involvement indicators, it still demonstrates that communication mechanisms were generally effective in facilitating information sharing and collaboration. Improving communication channels further could strengthen stakeholder participation and enhance long-term project sustainability.

The overall mean score of 4.18 and standard deviation of 0.79 indicate that respondents generally agreed that stakeholder involvement positively influenced the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project. The relatively low standard deviation suggests consistency in respondents' views regarding the importance of involving stakeholders throughout project implementation. From the findings, the study revealed that stakeholder involvement significantly contributed to the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project. The results indicate that active participation of beneficiaries, local authorities, community leaders, and other stakeholders enhanced project ownership, improved transparency, strengthened accountability, and promoted continuity of project activities beyond the implementation period. These findings imply that projects which actively involve stakeholders throughout planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation are more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes than projects with limited stakeholder participation.

The qualitative findings from the interviews further supported the quantitative results regarding the influence of stakeholder involvement on project sustainability. The majority of respondents indicated that involving beneficiaries, local authorities, and community representatives throughout project implementation created a sense of ownership and commitment that encouraged the continuation of project activities even after external support declined. Respondents explained that stakeholder participation enabled the project to identify community priorities, respond to local challenges, and implement interventions that reflected the actual needs of beneficiaries.

One respondent explained:

> *"The project involved beneficiaries and local leaders from the planning stage up to implementation and monitoring. This participation created a sense of ownership among community members because they felt that the project belonged to them. As a result, many project activities have continued even after external support was reduced."*

Another respondent emphasized the importance of continuous consultation and communication with stakeholders in improving project sustainability.

> *"Regular meetings with beneficiaries, community leaders, and project staff allowed us to identify challenges early and make joint decisions. Because everyone participated in decision-making, it became easier to solve problems and maintain project activities after implementation."*

Similarly, another respondent highlighted that stakeholder involvement improved trust and accountability among project participants.

> *"Stakeholder involvement strengthened cooperation between project management and beneficiaries. People became more committed because they understood the project objectives and were involved in monitoring progress. This greatly contributed to sustaining the project outcomes."*

In addition to these responses, several interviewees explained that active stakeholder participation strengthened collaboration among beneficiaries, local authorities, and implementing agencies. Respondents noted that regular consultations improved transparency, reduced misunderstandings, and encouraged collective responsibility for maintaining project achievements. They further explained that community ownership increased beneficiaries' willingness to continue project activities independently after donor support diminished.

Overall, the interview findings demonstrate that stakeholder involvement positively influenced project sustainability by strengthening community ownership, enhancing transparency, improving accountability, encouraging participatory decision-making, and promoting continued implementation of project activities. These qualitative findings complement the quantitative results and confirm that stakeholder involvement is a critical determinant of the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District.

4.1.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between stakeholder involvement and the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The analysis was appropriate because the study sought to

These findings are consistent with Freeman (2023), who argued that active stakeholder engagement enhances project ownership, improves decision-making, and strengthens long-term sustainability. The findings also agree with Bourne (2025), who observed that continuous stakeholder participation improves transparency, trust, and accountability within development projects. Similarly, Yang et al. (2024) established that projects which actively involve stakeholders throughout the project lifecycle are more likely to sustain project benefits because they strengthen community ownership and institutional support. These previous studies support the present findings that stakeholder involvement is a key factor in promoting the sustainability of rural youth employment projects.

establish whether variations in stakeholder involvement were associated with variations in project sustainability. The correlation coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, where a positive coefficient indicates that the two variables tend to increase together, while a negative coefficient indicates an inverse relationship. The significance level was assessed at the 5% level ($p < .05$). The results of the correlation analysis are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Correlation between Stakeholder Involvement and Project Sustainability

		Stakeholder Involvement	Project Sustainability
Stakeholder Involvement	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	136	
Project Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	.675**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	136	136

Source: Field data, 2026

The results in Table 3 indicate a strong positive relationship between stakeholder involvement and project sustainability ($r = .675$, $p < .001$). This implies that greater stakeholder involvement is associated with higher levels of project sustainability. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 significance level, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that stakeholder involvement has no significant relationship with project sustainability is rejected. The finding suggests that participation of beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders in project planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, consultation, and communication can contribute to the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project. However, the correlation result demonstrates association rather than causation; the regression analysis is therefore required to determine the extent to which stakeholder involvement predicts project sustainability.

4.1.4. Regression analysis

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of stakeholder involvement on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The analysis was used to establish the extent to which stakeholder involvement predicts project sustainability and to provide a basis for testing the study hypothesis. 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	.675[a]	.455	.451	.28241

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder involvement

The model summary indicates that stakeholder involvement had a strong positive relationship with project sustainability, with R = .675. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .456$) indicates that stakeholder involvement explained 45.5% of the variation in project sustainability, while the remaining 54.4% was explained by other factors not included in the model. This demonstrates that stakeholder involvement provides a substantial contribution to explaining differences in the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project

Table 5. ANOVA Results

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	8.923	1	8.923	111.884	.000[b]
1	Residual	10.687	134	.080		
	Total	19.611	135			

a. Dependent Variable: Project sustainability (X1)
b. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholder involvement

The ANOVA results show that the regression model was statistically significant ($F = 111.884$, $p < .001$). This indicates that stakeholder involvement significantly predicts project sustainability. Since the significance value of .000 is below the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis stating that stakeholder involvement has no significant effect on the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District is rejected. Therefore, stakeholder involvement has a statistically significant effect on project sustainability.

Table 6. Coefficient Results

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.957	.230		4.163	.000
	Stakeholder involvement	.654	.062	.675	10.578	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Project sustainability (Y)

The coefficient results in Table 6 show that stakeholder involvement has a positive and statistically significant effect on project sustainability ($\beta = .675$, $t = 10.578$, $p < .001$). This indicates that an increase in stakeholder involvement is associated with an increase in the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The significance value of .000 is below the 0.05 level, confirming that the effect is statistically significant. The unstandardized coefficient (B = .654) indicates that a one-unit increase in stakeholder involvement is associated with a 0.654-unit increase in project sustainability, holding other factors constant. The constant value of .957 indicates the estimated level of project sustainability when stakeholder involvement is zero. Overall, the results provide evidence that stakeholder involvement significantly contributes to project sustainability. Therefore, the null hypothesis stating that stakeholder involvement has no significant effect on project sustainability is rejected

4.2 Discussion of Findings

The findings indicate that stakeholder involvement plays an important role in the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. Involving beneficiaries, local authorities, project coordinators, and other relevant stakeholders in project activities can strengthen their sense of ownership and responsibility toward project outcomes. When stakeholders are given opportunities to participate in planning and decision-making, their needs and priorities can be incorporated into project activities, making the interventions more relevant to the local context. Participation in implementation and monitoring can further promote accountability and enable stakeholders to identify challenges and propose appropriate solutions. Regular consultation and communication can also strengthen cooperation between project management and beneficiaries, while continued involvement of local authorities can provide institutional support for maintaining project activities after external assistance is reduced.

The finding is consistent with Tumwebaze and Irechukwu (2022), who established that stakeholder involvement was associated with sustainability of a World Bank-funded Skills Development Project in Gasabo District, Rwanda. Their findings indicated that stakeholder empowerment, consultation, and participation in decision-making strengthened ownership and contributed to the continuation of project benefits. Similarly, Uwamariya, Safari, and Kengere (2021) found a significant relationship between stakeholder participation and sustainability of a donor-funded project in Kicukiro District, Rwanda. These findings support the present study by demonstrating that participation in project processes can strengthen beneficiaries' ownership and commitment, which are important conditions for sustaining project outcomes.

The findings are also consistent with evidence from other East African countries. Bukhala, Ekambi, and Kithandi (2025) found that stakeholder identification, involvement, and communication contributed to the sustainability of donor-funded projects among NGOs in Kenya. Similarly, Muriithi and Gatumi (2025) established that the involvement of community members, government agencies, NGOs, and private-sector actors enhanced ownership, resource mobilization, and project implementation in Baringo County, Kenya. These findings indicate that stakeholder involvement can contribute to sustainability by strengthening collaboration, accountability, communication, and resource support.

The qualitative findings provide further explanation of how stakeholder involvement contributed to project sustainability. Interview respondents reported that involving beneficiaries, local authorities, and community representatives from planning through implementation and monitoring created a sense of ownership and commitment. Respondents also indicated that regular consultation and communication enabled stakeholders to identify challenges, make joint decisions, and maintain project activities after external support was reduced. These findings suggest that participation can strengthen community ownership, improve accountability, encourage collective responsibility, and facilitate the continuation of project activities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that stakeholder involvement is an important factor in sustaining the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. Strengthening beneficiary participation, stakeholder consultation, local-leader involvement, monitoring, and communication can create stronger conditions for maintaining project activities and benefits. This is particularly important for rural youth employment projects because their long-term success depends on beneficiaries and local institutions being able and willing to continue supporting project activities after external assistance declines.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study concludes that stakeholder involvement plays an important role in the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District. The involvement of beneficiaries, local authorities, project coordinators, and other relevant stakeholders in project planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, consultation, and communication strengthened ownership, cooperation, accountability, and commitment to project activities. The findings further indicate that continuous stakeholder participation enabled stakeholders to identify challenges, contribute to joint decisions, and support the continuation of project activities beyond the period of external assistance.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the study findings on stakeholder involvement and the sustainability of the Rural Youth Employment Support Project in Huye District, the following specific recommendations are proposed:

1. Project management should involve youth beneficiaries in every major planning and

decision-making meeting. Beneficiaries should be given opportunities to identify their employment needs, propose activities, and provide feedback before project priorities are finalized. This will ensure that project interventions remain relevant to the actual needs of rural youth and strengthen their ownership of project activities.

2. Huye District local authorities should establish a structured stakeholder monitoring mechanism for the project. Local leaders should participate in scheduled monitoring visits and review project progress with beneficiaries and project coordinators. This would enable implementation challenges to be identified early and allow corrective measures to be taken before they affect the continuation of project activities.

3. Project management should conduct regular stakeholder consultation meetings. At least quarterly, project coordinators should organize meetings involving youth beneficiaries, local authorities, community representatives, and implementing partners to review progress, discuss challenges, and agree on practical solutions. Regular consultation would strengthen joint decision-making and ensure that stakeholders remain involved throughout the project cycle rather than only during implementation.

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