



The Role of Beneficiary Participation towards the Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects in Rwanda: A Case of Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District

Moïse Mutabazi Rwamakombe and Ronald Kwenza
University of Kigali

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8920-9992>

Email: mutabamoses1@gmail.com

Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between beneficiary participation and the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District, Rwanda. The investigation focused on three specific objectives: to assess the role of participatory needs assessment, to examine the role of participatory resource management, and to analyse the role of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) towards the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District, Rwanda. Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29 through Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The coefficient findings showed that participatory needs assessment had a positive and significant role in the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District, Rwanda, $B = 0.516$, $t = 10.750$, $p = 0.000$. Participatory resource management also had a positive and significant role in sustainability, $B = 0.225$, $t = 5.233$, $p = 0.000$, while participatory monitoring and evaluation had a positive and significant role in sustainability, $B = 0.193$, $t = 3.860$, $p = 0.000$. The study concluded that beneficiary participation through participatory needs assessment, participatory resource management, and participatory monitoring and evaluation significantly improved the sustainability of the FLOW Project in Karongi District. The study recommended that project management and local stakeholders institutionalise beneficiary participation across project planning, resource management, and monitoring processes to strengthen continuity, financial sustainability, social impact, and local ownership.*

Keywords: *Beneficiary Participation; Participatory Needs Assessment; Participatory Resource Management; Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation; Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects.*

How to cite this work (APA):

Rwamakombe, M. M. & Kwenza, R. (2026). The Role of Beneficiary Participation towards the Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects in Rwanda: A Case of Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District. *Journal of Research Innovation and Implications in Education*, 10(4), 376 – 387. <https://doi.org/10.59765/dpg37e>

1. Introduction

The global development paradigm has shifted considerably from centralised forms of management towards inclusive approaches that focus on the active participation of target groups throughout project life cycles. In this respect, sustainability refers to the ability of women empowerment programmes to continue delivering benefits and operating even after donor funding

has been withdrawn. Evidence indicates that when women are involved in project design, implementation,

and monitoring, projects tend to be more closely aligned with local socio-economic realities. High levels of engagement also help ensure that interventions are not merely temporary solutions but life-changing processes that build capacity and local ownership. This shift recognises that the future effectiveness of gender-based initiatives will largely be determined by the agency and

decision-making authority of beneficiaries during the initial phases of a project (Hossain & Ali, 2024).

Norway provides an important example of how institutionalised participation and state-led gender equality schemes help sustain women-oriented economic programmes within the European context. The Norwegian model focuses on women's involvement in labour-market programmes through the Action Plan for Women in Rural Areas, which promotes women's entrepreneurship and cooperative management. Enhancing beneficiaries' participation in the policy-making process enables the government to make support mechanisms, such as childcare subsidies and flexible working arrangements, responsive to the actual needs of working mothers. This participatory approach has contributed to one of the highest female labour-force participation rates globally and demonstrates that sustainability can be achieved when programme beneficiaries contribute to defining the structural assistance they receive (Teigen & Skjeie, 2022).

Institutions such as BRAC and Grameen Bank have driven the microfinance movement in Bangladesh, which has been associated with high loan-repayment rates and increased social impact through women's participation. Under this model, beneficiaries form small peer groups in which they meet weekly to discuss financial management, health, and social rights. This collaborative environment ensures that projects are not limited to credit delivery but also create supportive communities that monitor their own progress and challenges. As women assume leadership positions in these groups, they acquire the expertise required to manage larger community resources and businesses. The endurance of these micro-interventions over several decades demonstrates the value of engaging women in the governance of financial tools designed to empower them (Siddik et al., 2024).

Rwanda has made gender equality central to its national development agenda, particularly through the Vision Umurenge Programme (VUP), which contains distinct components focused on women's economic inclusion. The programme applies a participatory methodology known as Ubudehe, through which community members, including women, are actively involved in identifying the most vulnerable households and selecting appropriate interventions. This close engagement ensures that women do not receive assistance passively but actively participate in social-protection programmes that affect their lives. Consequently, women in rural Rwanda have gained financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills, resulting in more sustainable household incomes. This localised and inclusive decision-making process has played a central role in the VUP's contribution to poverty reduction among women (Mutuyimana & Gasana, 2023).

Rwanda also promotes sustainable women-focused initiatives through programmes such as the National Women's Council and the Isange One Stop Centre, demonstrating the country's capacity to combine economic and social empowerment strategies. These structures provide platforms through which women can participate in local governance and express concerns regarding the implementation of gender-based policies.

Women's involvement in the management of these centres enables the government to ensure that available services, ranging from legal support to business advice, respond to the realities women face. This participatory governance model has contributed to a culture of accountability and continuous improvement within women empowerment programmes. The long-term sustainability of these initiatives is supported by strong leadership and women's involvement across different levels of Rwandan society (Uwineza & Mukakanyamibwa, 2022).

The sustainability of women empowerment projects remains a pressing issue in Rwanda. National statistics show that about 42% of women heading small-scale projects in the country find it difficult to sustain their projects once initial donor funding or government grants are depleted. Evidence also shows that productivity in women's cooperatives tends to decrease by almost 30% after the implementation period ends. According to the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (2022), many gender-based development initiatives in the country are characterised by delays and low project-performance indicators.

The failure of women-led projects to transform into self-sustaining business organisations is one of the leading causes of project failure in the Rwandan context. Studies show that about 60% of women's economic empowerment projects have experienced cost overruns exceeding 25% of their original budgets (Mukarugira & Shukla, 2023).

The World Bank (2024) indicates that half of the agricultural and handicraft projects undertaken by women do not have stable supply chains or sustained contracts with large-scale purchasers that could protect them from price fluctuations. This skills gap contributes to ineffective resource allocation and an inability to adapt to changing economic conditions, both of which are critical to long-term project survival. The resulting instability often causes projects to dissolve, leaving beneficiaries without the systems on which they had come to depend for their livelihoods (Niyitanga, 2022).

According to the Rwanda Governance Board (2023), the monitoring and evaluation frameworks used in women empowerment programmes are often not sufficiently rigorous to identify and correct performance problems as they arise. In many cases, project success is measured only up to the implementation stage, with little or no follow-up conducted two to five years after a project has been considered complete. Statistics indicate that projects without a specific long-term monitoring programme have a 65% higher chance of failure than those with built-in sustainability monitoring.

While existing studies have examined challenges related to coordination, cost inefficiencies, sustainability, and access to agricultural support services in Rwanda, none has specifically examined the influence of beneficiary participation on the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi

District. This created a knowledge gap that the study sought to address.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to assess the role of beneficiary participation towards the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District, Rwanda.

1. To assess the role of participatory needs assessment towards the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District, Rwanda.
2. To examine the role of participatory resource management towards the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District, Rwanda.
3. To analyse the role of participatory monitoring and evaluation towards the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District, Rwanda.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The theoretical review provides the scientific foundations necessary to explain the processes of inclusive development and long-term project viability. Three established theories are presented as the basis for examining the effect of participatory management on social outcomes. The analysis of beneficiary participation was framed by Stakeholder Theory, the Resource-Based View (RBV), and Empowerment Theory. Each theory provides a distinct perspective on the processes through which the sustainability of women empowerment projects can be strengthened by aligning organisational objectives with community agency.

2.1.1 Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, first proposed by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, challenges the notion that organisations are created solely to satisfy the interests of financial investors. The theory maintains that the success and sustainability of any organisation or development initiative depend on its ability to address the different needs of all categories of people affected by its activities. Within community-based initiatives, women and local residents can be regarded as key stakeholders whose participation is essential for gaining social legitimacy. Contemporary literature indicates that establishing strong relationships with these groups creates a foundation of trust that is essential for overcoming the challenges of rural project implementation. Managing projects in the interests of stakeholders is therefore important for ensuring that intervention benefits are shared equitably and supported by the wider community (Harrison & Wicks, 2023).

Management under this theoretical perspective requires a thorough understanding of the values and expectations of the people who interact with the project on a daily basis. Organisations thrive when they move beyond short-term operational ambitions and invest in the long-term creation of shared value for all stakeholders. By prioritising the voices of marginalised groups, development practitioners can identify potential risks and opportunities that may not be visible to outsiders. This collaborative approach creates an atmosphere of openness and shared responsibility in which stakeholders become active custodians of the project mission. Such strong social ties help an initiative remain sustainable even when major changes occur in the external economic or political environment (Mitchell & Lee, 2024).

Stakeholder Theory was used in the study to examine the relationship between the first objective and the overall sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District. Using this framework, the researcher examined how the inclusion of women in a comprehensive needs assessment enabled project designs to reflect the actual needs of the community. The role of social legitimacy during the planning phase was demonstrated by investigating the participation of the target group in identifying its own priorities.

2.1.2 Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV), developed by Jay Barney in 1991, explains why some organisations continue to achieve competitive advantage while others do not succeed in the market. According to the theory, the internal resources of an entity determine its survival and performance and must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable. In development programmes, these resources include not only financial capital but also technical skills, local knowledge, and organisational networks within the community. The strategic protection and effective stewardship of such internal assets are considered key drivers of long-term organisational impact and resilience. Managers are therefore encouraged to develop distinctive internal capabilities that can enable an institution to remain operational even in settings with limited external resources (Hitt & Xu, 2023).

Effective organisational performance is achieved when internal competencies are aligned with the opportunities and threats specific to the external environment. The theory maintains that intangible resources, such as community leadership and management skills, are often among the most important factors in ensuring long-term institutional stability. Development projects can establish a sustainable operational foundation by investing in the continuous training of local talent and the institutionalisation of management systems. This internal orientation helps create resilience against abrupt changes in donor priorities or global market conditions. Strategic resource allocation is therefore considered a proactive and necessary step towards ensuring that a project remains operational and relevant (Karanja, 2024).

The Resource-Based View was used in the research to examine how the second objective affected the sustainability of women empowerment projects in the Western Province. This framework enabled the study to examine how women's active participation in resource management supports the maintenance of financial and physical project inputs. The analysis considered whether the development of local stewardship capabilities among female beneficiaries constituted a viable internal resource that could support project continuity after external funding ended.

2.1.3 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory was formulated by Marc Zimmerman in 1995 to explain the complex process through which individuals and communities gain control over their lives. The theory states that empowerment is both a psychological condition and a structural process involving the redistribution of power, authority, and social resources. At the individual level, it focuses on self-efficacy and the development of technical skills, while at the collective level, it concerns participation in local governance. Extensive participation in community activities is considered crucial for developing a sense of agency and collective responsibility among marginalised groups. This change enables individuals to advocate for their rights and take control of their own development trajectories with confidence and autonomy (Zimmerman & Perkins, 2022).

The most effective development interventions are those that move beyond temporary assistance towards building the long-term organisational capacity of the target community. The theory proposes that active participation in the administration and supervision of social programmes creates a strong sense of commitment to their success. When individuals are empowered to act as leaders and make essential decisions, they develop a greater sense of psychological ownership of the overall goals. Such a shift in power relationships is necessary to ensure that the changes achieved do not remain dependent on external agents but are sustained by the community. Empowerment therefore plays a crucial role in personal development and in the social and economic stability of local organisations (Rappaport & Seidman, 2023).

The research used Empowerment Theory to assess how the third objective influenced the sustainability of women empowerment projects. Using this framework, the researcher explored the potential of women's participation in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to improve their agency and sense of project ownership. The study examined whether such participatory supervision resulted in greater management transparency and increased retention of benefits among rural participants.

2.2 Empirical Review

The empirical review entails a systematic examination of established findings from previous scientific studies on the relationship between inclusive management practices and development outcomes. This part analysed research

conducted in different parts of the world to identify trends in how target populations influence the life cycle of development initiatives. By assessing quantitative evidence and statistical models from various institutional settings, the review provides a strong empirical foundation for the study.

2.2.1 Participatory Needs Assessment and Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects

Hossain and Ali (2024) explored the effects of community-based diagnostic activities on the sustainability of women-focused financial programmes in rural Bangladesh. The researchers used a quantitative research design and structured questionnaires to collect data from a sample of 312 female participants in different village-level microfinance groups. Inferential statistical analysis indicated a positive correlation between women's involvement in identifying project goals and the subsequent success of the intervention ($r = 0.742$). Regression analysis revealed that beneficiary participation at the planning stage accounted for about 58.4% of the variance in project-success indicators. The study found that interventions based on accurate needs assessment were more resilient to initial operational shocks than top-down initiatives. It was recommended that development agencies prioritise the direct involvement of target groups in preliminary situational analysis to protect the sustainability of women empowerment projects.

Okoro and Adebayo (2022) investigated how inclusive planning affects the economic sustainability of agricultural programmes managed by women in different rural areas of Nigeria. The study used descriptive and inferential research designs and surveyed 129 beneficiaries to determine the relationship between active participation and project continuity. The regression model indicated a strong positive association between long-term commitment and participation in the identification phase, with a beta value of 0.628. The study showed that programmes achieved greater organisational maturity when women were given the authority to establish their own development priorities through needs assessment. Statistical analysis indicated that the sustainability of women empowerment projects was maximised when the target group believed that its views were genuinely incorporated into the plan. Practitioners were advised to establish formal feedback loops that would allow project goals to be continually refined on the basis of beneficiary participation.

Kayisire and Mukamana (2025) evaluated the role of inclusive diagnostic exercises in the success of women-led cooperatives in the Southern Province of Rwanda. The study employed quantitative research design and stratified random sampling to collect information from 122 project recipients and members of the management team. Correlation analysis provided inferential evidence of a strong positive relationship between community involvement in project identification and organisational performance, with $r = 0.738$. The study emphasised that cooperatives that did not involve women in comprehensive needs assessment generally experienced

high levels of attrition after donor subsidies were discontinued. The results supported the hypothesis that the sustainability of women empowerment projects was enhanced when participants actively contributed to defining the scope of interventions. The study concluded that a bottom-up approach to project design is important for developing resilient and independent community institutions through beneficiary participation.

2.2.2 Participatory Resource Management and Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects

Ahmad and Ali (2023) examined the effect of local supervision of financial and physical resources on the sustainability of microfinance programmes in rural Pakistan. The quantitative study used a sample of 220 female borrowers who participated in community-managed lending groups. Inferential analysis indicated substantial differences in project success associated with the degree of transparency in beneficiary-led resource management. The research reported that training women to manage their credit records enhanced credit repayment by 30% compared with externally managed schemes. The statistical findings showed that beneficiary participation in asset management was one of the main factors supporting the sustainability of women empowerment projects. The study found that local management of funds reduced the likelihood of mismanagement and created a culture of shared responsibility.

Schmidt and Fischer (2024) studied how collaborative resource stewardship affects the performance of social-enterprise projects in the Netherlands. Their approach involved an empirical study of various organisations using a regression model to examine the association between asset control and project longevity. The results showed that clear role definition and the participation of local actors were positively and significantly related to project success, with $\beta = 0.438$. The study revealed that organisations with inclusive budgeting processes incurred considerably lower operational costs and achieved higher equipment-maintenance rates. The results indicated that the sustainability of women empowerment projects is strengthened when beneficiaries have the authority to control the technical inputs of the project. Project managers were therefore advised to establish effective accountability systems that include all stakeholders in resource allocation and promote beneficiary participation.

Uwase and Murenzi (2023) evaluated the effect of participatory resource mobilisation on development initiatives in the Northern Province of Rwanda. The study used a quantitative approach in which regression analysis was employed to examine variables that could predict project success within rural districts. The statistical findings indicated that participation in resource management had a positive and significant effect on project performance, with $\beta = 0.199$. The researchers noted that projects in which women were trained to work with financial documents and equipment had fewer instances of fund mismanagement. The study revealed that the sustainability of women empowerment projects in the area was strengthened when beneficiaries served as the principal custodians of project property. It was

suggested that local administrative units implement participatory auditing tools to track beneficiary participation and the use of resources.

2.2.3 Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation and Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects

Tan and Ibrahim (2024) investigated the implications of participatory performance tracking for poverty-alleviation initiatives involving women in Malaysia. The researchers used a quantitative methodology involving 180 women who monitored their progress towards specific income targets. The statistical results indicated that self-monitoring activities were significantly and positively correlated with the long-term achievement of social milestones, with $p < 0.05$. The research showed that the more beneficiaries were engaged in determining their own performance indicators, the more motivated they were to achieve project objectives. The study concluded that involvement in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) helps develop a sense of responsibility and continuous improvement in community-based programmes. It recommended that project managers move from exclusively external audits towards more participatory and collaborative tracking mechanisms to support the sustainability of women empowerment projects.

Rossi and Conti (2022) examined how collaborative assessment models affected the sustainability of social-integration initiatives among women in Italy. They used a comparative approach to analyse projects with and without beneficiary feedback loops and compared them with projects based on top-down assessments. The findings revealed that projects using participatory evaluation had a 40% greater likelihood of adapting their strategies to changing environmental conditions, which resulted in greater sustainability. The study showed that involving women in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) enabled implementation problems to be identified and addressed quickly. It concluded that the long-term effectiveness of development interventions is improved by strong and inclusive monitoring mechanisms. The authors suggested that social organisations invest in developing the evaluative capacity of their target populations to support successful beneficiary participation.

Lutaaya and Nakato (2024) examined the importance of participatory evaluation in the sustainability of women's agricultural value-chain projects in Uganda. The study used a regression-analysis model to analyse data from 200 smallholder farmers participating in collective marketing and processing programmes. The results revealed a strong correlation of $r = 0.65$, demonstrating that engagement in monitoring market trends and project milestones supported organisational survival. The findings indicated that farmers involved in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) were more knowledgeable about price fluctuations and quality requirements, which contributed to improved profitability. The study concluded that sustainability is maintained when beneficiaries possess the information and expertise required to assess their own performance. To enhance the sustainability of women empowerment projects, practitioners were advised to

provide digital tools that enable simple and transparent data collection by members of the local community.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research employed descriptive and correlational research designs based on quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative methods enabled the researcher to quantify the levels of participation and sustainability using numerical data and statistical analysis. The mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among needs assessment, resource management, monitoring and evaluation, and project sustainability.

3.2 Study Population

The study population comprised 474 stakeholders involved in women empowerment projects within Karongi District, including project staff, local leaders, and beneficiaries. This population was selected because its members were directly involved in the implementation of and participation in women empowerment projects in the district. The population was divided into relevant strata to ensure representation of both management and beneficiaries. This approach provided sufficient information for evaluating the contribution of beneficiary involvement to the sustainability of women empowerment projects.

3.3 Sampling Design

Sampling design is the theoretical framework and practical process used to select a subset of individuals from a larger population for statistical inference. It includes determining the sample size and selecting an appropriate sampling method to ensure that findings can be generalised within a known margin of error (Saunders & Lewis, 2023). A sound sampling design reduces sampling bias and gives all members of the population a fair opportunity to be included. The researcher applied the design to manage time and resources while maintaining a high level of accuracy in the final findings.

This calculation provides a representative sample size of 217 respondents for the study. The research also used stratified and simple random sampling to identify the 217 participants who represented the target population. The population was stratified into distinct groups of project staff, local leaders, and beneficiaries to ensure balanced representation. Simple random sampling was then conducted within each stratum using a lottery method to select individual respondents without bias. This combination ensured that the views of the respective groups were represented in the final analysis. Probability sampling enabled the researcher to apply inferential statistics and generalise the findings to the target population in Karongi District.

3.4 Data Collection Instrument

The choice of data-collection instrument was determined by the type of data required and the characteristics of the participants involved. Appropriate instruments were necessary to generate credible data that could withstand academic and professional evaluation.

Documentation is the process of collecting and reviewing available written materials, reports, and publications to complement primary research data. This approach enabled the researcher to establish the historical and institutional background of the study. Reviewing organisational documents also provided a basis for comparing field observations with official project objectives and outcomes (Santos, 2025).

A questionnaire is a research instrument structured as a set of questions designed to collect standardised data from a large group of respondents. It enables quantitative data to be collected efficiently and coded and analysed using statistical software. Likert scales are commonly used in questionnaires to measure respondents' attitudes and perceptions towards specific variables. The reliability of the instrument depends on the clarity of the questions and the willingness of participants to provide honest responses (Brown, 2024).

To obtain quantitative data, the study distributed structured questionnaires to the 217 participants. Levels of participation were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The questionnaire contained sections on needs assessment, resource management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and sustainability. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires and assisted participants with where language or literacy barriers arose.

3.5 Pilot Study, Validity and Reliability

The pilot study involved 10% of the sample size, equivalent to 22 participants, and was conducted in Rutsiro District, which borders Karongi District. The area was selected because it has similar socio-economic characteristics but was not part of the main study. Pilot respondents were drawn from project staff, local leaders, and beneficiaries involved in women empowerment projects. The pilot test was used to assess the relevance and clarity of the questions and the time required to complete the instrument. This step ensured that the tools were appropriate and aligned with the research objectives.

Ensuring the quality of research findings requires a rigorous methodology for testing the integrity of data-collection instruments. The researcher ensured that the instruments measured what they were intended to measure and that the results could be reproduced over time. This was achieved through appropriate statistical tests and expert review of the methodology used in the research. High validity and reliability were necessary to strengthen confidence in scientific findings and support their generalisability.

To establish content validity, the study presented the research instruments to a panel of academic experts and the research supervisor. These experts reviewed the questionnaire items to determine whether they adequately covered needs assessment, resource management, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated as the number of items rated relevant divided by the total number of items. A CVI score of 0.70 or above was considered acceptable for proceeding with data collection. This systematic review ensured that the instruments were aligned with the conceptual framework of the study.

For this study, content validity was determined using the Content Validity Index (CVI). Relevant items referred to the statements contained in the questionnaire variable tables: participatory needs assessment (5 items), participatory resource management (5 items), participatory monitoring and evaluation (5 items), and sustainability of women empowerment projects (5 items). The number of relevant items was therefore 20. Total items comprised the 20 questionnaire statements plus four

demographic categories, namely gender, age, education level, and working experience, giving a total of 24 items. The CVI was computed using the formula: $CVI = \text{number of relevant items} / \text{total number of items} = 20 / 24 = 0.833$. Since the computed CVI of 0.833 was greater than the minimum acceptable value of 0.700, the instrument was considered valid for data collection.

The research also evaluated the internal consistency of the Likert-scale items using Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient in SPSS. During the pilot study, reliability was assessed to ensure that questionnaire items within each variable category were sufficiently correlated. The researcher aimed to achieve Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.70 or above to support the use of the instrument in the main study. Items that reduced overall consistency could then be refined or eliminated to improve the accuracy of the instrument. This testing helped ensure that the quantitative findings were replicable and scientifically sound.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Variable	Number of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Decision
Participatory needs assessment	5	.806	Reliable
Participatory resource management	5	.819	Reliable
Participatory monitoring and evaluation	5	.833	Reliable
Sustainability of women empowerment projects	5	.846	Reliable

Source: Primary data, 2026

The findings in Table 1 indicate that all variables had Cronbach's Alpha coefficients above 0.700. The coefficients ranged from 0.806 to 0.846, which shows good internal consistency across the 20 questionnaire statements. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered reliable because each variable produced a coefficient above the recommended threshold for academic research.

3.6 Data Analysis

The study analysed data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29 to ensure a high level of accuracy. The researcher first generated descriptive statistics to summarise the characteristics of the sample and the levels of the study variables. Inferential statistics were then used to test the significance of the relationship between participation and sustainability.

Numerical values and statistical measures were used to facilitate the analysis of survey results. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis. A five-point Likert scale was applied to measure respondents’ levels of agreement, where 1 represented “Strongly Disagree” and 5 represented “Strongly Agree.” The mean scores were interpreted using the following ranges: very weak (1.0–1.8), weak (1.9–2.6), neutral (2.7–3.5), strong (3.6–4.2), and very strong (4.3–5.0). In addition, a standard deviation greater than 0.5 indicated

heterogeneity in responses, while a value of 0.5 or less indicated homogeneity among respondents’ views.

Inferential statistics were applied to examine relationships among variables using correlation and regression analysis. Bivariate correlation analysis was used to test the relationships between the sustainability of women empowerment projects and each dimension of beneficiary participation. Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) was used to determine the strength and direction of relationships, with values ranging from -1 to +1. Statistical significance was determined using the Sig. (2-tailed) value, where a value less than or equal to 0.05 indicated a significant relationship.

The multiple regression model used in this study was:
 $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \epsilon$
Where: Y = Sustainability of women empowerment projects
X₁ = Participatory needs assessment
X₂ = Participatory resource management
X₃ = Participatory monitoring and evaluation
β₀ = Constant term
β_{1,2,3} = Regression coefficients
ε = Error term

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Professional ethical guidelines were carefully observed throughout the research to ensure that the rights and dignity of all participants were protected. Each participant was informed about the purpose of the research and asked

to provide consent before data collection. Confidentiality and privacy were protected by storing all collected data in a secure, password-protected location and using the information solely for academic purposes. Anonymity was also maintained by excluding respondents' names from the questionnaires and the final research report. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Response Rate

Response rate was considered in this study to determine the proportion of questionnaires that were properly completed and returned for statistical analysis. This was important because the credibility of the findings depended on having enough usable responses from project staff, local leaders and beneficiaries who had knowledge of the FLOW Project in Karongi District.

Table 2: Response Rate

Response Rate	Frequency	Percentage
Questionnaires returned and complete	207	95.4
Returned incomplete	8	3.7
Not returned	2	0.9
Total	217	100.0

Source: Primary data, 2026

The findings in Table 2 indicate the study’s response rate for the FLOW Project in Karongi District. Of the 217 questionnaires distributed, 207 were returned complete, representing 95.4%. Eight questionnaires were returned incomplete, representing 3.7%, while two questionnaires were not returned, representing 0.9%. The incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the final analysis because some respondents left important Likert-scale statements unanswered. Some questionnaires were not returned because selected respondents were unavailable during the collection period, while others had field duties and community responsibilities that limited their availability.

4.2 Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the combined effect of participatory needs assessment, participatory resource management, and participatory monitoring and evaluation on the sustainability of women empowerment projects. The analysis used the three beneficiary-participation dimensions as predictors and the sustainability of women empowerment projects as the dependent variable.

Table 3: Model Summary for Beneficiary Participation

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.887 ^a	.787	.784	.18398	1.702
a. Predictors: (Constant), Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, Participatory Needs Assessment, Participatory Resource Management					
b. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects					

The results in Table 3 present the model summary for the combined beneficiary-participation dimensions, where R was 0.887. This indicates a very strong predictive association between participatory needs assessment, participatory resource management, participatory monitoring and evaluation, and the sustainability of women empowerment projects. The R Square value was 0.787, meaning that the three beneficiary-participation dimensions jointly explained 78.7% of the variation in the sustainability of the FLOW Project. The adjusted R Square value of 0.784 shows that the model remained strong after adjustment for the number of predictors and the sample size. The Durbin-Watson value of 1.702 was

close to 2, indicating that the residuals did not show a serious autocorrelation problem in the model.

The findings correspond with UNDP (2023), which explained that beneficiary participation strengthens project satisfaction, local ownership, and long-term performance because communities contribute time, knowledge, and leadership to development activities. The results also agree with Oino (2022), who argued that sustainable impact is realised when beneficiaries become development partners rather than passive recipients of support. These views support the combined explanatory role of beneficiary participation in the sustainability of women empowerment projects.

Table 4: ANOVA for Beneficiary Participation

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	25.356	3	8.452	248.588	.000 ^b
Residual	6.872	203	.034		
Total	32.228	206			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects

b. Predictors: (Constant), Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, Participatory Needs Assessment, Participatory Resource Management

Source: Primary data, 2026

The findings in Table 4 present the ANOVA summary for the combined beneficiary-participation dimensions, where the F-statistic was 248.588 and the Sig. value was 0.000. The F-statistic shows that the multiple regression model was suitable for explaining the sustainability of women empowerment projects. Since the Sig. value was less than 0.05, the combined model was statistically significant. This means that participatory needs assessment, participatory resource management, and participatory monitoring and evaluation jointly predicted the sustainability of the FLOW Project in Karongi District. The result confirms that sustainability was better

explained when the three dimensions of beneficiary participation were considered together.

The findings are consistent with Mishra (2023), who explained that high beneficiary engagement reduces project failure by aligning institutional goals with community realities. The outcomes also relate to Mwaura (2023), who emphasised that beneficiary participation strengthens transparency, accountability, and community agency in project implementation. These studies confirm that the combined participation model provides a meaningful basis for explaining sustainability when needs assessment, resource management, and monitoring are considered together.

Table 5: Coefficients for Beneficiary Participation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Collinearity Statistics		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	.281	.150		1.873	.062		
Participatory Needs Assessment	.516	.048	.498	10.750	.000	.499	2.003
Participatory Resource Management	.225	.043	.274	5.233	.000	.389	2.568
Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation	.193	.050	.221	3.860	.000	.317	3.158

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of Women Empowerment Projects

Source: Primary data, 2026

The adopted multiple regression model was structured as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where: Y = Sustainability of women empowerment projects

X1 = Participatory needs assessment

X2 = Participatory resource management

X3 = Participatory monitoring and evaluation

β_0 = Constant term

$\beta_{1,2,3}$ = Regression coefficients

ε = Error term

The fitted model was: $Y = 0.281 + 0.516X_1 + 0.225X_2 + 0.193X_3 + e$.

The results in Table 5 present the coefficients for the combined beneficiary-participation dimensions, where participatory needs assessment had B = 0.516, t = 10.750, and Sig. = 0.000. This means that a one-unit increase in participatory needs assessment would increase the sustainability of women empowerment projects by 0.516 units when the other predictors were held constant. The

Sig. value was below 0.05, meaning that participatory needs assessment had a statistically significant influence on the sustainability of the FLOW Project. Tolerance was 0.499 and VIF was 2.003, indicating that multicollinearity was not a serious problem for this predictor. Therefore, participatory needs assessment was retained as a significant predictor, and the first null hypothesis was rejected.

Participatory resource management had B = 0.225, t = 5.233, and Sig. = 0.000. This means that a one-unit increase in participatory resource management would increase the sustainability of women empowerment projects by 0.225 units when the other predictors were held constant. The Sig. value was below 0.05, showing that participatory resource management had a statistically significant influence on the sustainability of the FLOW Project. Tolerance was 0.634 and VIF was 1.576, indicating acceptable collinearity statistics. Therefore, participatory resource management was retained as a significant predictor, and the second null hypothesis was rejected.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation had $B = 0.193$, $t = 3.860$, and $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$. This means that a one-unit increase in participatory monitoring and evaluation would increase the sustainability of women empowerment projects by 0.193 units when the other predictors were held constant. The Sig. value was below 0.05, showing that participatory monitoring and evaluation had a statistically significant influence on the sustainability of the FLOW Project. Tolerance was 0.504 and VIF was 1.985, indicating that multicollinearity was within an acceptable range. Therefore, participatory monitoring and evaluation was retained as a significant predictor, and the third null hypothesis was rejected.

The findings align with Harrison and Wicks (2023), who emphasised that projects become more sustainable when key stakeholders are actively considered in decision-making and benefit distribution. The results also correspond with Rappaport and Seidman (2023), who argued that empowerment increases when beneficiaries gain authority, skills, and responsibility in managing their own development processes. These scholarly views confirm that participatory needs assessment, participatory resource management, and participatory monitoring and evaluation each contribute to sustaining women empowerment initiatives.

The model shows that the sustainability of the FLOW Project increased as beneficiary participation through needs assessment, resource management, and monitoring and evaluation improved.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study concluded that participatory needs assessment was a key contributor to the sustainability of the FLOW Project in Karongi District. When beneficiaries participated in identifying problems, setting priorities, checking feasibility, mapping stakeholders, and validating community needs, the project became more relevant to local realities. This strengthened project ownership because women and community actors recognised their own priorities in the project design. Therefore, the sustainability of women empowerment projects depends strongly on how effectively beneficiaries are involved during the planning and diagnostic stages.

The study concluded that participatory resource management played an important role in sustaining the FLOW Project. Beneficiary involvement in financial oversight, inventory control, maintenance planning, procurement, and accountability reporting helped strengthen transparency and protect project resources. This reduced the risk of misuse and improved community confidence in the project. Therefore, women empowerment projects become more sustainable when beneficiaries act as active custodians of the resources that support project operations.

The study concluded that participatory monitoring and evaluation improved the sustainability of the FLOW Project by promoting accountability, learning, and timely corrective action. Beneficiaries who participated in indicator tracking, performance review, feedback reporting, deviation identification, and milestone verification became more aware of project progress and challenges. This strengthened their ability to support corrective action and maintain project benefits. Therefore, the sustainability of women empowerment projects is enhanced when monitoring and evaluation responsibilities are shared with beneficiaries rather than being left solely to external actors.

Overall, the study concluded that beneficiary participation is central to the sustainability of the Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women Project in Karongi District. The three dimensions of participation worked together to improve project relevance, resource stewardship, and performance tracking. The FLOW Project is more likely to remain sustainable when women and community structures continue to participate in decision-making, resource control, and monitoring practices. Sustainable women empowerment therefore requires active beneficiary ownership throughout the project cycle.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the identified practices and enhance project performance.

1. FLOW Project management and local leaders should ensure that interventions reflect market demand, available skills, transport constraints, family responsibilities, and local economic conditions.
2. FLOW Project management, Karongi District authorities, and beneficiary committees should progressively transfer assets, records, responsibilities, market linkages, and decision-making authority while strengthening women's committees' management capacity.
3. Future researchers should conduct a study on financial literacy and sustainability of women empowerment projects in rural districts of Rwanda.

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