

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE OF NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND PROJECTS IN KENYA

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Abstract

Understanding community participation and its influence on project performance is crucial for the success of National-Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) initiatives in Kenya. Despite existing studies suggesting the importance of leadership in improving project performance, there are challenges such as substandard workmanship and budget overruns affecting project performance. Community participation is essential for sustainable communal projects, yet it is often politicized, necessitating inclusive strategies to empower and engage diverse stakeholders. This study examined the influence of community participation strategies on the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya and was guided by stakeholder theory. The study employed a cross-sectional design to collect data from NG-CDF Fund Account Managers, Project Management Committee members and contractors, totalling 176,243 individuals. A sample size of 384 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula, distributed among the three groups. Structured questionnaires were utilized for data collection to ensure consistency. The reliability of the tools was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, while validity was confirmed through content and construct validation methods. Descriptive (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation) and inferential statistical (regressions and correlations) techniques were employed for data analysis, summarizing characteristics and making predictions about the population based on the sample data. Findings revealed that there was a strong agreement (37.9% to 60.1%) towards inclusive decision-making processes, needs assessment and clear communication plans. Notably, a majority (44.8% to 60.1%) recognized the openness of the decision-making process and the sharing of project benefits with the community, highlighting the importance of community participation strategy for enhanced performance of NG-CDF projects. The study concluded that community participation within Kenyan NG-CDF initiatives is important, stressing the imperative of transparent communication and the mitigation of participation obstacles to strengthen project relevance and lasting viability. This study recommends transparent communication and addressing participation barriers to enhance the relevance and sustainability of NG-CDF projects in Kenya.

Keywords: *community participation strategy, community projects, performance of projects*

Introduction

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is a policy tool that allocates designated funds to specific political areas, facilitating strategic decision-making on resource allocation to address local needs and priorities. Early adopters of CDFs, such as Ghana, India, and Papua New Guinea, utilized this approach to enhance local decision-making and community development through grassroots involvement and empowerment (Keya, Aduda, Nyamute & Pokhariyal, 2020). Despite these intentions, the establishment of CDFs has sparked controversy and debate in many countries (Hickey & Bukenya, 2021). Studies by Patanakul *et al.* (2016) and Locatelli

et al. (2017) highlight persistent issues in publicly funded projects, including time overruns, quality issues, and cost overruns, with many infrastructure projects in Europe not completed as planned despite significant government support. However, these studies primarily focus on specific countries, indicating a gap in comprehensive research on the effectiveness of CDFs, particularly in Kenya, where understanding the influence of community participation on NG-CDF project performance remains limited.

Constituency development funds (CDFs) in African nations aim to address longstanding development disparities by allocating public funds to local projects, emphasizing decentralized development efforts. However, the success of these projects relies heavily on the active involvement and support of local communities, which is often lacking (Chasukwa & Banik, 2019; Matipa, 2020). In Zambia, leadership approaches in community funds foster financial misuse, prioritizing political leaders' interests over local communities' needs, resulting in projects that fail to improve constituents' socio-economic well-being (Mumba, 2020; Chrine, Tembo & Zyambo, 2020). Similarly, in Uganda, limited stakeholder involvement leads to challenges like vandalism and unmet project goals (Matipa, 2020; Hickey & Bukenya, 2021). Despite the intention to tackle development disparities, CDF projects in African nations, including Kenya, face significant challenges due to insufficient community involvement. This highlights a need to understand the influence of effective community participation in enhancing the performance and sustainability of NG-CDF projects.

The inception of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Kenya in 2003 aimed to combat poverty and foster grassroots socio-economic growth (Keya *et al.*, 2020; Ali, 2019). The evolution of the National Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) in 2016 expanded this scope to cover 290 constituencies, emphasizing community-driven projects and highlighting the crucial role of community participation in equitable engagement (Keya *et al.*, 2020). Enforced by the NG-CDF Act of 2015, NG-CDF projects are required to be community-centric, stressing the importance of community engagement in project execution (Ali, 2019; Iminy & Miroga, 2018). Despite these efforts, skepticism remains among Kenyan constituents regarding the effectiveness of NG-CDF in achieving its goals, largely due to concerns about its success rate and the actual level of community involvement in projects (Musyoka, 2020). This reflects ongoing challenges and doubts about whether NG-CDF initiatives genuinely prioritize local development. Therefore, there was a need to understand the extent of community participation in NG-CDF projects and its influence on project performance. This necessitated an examination of the influence of community participation strategy on the performance of the NG-CDF projects in Kenya. Community participation initiatives are critical for improving Kenya's NG-CDF projects, yet issues such as poor workmanship and budget overruns persist, emphasising the need for improved engagement strategies. From this backdrop, this study sought to investigate the use of community participation strategy in enhancing the performance of NG-CDF projects.

Problem Statement

The effectiveness of community participation strategies in enhancing the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya is a confounding problem in the constituencies. Despite the fund's intent to foster community development, challenges like substandard workmanship and budget overruns persist, leading to public dissatisfaction (Nyuko & Mwasiagi, 2023; Wambiya, Atoni & Ogula, 2021). Limited community involvement exacerbates these issues, highlighting the need for effective engagement strategies (Gitau & Kimencu, 2019). While existing studies (Leariwalwa & Kamau, 2021; Biwott, 2020) suggest the importance of leadership in improving project outcomes, understanding community participation's direct influence on NG-CDF project performance remains underexplored. Therefore, this study sought to examine the influence of community participation strategy on the performance of the NG-CDF projects in Kenya.

Research Objective

This study sought to examine the influence of community participation strategy on the performance of the NG-CDF projects in Kenya.

Hypothesis

H₀: Community participation strategy has no significant influence on the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya

Literature Review

Community participation is essential for sustainable communal projects, yet often politicized, necessitating inclusive strategies to empower and engage diverse stakeholders (Ngigi & Busolo, 2019). Effective engagement involves raising awareness, building capacity, and fostering collaboration, ensuring decisions reflect community needs and aspirations (Marston, Renedo & Miles, 2020; Leonidou *et al.*, 2020). Strategies like lobbying and mobilization drive collective action, reinforcing community engagement and solidarity through feedback mechanisms for sustainable development (Bakari & Mbunda, 2022; Mogomotsi *et al.*, 2020; Mwangi & Kubasu, 2022; Wibowo *et al.*, 2023; Omar & Moi, 2020). There is limited exploration into the practical implementation and influence of specific community participation strategies, such as lobbying, mobilization, and feedback mechanisms, in fostering genuine stakeholder engagement and overcoming political influences in communal projects.

Community involvement encompasses engaging community members in all stages of project planning, decision-making, and implementation; this fosters a profound sense of ownership and empowerment crucial to their development trajectory (Roque, 2022). Prioritizing community voices and contributions serves as a conduit to bridging access gaps to resources and opportunities, empowering individuals to pursue their aspirations and collectively tackle challenges (Gruber & Hagendorfer-Jauk, 2021). Motivating community members to advocate for their interests through participation techniques enables individuals to assert their rights, demand accountability and drive systemic change (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). Engaging in advocacy initiatives not only amplifies community voices but also instills a profound sense of empowerment by showcasing the transformative potential of collective action in shaping the

community's future. The shared objectives of project ownership and community involvement methodologies strive to enhance the sustainability and efficacy of development initiatives while empowering community members (Mengistu & Assefa, 2020). Community participation strategies empower community members through training and skill development, nurturing a sense of ownership and dedication to project success, thereby driving increased sustainability and long-term impact on community development (Grilli *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, there is a need to assess the effectiveness of community participation strategies, such as advocacy initiatives and skill development programs, in fostering sustainable development and empowering individuals to address local challenges and drive systemic change

Community participation strategy in project management, while essential, intersects with various dimensions of project performance. Traditionally, project performance is measured by adherence to time, cost, and scope constraints, as outlined by Pinto (2020). However, contemporary literature also emphasizes client satisfaction and effectiveness, which include meeting stakeholder expectations (PMI, 2017). Furthermore, sustainability considerations, such as environmental and social impacts, are increasingly vital in evaluating project effectiveness (Luhombo, 2022). As project management approaches evolve, adaptability to changing conditions and stakeholder demands becomes crucial (PMI, 2017). Timeliness, cost management, and risk mitigation are integral aspects of project performance, with efficient resource allocation and scope management being key drivers of success (Unegbu *et al.*, 2022; Kerzner, 2022). Effective community participation can enhance project performance by aligning project goals with stakeholder needs and ensuring timely delivery within budgetary constraints. There is a need to explore how community participation strategies specifically influence project performance metrics based on time, cost and scope adherence in Kenya. This study was guided by Stakeholder Theory, founded by R. Edward Freeman in 1984, which emphasizes the importance of identifying, engaging, and addressing the interests of all stakeholders in a project to ensure successful management and ethical decision-making.

Conceptual framework

The success of NG-CDF projects relies on the implementation of effective community participation strategies, which are assessed based on performance indicators such as timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and scope.

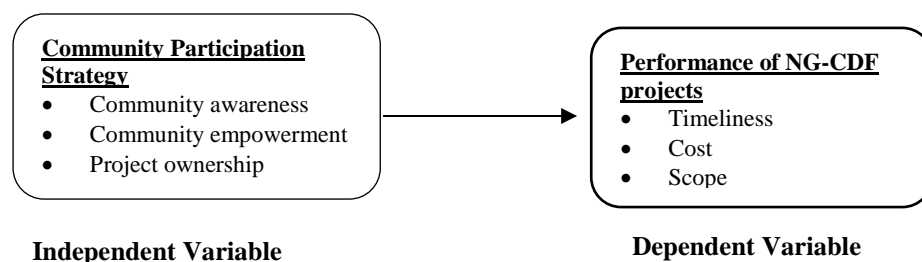


Figure 1: Community participation strategy and performance of NG-CDF projects

Methodology

This study was conducted in Kenya, focusing on the National Government Constituency Development Fund (NG-CDF) projects. It adopted a cross-sectional study design, which involved collecting data from a population at a specific point in time. The target population

was informed by the number of NG-CDF projects from 2017/2018 to 2021/2022 5-year period (Government of Kenya, 2022) which were 58,651 projects. The NG-CDF projects were the unit of analysis. The unit of observation comprised NG-CDF Fund Account Managers (290), Project Management Committee members (secretaries and community representatives – 117,302) and contractors (58,651) involved in NG-CDF projects totalling 176,243.

The sample size was determined by Krejcie and Morgan's formulae of 1970. The sample size was 384 from a target population of 176,243. The sample size was distributed as follows NG-CDF Fund managers (2), Project Management Committee (PMC – 255) members, and contractors (127) involved in NG-CDF projects. Data collection was conducted using structured questionnaires. The reliability of the data collected was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, a statistical measure used to evaluate the internal consistency of a questionnaire whose score was 0.83 above the baseline of 0.70 and hence was acceptable (Izah, Sylva & Hait, 2023). Validity was ensured through content and construct validation methods. Content validation involves assessing whether the questionnaire items adequately cover the topic of interest, while construct validation assesses whether the questionnaire measures the intended constructs accurately.

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize and describe the characteristics of the data, such as means, frequencies, and percentages. Inferential statistics (regressions and correlation) were used to make inferences or predictions about the population based on the sample data. The study operationalized the hypotheses derived from the model as follows: H_0 : Community participation strategy has no significant influence on the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya.

Throughout the research process, ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure the well-being and rights of the participants. This included obtaining informed consent from participants, ensuring confidentiality of responses and minimizing any potential harm or risks associated with participation in the study.

Results and Discussion

This study investigated the influence of community participation strategy on the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya, focusing on inclusiveness, communication, and needs assessment. Using a nine-item questionnaire adapted from previous research, responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale and analysed through percentages, means, and standard deviations. The findings, detailed in Table 1, highlight the significant role of community engagement in project success.

The findings in Table 1 reveal that 37.9% of respondents strongly agreed that frequent consultative meetings are held between project management and local community members, with an additional 22.8% agreeing. Conversely, 24.1% strongly disagreed, 11.8% disagreed,

and 3.4% were neutral, resulting in a mean of 3.569 and a standard deviation of 0.5292. Similarly, 37.9% strongly agreed that community members are given opportunities to participate in decision-making processes about project implementation, with 13.8% agreeing, 27.6% strongly disagreeing, 13.8% disagreeing, and 6.9% remaining neutral, yielding a mean of 3.521 and a standard deviation of 0.6029.

Additionally, the findings in Table 1 indicate that 41.4% of respondents strongly agreed that community members are usually involved in the project identification process to establish their needs, with 34.5% also agreeing. Conversely, 10.8% were neutral, 6.4% strongly disagreed, and 6.9% disagreed, resulting in a mean of 3.976 and a standard deviation of 0.5413.

The results in Table 1 indicate that a majority (40.9%) of respondents agreed that community members are involved in selecting representatives for the project management committee, with another 27.9% strongly agreeing. Conversely, only 3.4% strongly disagreed, while 13.8% disagreed, resulting in a mean of 3.807 and a standard deviation of 0.6172. Additionally, the findings show that 58.6% of respondents strongly agreed that mechanisms are in place to involve community members facing barriers to participation, with 17.2% agreeing, while 3.4% strongly disagreed and 6.9% disagreed, resulting in a mean of 3.856 and a standard deviation of 0.579.

The findings in Table 1 consistently show that a majority (44.8%) strongly agreed that the decision-making process is open to community scrutiny, with 30.6% agreeing, resulting in a mean of 3.716 and a standard deviation of 0.6182. Similarly, 37.9% of respondents strongly agreed that community members always share in project benefits, with 17.2% agreeing, yielding a mean of 3.861 and a standard deviation of 0.5123. Furthermore, 60.1% agreed that NG-CDF projects have clear communication plans, with 30.5% strongly agreeing, resulting in a mean of 4.152 and a standard deviation of 0.5012. Table 1 presents the findings.

Table 1: Community Participation Strategy

| | 1= SD, 2= D, 3= N, 4= A, 5=SA | 1 % | 2 % | 3 % | 4 % | 5 % | mean | Std dev. |
|-------------------------|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------|-------------|
| Needs Assessment | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Project stakeholders always hold consultative meetings with community members | 24.1 | 11.8 | 3.4 | 22.8 | 37.9 | 3.569 | .6192 |
| 2 | Community members are given opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes | 27.6 | 13.8 | 6.9 | 13.8 | 37.9 | 3.521 | .6029 |
| 3 | Community members are involved in the project identification | 6.4 | 6.9 | 10.8 | 34.5 | 41.4 | 3.976 | .5413 |
| Inclusiveness | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Community members are involved in selecting a few members to represent them in the project management committee | 3.4 | 13.8 | 14.2 | 40.9 | 27.9 | 3.807 | .6172 |
| 5 | Steps are always taken to involve marginalized or disadvantaged groups in the community | 10.3 | 10.3 | 17.2 | 31.0 | 31.0 | 3.637 | .7240 |
| 6 | Mechanisms are always in place to involve community members who may face barriers to participation, such as language, physical or socioeconomic challenges | 3.4 | 6.9 | 13.8 | 17.2 | 58.6 | 3.856 | .5790 |
| Communication | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | The decision-making process is always open to scrutiny by community members or the public | 3.4 | 10.3 | 10.8 | 30.6 | 44.8 | 3.716 | .6182 |
| 8 | Community members share in the benefits that accrue from the NG-CDF projects | 13.8 | 13.8 | 17.2 | 17.2 | 37.9 | 3.861 | .5123 |
| 9 | All NG-CDF projects have communication plans that are made known to all community members | 3.9 | 4.1 | 3.4 | 60.1 | 30.5 | 4.152 | .5012 |

The findings of this study, stress the crucial role of community participation strategy in enhancing the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya. The high percentage of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with statements related to community involvement in decision-making processes, project identification, and selection of project management representatives indicates a positive perception of community engagement. These findings align with existing studies emphasizing the importance of community involvement in driving project success (Gikombi & Njoroge, 2018; Marston, Renedo, & Miles, 2020).

Specifically, the strong agreement among respondents regarding the frequency of consultative meetings and the opportunities for community participation in decision-making processes suggests that active community involvement is perceived as essential for effective project implementation. This resonates with studies highlighting the positive influence of community engagement on project relevance, ownership, and sustainability (Roque, 2022; Switzer, 2020).

Moreover, the findings indicating that mechanisms are in place to involve community members facing barriers to participation further emphasize the importance of inclusivity in project

development processes. This aligns with literature advocating for strategies to overcome barriers to community engagement, such as language, physical or socio-economic challenges (Gikombi & Njoroge, 2018). The strong agreement regarding the openness of the decision-making process to community scrutiny and the clarity of communication plans further corroborate the significance of transparency and effective communication in fostering trust and accountability within project communities (Marston, Renedo & Miles, 2020).

Overall, these findings provide empirical evidence supporting the theoretical framework of community participation strategy and its positive influence on NG-CDF project performance. They emphasize the importance of fostering meaningful community participation in project development processes to ensure project success and sustainability, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on participatory development approaches in Kenya and beyond.

Correlational analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to assess the linear relationship between community participation strategy and NG-CDF project performance, with a focus on timeliness, cost and scope. Utilizing Karl Pearson's correlation coefficient, which ranges from -1 to +1, the study aimed to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between predictor and predicted variables. The findings, detailed in Table 2, provide insights into the extent to which community participation strategy correlates with various aspects of project performance, aligning with established principles in correlation analysis (Kindu *et al.*, 2021; Kothari & Garg, 2014; Cooper & Schilder, 2011).

Table 2: Correlational Matrix

| | | Community participation | Project performance |
|-------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Community participation | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 1 | |
| Project performance | Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.615** 0.000 | 1 |

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

The findings obtained in Table 2 revealed that the influence of community participation strategy on project performance was positive and significant 0.01 ($r=0.615$, $p < 0.01$). Consistently, this finding was supported by Wambiya *et al.* (2021) who opine that proper stakeholder participation throughout the project stages, and the allocation of funds, enhances the performance of both NG-CDF and County projects in schools. Similarly, Muniu and Gakuu (2018) found a positive and significant correlation between community participation and the sustainability of community projects in Nyeri, Kenya. Furthermore, these findings were also supported by Suya (2020) who found that there was a statistically significant relationship between stakeholder involvement and performance of CDF projects in Nakuru Town West Constituency, Kenya. Gikombi and Njoroge (2018) also found that stakeholder involvement significantly affects the implementation of NG-CDF projects in Njoro Sub County in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Regression Analysis

The study conducted a regression analysis to examine the influence of predictor variables on the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya, aiming to determine both the extent of their influence and the nature of the relationship between community participation strategy and project performance. This analysis provided insights into how these variables contribute to project outcomes, with the results being presented and discussed accordingly.

Regression of community participation and project performance

The study conducted linear regression analysis to quantify the influence of community participation as an independent variable on the performance of NG-CDF projects as the dependent variable. The results, presented in Table 3, indicated a positive and statistically significant relationship between community participation and project performance ($r=0.615$, $p < 0.01$). To ascertain the precise magnitude of this influence, community participation was regressed against project performance, and the findings were interpreted from the regression results in Table 3.

Table 3: Community Participation in Project Performance

| Model Summary | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | R Square Change | Change Statistics | |
| | | | | | | F Change | Sig. F Change |
| 1 | .615 ^a | .378 | .375 | .54068 | .378 | 101.187 | .000 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), community participation

The results presented in Table 4.3 provide insights into the extent to which the independent variable, community participation, accounts for variations in the dependent variable, project performance. The correlation coefficient (R-value) of 0.615 and the coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.378 indicate that approximately 37.8% of the observed changes in project performance can be attributed to variations in community participation strategy. This finding is consistent with previous research which demonstrated a similar relationship between community participation and project performance in NG-CDF and County projects in schools (Wambiya *et al.*, 2021). Also, the ANOVA test value of 101.187, with a significance level of $p < 0.01$, underscores the adequacy of the regression model in explaining the variability in project performance. This aligns with the findings by Muniu and Gakuu (2018), who also emphasized the significance of community involvement in enhancing the sustainability of community projects in Kenya. Therefore, these results validate the importance of community participation as a significant factor influencing the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya, as highlighted in Table 3, which displays the unstandardized coefficients of community participation.

Table 4: Community Participation Coefficient

| | | Coefficients^a | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|--------------|--------|-------|
| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized | T | Sig. |
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.474 | .374 | | 5.013 | 0.000 |
| | Community participation | .710 | .074 | .615 | 10.549 | 0.000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Project performance

Based on the findings presented in Table 4, the standardized coefficient (β value) for community participation strategy was determined to be 0.615, with a corresponding t-value of 10.549, significant at $p < 0.05$. This suggests that the estimated regression model, as depicted in Table 4, is statistically significant and reliable. For instance, in a similar study, Suya (2020) found that a higher standardized coefficient indicated a stronger influence of community participation on project performance in NG-CDF projects in Nakuru Town West Constituency, Kenya. Additionally, with a significance level of $p < 0.05$, the results indicate that for every 5% increase in community participation strategy, there is a predicted increase in project performance. This finding is consistent with research by Gikombi and Njoroge (2018), who observed a similar positive relationship between community participation and project outcomes in NG-CDF projects in Njoro Sub County in Nakuru County, Kenya. Consequently, the study rejects the null hypothesis (H_0) that community participation strategy has no significant influence on the performance of NG-CDF projects in Kenya, aligning with prior research findings.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study has highlighted the importance of strong community participation in NG-CDF projects in Kenya, reflecting positive engagement throughout various project stages. Community participation in decision-making, project identification and the selection of management representatives was widely acknowledged. The consensus on mechanisms to address participation barriers highlights an environment conducive to engagement, emphasizing the importance of fostering active community involvement and transparent communication to strengthen project relevance, ownership and sustainability.

The study recommends the enhancement of community participation in NG-CDF projects through active involvement which is crucial in decision-making, project identification and its management. Further, this study underscores the imperative of transparent communication channels, leveraging diverse platforms like meetings, newsletters, social media and radio broadcasts to foster trust, accountability and sustainability among stakeholders, thus amplifying project efficacy and relevance.

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