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DECISION MAKING AND SUSTAINABILITY OF WORLD VISION COMMUNITY WATER PROJECTS IN HOMABAY COUNTY, KENYA

[1] Odhiambo Juliet Akeyo, [2] Dr. Lango Benard

[1]MSc, Project Management, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology.

[2]Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology.

Abstract

Access to clean water is a fundamental human right and a crucial component of sustainable development. Community participation has been recognized as a key factor in achieving sustainable development goals, as it fosters active participation, local ownership, and accountability. The general objective of this study was to assess the influence of decision making on sustainability of community water projects implemented by World Vision in Homabay County. This research was based on the stakeholder theory. A descriptive research design was adopted. The target population was 208 respondents consisting of project managers, project committee members and local area chiefs. Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires and was analyzed descriptively by use of means and standard deviation and inferentially by use of correlation and regression analyses. The results revealed that decision-making (Beta = 0.294, p = 0.000) significantly influenced the projects' sustainability. The study concluded that the active involvement of community members in decision making in various aspects of the project, was vital for the long-term success and sustainability of such initiatives. Recommendations highlighted the necessity to prioritize transparency in decision-making and to ensure projects' sustainability. Future research suggestions encompass exploring regional variabilities, integrating technology and innovation into water projects, and conducting longitudinal studies to comprehend evolving dynamics over time.

Keywords; decision making, Project sustainability, community water projects, Homabay county, community projects.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

The importance of sustainability of water projects globally cannot be overstated. Water is a finite resource essential for human survival, agriculture, industry, and ecosystems. Sustainable water projects are crucial for ensuring reliable access to clean water, reducing water scarcity, and mitigating water-related conflicts (Scanlon et al., 2023). Moreover, sustainable water management practices contribute to environmental conservation, preserving aquatic ecosystems, and safeguarding biodiversity. Molino et al. (2023) argue addressing water challenges globally requires the long-term viability of water projects, including infrastructure, governance, and community participation, to ensure equitable access, efficient use, and conservation of water resources. Promoting sustainable water projects worldwide, enhance resilience, support economic development, protect public health, and foster social equity, ultimately paving the way for a sustainable and water-secure future (Sabale et al., 2023).

The sustainability of water projects globally faces a range of challenges. Climate change is altering hydrological patterns, causing increased water scarcity, and affecting the reliability of water sources (Mohammed et al., 2022). Onanuga et al. (2022) noted rapid urbanization and population growth strain existing water infrastructure and resources, leading to inadequate access and service provision. Additionally, inadequate governance, weak institutions, and limited financial resources hinder the long-term sustainability of water projects. Moreover, social and cultural factors, such as unequal access, gender disparities, and community disengagement, further compound the sustainability challenges. To address these issues, there is a growing recognition of the need for integrated water resource management, participatory approaches, innovative technologies, and multi- stakeholder collaborations. Efforts are being made to enhance the sustainability of water projects through policy reforms, capacity building, and community empowerment, but ongoing global efforts are necessary to ensure sustainable and equitable access to water for all (Schaub et al., 2023).

Statement of the Problem

Globally, the importance of development projects cannot be overstated. Several community development projects have failed to achieve the set objective of elevating the lives of community members as had originally been the goal. Billions of dollars have been spent on community projects but 30-50% of the projects have failed a short period after implementation (UNICEF, 2016). In 2015, UN world water development report highlighted that globally, of 126,251 water points across 37 countries, 20% were not functional and 10% of the functioning ones had problems (Cornor, 2015).

In Kenya, Community projects account for a large percentage of projects used to alleviate lives of citizens. Currently, the water and sanitation coverage is only 32% countrywide which is low and the government is looking to increase it to 40% before the end of the year 2023 (Muindi & Baraka, 2022). According to African Development Bank, (2020) the 2011-2017 water and sanitation project for small towns and rural areas has yielded great results.

Research data indicates that projects with robust community participation have a notably higher rate of long-term success, with a reported average of 20% longer project lifespans compared to projects with limited community interaction (World Bank, 2021). Furthermore, analyses of community-led initiatives show that they are 35% more likely to implement sustainable practices and 25% more likely to secure alternative funding sources beyond initial project grants (Githinji,

2020). These statistical trends underscore the pivotal role of community participation in fostering ownership, fostering sustainable behaviors, and attracting external support, all of which significantly contribute to the overall sustainability of water projects.

Several development projects have not survived beyond the exit of donors despite heavy funding on the implementation of the projects. Poor sustainability of projects therefore deprives beneficiaries returns expected from these investments, (Luvenga et al., 2015). For the water projects that are ongoing in Homabay county, Omulo (2021) reports on sixteen stalled water projects in the county that already paid out 51.4 million shillings out of the needed 99.9 million shillings. Homabay County is one of the semi-arid areas of the country that world vision has set up projects to help with the water scarcity situation.

Several studies have been done on community participation in Kenya (Davis et al., 2018; Mutiso et al., 2018; Rodgers, 2021; Ochola, 2022) but they focused on other contexts and therefore their findings cannot be used to generalize water projects implemented by World Vision in Homabay County. This study therefore intended to fill the existing conceptual and knowledge gaps. This study therefore determined the influence of decision making on the sustainability of world vision water projects in Homabay County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholders' theory has its origin from Freeman (1984) as cited by (Fontaine, Haarman, & Schmid, 2006). Stakeholder theory contends that firms produce externalities that affect many stakeholders which are both internal and external (Reuter, Goebel & Foerstl, 2021). Externalities often cause stakeholders to increasepressures on firms to decrease negative impacts and increase positive impacts (Sarkis, Gonzalez-Torre & Adenso-Diaz, 2020). Stakeholder theory further states that organizations are responsible toward various stakeholders since they are expected to react to their different claims as an attempt to legitimize their existence (Freeman, 2010). This theory also suggests that firms are rooted in a network of relationships with stakeholders and that these firms allocate varying amounts of resources and attention to these stakeholders (Parmar et al., 2020).

While stakeholder theory has gained significant attention and recognition in the field of management and decision making, it is not without its criticisms. One critique is the challenge of defining and identifying relevant stakeholders. Stakeholder theory encompasses a broad range of individuals and groups, and determining who should be considered a stakeholder and how their interests should be represented can be subjective and complex. Additionally, balancing the conflicting interests and demands of various stakeholders can be challenging, leading to potential conflicts and difficulties in reaching consensus (Sarkis et al., 2020). Critics also argue that stakeholder theory may prioritize short-term stakeholder satisfaction over long-term sustainability goals, potentially compromising the overall success and effectiveness of projects. Finally, some critics contend that stakeholder theory lacks a clear framework for decision making and does not provide specific guidance on how to prioritize stakeholder interests or resolve conflicts between stakeholders (Reuter et al., 2021).

Stakeholder theory is relevant to the relationship between decision making and sustainability of water projects. Water projects involve multiple stakeholders, including community members, government agencies, NGOs, and industry representatives, who have a vested interest in the project's outcomes. By considering the interests, concerns, and needs of these stakeholders in the decision-making process, decision makers can ensure that decisions are well-informed, socially

inclusive, and aligned with the long-term sustainability goals of the project. Engaging stakeholders promotes transparency, collaboration, and accountability, leading to better decision outcomes and increased stakeholder support. Furthermore, by incorporating stakeholder perspectives, decision makers can address potential conflicts, mitigate risks, and maximize the positive impacts of the water projects on the environment, society, and economy, thus enhancing its overall sustainability.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework is an organized structure or a theoretical model that helps to guide and shape the understanding of a specific topic or phenomenon (Zikmund et al., 2019). This study contains independent variables (community participation) and the dependent variable (sustainability of water projects) linked by a theoretical structure. Figure 1 shows the theoretical background of the study

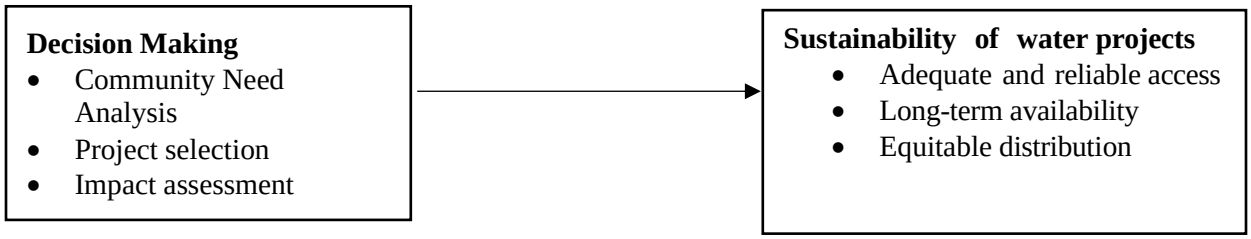

Figure1 Conceptual framework

Review of Literature on Decision Making

The inclusion of community representatives in the decision-making process related to water projects planning, implementation, and management is crucial for ensuring the success and sustainability of the project. By involving community members, particularly those directly affected by the project, decision makers can tap into local knowledge, perspectives, and expertise (Silvius & Shipper, 2019). Community representatives can provide valuable insights into the specific needs, challenges, and aspirations of the community, allowing for more informed and contextually appropriate decision making. Moreover, their inclusion fosters a sense of ownership and empowerment, as community members become active participants rather than passive recipients of the project. This involvement promotes transparency, accountability, and legitimacy, as decisions are made collectively and with the community's best interests in mind (Onyango, 2020).

Community members' participation in setting project goals, objectives, and priorities is essential for ensuring that the water projects aligns with the community's needs and aspirations. By allowing community input at the goal-setting stage, decision makers can prioritize the issues and outcomes that matter most to the community. This participatory approach acknowledges the unique knowledge and understanding that community members possess about their own contexts, challenges, and opportunities (Makanda et al., 2022). It also helps build trust and mutual understanding between decision makers and the community, as community members see their concerns and aspirations reflected in the project's objectives. By involving the community in goal setting, decision makers can create a sense of shared purpose and ensure that the project addresses the most pressing water-related needs of the community (Matu, Kyalo, Mbugua & Mulwa, 2020).

The existence of mechanisms for community feedback and input on key decisions is crucial for maintaining an ongoing dialogue and ensuring that community perspectives are considered throughout the water project’s lifecycle. Regular opportunities for community participation, such

as community meetings, focus groups, or surveys, provide channels for community members to voice their opinions, concerns, and suggestions (Kiani Mavi & Ahadi, 2021). This feedback mechanism allows decision makers to assess community satisfaction, identify potential issues or challenges, and make necessary adjustments to project plans and strategies. By actively seeking community input, decision makers demonstrate their commitment to inclusivity, responsiveness, and continuous improvement. This participatory approach fosters a sense of trust and collaboration between decision makers and the community, enhancing the likelihood of successful project outcomes and long-term sustainability expertise (Silvius & Shipper, 2019).

Empirical Review

Decision making and sustainability of water projects

Decision making has been studied extensively in the context of inter-firm relationships and its impact on project sustainability. Silvius and Shipper (2019) focused on the role of decision making in sustainable project management. The study was anchored on the theory of sustainable project management. The study used a qualitative case study approach. The population of the study was project managers involved in sustainable projects. The sample size was 10 project managers. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling. The data collection instrument was semi- structured interviews. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The study found that decision-making was an important factor in sustainable project management. The study also found that project managers need to consider the social, environmental, and economic impacts of their decisions when managing sustainable projects.

Kiani Mavi and Ahadi (2021) focused on the role of decision-making in project sustainability: A systematic review. The study did not anchor on any specific theory. The study used a systematic review approach. The population of the study was empirical studies on decision-making and project sustainability. The sample size was 24 studies. The sampling strategy was a systematic search of the literature. The data collection instrument was a coding framework. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The study found that decision-making was an important factor in project sustainability. The study also found that there were a number of factors that influenced decision-making for project sustainability, including stakeholder participation, the use of sustainability criteria, and the consideration of the triple bottom line. Onyango (2020) focused on the effect of decision-making on project sustainability in Kenya. The study was anchored on the theory of stakeholder participation. The study used a mixed-methods approach, with a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The population of the study was project managers in Kenya. The sample size was 200 project managers. The sampling strategy was stratified random sampling. The data collection instrument was a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, factor analysis, and structural equation modeling. The study found that decision-making had a significant impact on project sustainability. The study also found that stakeholder participation was an important factor in decision-making for project sustainability.

Matu, Kyalo, Mbugua and Mulwa (2020) focused on the effect of decision-making on project sustainability in Kenya. The study was anchored on the theory of project sustainability. The study used a case study approach. The population of the study was the project managers involved in the Arror-Kimwarer dam project. The sample size was 10 project managers. The sampling strategy was purposive sampling. The data collection instrument was semi-structured interviews. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The study found that decision-making had a significant impact on the sustainability of the Arror-Kimwarer dam project. The study also found that poor decision-making was one of the factors that contributed to the failure of the project.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current study utilized a descriptive research design to examine the effect of community participation on sustainability of water projects implemented by World Vision in Homabay County. This study looked at projects that have been completed by World Vision in Homabay Count whereby, the target population was the 208 respondents consisting of project managers, project committee members and local area chief. The sample size for this research was 137 respondents using Yamane formula.

Data Collection and Analysis Techniques

Primary data was collected to ensure the study objectives are fully met. The primary data was obtained using a structured questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was chosen because the study adopted a quantitative approach, which was similar to numerical data. The questionnaires were shared with the respondents via mail on google forms. A research assistant was employed to help administer the questionnaires through drop and pick in cases where respondents were not reachable via Google form.

Data was evaluated using descriptive statistical methods such as the mean, which is a measure of central tendency, and the standard deviation, which is a measure of dispersion. This was done using the SPSS application.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive statistics

Table 1 sheds light on the perspective of the respondents about the involvement and role of community members in the decision-making process of the water projects implemented by World Vision in Homabay County.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Decision Making

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev
The community members are actively involved in the decision-making process of the project.	96	3.86	0.81
The project team considers the opinions and preferences of the community when making important project decisions.	96	4.05	0.77
The decision-making process is transparent, and the community is informed about the reasons behind project decisions.	96	3.91	0.95
The community feels empowered to influence project decisions and outcomes.	96	4.09	0.60
The project team seeks consensus among community members when making decisions.	96	4.05	0.77
The community has opportunities to provide feedback and suggestions on project decisions.	96	4.64	0.48
The project team effectively communicates the impact of community input on project decisions.	96	4.06	0.79
The community believes that their input is valued and considered during the decision-making process.	96	3.98	0.73
Overall mean Score		**4.08**	**0.76**

The overall mean score for all the statements related to decision-making stands at 4.08 with a

standard deviation of 0.76. This suggests that, on average, the respondents have a positive perception of the involvement and importance of the community in the decision-making process.

This emphasis on decision- making resonates with the findings of Silvius and Shipper (2019) who, through their qualitative case study approach, pinpointed decision-making as a pivotal component in sustainable project management.

Table 2 Sustainability of Water Projects

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Dev
The water projects have effectively addressed the water needs of the community.	96	4.09	0.67
The water projects have demonstrated long-term viability and resilience.	96	3.95	0.71
The water projects have contributed to the improvement of community health and well-being.	96	3.68	1.14
The water projects have promoted sustainable water resource management practices.	96	3.64	0.88
The water projects have effectively engaged and involved community members in its planning and implementation.	96	4.09	0.73
The water projects have considered the social, economic, and environmental impacts of its activities.	96	3.95	0.88
The water projects have established mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of its performance.	96	3.98	0.67
The community believes that the benefits of the water projects will continue to be realized in the future.	96	4.02	0.81
Overall Mean Score	**96**	**3.93**	**0.73**

The overall mean score for all statements regarding the sustainability of water projects stands at 3.93, with a standard deviation of 0.73. This suggests that, generally, respondents view the water projects as sustainable and impactful.

Effectively addressing community water needs, actively engaging the community in decision making, and community belief in future benefits are key factors in shaping perceptions of sustainability and impact.

Inferential Statistics

Correlation analysis

There's a strong positive correlation of 0.713 between the sustainability of water projects and decision-making processes. The p-value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000 indicates that this correlation is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. This suggests that as the quality of decision-making improves, there is a likely increase in the sustainability of water projects, and vice versa.

Table 3 Correlation Results

		Sustainability of water projects	Decision making
sustainability of water projects	Pearson Correlation	1	
Decision making	Pearson Correlation	.713**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	

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

b. Listwise N=96

Regression analysis

The model summary, ANOVA, and coefficients tables present the analysis' findings. The model summary explains how much variation in the dependent variable is due to the independent variables fitted in the model.

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	djusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.965[a]	.931	.928	.226091	2.01

a. Predictor: (Constant), Decision making
b. Dependent Variable: sustainability of water projects

Table 4 provides a snapshot of the strength and predictive capability of the regression model. The R-value is 0.965, suggesting a very strong linear relationship between the decision making and the dependent variable, sustainability of water projects. The R Square value is 0.931, indicating that approximately 93.1% of the variability in the sustainability of water projects can be explained by the decision-making variable included in the model.

Table 5 ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	62.647	4	15.662	306.387	.000[b]
	Residual	4.652	91	.051		
	Total	67.298	95			

a. Dependent Variable: sustainability of water projects
b. Predictor: Decision making

Table 5 tests the hypothesis that the regression model predicts the dependent variable (sustainability of water projects) significantly better than a model with no predictors. The F-statistic, a measure of how much the model improves the prediction of the outcome over a model with no predictors, is 306.387. The extremely small significance value (Sig.) of .000, which is below any conventional significance level (0.05), strongly suggests that the regression model fits the data better than the intercept-only model. In simple terms, the predictors in the regression model contribute significantly to explaining the variability in the sustainability of water projects, and the model is statistically significant.

Table 6 Model Coefficients

		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.079	.201		5.361	.000
	Decision making	.221	.053	.294	4.184	.000

a Dependent variable: sustainability of water projects

From the Table 4:21 the following model was developed.

$Y = 1.079 + 0.294X1 + Ɛ$

Where:

Y = sustainability of water projects

X1 = decision making

The coefficient of decision-making is 0.221. This indicates that for every one-unit increase in decision-making, the sustainability of water projects is predicted to increase by 0.221 units, while keeping all other variables constant. Its standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.294 represents the strength and direction of its relationship with the sustainability of water projects in terms of standard deviation units. With a positive t-value of 4.184 and a significance level of .000, this suggests that decision-making has a statistically significant positive effect on the sustainability of water projects.

Conclusion

The study conclusively established that decision-making plays a pivotal role in determining the sustainability of water projects overseen by World Vision in Homabay County. An inclusive decision-making process, characterized by active community involvement, transparency, and a quest for consensus, positively influences the long-term viability and acceptance of these projects. The significant positive correlation between community-driven decision-making and project sustainability underscores the essence of prioritizing community voices, opinions, and preferences in critical project decisions.

Recommendation

For water projects to achieve enduring sustainability, it is recommended that World Vision in Homabay County places a heightened emphasis on community-centric decision-making processes. It is vital to ensure that community voices, opinions, and preferences are not only heard but also integrated into key project decisions. By adopting an inclusive and transparent decision-making framework, World Vision can foster a deeper sense of ownership and commitment among community members, leading to higher project acceptance and long-term success. Thus, continuous efforts should be made to empower and involve the community in the decision-making process at all project phases.

Suggestions for Further Research

The current research predominantly concentrated on community involvement, and decision making. Another promising avenue for exploration could be the role of technology and innovation in enhancing the sustainability of water projects. This involves understanding how emerging technologies, from water purification systems to AI-driven monitoring tools, can be integrated into water projects to amplify their efficiency, reach, and longevity. Furthermore, examining the community's receptiveness and adaptability to such technologies would provide a holistic view of technology's potential role in sustainable water management.

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