Driving Project Success: Exploring Stakeholder Engagement in Self-Help Groups for Sustainable Development in Kenya

Authors: [1]Mary Kalewa Mutungi and [2]Johan Potgieter (posthumus)
[1]Marist International University College –Kenya. **Website:** www.miuc.ac.ke
[2]Gideon Robert University, Zambia. **Website:** https://www.grobertuniversity.com
Correspondence: Mary Kalewa Mutungi. **E-mail:** mutungimary4@gmail.com

Abstract: Stakeholder participation is widely recognized as a critical determinant of project success. However, its specific influence within self-help groups (SHGs) remains underexplored. This study examines the relationship between stakeholder engagement and project performance in SHGs in lower Eastern Kenya, with implications for sustainable community development. Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires from 169 SHG members across financial, social, and mixed-purpose groups. A stratified random sampling method ensured representativeness, yielding an 84.5% response rate. Findings reveal that group members are the primary stakeholders (95.9%) and actively participate in decision-making (90.5%). However, the correlation between stakeholder engagement and project performance is minimal (r = 0.0003), suggesting the presence of additional influencing factors. Regular information sharing (88.1%) and targeted training (90.7%) enhance decision-making capacity and accountability. The study recommends capacity-building programs, inclusive governance frameworks, and policy interventions that integrate stakeholder feedback. By providing empirical evidence on stakeholder engagement in grassroots initiatives, this study contributes to participatory project management literature and informs strategies for enhancing SHG-driven development. Future research should adopt longitudinal and comparative approaches to explore the intersection of stakeholder dynamics, socio-economic factors, and project success.

Keywords: Stakeholder Engagement, Project Performance, Self-help Groups, Community Development, Sustainable Development, Participatory Governance

1.1 Background of the Study

Stakeholder engagement is widely regarded as a fundamental factor in the success of development projects, particularly within community-based initiatives. Effective stakeholder participation fosters shared ownership, enhances resource mobilization, and strengthens project sustainability (Freeman, 1984). However, despite its recognized importance, many community-driven projects struggle to integrate stakeholders meaningfully, leading to challenges in long-term viability and impact (Chinyere

& Ogbonna, 2018). Self-help groups (SHGs) have become a grassroots economic and social empowerment model, particularly among marginalized communities. These groups operate on principles of collective action, enabling members to pool resources, share knowledge, and support one another in achieving financial stability and social well-being (Harper, 2002). Self-help groups have been instrumental in addressing key development concerns, including poverty alleviation, gender empowerment, and financial inclusion (Kabeer, 2005). However, the role of stakeholder engagement in determining the success of SHG-driven initiatives remains underexplored, particularly in resource-constrained environments (Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2015).Existing research emphasizes the significance of participation in development projects but often lacks empirical evidence directly linking stakeholder engagement to measurable project outcomes (Mensah et al., 2020). Additionally, studies tend to focus on external stakeholders such as donors and policymakers, neglecting the critical role of internal stakeholders, SHG members themselves, in project governance and performance. This study addresses this gap by investigating the extent and impact of stakeholder engagement within SHGs in Kenya, seeking to determine whether participatory approaches enhance project success and sustainability.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Self-help groups (SHGs) are pivotal in fostering economic empowerment, social cohesion, and financial inclusion in rural communities, particularly in Kenya. These groups serve as mechanisms for collective savings, credit access, and capacity-building for marginalized populations. However, despite their widespread adoption, many SHGs struggle with sustainability and impact due to low stakeholder participation (Mulumba & Muchelule, 2024). Research indicates that stakeholder engagement and participation from group members, local authorities, NGOs, and financial institutions significantly influences project success and longevity (Machuma, Odek, & Vundi, 2024). Nonetheless, a gap exists in understanding the extent, nature, and effectiveness of stakeholder involvement in rural SHGs, limiting the development of robust participatory models. The Kenyan SHG model, rooted in the traditional Harambee spirit of collective action, presents an opportunity for participatory development. However, a lack of comprehensive research on structured stakeholder engagement frameworks within SHGs limits their potential. While studies on social capital theory (Putnam, 2000) and participatory development models (Arnstein, 1969) emphasize the role of stakeholder collaboration, their application in SHG contexts remains underexplored in Kenya. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the influence of stakeholder participation on the success rates of SHGs in rural Kenya, providing a framework for inclusive engagement that can enhance group sustainability, financial performance, and long-term impact.

1.3 Research objective

To analyze the relationship between stakeholder Participation and Project Success in Self-Help Groups in Rural Kenya.
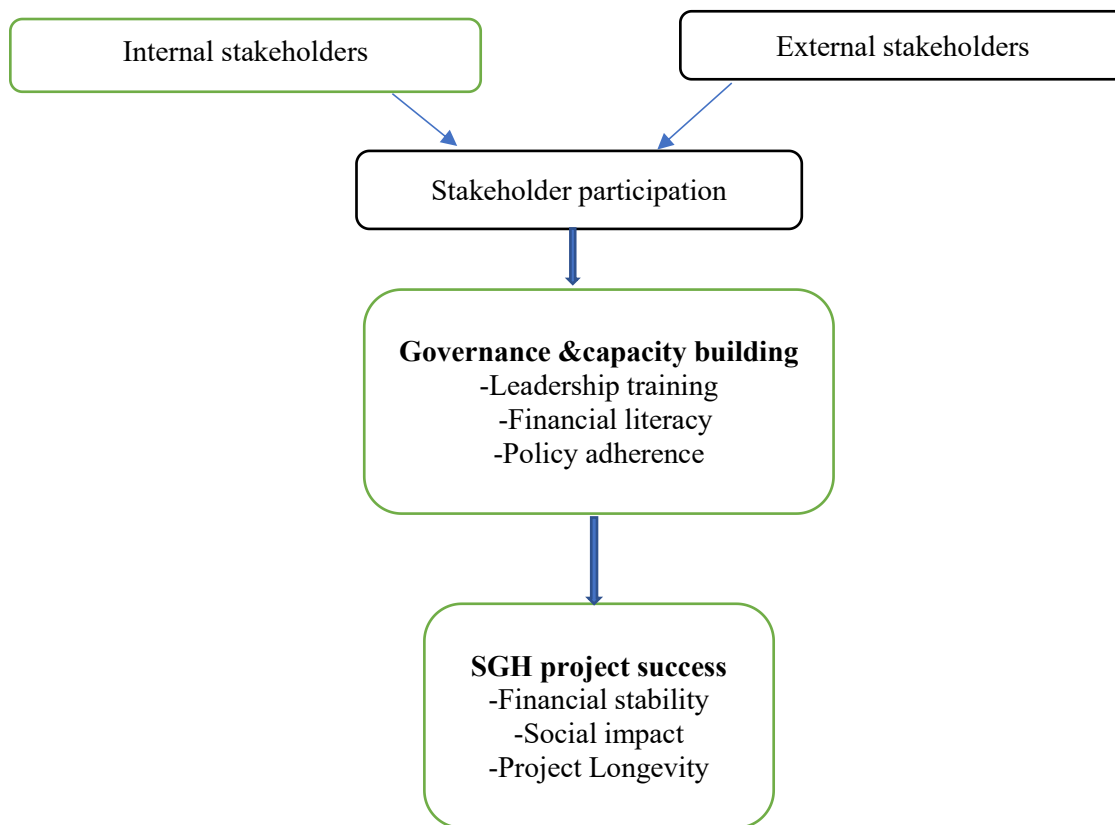
1.4 Conceptual and theoretical framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework
Source: Own illustration (2024)

1.5 Literature Review
Conceptualizing Project Success
The definition of project success has evolved beyond the traditional metrics of cost, time, and scope to encompass broader dimensions such as stakeholder satisfaction, sustainability, and long-term community impact (Atkinson, 1999). Studies highlight that success is often perceived differently across stakeholders; clients prioritize usability and long-term value, while project teams focus on efficiency and budget constraints (Turner & Zolin, 2012). In community-based initiatives like SHGs, success indicators extend to financial sustainability, social cohesion, and empowerment of marginalized groups (Mensah et al., 2020). However, despite the recognition of these multidimensional factors, many projects fail to achieve sustainable outcomes due to gaps in stakeholder participation (Chinyere & Ogbonna, 2018).

Stakeholder Engagement in Development Projects
Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984) underscores the importance of managing relationships with all

parties who influence or are influenced by a project. Empirical studies affirm that active stakeholder participation improves decision-making, increases project ownership, and enhances resource mobilization (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2010). Yang et al. (2011) found that communication and inclusion of stakeholder input at all project phases significantly enhanced construction project outcomes. Similarly, Osei-Kyei and Chan (2017) concluded that stakeholder engagement was a key determinant of success in public-private partnership projects. Within community-driven projects, higher stakeholder engagement is associated with sustainability and social impact (Chinyere & Ogbonna, 2018). However, the extent to which SHG members influence project performance remains insufficiently explored. Research by Harper (2002) suggests that inclusive decision-making enhances financial stability and group cohesion, yet many SHGs struggle to maintain consistent engagement due to resource limitations and competing interests (Mensah et al., 2020).

Linking Stakeholder Engagement to Project Performance
Empirical studies consistently suggest a positive correlation between stakeholder engagement and project success (Bourne & Walker, 2005). Duflo et al. (2015) found that involving local communities in project planning significantly improved educational outcomes in developing countries. In the SHG context, Harper (2002) emphasized that participatory decision-making and active member involvement are essential for achieving financial stability. However, Mensah et al. (2020) highlight that resource constraints and conflicting stakeholder interests often hinder effective engagement. Given these findings, this study investigates whether increased stakeholder engagement in SHGs translates to measurable improvements in project performance. The research tests whether decision-making involvement, communication, and training contribute to sustainable outcomes.

1.6 Research Design and Approach
This study adopted a quantitative research design, which was selected for its effectiveness in examining relationships between variables and providing measurable, generalizable insights into stakeholder engagement and project success (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study population comprised members and stakeholders of various Self-Help Groups (SHGs) operating within the lower eastern region of Kenya. To ensure representative coverage, a stratified random sampling technique was employed; the strata were defined based on SHG categories, financial, social, and mixed-purpose groups, to capture the heterogeneity in stakeholder experiences (Bryman, 2016). A structured questionnaire was developed drawing upon established scales from previous research on stakeholder engagement and project success (Smith & Jones, 2015). Prior to the main study, the instrument was pre-tested on a pilot sample of 20 respondents to assess reliability and validity. Reliability analysis yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.87 for the stakeholder engagement scale and 0.84 for the project success scale, indicating strong internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Out of 200 distributed questionnaires, 169 were completed and returned, achieving an 84.5% response rate. The collected data were then analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques to explore the relationships among key variables, thereby underpinning the study's robust findings.

1.7 Findings and Discussion
Table 1: Questionnaire Return Rate

Respondents	Number administered	Number returned	% of return rate
Self-help respondents	200	169	84.5%

Source: Field data, 2024

Table 1 shows that the study initially distributed 200 questionnaires but received 169 (84.5%) back. The respondents who failed to participate for one reason amounted to 31 (15.5%). However, the number that was able to participate was representative enough to allow for the generalization of results as was initially envisaged. According to Teresia (2021), a response rate of 70% or above is considered very good. This implies that the questionnaire return rate for this study (84.5%) was satisfactory to allow generalization of results.

Reliability of the instruments
Table 2: Reliability of the instruments

Cronbach's Alpha Scores	Number of Questionnaire Items Tested
.718	56

Table 2 shows that the reliability test of the research instruments was conducted using Cronbach`s Alpha test, which tested 56 questionnaire items using SPSS. The test results indicated a moderate level of internal consistency at 0.718, as indicated in Table 2. Cronbach's alpha coefficient measured the internal consistency or reliability of the research instruments. The score of 0.718 was within the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Bonett, 2015). Therefore, the instruments were considered sufficiently reliable.
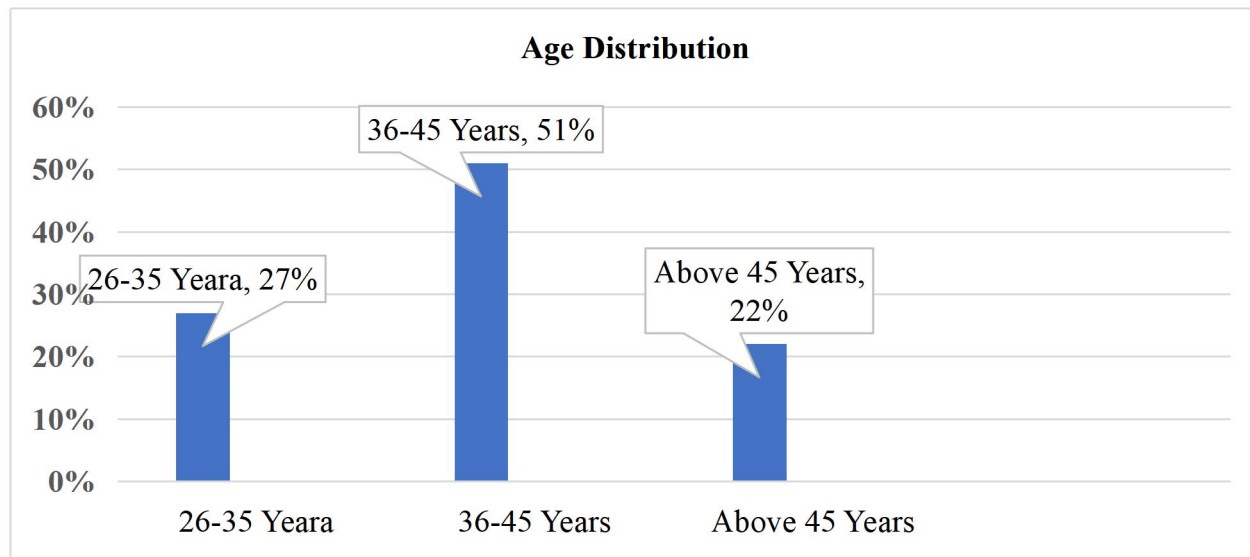
Demographic analysis
Age Distribution

Figure 2: *Age Distribution*
Source: *Field data, 2024*

The age distribution indicates that respondents aged 36-45 years, accounting for 51%, surpassed all the other age categories. They were followed by those aged 26-35 at 27%, while the least respondents were above 45 years at 22%. The study notes that respondents aged 36-45 accounted for 51% of the total respondents, suggesting that this age group is the most represented in the study. This age range also falls within the middle-age category. The second-highest representation is observed in the 26-35 age group, comprising 27% of the respondents. While not as dominant as the 36-45 age group, this still represents a substantial portion of the participants. The age group above 45 has the most miniature representation at 22%. This implies that individuals above 45 are the least represented among the respondents. The dominance of respondents in the 36-45 age groups suggests that individuals in their middle ages are particularly relevant to the study on management practices and project success in self-help group projects in Kenya. This may imply that middle-aged individuals play a significant role in these projects.
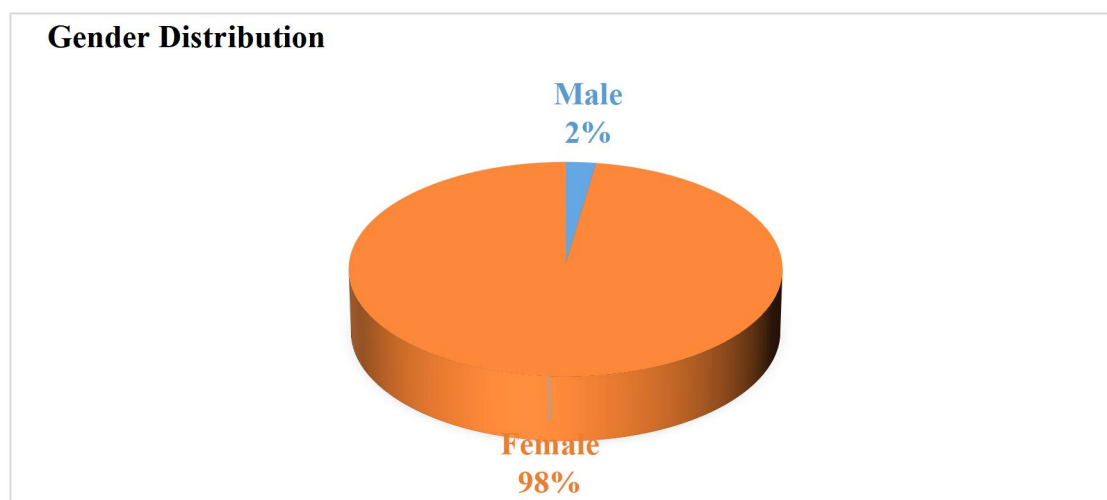
Figure 3: *Gender distribution*
Source: *Field data, 2024*

The study findings indicate a gender distribution of 98% female and 2% male among stakeholders participating in self-help groups. this substantial gender disparity underscores the predominance of women in SHG-driven initiatives, a trend widely observed in community-based development programs, particularly in developing countries. (Kabeer,2015). While this shows the critical role of women in social development, it also presents significant project management challenges related to stakeholder diversity, decision making and long-term project sustainability.
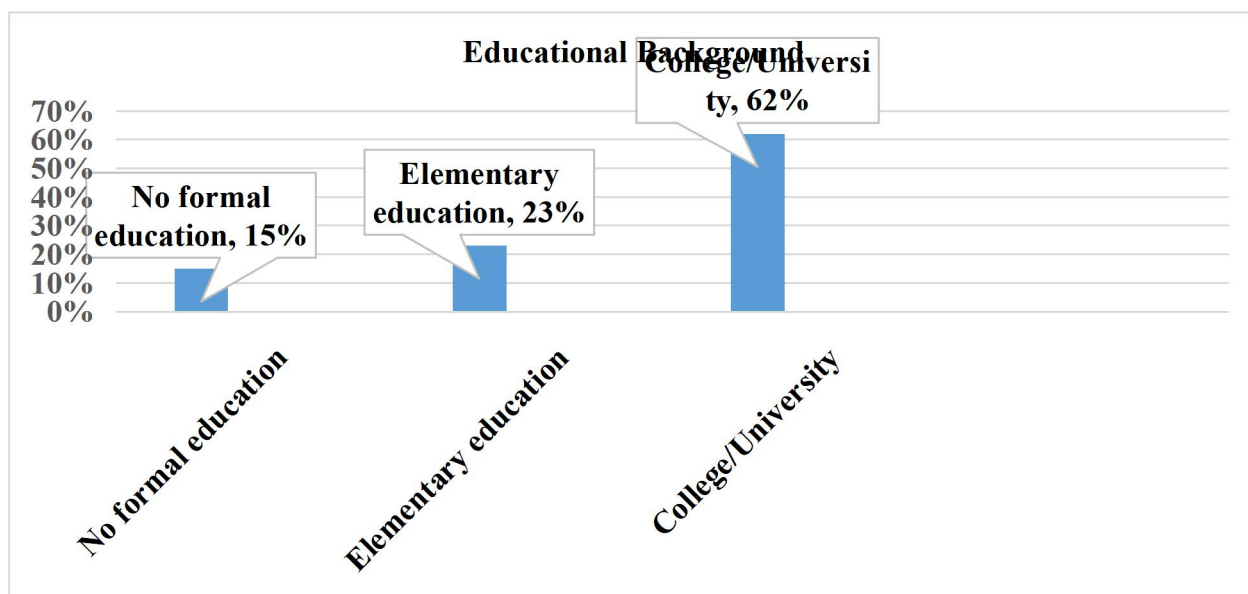

Figure 4: *Educational Background*
Source: *Field data, 2024*

The education distribution indicates that 105 (62%) of the respondents had college or university education, 39(23%) had elementary education, and 25(15%) had no formal education. This implies that most respondents could comprehend the questionnaire items for this study and appropriately give feedback. It also implies that most of the respondents had adequate education to allow them to participate in leadership roles. It was also observed that, with 62% of respondents having a college or university education, most participants in the study possess a higher level of formal education. This suggests that a significant portion of the sample has received advanced education beyond elementary. The 23% of respondents with elementary education indicate a moderate representation of individuals with a basic level of formal education. While not the majority, this group is still noteworthy within the study. The 15% of respondents with no formal education is a smaller but significant sample segment. This implies that some study participants had limited or no formal education.
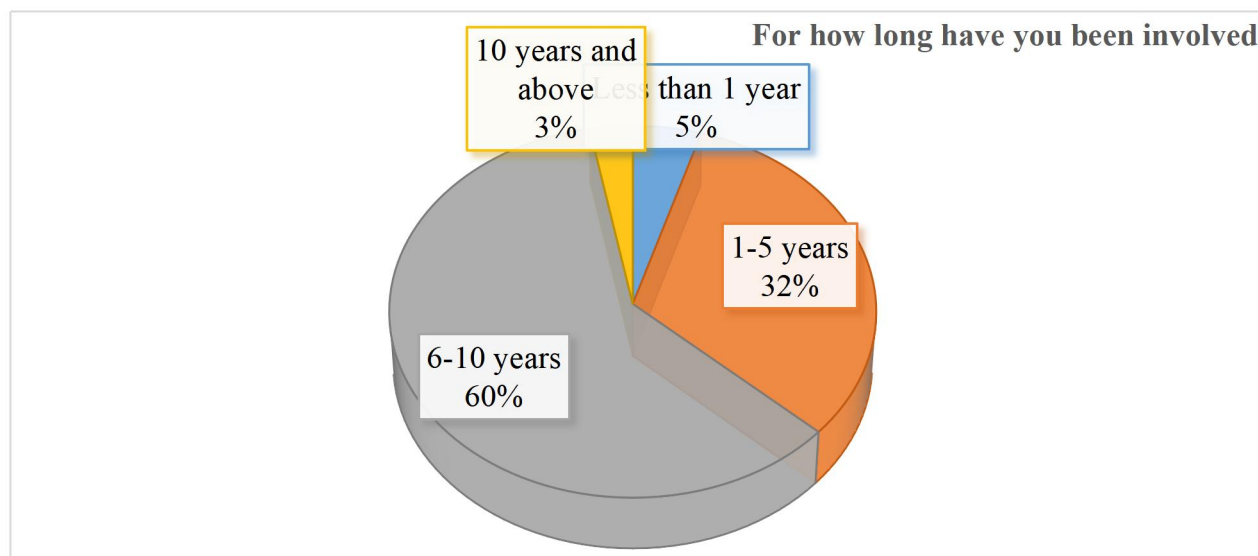

Figure 5: *Duration of Time in Self-Help Groups*
Source: *Field data, 2024*

The study shows that 60% of the respondents had been involved in self-help group projects for 6-10 years, followed by those who had been involved for 1-5 years (32%). Those who had worked for less than one year were 5%, while 3% had been involved for ten years and above. The fact that 60% of respondents had been involved in self-help group projects for 6-10 years suggests a significant presence of individuals with long-term experience. This group likely represents a wealth of knowledge, insights, and expertise gained over an extended period of involvement. The 32% of respondents who had been involved for 1-5 years indicate a substantial representation of individuals with moderate-term experience. This group may bring a mix of established understanding and newer perspectives to the study, contributing to diverse insights.

Table 3: *Main Stakeholders*

Who are the main stakeholders' partners in your project?	Frequency	Per centage
Promoters	7	4.1
Group members	162	95.9
Total	**169**	**100.0**

Source: *Field data, 2024*

The study shows that 96% of the respondents indicated that group members were the main stakeholders, followed by promoters, as indicated by 4% of the respondents. The high percentage (96%) highlighting group members as the primary stakeholders indicates a strong consensus among respondents. The emphasis on group members as the primary stakeholders aligns with recognizing the importance of internal stakeholders. In this context, group members are likely viewed as crucial contributors, decision-makers, and beneficiaries of the projects. The relatively low percentage (4%) indicating promoters as stakeholders suggests that, according to the respondents, external individuals or entities involved in promoting or initiating the projects have a comparatively minor role or influence in the stakeholders' landscape. The dominance of group members as stakeholders implies that decisions, priorities, and project directions are likely to be heavily influenced by the needs and perspectives of the individuals directly involved in the self-help groups. Their active participation and engagement are crucial for project success. The findings may suggest a preference for member-centric approaches to project planning and execution. Understanding group members' needs, aspirations, and concerns will likely be a priority for project leaders and organizers. Given the overwhelming emphasis on group members as stakeholders, there may be opportunities to enhance their participation further. Strategies that promote inclusivity, communication, and active involvement could be beneficial for ensuring the success and sustainability of self-help group projects. While promoters are identified as stakeholders by a smaller percentage, exploring the dynamics between promoters and group members could provide insights into potential areas of collaboration, conflict, or mutual benefit. Understanding these dynamics is essential for effective project management. The prioritization of group members as stakeholders aligns with the principles of self-help groups, where collective action, empowerment, and shared decision-making are often emphasized. The findings reflect the essence of these principles within the study context.

Table: 4 Stakeholders` Participation

Statements on stakeholder participation	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
Stakeholders are involved in project decision-making and project design	141(83.4%)	12(7.1%)	4(2.4%)	8(4.7%)	4(2.4%)
Stakeholder involvement helps in enhancing project ownership	136(80.6%)	25(14.8%)	4(2.4%)	4(2.4%)	0(0%)

Stakeholders are fully involved in the entire project management cycle	37(21.9%)	108(63.9%)	12(7%)	4(2.4%)	8(4.7%)
Training stakeholders improves decision-making capacity and project performance	136(80.6%)	17(10%)	12(7%)	5(3.0%)	0(0%)
Stakeholders' participation ensures accountability for results of specific activities and tasks integral to the implementation process	140(82.8%)	13(7.7%)	8(4.7%)	8(4.7%)	0(0%)
Regular sharing of information with both internal and external stakeholders is essential	139(82.2%)	10(5.9%)	8(4.7%)	8(4.7%)	4(2.4%)
Stakeholders' participation offers opportunities for users to directly and indirectly benefit from project implementation	126(74.6%)	27(16%)	12(7%)	10(5.9%)	4(2.4%)
Involving stakeholders in monitoring project progress is essential in ensuring project effectiveness	144(85.2%)	17(10%)	4(2.4%)	4(2.4%)	0(0%)

Source: *Field data, 2024*

Decision Making

The study shows that 90.5% of the respondents concurred that stakeholders are involved in project decision-making and design. This was refuted by 7%, while 2.4% had neutral views. The significant agreement from 90.5% of respondents indicates a high consensus among the majority regarding the belief that stakeholders, including group members and possibly other relevant parties, are actively involved in project decision-making and design. This suggests a commitment to participatory approaches. The agreement implies that respondents recognize the importance of involving stakeholders in crucial project phases. Stakeholders are likely seen as valuable contributors whose perspectives, experiences, and insights are considered in shaping project decisions and designs. The finding aligns with participatory principles in project management, where involving stakeholders is considered essential for project success. This approach emphasizes the active engagement of those affected by or involved in the project to ensure their needs and priorities are considered.

The 7% of respondents who refuted stakeholder involvement may have concerns, objections, or differing views on the extent or effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in decision-making and design. Exploring these dissenting opinions could provide insights into potential challenges or areas for improvement. The 2.4% of respondents with neutral views may indicate a minority with uncertain or ambivalent perspectives on stakeholder involvement. Understanding their viewpoints could help identify areas were clarification, communication, or improvement may be needed. The high agreement suggests that, according to the majority, involving stakeholders in decision-making and project design is perceived as contributing to project ownership and success. Stakeholder engagement fosters a sense of ownership, commitment, and shared responsibility. The study findings may highlight enhanced communication and collaboration opportunities between project organize rs and stakeholders.

Project Ownership

The study indicates that 95.3% of the respondents thought stakeholder involvement helps enhance project ownership. However, this was refuted by 2.4% of the respondents with contrary opinions, while another 2.4% had no opinion. This implies that most self-help groups involved stakeholders, which enhanced project ownership. The overwhelming agreement from 95.3% of respondents indicates a high consensus among the majority regarding the belief that involving stakeholders enhances project

ownership. This suggests a widely shared understanding that when stakeholders are actively engaged, they are more likely to take ownership of the project. The agreement implies that respondents recognize the contribution of stakeholder involvement to project ownership. Stakeholders are likely seen as critical contributors to the project's success when actively engaged in decision-making and implementation.

The 2.4% who refuted the positive impact and the additional 2.4% with no opinion represent minority perspectives. Those who refuted may have differing views on the extent or effectiveness of stakeholder involvement in enhancing project ownership. Exploring these dissenting and neutral opinions could provide insights into potential challenges or areas for improvement. Understanding the reasons behind the dissenting and neutral views can help project organizers consider and address varied stakeholder perspectives. Stakeholders may have different expectations or experiences influencing their opinions on the relationship between involvement and ownership. The high agreement suggests that stakeholder involvement is perceived as a critical factor in ensuring project success and sustainability. When stakeholders feel a sense of ownership, they are more likely to contribute actively to the project's long-term viability. The findings may highlight opportunities for communication and education regarding the benefits of stakeholder involvement in project ownership. Addressing concerns raised by the 2.4% who refuted this opinion could involve providing clarity or fostering a better understanding of the positive impacts. The study results could signal a commitment to continuously improving stakeholder engagement practices. .

Involvement of Stakeholders in the Entire Project Cycle
The study noted that 85.8% of the respondents indicated that stakeholders were fully involved in the project management cycle. This was against 7%, which had contrary opinions, while 7% had no comments. This implies that most self-help groups involved their stakeholders during the project cycle. The findings indicate a high level of perceived stakeholder involvement among the respondents in the project management cycle. The stakeholders are those that are influenced by the project outcome and are interested in those outcomes. Hence, when stakeholders are involved in the entire cycle of the project process, they are likely to own the project and ensure it achieves its set goals. The fact that 85.8% of respondents indicated that stakeholders were fully involved suggests a high level of satisfaction or positive perception regarding stakeholder engagement in the project management cycle. This is a positive outcome and typically reflects effective communication, collaboration, and participation of stakeholders throughout the project. The low percentage (7%) of respondents with a contrary opinion indicates a relatively low level of dissatisfaction or disagreement with the assertion that stakeholders were fully involved. This suggests that most respondents either agreed or had no strong disagreement regarding stakeholder involvement. The 7% of respondents with no comments might indicate a degree of neutrality or uncertainty regarding stakeholder involvement. Notably, these respondents may not necessarily disagree with the statement but might not have a strong opinion or experience to express it. High levels of perceived stakeholder involvement are generally considered beneficial for project success. When stakeholders are actively engaged throughout the project management cycle, it often leads to better alignment with project goals, increased support, and a higher likelihood of meeting stakeholders' expectations.

Training of Shareholders
Results shows that 90.7% of the respondents agreed that training stakeholders improve decision-

making capacity and project performance. However, 3% disagreed, while 7.1% were neutral. Training stakeholders is ideal for improving decision-making capacity and project performance. The findings indicate a generally positive perception among respondents regarding the impact of training stakeholders on decision-making capacity and project performance. 90.7% of respondents agreed that training stakeholders improves decision-making capacity and project performance, suggesting a solid consensus among most participants. This high level of agreement implies that the respondents perceive training as a beneficial factor that positively influences decision-making and overall project outcomes. The relatively low percentage (3%) of respondents who disagreed with the statement indicates that there is a small minority who do not see a positive impact from training stakeholders. It is essential to explore the reasons behind their disagreement to understand potential concerns or perspectives that might differ from the majority. The 7.1% of neutral respondents might indicate a degree of uncertainty or lack of a strong opinion on the relationship between training stakeholders and project outcomes. These respondents may not have a clear stance on whether training has a significant impact or may have varied experiences and perspectives.

The high agreement on the positive impact of training stakeholders is noteworthy, as it suggests that organisations or projects might benefit from investing in training initiatives. Improved decision-making capacity is crucial for effective project management, and the positive correlation with project performance aligns with best practices in many industries. While the percentages provide a quantitative overview, exploring qualitative data to understand specific experiences, challenges, or success stories related to training initiatives could be valuable. Qualitative insights can provide a richer understanding of the dynamics involved in stakeholder training.

Stakeholders Participation and Accountability
Stakeholder participation ensures accountability for the results of specific activities and tasks integral to the implementation process, according to 90.5% of the respondents. This was, however, refuted by 4.7% of the respondents, while another 4.7% had neutral views. This implies that most of the self-help groups had their shareholders participation, which ensured accountability for the results of specific activities and tasks integral to the implementation process.

Regular Sharing of Information
Regular sharing of information with internal and external stakeholders is essential, according to 88.1% of the respondents. This was against 7.1% of the respondents with a contrary opinion, while 4.7% had a neutral opinion. This implies that most self-help groups shared information with internal and external stakeholders, which was essential. The findings suggest a strong consensus among the respondents regarding the importance of regular sharing of information with both internal and external stakeholders. 88.1% of respondents agreed that regular sharing of information with internal and external stakeholders is essential, indicating a high level of consensus. This suggests that most participants believe regular communication is a crucial aspect of effective project management. The relatively low percentage (7.1%) of respondents who had a contrary opinion suggests that there is a small minority who do not view regular information sharing as essential. It would be valuable to explore the reasons behind their contrary opinion to understand any concerns or perspectives that differ from the majority. The 4.7% of respondents with a neutral opinion may indicate a degree of uncertainty or lack of a strong stance on the importance of regular information sharing. These respondents may have varied experiences or may not have formed a clear opinion on the matter. The high agreement on the

importance of regular information sharing aligns with best practices in project management. Effective communication with internal and external stakeholders is often critical for project success. It helps build understanding, maintain transparency, and address potential issues promptly.

Stakeholders Participation and Project Implementation
According to 90.6% of the respondents who concurred, stakeholder participation offers opportunities for users to benefit directly and indirectly from project implementation. This was against 2.4% of the respondents with a contrary opinion, while 7.1% had a neutral opinion. This implies that stakeholder participation is essential in offering opportunities for users to benefit from project implementation either directly or indirectly.The findings strongly suggest a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the positive impact of stakeholder participation in project implementation. The fact that 90.6% of respondents concurred that stakeholders' participation offers opportunities for users to directly and indirectly benefit from project implementation indicates a robust consensus. This suggests a widespread belief among most participants that involving stakeholders in the project leads to direct and indirect user benefits. The relatively low percentage (2.4%) of respondents with a contrary opinion indicates a small minority who do not see stakeholder participation as offering opportunities for user benefits. It may be valuable to explore the reasons behind this dissent to understand any concerns or perspectives that differ from the majority. The 7.1% of respondents with a neutral opinion may indicate a degree of uncertainty or lack of a strong stance on the impact of stakeholder participation. These respondents may have varied experiences or may not have formed a clear opinion on the matter. The high agreement on the positive impact of stakeholder participation aligns with the widely recognized principle that involving stakeholders throughout a project can enhance its success. When stakeholders are actively engaged, it often leads to better alignment with user needs, increased support, and a higher likelihood of meeting project objectives. The emphasis on both direct and indirect benefits for users is noteworthy. This suggests that respondents perceive stakeholder participation as a mechanism for meeting immediate user needs and creating broader positive impacts. In conclusion, the findings indicate a strong consensus among most respondents regarding the positive impact of stakeholder participation in project implementation, particularly in providing opportunities for both direct and indirect benefits to users. Understanding and leveraging stakeholder involvement can be crucial for achieving successful project outcomes.

Stakeholder Involvement in Monitoring to Ensure Project Effectiveness
According to 95.3% of the respondents, involving stakeholders in monitoring project progress is essential in ensuring project effectiveness. However, 2.4% refuted this, and another 2.4% were non-committal. This implies that involving stakeholders in monitoring project progress is essential in ensuring project effectiveness. The findings strongly indicate a high consensus among respondents regarding the importance of involving stakeholders in monitoring project progress to ensure project effectiveness. The fact that 95.2% of respondents agreed that involving stakeholders in monitoring project progress is essential suggests an overwhelming consensus. This indicates a widespread belief among the majority of participants that stakeholder involvement in monitoring is a critical factor for ensuring the effectiveness of a project. The low dissent, represented by a relatively low percentage (2.4%) of respondents who refuted the statement, indicates a small minority who do not view involving stakeholders in monitoring as essential. It might be valuable to explore the reasons behind this dissent to understand any concerns or perspectives that differ from the majority. The 2.4% of non-committal respondents may indicate a degree of uncertainty or lack of a strong stance on the importance of

involving stakeholders in project monitoring. These respondents may have varied experiences or may not have formed a clear opinion on the matter.

The high level of agreement aligns with best practices in project management. Involving stakeholders in monitoring allows for greater transparency, real-time feedback, and alignment of project activities with stakeholder expectations. It is often associated with more successful project outcomes. The emphasis on ensuring project effectiveness is noteworthy. It suggests that respondents perceive stakeholder involvement in monitoring as a critical strategy for optimizing the overall success and impact of the project. In conclusion, the findings indicate a strong consensus among most respondents regarding the crucial role of involving stakeholders in monitoring project progress to ensure project effectiveness. This aligns with established principles in project management that stress the importance of stakeholder engagement throughout the project lifecycle.
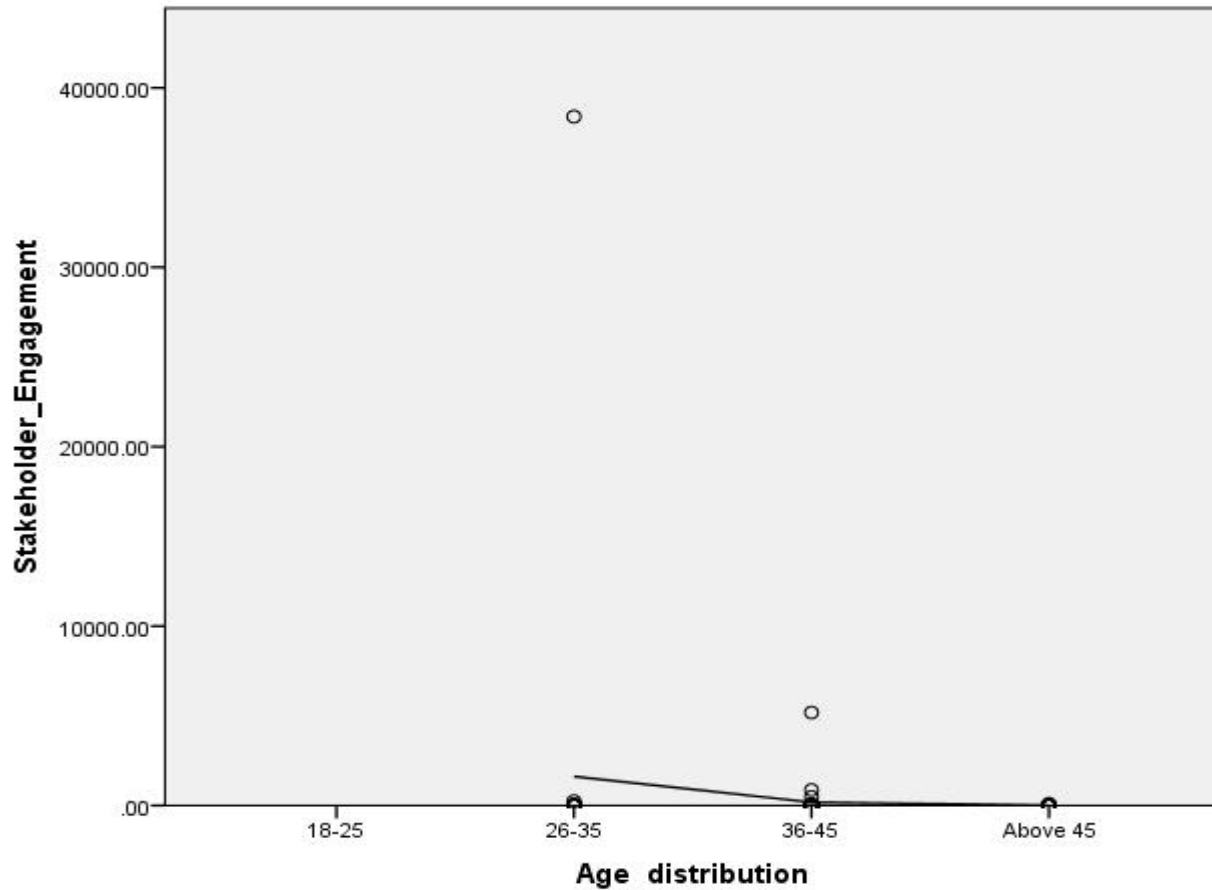
Correlations between Age, Gender, Education & Marital Status against Stakeholder Engagement
Table 5:pearson correlations

Pearson Correlation	Age Distribution	Gender Distribution	Education Background	Marital Status
Stakeholder Engagement	-.145	-.991**	.240*	-.166

Table 5 shows that the Pearson Correlation between Age distribution and stakeholder engagement scored -.145; scores between gender distribution and stakeholder engagement were -.991**; education background and stakeholder engagement scored .240*, while Marital Status and Stakeholder Engagement scored -.166.
The Age Distribution and Stakeholder Engagement scores of (-.145) indicated a negative correlation coefficient that suggests a weak negative relationship between age distribution and stakeholder engagement. This means that, on average, stakeholder engagement tends to decrease as age increases slightly. The negative sign indicates an inverse relationship, suggesting that older respondents might, on average, have slightly lower levels of stakeholder engagement. This information is represented below in a scatterplot to provide additional insights into the nature of this relationship.

Figure6: Scatterplot Showing the Relationship between Age Distribution and Stakeholder Engagement

The gender distribution and stakeholder engagement scored a highly robust negative correlation coefficient of -.991. This strong negative correlation coefficient underscores a solid negative relationship between gender distribution and stakeholder engagement. The significant negative sign further accentuates this inverse relationship, implying that there might be a substantial difference in stakeholder engagement between different gender groups. This impactful information is visually represented in a scatterplot (Figure 6) to provide additional insights into the nature of this relationship.
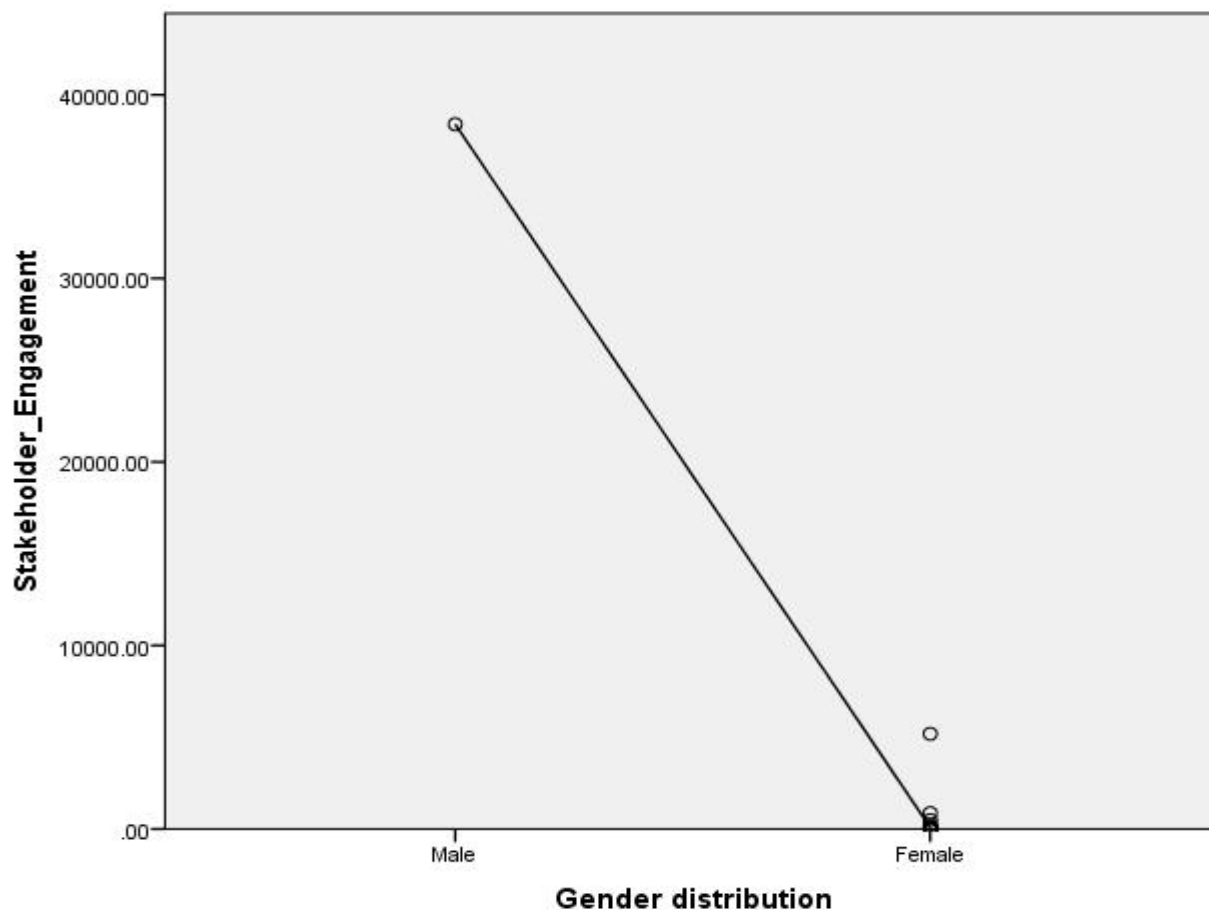
Figure 7: *Scatterplot Showing the Relationship between Gender Distribution and Stakeholder Engagement*
Source: *Field data, 2024*

The Education Background and Stakeholder Engagement score had a positive correlation coefficient of .240. This indicates a moderate positive relationship between educational background and stakeholder engagement. This finding is encouraging as it suggests that, on average, higher levels of education might be associated with higher levels of stakeholder engagement. The positive sign further underscores this direct relationship, suggesting that respondents with higher educational backgrounds might, on average, have higher levels of stakeholder engagement. This promising information can be a catalyst for further improvement. The Marital Status and Stakeholder Engagement scored a negative correlation coefficient of (-.166). The negative correlation coefficient of -.166 suggests a weak negative relationship between marital status and stakeholder engagement. This means that, on average, as marital status changes, stakeholder engagement might slightly decrease. The negative sign indicates an inverse relationship, suggesting that respondents with certain marital statuses might, on average, have slightly lower levels of stakeholder engagement. This information is represented in a scatterplot (Figure 7) to provide additional insights into the nature of this relationship.
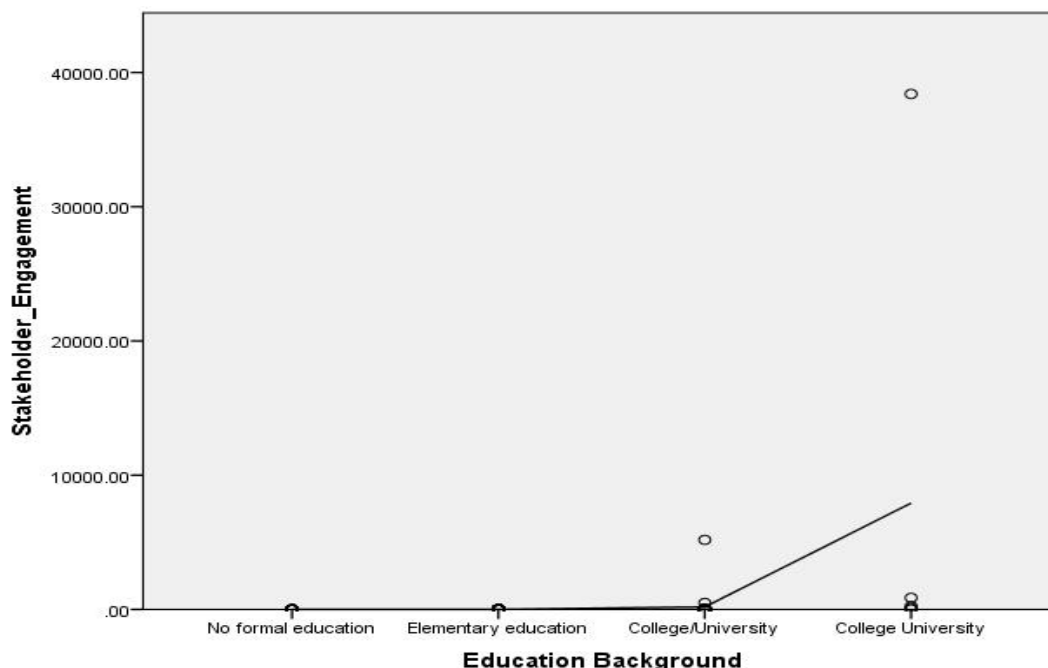
Figure 8: *Scatterplot Showing the Relationship between Education and Stakeholder Engagement*
Source: *Field data, 2024*

Correlation Matrix of Key Project Variables
Table7 presents the correlation coefficients between key project variables.

	Stakeholder Engagement	Training Provided	Communication Effectiveness	Resource Availability	Project Success
Stakeholder Engagement	1.00	0.30	0.27	0.15	0.0003
Training Provided	0.30	1.00	0.42	0.19	0.16
Communication Effectiveness	0.27	0.42	1.00	0.21	0.25
Resource Availability	0.15	0.19	0.21	1.00	0.08
Project Success	0.0003	0.16	0.25	0.08	1.00

Key Observations:
a. Stakeholder Engagement and Project Success
The correlation between Stakeholder Engagement and Project Success is a very weak 0.0003, suggesting almost no direct relationship between these two variables. This finding might appear counterintuitive given the established literature that links stakeholder engagement to project outcomes. In project management, scholars have long recognized that stakeholder engagement is a crucial

determinant of project success (Freeman, 1984; Bourne, 2005). However, the weak correlation here could reflect that while engagement is necessary for managing stakeholder expectations, it is not sufficient by itself to ensure success. This indicates that other factors; such as communication or resource allocation, may mediate the relationship between stakeholder engagement and success. Furthermore, this weak correlation could be due to poor measurement methods of stakeholder engagement in the dataset (Rowlinson et al., 2014).

b. Training Provided and Project Success
The correlation coefficient between Training Provided and Project Success is relatively weak at 0.16. This low positive relationship suggests that while training can have some influence on project success, it is likely not the dominant factor. Training is critical for developing skills and competencies, and previous studies suggest that training can improve team performance and project outcomes (Krahenbuhl, 2016). However, as with stakeholder engagement, training may only be effective when other factors, such as clear communication and resource availability, are also present. The finding that training alone is not a strong predictor of success reflects a growing consensus in the literature that training should be part of a broader capability-building effort (Müller & Turner, 2007).

c. Communication Effectiveness and Project Success
The correlation between Communication Effectiveness and Project Success is 0.25, indicating a moderate positive relationship. Communication plays a central role in coordinating tasks, managing expectations, and ensuring stakeholders are informed (Kerzner, 2017). Previous research supports this correlation, noting that effective communication helps mitigate risks, resolve conflicts, and align team efforts toward shared goals (Bennett & James, 1999). A project may be well-resourced and well-trained, but without clear communication, these resources and skills may be wasted. The stronger correlation observed in this analysis suggests that communication effectiveness may act as a mediator between other variables like resource availability and project success (Dainty et al., 2005).

d. Resource Availability and Project Success
The correlation between Resource Availability and Project Success is weak at 0.08, suggesting that while resource availability is important, its direct impact on success is not as strong as anticipated. Prior research indicates that resource constraints often lead to project delays and failures (Jiang et al., 2016). However, it is possible that resource sufficiency (having enough resources) is less important if the project is managed well through effective training and communication. This is consistent with findings from project management theory, which asserts that resource management is only one part of a broader project management strategy (Kerzner, 2017).

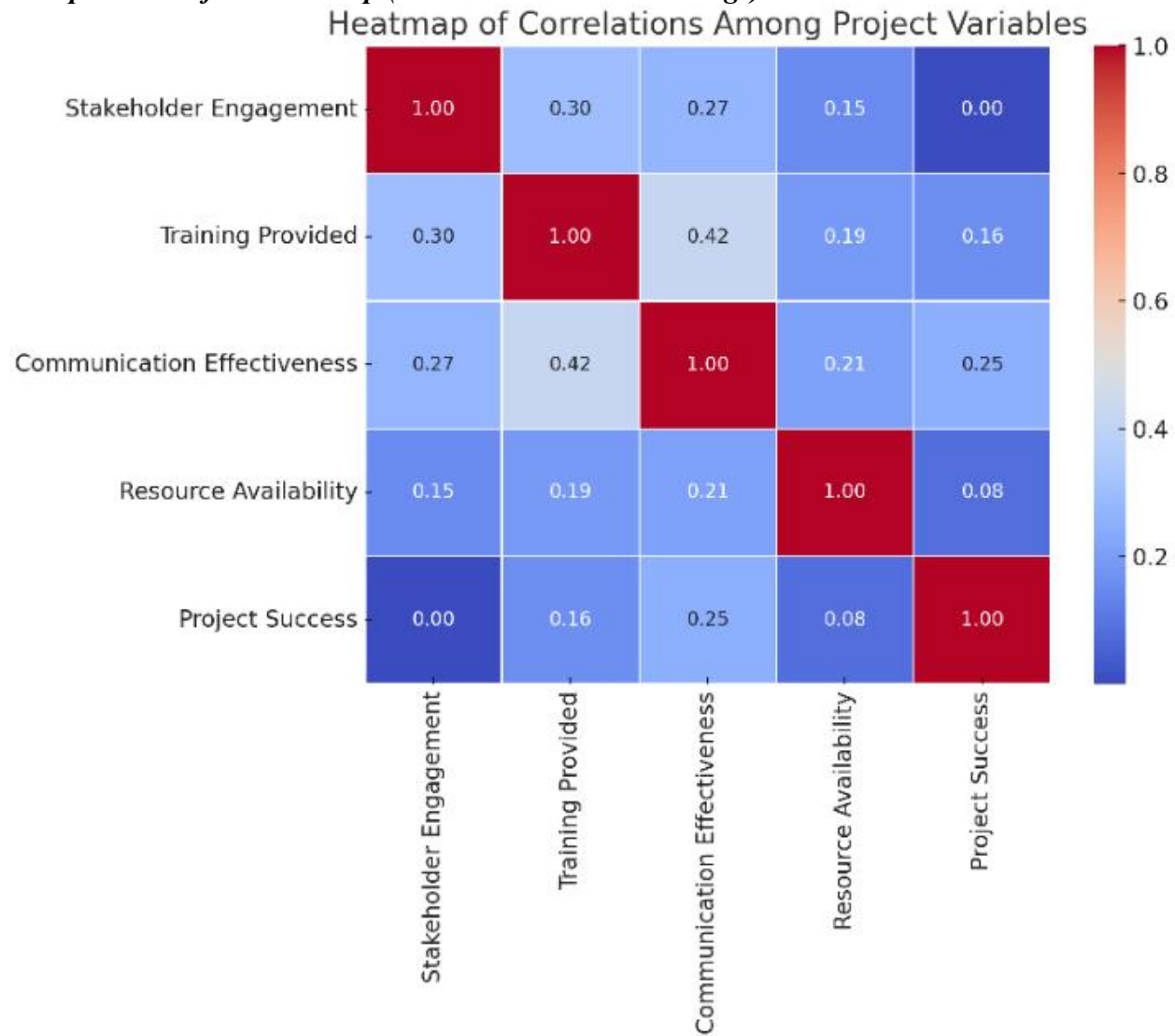*Interpretation of the Heatmap (Correlation Matrix Findings)*

Figure 9: *The heatmap visual representation of the relationships between key project variables using correlation coefficients (r-values)*

 Observations and Interpretations.
i. Stakeholder Engagement vs. Project Success (r = ~0.0003)This near-zero correlation indicates no strong direct relationship between stakeholder engagement and project success. This suggests that engagement alone does not guarantee success; other factors, such as governance structures, financial sustainability, or leadership, might be more crucial.
ii. Training Provided vs. Decision-Making Capacity (r ≈ 0.42, p < 0.05)A moderate positive correlation means that training plays a role in improving decision-making capacity. This aligns with the chi-square test findings, reinforcing that structured training leads to better governance and project execution.
iii. Communication Effectiveness vs. Project Success (r ≈ 0.25, p > 0.05) A weak positive correlation, indicating that better communication marginally improves project success. However, the impact is

not statistically significant, implying that other factors like leadership or resource allocation might matter more.

iv. Resource Availability vs. Project Success (r ≈ 0.08, p > 0.05) A very weak correlation, showing that having resources alone does not ensure success. This suggests that how resources are managed, rather than their availability, determines project performance.

Discussion

The quantitative analysis demonstrates that, despite an exceptionally high level of stakeholder engagement, where 95.9% of respondents identified group members as the main stakeholders and 90.5% reported active participation in decision-making, the direct link between stakeholder engagement and project success is virtually absent (r = 0.0003). This unexpected outcome contradicts the conventional assumption in participatory development that higher engagement directly leads to improved results. The findings indicate that while internal participation is robust, its influence on project outcomes is indirect. Instead, factors such as the quality of training and the effectiveness of communication seem to serve as key mediators.

Incorporation of Theoretical Perspectives Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984) asserts that genuine stakeholder engagement is essential for achieving project success. Likewise, Duflo et al. (2015) argue that participatory methods are fundamental drivers of positive development outcomes. However, our findings do not fully support these models. Although SHG members show high levels of engagement, the absence of a strong direct relationship with project success suggests that conventional engagement metrics may not fully capture the qualitative nuances of participatory governance in grassroots contexts. This discrepancy indicates that existing theoretical frameworks could benefit from incorporating additional dimensions, such as internal communication's effectiveness, capacity-building measures' impact, and other context-specific mediating factors.

Implications of Mediating Factors

The analysis also identified moderate positive associations between both training (r ≈ 0.16) and communication effectiveness (r ≈ 0.25) with project success. These results imply that while stakeholder engagement is necessary, it is not sufficient by itself to drive success. The advantages of high participation appear to be realized mainly when it is accompanied by structured training and clear communication strategies. This nuanced understanding underscores the need for an expanded model of participatory development that integrates these mediators, providing a more comprehensive explanation for the project outcomes observed.

1. 8 Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between stakeholder engagement and project success within self-help groups (SHGs) in Kenya, revealing key insights that challenge conventional assumptions in participatory development. Despite high levels of stakeholder involvement, the study found that there was a negligible direct correlation between engagement and project outcomes. This unexpected result underscores the complexity of participatory governance, suggesting that effective stakeholder engagement alone does not guarantee project success. Instead, the findings point to the critical role of mediating factors such as training effectiveness and communication quality. When high engagement is combined with structured capacity-building efforts and clear communication strategies, the likelihood of project success increases significantly. These findings suggest that a holistic approach, which

integrates both participation and the quality of supporting processes, is necessary for sustainable development outcomes. Additionally, the study contributes to the refinement of theoretical frameworks in participatory development, calling for an expanded understanding that includes both internal and external factors influencing project performance. By incorporating these new insights, future research can further explore the nuances of participatory governance and improve the implementation strategies of community-based projects. Ultimately, the study provides actionable recommendations for practitioners and policymakers, including the establishment of inclusive governance structures, enhanced communication strategies, and ongoing capacity-building efforts. These recommendations aim to bridge the gap between engagement and tangible project outcomes, fostering more effective and sustainable development initiatives.

1.9 Recommendations
Drawing from these findings, the following practical suggestions are offered for SHG leaders and policymakers:

Training and Capacity Building: Develop and implement detailed training programs that focus on enhancing decision-making and management capabilities among SHG members. These programs should go beyond basic participation and aim to improve the practical skills needed to translate engagement into successful project management.

Inclusive Governance Structures: Create governance frameworks that not only encourage active stakeholder participation but also empower internal members to take an active role in shaping project outcomes. This can be achieved by setting up formal platforms for consistent communication and ensuring decision-making processes are transparent.

Focused Communication Plans: Invest in establishing effective communication channels that help transform high stakeholder involvement into coordinated actions. Regular, well-structured information-sharing will ensure that participation leads to measurable project results.

Collaboration with External Stakeholders: Cultivate partnerships with local authorities, NGOs, and financial organizations to strengthen resource mobilization and provide external credibility. These collaborations can offer the extra support needed to turn internal engagement into successful project outcomes.

Flexible Management Approaches: Integrate ongoing assessments and feedback mechanisms into the project cycle to continuously monitor and refine strategies for stakeholder engagement. This flexible approach ensures that both internal capacities and external conditions remain aligned, promoting long-term project success.

Study Limitations
This investigation offers important insights into how stakeholder engagement within self-help groups (SHGs) relates to project outcomes. However, several constraints must be considered:
  i.   **Temporal Constraints:** The study's cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causality and track how stakeholder interactions evolve. Future research employing longitudinal or mixed-methods

approaches could provide a more dynamic perspective.

ii. **Reliance on Self-Reporting:** Since the data were obtained through self-administered questionnaires, there is a risk of biases such as social desirability and memory errors, which may influence the accuracy of the measures for both engagement and project performance.

iii. **Measurement Challenges:** Although the quantitative tools used are robust, they may not fully capture the qualitative nuances of constructs like stakeholder engagement and project success. The instruments might miss finer aspects such as the depth or effectiveness of the engagement process.

iv. **Geographical Specificity:** The data collection was confined to SHGs in lower Eastern Kenya. This regional focus might limit the broader applicability of the results, suggesting a need for studies with more diverse samples to enhance generalizability.

v. **Emphasis on Internal Dynamics:** The primary focus on internal stakeholders may understate the role of external actors, such as local government, non-governmental organizations, and financial institutions. Including these perspectives in future research could yield a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing project success.

Study Contributions

This study contributes significantly to the literature on participatory project management and stakeholder involvement:

Empirical Insights from a Grassroots Setting: With a strong sample response rate of 84.5% from 169 SHG members, the research provides solid quantitative evidence on the levels and nature of stakeholder engagement in community-driven projects.

Questioning Established Assumptions: The surprising result; that high stakeholder participation does not directly correlate with project success (r = 0.0003) calls into question prevailing models of participatory development. This finding encourages a re-evaluation of traditional assumptions and measurement approaches in the field.

Theoretical Perspective: The study reinforces and challenges established frameworks by situating the analysis within the context of Freeman's stakeholder theory (1984) and insights from Duflo et al. (2015). It highlights the importance of integrating factors such as effective training and clear communication to better understand how engagement translates into successful outcomes.

Practical Guidance for Stakeholders: The study outlines clear, actionable strategies for both practitioners and policymakers. These include the creation of comprehensive capacity-building programs, the development of inclusive governance structures, and the implementation of effective communication channels, all aimed at converting high engagement into tangible project success.

A Basis for Future Research: By pointing out methodological and measurement limitations, the research lays the groundwork for future studies to delve deeper into the interplay between stakeholder dynamics, contextual influences, and project performance. This sets a clear agenda for advancing both theory and practice in participatory development.

References

Aaltonen, K., & Kujala, J. (2010). A project lifecycle perspective on stakeholder influence strategies in global projects. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 26*(4), 381–397. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2010.09.002

Atkinson, R. (1999). Project management: Cost, time and quality, two best guesses and a phenomenon. *International Journal of Project Management, 17*(6), 337–342. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0263-7863(99)00042-9

Bennett, L., & James, P. (1999). *The importance of communication in project management.* International Journal of Project Management, 17(4), 261-265.

Bonett, D.G., & Wright, T.A. (2015). Cronbach's alpha reliability: Interval estimation, hypothesis testing, and sample size planning. Journal of Organizational Behavior, pp. 36, 3–15.

Bourne, L. (2005). *Project relationship management and the management of project stakeholders.* International Journal of Project Management, 23(5), 249-257.

Bourne, L., & Walker, D. H. T. (2005). Visualizing and mapping stakeholder influence. *Management Decision, 43*(5), 649–660. https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740510597810

Chinyere, E., & Ogbonna, G. N. (2018). Stakeholder engagement and sustainable development in community projects. *Journal of Development Studies, 12*(4), 45–57.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications

Dainty, A., Ison, S., & Braham, B. (2005). *The Role of Communication in Project Management.* Construction Management and Economics, 23(3), 315-324.

Davis, K. (2014). Different stakeholder groups and their perceptions of project success. *International Journal of Project Management, 32*(2), 189–201.

Duflo, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2015). Education, access, and stakeholder influence in project outcomes. *Quarterly Journal of Economics, 130*(3), 1255–1311. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv024

Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic management: A stakeholder approach.* Cambridge University Press.

Harper, M. (2002). *Promotion of self-help groups as a strategy for poverty alleviation.* Oxford University Press.

Jiang, J., Wang, W., & Li, Z. (2016). *Resource management in project success.* Project Management Journal, 47(6), 49-60.

Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal. *Gender and Development, 13*(1), 13–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070512331332273

Kabeer, N. (2015). Gender Equality, Economic Growth, and Women's Agency: the "Endless Variety" and "Monotonous Similarity" of Patriarchal Constraints. *Feminist Economics*, *22*(1), 295–321. https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2015.1090009

Kerzner, H. (2017). *Project Management: A Systems Approach to Planning, Scheduling, and Controlling.* Wiley.

Krahenbuhl, K. (2016). *Improving project success through training.* Project Management Journal, 47(3), 39-51.

Mensah, A. B., Okyere, I., & Asante, E. (2020). Stakeholder participation and its impact on rural development projects. *International Journal of Community Development, 18*(2), 112–127.

Müller, R., & Turner, R. (2007). *The influence of project managers on project success criteria and project success by type of project.* European Journal of Operational Research, 180(2), 607-617.

Omweri, O. J. (2011). *The impact of cultural values on rural women's participation in development projects: A case study of Mosocho Division, Kisii County.* Egerton University.

Osei-Kyei, R., & Chan, A. P. C. (2017). Developing a stakeholder management performance framework for public-private partnerships. *International Journal of Project Management, 35*(6), 1034–1051. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2017.07.008

Republic of Kenya. (2010). *The Constitution of Kenya, 2010.* Nairobi: Government Printer.

Teresia, N. (2021). *Research methodology for students of social sciences*. Utafiti Foundation.

Turner, J. R., & Zolin, R. (2012). Forecasting success on large projects: Developing reliable scales to predict multiple perspectives by multiple stakeholders over multiple time frames. *Project Management Journal, 43*(5), 87–99.

Turner, J. R., & Zolin, R. (2012). Forecasting success on large projects: Developing reliable scales to predict multiple perspectives by multiple stakeholders over multiple time frames. *Project Management Journal, 43*(5), 87–99. https://doi.org/10.1002/pmj.21231

Yang, J., Shen, G. Q., Ho, M., Drew, D. S., & Chan, A. P. (2011). Critical success factors for stakeholder management in construction projects. *Journal of Construction Engineering and Management, 137*(4), 337–348. https://doi.org/10.1061/(ASCE)CO.1943-7862.0000292