



Vol. 26 | Post COVID-19 Recovery and Sustainable development

Vol. 26 Article 4 | August 27, 2025

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### **Community Participation and the Performance of Gender-Based Empowerment Projects in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi City County, Kenya**

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**Cite as:** Kavita, C. K., Lango, B., & Karuu, R. N. (2025). Community Participation and the Performance of Gender-Based Empowerment Projects in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi City County, Kenya. *International Journal of Social and Development Concerns*, 26(4), 37–52. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16963075>

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**Abstract:** This study examined the influence of community participation on the performance of gender-based empowerment projects in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi City County, Kenya. Anchored on Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) and Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986), the research employed a convergent parallel design that integrated both quantitative and qualitative data. The target population comprised 6,400 beneficiaries drawn from seven Community-Based Organizations, with a sample of 376 respondents selected through stratified random sampling, while key informants were purposively chosen. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Reliability and validity of the instruments were confirmed, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding 0.7. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics in SPSS Version 30, while qualitative data were thematically analyzed. The study attained a 90.2% response rate ( $n = 339$ ) and completed six of seven key informant interviews. Findings revealed that community participation had a statistically significant effect on project performance, as evidenced by volunteerism, active meeting attendance, and feedback integration. However, economic constraints and limited recognition of community input hindered full participation. The study concludes that sustained and inclusive community participation is critical for enhancing the success of gender-based empowerment initiatives in urban informal settlements such as Mathare.

**Keywords:** Community Participation, Performance, Gender-Based Empowerment Projects

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Gender-based empowerment is globally recognized as a cornerstone for achieving gender equality and driving sustainable development. It entails enabling women and girls to exercise their rights, voice their concerns, participate in decision-making, and access opportunities that improve their social, economic, and political well-being (Sen, Karmakar & Adhikari, 2023). Beyond resource provision, empowerment requires dismantling systemic barriers, challenging discriminatory norms, and fostering environments where women and girls can thrive in all spheres of life. When women are empowered, the benefits extend beyond individuals to families, communities, and entire nations, contributing to more equitable and resilient societies (Rajak & Dolan, 2024). Despite these gains, the success of gender-based empowerment

projects does not depend solely on funding or policy frameworks but critically on community participation. Without strong community involvement, projects risk misalignment with local realities and limited impact (Tsuma, 2023; Sen et al., 2023).

Globally, significant strides have been made toward advancing women's empowerment. Institutions such as UNDP and UN Women have spearheaded gender-inclusive policies, reinforced by the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, with Goal 5 prioritizing gender equality and empowerment of women and girls (Tangguh, 2022; Monaco, 2024). Yet persistent disparities remain. The Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2023) warns that it will take over 131 years to achieve full gender parity, particularly in economic participation, education, and political representation. Interventions in various regions underscore the importance of community participation. In the United States, community-based gender violence prevention programs have demonstrated sustainability through grassroots leadership (Götze, Klingebiel, & Khalid, 2025). Meanwhile, in Scandinavia, male involvement and community mobilization have strengthened gender parity in leadership roles (Smith & Sinkford, 2022). In Asia, local ownership has been central to the success of empowerment initiatives, with NGOs such as Educate Girls and Room to Read enhancing girls' education through community-driven models in India and Nepal (Sey & Kingsley, 2022).

In Africa, gender-based empowerment remains critical for social and economic transformation. Participatory approaches—including local leadership engagement, community capacity building, and resource mobilization—have enhanced empowerment outcomes across the continent (Tsuma, 2023). In Rwanda, South Africa, and Uganda, community participation has contributed to high women's representation in parliament and the development of inclusive policies (Chouchou Lyliane, 2022). Similarly, village savings and loan associations in Uganda have mobilized resources to expand women's access to financial inclusion (Abbas, 2024). However, challenges persist. In Nigeria, entrenched patriarchal norms and weak governance exclude women from decision-making, undermining empowerment initiatives (Tüfekçi & Hashiru, 2021). Studies in South Sudan and Uganda further reveal that insecurity and conflict erode community capacity-building structures, weakening long-term progress (Atem, 2022; De, 2024). Despite these challenges, there is growing recognition across the continent that embedding empowerment initiatives within context-specific, community-driven frameworks is essential for sustainability.

In Kenya, the number of empowerment projects targeting women and girls has grown significantly, particularly in urban informal settlements such as Nairobi and Kiambu counties (Makario, Mutui & Muhingi, 2023). However, evidence indicates that many of these projects fall short due to limited community participation, weak local leadership, and inadequate ownership (Okello, 2020). For example, the Kibera Power Women Group, despite receiving donor support for years, has failed to achieve sustained empowerment outcomes due to misalignment with community priorities and lack of grassroots involvement (Powell, 2022). Similarly, findings from Mombasa reveal that limited education and restricted access to financial services constrain women's empowerment despite donor funding (KNBS, 2020; Chepkemai & Kisimbii, 2021). Projects often operate in uncertain contexts with unpredictable needs, external pressures, and conflicting resources, which further hampers sustainability (Rugut & Mungai, 2024).

Within this context, Mathare Constituency—one of Nairobi’s largest informal settlements—presents a critical case for examining the role of community participation in gender-based empowerment projects. While financial support and donor involvement are often present, weak community engagement continues to undermine inclusivity, relevance, and sustainability. Empirical evidence on how community participation shapes project performance in Mathare remains limited, creating a knowledge gap. This study therefore seeks to examine the influence of community participation on the performance of gender-based empowerment projects in Mathare, contributing to the broader discourse on how grassroots engagement can strengthen gender empowerment outcomes in resource-constrained urban settings.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Gender empowerment has become a central pillar in Kenya’s development agenda, reflected in national policies such as Vision 2030 and alignment with global frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 on gender equality (Novovic, 2021). Within this context, several empowerment initiatives have been implemented in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi, including women-led savings groups, vocational training, entrepreneurship support, and community-based advocacy (Makasa, 2020; Mutahi & Kimari, 2023). These interventions aim to address systemic inequalities by promoting financial inclusion, policy advocacy, and protection of survivors of gender-based violence (Githaiga & Wildermuth, 2022). Digital innovations and continuous monitoring further enhance outreach and accountability (Nyadida & Otuya, 2021).

Despite these efforts, the performance of empowerment projects in Mathare remains modest. Poverty levels stand at 42% compared to the national average of 33.6% (KNBS, 2021; Vasu, 2025), while youth unemployment exceeds 60% (Omboi, 2020). Gender-based violence remains widespread, with 40% of women in Nairobi County reporting experiences of violence (KNBS, 2023). Structural inequalities, cultural resistance, inadequate resources, and weak enforcement mechanisms further hinder project sustainability. These challenges risk perpetuating cycles of inequality, poverty, and disempowerment if unaddressed.

Although gender empowerment has been widely studied globally and nationally, few studies have specifically examined the role of community-based strategies in shaping the performance of empowerment projects within informal urban settlements such as Mathare. Methodological gaps also persist, with limited use of mixed-method approaches that capture both the quantitative impact and the lived experiences of beneficiaries. Furthermore, contextual and geographical gaps exist, as most research in Kenya has focused on rural settings or generalized urban contexts, overlooking the unique vulnerabilities of densely populated informal settlements. This study therefore seeks to fill these empirical, conceptual, and contextual gaps by investigating how community participation influences the performance of gender-based empowerment projects in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi City County.

## 1.3 Literature review

In this section, theoretical and empirical reviews are presented

### 1.3.1 Theoretical Review

The Ladder of Citizen Participation (LCP), developed by Arnstein (1969), remains a seminal model in conceptualizing the extent of citizen involvement in decision-making. The ladder distinguishes between

non-participation, tokenism, and genuine citizen power, arguing that empowerment is achieved when communities exercise real influence over decisions and resources (Lauria & Slotterback, 2021; Varwell, 2022). Its strength lies in differentiating symbolic from substantive participation, exposing the superficiality of initiatives that merely “inform” or “consult” communities without redistributing power (Zakhour, 2020). Empirical studies confirm its relevance in gender-based empowerment, where women are often confined to tokenistic roles (BanUkuna, Kontinen & Holma, 2022). Only when women ascend to partnership or control do empowerment projects demonstrate transformative outcomes (Cao & Kang, 2022). Nonetheless, its linear and hierarchical design has been critiqued as oversimplifying the dynamic, cultural, and political realities of participation (Varwell, 2023).

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), introduced in the 1980s, complements LCP by shifting focus to the psychological dimensions of empowerment. Central to SCT is reciprocal determinism, where personal factors, behavior, and environment interact to shape outcomes (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy, the belief in one’s ability to achieve desired results, is particularly applicable in empowerment contexts (Egele, Klopp & Stark, 2025). Community-based projects in Spain, Ethiopia, and other contexts illustrate how peer modeling, mentorship, and group participation enhance self-efficacy and collective agency (Sebastian et al., 2021; Tulloch et al., 2020). However, critics argue that SCT overemphasizes individual agency while underestimating structural barriers in patriarchal or resource-constrained settings (Alaee & Zwickl, 2024).

Together, LCP and SCT provide a multidimensional framework for analyzing community participation in Mathare’s gender-based empowerment projects. LCP illuminates the structural positioning of women within participation hierarchies, while SCT explains how psychosocial factors—self-efficacy, role modeling, and collective learning—translate participation into sustainable empowerment outcomes.

### 1.3.2 Empirical Review

#### ***Empirical Review: Community Participation and the Performance of Gender-Based Empowerment Projects in***

Community participation has historically been viewed as a cornerstone of effective development, particularly in gender-based empowerment initiatives. Globally, participation has evolved from tokenistic consultation to structured involvement, where communities not only attend meetings but also shape agendas, monitor outcomes, and hold implementers accountable (Arnstein, 1969; Lauria & Slotterback, 2021). In Sweden, for example, empowerment projects thrive under an integrated model where participation is institutionalized within local councils and adult education centres. With sustained attendance rates exceeding 85%, bolstered by services such as childcare, Swedish projects illustrate how structural enablers and progressive policy frameworks translate into women’s economic independence and leadership gains (Lazoroska, Palm, & Bergek, 2021; Kåks & Målqvist, 2020; Otero-Hermida & Gonzalez-Urango, 2025).

Spain demonstrates an alternative pathway, where volunteerism and intergenerational mentorship foster continuity and grassroots empowerment. Peer-to-peer training enhances sustainability, with over 62% of volunteers maintaining long-term engagement and multiplying impact across networks (Bastida et al., 2020; Alcañiz & Fuertes, 2021). African parallels, such as Nigeria, show that volunteer-driven models can deepen gender messaging, though sustainability often depends on recognition and modest incentives

(Adebayo & Ojo, 2021; Okafor & Aniche, 2021). These cases emphasize that participation must balance intrinsic motivation with structural support.

In contrast, Germany exemplifies institutionalized feedback systems. Through participatory evaluation frameworks like “*Stimmen für Gleichheit*,” projects integrate community voices into decision-making, with transparency mechanisms sustaining over 78% of initiatives beyond three years (Gromann et al., 2023; Luther et al., 2025). However, this model often contrasts sharply with African settings, where feedback mechanisms are formalized but seldom acted upon, creating community disillusionment (Trinkenreich et al., 2021).

Empirical studies from sub-Saharan Africa highlight structural and cultural barriers limiting participation. In South Africa and Uganda, socio-economic pressures, childcare burdens, and cultural expectations constrain women’s attendance (Makhunga & Madzivhandila, 2020; Tshabalala & Ngwenya, 2024). Strategic measures—such as flexible scheduling and child-friendly spaces—have improved inclusion (Moyo & Mavuso, 2022), yet participation remains context-dependent. Ethiopia’s reliance on volunteerism highlights how local culture drives engagement, but limited training and logistical support undermine sustainability (Dejene et al., 2024; Kinati et al., 2023). Ghana and Tanzania show that structured feedback, through community scorecards and town halls, enhances trust and inclusivity, although consistency and responsiveness remain challenges (Amoah & Gyasi, 2020; Boakye & Frempong, 2023).

Kenyan experiences mirror these regional dynamics. In coastal counties like Mombasa and Mandera, participation is shaped by spousal restrictions, religious norms, and logistical barriers. NGOs often boost engagement through incentives such as meals and transport reimbursements (Kimathi & Mwangi, 2022; Njenga et al., 2022). In Makueni, inclusive communication across project cycles has enhanced accountability, but gendered gaps in male participation and weak follow-up dilute impact (Gitu, 2024; Edwards et al., 2022).

Focusing on Mathare Constituency, Nairobi City County, these findings underscore critical implications. Mathare, characterized by high population density, poverty, and entrenched gender inequalities, presents unique challenges for empowerment projects. Participation is often constrained by household economic pressures, safety concerns, and entrenched patriarchal norms. Evidence from other Kenyan counties suggests that projects in Mathare will require culturally sensitive strategies, robust logistical support, and deliberate inclusion of community gatekeepers such as chiefs, ward administrators, and religious leaders to enhance legitimacy and attendance. Volunteer-driven approaches may be effective, given Mathare’s history of grassroots organizing, but without structured training, recognition, and feedback mechanisms, sustainability risks remain high.

In synthesis, while global and regional evidence affirms that community participation drives performance and sustainability of gender-based empowerment projects, its effectiveness is mediated by context. For Mathare, integration of support services (e.g., childcare, safe venues), responsive feedback systems, and recognition of grassroots volunteerism are critical. Unlike European cases where participation is embedded in formal governance structures, Mathare requires hybrid models combining formal institutional support with informal community networks to achieve meaningful and sustainable empowerment outcomes.



## 1.4 Methodology

**Research Design:** A research design provides the plan guiding how data is collected, measured, and analyzed (Kumar & Praveenakumar, 2025). Its choice depends on the research problem, objectives, type of data required, and population accessibility (Cash, Isaksson, Maier, & Summers, 2022; Areia, Tavares, & Costa, 2023). This study adopted a mixed-method approach using a convergent parallel design, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously, analyzed separately, and then merged to provide a holistic understanding of community participation and gender empowerment.

**Study Location:** The study was conducted in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi County, an area with high poverty, dense population, and entrenched gender inequalities (Sverdlik, 2025). With a population of 206,564 across 74,967 households, Mathare has one of Nairobi's highest densities, averaging 69,000 persons/km<sup>2</sup> (KNBS, 2019). Several CBOs operate in the area, including Mathare Social Justice Centre and Mwelu Foundation, making it an ideal setting to explore community-based empowerment strategies.

**Target Population:** The target population consisted of 6,400 project beneficiaries from seven CBOs and seven facilitators managing gender empowerment projects.

**Table 1: Sample Size and Sampling Methods**

Parameter	Description
Population size	6,400 beneficiaries + 7 facilitators
Formula used	Yamane's formula (95% confidence)
Sample size	376 beneficiaries + 7 facilitators = <b>383 respondents</b>
Sampling technique (beneficiaries)	Stratified random sampling + PPS allocation + simple random sampling
Sampling technique (facilitators)	Purposive sampling until saturation (Thomas, 2022)

**Source:** *Field data, 2025*

**Table 2: Data Collection Instruments**

Instrument	Target group	Purpose
Structured questionnaires	Beneficiaries	Quantitative data on participation, leadership, capacity building, resource mobilization, and performance
Semi-structured interviews	Facilitators	Qualitative insights on project implementation, challenges, and community dynamics

**Source:** *Field data, 2025*

A pilot test with 37 respondents at Babadogo Women Empowerment Project confirmed tool clarity and contextual relevance (Zainal & Masrek, 2023):- Validity: Established via expert review using Lawshe's CVR method (Rusticus, 2024); and Reliability: Cronbach's Alpha exceeded 0.7, confirming internal consistency (Shrestha, 2021).

**Reliability results:** Reliability analysis was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) to assess the internal consistency of the items measuring each construct. A Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.70 was considered acceptable and adequate, values above 0.80 indicated very good reliability, and values above 0.90 reflected excellent internal consistency for further statistical analysis.

**Table 3: Reliability test results**

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Interpretation
Community Participation	9	0.700	Acceptable
Local Leadership	9	0.866	Very Good
Capacity Building	9	0.729	Acceptable
Resource Mobilization	9	0.890	Excellent
Cultural Norms	9	0.906	Excellent
Gender-Based Empowerment	9	0.719	Acceptable

**Source:** Field data, 2025

All the constructs reported Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) values above the commonly accepted minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating that the measurement instruments used in the study were reliable and internally consistent. Specifically, Community Participation reported an alpha of  $\alpha = 0.700$ , indicating acceptable reliability. Local Leadership showed very good reliability with an alpha of  $\alpha = 0.866$ , while Capacity Building also demonstrated acceptable internal consistency at  $\alpha = 0.729$ . Resource Mobilization achieved excellent reliability with  $\alpha = 0.890$ , and Cultural Norms recorded an alpha,  $\alpha = 0.906$ , reflecting excellent internal consistency among the scale items. The dependent variable, the performance of Gender-Based Empowerment projects with 9 items, indicated reliability coefficient of  $\alpha = 0.719$ , confirming the scale's acceptability.

**Data Collection Procedures:** After ethical approval from CUEA and a NACOSTI permit, CBO leaders were engaged to develop a sampling frame. Trained assistants administered questionnaires face-to-face in Kiswahili or English. Beneficiary sessions averaged 30 minutes in private venues. Facilitator interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and supplemented with notes. Data were securely stored.

**Table 4: Data Analysis**

Data Type	Analysis Technique	Software/Approach	Output Produced
Quantitative	Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, frequencies); inferential analysis (correlation, multiple regression)	SPSS v30	Relationship between community participation and project performance
Qualitative	Thematic analysis: transcription, coding, theme development	Manual + NVivo coding principles	Narratives, quotations, emergent themes
Integration	Convergence and divergence of quantitative and qualitative findings	Mixed-method triangulation	Holistic interpretation

**Source:** Field data, 2025

Regression model:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- Y = Project performance
- $X_1$  = Community participation
- $X_2$  = Leadership
- $X_3$  = Capacity building
- $X_4$  = Resource mobilization

**Ethical Considerations:** The study ensured voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Data were securely stored, used only for research, and reported without falsification. Approvals were obtained from CUEA and NACOSTI, aligning with institutional and national ethical standards.

## 1.5 Results and Discussion

### *Response rate*

The study administered a total of 376 structured questionnaires to the study participants within Mathare Constituency. From which, 339 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 90.2%. This was considered a high response rate and suggested that the data collected was representative and reliable for statistical analysis. Additionally, the study scheduled 7 key informant interviews (KIIs) with project managers. However, only 6 key informants successfully completed the interviews. The one non-response was due to the respondent failing to absenteeism and busy schedules that frequent appointments did not work.

**Table 5: Response rate for Questionnaires and Key Informant Interviews**

Data Collection Tool	Targeted Respondents	Completed Responses	Response Rate (%)
Questionnaires	376	339	90.2%
Key Informant Interviews	7	6	-

**Source:** Field data, 2025

### *Descriptive statistics for respondent profile*

The study analyzed demographic variables such as gender, ag-groups, level of education attained and employment status of the respondents to examine the background characteristics. Descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies and percentages, were used to summarize the demographic data.

**Table 6: Descriptive statistics for demographics**

Variable	Category	n (%)
Gender of Respondent	Female	205 (60.5%)
	Male	134 (39.5%)
Age Group	Below 18	23 (6.8%)
	18–25	68 (20.1%)
	26–35	157 (46.3%)
	36–45	58 (17.1%)



Marital Status	Above 45	33 (9.7%)
	Single	28 (8.3%)
	Married	149 (44.0%)
	Divorced/Separated	94 (27.7%)
	Widowed	68 (20.1%)
Education Level	No Formal Education	34 (10.0%)
	Primary Education	64 (18.9%)
	Secondary	137 (40.4%)
	College/TVET	63 (18.6%)
Employment Status	University	41 (12.1%)
	Formal Employment	8 (2.4%)
	Self-employed	46 (13.6%)
	Unemployed	240 (70.8%)
	Student	45 (13.3%)

**Source:** Field data, 2025

### ***Gender of Respondents***

The majority of respondents were female, accounting for 205 (60.5%), while male participants were 134 (39.5%). This suggests that women are the primary focus and target of empowerment efforts in Mathare, reflecting both the design of the interventions and the high level of need among female residents. Gender-based programs must therefore continue prioritizing women while also ensuring male inclusion to promote holistic community transformation. This finding aligns with prior Akinyi (2023) and Njoki and Gathenya (2022), which noted that women constitute the largest proportion of beneficiaries in gender-based empowerment programs, particularly in urban informal settlements.

### ***Age Group of Respondents***

The results indicate that age group, 26–35 years made the largest respondents with 157 (46.3%). This was followed by 18–25 years at 68 (20.1%), 36–45 years at 58 (17.1%), and above 45 years at 33 (9.7%). Only 23 respondents (6.8%) were under 18 years. The results implied that empowerment programs are attracting participants at a stage of life where individuals are actively seeking stability, economic participation, and growth opportunities. Interventions should therefore be tailored to support this demographic's aspirations, such as small business support, vocational training, and maternal health services. The dominance of the 26–35 age bracket is consistent with findings by Wambugu et al. (2021), who found that young to mid-adulthood people are the most actively engaged in CBO-led initiatives due to their higher mobility, productivity, and interest in financial independence.

### ***Marital Status of Respondents***

The majority of respondents were married at 149 (44.0%), followed by divorced or separated at 94 (27.7%), widowed at 68 (20.1%), and single at only 28 (8.3%). Programs should consider the unique needs of married, widowed, and separated women, such as child care support, financial literacy, and trauma-informed interventions, as these categories dominate the beneficiary pool and face heightened social and economic vulnerabilities. These results reflect trends observed by Abok et al. (2022) and Oketch and Kimani (2020), who found that a significant portion of women and men involved in gender empowerment programs were either married or had previously been in a marriage. These categories often represent gender with dependents or caregiving roles, thus highly motivated to participate in empowerment efforts.

***Education Level of Respondents***

Results underscored that majority of the respondents had attained secondary education (137; 40.4%), followed by primary education (64; 18.9%), college/TVET (63; 18.6%), and university (41; 12.1%). A smaller group had no formal education (34; 10.0%). These findings are supported by Mberia et al. (2021) and UNESCO (2020) reports, which indicated that most CBO beneficiaries in Nairobi informal settlements have basic to intermediate education levels. The data indicates that most beneficiaries can comprehend and engage with moderately technical empowerment content. Program designers should thus strike a balance between simplicity and practicality in content delivery, favoring training approaches that blend literacy with life skills, hands-on workshops, and visual aids to reach both low and mid-educated groups effectively.

***Employment status***

The data revealed that the majority of respondents were unemployed, 240 (70.8%), followed by self-employed at 46 (13.6%), students at 45 (13.3%), and only 8 respondents (2.4%) reported being in formal employment. This trend aligns with the economic realities of many informal urban settlements like Mathare, where access to stable, formal jobs is limited due to low education levels, limited professional networks, and a competitive labor market. The dominance of unemployment among beneficiaries is consistent with findings by Mburu and Waithaka (2021), who observed that most youth-aged adults in Nairobi's informal settlements rely on informal and unstable livelihoods. The presence of 13.3% students highlights the need for youth-focused empowerment interventions that can nurture self-reliance, skill development, and transition-to-work programs. These findings imply that employment creation, vocational training, and income-generating activities must be central components of gender-based empowerment initiatives in Mathare. The high unemployment rate underscores the economic fragility of the population and justifies the need for interventions that go beyond awareness and advocacy, to include tangible livelihood support. Ultimately, addressing unemployment not only improves individual well-being but also strengthens the sustainability of empowerment projects by fostering economic independence among beneficiaries.

***Descriptive statistics results for the study constructs***

Descriptive statistics; frequency distribution, mean and standard deviation were used to summarize participants' responses. Mean scores indicated levels of agreement, with values above 3.0 interpreted as positive perceptions, exactly 3.0 representing neutrality, and below 3.0 indicating disagreement (Rokeman, 2024; Doubleday et al., 2022). Standard deviation (SD) measured response variability with values below 1.0 reflecting consistent views (low discrepancies), while values above 1.0 indicated diverse opinions; high discrepancies (Kennedy, 2022).

***Community participation***

The first study objective was to evaluate the influence of community participation on the performance of gender-based empowerment projects in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi County. The respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the 5-Point Likert scale measurements items.

**Table 7: Respondents Opinion on Community participation**

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	M	SD
I rarely attend project meetings because they are not well organized.	0.6%	0.9%	21.2%	54.6%	22.7%	3.98	.727
Many community members volunteer their time to support project activities.	0.3%	0.6%	18.0%	59.9%	21.2%	4.01	.666
Project meetings are poorly attended by community members.	0.3%	0.9%	31.0%	44.8%	23.0%	3.89	.770
My feedback is always considered in project planning and decision-making.	0.3%	1.5%	26.5%	54.0%	17.7%	3.87	.717
Few people from the community are willing to volunteer for project activities.	0.6%	0.3%	36.3%	49.3%	13.6%	3.75	.709
There is high turnout during project mobilization and sensitization events.	2.1%	11.8%	17.4%	45.1%	23.6%	3.76	.708
Our opinions are usually ignored when we give feedback about the project.	0.6%	15.6%	31.3%	39.5%	13.0%	3.49	.927
Volunteers are recognized and encouraged to participate in the project.	2.1%	5.3%	20.6%	49.6%	22.4%	3.85	.899
I regularly attend meetings related to the gender-based empowerment project.	2.1%	4.7%	23.6%	50.4%	19.2%	3.80	.874

**Source:** Field data, 2025

The study revealed a generally positive perception of community participation in gender-based empowerment projects in Mathare Constituency. It found that 59.9% agreed and 21.2% strongly agreed that many community members volunteer their time to support project activities (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.666), suggesting strong local commitment with low dispersion indicating consensus. Similarly, 54.6% agreed and 22.7% strongly agreed that project meetings are well-organized and rarely missed for that reason (Mean = 3.98, SD = 0.727). This supports findings by Kilonzo and Oduor (2021), who observed that when community projects are well-coordinated, participation tends to increase as individuals feel their time and input are respected. Additionally, 49.6% agreed and 22.4% strongly agreed that volunteers are encouraged and recognized (Mean = 3.85, SD = 0.899), although the slightly higher standard deviation indicated differing experiences among participants.

These findings were reinforced by key informants. For instance, [KII\_01, Female, 9th July 2025] emphasized,

*“...We recognize volunteers during community barazas, and this has really motivated youth and women to participate consistently...”*

Similarly, [KII\_05, Male, 9th July 2025] remarked,

*“...Meetings are usually planned well and information shared early, which explains the high participation we are witnessing lately...”*

These perspectives validate the quantitative results and align with Nyamai and Kamau (2020), who concluded that recognition and timely communication enhance stakeholder involvement in grassroots projects. Furthermore, 54.0% agreed and 17.7% strongly agreed that their feedback is considered in project decision-making (Mean = 3.87, SD = 0.717), suggesting operational participatory platforms. This mirrors findings by Habib and Okello (2019), who found that inclusive consultation mechanisms improve ownership and sustainability in gender-focused programs.

As noted by [KII\_03, Female, 9th July 2025],

*“...There are moments when our views were directly used to shape activities—especially on where to set up safe spaces for women...”*

However, the study also identified critical gaps that could hinder the effectiveness of community participation. While meetings were considered well-organized, 44.8% agreed and 23.0% strongly agreed

that they are poorly attended (Mean = 3.89, SD = 0.770), pointing to inconsistency in actual engagement. Additionally, 49.3% agreed and 13.6% strongly agreed that few community members are willing to volunteer (Mean = 3.75, SD = 0.709), reflecting potential disengagement or unmet expectations.

This concern was echoed by [KII\_02, Male, 9th July 2025], who explained,

*“...People only come when there is a promise of a stipend—volunteerism is declining due to hard economic times...”*

These insights support Odhiambo and Maina (2022), who observed that economic constraints have significantly eroded the culture of volunteerism in informal settlements. Moreover, although 45.1% agreed and 23.6% strongly agreed that there is high turnout during mobilization and sensitization events, 13.9% disagreed, suggesting uneven enthusiasm (Mean = 3.76, SD = 0.708). A more concerning issue arose around inclusivity in decision-making: 39.5% agreed and 13.0% strongly agreed that their opinions are often ignored (Mean = 3.49, SD = 0.927), with the high standard deviation reflecting divergent experiences.

This sentiment was strongly expressed by [KII\_04, Female, 9th July 2025], who stated,

*“...We attend meetings and share our views, but decisions are already made. It’s just a formality...”*

Similarly, [KII\_07, Female, 9th July 2025] suggested,

*“...If the project teams used more open dialogue and feedback loops, more people would be motivated to contribute...”*

These findings align with Abebe and Tsegaye (2021), who emphasized that community-based programs often fall short of integrating feedback into final decisions, leading to disillusionment and token participation. Therefore, while structures for participation exist, the study underscores the need for deeper engagement strategies, including genuine feedback integration, improved trust-building, and equitable communication to strengthen long-term project ownership and sustainability.

## 1.6 Conclusion

The study established that community-based strategies, particularly community participation, significantly influence the performance of gender-based empowerment projects in Mathare Constituency. Beneficiaries’ involvement in decision-making, volunteering, and collective action enhanced project ownership, accountability, and sustainability. However, challenges such as economic constraints, limited resources, weak leadership structures, and inadequate recognition of community voices reduced the overall effectiveness of these initiatives. The findings align with Arnstein’s Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969), which emphasizes that meaningful engagement empowers communities and enhances development outcomes. Similarly, the application of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) reinforced the importance of social learning, where communities build collective capacity to drive empowerment. Despite notable progress, structural inequalities, poor legal enforcement, and persistent gender-based violence continue to hinder the full realization of empowerment outcomes in Mathare. The study concludes that community participation is not only a driver of project performance but also a pathway to sustainable gender empowerment, provided it is supported by leadership, capacity building, and resource mobilization.

## 1.7 Recommendations

**Strengthen Community Participation:** Project facilitators and CBOs should institutionalize participatory approaches that go beyond tokenism, ensuring that women, youth, and marginalized groups are meaningfully involved in planning, decision-making, and monitoring processes.

**Enhance Local Leadership Capacity:** County government in collaboration with NGOs should invest in leadership training for community leaders to improve accountability, inclusivity, and responsiveness in empowerment projects.

**Prioritize Capacity Building:** Continuous training in entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and digital skills should be scaled up by project managers to enhance beneficiaries' ability to utilize empowerment opportunities effectively.

**Strengthen Resource Mobilization:** CBOs should diversify funding streams through partnerships with private sector actors, donor agencies, and government programs to reduce overdependence on limited local contributions.

**Integrate Feedback Mechanisms:** Project facilitators should develop structured feedback systems that respect and incorporate community input, thereby improving trust and project performance.

**Policy and Legal Support:** Policymakers at county and national levels should enhance enforcement of gender-related laws and allocate targeted funding to scale successful community-driven empowerment models in informal settlements like Mathare.

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