

Influence of Shared Decision-Making on the Development Projects Sustainability in Rural Societies in Mt. Elgon, Bungoma County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Shared decision-making is increasingly recognized as a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability of community development projects in rural areas. However, despite its importance, many initiatives continue to be designed and implemented with minimal involvement of local stakeholders, undermining their long-term success. This study explored the influence of shared decision-making on the sustainability of rural community development projects, focusing on Mt. Elgon region in Bungoma County, Kenya. The study aimed to understand how inclusive participation involving community members, leaders, and project implementers contributes to ownership, accountability, and effective alignment of development goals with community needs.

The research adopted a descriptive research design and employed a mixed-methods approach. The target population consisted of 3,000 stakeholders in rural development projects, including local leaders, project beneficiaries, government officers, and NGO representatives. A sample size of 341 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula and selected through purposive sampling. Quantitative data were collected via structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential analysis (correlation and regression), while qualitative responses were thematically analyzed and reported narratively to complement the statistical findings. The findings revealed that shared decision-making significantly enhances the sustainability of community development projects. In Mt. Elgon, projects that incorporated inclusive participation experienced higher levels of ownership, reduced resistance, and greater responsiveness to community priorities. Conversely, exclusion of community voices led to challenges such as poor project management, lack of maintenance, and eventual failure. The study demonstrated that sustainability is closely tied to how well local communities are empowered to participate in decision-making processes. The study recommends that development stakeholders institutionalize shared decision-making in rural project planning and execution. This includes organizing inclusive planning forums, employing participatory tools, and ensuring representation of marginalized voices. Capacity-building initiatives should be implemented to equip communities with planning, budgeting, and monitoring skills. Emphasizing shared decision-making is not only a governance imperative but also a practical pathway to sustainable development.

Key words: Capacity building, Collective ownership, Community development projects, Community empowerment, Indigenous knowledge, Rural communities, Shared decision-making, social cohesion, Stakeholder engagement, Sustainability.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Rural development is a cornerstone for achieving equitable and sustainable global progress, particularly in the fight against poverty (Shiurkar, 2023). SDG 1—No Poverty—aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, and this goal is closely tied to rural transformation, where a significant proportion of the world's poor reside (Sengupta, 2018). Effective rural development fosters improved access to education, healthcare, markets,

infrastructure, and income-generating opportunities for rural populations (Yu et al., 2024). However, despite decades of investment in rural development initiatives, the sustainability of such projects is often undermined by insufficient community participation. Without local ownership, many interventions fail to meet the long-term needs and priorities of beneficiaries (Blackburn, 2018).

At the global level, numerous development projects illustrate the growing concern that the sustainability of rural development initiatives is often undermined by insufficient community participation in decision-making processes (Lucky, 2016). While development agencies and governments have invested heavily in infrastructure, agriculture, health, education, and natural resource management in rural areas, many of these projects have struggled to achieve long-term success because they failed to meaningfully engage local populations in their design, implementation, and monitoring (Blackburn et al., 2018). In India, the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) rural roads project was designed to enhance rural connectivity, however many communities reported limited involvement in planning, leading to roads that sometimes missed key economic or social centers (Wagale et al., 2020). In Colombia's Rural Development Agency initiated programs to improve rural livelihoods post-conflict. Yet, a lack of adequate consultation with marginalized communities, especially Indigenous groups, has threatened both peacebuilding and sustainability (Suarez et al., 2018). In Nepal, reforestation projects collapsed after donor withdrawal because community members were never trained or consulted, leading to neglect of the planted areas (Laudari et al., 2022).

African context, and its rural development is frequently compromised by centralized decision-making and inconsistent policy frameworks (Atisa et al., 2021). In Ethiopia, the Sustainable Land Management Programme (SLMP) aimed to address land degradation, but coupled with low levels of local involvement, especially in design and monitoring, leading to poor maintenance of rehabilitated lands (Tessema, 2024). In Nigeria, the Fadama III project sought to support smallholder farmers through improved irrigation and cooperative funding, encountered elite capture and weak community accountability structures hence loss of long-term benefits (Egenti, 2020). In Kenya the Lokichar oil project which sparked excitement for local development, encountered community grievances over exclusion from decision-making, land rights violations, and unmet expectations led to protests, stalling progress (Muchiri, 2020). In Trans-Nzoia County, government-initiated settlement schemes were aimed at reducing landlessness, but because of lack of inclusive planning led to ethnic tensions and disputes over allocation, which not only stalled development but also triggered social conflict (Walter, 2024). The recurring theme across all contexts is the limited integration of communities in the full project cycle—from planning and design to monitoring and evaluation. This reveals a critical research inquiry for more empirical studies on the dynamics of genuine community participation and how it influences the sustainability of rural development projects, by assessing the Influence of Shared Decision-Making on the Development Projects Sustainability in Rural Societies in Mt. Elgon, Bungoma County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Rural development projects should be community-driven, with local populations actively engaged in identifying needs, designing solutions, implementing plans, and monitoring outcomes. This inclusive approach ensures ownership, relevance, and long-term sustainability of interventions. In reality, many development projects in rural Kenya, including those in Mt. Elgon, are conceived and executed with minimal community involvement. Local voices are often ignored in the planning stages, and decisions are made by external actors—government officials, NGOs, or donors—leading to projects that do not align with the lived experiences, priorities, or capabilities of the local people. Efforts such as devolved governance under Kenya's 2010 Constitution, public participation frameworks, and county integrated development plans (CIDPs) were intended to enhance local engagement. However, these mechanisms have largely remained procedural rather than transformative. They often involve tokenistic consultations rather than genuine power-sharing, resulting in poor implementation and unsustainable outcomes. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a focused investigation into how shared decision-making—or the lack thereof—affects the sustainability of rural development projects in Mt. Elgon.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to examine the Influence of Shared Decision-Making on the Development Projects Sustainability in Rural Societies in Mt. Elgon, Bungoma County, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

The study has been anchored on Participatory Development Theory, developed through the works of scholars such as Chambers (1994) and Rahman (1993). According to Participatory Development Theory, sustainable development is best achieved when local communities are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of projects that affect them. The theory emphasizes bottom-up approaches and considers the local knowledge, needs, and priorities of community members as central to the development process. Participatory Development Theory posits that shared decision-making fosters ownership and accountability among local stakeholders, which in turn enhances the relevance, efficiency, and sustainability of community-based initiatives.

When communities are given a voice in the decision-making process, they are more likely to support and sustain development projects beyond donor involvement. The theory also highlights the importance of empowerment, capacity building, and trust-building among the participants. In relation to this study, the theory helps explain how involving rural communities in decision-making processes influences the long-term success and sustainability of community development projects in Kenya. It provides a framework for understanding the role of inclusivity, collective action, and local agency in ensuring that development efforts are not only accepted by communities but are also effectively maintained over time.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 hypothesizes the interaction between shared decision-making and the sustainability of community development projects in rural societies in Kenya. It proposes that the extent and quality of shared decision-making processes—such as inclusiveness, transparency, and responsiveness—directly influence the long-term viability, ownership, and impact of development initiatives within rural communities.

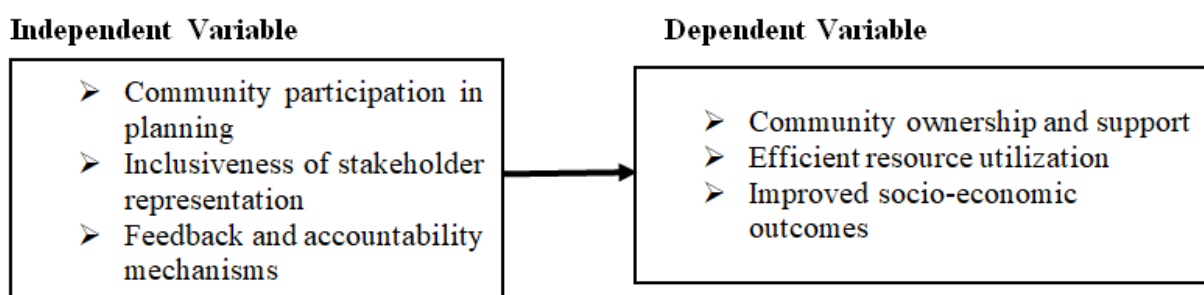


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework.

Empirical Review

Shared decision-making (SDM) is increasingly recognized as a crucial factor in the sustainability of community development projects, particularly in rural contexts (Owino et al., 2025). It refers to the inclusive process through which all stakeholders, especially community members, actively participate in identifying, designing, implementing, and evaluating development initiatives (Ahmad & Islam, 2024). In rural societies, where socio-cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions deeply influence project outcomes, SDM ensures that development aligns with local priorities, enhances ownership, and strengthens long-term commitment (Thelma & Chitondo, 2024). Srivastava and Chinnasamy (2024) empirically examined watershed development interventions in the semi-arid region of Western India and found that these interventions significantly improved rural water safety, security, and sustainability. However, the study highlighted that limited community participation in planning and implementation stages posed a challenge to long-term success. Areas with strong local involvement experienced more sustainable outcomes and better maintenance of water structures, while

regions with minimal community engagement faced issues such as misuse of resources and lack of ownership. This underscores the importance of inclusive community participation in enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of rural development projects.

Smith et al. (2016) empirically found that a strong sense of community in Patanatic, Guatemala, significantly contributed to improvements in rural healthcare delivery. The study demonstrated that active community participation—through volunteerism, local leadership, and collective problem-solving—enhanced the sustainability and effectiveness of health interventions. However, it also revealed that in areas where participation was limited due to mistrust, lack of information, or leadership gaps, challenges emerged, including delays in service delivery and resistance to health programs. Kelly et al. (2018) found that community-managed water systems in rural Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia faced seasonal fluctuations that significantly affected water availability and usage patterns. The study revealed that while community participation played a key role in sustaining these systems, limited and inconsistent involvement—particularly in decision-making, maintenance planning, and resource mobilization—led to operational challenges, especially during dry seasons.

Magessa (2020) empirically found that Participatory Forest Management (PFM) in Tanzania often failed to meet its policy objectives due to a significant mismatch between intended outcomes and actual results on the ground. This failure was closely linked to limited community participation, where local communities were either insufficiently involved or lacked meaningful influence in decision-making processes. Although policies emphasized community engagement, in practice, participation was often superficial, with power remaining centralized in government or external actors. Jarso (2020) found that the sustainability of drought support projects among pastoralists in Isiolo County was significantly influenced by factors such as community involvement, project design, and local ownership. Empirical evidence from the study showed that limited community participation negatively affected the long-term success of the projects. Many pastoralists reported feeling excluded from key planning and decision-making processes, leading to low community buy-in and poor project outcomes. This lack of participation created challenges such as weak local support systems, misaligned interventions with community needs, and eventual project failure, highlighting the critical role of inclusive participation in sustaining development initiatives in marginalized areas.

Khaemba (2020) empirically found that community participation significantly influenced the sustainability of rural water access in Bungoma County. The study revealed that where community members were actively involved in planning, decision-making, and management of water projects, there was improved functionality and long-term access to water services. However, in areas with limited participation, water projects faced operational challenges such as breakdowns, mismanagement, and lack of ownership. This lack of inclusion hindered sustainability, as community members felt detached from the projects and were less likely to contribute to their maintenance or protect them from misuse. While global and regional studies affirm the role of shared decision-making in enhancing sustainability, empirical evidence on how this dynamic specifically operates across diverse rural communities in Kenya remains limited. Most Kenyan studies focus on sector-specific projects (e.g., water or health), with less emphasis on the holistic influence of SDM across various development sectors. Furthermore, the mechanisms through which shared decision-making translates into sustained outcomes—such as enhanced trust, social capital, or adaptive learning—are underexplored. This study seeks to examine the influence of shared decision-making on the sustainability of multi-sectoral community development projects in Mt. Elgon, Bungoma County, Kenya.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design to investigate the influence of shared decision-making on the sustainability of community development projects in rural societies in Kenya. The focus was on rural communities actively involved in development initiatives in rural societies of Mt. Elgon in Bungoma county. The study targeted 3000 community development stakeholders including community leaders, project beneficiaries, local government officers, and representatives from non-governmental organizations involved in rural development across Kenya to respond to the questionnaires. Additionally, 30 participants were targeted for key informant interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Through Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula a sample of 341 respondents were identified and through purposively sampling procedures they were made to

participate in the study. A mixed-methods approach was employed. Quantitative data was gathered using structured questionnaires administered to project beneficiaries and community leaders. Additionally, qualitative data was collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with local administrators and NGO officials. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as means, frequencies, and percentages, and inferential statistics including correlation and regression analysis to test the relationship between shared decision-making and development project sustainability. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis and presented in narrative form to enrich the quantitative findings.

To determine the influence of shared decision-making on project sustainability, the study utilized a univariate linear regression model specified as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Sustainability of community development projects

X = Level of shared decision-making

ε = Error term, assumed to be normally distributed with a mean of zero

This model facilitated the identification of the extent to which shared decision-making practices impact the long-term viability of rural development project initiatives.

DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

Response Rate

The study ambitiously targeted a total of 3,000 community development stakeholders across diverse rural societies in Kenya, recognizing their vital role in shaping and sustaining local development efforts. In a testament to both the relevance of the research and the commitment of the community, 291 stakeholders completed and returned the questionnaires, resulting in a commendable response rate of approximately 74%. In addition, 27 participants enthusiastically engaged in Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), producing an impressive 90% response rate. These figures did not merely surpass the minimum threshold of 60% recommended by Sataloff and Vontela (2021) in the Journal of the American Medical Association for robust statistical validity; they also met and exceeded the academic benchmark of 50% set by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) for reliable data analysis.

These high response rates are a reflection of the stakeholders' deep-rooted interest in shaping the trajectory of rural development through inclusive and participatory approaches. The primary goal of the study was to explore the profound influence of shared decision-making on the sustainability of community development projects—a subject that resonates deeply with the ongoing quest for equity, empowerment, and ownership in local development processes. This section now delves into the illuminating findings drawn from descriptive statistics and univariate regression models, revealing the strong link between inclusive decision-making and the enduring success of development initiatives. These insights not only affirm the importance of giving voice to rural communities but also provide a powerful call to action for policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders to embrace collaborative governance as a cornerstone of sustainable rural transformation in Kenya and beyond.

Descriptive Statistics on Shared Decision-Making and development project sustainability.

This section provides a compelling presentation of the descriptive statistics on shared decision-making, highlighting not only the numerical values but also the powerful insights they convey about the lived experiences of rural communities. By employing a five-point Likert scale—from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”—

the study captured the nuanced perceptions of respondents regarding the role of shared decision-making in enhancing the sustainability of community development projects. Measures of central tendency, including the mean and standard deviation, alongside frequencies and percentages, offer a well-rounded picture of collective sentiment. These figures are not mere statistics; they reflect voices yearning to be heard, decisions longing for inclusivity, and development efforts striving for longevity through participatory engagement. Each response represents a moment of reflection and lived experience, reminding us that sustainable development cannot thrive where decisions are made in isolation. The summarized responses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Perception of Respondents on Shared Decision-Making.

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	MEAN	STDV
Community members are rarely consulted during key project decisions.	11.3	17.2	5.2	32.6	33.7	3.6014	1.39427
Shared decision-making often excludes marginalized groups such as women and youth.	13.4	19.9	4.1	28.9	33.7	3.4948	1.46068
Project priorities are usually decided without community input.	11.7	16.8	7.2	29.9	34.4	3.5842	1.40527
Community leaders do not explain decisions clearly to members.	11.7	16.2	4.1	32.0	36.1	3.6460	1.40754
There is little effort to ensure decisions are made transparently.	12.7	18.6	5.8	29.6	33.3	3.5223	1.43431
Most resource allocation decisions are made by a few individuals.	12.7	16.5	3.8	30.9	36.1	3.6117	1.43493
Disagreements often arise due to lack of shared decision-making.	12.7	18.2	5.2	30.2	33.7	3.5395	1.43394
Community views are often ignored in project planning.	8.9	17.2	4.8	33.3	35.7	3.6976	1.34599
Shared decision-making rarely improves project sustainability.	12.0	18.2	5.2	30.6	34.0	3.5636	1.42099

Key: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree

The findings on respondents' perceptions of shared decision-making reveal overwhelmingly high levels of agreement with statements that highlight its shortcomings in practice, yet simultaneously affirm its crucial role in project sustainability. A total of **66.3%** agreed or strongly agreed that community members are rarely consulted during key project decisions, with **5.2%** remaining neutral and a combined **28.5%** disagreeing. This is supported by a community elder in a key informant interview (KII-03, 2025), who reported that “*decisions are often brought to us already made, and we are only told what is going to happen—not asked if we agree.*” Such sentiments reflect a widespread feeling of top-down project management, undermining participatory ideals.

Similarly, the statement that shared decision-making often excludes marginalized groups such as women and youth received high agreement (**62.6%**), indicating persistent exclusion. An FGD participant noted, “*Women are told to attend meetings but are never part of the real discussions; the men still make the final call.*” (FGD-01, 2025). This evidence reinforces the need for targeted inclusion mechanisms, particularly for groups traditionally sidelined in decision-making forums.

The claim that project priorities are usually decided without community input was also affirmed by **64.3%** of respondents. An assistant chief (KII-06, 2025) remarked, *“The donors and implementing partners come with their own plans; they rarely ask us what we actually need.”* This underscores a recurring pattern of externally driven planning, disconnected from community-identified priorities and reducing the sense of local ownership. On the issue that community leaders do not explain decisions clearly to members, **68.1%** agreed or strongly agreed, reflecting a lack of communication transparency. A young participant in an FGD (FGD-04, 2025) said, *“They just mention projects in barazas, but we never understand how or why they were chosen. Everything seems secretive.”* This lack of clarity contributes to misinformation and weakens accountability. The statement that there is little effort to ensure decisions are made transparently was supported by **62.9%** of respondents. One key informant, a project officer (KII-04, 2025), stated, *“Transparency only comes when donors are asked questions. Otherwise, everything stays in the hands of a few.”* This aligns with the growing concern that transparency is reactive rather than embedded in project governance structures. Concerning resource allocation being made by a few individuals, **67.0%** agreed, indicating perceptions of centralized control. A women’s group leader (KII-08, 2025) shared, *“We just hear money was sent, but we don’t know how it was used or who decided.”* This concentration of financial control often leads to mistrust and resentment, especially where community development outcomes are not visible.

Disagreement stemming from lack of shared decision-making was also strongly acknowledged, with **63.9%** agreeing that disagreements often arise due to lack of shared decision-making. A youth leader in an FGD stated, *“When people are excluded, they feel angry. That’s when you start hearing people resist or sabotage projects.”* (FGD-03, 2025). This emphasizes the social costs of exclusionary practices. The perception that community views are often ignored in project planning was affirmed by **69.0%**, with one elder saying, *“We attend planning meetings, but our ideas are never taken seriously.”* (KII-02, 2025). This sense of tokenistic participation undermines trust and reduces the legitimacy of development interventions. Finally, the assertion that shared decision-making rarely improves project sustainability had agreement from **64.6%**, suggesting some variability in experiences. Nonetheless, a project facilitator (KII-05, 2025) clarified, *“Where people have been genuinely involved, those projects last. But when decisions are imposed, the community eventually abandons them.”* This highlights that while shared decision-making is not always guaranteed to ensure sustainability, its absence significantly threatens it. The findings reveal a deeply felt contradiction within community perceptions of shared decision-making—on one hand, it is widely recognized as essential for sustaining development projects, yet on the other, it is routinely undermined in practice. Community members report feeling sidelined during critical decision-making moments, with many expressing that they are merely informed about pre-decided actions rather than being genuinely consulted. Marginalized groups, especially women and youth, continue to face exclusion from substantive participation, despite formal invitations to attend meetings. The emotional cost of being ignored—ranging from anger to active resistance—underscores how exclusionary practices jeopardize not only the social fabric but also the longevity of development efforts.

Table 2: Perception of Respondents on Development Project Sustainability.

Statement	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	MEAN	STDV
Most community projects often stall due to poor decision-making processes.	11.3	17.2	5.2	32.6	33.7	3.6014	1.39427
Use of substandard materials in development projects is common due to lack of proper stakeholder involvement.	13.4	19.9	4.1	28.9	33.7	3.4948	1.46068
Project funds are frequently misused because community members are not involved in key financial decisions.	11.7	16.8	7.2	29.9	34.4	3.5842	1.40527

Development priorities often do not reflect actual community needs due to lack of inclusive decision-making.	11.7	16.2	4.1	32.0	36.1	3.6460	1.40754
Many development projects duplicate efforts of past or existing ones led by different political leaders.	12.7	18.6	5.8	29.6	33.3	3.5223	1.43431
Most projects initiated are not maintained over time due to poor planning and lack of community ownership.	12.7	16.5	3.8	30.9	36.1	3.6117	1.43493
There is minimal transparency in how community development projects are selected and implemented.	12.7	18.2	5.2	30.2	33.7	3.5395	1.43394
Shared decision-making is often bypassed, leading to weak sustainability of most community projects.	8.9	17.2	4.8	33.3	35.7	3.6976	1.34599

Key: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; N = Neutral; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree

The findings indicate that most respondents perceived poor decision-making as a major cause of stalled community projects. A combined 66.3% either agreed (32.6%) or strongly agreed (33.7%) that poor decision-making contributes to this problem, while 5.2% remained neutral and a combined 28.5% disagreed. This view was echoed during focus group discussions, where a participant stated, *“Projects collapse mid-way because leaders don’t listen to what we really need. Decisions are made elsewhere without our input.”* (FGD-01, 2025). Key informants reported that top-down decisions often overlook vital contextual realities, leading to impractical plans and eventual project failure. Regarding the use of substandard materials, 62.6% of respondents agreed (28.9%) or strongly agreed (33.7%) that this issue stems from a lack of proper stakeholder involvement. Only 4.1% were neutral, while a combined 33.3% disagreed. In qualitative interviews, a community elder noted, *“When people are not consulted, contractors bring cheap materials because there’s no one to question them.”* (KII-03, 2025). This sentiment was reinforced by focus group participants who stressed the need for technical committees with community representation to ensure quality standards are upheld.

On the misuse of project funds, 64.3% of respondents agreed (29.9%) or strongly agreed (34.4%) that it is linked to the exclusion of community members from key financial decisions. A total of 7.2% expressed neutrality, while 28.5% disagreed. According to a women’s group leader interviewed, *“If we’re not involved in budgeting or procurement, then who will stop the corruption?”* (KII-05, 2025). Participants consistently argued that transparency in financial management requires grassroots oversight. When asked whether development priorities reflect community needs, 68.1% agreed (32.0%) or strongly agreed (36.1%) that the lack of inclusivity in decision-making results in irrelevant projects. Just 4.1% were neutral and 27.9% disagreed. One participant from a youth group explained, *“Sometimes they build things we don’t even use—like a market in a place we never trade.”* (FGD-02, 2025). Informants stressed that community forums must be held early in project design to capture genuine needs. Similarly, 62.9% of respondents believed that development projects often duplicate efforts led by different political leaders due to poor coordination, with 29.6% agreeing and 33.3% strongly agreeing. A total of 5.8% remained neutral, while 31.3% disagreed. One key informant remarked, *“Each new leader wants a project that bears their name, even if the community already has one. That’s wasteful.”* (KII-06, 2025). Such political overlaps were described as undermining continuity and impact.

The issue of maintenance and sustainability received agreement from 67.0% of respondents, who attributed project failure to poor planning and lack of community ownership—30.9% agreed and 36.1% strongly agreed. Only 3.8% were neutral and 29.2% disagreed. During discussions, a local chief explained, *“If people don’t feel the project is theirs, they won’t maintain it. Ownership begins with involvement.”* (FGD-03, 2025). Participants emphasized that community maintenance committees should be part of every project. On transparency, 63.9%

of respondents agreed (30.2%) or strongly agreed (33.7%) that there is minimal clarity in how development projects are selected and implemented. Only 5.2% were neutral and 30.9% disagreed. One youth representative observed, *“We never know why a project was chosen, or who decided. Everything is hidden.”* (KII-02, 2025). Both interviewees and focus group members called for open barazas to explain project selection criteria. Lastly, regarding the bypassing of shared decision-making, 69.0% agreed (33.3%) or strongly agreed (35.7%) that this weakens the sustainability of community projects. A small proportion (4.8%) remained neutral, while 26.1% disagreed. One informant commented, *“When leaders impose ideas without consultation, people don’t support the projects. It’s that simple.”* (KII-04, 2025). The discussions highlighted a recurring theme: participation breeds responsibility, while exclusion fuels apathy.

Regression Analysis

The assumptions of using the least square estimator are that the predictor variables should not be highly correlated, the error term should be normally distributed (normality) with a constant variance (homoscedasticity) and a mean zero and that it should not be highly correlated across the predictor variables (serial correlation). These assumptions are tested under this section before running the regression model to determine the influence of Intergovernmental Relations on Healthcare Service Delivery. One of the assumptions of least square regression is that the error term should be normally distributed. This study tested for this assumption graphically using P-P plots for regression standardized residual as well as the normality plot as shown in figure 2.

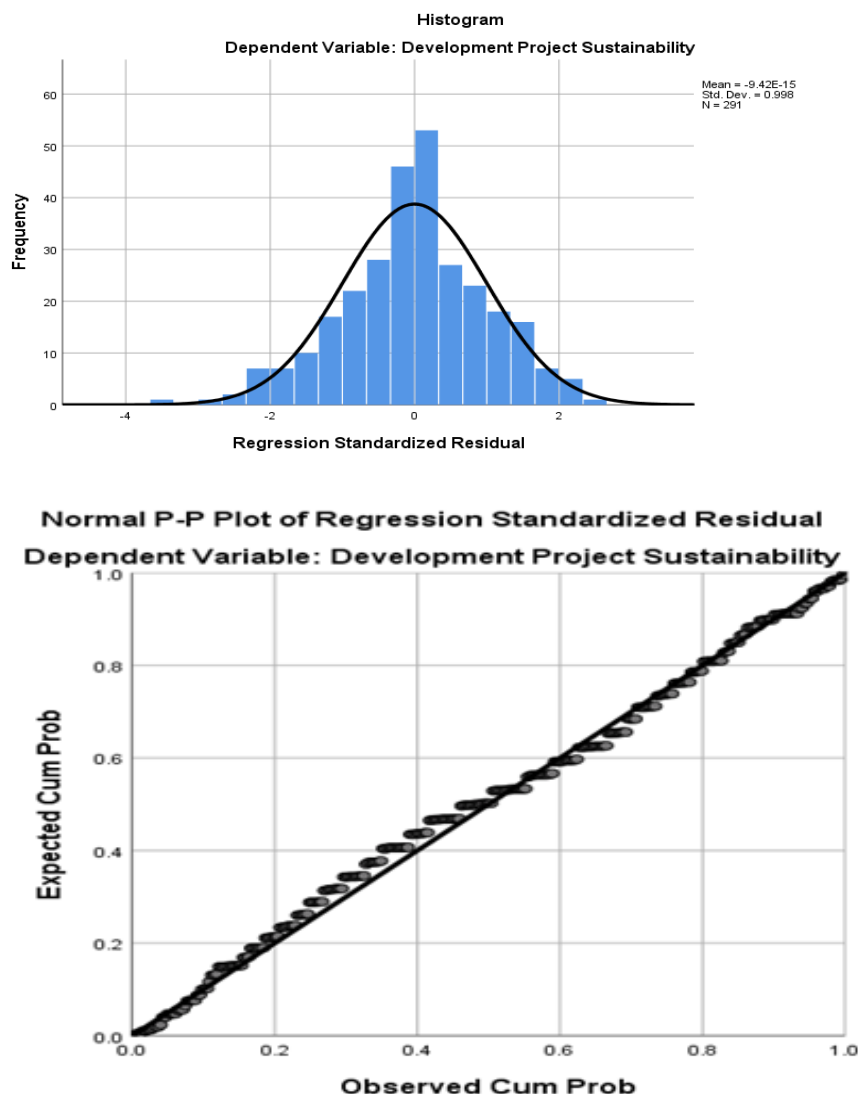


Figure 2: Normality test of the regression residual

The graphical results on the normality of the residual term using both P-P plots as well as the normality plot as shown in Figure 2 showed that the residual of the regression was in form of a bell-shape as required. Therefore, it did not violate the assumption of normality. Another assumption is that autocorrelation which was tested using Durbin Watson (DW) method that requires the DW statistic to be between 1.5 and 2.0 to imply absence of serial correlation. The results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Durbin Watson test of autocorrelation.

Model Summary ^b										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.481 ^a	.231	.228	.52413	.231	86.891	1	289	.000	1.920
a. Predictors: (Constant), Shared Decision-Making										
b. Dependent Variable: Development Project Sustainability										

Source: Survey Data (2025).

As shown in table 3, it was established that the DW value of 1.920 lied between 1.5 and 2.0 which implies that there was absence of serial correlation. Therefore, it was suitable to use a least square estimator regression model. The assumption of Heteroscedasticity was also tested using Breusch Pagan method which requires that the P-Value is not significant so that the null hypothesis of homoscedasticity is upheld. The results are shown in table 4.

Table 4: Breusch Pagan test of heteroscedasticity.

Breusch-Pagan Test for Heteroskedasticity ^{a, b, c}		
Chi-Square	df	Sig.
.004	1	.953
a. Dependent variable: Development Project Sustainability		
b. Tests the null hypothesis that the variance of the errors does not depend on the values of the independent variables.		
c. Predicted values from design: Intercept + OBJ1		

Source: Survey Data (2025).

As shown in table 4, the P-Value (0.953 is greater than 0.05) meaning that the null hypothesis of homoscedasticity is upheld. This implies that the error term had constant variance as required. Therefore, it was suitable to use a least square estimator regression model. Since all the assumptions of using an OLS had been tested and met, the study used a bivariate regression method to determine the nature and magnitude of the relationship between Shared Decision-Making and Development Project Sustainability. The univariate regression results present the model summary results, ANOVA and regression coefficients results. The coefficient of determination results (R-square) in table 5 indicates the variation in the dependent variable (Nature of Healthcare Service Delivery) accounted for by the independent variable (Intergovernmental Relations).

Table 5: Model summary

Model Summary ^b										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df 1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.481 ^a	.231	.228	.52413	.231	86.891	1	289	.000	1.920
a. Predictors: (Constant), Shared Decision-Making										
b. Dependent Variable: Development Project Sustainability										

Source: Survey Data (2025).

The results are presented in table 5 demonstrate that Shared Decision-Making has a positive association with Development Project Sustainability to mean that an improvement in Intergovernmental Relations is associated with an improvement in Nature of Healthcare Service Delivery ($R = 0.481$). In addition, the results showed that Shared Decision-Making account for up to 22.8% of the variation in Development Project Sustainability ($R\text{-Square} = 0.228$). Other than that, the remaining variation can be predicted by other factors. The study also tested for the fitness of the regression model linking the two variables through ANOVA. The results are presented in table 6.

Table 6: ANOVA (Shared Decision-Making and Development Project Sustainability).

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	23.870	1	23.870	86.891	.000 ^b
	Residual	79.391	289	.275		
	Total	103.261	290			
a. Dependent Variable: Development Project Sustainability						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Shared Decision-Making						

Source: Survey Data (2025).

As shown in Table 6, the F-test in the ANOVA output yielded an impressive F-statistic of 86.891 with a p-value of .000, signaling a model of exceptional statistical significance. This means that the relationship between Shared Decision-Making and Development Project Sustainability is not by chance—it is real, strong, and meaningful. The remarkably low p-value ($\text{Sig} = 0.000 < 0.05$) underscores the fitness of the regression model and reinforces its reliability in explaining how inclusive, participatory decision-making drives long-term success in development initiatives. This finding is not only statistically powerful but also inspiring, as it validates the transformative role of communities in shaping their own progress. It reminds us that when people are genuinely involved in the decisions that affect them, development ceases to be a top-down imposition and becomes a shared journey toward sustainability and dignity. The regression coefficients, further presented in Table 7, build upon this foundation to show the strength and direction of this impact.

Table 7: Model coefficients

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.806	.194		9.323	.000
	Shared Decision-Making	.496	.053	.481	9.322	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Development Project Sustainability						

Source: Survey Data (2025).

The regression model coefficient results in Table 7 demonstrate that, holding other factors constant, shared decision-making has a positive and significant effect on development project sustainability ($\beta = 0.496$). This implies that a unit improvement in shared decision-making would lead to an improvement in development project sustainability by up to 0.496 units. This finding affirms that shared decision-making (SDM)—where community members and stakeholders actively participate in planning, implementation, and evaluation—is a critical determinant of project success, particularly in rural settings (Owino et al., 2025). SDM enhances ownership, strengthens trust, and ensures that interventions are locally relevant and context-specific (Ahmad & Islam, 2024; Thelma & Chitondo, 2024). These results are consistent with studies such as that of Srivastava and Chinnasamy (2024), who found that watershed development interventions in semi-arid India were more sustainable where communities were actively engaged in the planning and implementation process. Similarly, Smith et al. (2016) found that community involvement in healthcare delivery in Guatemala significantly improved project outcomes. However, both studies noted that lack of genuine participation led to delays, misuse of resources, and low ownership. In African contexts, Magessa (2020) showed that limited involvement in Tanzania's Participatory Forest Management reduced policy effectiveness. In Isiolo County, Kenya, Jarso (2020) found that community exclusion from drought support planning led to poor sustainability. Locally, Khaemba (2020) noted that in Bungoma County, water projects were more sustainable where community members were involved from inception to management.

CONCLUSION

The study affirms that shared decision-making is a fundamental pillar for ensuring the sustainability of community development projects, particularly within the context of Mt. Elgon, Bungoma County. The findings underscore that inclusive participation—where all stakeholders, especially the local community members, are actively involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation phases of development projects—significantly enhances community ownership, reduces resistance to externally introduced interventions, and aligns development strategies more closely with the actual needs and priorities of the beneficiaries. This inclusive approach fosters a sense of responsibility and accountability among community members, thereby promoting better management and maintenance of projects. Conversely, the absence of meaningful engagement from beneficiaries often leads to critical sustainability challenges, including mismanagement of resources, lack of continuity, and eventual project failure. The evidence gathered from the field highlights those exclusionary practices not only alienate communities but also jeopardize the long-term impact of development efforts. Therefore, it is imperative that development actors, policymakers, and implementers prioritize and institutionalize mechanisms that promote shared decision-making and empower local populations to take an active role in shaping initiatives that affect their livelihoods. Such participatory frameworks not only strengthen trust between communities and development partners but also lay a firm foundation for the resilience, relevance, and sustainability of community-driven development programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the study recommends that development agencies, government institutions, and other stakeholders in Mt. Elgon and similar rural contexts take deliberate steps to institutionalize shared decision-making practices. First, they should ensure inclusive planning forums where all community members, especially marginalized groups, are represented. This includes using participatory rural appraisal tools and community barazas to collect input and foster dialogue. Second, stakeholders should build the capacity of local communities to participate meaningfully by providing training on project planning, budgeting, and monitoring. Third, project implementers should establish clear mechanisms for feedback and accountability throughout the project lifecycle. These include community scorecards, regular progress review meetings, and transparent reporting. Fourth, stakeholders should invest in fostering trust and social capital within communities by promoting transparency, respecting local knowledge, and recognizing community leadership structures. Finally, to enhance adaptive learning, project teams should document and share lessons from participatory approaches and scale successful models across sectors and regions. Strengthening shared decision-making is not just a democratic imperative—it is a practical strategy for ensuring that development projects are relevant, resilient, and responsive to local realities.

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