



## Assessing the Integration of Sustainability Practices in Community Development Projects

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### Abstract

This study assessed the applicability of sustainability principles in community development projects in Tanzania, focusing on selected initiatives under the Child Reach Program. The research was guided by the need to understand the extent to which sustainability principles such as community participation, government involvement, capacity building, local ownership, continuous monitoring, and integration into local plans are effectively applied in community projects. A total of 30 respondents who were former stakeholders in four key projects participated in the study. Data were collected using a structured interview. The findings revealed that a majority (53.33%) of stakeholders perceived their projects as sustainable, while 13.33% rated them as very sustainable. The study identified key strategies that promoted sustainability, including early community engagement, government support, skills development, establishment of local management structures, and feedback mechanisms. However, several barriers threatened the long-term success of these projects, such as political divisions within communities, lack of cooperation from parents, integration challenges within school programs, limited inclusiveness, and negative perceptions toward persons with disabilities. The study concludes that while sustainability principles are recognized and applied to a significant extent, socio-political, institutional, and cultural factors limit their full realization. The study recommends the need for inclusive stakeholder engagement, strengthened capacity development, and deliberate efforts to address contextual barriers to enhance the sustainability of community development projects in Tanzania.

**Keywords:** Sustainability, Community Project, Project Sustainability, Stakeholders and Sustainability Strategies

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background Information

Development is a concept that is of great concern to communities and the globe have embraced this agenda with not only the implementation of Millennium Development Goals but also the sustainable development goals of 2015 (Kaimenyi, 2019) <sup>[5]</sup>. Sustainability is the general principle of a balanced approach to development which considers the three-fold perspective of the environment, people, and the economy (Ozumba *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[13]</sup>. Subsequently according to (Ozumba *et al.*, 2020) <sup>[13]</sup> by nature, sustainability is focused on the long-term view of any situation, seeking to integrate the social, environmental and economic aspects of a project.

A project is considered sustainable when the beneficiary community is able on its own to continue to gain benefited results that are answering the existing problem without the assistance of outside development partners (Kayijuka, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup>. This growing attention for the consideration of sustainability in project management is encouraging, however, it also bears some challenges as the concept of sustainability is understood by instinct, but difficult to express in concrete, operational terms (Silvius *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[16]</sup> especially in developing countries hence the perseverance in poverty. Poverty in Tanzania remains a persistent problem.

In order for the government, development partners, and other key stakeholders to reduce poverty and boost shared prosperity in Tanzania, it is essential to understand poverty trends, inequality, and their dynamics (The World Bank Group, 2015) <sup>[17]</sup>.

The community development projects are majorly initiated to transform social, political and economic wellbeing of the community in particular area, however, some are unable to achieve the intended objectives and goals (Salat & James, 2019) <sup>[14]</sup>. Today's project manager fulfils not only traditional roles of project management but also must manage the project in the most efficient and effective manner with respect to sustainability (Silvius *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Furthermore, according to (Mrangu, 2018) <sup>[10]</sup>, the Community Projects are core initiatives for intervention of common problems while enhancing development in most communities. With this in mind, different projects are formulated and carried every year with different purposes such as ensuring clean, reducing poverty, promoting human rights and peace, managing natural resources, climate change adaptation and many more. However, according to many projects have failed after the sponsor withdraw their support (Ochieng, 2016) <sup>[11]</sup> while other areas have managed to attain sustainability of their project (Uche *et al.*, 2023a) <sup>[18]</sup>. Henceforth the study the common principles, determinants of sustainability in relation to the nature of the community and barriers that hinder the applicability of some principles in some communities.

An effective and efficient implementation of projects is important however, the sustainability of a project is vital especially in community development initiatives. Several researches have been conducted regarding sustainability specially in the African context specifically on the principal of participation i.e (Kaimenyi, 2019) <sup>[5]</sup>; (Amani *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[2]</sup>; (Mrangu, 2018) <sup>[10]</sup> (Uche *et al.*, 2023a) <sup>[18]</sup>; (Kayijuka, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup> and (Onkoba, 2016) <sup>[12]</sup>. However, according to theories such as modernization theory, depict that there are different types of societies which are traditional societies, take-off, maturation, and mass consumption and mass production. Henceforth, certain principles of sustainability may not be universal due to difference in technology and culture.

Henceforth, the study aims to assess the sustainability principles in community development projects in Tanzania by reviewing and identifying the key principles of sustainability in community development projects in existing literature and determine the barriers that impede certain principles to be applied in Tanzanian community development projects.

## 2. Methodology

The study focused on projects implemented under the Child Reach Program, which operated across six regions, including Kilimanjaro. Specifically, the organization implemented various projects such as school improvement initiatives, the Deaf Education Development Program, school water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) projects, "My School My Voice," nutrition interventions, and apprenticeship programs. The target population for this study comprised former stakeholders involved in four key projects, the Deaf Education Development Program, the School WASH Project, the School Improvement Project, and the Hygiene and Nutrition Project. A total of 30 respondents were selected. This sample size aligns with (Maas & Hox, 2005) <sup>[8]</sup>, who

states that a sample size of at least 30 respondents is reasonably sufficient in social science research studies to ensure normal distribution of the sample mean. Furthermore, data was collected using a structured interview.

## 3. Findings and Discussion.

### 3.1 Findings

#### 3.1.1 Sustainability of the project

Stakeholders were asked to evaluate the sustainability of their respective projects using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Not sustainable) to 5 (Very sustainable). The results, as shown in Table 1, indicate varying perceptions of sustainability among respondents.

**Table 1:** Level of sustainability

S/n	Descriptive	Frequency	Percentage
01	Not sustainable	2	6.67
02	Slightly Sustainable	4	13.33
03	Neutral	3	10
04	Sustainable	16	53.33
05	Very sustainable	4	13.33
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>

Majority of stakeholders (53.33%) rated their projects as "Sustainable", suggesting that most initiatives have been successfully maintained and integrated into the community, while, 13.33% of respondents considered their projects "Very Sustainable", indicating a high level of confidence in their long-term viability. A combined 20% (6.67% for "Not Sustainable" and 13.33% for "Slightly Sustainable") expressed concerns about sustainability, implying that some respondents are sceptic on the sustainability aspect of the projects. 10% remained "Neutral" (3), possibly reflecting uncertainty or mixed experiences regarding projects sustainability.

#### 3.1.2. Strategies that promote sustainability

This study aimed to identify the key strategies implemented by the project team to enhance the sustainability of community development initiatives. To achieve this, data were collected from key informants and community members who actively participated in or directly benefited from the projects. Their responses highlighted a range of effective approaches employed to ensure the long-term success and continuity of these initiatives.

One of the key informants noted the importance of early community involvement, stating;

*"For us, a project can only succeed when it begins with the people. When we are part of the discussions from the start, we feel responsible for the outcome. It becomes our project, not something imposed on us. The project team involved parents during the implementation of the project, including in activities such as purchasing materials for repairing toilets, classrooms, and water systems."* (School WASH Project Stakeholder)

Similarly, another stakeholder emphasized the role of government involvement in sustaining project outcomes:

*"We cannot work in isolation. Having our leaders and government officers involved gives weight to the project. Their presence assures us that what we are doing is recognized and supported beyond the village. The government took ownership of the project and made*

*ensure that parents were mandated participated actively. This was done deliberately to promote a sense of ownership among community members.*" (School Improvement Project Stakeholder).

In addition, capacity building and skills development were highlighted as essential strategies. One respondent explained; *"It is not enough to bring a project; we need to be taught how to manage it. When we receive training and learn new skills, the project lives even after those who brought it leave. Several workshops were conducted regarding menstrual hygiene, making homemade handwashing soups, detergents and multipurpose soaps"* (Hygiene and Nutrition Project Stakeholder) (Hygiene and Nutrition Project)

The establishment of local management structures was also mentioned as a key sustainability measure. A participant reported;

*"Every project needs caretakers. When we, as parents and community members, are trusted to form committees, it creates a sense of duty. We look after the project like it is our own household. The committee even introduced a policy that if a child damages any infrastructure, their parents will be responsible for covering the repair costs."* (School WASH Project Stakeholder)

Furthermore, continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms were considered vital in ensuring project continuity. One stakeholder explained;

*"We like it when those who brought the project return to ask us how it is going. When they check and listen to our feedback, we feel valued and it motivates us to keep the project running."* (The Deaf Education Development Program stakeholder).

Finally, respondents stressed the importance of integrating project activities into local development plans. One of them remarked;

*"When a project becomes part of our village plans, it is no longer temporary. It becomes a permanent concern of our leaders and the entire community, and we know it will continue even in future years"* (School Improvement Project Stakeholder)

From the participants' responses, it was evident that the strategies employed to ensure project sustainability included: engaging the community from the outset; involving government officials such as Ward Executive Officers and Community Development Officers; building the capacity of community members and leaders; establishing local management committees; maintaining continuous monitoring and feedback; and integrating project activities into local development plans. According to

### 3.1.3 Barriers that threatened project sustainability

Sustaining community development projects comes with various challenges that can hinder long-term success. To understand these obstacles, respondents were asked to identify the key barriers that affected the sustainability of the projects. Their insights revealed several critical issues that limited effective implementation and continuity. The following are the major challenges highlighted by the respondents.

One of the respondents expressed the following;

One of the respondents explained that;

*"The project became difficult to implement because some parents refused to cooperate simply because they did not agree with the political views of others. Instead of working together, divisions arose, affecting the overall progress"* (Community Development Officer)

A respondent shared that;

*"Integrating project activities into the school schedule was a big challenge. The teachers were already struggling to complete the syllabus, and any additional activity was seen as a distraction rather than an opportunity."* (School Teacher)

A project beneficiary expressed that;

*"Many parents initially showed interest, but as time went on, they started withdrawing. They felt that since there was no financial gain, their time could be better spent elsewhere."* (School Improvement Project Stakeholder)

One of those interviewed commented that;

*"We discovered that some of the materials intended for the project were left unused. Some were locked away in storage because those responsible for distribution were either unaware of their purpose or felt they were not immediately necessary and some materials were taken by teachers for their domestic use."* (The Deaf Education Development Program stakeholder).

Another participant stated that,

*"Some organisations proved incapable of employing individual with a hearing disability, due to the language barrier and bad perception about having a person with a hearing disability in their area of work. This made it hard to implement the apprenticeship process that was meant for them thus created a challenge in the sustainability"* (The Deaf Education Development Program stakeholder).

Lastly, another key information gathered was that;

*"There was frustration among students and parents when only certain groups were chosen to participate in the project. Those excluded felt left out, and it created a perception that the program was only meant for the 'smart' students."* (School WASH Project Stakeholder)

## 3.2 Discussion of findings

### 3.2.1. Perceived level of sustainability

The findings revealed a generally positive perception regarding the sustainability of community development projects. A majority of respondents (53.33%) perceived their projects as "Sustainable," while an additional 13.33% considered them "Very Sustainable." This suggests that over two-thirds of stakeholders acknowledged the successful maintenance and integration of these initiatives within their communities. Such positive feedback demonstrates the effectiveness of participatory approaches in promoting ownership and enhancing sustainability.

However, the results also highlighted concerns among a section of stakeholders, with 6.67% rating their projects as "Not Sustainable" and 13.33% as "Slightly Sustainable." This combined 20% indicates that despite the recorded success, sustainability remains questionable in certain contexts.



Factors such as limited stakeholder engagement, lack of continuous capacity development, or inadequate resource allocation may have contributed to these negative perceptions. Additionally, 10% of respondents remained neutral, possibly reflecting uncertainty or a lack of awareness regarding the projects' long-term prospects.

These mixed responses reflect broader debates in community development literature, which emphasize that sustainability is multidimensional and requires the continuous commitment of stakeholders, supportive policies, and adaptable strategies that address emerging challenges. The variation in responses further underscores the need for tailored sustainability measures that consider the specific needs and dynamics of each community.

### 3.2.2 Strategies for promoting sustainability

The study identified several key strategies that contributed to sustaining community development projects. One critical factor was the early involvement of community members during project planning and implementation. According to Ugwu & Aruma (2019) <sup>[20]</sup> community participation is a vital tool for sustainable community development which must be encouraged in all the stages of community development process, namely needs identification, community development planning, project implementation, management and evaluation. When community members are engaged from the onset, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility, thereby ensuring the longevity of project outcomes.

Another important strategy was the deliberate involvement of government officials and local leadership. The presence of government representatives legitimized project activities and fostered accountability among community members. It also facilitated the inclusion of project activities in local development plans, a move that institutionalized project initiatives and increased their chances of continuity.

Capacity building emerged as another pillar of sustainability. Through workshops and training sessions, community members acquired practical skills necessary for managing and sustaining project activities independently. These initiatives enhanced community autonomy and reduced dependency on external support. This finding is supported by Machuma *et al.* (2024) <sup>[9]</sup> who argued that recent studies emphasize that continuous education and skill development are key to building the capacity of communities to sustain such initiatives. Another study conducted by Kadunguri & Njenga Gitahi in 2023 <sup>[4]</sup> confirmed that, capacity building was found to have a positive and statistically significant correlation ( $r=0.772$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) with project sustainability.

The findings also determined that, the establishment of local management structures, such as committees, further reinforced sustainability. This has also been emphasized with Komba (2023) <sup>[7]</sup> who stated that local institutions are the key to sustainability; these can be done through village meeting, or village committee. When local groups are actively involved in project design and implementation, they take on ownership and are more likely to continue the project when donor funding ends. These structures provided a platform for coordination, decision-making, and conflict resolution, ensuring that project resources were well managed and maintained.

In addition, continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms ensured that community voices were heard, challenges were addressed, and corrective actions were taken

promptly. According to Abdul Ramadhan *et al.* (2023) <sup>[1]</sup>, with a unit improvement in project monitoring and evaluation practices, the sustainability of project is improved by 0.467 which is significant since the p value is 0.000. This finding underscores the critical role of consistent monitoring and evaluation in ensuring the long-term success of community development initiatives.

To attain genuine sustainability, it is necessary to adopt a holistic approach that effectively combines all components into a unified strategy. Organisations can improve their sustainability performance and responsibility by implementing sustainability reporting standards, investing in employee training and development, and establishing KPIs for long-term value generation (Devi, 2024) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### 3.2.3. Barriers to project sustainability

Despite the success strategies reported, several barriers to project sustainability were identified. One notable challenge was the presence of political divisions within the community, which led to resistance and lack of cooperation among some stakeholders. According to Sharif (2023) <sup>[15]</sup> a comparative study in Jordan identified key barriers to achieving social sustainability, including political divisions within communities. The research emphasized that such divisions can lead to resistance and lack of cooperation among stakeholders, undermining the effectiveness and longevity of development projects. This highlights how social and political dynamics can undermine community-driven initiatives and fragment collective efforts.

Another critical challenge was the difficulty in integrating project activities into existing institutional schedules, particularly in schools. Overburdened teachers and administrators often perceived project activities as additional tasks rather than integral components of educational development, limiting their full adoption. This challenge highlights the complexities of aligning external project activities with institutional structures, particularly in education settings. Schools operate within rigid schedules that prioritize curriculum coverage, standardized assessments, and administrative responsibilities. When new projects are introduced without considering these pre-existing structures, they are often viewed as an additional burden rather than a complementary initiative. Teachers and administrators, already managed heavy workloads, may struggle to allocate time and resources to project activities. This resistance can stem from a lack of clear integration strategies, insufficient training, or inadequate institutional support. If project activities are not seamlessly embedded into the existing framework such as being incorporated into lesson plans or extracurricular programs.

*"It was very tough to align with the school schedule. We had engage early with institutional leaders to align project goals with school priorities but still it was not easy. "(Prior- project officer) - School WASH Project Stakeholder*

Furthermore, the perception of minimal financial benefits discouraged sustained community involvement. Many parents and community members withdrew their participation over time, as they viewed project activities as lacking direct economic incentives. The people are poor and find it difficult to contribute to the sustainability of projects. The government and NGOs should therefore empower the

people economically and politically to enable them to cope with the sustainability of community development projects (Uche *et al.*, 2023b) <sup>[19]</sup>. This underscores the importance of addressing both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations when designing community development projects.

Poor resource management also emerged as a threat to sustainability because there were instances of unused materials, mismanagement of resources, and diversion of project inputs to personal use were reported. These issues point to weak accountability mechanisms and the need for better community oversight. Additionally, the study revealed exclusionary practices that created feelings of marginalization among community members. Selective participation, particularly favouring certain student groups, contributed to frustration and reduced community ownership of the initiatives.

Lastly, Negative attitudes and social stigma toward persons with disabilities created significant barriers to the successful implementation and long-term sustainability of inclusive programs. Deep-seated societal prejudices and misconceptions about disability often lead to exclusionary practices, reducing the effectiveness of interventions designed to promote equal opportunities. In particular, discriminatory hiring practices by some organizations restrict employment opportunities for individuals with hearing disabilities thus limited the apprenticeship program of in the Deaf Education Development Program stakeholder. This not only limits their economic independence but also undermines broader efforts to create an inclusive workforce. Without systemic change in workplace policies and societal attitudes, interventions targeting this group struggle to achieve long-term impact. Moreover, stigma discouraged individuals with disabilities from participating in programs due to fear of discrimination or lack of accessibility.

#### 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the critical role of sustainability principles in the successful implementation of community development projects in Tanzania. Key factors contributing to sustainability include early community engagement, government collaboration, skills development, and continuous feedback mechanisms. These strategies have proven effective in fostering a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members, ultimately enhancing the long-term viability of projects. However, the study also identified significant challenges that continue to hinder sustainability efforts. Political divisions within communities, inconsistent stakeholder cooperation, exclusionary practices, inefficient resource management, and societal biases toward marginalized groups pose serious threats to the durability of development initiatives. These findings emphasize the importance of a contextualized approach to sustainability, one that considers the complex socio-political and cultural landscapes in which projects operate, rather than relying solely on generalized sustainability frameworks. Strengthening stakeholder collaboration, promoting inclusive planning, enhancing capacity-building efforts, and ensuring transparent resource management are essential steps toward sustainable development. Additionally, embedding sustainability principles into local governance structures and fostering a culture of collective responsibility will further reinforce the effectiveness and continuity of community-driven projects. By adopting these strategies, development initiatives can

move beyond short-term successes and create meaningful, long-lasting change.

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