



PARTICIPATORY PLANNING AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF DONOR-FUNDED PROJECTS: EVIDENCE FROM A FAITH-BASED ORGANISATION IN AN URBAN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT IN NAIROBI, KENYA

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Abstract

Donor-funded projects continue to play a significant role in addressing socio-economic challenges in developing countries, yet their long-term sustainability remains a persistent concern, particularly within urban informal settlements. Although stakeholder participation is widely acknowledged as central to project continuity, limited empirical attention has been given to how specific dimensions of stakeholder participation, particularly participatory planning, influence sustainability. This article focuses exclusively on participatory planning, one dimension of stakeholder participation examined in a broader postgraduate thesis, within faith-based organisations operating in urban informal settlements. The study investigated the influence of participatory planning on the sustainability of donor-funded projects at Mukuru Promotion Centre (MPC) a faith-based organization in the Mukuru informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya. The findings presented in this article relate only to the participatory planning dimension. Grounded in Participation Theory and Sustainability Theory, the study adopted a mixed-methods approach and convergent parallel design. Quantitative data were obtained from 157 stakeholders through a structured questionnaire, while qualitative data were drawn from 17 purposively selected key informants through semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Spearman's rank-order correlation, and multiple linear regression on SPSS version 27, with thematic analysis for the qualitative strand. The findings revealed that participatory planning had a moderate, positive and statistically significant relationship with project sustainability ($r = 0.501$, $p < 0.01$) and emerged as the strongest individual predictor in the regression model ($\beta = 0.367$, $p = 0.001$). The study concludes that meaningful, inclusive participatory

planning is positively related to ownership and continuity. Additionally, the study recommends improving inclusive participatory planning forums to priorities quality and inclusivity over frequency.

Keywords: participatory planning, project sustainability, donor-funded projects, stakeholder participation, urban informal settlements, faith-based organisations

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Donor-funded projects are implemented globally as instruments for addressing socio-economic challenges, yet their sustainability remains a major concern despite significant financial investment. Global development assistance reached approximately USD 211 billion in 2021, with a substantial proportion directed toward health, education, governance and poverty, reduction interventions across Africa, Asia and Latin America (OECD, 2022). Despite these investments, available reports indicate that although many donor-funded projects achieve favorable short-term outcomes, they frequently fail to sustain their impact once donor funding ends. This sustainability challenge has been attributed to inadequate stakeholder participation, particularly the limited participation of beneficiaries and local implementers in project processes. Sustainability is therefore influenced not only by financial support but also by the depth and quality of stakeholder participation in project planning, implementation and management. This article reports specifically on participatory planning as one dimension of stakeholder participation, recognizing that other aspects such as communication,

monitoring and evaluation and resource mobilization are addressed in the broader thesis.

Global evidence indicates that projects characterized by active stakeholder participation in needs assessment, goal formulation and decision-making are more likely to achieve long-term sustainability. Community development projects in which beneficiaries participated during the early planning and goal-setting stages recorded higher levels of ownership and continuity after donor funding cycles ended, while rural development projects incorporating community-level consultations achieved greater relevance because interventions were aligned with community priorities. Participatory planning improves the alignment between project activities and community needs, thereby improving sustainability outcomes. The focus here is on participatory planning, particularly its role in aligning project activities with community needs.

In Kenya, donor-funded projects complement government efforts in service delivery, particularly within informal settlements; however, sustainability remains a major challenge. National data indicate that more than half of the donor-funded community initiatives implemented between 2010 and 2018 became inactive within five years, a trend attributed to inadequate stakeholder participation in planning, weak communication systems, limited resource mobilization and ineffective monitoring and evaluation. Urban informal settlements face additional sustainability challenges arising from high population density, poverty, fragmented governance structures and overlapping donor interventions. In such contexts, sustainability depends on meaningful stakeholder participation, and the failure to institutionalize participatory mechanisms often results in donor dependency, misalignment between project objectives and community needs, and eventual project collapse after donor withdrawal. Within the Kenyan context, this study examines participatory planning as a determinant of sustainability, acknowledging that other factors of stakeholder participation remain outside the scope of this article.

Mukuru Promotion Centre (MPC) is a faith-based organization operating within the Mukuru informal settlement in Nairobi, implementing donor-funded projects in health, education, rehabilitation and community empowerment. The Centre directly supported over 7,700 beneficiaries in 2023, while its clinic served more than 20,000 people, and it implemented over 21,000 community interventions and distributed 2.1 million meals through its donor-funded projects. Despite these achievements, internal evaluations reveal sustainability of many projects is largely dependent on donor and partner support. Although external funding has played a critical role in facilitating service delivery and community development interventions, reliance on such funding exposes the organization to financial risks that may affect the continuity of projects in the event of donor

exit. The Mukuru Promotion Centre case illustrates how participatory planning practices influence sustainability outcomes in donor-funded projects. This dependence provides the justification for examining the various dimensions of stakeholder participation and their influence on project sustainability

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Donor-funded projects are central to advancing development and delivering essential services. However, their long-term viability, particularly once external donors withdraw, remains a pressing challenge (Choto et al., 2020). The NGO Coordination Board (2023) reports that Kenya's NGO sector oversees diverse initiatives supported annually by approximately one hundred million Kenya shillings in donor funding. Despite this scale of investment, sustainability is often fragile and inconsistent after donor exit. Previous studies have examined sustainability challenges in donor-funded projects, but most have concentrated on government-led or NGO-led initiatives in rural contexts. Moreover, stakeholder participation has typically been treated in broad terms, without isolating participatory planning as a distinct determinant of sustainability. Consequently, limited empirical attention has been directed toward how stakeholder participation in planning influences the sustainability of donor-funded projects implemented by faith-based organizations in urban informal settlements such as Mukuru. This article addresses that contextual and empirical gap.

1.3 Purpose and Objectives of the Article

The purpose of this article was to examine the influence of stakeholder participation on the sustainability of donor-funded projects at Mukuru Promotion Centre, Nairobi, Kenya. Drawing strictly from the parent thesis, the article focuses on one of the four thesis objectives:

1. To examine how participatory planning influences the sustainability of donor-funded projects at Mukuru Promotion Centre.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study provide instrumental insights for project implementers, donors, development partners and policymakers engaged in donor-funded interventions in urban informal settlements. The findings can inform the design and implementation of inclusive and effective projects, highlighting to donors and development partners the importance of supporting participatory approaches that promote community ownership, accountability and long-term impact. Furthermore, the study contributes to academic literature by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between stakeholder participation and project sustainability within a faith-based organizational context in an urban informal settlement, serving as a useful reference for researchers seeking to understand participatory approaches to sustainable development.

1.5 Limitation of the Study

The study was conducted only at Mukuru Promotion Centre, which limits how widely the findings can be applied, especially to other organizations or rural areas. However, this was addressed by giving a detailed description of the context, using a large quantitative sample, and including different stakeholder groups. This helps readers judge how applicable the findings are to similar urban informal settlement settings. Second, the study used self-reported questionnaires, which may be affected by bias or social desirability. This was reduced by ensuring confidentiality and anonymity to encourage honest responses. In addition, the use of a mixed-method approach allowed interview findings to be used to confirm and compare the quantitative results, improving the credibility of the data. Finally, the study faced time and resource constraints. This was managed by using purposive sampling to select knowledgeable key informants who could provide relevant and rich information within the available time.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews the conceptual, theoretical and empirical literature relevant to participatory planning as a determinant of the sustainability of donor-funded projects, and concludes by identifying the knowledge gaps that the study addressed.

2.1 Conceptual Review

Participatory planning refers to a participative process through which the various stakeholders of an organization jointly identify community needs, priorities them and outline project strategies before actual implementation begins. It involves the deliberate inclusion of beneficiaries, implementing agencies, local leaders and donor representatives in needs identification, consultation and the joint formulation of project objectives. Through this process, stakeholders are able to express their priorities, contextual realities and expectations regarding project design, thereby improving ownership, accountability and commitment to project outcomes.

2.2 Theoretical Review

The study was anchored on two complementary theories, Participation Theory and Sustainability Theory, which jointly explain how the participation of stakeholders contributes to the sustainability of donor-funded projects.

2.2.1 Participation Theory

Participation Theory has its roots in the works of Arnstein (1969) through the Ladder of Citizen Participation and was subsequently developed by Cohen and Uphoff (1980) and Oakley (1991). The theory suggests that development projects are successful and sustainable to the degree to which targeted beneficiaries participate in a meaningful manner in decision making processes. The theory regards genuine participation as more than a single consultation. It rather involves empowerment, inclusion, accountability and ownership, with higher levels of stakeholder influence, such as

partnership and citizen control, producing more sustainable outcomes than tokenistic participation. In this study, Participation Theory provides a framework for analyzing how stakeholder participation in participatory planning influences sustainability. The theory has, however, been criticized for being idealistic, since it assumes that participation automatically leads to sustainability while overlooking power asymmetries, capacity limitations and contextual constraints that may hinder effective participation. This limitation is particularly relevant in informal settlement contexts such as Mukuru, where differences in stakeholder capacity and institutional conditions may influence the effectiveness of participation. The study mitigates these shortcomings by operationalizing the theory into concrete and measurable dimensions and by examining participation within a specific urban informal settlement and institutional setting.

2.2.2 Sustainability Theory

Sustainability Theory, traceable to the sustainable development discourse advanced by Goodland (1995) and Basiago (1995), emphasizes that meaningful development focuses not only on short-term project outputs but also on the attainment of long-term social, economic and institutional impacts. According to the theory, projects survive when they are able to maintain their functions, services and benefits with minimal dependence on external assistance, which is achievable through strong local capacity, institutional integration, ownership and adaptive management systems. The theory provides a basis for examining how participatory planning contributes to financial continuity, institutional integration and social ownership. It has nonetheless been criticized for being abstract and difficult to measure empirically, and for paying insufficient attention to the structural constraints of marginalized communities. The study responds to these shortcomings by conceptualizing sustainability into quantifiable metrics and by empirically linking sustainability performance to specific dimensions of stakeholder participation. Whereas Participation Theory explains the process of stakeholder participation, Sustainability Theory explains how that participation translates into sustainable project outcomes; together, the two theories provide a robust conceptual foundation for the study.

2.3 Empirical Review

2.3.1 Participatory Planning and Sustainability of Donor-Funded Projects

Participatory planning is widely regarded as the foundation of stakeholder participation in donor-funded projects. Mang'atu et al. (2025) observe that participatory planning enables stakeholders to share their lived experiences and collectively identify interventions that best address community needs, thereby improving ownership, accountability and commitment to project outcomes. Existing studies consistently demonstrate a positive relationship between participatory planning and sustainability. Onuche et al. (2025), in a study of donor-funded water projects in

Nigeria, found that communities involved in early needs assessment and consultation meetings exhibited higher levels of project ownership and long-term maintenance, with infrastructure facilities remaining functional even after donor withdrawal. Similarly, Musyoki et al. (2021) observed that early stakeholder participation in rural development projects in Kenya enhanced community commitment and the mobilization of local resources, while Jackson (2023) argues that stakeholders who actively participate in project identification, goal setting and resource allocation are more likely to remain committed to project activities even after donor support ends. The common trend emerging from these studies is that stakeholder participation during the planning stage increases community ownership, accountability and long-term continuity.

Despite this convergence, some studies reveal contradictions in the practical application of participatory planning. Wanjue (2023) found that community participation is often superficial, with local communities frequently invited only to approve plans already designed by donors or external consultants, a form of token participation that weakens ownership. In a similar vein, Mwangi (2020) noted that projects employing top-down planning approaches frequently experience sustainability challenges because local stakeholders are excluded from needs identification and goal formulation. These findings suggest that the success of participatory planning depends not merely on consultation, but on the extent to which stakeholders are genuinely involved in decision-making. The literature further indicates that participatory planning is particularly important in complex environments such as urban informal settlements; Onuche et al. (2025) reported higher sustainability where local communities actively participated in planning, while Ochieng, Obiero and Maritim (2023) argue that participatory planning enables organizations operating in informal settlements to design interventions matched to local strengths, priorities and capacities. Nevertheless, structural barriers, time constraints, limited budgets and donor pressure for quick results, often discourage meaningful participation, explaining why some donor-funded projects collapse after donor withdrawal despite initial implementation success.

2.4 Knowledge Gaps

The reviewed literature reveals several gaps that the study addressed. First, the majority of available studies on stakeholder participation and sustainability focus on rural contexts or single-sector interventions such as water, agriculture or health, overlooking the distinctive challenges of densely populated, poorly governed urban informal settlements such as Mukuru where donor interventions overlap. Second, much of the literature confines participation to a single broad concept rather than isolating specific dimensions such as participatory planning, thereby obscuring the nuanced ways through which each form of participation influences sustainability. Third, the existing literature is dominated

by qualitative accounts, with few mixed-methods studies that quantify the effects of participation on tangible sustainability measures. Finally, stakeholder participation within faith-based organizations, whose institutional culture, leadership and coordination mechanisms strongly shape participation and sustainability, remains among the least studied. The study therefore addressed these contextual, conceptual and methodological gaps by examining how participatory planning influences the sustainability of donor-funded projects at Mukuru Promotion Centre, an urban informal settlement context with minimal prior empirical research.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy and Design

The study was guided by a pragmatic philosophical paradigm, which combines constructivist and positivist assumptions and supports the use of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in pursuit of scientific understanding. The study's mixed-methods research approach was in line with this paradigm; it allowed for the objective assessment as well as the subjective interpretation of the impact of participatory planning on the long-term sustainability of donor-funded projects. To be more precise, the research used a convergent parallel design, which meant that both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same time, processed independently, and then combined during interpretation. By using each research technique to supplement the other, a more comprehensive and strong comprehension of the topic being studied was achieved via this strategy.

3.2 Study Area and Target Population

The study was conducted at Mukuru Promotion Centre, located within the Mukuru informal settlement in Nairobi County, Embakasi South Constituency, Kenya. Mukuru is among the largest informal settlements in Nairobi, characterized by high population density, poverty, poor housing and limited access to basic services, providing a relevant environment for examining sustainability challenges in donor-funded projects. Mukuru Promotion Centre is a faith-based institution established in 1985 by the Sisters of Mercy to provide education, healthcare, vocational training and social support, and it implements numerous donor-funded projects across its branches. The target population comprised 178 stakeholders, namely 128 MPC staff, 34 community representatives and 16 donor and partner personnel, drawn from the Centre's branches. These stakeholder categories were selected because they enable a comprehensive assessment of stakeholder participation in planning.

Table 1: Target Population of the Study

Respondent Category	Description	Number
MPC staff	Staff assigned to each project	128

Respondent Category	Description	Number
Community representatives	Youth, women and men	34
Donor agencies and partner organizations	Provide financial and technical support	16
Total		178

Source: Field Data (2026)

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

The study employed distinct but complementary sampling procedures for the two strands. For the quantitative strand, a census approach was adopted, in which all 178 stakeholders were targeted, since a census is most appropriate where the target population is small. The census approach guaranteed the participation of all stakeholders, minimized sampling bias and enhanced the reliability and statistical power of the analysis. For the qualitative strand, a nested sampling approach was used, in which key informants were purposively selected from the same census population, with the number of interviews guided by the principle of data saturation. Although the qualitative sample was fixed at between 15 and 20 participants, saturation was reached at 17 respondents, after which interviewing was discontinued to avoid redundancy. Maximum variation sampling was applied to ensure that the diverse perspectives of staff, community representatives and donor/partner groups were adequately captured.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Two tools were used to gather information. All three stakeholder groups were asked to fill out a standardized questionnaire that measured participatory planning and project sustainability using a five-point Likert scale. The scale went from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5). The study was able to gather detailed, contextual explanations of stakeholder participation practices and sustainability outcomes that structured questionnaires might miss by using semi-structured interviews to gather qualitative data from a variety of staff, community, and donor/partner representatives.

3.5 Pilot Study, Validity and Reliability

Eighteen people, or around 10% of the total population, took part in a pilot study in Mukuru kwa Reuben to find and fix any problems with the research tools. The findings of the pilot tests were used only for the purpose of instrument refinement and were omitted from the final report. The questionnaire and interview guide were reviewed by university supervisors and project management professionals at MPC to ensure they included all the important aspects of stakeholder engagement and sustainability. This process confirmed content validity. Exploratory factor analysis with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity further confirmed construct validity, which was enhanced by aligning instrument items with the theoretical constructs

of Participation Theory and Sustainability Theory. The internal consistency was measured using Cronbach's Alpha to determine reliability. A value of 0.70 or above is considered appropriate for social science research.

3.6 Data Analysis Techniques

The study used SPSS 27 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to code and analyses the quantitative data. Statistics such as averages, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages were used to summaries the demographic information of the respondents and to illustrate trends in participatory planning and project sustainability. The direction and strength of the relationship between each independent variable and project sustainability were examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient. The combined and individual predictive influence of the independent variables on sustainability were assessed through multiple linear regression analysis. To ensure the data was suitable for regression analysis, diagnostic tests were run to check for multicollinearity and normality. Using NVivo software to transcribe, arrange, code, and manage qualitative data in line with the study's objectives and conceptual frame, thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview transcripts was conducted, classifying them according to the study's independent variables and developing themes. To set up regions of convergence, divergence, and complementarity, the quantitative and qualitative results were combined during the interpretation stage, in accordance with the convergent parallel design.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The research office of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa provided ethical permission, and then the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) issued a study authorization, all before data collection could begin. The Director of the Mukuru Promotion Centre also gave his official approval. Every participant was given all the information they needed to make an educated decision, including the study's goals, methods, and the fact that they may stop participating at any moment without penalty. Ensuring the physical and psychological safety of participants throughout the study, the researcher followed the cultural norms and values of the Mukuru group, and anonymized replies and data to ensure participant privacy.

4.0 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the research are discussed here in light of the first objective. Presentation of descriptive statistics, diagnostic tests, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and integrated qualitative findings for participatory research follows an overview of the response rate, reliability and validity test results, and the demographic profile of the respondents.

4.1 Response Rate

A total of 157 out of 178 surveys were returned with the requested information, for an 88% response rate.

According to the widespread consensus, response rates over 70% are sufficient for reducing non-response bias and ensuring representativeness in social scientific research, hence this percentage is high and acceptable. Meaningful associations, including small-to-moderate correlations, among the research variables could be detected by the attained sample of 157 respondents, which gave acceptable statistical power.

4.2 Reliability and Validity Test Results

With a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.941, the 50-item questionnaire was found to have high internal consistency, exceeding the recognized criterion of 0.70. This means that the questions accurately assessed the intended constructs, according to the reliability study. To back up the claim that every item made a significant contribution and that nothing needed to be removed, the item-total analysis revealed that the 'alpha if item eliminated' values were very close to the overall coefficient. Regarding construct validity, the data was deemed suitable for factor analysis by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, and the total KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.875, categorized as 'meritorious' ($\chi^2 = 5037.854$, $df = 1225$, $p < 0.001$). The construct validity of the instrument was confirmed by the statistically significant Bartlett's tests ($p < 0.001$) and the KMO value of 0.860 reported for the participatory planning construct.

4.3 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic results showed that out of the total number of respondents, 59.9% were female ($n = 94$), 35.7% were male ($n = 56$), and 4.5% were classified as 'other' ($n = 7$). The higher proportion of female respondents likely reflects their greater involvement in community activities and availability during data collection at MPC. However, the inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups and the use of a census design helped reduce sampling bias. The 4.5% of respondents who identified as "other" represents a small but notable inclusion of non-binary or non-conforming gender identities, but the number was too small to allow for separate analysis. Of those who participated, the majority were working-age adults; specifically, 29.9% were between the ages of 36 and 45 and 26.1% were between the ages of 26 and 35. Members of the staff made up the biggest stakeholder group (75.8%, $n = 119$), followed by members of the community (17.8%, $n = 28$), and finally, representatives from donors and partners (6.4%, $n = 10$). With 41.4% holding a diploma and 26.8% a bachelor's degree, the majority of the population had intermediate-level academic credentials. Considering the length of time involved in MPC programmers, a significant portion of the respondents had extensive experience with the Centre's initiatives; specifically, 35.0% had been involved for over six years and 25.5% for four to six years. The demographic profile as a whole lends credence to the findings by indicating that the respondents were knowledgeable, engaged, and experienced stakeholders.

4.4 Objective One: Participatory Planning and Project Sustainability

4.4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Participatory Planning

Participatory planning was measured using ten Likert-scale items, yielding composite scores ranging from 10 to 50. A composite sum score was used to aggregate responses across the ten items in order to capture the overall level of participatory planning as a single construct. This approach reflects the total intensity of the variable across all indicators, increases the range and variability of the data, and improves the sensitivity of subsequent statistical analyses. The variable recorded a mean score of 35.69 (SD = 8.15), which lies above the scale midpoint of 25, indicating a moderately high level of agreement among respondents regarding the presence of participatory planning in MPC projects. The standard deviation of 8.15, alongside a minimum score of 13 and a maximum score of 50, indicates considerable variation in responses, while the slight negative skewness (-0.37) suggests that more respondents reported higher agreement with participatory planning.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Participatory Planning

Statistic	Value
Mean	35.69
Standard Deviation	8.15
Minimum Score	13
Maximum Score	50
Skewness	-0.37

Source: Field Data (2026)

A one-way non-parametric analysis (Kruskal-Wallis test) revealed no statistically significant difference in perceptions of participatory planning across the three stakeholder groups ($H = 4.761$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.092$). Although community representatives recorded a higher mean rank (95.96) than staff (75.22) and donor/partners (76.45), these differences were not statistically significant, indicating that perceptions of participatory planning were relatively similar across stakeholder categories. At the item level, respondents most strongly agreed that community needs and priorities are considered during project planning ($M = 4.07$, $SD = 1.01$), that planning meetings provide adequate opportunities for stakeholder contribution ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.09$), and that stakeholders are actively involved in setting project goals ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.08$). However, moderate mean scores on statements relating to donor or management dominance in planning decisions ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.43$) and limited beneficiary influence ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.37$) suggest that stakeholder participation does not always translate into meaningful influence over decision-making. Overall, the descriptive results imply that while participatory planning structures exist at MPC, there remains a need to improve genuine inclusion in project planning.

4.4.2 Diagnostic Tests

Prior to inferential analysis, diagnostic tests for multicollinearity and normality were conducted. The multicollinearity test indicated that participatory planning recorded a tolerance value of 0.378 and a variance inflation factor (VIF) of 2.643. As all tolerance values exceeded the recommended minimum and all VIF values were well below the threshold of 10, the results confirmed the absence of significant multicollinearity, indicating that each independent variable contributed distinct information to the regression model. The test for normality, however, returned Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance values below 0.05 for all variables, indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Consequently, Spearman's rank-order correlation, a non-parametric technique, was adopted for the correlation analysis, while multiple linear regression was retained on the basis that the sample size of 157 was adequate to reduce the influence of non-normality on the estimation of regression coefficients.

4.4.3 Correlation between Participatory Planning and Project Sustainability

Table 3: Spearman's Correlation between Participatory Planning and Project Sustainability

Statistic	Participatory Planning	Project Sustainability
Correlation Coefficient (r)	1.000	0.501**
Sig. (2-tailed)	–	0.000
N	157	157

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Source: Field Data (2026)

The Spearman's correlation analysis revealed a moderate, positive and statistically significant relationship between participatory planning and project sustainability ($r = 0.501$, $p < 0.01$). A correlation coefficient of 0.501 indicates a moderate positive association, implying that participatory planning is a significant factor in promoting project sustainability, although it is not the sole determinant. Consistent with Objective One, this result supports the proposition that greater stakeholder participation during the planning stage is linked to enhanced sustainability outcomes; the moderate strength of the coefficient, however, indicates that other variables also exert considerable influence on sustainability.

4.4.4 Integrated Qualitative Findings on Participatory Planning

The qualitative findings strongly corroborated the correlation results. Thirteen of the seventeen interviewed key informants emphasized that the participation of all stakeholders, including the community, in identifying needs and planning projects fosters ownership and long-term sustainability. One respondent observed that the community first identifies the issues affecting it, then jointly prioritizes them and presents them to donors, while another noted that when the community owns a project, it is able to continue with

it even in the absence of funding. These accounts highlight a participatory approach in which the community and stakeholders actively shape interventions, generating a sense of responsibility and continuity even after donor withdrawal. However, four of the seventeen respondents expressed a contrasting view regarding participation in decision-making, observing that staff are not deeply involved and that decisions tend to be dominated by management and donors. This concern reflects the limitation, articulated within Participation Theory, that genuine participation is not tokenistic but involves empowerment, inclusion and accountability. The quantitative and qualitative findings therefore demonstrate robust convergence in affirming the importance of stakeholder participation, with minor divergence indicating that the experience of participation may vary across stakeholder levels, particularly among junior staff.

4.5 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

To determine the independent factors combined and individual predictive effect on project sustainability, multiple linear regression was used. According to the model summary, there is a moderate-to-strong relationship between the predictors and project sustainability ($R=0.599$), and the independent variables explained 35.8% of the variance in project sustainability ($R^2=0.358$). The remaining 64.2% is explained by other factors not part of this model. The F-test and adjusted R^2 of 0.342 demonstrated that the regression model was statistically significant and that the combined impact of the variables on sustainability was not due to chance.

Table 4: Regression Model Summary and ANOVA

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error
0.599	0.358	0.342	6.817
Model	F	df (Reg., Res.)	Sig.
Regression	21.233	4, 152	0.000

Source: Field Data (2026)

The regression coefficients revealed the individual contribution of each independent variable. With respect to Objective One, participatory planning recorded a positive and statistically significant standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.367$, $t = 3.471$, $p = 0.001$), emerging as the strongest individual predictor of project sustainability among all variables examined. This result substantiates the role of participatory planning as a critical determinant of sustainability, implying that a greater degree of stakeholder participation in planning activities considerably improves sustainability outcomes at MPC.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients for Participatory Planning and Project Sustainability

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	7.596	2.928	–	0.010

Predictor	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	Sig. (p)
Participatory Planning	0.378	0.109	0.367	0.001

Dependent Variable: Project Sustainability. Source: Field Data (2026)

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Participatory Planning and Project Sustainability

The findings affirm that participatory planning is a significant predictor of the sustainability of donor-funded projects at Mukuru Promotion Centre. The moderate, positive and statistically significant correlation ($r = 0.501$, $p < 0.01$), reinforced by the strong positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.367$, $p = 0.001$), establishes participatory planning as the most influential of the participation dimensions examined. This result aligns with Onuche et al. (2025), whose study of donor-funded water projects in Nigeria found that communities involved in early needs assessment and consultation meetings exhibited greater ownership and long-term maintenance, with infrastructure remaining functional even after donor withdrawal because stakeholders had collaboratively defined project objectives. The finding is similarly consistent with Wanjue (2023), who argues that stakeholder participation is associated with sustainability because consulting local communities enables the integration of local knowledge and technology into project design, improving productivity and continuity even after funding ceases.

Theoretically, the finding strongly supports Participation Theory, which holds that development projects are more likely to be sustainable to the degree to which beneficiaries participate meaningfully in decision-making. The qualitative accounts, in which respondents emphasized that community-identified and community-owned projects continue even in the absence of funding, illustrate the empowerment and ownership mechanisms central to the theory. At the same time, the concerns raised by a minority of respondents that decision-making is dominated by management and donors echo the theory's caution against tokenistic participation, in which stakeholders are consulted without being genuinely empowered to influence decisions. The moderate, rather than strong, correlation indicates that participatory planning at MPC, while substantive, has not yet attained the depth of inclusion associated with sustainability. This interpretation is consistent with Mwangi (2020), who found that projects employing top-down planning approaches experience sustainability challenges because local stakeholders are excluded from needs identification and goal formulation. Taken together, the convergence of quantitative evidence, qualitative accounts and theoretical framing underscores that participatory planning is not only statistically significant but also practically indispensable for project continuity. This synthesis highlights that genuine, decision-level participation, particularly by community representatives

and junior staff is strongly associated with sustainability of donor-funded projects after external support ends. At the same time, the persistence of tokenistic tendencies signals that deeper inclusion associated with sustainability is required. By merging these strands, the study demonstrates that participatory planning is both the strongest predictor and a factor associated with long-term sustainability at MPC.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of participatory planning on the sustainability of donor-funded projects at Mukuru Promotion Centre, a faith-based organization operating within an urban informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya. On the basis of the findings, the study draws the following conclusion.

With respect to the first objective, the study concludes that participatory planning is significantly and positively related to the sustainability of donor-funded projects. Participation is associated with positive outcomes when stakeholders are engaged from the initial stages of identifying needs through to the level of decision-making. Where stakeholder participation in decision-making is limited, the level of community ownership, which is associated with long-term sustainability, is correspondingly lower. Participatory planning therefore stands out as the dimension of stakeholder participation strongly associated with sustainability of donor-funded projects at MPC.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings and conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations in line with objective one.

7.1 Recommendations on Participatory Planning

Given that participatory planning emerged as the strongest predictor of project sustainability ($\beta = 0.367$, $p = 0.001$), it is recommended that Mukuru Promotion Centre implement more inclusive participatory planning processes for all donor-funded initiatives. This entails actively engaging stakeholders, particularly community representatives and junior staff, throughout the project lifecycle, from needs assessment through to priority setting, design and decision-making. The Centre should establish formal participatory forums, hold consistent consultative meetings and constitute collaborative planning committees in order to deepen stakeholder ownership and promote long-term commitment to project continuity. Moving beyond mere consultation to genuine, decision-level involvement is essential if participatory planning is to translate fully into sustainability.

7.2 Recommendation for Further Research

Because participatory planning significantly influences project sustainability, future studies should examine which participatory components contribute most to sustainability. Comparative studies across a wider range of donor-funded and faith-based organizations operating in diverse geographical and institutional contexts would

also help to establish whether the relationships identified in this study are context-specific or more broadly applicable.

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