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THE EFFECTS OF STAKEHOLDERS' PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING ON PROGRAMME SUSTAINABILITY OF THE TUGENDE TUTANDIKE PROGRAMME IN MASINDI, UGANDA

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of stakeholders' participation in planning on the sustainability of the Tugende Tutandike Programme (TTP) in Masindi District, Western Uganda. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 312 stakeholders using a structured questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$), while qualitative data were gathered through 12 key informant interviews with programme managers, local leaders, and community representatives. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression were used to analyse quantitative data, while thematic analysis (following Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework with explicit coding procedures) was applied to qualitative data. Descriptive results indicated a high level of stakeholder participation in planning (overall mean = 3.89, SD = 1.12 on a 5-point scale). Correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between stakeholders' participation in planning and programme sustainability ($r = 0.438$, $p < 0.01$). Regression analysis showed that stakeholders' participation in planning explained approximately 19.2% of the variance in programme sustainability ($R^2 = 0.192$, $\beta = 0.529$, $p < 0.001$). The null hypothesis was rejected, confirming a statistically significant positive effect. The study confirms Stakeholder Theory's applicability in community development contexts, demonstrating that inclusive planning fosters ownership, legitimacy, and long-term programme viability. Practically, the findings underscore the need for genuine participatory mechanisms beyond tokenistic consultation. Policy-wise, district local governments should mandate stakeholder planning frameworks in all community development initiatives. Programme implementers should institutionalize quarterly community dialogue forums, train local leaders in participatory planning techniques, and ensure resource allocation reflects stakeholder priorities. Future research should explore moderators of the participation–sustainability relationship, including leadership quality and institutional capacity.

Keywords: Stakeholders' Participation, Programme Planning, Programme Sustainability, Tugende Tutandike Programme, Stakeholder Theory

Introduction

Stakeholder participation has increasingly been recognized as a critical determinant of success and longevity in community development programmes, particularly within resource-constrained developing country contexts (Freeman, 2020; Reed et al., 2021). The rationale is straightforward: when those affected by a programme are actively involved in its design and execution, they develop a sense of ownership, which in turn enhances the programme's ability to continue delivering benefits after external support ceases (Bennett & Jessani, 2019; Scheirer, 2019). Globally, empirical evidence suggests that projects with high stakeholder participation sustain their achievements at rates between 60% and 80%, while those with poor participation tend to collapse soon after donor departure (Smith & Patel, 2022; UNDP, 2021).

The Tugende Tutandike Programme (TTP) in Masindi District, Western Uganda, was designed as a community-based development initiative aimed at improving livelihoods through inclusive stakeholder engagement. Despite initial successes, the programme now faces significant sustainability challenges. According to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD, 2022), only 39% of community interventions under TTP remain functional two years after implementation. This decline has been attributed to poor continuity of services, weak post-project management structures, and minimal community ownership (Okello & Nsubuga, 2023). Central to this sustainability problem is the inadequate and often ineffective participation of stakeholders. Evidence indicates that beneficiaries, community leaders, local government officials, and community-based organizations (CBOs) in Masindi are frequently engaged too late in the project cycle or for merely superficial reasons that neither empower them nor enable meaningful influence over decision-making processes (Farah et al., 2022). This pattern mirrors broader critiques of participatory development, where participation becomes tokenistic rather than transformative (Cornwall, 2008).

Problem Statement

The specific problem is that the Tugende Tutandike Programme in Masindi District is not achieving sustainable outcomes because stakeholders are not being adequately involved in programme planning. Without genuine involvement, beneficiaries and local actors have not developed the ownership, capacity, and commitment necessary to maintain project activities and benefits after external support ceases. Although various studies have examined project

management and sustainability in Uganda (Bagire & Nalweyiso, 2016; Muhumuza, 2021), there remains limited empirical evidence specifically investigating how stakeholder participation across different project phases particularly planning affects sustainability outcomes in the Ugandan context. This study addresses this gap by focusing on the planning phase to determine how stakeholder engagement contributes to or detracts from long-term programme sustainability.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following research question: What is the effect of stakeholders' participation in planning on the sustainability of the Tugende Tutandike Programme in Masindi District, Uganda?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of stakeholders' participation in planning on the sustainability of the Tugende Tutandike Programme in Masindi District, Uganda.

Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant effect of stakeholders' participation in planning on the sustainability of the Tugende Tutandike Programme in Masindi, Uganda.

Literature Review

Conceptual Review

Stakeholders' Participation refers to the active involvement of all relevant parties including beneficiaries, community leaders, local government officials, and implementing agencies in programme decision-making, execution, and evaluation. It is measured through engagement in planning, implementation, and monitoring activities (Freeman, 2020; Reed et al., 2021).

Project Sustainability is defined as the ability of a programme to maintain its operations and achieve intended outcomes over the long term, incorporating social, environmental, and financial dimensions. Social sustainability focuses on community engagement and equitable benefits; environmental sustainability addresses minimal negative ecological impacts; and financial sustainability ensures continuous funding and resource mobilization (Scheirer, 2019; UNDP, 2021).

Stakeholders' Participation in Planning specifically entails the inclusion of stakeholders in setting programme objectives, defining roles, and allocating resources before implementation begins. Effective participation in planning ensures clarity of goals and fosters ownership, which positively influences programme outcomes (Bryson et al., 2020; Ansell & Gash, 2018).

Theoretical Underpinning

This study is anchored in Freeman's (1984) Stakeholder Theory, which posits that organizations and programmes should consider the interests of all parties who are affected by or can affect the achievement of their objectives. Donaldson and Preston (1995) extended this theory by distinguishing three dimensions: descriptive (the theory describes how organizations actually operate), instrumental (stakeholder management leads to improved performance), and normative (stakeholder interests have intrinsic value). This study is primarily concerned with the instrumental dimension namely, that meaningful stakeholder participation in planning leads to improved programme sustainability outcomes. Mitchell et al. (1997) further refined the theory by introducing stakeholder salience based on power, legitimacy, and urgency, providing a lens to understand why some stakeholder voices are heard while others are marginalized.

Theoretical Contribution Statement: This study extends Stakeholder Theory into the domain of rural development programme sustainability in Uganda. While Stakeholder Theory has been extensively applied in corporate and environmental management contexts (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell et al., 1997), its application to community-based programme planning in sub-Saharan Africa remains limited. This study empirically validates the instrumental proposition that stakeholder participation in planning leads to improved sustainability outcomes within a Ugandan rural development context, thereby extending the theory's geographical and sectoral reach.

Empirical Review: Effects of Stakeholders' Participation in Planning on Programme Sustainability

To improve synthesis, the empirical literature is organized into three thematic clusters:

Cluster 1: Positive effects of participatory planning on sustainability. A consistent finding across multiple studies is that stakeholder participation during the planning phase significantly enhances project sustainability. Smith and Johnson (2022), in a mixed-methods study of 12 community health projects in the United States, found that early and consistent involvement of local stakeholders in planning was associated with a 35% higher sustainability index. Their qualitative data revealed that enhanced local ownership and adaptability were the key mechanisms driving this relationship. Similarly, Martin et al. (2021) employed a longitudinal case study methodology to assess environmental conservation projects in the United Kingdom

and reported that participatory planning processes fostered stronger community commitment, translating into better maintenance and long-term success.

Cluster 2: African and East African evidence. In the African context, Nkosi et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study across three Southern African countries using structured questionnaires to assess stakeholder engagement in agricultural development projects. They found a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$) between participatory planning and sustainability metrics such as resource use efficiency and community resilience. Conversely, Abebe (2021) used focus groups and key informant interviews in Ethiopia to reveal that many rural development projects still employ top-down planning approaches, limiting community buy-in and causing premature project failure. Focusing on East Africa, Kamau and Wambua (2023) used surveys and participatory rural appraisals to evaluate water sanitation projects in Kenya. They documented that projects with active stakeholder involvement in planning reported 40% higher functionality rates after three years compared to those with limited participation. In Uganda, Muhumuza (2021) highlighted that stakeholder participation during planning is often hindered by bureaucratic delays and limited technical capacity at the local government level. At the local level in Masindi District, Achen and Ochieng (2024) found that stakeholder participation during planning significantly correlated with increased community ownership and project continuity, showing a 30% increase in sustainability indicators when planning was inclusive.

Cluster 3: Contradictions and cautionary evidence. Despite these positive findings, important contradictions emerge in the literature. Patel and Lee (2023) caution that participation can sometimes be superficial or tokenistic, with dominant groups overshadowing marginalized voices. Their analysis warns that without equitable participation structures, planning stages risk reinforcing existing inequalities, which ultimately undermines sustainability goals. Nasser and Abdallah (2023) found that in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, participatory planning processes actually worsened outcomes when they raised expectations that could not be met. These contradictions suggest that the participation–sustainability relationship is not automatic but depends on quality, inclusivity, and contextual conditions.

Conceptual Gap: The literature reveals four gaps. First, there is limited empirical evidence specifically from the Ugandan context, particularly Masindi District. Second, few studies isolate the planning phase from implementation and monitoring. Third, most existing studies are either

purely quantitative or purely qualitative, with limited use of mixed-methods designs. Fourth, the mechanisms linking participation to sustainability remain under-specified. This study addresses these gaps by focusing on the Tugende Tutandike Programme in Masindi, isolating the planning phase, employing a mixed-methods design, and applying Stakeholder Theory.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature reveals three key conclusions. First, stakeholder participation in planning positively influences programme sustainability, with effect sizes ranging from 30% to 40% improvement. The mechanisms include enhanced local ownership, contextual relevance, accountability, and trust. Second, this relationship depends on the quality and inclusivity of participation, facilitative leadership, and local institutional capacity. Tokenistic participation can be worse than no participation. Third, persistent barriers include bureaucratic delays, limited technical capacity, socio-cultural exclusion, and weak institutional support. Given that only 39% of Tugende Tutandike interventions remain functional, this study examines not merely whether participation occurred, but how it occurred and whose voices were included.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design in Masindi District, Uganda, targeting 1,500 stakeholders of the Tugende Tutandike Programme. Using Yamane's formula, 312 respondents were selected through stratified random sampling, comprising programme beneficiaries, community leaders, local government officials, and CBO representatives. Quantitative data were collected using a structured 30-item questionnaire (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$), measuring stakeholder participation in planning on a 5-point Likert scale. Qualitative data were gathered through 12 key informant interviews with programme managers, local leaders, and community representatives, using a semi-structured guide.

Thematic Analysis Operationalization: Qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: (1) familiarization with data through repeated reading; (2) generation of initial codes (e.g., "invitation to meetings," "feedback incorporation," "resource constraints"); (3) searching for themes (e.g., "inclusivity," "tokenism," "resource alignment"); (4) reviewing themes against coded extracts and entire dataset; (5) defining and naming themes (e.g., "Meaningful inclusion," "Resource-participation gap"); and (6) producing the report with representative quotations. Two

researchers independently coded 20% of transcripts to establish inter-coder reliability (agreement = 89%). Discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression in SPSS version 25. All ethical standards guiding research were adhered to, from obtaining approval from relevant authorities, to obtaining informed consent from all participants, to maintaining strict confidentiality and voluntary participation.

Results

Descriptive Statistics: Stakeholders' Participation in Planning

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for stakeholders' participation in planning.

Table 1: Responses to Stakeholder Participation in Planning

Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std Dev
All relevant stakeholders were invited to participate in the planning phase.	15 (4.8)	25 (8.0)	40 (12.8)	120 (38.5)	112 (35.9)	3.93	1.11
The planning process actively sought input from marginalized groups.	18 (5.8)	28 (9.0)	44 (14.1)	115 (36.9)	107 (34.3)	3.85	1.16
Stakeholder feedback was valued and incorporated into planning decisions.	12 (3.8)	20 (6.4)	38 (12.2)	130 (41.7)	112 (35.9)	3.99	1.04
Programme objectives were clearly communicated during planning.	10 (3.2)	22 (7.1)	36 (11.5)	128 (41.0)	116 (37.2)	4.02	1.03
Stakeholders understood	14	24 (7.7)	45 (14.4)	117	112	3.93	1.10

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Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	NS (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Mean	Std Dev
their roles in achieving programme objectives.	(4.5)			(37.5)	(35.9)		
Programme objectives align with community needs.	11 (3.5)	19 (6.1)	40 (12.8)	122 (39.1)	120 (38.5)	4.03	1.04
Resources were allocated based on stakeholder input during planning.	20 (6.4)	30 (9.6)	50 (16.0)	110 (35.3)	102 (32.7)	3.78	1.18
The programme budget reflects stakeholder priorities.	22 (7.1)	29 (9.3)	47 (15.1)	108 (34.6)	106 (34.0)	3.79	1.21
Sufficient resources are available to achieve programme objectives as planned.	25 (8.0)	32 (10.3)	48 (15.4)	105 (33.7)	102 (32.7)	3.73	1.24
Average Mean						3.89	

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, NS = Not Sure, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Source: Primary field data, 2026

As shown in Table 1, the average mean score of 3.89 (SD = 1.12) indicates a high level of stakeholder participation in planning. The highest-rated items were alignment of objectives with community needs (mean = 4.03) and clarity of communication (mean = 4.02), while resource sufficiency (mean = 3.73) and input-based resource allocation (mean = 3.78) received comparatively lower ratings.

Qualitative findings corroborated these results. One key informant (Community Leader, Masindi) stated: "During the planning meetings, we were all invited men, women, youth, even the elderly. The facilitators listened to our problems and wrote them down. We felt that for the first time, a project was not just telling us what they would do but asking us what we needed." However, a Programme Manager noted persistent challenges: "While we try to include everyone, logistical constraints mean that some remote villages are sometimes under-represented. We are working on mobile outreach for planning sessions."

Correlation Analysis

Table 2: Correlation Matrix: Stakeholders' Participation in Planning and Programme Sustainability

Variable	1	2
1. Stakeholder Participation in Planning	1.00	
2. Programme Sustainability	0.438**	1.00

Source: Primary field data, 2026

As revealed in Table 2, there is a moderate, positive, and statistically significant correlation between stakeholders' participation in planning and programme sustainability ($r = 0.438$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that as stakeholder involvement in planning increases, programme sustainability tends to increase as well.

Regression Analysis

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression Results

Table 3a: Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.438	0.192	0.190	0.511

Source: Primary field data, 2026

Table 3b: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	34.578	1	34.578	132.357	0.000
Residual	145.162	310	0.468		
Total	179.740	311			

Source: Primary field data, 2026

Table 3c: Coefficients

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Model	Unstandardized B	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.382	0.121		11.421	0.000
Stakeholder Participation in Planning	0.529	0.046	0.438	11.504	0.000

Source: Primary field data, 2026

Table 3 shows that the regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 310) = 132.357$, $p < 0.001$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.192$) indicates that stakeholders' participation in planning explains approximately 19.2% of the variance in programme sustainability. The unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.529$, $p < 0.001$) means that for every one-unit increase in stakeholder participation in planning, programme sustainability increases by 0.529 units, holding other factors constant.

Hypothesis Testing

Based on the regression results ($p < 0.001$), the null hypothesis (H_{01}) was rejected. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis that there is a statistically significant positive effect of stakeholders' participation in planning on the sustainability of the Tugende Tutandike Programme was accepted. This provides a direct answer to the research question: Stakeholders' participation in planning has a positive and statistically significant effect on programme sustainability.

Qualitative Thematic Findings

Thematic analysis of key informant interviews revealed four major themes:

Theme 1: Meaningful inclusion and ownership. Most informants reported feeling genuinely included in planning. A CBO representative stated: "When we saw that our suggestions like starting village savings groups were actually included in the work plan, we became committed. It was no longer their project; it was our project."

Theme 2: Tokenism and resource constraints. Despite positive perceptions, some informants described superficial participation. A local government official noted: "Sometimes community meetings are just for show. Decisions are already made in Kampala. We are asked to clap, not to think."

Theme 3: The resource-participation gap. Several informants highlighted that while their voices were heard, financial resources did not always follow. A programme manager explained:

"Communities prioritize borehole repairs, but the budget is already locked for training workshops. This mismatch creates frustration."

Theme 4: Logistical barriers to inclusion. Remote village representation remained problematic. A key informant stated: "If the meeting is at the sub-county headquarters, women from the farthest villages cannot attend. No transport, no childcare."

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings in Light of Stakeholder Theory

The finding that stakeholders' participation in planning has a significant positive effect on programme sustainability ($\beta = 0.529$, $R^2 = 0.192$) aligns with the instrumental proposition of Stakeholder Theory (Donaldson & Preston, 1995), which holds that stakeholder management leads to improved organizational performance. This finding is consistent with Smith and Johnson's (2022) study in the United States, which found that early stakeholder involvement improved sustainability indices by 35%. It also aligns with Nkosi et al.'s (2020) Southern African study, which reported a strong correlation ($r = 0.68$) between inclusive planning and community resilience.

Addressing the Moderating Factors

While $R^2 = 0.192$ is statistically significant, it also means that 80.8% of the variance in programme sustainability is explained by factors other than stakeholder participation in planning. This finding requires explicit discussion. The remaining variance is likely attributable to:

Leadership quality (Bagire & Nalweyiso, 2016): Effective project leadership can compensate for weak participation, while poor leadership can undermine even well-participated planning.

Funding continuity and donor behaviour (Smith & Patel, 2022): Even with excellent participation, programmes collapse when external funding ceases abruptly without exit strategies.

Institutional capacity of local government (Muhumuza, 2021): Weak local government systems cannot sustain programmes regardless of planning quality.

External shocks (climate, economic, political): These lie outside the planning–sustainability relationship but significantly affect outcomes.

Measurement limitations: Sustainability is a multidimensional construct; this study captured only some dimensions.

Future research should quantitatively examine these moderating variables, potentially through hierarchical regression or structural equation modelling.

The Descriptive and Qualitative Insights

The descriptive finding that 74.4% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that all relevant stakeholders were invited to participate (mean = 3.93) suggests that the TTP achieved broad representation. This supports Achen and Ochieng's (2024) observation in Masindi that inclusive planning correlates with increased community ownership. However, the lower rating for marginalized group input (mean = 3.85) and the qualitative concerns about logistical barriers echo Namusisi's (2020) finding that socio-cultural barriers and distance hinder full participation. The high rating for alignment between programme objectives and community needs (mean = 4.03) is particularly noteworthy. This suggests that the TTP succeeded in translating stakeholder input into programme design a critical mechanism linking participation to sustainability (Martin et al., 2021).

The Resource-Participation Gap

The finding that 68% of respondents agreed that resources were allocated based on stakeholder input (mean = 3.78) is encouraging but also indicates room for improvement. Lower ratings for resource sufficiency (mean = 3.73) and budget alignment (mean = 3.79) suggest that while participatory processes exist, their translation into tangible resource commitments remains partial. This resonates with Patel and Lee's (2023) caution that participation can become symbolic when not backed by real resource allocation. The qualitative theme of "tokenism" further reinforces this concern.

Summary

This study examined how involving stakeholders in the planning phase of the Tugende Tutandike Programme in Masindi, Uganda, affects the programme's long-term sustainability. Data from 312 respondents showed that stakeholder participation in planning was high (mean = 3.89 out of 5). Statistical analysis revealed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.438$) between participatory planning and programme sustainability, with participation explaining about 19% of sustainability outcomes. The null hypothesis was rejected, confirming that meaningful stakeholder involvement in planning through inclusive consultations, clear communication, and responsive resource allocation significantly enhances the likelihood that community programmes

will continue delivering benefits after external support ends. The research question was answered affirmatively: stakeholder participation in planning has a significant positive effect on programme sustainability. Qualitative findings reinforced these results while also revealing persistent challenges of tokenism, resource misalignment, and logistical barriers to full inclusion.

Conclusion

The study concludes that stakeholders' participation in planning has a statistically significant positive effect on the sustainability of the Tugende Tutandike Programme in Masindi, Uganda. The findings confirm that when stakeholders are genuinely involved in setting objectives, defining roles, and allocating resources, they develop ownership and commitment that drive long-term programme viability. While participatory planning is not the sole determinant of sustainability (explaining only 19.2% of variance), it is a critical and strategic investment. The study affirms Stakeholder Theory's applicability in community development contexts and highlights that participation must be substantive not tokenistic to yield sustainable outcomes. The research question has been answered: there is a significant positive effect of stakeholders' participation in planning on programme sustainability.

Recommendations

From the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Institutionalize quarterly community dialogue forums at the parish level to ensure continuous stakeholder input into programme planning and decision-making.
- ii. Build participatory planning capacity through annual training for local leaders, School Management Committees, and CBO representatives in inclusive facilitation and priority-setting tools.
- iii. Strengthen resource-planning linkages by establishing transparent feedback mechanisms that demonstrate how stakeholder input directly influences budget allocations.
- iv. Mandate inclusive planning frameworks at district level, requiring evidence of marginalized group participation (women, youth, persons with disabilities) as a condition for project funding approval. Address logistical barriers through mobile outreach and transport reimbursements for remote participants.
- v. Conduct longitudinal research to track how stakeholder participation influences sustainability over 3–5 years post-implementation, including moderator analyses of leadership quality, funding continuity, and institutional capacity.

- vi. Employ structural equation modelling to test the mediating role of ownership and commitment in the participation–sustainability relationship.
- vii. Compare programmes with high versus low participation quality to identify threshold effects.

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