Sustainability of Government-Funded School Projects: Nature, Criteria and Factors Affecting Community Participation in Sustaining Government-Funded School Projects in Morogoro Region, Tanzania

Boniphace Gonjo[1]*, Paul Dominic Mushi[1], and Kassimu A. Nihuka[1]

[1]Jordan University College, P. O. Box 1878

Morogoro, Tanzania

ABSTRACT

This study explored the sustainability of government-funded school projects with a focus on nature, criteria and factors affecting community participation in sustaining government-funded school projects in Morogoro Region, Tanzania. The study employed a qualitative research approach. A total of 33 participants were involved. The study includes heads of schools, school board chairpersons, ward councilors, and ward education officers from secondary schools in selected districts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and then analyzed using thematic analysis. The study found that community participation in sustaining school projects varied by locality, with urban areas like Morogoro Municipality offering financial support, while rural districts such as Kilosa and Gairo provided labor and materials. However, participation was mostly passive and consultative, with minimal involvement in planning and decision-making, which weakened long-term sustainability. Informal practices, personal ties, and leadership influence shaped participation more than formal processes, while barriers such as economic hardship, poor communication, and weak leadership limited engagement though inclusive and transparent leadership significantly boosted trust and involvement. The study recommends establishing clear participation frameworks, enhancing community awareness, training local leaders, and introducing flexible contribution models to promote inclusive and sustained involvement.

Keywords: Community Participation, Decision-making Government Funded Projects, Sustainability.

1. INTRODUCTION

Community participation plays a pivotal role in the successful implementation and sustainability of government-funded development projects. By engaging local communities in the planning, decision-making, and execution stages, projects are more likely to reflect community needs, thereby fostering ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability (Ishola et al. 2024). Participation not only increases relevance and effectiveness but also enhances social equity and empowers marginalized groups by providing platforms for engagement (Newton et al., 2019). However, meaningful participation is often challenged by limited capacities, political interference, inadequate resources, and institutional constraints, which necessitate inclusive and robust engagement frameworks (Rijal, 2023).

Studies across Africa, such as Rugeiyamu et al. (2021), Aryeh-Adjei (2021), and Ngwama (2024) have highlighted the significance of involving communities in ensuring accountability and equitable development at the grassroots level. Tiwari et al. (2024) and Sanfo (2020) further emphasize that active participation enhances transparency and strengthens local governance systems.

Despite this recognition, the sustainability of school development projects often remains elusive due to several constraining factors. Apathy among community members, inadequate capacity, dysfunctional school management systems, and ambiguous definitions of "participation" significantly hinder effective engagement (Shibuya, 2020; Mbithi et al., 2018). These challenges are often compounded by delays in decision-making, conflicts of interest, and the exclusion of key community actors, such as traditional leaders, from the project cycle (Chiweza, 2021).

In Ghana, Arkorful et al. (2023) identified limited resources, competing interests, poor information flow, and political interference as significant barriers to community engagement. In Kenya's Alego-Usonga sub-county, Opiyo and Ng'eno (2024) found weak correlations between participatory structures and project sustainability. Similarly, Boadi (2021) noted that bureaucratic inefficiencies and political dynamics hindered community ownership and sustainability in Ghana's Asokore Mampong Municipal Assembly.

Despite these challenges, participatory approaches have shown promise in strengthening community involvement in school development projects. These include participatory planning, community consultations, Community-Driven Development (CDD) models, participatory budgeting, and local monitoring and evaluation (Rijal, 2023; Callistus & Clinton, 2018). Such methods not only enhance accountability and transparency but also build social capital and empower local stakeholders.

Furthermore, communities contribute to school development in various meaningful ways. Financial inputs through fundraising and user fees, labor or "sweat equity" during construction and maintenance, and material donations such as land or building resources help reduce project costs and foster ownership (Matsa et al., 2023; Pagès et al., 2019). Knowledge sharing also ensures that projects align with local socio-cultural contexts (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). Decision-making through school committees or advisory boards enables communities to shape project direction and improve governance (Abas et al., 2023).

Despite the recognized importance of community involvement, limited research has thoroughly examined the specific factors that influence community participation in sustaining government-funded school projects within the Tanzanian context, particularly in the Morogoro Region. Most existing studies, such as Mwakasangula (2023), Naku et al. (2021), Mwakisisile (2023), and Kinunga (2023), tend to focus on strategies for involving the community, project outcomes, overlooking critical aspects such as factors affecting community participation in sustaining government-funded school projects. These gaps limit the development of effective strategies to foster inclusive participation in school development initiatives. In response to this gap, the present study seeks to investigate the factors that affect community participation in sustaining government-funded school projects across three districts in the Morogoro Region: Morogoro Municipality, Kilosa District, and Gairo District.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study addressed the following objectives;

  i.   To examine the nature of community participation in sustaining government-funded school projects.
  ii. To explore the criteria used to guide community participation in sustaining government-funded school projects.
  iii. To analyze the factors affecting community participation based on the level and nature of involvement in sustaining government-funded school projects.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach

This study employed a qualitative research approach. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for the exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and the underlying reasons behind their engagement in school projects. This approach is particularly suitable for understanding complex social phenomena, such as community involvement, that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Area of the Study

This study was conducted in three administrative areas of the Morogoro Region, namely, Morogoro Municipality, Kilosa District, and Gairo District. These sites were purposefully selected to represent diverse settings: Morogoro Municipality with 50 secondary schools (23 public and 27 private) reflects urban dynamics; Kilosa District, with 43 schools (39 public and 4 private), presents a semi-urban context; and Gairo District, with 12 public secondary schools, provides insights from a rural perspective. This diversity enables a comprehensive understanding of the varying levels

and challenges of community engagement in sustaining school projects across different socio-economic and geographical contexts.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

Table 1 below outlines the distribution of study and sample size of secondary schools used in the study.

Table 1: Distribution of Study Population and Sample Size

S/No.	District	Study Population	Sample Size
1.	Morogoro Municipal	50	16
2.	Kilosa District	43	13
3.	Gairo District	12	4
Total		**105**	**33**

Source: Researcher (2023)

From Table 1, the sample size was determined basing on the recommendations of Suskie (1996), Nardi (2003), and Neuman (2007). These experts suggest that for populations under 1000, a minimum sample ratio of 30 percent is ideal to ensure the sample is representative.

Stratified sampling techniques were employed in the selection of secondary schools to ensure representation across different key subgroups. The population was first stratified by district—Morogoro Municipal, Kilosa District, and Gairo District. Within each district, further stratification was done based on school type (public vs. private). From each stratum, schools were then selected using simple random sampling to maintain objectivity and reduce sampling bias. Specifically, in Morogoro Municipal, a total of 16 schools were selected, comprising 7 public and 9 private schools. In Kilosa District, 13 schools were selected, with 12 being public and 1 private. In Gairo District, 4 public schools were selected. The detailed distribution is presented in Table 2. This method ensures proportional representation across different regions and school types.

Table 2: Summary of Sampling Plan

S/No.	District	Public Schools Selected	Private Schools Selected	Total Selected
1.	Morogoro Municipal	$\frac{23}{50} \ x \ 16 = 7.36 \approx 7$	$\frac{27}{50} \ x \ 16 = 8.64 \approx 9$	16
2.	Kilosa District	$\frac{39}{43} \ x \ 13 = 11.8 \approx 12$	$\frac{4}{43} \ x \ 13 = 1.2 \approx 1$	13
3.	Gairo District	$\frac{12}{12} \ x \ 4 = 4$	$\frac{0}{12} \ x \ 4 = 0$	4
Total		**23**	**10**	**33**

Source: Researcher (2023)

In each selected secondary school, the head of school, school board chairperson, ward councilor, and ward education officer were purposively selected due to their direct involvement in the planning, implementation, and oversight of school projects and community participation activities. This purposive sampling technique was justified as it allows

the researcher to intentionally select information-rich participants who possess the relevant knowledge and experience necessary for addressing the study objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

Semi-structured interview guides were used to collect data from heads of schools, school board chairpersons, ward councilors, and ward education officers. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was conducted on-site at the respective schools or ward offices to ensure convenience and a comfortable environment for participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). With participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy; however, where recording was not permitted, detailed notes were taken instead (Patton, 2015). This method allowed for rich, context-specific data while maintaining flexibility and consistency across interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected through interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This technique enabled the identification and interpretation of patterns related to community participation in sustaining government-funded school projects. All audio-recorded interviews were first transcribed verbatim, while data from handwritten notes were carefully organized and included in the analysis. The researcher then conducted a thorough reading of the transcripts, generated initial codes, and grouped similar codes into broader themes aligned with the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives and ensured that the findings were grounded in the actual experiences shared during the interviews (Nowell et al., 2017).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Nature of Community Participation in Sustaining School Projects

4.1.1 Forms of Participation

The study revealed diverse forms of community involvement across the districts. In Morogoro Municipality, most contributions were financial or administrative. One head of school explained:

> *"Parents here are more willing to contribute money than time. They usually support when we ask for funds for maintenance or small infrastructure improvements"*

In Kilosa and Gairo Districts, physical participation was more common. Community members provided materials, helped in construction, and participated in site supervision. A school board chairperson noted:

> *"We don't have much money, but people come with water, stones, and even their own tools to help in construction projects."*

This shows a clear distinction in the type of participation based on locality, with urban communities more inclined to provide financial support and rural ones contributing physical labor and time.

These findings align with Ataine and Nkedishu (2017), who highlighted community involvement not only in infrastructure development but also in offering land and utilizing school premises for communal purposes like elections and festivals. Mushi (2017) also emphasized community support in providing social services and cooperation with school staff, showing that participation extends beyond physical and financial inputs to social and emotional support for educators.

This diversity in participation suggests that urban communities favor financial support, likely due to higher income levels and time constraints, while rural communities contribute through physical engagement, driven by limited financial resources and a stronger sense of ownership.

4.1.2 Level of Participation

Despite various forms of involvement, the study found that participation was mostly passive or consultative rather than active or collaborative. Communities were rarely involved in project design or decision-making. One of the ward councilors stated:

> *"When the government funds arrive, schools just inform us about what they plan to do. We are not consulted on what is needed or how it should be done."*

Similarly, a ward education officer admitted:

> *"Community members are usually called to attend meetings after everything has been planned. Their role is more about agreeing than deciding."*

This indicates that while community involvement exists, it does not extend to project initiation, budgeting, or monitoring, which limits the sustainability of these initiatives.

This pattern resonates with findings by Nnunduma and Hussein (2023) and Hakim (2020), where community roles were found to be primarily consultative. Community members often attended meetings but had limited influence in budget planning and project design. This limited participation restricts opportunities for communities to shape projects according to their needs, weakening the potential for sustainability.

Ndungu and Karugu (2019) argued that community involvement in early project stages, especially in identification and planning, significantly enhances performance and sustainability. Similarly, Mutuma and Iravo (2018) found that active community representation in planning, funding, and monitoring significantly impacted decision-making and long-term project success. Therefore, the passive role observed in this study suggests a missed opportunity to tap into local knowledge, build ownership, and ensure the continuity of school projects.

4.1.3 Variation Across Districts

Geographical setting influenced the intensity and type of participation. In Gairo, where the community feels closely tied to the school's success, participation was more visible and enthusiastic. As one school board chairperson put it:

> *"This school is ours. If we don't help, who will? The government can only do so much."*

This contrasts with the sentiments from more urban areas, where school affairs are often viewed as the responsibility of government structures. The variation suggests that ownership and attachment to the school are stronger in rural areas, while urban settings may experience detachment, possibly due to more formal structures or competing priorities.

Such sentiments highlight a collective sense of ownership, which Arkorful et al. (2023) identified as a key factor in preventing project abandonment. When communities feel connected to projects and are actively involved, they are more likely to sustain them over time. The strong rural participation aligns with Loparimoi and Ng'eno (2023), who found a positive relationship between community participation and the sustainability of donor-supported projects.

In contrast, urban areas like Morogoro Municipality reflected a more institutionalized and distanced relationship, with school affairs viewed as the responsibility of government entities. This aligns with Kayuga (2015), who highlighted barriers such as lack of education in project management and unequal participation, which often marginalize community voices in formal decision-making structures.

Additionally, Abdirahman et al. (2017) pointed out that cultural practices, communication, and awareness levels influence participation. In rural districts like Gairo, strong cultural cohesion and interpersonal networks may encourage more hands-on involvement, whereas in urban areas, formal communication and fragmented communities might hinder deeper engagement.

4.2 Criteria Guiding Community Participation in School Projects

4.2.1 Informal Selection Practices

The study found that the criteria used to guide community participation were mostly informal, driven by social obligations and leadership directives rather than formalized processes or guidelines. One of the participants noted:

> *"There are no strict criteria. Sometimes, it's just about who is available or who the ward councilor knows. We don't have a system in place to ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate."*

Similarly, a school board chairperson who participated in the interview shared:

> *"The head of the school usually picks people who are known in the community. But there's no formal process for selecting participants for project tasks."*

These findings suggest that subjectivity and personal connections often determine who participates in school projects, which may undermine inclusivity and fairness. The absence of standardized selection mechanisms risks excluding less-known but potentially capable community members, particularly marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

These observations resonate with Kayuga (2015), who noted that unequal participation and limited capacity among certain community segments were significant barriers to effective engagement. Informality, though sometimes efficient, can foster favoritism and disempower communities in the long term.

4.2.2 Leadership Influence

The role of school leadership and local authorities was pivotal in determining who participated in school projects. In many cases, the school head or the ward education officer played a key role in decision-making. A ward education officer explained:

> *"We usually ask the school heads and local leaders to guide us on who should participate. It's based on who is trusted in the community and who has the experience to handle the tasks at hand."*

While leadership guidance can help ensure efficient task delegation, overreliance on a few individuals' judgments may lead to exclusion, lack of accountability, and the centralization of power. This top-down approach contradicts the principles of participatory development, which emphasize collective decision-making and community empowerment, as highlighted by Ndungu and Karugu (2019) and Mutuma and Iravo (2018). These studies emphasized the importance of community-wide consultations and early-stage involvement to enhance the sustainability and performance of development projects.

4.2.3 Lack of Formal Guidelines

The lack of formalized criteria was a consistent concern across all districts. One of the ward councilors mentioned:

> *"There is no written guideline for who should participate. It's based on local knowledge, but this leads to confusion and sometimes even frustration, especially for those who are not considered important by the leadership."*

The absence of structured guidelines leads to ambiguity, unfair selection processes, and potential exclusion, particularly for those outside the core leadership network. Literature from Arkorful et al. (2023) supports this observation, noting that inadequate community engagement and weak institutional frameworks were major contributors to the abandonment of government-funded projects in Ghana.

Similarly, Nnunduma and Hussein (2023) reported that while community members often attended meetings, their participation in decision-making, budgeting, and planning was minimal—often due to unclear roles and lack of structured pathways for engagement.

Establishing clear, written criteria and community selection frameworks can enhance transparency, inclusivity, and equity, ensuring all community members have a fair chance to contribute to school development initiatives.

4.2.4 Perception of Fairness and Equity

Despite the reliance on informal practices, many participants were aware of the need for transparency and equity. A school board chairperson said:

> *"If we had clear guidelines, more people would participate because they would know what is expected of them and how to get involved."*

This perspective reflects the desire for equity and procedural justice among community members. Abdirahman et al. (2017) emphasized that effective community participation depends not only on opportunity but also on people's

perception of the process—whether it is fair, transparent, and respectful. When people feel the process is biased or controlled by a few, their motivation to participate diminishes, threatening the sustainability of projects.

Further, Hakim (2020) underscored the importance of school committees functioning not only as advisory or supportive bodies but also as instruments for promoting fairness and accountability within community projects. Where such structures are weak or merely symbolic, trust erodes, and engagement declines.

4.3 Factors Affecting Community Participation in School Projects

4.3.1 Economic Barriers

One of the most significant factors hindering active community participation, particularly in the area studied, was economic constraints. Many community members were unable to contribute financially or invest time in school projects due to poverty. A ward councilor mentioned:

> *"Most people here are struggling to make ends meet. Asking them to contribute financially to school projects is often too much, especially when their own families are in need."*

Similarly, another participant said:

> *"While we have a lot of willing hands, people are too busy trying to survive. For example, many families rely on farming, and school work doesn't always take priority over earning a living."*

This reinforces the idea that economic hardship often restricts the level of involvement a community can offer, as basic survival becomes the priority over voluntary school participation.

These findings align with Nestory (2020), who found that financial constraints were a major barrier to participation in school projects in Kasulu District, Tanzania. Likewise, Nyambeke (2016) in Kilosa District observed that 67% of parents were not actively engaged in their children's education due to economic difficulties, among other challenges.

Additionally, Arkorful et al. (2023) in Ghana identified resource limitations and competing interests as major hindrances to effective community involvement. Similarly, Kinyata and Abiodun (2020) underscored how poverty limits the ability of community members to meaningfully engage in development projects, perpetuating exclusion and inequality.

Thus, addressing economic challenges through strategies such as financial incentives, food-for-work schemes, or aligning participation efforts with farming seasons could help improve involvement in school initiatives.

4.3.2 Awareness and Communication Gaps

Another significant barrier to participation was the lack of awareness and poor communication between school management and the community. Many participants felt that they were not well informed about the projects or their roles. One of the ward education officers explained:

> *"The community doesn't always know about upcoming projects until they are already underway. If there were more communication, maybe they would feel more included and motivated to help."*

One of the heads of school echoed this sentiment:

> *"We try to communicate, but there is no regular platform for engagement. Parents and community members often only hear about projects when they are asked for money or materials."*

This lack of ongoing communication and engagement prevents many from feeling that their involvement is truly meaningful or impactful. Effective community engagement relies on consistent communication and awareness-building efforts.

This reflects broader concerns found in Mgalla (2017), who reported that limited awareness and lack of direct involvement in decision-making were major challenges to sustaining school projects in Kibaha District. Lucas (2019) in Musoma District Council also highlighted the lack of community understanding and poor communication mechanisms as key factors hindering meaningful participation.

These barriers can be overcome through more interactive platforms, regular meetings, community sensitization efforts, and effective feedback mechanisms that keep stakeholders informed and engaged from the planning stage.

4.3.3 Perceptions of Responsibility

The study also found that many community members viewed school projects as the government's responsibility, which reduced their willingness to participate. Another participant shared:

> *"Some people think that the government should handle everything, and they don't see why they should get involved in something that is 'officially' the government's job."*

Similarly, one of the school board chairperson said:

> *"The perception here is that since the government is funding these projects, it's up to them to ensure their success. People feel less inclined to contribute unless necessary."*

This sentiment reflects the lack of ownership felt by some members of the community, which directly impacts their level of participation and commitment to sustaining projects.

These views reveal a lack of ownership among some community members, which limits their sense of accountability and commitment. According to Hassan (2022), in many developing countries, community participation in decision-making and implementation of government-led projects is limited, as state control often overshadows grassroots ownership.

Furthermore, Boadi (2021) noted that in Ghana, bureaucracy and centralization often create a disconnect between communities and public projects, reducing the sense of shared responsibility. Mohamed (2023) similarly emphasized that low community engagement negatively affects the sustainability of school projects in Temeke Municipal, Tanzania.

Therefore, fostering a sense of shared ownership through inclusive planning processes and civic education could enhance local commitment and participation in school development efforts.

4.3.4 Role of Leadership and Trust

Despite these barriers, areas with strong school leadership reported higher levels of community involvement. Active leaders worked to foster trust and engagement within the community. A school head noted:

> *"When we involve the community from the start and show them how their contributions make a difference, they are more willing to participate. It's all about building trust."*

A ward education officer also emphasized the importance of transparency and trust:

> *"When the community trusts the school leadership, they're more willing to join efforts. But if they feel that the leadership is not transparent or accountable, they pull back."*

This supports the idea that strong leadership and transparent communication are essential for fostering community participation, as leaders help to build trust and demonstrate the tangible benefits of involvement.

These observations align with Kinunga (2023), who found that effective community participation contributed to improved student performance, teacher accountability, and overall school development in Chalinze District. Similarly, Maige (2023) and Mrangu (2018) emphasized the importance of leadership transparency and oversight in improving project outcomes.

Moreover, Opiyo and Ng'eno (2024) noted that public participation structures though not very strong do influence project sustainability, especially when leadership fosters clear channels for inclusion and accountability.

Transparent, inclusive, and accountable leadership is therefore pivotal to creating trust and sustaining community participation, as it reassures citizens that their efforts are respected and impactful.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

5.1 Conclusion

Community participation in sustaining school projects varies by locality, with urban areas like Morogoro Municipality offering financial support, while rural districts such as Kilosa and Gairo contribute labor and materials. However, participation remains mostly passive and limited to consultation, with minimal input in planning and decision-making. Informal practices, personal ties, and leadership influence guide involvement, raising concerns about fairness, inclusivity, and transparency. Economic hardship, poor communication, limited awareness, weak leadership, and the belief that school projects are solely a government responsibility hinder engagement, while strong, inclusive leadership fosters greater trust and participation.

5.2 Recommendations of the Study

The study recommends establishing formal structures to actively involve community members in all stages of school projects, ensuring transparency, inclusivity, and fairness. Effective communication strategies and leadership training should be prioritized to build trust and improve coordination. Addressing economic barriers through support mechanisms and shifting the perception that school projects are solely a government responsibility are also essential to enhance active participation and promote long-term sustainability.

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*Corresponding author, gonjoboniphace18@gmail.com