

## **Stakeholders' Participation and the Viability of Public Projects in Bayelsa State, Nigeria**

**Thompson Olusegun Ewata**

Department of Linguistics & Nigerian languages  
University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Nigeria  
(corresponding author)

toewata@uat.edu.ng; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6251-0979>

**Yimovie Sakue-Collins**

Department of Political Science  
University of Africa, Toru-Orua, Nigeria  
International Doctoral Program in Asia-Pacific Studies  
National Chengchi University, Taiwan  
yimovie.sakue@uat.edu.ng; <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6803-4213>

**Epem Ubodiom**

Department of History  
Isaac Adaka Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Nigeria  
v1conscience@gmail.com

**Edoni Harold Harcourt**

Department of Political Science  
Isaac Adaka Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Nigeria  
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### **Abstract**

*The involvement of the key stakeholders (direct beneficiaries/end users, local government authorities, etc.) of any project, at whatever level, is a key factor to the project's success. How does the level of stakeholder participation impact the success and sustainability of public projects in Bayelsa State? This study employed an eclectic approach that involved a transdisciplinary approach to examine the intersection between communication and sustainability of public projects as well as a mixed-methods approach which entailed quantitative survey and qualitative interviews of project stakeholders in Sagbama Town, in the Sagbama Local Government of Bayelsa State. This paper focuses on the 75,000 Litre Solar Water Plant Project in Sagbama and utilises the quantitative survey (i.e. structured questionnaire) to explore the nexus between communication, collaboration and sustainability of public projects in the state. With data obtained from forty (40) stakeholders – contractors, government officials, community leaders, and community based organisations (CBOs) – the study found that the level of stakeholders' involvement in project planning, decision-making, and monitoring are key factors of a project's viability which is gauged by features as community involvement in project conception and execution, project completion rates, community ownership, and long-term functionality. The study also discovered that poor communication, limited resource allocation, and a lack of clear institutional mechanisms for engagement are part of the different barriers to meaningful stakeholder participation. The study recommends inclusive stakeholder engagement, collaborative project planning, capacity*

*building and training, transparency and accountability amongst others for strengthening stakeholder participation frameworks and enhancing the sustainability of public projects in Bayelsa state in particular and other resource-rich but developmentally-challenged areas of the world.*

**Keywords:** *Bayelsa State, public projects, communication, sustainability, stakeholders' participation*

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## **1. Introduction**

Public projects are a fundamental tool for social development and infrastructure growth, particularly in resource-dependent regions such as Bayelsa State, Nigeria. However, many such projects often face challenges in terms of long-term sustainability and viability due to poor communication, lack of community involvement, and insufficient stakeholder engagement. Behind every venture, project, initiative, intervention, or effort are people (clients, staff, members of the public, government, and agencies of government, regulators, the media, suppliers, investors/financiers, nearby businesses, and residents), summed up as, stakeholders. Stakeholders are people who can be impacted by the project's decisions, directly or indirectly. They are people that may be affected by, have an influence on, or see themselves as affected by a decision, activity, or outcome of a project, program, or portfolio (Miller & Oliver, 2015). The stakeholders may also include those who, although not personally impacted, together with their families, friends, and connections but have a significant interest in the project for philosophical, political, or scholarly reasons (Ezeh, et al., 2024). Stakeholders could be internal or external and entail all of the people and teams who the venture or project will involve or affect. Understanding the stakeholders and their concerns (stakeholder analysis – process through which various stakeholders are determined and their significance, influence, interests, or impact on a project or business decision is evaluated) from the inception of a project is part of the due diligence that project managers must perform (Product Plan, 2024).

Other analysts add that stakeholder analysis is the identification of individuals, groups, and organisations with a specific interest or stake in an issue, organization, or initiative. Organisations in all sectors can better understand their stakeholders and maximize their collaboration by using stakeholder analysis as a critical tool (Eversole, 2018). To Ketokivi & Mahoney (2022), stakeholders are constituents with great deal at stake because they have made big bets on organisational outcomes as a result of their involvement in the organisation. With stakeholder analysis, there is a better understanding of interests and expectations of various stakeholders as there is control to stakeholders' risk, get backing from stakeholders, improve decision-making, align resources optimally, boost credibility and project results (Grégoire, 2024; Rabinowitz, 2024). The purpose of stakeholder analysis, according to Ketokivi & Mahoney (2022), is to determine which stakeholders have the greatest stake in the outcome and how to best secure their cooperation by putting the necessary governance measures in place. Stakeholder analysis helps organisations understand social landscapes and influence practical outcomes. It identifies relevant stakeholders, their characteristics, and influence over outcomes, ensuring policy initiatives, business activities, and projects are acceptable and supported by relevant parties (Eversole, 2018).

It is important to understand that stakeholders have their own aims and objectives; make important decisions that might affect the way businesses/projects operate; have lives that the decisions made by an organisation could impact; are worse off physical or financial if situations

change; are a part of a larger group of people who are impacted by actions and developments etc. As a result of this, businesses and governments often consider their stakeholders when making decisions to ensure they align with the stakeholders' goals (Hendricks, 2023; Indeed, 2024). As a rule, it must be understood that the success of any project or venture depends on the engagement of the critical stakeholders. Not factoring this into the scheme of things have resulted in tremendous socioeconomic and political repercussions that threaten human existence (Barasa, et al., 2021; Prebanić Vukomanović, 2023). It is the duty of any government or business concern, that is progressive and focused on genuine development, irrespective of the busine/project's nature or purpose, to identify, understand, and skilfully handle relationships with stakeholders who have a stake in the successful completion of the project or enterprise (Njue, et al. 2021; Wrike, 2024). This should be done through methodical identification, evaluation, preparation, and execution of initiatives intended to sway stakeholders that analysts called stakeholders engagement (Management, 2019). Constructive engagement of the critical stakeholders helps empower people, make long-lasting changes, build relationships, build a better organisation, society and environment, increase success, educate, etc. (Dwivedi & Dwivedi, 2021; Zikargae, et al., 2022).

There are different projects in any community funded by different means; some by the community's self-efforts, some by religious bodies, others by philanthropic organisations and individuals; business concerns like local and multinationals and some by the different tiers of government. The concern of this study are those projects that are publicly funded – the projects that are initiated, overseen, or managed by one or more publicly funded organisations (Kassel, 2016). Public projects – one owned, funded and operated by the government (or publicly funded organisations) for the use and benefit of the public (Gasik, 2016) are the bloodline of any community, and constitute a significant sector of the economy in the majority of developed nations not to mention developing ones (Volden & Welde, 2022). They are established avenue for the movement, distribution, gathering, and exchange of commodities, services, or individuals (such as pipelines, roads, and bridges) (Prebanić & Vukomanović, 2023). They are catalysts of change and development for the local population and are essential for societal growth (Matu, et al., 2020; Monroe & Waggoner, 2024).

Public projects include:

- public buildings (municipal buildings, schools, hospitals, etc.)
- transport infrastructure (roads, railroads, bridges, ports, airports, etc.)
- public spaces (parks, beaches, public squares, etc.)
- public services (water supply, sewage treatment, electrical grid, dams, etc.)
- other long-term physical assets and facilities

As public projects have different meanings to different people with a multidimensional concept that is directly dependent on context, there is no one size fits all approach to project success (Castro, et al., 2021). The success of any project can have different meanings to different people based on their perceptions (Baker, et al., 1997). A project is considered a success when all key stakeholders are highly satisfied with the outcome (Prabhakar, 2008). On the other hand, Miller & Oliver, M. (2015) state that rather than a complete failure, it is likely that many of projects are "installed" as opposed to "implemented," which prevents the potential benefits from being completely achieved. Despite their specific purpose, public projects typically aim to provide short and long-term benefits to various stakeholders. They are implemented for societal and taxpayer benefit, can face challenges such as unclear purpose, unclear benefits,

lack of market trade, accountability issues, and less transparent governance. The government's funding terms may also reduce stakeholders' incentives for socially beneficial solutions (Volden & Welde, 2022).

Criticisms against public projects have arisen due to socio-political and economic factors include projects' failure to satisfy stakeholders or achieve planned objectives, incorrect project selection, underestimation of costs, and overestimation of benefits (Brunet & Aubry, 2016; Nguyen, et al., 2021). Thus, engaging in public projects entails each project is viewed as a process which needs to be meticulously planned, executed, and evaluated to ensure that it accomplish its objectives and benefit the general population. Viewing public projects as a process is a novel strategy that helps resolve implementation fears and problems for more responsive and successful projects (Njue, et al., 2021). Engaging all stakeholders in the process will enhance the overall effectiveness, foster community support, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the community context (Hendricks, 2023; Rabinowitz, 2024). It is a strategic process for organisations to effectively communicate with and inform their existing stakeholders, using available resources and identifying key stakeholders. It helps to considers stakeholder needs, fostering trust, confidence, buy-in for key initiatives manage risks and conflicts that can mitigate against uncertainty and resistance to change (Sedmak, 2024).

From the foregoing, the value of stakeholders' participation in public project appears uncontested, the concern however is the state of stakeholders' engagement in different societies and how it impacts on public projects. How does the level of stakeholder participation impact the success and sustainability of public projects in Bayelsa State? What are the main barriers and challenges to effective stakeholder participation in public projects in Bayelsa State? This paper explores how effective communication and active participation from stakeholders can enhance the sustainability of public projects, using the 75,000-litre Solar Water Plant Project in Sabama as a case study. To do this, this paper is organised into six sections, the first is this introduction. This is followed by a brief conceptual framework which situates the study in communication as pivotal to stakeholders' involvement in public projects. The third looks at stakeholders in public project and the latter's viability, while the fourth section addresses methodological concerns. The fifth section presents and discusses the findings of the study, while the sixth concludes the study.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

Communication plays a pivotal role in the development and implementation of public projects. It can be verbal, nonverbal, or paraverbal and is often the medium through which acceptance, rejection, or ambivalence about public projects is expressed. The current research adopts a transdisciplinary approach, combining insights from project management, communication studies, and sustainable development. The key argument is that integrating stakeholder participation into every phase of the project—planning, decision-making, and execution—enhances the long-term success and sustainability of such projects. Scholars such as Fraser & Restrepo-Estrada (1998) have demonstrated that communication for development fosters a participatory approach that allows communities to be involved in the decision-making process. Participatory communication has proven to be essential for enhancing project ownership, reducing resistance, and promoting transparency (Servaes, 2020). Stakeholder participation goes beyond informing or consulting with communities—it includes ensuring that they are active participants throughout the project lifecycle (Ezeh *et al.*, 2024).

Stakeholder participation is crucial for ensuring that projects reflect the genuine needs and desires of the community. In this context, stakeholders include not only the government but also local residents, contractors, community-based organizations (CBOs), and private entities. Their input during the planning and implementation phases of a project can provide insights that reduce operational risks and anticipate potential obstacles. Empirical studies support this view. A study by Munang *et al.*, (2014) emphasises the value of inclusive participation in ensuring that public projects are designed and executed in line with local needs, which is particularly vital in developing regions such as Bayelsa. Furthermore, effective communication helps establish trust between stakeholders, which in turn enhances the viability and long-term success of the project. Communication enables stakeholders to voice their opinions, contribute ideas, and engage in dialogue, which fosters ownership and enhances project sustainability.

### 3. Stakeholders in Public Projects

The success or otherwise of any public project depends to a large extent on the whole stakeholders who are vital elements the project's lifecycle (Waris, et al., 2022; Prebanić & Vukomanović, 2023) whose need and interest are ever changing (Njue, et al., 2021). The public projects stakeholders are important to the projects not only because to guarantee that different viewpoints are taken into consideration but also to improve public trust, accountability, and transparency. Stakeholders in public projects are grouped into two types: direct (internal) - can be divided into the demand side (e.g., sponsors, clients of the client) and the supply side (e.g., contractors, designers) and indirect (externa) – can be divided into private (e.g., the local community) and public (e.g., regulators, local authorities) otherwise called (Prebanić, *et al.*, 2023; Winch, 2012) stakeholders. Internal stakeholders also called primary stakeholders or beneficiaries of the endeavour (investors, owners, directors, managers, and employees) stand to be immediately impacted by an agency, institution, or organization's efforts or actions, either favourably or unfavourably. they are people who the organisation itself hired. The external stakeholders (customers and local communities, suppliers, and various government or financial institutions) on the other hand, though have a stake in the organisation but must be taken into consideration. They are not immediately impacted by its performance or ability to make decisions. External stakeholders are not part of the organisation, unlike the internal stakeholders with direct priority theirs is secondary, their influence is indirect, and the information available to them is a public one (Johnivan, 2023; Rabinowitz, 2024; Zaichenko, 2024).

There are diverse stakeholders' interest in an organisation or project. The interest includes: economics, social change, work, time, environment, physical health, safety and security, mental health and so on (Rabinowitz, 2024). We may further divide the stakeholders to those general affected (positively or negatively) with the venture or project and the key stakeholder. The key stakeholders include:

government officials and policy makers: legislators (local, state and federal), governors, mayors, city/town councillors, selectmen, etc, local board members, state/federal/local agencies, policy makers; the media; people in positions that convey influence: clergy members, doctors, CEOs, etc.; Community leaders; those who have a stake in how an endeavour turns out, etc (Rabinowitz, 2024).

Stakeholders involved in a public project is important for various reasons. In the opinion of Watt (2014, p. 38), “Key stakeholders can make or break the success of a project. Even if all the deliverables are met and the objectives are satisfied, if your key stakeholders aren’t happy, nobody’s happy”. The importance of involving the key stakeholders includes, among others, to ensures that diverse perspectives and expertise are considered in decision-making processes; promotes transparency and responsibility by involving stakeholders in its planning and execution; and helps in fostering public trust, backing, ownership, and legitimacy for the project (Acquisition International, 2024). Others include, to promotes a sense of ownership and legitimacy by keeping stakeholders informed about project goals, progress, and impact (Watt, 2014); provides invaluable expertise about the project; aids in identifying potential risks; helps in increasing the likelihood of success (KissflowInc, 2023); and assists in resolving issues and fostering trust between various groups (Ezeh *et al.*, 2024). The contention is that it is essential for reducing conflict and promoting collaboration, and essential for reaching all-encompassing sustainability objectives that include aspects related to the environment, society, and economy (Bazimya, 2023).

Moreover, since studies are not done in a vacuum, it is proper to consider some previous works done in the area of stakeholders’ participation and link them to the present so as to “help situate this study in the league of studies before it” (Ewata, 2024). In a study that aims to identify the factors and obstacles that hinder construction project performance in Nigeria through literature review, (Unegbu *et al.*, 2023) list ineffective stakeholder management as one of the main factors (which include: poor project planning and scheduling, inadequate risk management, and corruption) contributing to poor project performance in Nigeria. Awhefeada, *et al.* (2023) in their study that proposes a practical method for achieving a sustainable environment in Nigeria through enhanced public participation and promoting sustainable development and cooperation among indigenous people; found out that Nigeria's current legal and regulatory framework for environmental protection contradicts the idea of enhanced public participation. In another study, which explores the role of collaborative governance and project community stake holding in infrastructural governance in developing countries, drawing on Nigeria's experience, (Ashade & Mutereko, 2022) submit that while community engagement is crucial for project survival, conventional public participation mechanisms do not seem to positively affect community groups' trust in project handlers. Oroniyi, *et al.* (2024) in a case study that evaluates the involvement and participation of stakeholders in mass housing development projects in Abuja. The study underscores the significance of enhancing stakeholder engagement and participation in addressing Abuja's housing issues, advocating for transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in future PPP housing projects. In a study that investigates the impact of stakeholders' involvement on the performance of a road construction project in Nigeria that adopted a mixed design research approach through questionnaires, direct observation and oral interview, (Nnadi & Oyama, 2023), 40% of the study’s respondents strongly believe that the performance of road construction is significantly influenced by the proper involvement of stakeholders.

#### **4. Case Study and Methodology**

Sagbama Town is the headquarters of the Sagbama Local Government Area, one of the three local government from which the name Bayelsa was derived from. The name Bayelsa is an acronym for Brass, Yenagoa, and Sagbama local government areas in the old Rivers State from

where the state was created. Bayelsa State is part of the River Niger delta basin or Niger Delta region of Nigeria, with three quarters of its landmass covered in water. (NigeriaGalleria, 2021; Bayelsa State Government, 2024; Brinkhoff, 2024). The Solar Water Plant Project in Sagbama, initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) through the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) initiative, serves as a useful case study. The project was designed to provide a sustainable source of clean water to the Sagbama community, which historically had faced water scarcity issues even though it is surrounded by water. While the project was technically sound and fulfilled its immediate objectives, issues of long-term sustainability remain due to insufficient local engagement.

## **Method**

### ***Sampling technique and Sample size***

Given the nature of the study, this research adopts purposive sampling technique to select participants who are directly involved in public projects within the study area. Purposive sampling allows for the intentional selection of individuals based on their knowledge, roles, and relevance to the research topic. The respondents include contractors, local government officials, community leaders, and representatives of community-based organisations (CBOs). This is drawn with understanding from existing literature as critical partners in projects cited in specific locale. The study has a total sample size of 40 respondents, distributed among four key stakeholder groups as follows: contractors – 8 respondents, local government officials – 8 respondents, community leaders – 12 respondents, and CBO representatives – 12 respondents, representing 20%, 20%, 30%, and 30% respectively.

### ***Data collection instrument and Analysis***

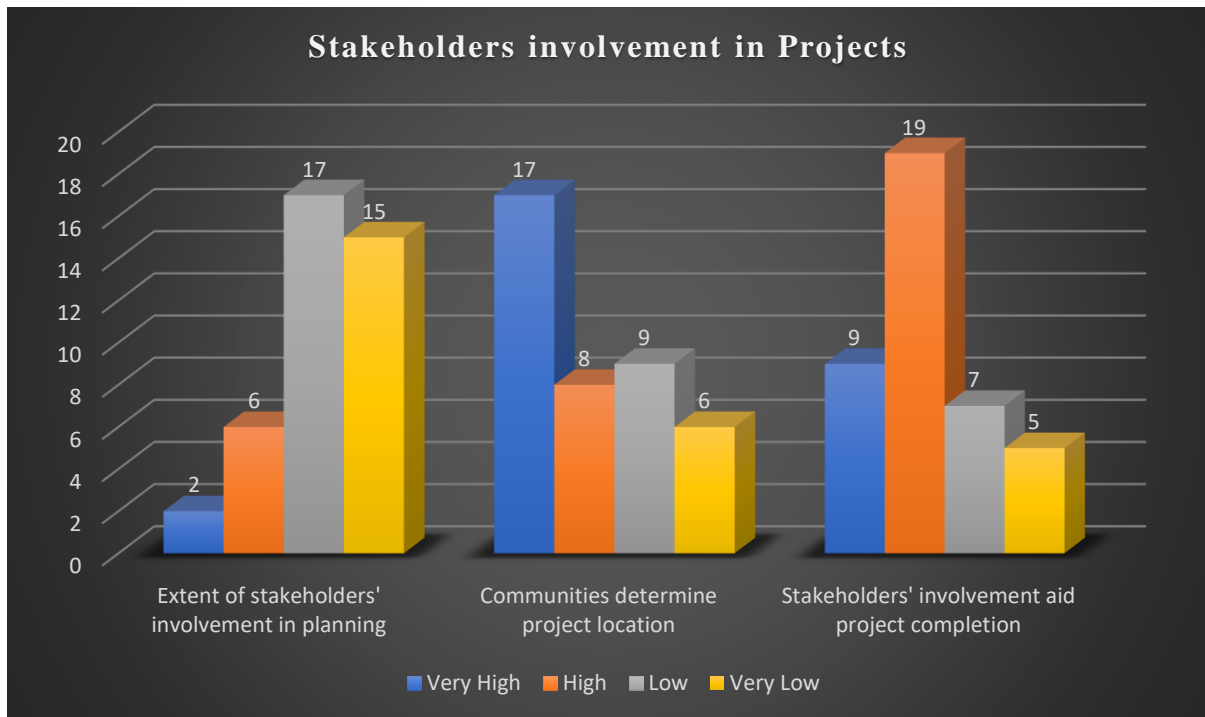
The primary tool for data collection is a questionnaire designed using a 4-point Likert scale to gauge respondents' opinions on various aspects of community participation and project sustainability. The Likert scale ranges from very high to very low, and very effective to not effective, as the case requires. The questionnaire comprises structured questions that address the following key areas, namely extent of stakeholder involvement in project planning and execution, perceived benefits of community participation in public projects, challenges encountered in collaboration among stakeholders, and effectiveness of communication between the government, contractors, and communities. The survey is supplemented by follow-up interviews with select participants to gain deeper insights into the quantitative data gathered through the questionnaire (this is outside the purview of the current paper). Data gathered were organised graphically, analysed using simple descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequency distribution, and their implications discussed accordingly.

## **5. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion**

In this section, the data gathered from structured questionnaire are presented graphically and discussed. Data are presented according to the category of stakeholders, beginning with generalised questions cutting across all categories. The similarity or related nature of themes notwithstanding, questions for each category were designed with the target respondents in

mind. What follows are five graphs showing responses to the subject-matter and discussions emanating from the findings and their implications.

**Figure 4.1:** General Questions (All Stakeholders)



**Source:** Field survey, 2024

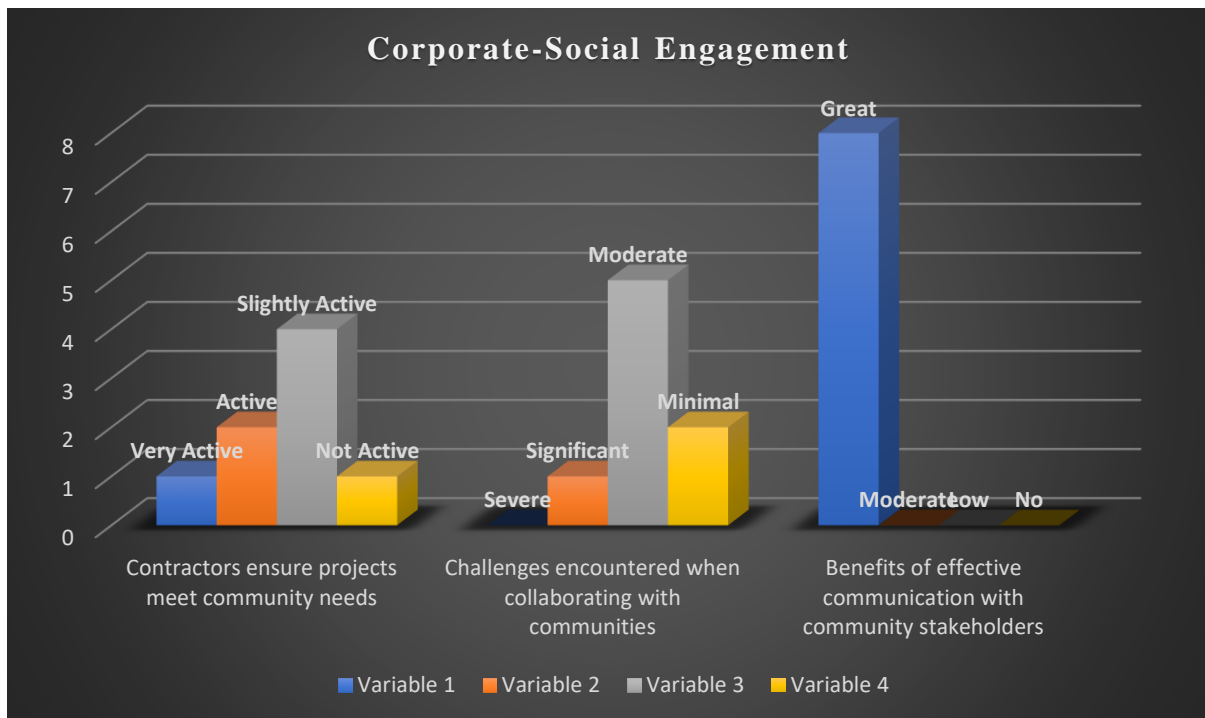
The graph shows respondents' position on the extent of stakeholders' involvement in planning of public projects, with 2, 6, 17, and 15 respondents representing 5% for "very high", 15% for "high", 42.5% for "low", and 37.5% for "very low", respectively. The combined "low" and "very low" responses (80%) indicate that stakeholder involvement in project planning is generally minimal. Only 20% of the respondents rated involvement as "very high" or "high." This suggests a significant gap in communication channels during the early stages of project planning. For whether communities determine project location, the graph shows the distribution of responses as 17, 8, 9, and 6 respondents representing 42.5% for "very high", 20% for "high", 22.5% for "low", and 15% for "very low", respectively. Here, 62.5% of respondents indicated a "very high" or "high" degree of community input in determining project locations, showing that community participation in this specific aspect is relatively robust. However, the 37.5% who rated it "low" or "very low" indicate that there is still room for improvement. As for whether stakeholders' involvement aids project completion, the graph shows the distribution as 9, 19, 7, and 5 respondents representing 22.5% for "very high", 47.5% for "high", 17.5% for "low", and 12.5% for "very low", respectively. Here, 70% of respondents rated stakeholder involvement as "high" or "very high" in aiding project completion. This shows that when stakeholders are involved, it significantly improves project outcomes. However, 30% feel their involvement has less impact, which could reflect gaps in communication or unclear roles for stakeholders.



## Discussion

Lack of involvement in planning or low engagement of stakeholders in the planning phase may result in projects that are misaligned with the community’s needs, leading to issues of project abandonment or inefficiency. According to Sillitoe (2017), when stakeholders are excluded from early planning stages, there is a loss of local knowledge, which often results in project failure. It is crucial to adopt participatory planning processes to harness local insights and ensure that projects are relevant and sustainable. On Community participation in determining the location of projects, relatively high level of community involvement in selecting project locations can contribute to more effective and contextually appropriate project implementation. As Kane (2018) argues, involving communities in location decisions promotes ownership and increases the likelihood of project sustainability. However, with 37.5% still rating this aspect as "low" or "very low," efforts to broaden and deepen community participation are necessary to optimise project success. This is corroborated by the fact that 70% of respondents agree that stakeholder involvement positively influences project completion underscores the importance of maintaining open communication channels throughout the project lifecycle. Effective stakeholder engagement ensures accountability and can lead to the timely and successful conclusion of projects. Mansuri and Rao (2013) highlight that projects with strong stakeholder involvement tend to be more resilient and adaptable to local challenges.

**Figure 4.2:** Contractors



**Source:** Field survey, 2024

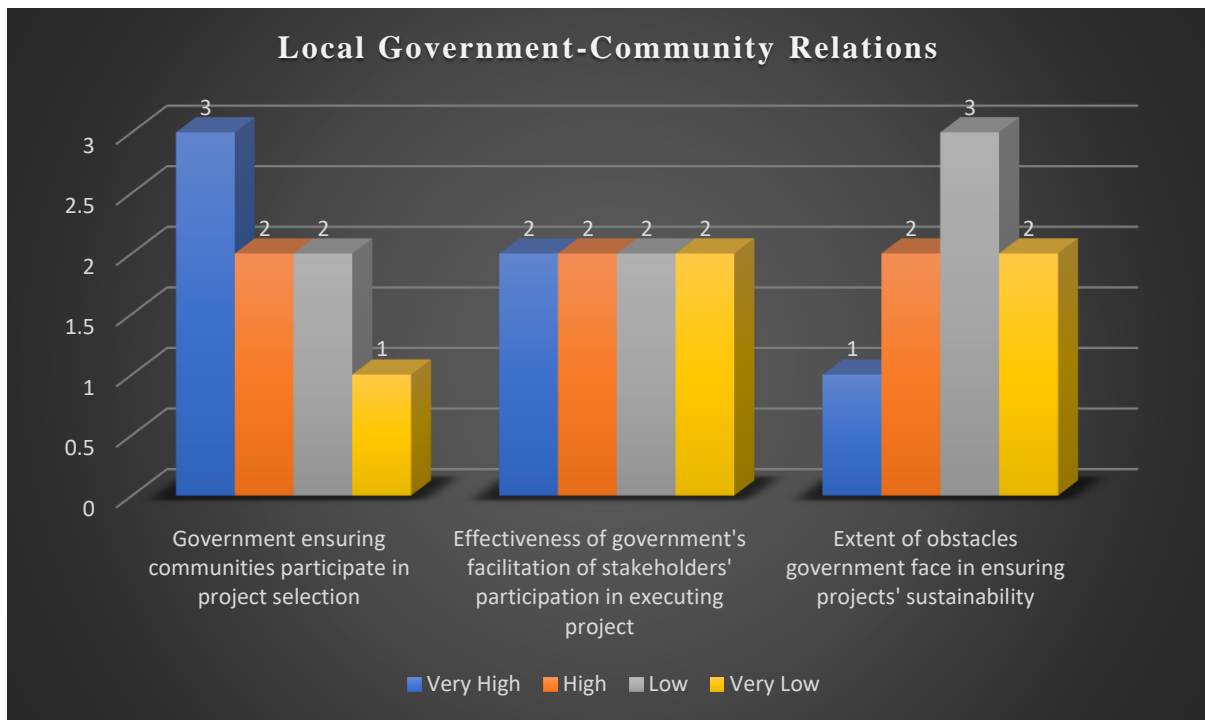
The graph shows how contractors respond to issues of engagement with community stakeholders’, from communities’ need, to collaboration, and benefits of effective communication. Each row has concern has different variables, highlighted by the number of responses in each case.

## Discussion

The first row, i.e. communities' need, shows that the perception of the community regarding contractors' effectiveness in meeting their needs is mixed, with the majority (4 respondents) falling under "Slightly Agree", indicating some level of dissatisfaction. This could reflect the inadequacy in addressing the specific local requirements, leading to potential mismatches between the projects executed and the community's actual needs. According to Jones et al. (2021), inadequate engagement and feedback mechanisms between contractors and communities often result in poorly tailored projects that fail to address key priorities. The second row, i.e. contractors' collaboration with communities, outlines the challenges encountered by contractors or government officials when collaborating with the communities on a continuum with "severe" and "minimal" as extremes. The majority of respondents (5) fall under "Moderate", indicating less challenges is encountered during community collaboration, with another 2 respondents representing "minimal" challenge. Only 1 respondent placed this under "significant", highlighting noticeable difficulties in rare cases. This suggests that challenges in community engagement, such as communication barriers and mistrust, are less prevalent where there is corporate-social engagement. Research by Mertens & Smith (2020) shows that the inability to engage communities effectively leads to friction and delays in public projects, contributing to inefficiencies and additional costs.

The third row, i.e. benefits of effective communication, reflects overwhelming consensus on the benefits of effective communication with community stakeholders, as all responses (8) fall under "great", representing a very high level of agreement. This data suggests that all respondents recognise the value of communication in ensuring project success, which aligns with current research indicating that well-structured communication channels reduce misunderstandings, increase project transparency, and foster cooperation (Aguilera & Hayes, 2021). The data reinforces the idea that communication plays a pivotal role in public project success. The mixed perceptions on whether contractors meet community needs highlight potential gaps in communication and participation strategies. Communities must feel their needs are acknowledged and addressed, which can be facilitated through participatory mechanisms. Stakeholders generally recognise the importance of communication, but challenges in collaboration indicate existing communication methods may be inefficient.

**Figure 4.3:** Local Government Officials



**Source:** Field survey, 2024

The graph shows the relationship between local government and communities in terms of ensuring communities participate in project selection, execution, and project's sustainability. First, three (3) respondents' rate this as very high, which indicates 37.5%, 2 or 25% of respondents find the government's involvement in ensuring community participation as high, while 2 or 25% rate it low, and 1 or 12.5% feel that community involvement in project selection is very low. Second, on the effectiveness of government's facilitation of stakeholders' participation in executing public projects, 2 out of 8 or 25% of respondents rate this very high. The same is the case for high, low and very low, all with 2 or 25% respectively. The equal spread of response not only reflect divided opinions, but also suggestive that the effectiveness of government facilitation is very low. Third, on the extent of obstacles local government encounter regarding sustainability of public projects where communities are carried along, 3 or 37.5% (low) and 2 or 25% (very low) think the obstacles are moderately low, compared to 3 or 37.5% who think there is significant obstacles where there is paucity of engagement.

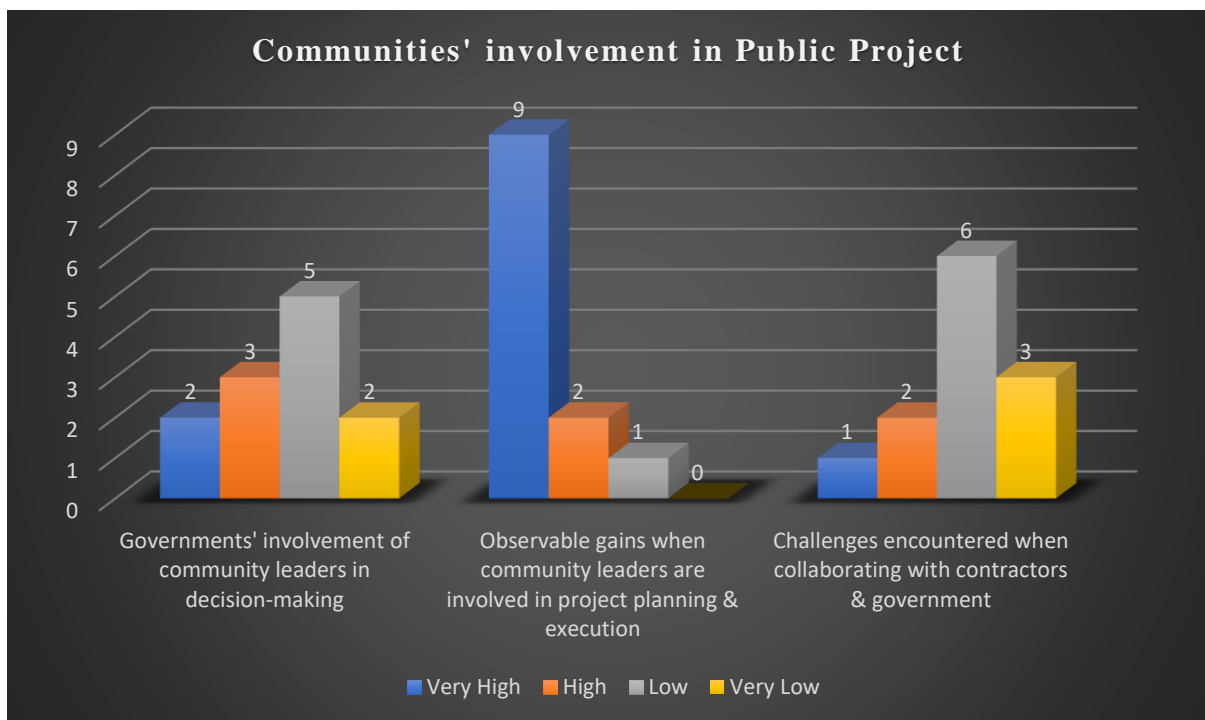
**Discussion:**

This shows a fairly mixed response, with only about 37.5% strongly agreeing that the government ensures community participation in project selection, which aligns with research that highlights the importance of local engagement for project sustainability (Awortwi, 2012). Scholars emphasise that local input during the planning phase fosters a sense of ownership, which is vital for the long-term success of public projects (Ostrom, 1996). On the effectiveness of government's facilitation of stakeholders' participation in executing public projects, the divided opinions suggest there are significant gaps in how the government facilitates stakeholders' roles in execution. Effective participation in project execution is key to ensuring

that projects are adapted to local conditions and needs. This inconsistency in responses may indicate that while some efforts are being made, they are uneven or inadequate across different projects or areas. On the extent of obstacles local government encounter regarding sustainability of public projects where communities are carried along, while 37.5% believe that obstacles to sustainability are low, the remainder sees significant challenges. Research by Mansuri and Rao (2012) emphasises that inadequate community participation or misalignment between government objectives and local needs can be critical obstacles to sustainability.

The results show that the government's role in engaging communities and stakeholders in public projects is perceived with variability. The mixed ratings suggest that while some communities or stakeholders may experience significant government support in project selection and execution, others do not. Studies indicate that community participation not only improves project relevance but also enhances sustainability, particularly in rural or underserved areas. The relatively high percentage of respondents who see obstacles to project sustainability as low may reflect areas where government and community collaboration is more effective. However, there are still substantial portions of the population reporting that community engagement, especially in the execution phase, is inadequate. This supports findings in recent development literature, which argue that projects lacking local ownership and input tend to be less sustainable (Jain, 2021).

**Figure 4.4:** Community Leaders



**Source:** Field survey, 2024

The graph shows that only 50% of respondents rated the involvement of community leaders as either "very high" or "high." The other half rated the involvement as "low" or "very low," suggesting that the government's engagement of community leaders in decision-making processes is inconsistent or limited in scope. This points to a potential gap in governance

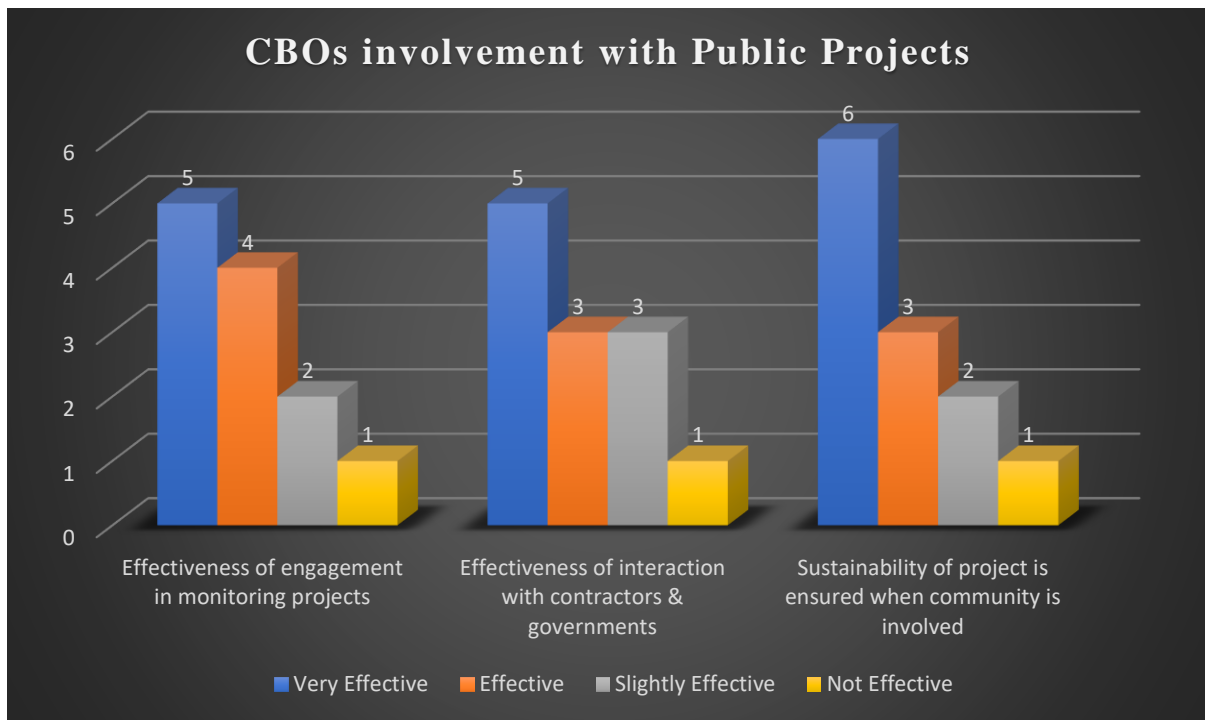
practices that may be limiting the community's ability to effectively contribute to the decision-making processes that influence project design and implementation. According to Mansuri and Rao (2012), limited community involvement in decision-making often leads to a mismatch between project outcomes and local needs, ultimately reducing both the project's viability and sustainability.

On observable gains when community leaders are actively involved from project concept to gestation, 90% of respondents rated the gains from community leaders' involvement in planning and execution as "very high" or "high." This overwhelming support for community involvement highlights the value of local leadership in ensuring projects' success. The implication is that when community leaders are included, projects are more likely to meet the needs of the population, leading to improved outcomes and sustainability. Several studies support this, indicating that community participation fosters a sense of ownership, which is crucial for long-term project sustainability (Awortwi, 2021; Jain, 2021). On the challenges of community collaborating with contractors and government, a majority of respondents (60%) believe that challenges when collaborating with contractors and the government are not overwhelming, as they rated the challenges as "low". And, when taken together with 30% who rated the challenges as "very low," this indicates that while there are occasional difficulties in collaboration, it is generally smooth. This could involve issues like inadequate communication, delayed decision-making, or misalignment between community priorities and government/contractor objectives. As noted by Chambers (2007), collaborative partnerships in project execution require clear communication and alignment of interests, and any misalignment in this regard can be easily addressed at the level of collaboration.

## **Discussion**

The findings suggest that involving community leaders in decision-making processes enhances the relevance of projects to local needs and increases the likelihood of their sustainability. However, the relatively low involvement of leaders in some cases could undermine the success of projects. According to Awortwi (2012), engaging local leaders is essential to tailoring projects to local realities and building community trust, which ultimately leads to better project ownership and outcomes. **Observable Gains from Involvement:** The high percentage of respondents reporting gains when community leaders are involved reflects the importance of community participation in project planning and execution. This aligns with the notion that projects designed with community input tend to have higher acceptance and success rates. Mosse (2005) found that community-driven projects are more likely to be maintained after external agencies withdraw, thus improving their sustainability. **Challenges in Collaboration:** While most respondents felt the challenges in collaborating with contractors and government were minimal, it is essential to address any challenges that arise to ensure smooth operations. Challenges such as miscommunication or conflicting interests can slow down project execution. Tackling these challenges early on in the course of decision-making can prevent long-term project delays and inefficiencies, thereby contributing to both the viability and sustainability of the projects.

**Figure 4.5:** Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) Representatives



**Source:** Field survey, 2024

The data shows that 90% of the respondents believe engagement in monitoring projects is effective to some extent, with half rating it as "very effective." On the effectiveness of interaction between CBOs on the one hand and contractors and government on the other hand, 80% of the respondents rating interaction with contractors and government as effective or very effective, it highlights the importance of clear communication channels for project execution. Also, on sustainability, the graph shows that 90% of respondents believe that project sustainability is significantly enhanced when communities are involved, with 60% of them rating it as "very effective."

### Discussion

In general, the graph reflects the critical role of community engagement in monitoring projects for ensuring project accountability and alignment with community needs. According to Mansuri and Rao (2012), community participation in monitoring enhances transparency, which contributes to project success. When communities are involved in monitoring, they can quickly identify potential issues and work collaboratively with contractors to address them, thus promoting sustainability. The effectiveness of stakeholder interactions aligns with findings in recent studies, on the one hand, which stress that strong communication between communities, contractors, and government is essential for project success and longevity (Mosse, 2005). On the other hand, the 10% who found these interactions ineffective may point to instances of poor coordination or miscommunication, which could undermine the project's viability and long-term success. Similarly, this overwhelming support for community involvement highlights the consensus in the literature that local engagement is a crucial factor in the long-term success of development projects. Involving the community in the project design, implementation, and

maintenance stages leads to greater ownership, which fosters sustainability. Community involvement ensures that projects meet local needs, increasing the likelihood that they will be maintained over time (Awortwi, 2012).

More so, these results highlight the central role of community engagement in the monitoring and execution of public projects, as well as the importance of sustained communication between stakeholders. Studies have emphasised that when communities are actively involved, project sustainability is more likely because the locals take ownership and feel responsible for the project's success (Chambers, 2007). Nevertheless, the presence of respondents who found interactions or engagement to be slightly or not effective also signals challenges in coordination or communication that could undermine project outcomes. Improving these aspects can further strengthen the sustainability of public projects, particularly in contexts where resources for maintenance are limited.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings of this study emphasize the need for increased government efforts to ensure robust community participation, particularly during the selection and execution phases of public projects. Addressing obstacles to sustainability remains a key area for improvement. The uneven distribution of responses across various categories indicates that current processes are inconsistent, necessitating more focused attention to make them uniformly effective. Effective stakeholder communication is crucial for aligning public projects with community needs. According to Owens et al. (2022), incorporating the voices of all stakeholders, including marginalised groups, during the planning phase is essential for project sustainability and gaining community acceptance. Moreover, stakeholder engagement should not be a one-time effort but a continuous process throughout a project's lifecycle to address emerging concerns and maintain alignment with community needs.

The data also highlights the importance of involving local leaders in enhancing the viability and sustainability of public projects. Projects tend to be more successful when leaders are involved in both planning and execution. While challenges in collaboration with contractors and government agencies exist, they are manageable through improved communication and engagement. Greater government interaction with community stakeholders can significantly improve project outcomes and ensure long-term sustainability. To bridge identified gaps, a more structured framework for stakeholder participation is necessary. This includes strengthening communication strategies to involve stakeholders from the planning stages. While stakeholder involvement currently exists in forms such as representative discussions during budget appropriations, this is often insufficient, as many representatives are distanced from their constituencies and lack adequate consultative mechanisms. Additionally, capacity-building programs should be implemented to ensure stakeholders understand their roles in project execution and are equipped to contribute effectively. The study confirms that effective communication and active community involvement are critical to the sustainability of public projects. Local participation fosters accountability and ensures that projects align with the community's needs, enhancing their long-term viability. These findings resonate with broader empirical research, which advocates for participatory governance models in development. Such models underscore the importance of inclusive decision-making processes, which are vital for successful and sustainable public projects.

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