Community-Led Project Initiation as a Catalyst for Sustainable Clean Water Solutions in Ruhango District, Rwanda

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Abstract

Participation by the community during the initiation stage helps in the identification of stakeholders, analysis of local power relations, and dealing with inequalities. This paper examines the influence of this stage on the sustainability of potable water projects within Ruhango District in Rwanda. Water projects are said to be successful where goals between stakeholders and the needs of the community members are met; therefore, such projects must be relevant and legitimate, sustained over the long term through early involvement of the members. It adopted an integrated methods approach in which data were collected through the use of questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interviews with key informants from 398 households and key stakeholders at district levels, including district water officers, private water company operators, and community leaders. Results indicate that a high level of participation by the community, particularly through local leaders, ensures a rise in ownership and, therefore, assures the success of water projects. Areas that still need more openness concern financial decision-making and site selection processes so that there is full community support. Therefore, the study concludes that continued and inclusive community engagement during the initiation phase is critical to the long-term sustainability of water projects in Ruhango District.

Key Words: *Community participation, Project initiation, Sustainability, Potable water projects, Ruhango District*

Introduction

Most Sub-Saharan African nations have developed several clean water projects to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals, which have now been renamed Sustainable Development Goals. According to Donnelly (2000), projects are sustained when persons who live with the project's results continue to enjoy the advantages as they see them... “Failure of sustainability in potable Water projects is perceived as a deterioration in service standards as well as a total loss of service.” Sustainable potable water projects, according to the IWA (International Water Association), should provide adequate water quantity and quality without jeopardizing future ability to provide that capacity and quality. IWA's Integrated WRM (Water Resource Management) recognizes that the water cycle can be effectively managed when private and public stakeholders work together.

A holistic and multidisciplinary approach that addresses technical, environmental, societal, and cultural factors is required to achieve sustainability. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has recognized that in order to achieve sustainability, projects must engage in transparent and inclusive processes in collaboration with their communities. Their Sustainability Policy calls on water projects to ensure potable water infrastructures are cost-effective throughout their lifecycle, resource-efficient, and consistent with relative community goals or values. It should also be noted that there are varying levels of sustainability among water projects. The fact that new initiatives may face decreasing community support and confidence, especially in places where programs have been suddenly or wrongly discontinued, is a major cause for worry about program sustainability (Goodman & Stickler, 1987/88). After a two-to-five-year period, 30 to 50 percent of water points quit operating.

The necessity of water for the ongoing development and well-being of emerging nations has come to light more and more in recent years, particularly those in arid and semiarid regions. The necessity of effective water management for the sustainable development of their nations is becoming more recognized by planners and decision-makers (Biswas, 1991). Noori (2017) did case study research targeting the National Solidarity Program Afghanistan (NSP). The majority of programs and projects just provide financial aid or agricultural supplies to communities without considering whether or not they will be useful to the intended audience. The problem was that programs and projects were centrally planned (top-down approach) without the participation of communities, and that targeted communities were only involved in a small number of the program's and project's execution-related activities. The

communities frequently did not want to maintain or continue the activities of the projects that were presented to them after the program and projects ended, nor did they want to demonstrate any sense of ownership for the upkeep of the services that the program and projects had provided. According to research and reports from donor organizations and the Afghan government, many programs and projects have been carried out without having a noticeably positive effect on the intended beneficiaries (Lutz & Desai, 2014), especially those who reside in rural communities, which are the foundation of Afghanistan's economy. Afghanistan's 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas (World Bank, 2014).

It is also important to note that government systems decide who accesses the potable water services as well as how and where. Therefore, all stakeholders have a vital role in addressing potential barriers to sustainability that lies in governance systems. One of the reasons many clean waters projects fail is that they fail to consider the requirements and perspectives of several key stakeholders, including the primary beneficiaries (Parry, 2001). There is a need to form partnerships at the sector level to improve sustainability. This will include other bodies, such as NGOs, that are involved in regulating and operating clean water projects. Setting clear sustainability targets enables the identification of key indicators, which in turn creates a sense of stakeholder ownership for everyone involved in the partnerships. It should be noted that a strong national monitoring system is a valuable long-term strategy as it ensures potable water projects continue to be monitored beyond the project implementation phase.

For example, being able to monitor sustainability factors such as consumption levels and payments acts as a sustainability safeguard. In addition to being able to effectively monitor clean water projects, sector interventions are just as important as there are many factors (such as a coherent national WASH policy) that can affect the scale and level of intervention. Intervention requires sufficient funds in order to be implemented, but lack of or inadequate funding results in service failure eventually. A 2015 UN study showed that even though 80% of countries reported to have WASH policies, only 20% to 30% of them were executing them: the identified restricting factors seen as barriers to sustainable WASH projects were lack of financing, deficient institutional arrangements, and failure to engage stakeholders. It can be said that the government acts as both a “guide and a buffer” (Universal Class, n.d.). Even though governments have a major responsibility, sustainable progress is achieved only when other stakeholders are involved. Water and sanitation problems directly affect communities that are motivated to seek solutions as well as make broad decisions when governance is participatory and inclusive.

Research has shown that the active participation of CBOs has been the best method so far to ensure the maintenance of services. In addition to their importance in infrastructure maintenance, CBOs also influence the local government and are in turn influenced by NGOs. UN (2015) argues that, NGOs have the biggest influence in the mobilization and capacity building of CBOs. In fact, NGOs are critical providers of confidence, knowledge, and skills CBOs need to engage the government. NGOs provide important analysis and expertise which act as early warning mechanisms that assist in monitoring, implementing, and sustainability of programs and other agreements. Water Aid as part of its water project sustainability has recognized the role of international NGOs in advocating for improved sector policies and governance. In addition, NGOs have a major role to play in the capacity building of key civil society players, including encouraging cooperation over competition. Civil society is a concept that describes a social formation or arena where players (ex: family, state, non-state structures) meet to advance common interests.

Literature Review

A project can be defined as an opportunity to achieve a result using a systematic management approach A project is distinct from other kinds of work in that more than including routine operation, it is a specific set of instructions designed to achieve one goal (Project Management Institute, n.d.). Three characteristics have been identified regarding projects: they are temporary, having a fixed beginning and end, result in deliverables (services, products), and involve progressive collaboration. Projects are a vital mechanism in the development of the water sector (Tom, 1990). Project identification is the first and fundamental stage of a project’s life cycle and affects the other stages that will follow. Baum’s model of a project was one of the earliest and includes identification, formulation, appraisal, implementation, and evaluation forming a cycle (Kisumbi, Mulwa & Mbugua, 2022). Zaveri (2022) states that the project goals are generally defined during the project initiation phase. Brainstorming generates a lot of ideas for the organization, which are then properly planned to become tangible goals around which the entire strategy is based. Stakeholders are identified once the aim has been determined. According to Yemini et al. (2018), it is especially crucial to allocate substantial resources to a project's preparatory phase and, more specifically, its starting phases.

Interaction between stakeholders is essential because different stakeholders may have different ideas of what type of project is needed. There are instances of projects that did not deliver the intended services because the beneficiaries had a different motivation from those funding and implementing the project. Therefore, it is easy to see the importance of community participation in the project identification phase. Involving the community allows from the onset of the project for the identification of who the stakeholders are, what their incentives are, and their roles. Community participation in this critical project phase is a complex issue because it touches on power dynamics. In many communities, power is usually centralized (Cunningham et al., 2019). Gender is

considered a major regarding power: many societies assign the decision-making to men over women. Understanding power dynamics is important regarding community-based projects that are meant to support every member of the community, especially those who have inadequate or no access to clean water services. By identifying these power dynamics, stakeholders can better understand risk patterns and protective factors allowing them to better reduce factors in project policies that may increase the vulnerabilities or put such individuals at a disadvantage. In other words, understanding local power dynamics results in an inclusive process that does not reproduce “existing power inequalities” (Child Resilience Alliance, 2018).

The identification of needs, or the knowledge that there is a need, is the first step in need analysis during project initiation. Stakeholders identify and prioritize the root causes and impacts of problems (Regional Partnership for Resource Development, 2009). The goal of project identification is to create a proposal that includes the most relevant interventions within a set of time and money constraints. Community participation in need identification is critical, according to Barasa and Jelagat (2013), since once a community has collaboratively defined and prioritized a problem, it can grasp its scope and legitimize the process of addressing it. Even if the need is recognized by others, they will not legitimize it unless they participate in its identification. Because stopping during the implementation stage is more likely, there is a lack of long-term sustainability.

After the problem has been recognized, the problem is evaluated or analyzed. Stakeholders debate the issue thoroughly before reaching an agreement. The goal of such a conversation is to gain a better knowledge of the problem, its impact on the community, and its scope. This common knowledge serves as a firm platform for devising solutions to the situation. It also aids in defining the breadth of the issue at hand as well as the resources available. The community can also specify the objectives, goals, and timeline for the planned development (Mulwa, 2018). “Need analysis is both a method and a process at the project initiation stage. It can help to develop leadership, group solidarity, and a sense of local engagement in the community initiative as a result of the process. Participants can share their thoughts on community concerns using several needs analysis tools, such as surveys and focus groups.

Kisumbi, Mulwa, and Mbugua (2022) assert that the way in which several practical and viable mango initiatives were started prior to the project's planning phase was the sole determinant of their effective implementation. As the initial stage of the project management life cycle, the project initiation phase serves as the primary explanation for the project's creation and is characterized by a "hard-nosed" strategic fit (Kisumbi et al., 2022). Muniu, Gakuu, and Rambo (2017) state that within the last ten years, the water industry has undergone a number of reforms with the goal of advancing project sustainability. It is widely acknowledged that involvement in community projects affects project performance; nevertheless, it is unclear how participation in decision-making affects the sustainability of community water projects. Muniu et al. (2017) discovered a favorable correlation between the degree of project sustainability and the increasing strength of participation from weak, moderate, to strong. According to Tabot, Owuor, and Migosi (2020), the community's lack of involvement at the start of forestry-related projects is the reason they fail. This results in even more unsustainable forest management. According to Tabot et al. (2020), Saboti's sustainable forest management was enhanced by a rise in the initiation of participatory projects. Sustainable forest management was significantly impacted by the community's involvement in initiation (Tabot et al., 2020).

While these donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects have historically strengthened local communities, guaranteed food security, and aided in economic growth, Matsika, Marara, and Chinamasa (2022) claim that we still don't fully understand why these projects failed to continue after the donors withdrew. The findings support the theory that investment collapses originate from recipients not being involved in the start-up of donor-funded rural irrigation projects. Towett, Kamau, and Nyaoga (2022) state that the Sabasaba urban water supply project was started with the goal of providing better access to clean water for a greater number of people living in low-income districts of Murang'a County. To ensure that the initiative meets its objectives, the World Bank implemented the Output-Based Aid system. Unlike the traditional method of funding inputs, output-based aid funds preset project outputs. According to Towett et al. (2022), there was a statistically significant impact of the project initiation on the project performance. Setting priorities for goals and stakeholders' expectations, assigning authority, creating a work list, budgeting for the project, and managing expectations are the main obstacles encountered during the project beginning phase. If not, the project's success is in jeopardy (Zaveri et al., 2022). All must be appropriately handled. Matsika, Marara, and Chinamasa (2022) conclude that a crucial sustainability element for the donor-funded irrigation project was the non-involvement of buyers, interest groups, suppliers of inputs, and beneficiaries during its inception, even though the conclusions are still relevant to the Zvimba district study region. According to Matsika et al. (2022), the project lice cycle should be initiated using a participative donor-funded smallholder irrigation project initiation paradigm.

Methods

The study used social capital theory. The premise of social capital theory is that social networks are inherently valuable and that particular behaviors inside the network are facilitated by the connections that individuals have with one another through groups, communities, and larger social institutions. According to the notion, social interactions are a type of "capital" that can encourage group behavior for mutual gain. Pierre Bourdieu (1979), James Coleman, and Robert Putnam (1993/2000) are prominent proponents

of this theory, and they each offer a unique viewpoint on the idea of social capital. Putnam (1993) underlined the importance of social capital in promoting civic involvement and the effective operation of democracy, while Bourdieu emphasized the power dynamics within social networks and Coleman the role of social capital in producing human capital (Lin, 2002; Woolcock, 2002; Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009). In the Ruhango District, the pre-existing networks of ties within the community have a substantial impact on the effectiveness of potable water projects. These networks provide a crucial forum for encouraging reciprocity and trust among neighbors, two qualities that are necessary for galvanizing group action. For example, people are more likely to be willing to donate time, resources, and effort to the shared objective of sustainable water access in communities where trust and good interpersonal relationships are common. This dynamic emphasizes how important it is to identify and support these networks in order to improve project success (Akdere, 2005 & Flap, 2002).

According to Schmid & Robison (1995) people and organizations in the Ruhango District can access and make use of a range of resources that would not be available or would be challenging to mobilize without the social capital ingrained in the district's community networks. Physical resources like materials for water infrastructure and intangible resources like experience and understanding of water management techniques could fall under this category. The study emphasizes the significance of community involvement in the planning and implementation stages by demonstrating how these resources, when viewed through the perspective of social capital, can have a substantial impact on the efficacy and efficiency of water projects (McElroy, Jorna, & van Engelen 2006; Kim & Cannella Jr, 2008). In the context of the Ruhango District, the premise that social capital promotes collective action by lowering the costs connected with coordination and cooperation is especially pertinent. For drinkable water systems to be sustained over the long run and be sustainable, cooperation is essential. Social capital improves the sustainability of the project and lessens its dependency on outside assistance by streamlining the process of assembling community members for project-related tasks, from building to upkeep, using existing networks and relationships.

Ruhango is one of the districts in the Southern Province. Muhanga is to the north, Kamonyi is to the east, Karongi is to the west, Nyanza is to the south, Nyamagabe is to the southwest, and Bugesera is to the southeast. The district is at 2° 13' 24" South and 29° 46' 41" East. It is directly north of the Busasamana Sector in the Nyanza District, which is where the headquarters of the southern province are located. The area is 621.8 km2, and the latitude, longitude, and elevation are -2.223333, 29.778056, and 1782 m. It has 59 Cells, 533 villages, and 9 Sectors (Kinazi, Byimana, Bweramana, Mbuye, Ruhango, Mwendo, Kabagari and Imidugudu). The target population for this study was strategically chosen to ensure a comprehensive understanding of community participation in water projects within Ruhango District, Rwanda. The study targeted individuals with professional knowledge of community-based potable water programs, including those involved in the development, usage, and administration of clean water initiatives in Ruhango. These informants provide expert insights, historical context, and a deep understanding of the technical and strategic aspects of water projects. The primary group of respondents comprised the residents of Ruhango District. According to Rwanda's Fourth Census conducted in 2012, the district contains 71,086 households (NISR, n.d.). For this study, a descriptive research design was chosen to provide a detailed account of the community participation in water projects within Ruhango District, Rwanda. The study employed systematic simple random sampling, and purposive sampling. To acquire quantitative data, a cluster sampling approach was used, in which settlements are not evenly distributed but grouped around water projects. A sample of 398 respondents was selected from the target population using a systematic random sampling technique. The sample consists of 398 household heads while the entire population also included additional 5 district water officers, 5 private water company operators, 5 officials from the Ministry of water and forestry & 5 community leaders. Among these GFD (Group Focused Discussion) constituted two participants from each of the four groups above i.e. (2 Ruhango district water officers, 2 private water company operators, 2 community leaders, and 2 officials from Ministry of water and forestry) totaling to 8 persons. The study used questionnaire, focus group discussion and key informant interview. The main analytical technique used for the study's qualitative data collection was theme analysis. For quantitative data simple descriptive statistics, such as means, percentages, frequency distributions, and standard deviations, were used in the analysis.

Results

Table 1: Community Participation in Project Initiation

	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic
The potable water project teams involved the community in brainstorming on the challenges and issues prevailing at the community and their outcomes were captured appropriately.	408	4.16	1.145
The process of problem solving was done by the community and community leadership.	408	4.59	.648

The Most Important thing prioritized by the Ruhango District community was the issue of Potable water projects.	408	4.69	.533
The community's perceived suggestions to dealing with their challenges were applied at arriving at the expected solutions in Potable water projects in Ruhango District.	408	4.47	.771
In your personal view and discretion, to what degree does participation by community households in problem Identification have influence on Potable water projects sustainability	408	4.51	.687
Valid N (listwise)	408		

Source, Researcher (2023)

On the question of whether the potable water project teams involved the community in brainstorming on the challenges and issues prevailing in the community and whether their outcomes were captured appropriately, the study got a mean of 4.16 and a Std. Dev. of 1.145. The mean value of 4.16 shows that a significant portion of respondents believe that the potable water project teams did involve the community in brainstorming about local challenges and issues and captured their outcomes. This is a positive indication as it reflects the inclusiveness and responsiveness of the project teams towards community feedback and concerns. By getting community input, sustainable projects can be developed since long-term adoption and maintenance rely on community involvement. The variation in responses shows that while many felt included, a significant number might have had different experiences. The data (mean of 4.16) shows that the potable water project teams have been relatively successful in involving the community in brainstorming sessions about challenges and issues. The community recognizes and appreciates this involvement.

On the question of whether the process of problem solving was done by the community and community leadership, the study got a mean of 4.59 and a Std. Dev. of 0.648. The mean value is 4.59 indicates that the majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that the problem-solving process was undertaken by the community and community leadership. This high mean is a strong indicator that community-led problem-solving is prevalent and recognized in the projects. The community's perception is that their involvement in problem-solving is substantial. The standard deviation is 0.648, which is relatively low indicates that there's less variability in the responses and a strong consensus among respondents about the community and leadership's involvement in problem-solving. These statistics indicate that community engagement is present and also effective. When community members feel they are a genuine part of problem-solving, it can lead to higher project acceptance, a sense of ownership, better maintenance of project outcomes, and a higher chance of project sustainability. The data (mean of 4.59) indicates a very positive perception of community and leadership involvement in problem-solving within the water projects. There is a consensus that the community is actively engaged, and their leadership is playing a significant role.

On the question of whether the most important thing prioritized by the Ruhango District community was the issue of potable water projects, the study got a mean of 4.69 and a Std. Dev. of 0.533. The mean score is 4.69 this shows that majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Ruhango District community prioritizes the issue of potable water projects above other concerns. This mean indicates that potable water projects are of utmost importance to the community, possibly due to factors like the essential nature of water, previous challenges with water access, or the health implications of not having clean, potable water. The standard deviation is 0.533, which is low shows a strong consensus among the respondents regarding the high priority of potable water projects in the Ruhango District. Community members perceive potable water as a shared, central concern, since perception differs little. These statistics indicate that the community is very much aligned in its view of potable water projects as a priority. Community priorities increase the likelihood of sustaining community support, engagement, and active participation. The data also indicates that future projects or initiatives in the community should consider focusing on or integrating with potable water projects, given their high priority. The data (mean of 4.69) indicates a clear and strong consensus within the Ruhango District community that potable water projects are a top priority. This underscores the critical nature of water in this community's daily life and health and signals to any organizations or individuals working in that area that their efforts align with community priorities. The low variability in responses reinforces the community's unified stance on this issue, making it a key focus area for any developmental or health initiatives in the region.

On the question of whether the community's perceived suggestions to deal with their challenges were applied at arriving at the expected solutions in potable water projects in Ruhango District, the study got a mean of 4.47 and a Std. Dev. of 0.771. The mean

score of 4.47 is significantly high and indicates that a large majority of respondents believe that their suggestions concerning potable water projects were indeed applied in formulating solutions. This score shows a positive perception of the community's influence on decision-making processes and problem-solving strategies within the water projects. It also implies that the community feels heard and valued in these developmental initiatives. The standard deviation is 0.771 indicates a moderate level of variability in the responses. Some might feel very strongly that their ideas were implemented, while others may feel less represented in the solutions developed. The relatively high mean score points to a community that is actively engaged and sees its suggestions being considered, which is crucial for the sustainability of potable water projects. As communities participate in problem-solving, maintenance, compliance, and sustainability improve, which leads to better long-term sustainability. The data (mean of 4.47) reflects a positive trend where the community feels their input is considered and applied in potable water projects.

On the question of whether in your personal view and discretion, to what degree does participation by community households in problem Identification have influence on Potable water projects sustainability, the study got a mean of 4.51 and a Std. Dev. of 0.687. The mean score is 4.51, a high mean, indicating that respondents generally agree or strongly agree that the participation of community households in problem identification significantly influences the sustainability of potable water projects. Hence, early community involvement is crucial when developing a project. Water projects are more likely to be sustainable when community households participate actively in identifying their problems. The standard deviation is 0.687, indicating a moderate level of variation in responses. Some might perceive household participation in problem identification as extremely crucial for sustainability, while others might see it as important but not the only determining factor. The high mean value highlights community participation as a key factor in the project's sustainability. Hence, sustainable projects are those that address the real needs and problems identified by the community, encouraging ownership and responsibility among residents. Their early involvement likely leads to better acceptance, maintenance, and longevity of the potable water projects. The results imply that involving community households in the problem-identification phase is viewed as essential for ensuring the project's success and longevity. The data (mean of 4.51) strongly shows that community household involvement in the problem-identification phase is seen as a critical component for the sustainability of potable water projects in Ruhango District.

Discussion

The study's findings indicate that potable water project teams have made commendable efforts in involving the community in brainstorming sessions concerning local challenges and issues. With a mean value of 4.16 on a scale of 1 to 5, it is evident that a significant portion of the community feels that their feedback and concerns have been acknowledged and incorporated by the project teams. Getting community participation in projects is crucial to the successful adoption and sustainment of projects (Barasa & Jelagat, 2013). However, the standard deviation of 1.145 suggests that there is a variation in the experiences and perceptions of community members. While many feel included, there's a segment of the community that might have had different experiences. This variation could stem from a range of factors, including uneven outreach or certain segments of the community feeling overlooked. It is essential for project teams to recognize and address these discrepancies to ensure holistic community involvement and the overall success of the project (Child Resilience Alliance, 2018; Cunningham et al., 2019). The study underscores the significance of community and leadership involvement in problem-solving processes within water projects. With a mean value of 4.59 out of 5, it is evident that a majority of the respondents perceive their involvement in problem-solving as substantial, suggesting that community-led initiatives are not only prevalent but also recognized and valued in the projects. This aligns with the literature which emphasizes the importance of community participation in project identification and need analysis, as it fosters a sense of ownership and legitimizes the process of addressing community needs (Barasa and Jelagat, 2013). Furthermore, the low standard deviation of 0.648 indicates a strong consensus among respondents, reinforcing the notion that community engagement is not only present but also effective. As Mulwa (2018) posits, when communities are actively involved in problem-solving, it provides a robust platform for devising solutions, ensuring project sustainability, and fostering local engagement. Data suggests that water projects that prioritize community and leadership involvement tend to be more successful and sustainable over time.

The findings from the study highlight the paramount importance of potable water projects to the Ruhango District community. With a compelling mean score of 4.69 out of 5, it is evident that the community overwhelmingly prioritizes access to clean and safe water over other potential concerns. This aligns with the literature which underscores the significance of community participation in project identification and the importance of addressing genuine community needs for the success and sustainability of projects (Barasa and Jelagat, 2013). The low standard deviation of 0.533 further emphasizes a strong consensus among community members, suggesting that any interventions or projects in the Ruhango District should prioritize or incorporate potable water initiatives. Given the essential nature of water for daily life, health, and well-being, and considering previous challenges the community might have faced regarding water access, it is imperative for stakeholders, organizations, and policymakers to recognize and act upon this clear community priority. The unified stance of the community on this issue provides a robust foundation for impactful and sustainable interventions in the water sector (Tom, 1990; Mulwa, 2018).

The study reveals a strong perception within the Ruhango District community that their suggestions regarding challenges in potable water projects have been actively considered and integrated into the solutions. With a mean score of 4.47, it is evident that the community feels a sense of ownership and believes that their voices and concerns are being addressed in these projects. This aligns with the literature which underscores the significance of community participation in project identification and the importance of addressing genuine community needs for the success and sustainability of projects (Barasa and Jelagat, 2013; Mulwa, 2018). However, the standard deviation of 0.771 suggests that while many feel their suggestions have been applied, there is a segment of the community that might feel less represented or heard. This variability underscores the importance of ensuring that community engagement strategies are consistently inclusive and transparent. As the Child Resilience Alliance (2018) notes, understanding local dynamics and ensuring an inclusive process is crucial to avoid reproducing existing power inequalities. Community involvement trends are positive, but improvement is needed for all segments to feel valued and represented, ensuring long-term viability.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that community participation in the planning, design, and initial execution phases of potable water projects in Ruhango District, Rwanda, significantly contributes to their sustainability, although areas like financial decision-making and site selection processes require further enhancement for greater inclusivity and transparency. The study recommends that community members are encouraged to seek active roles from the initiation to the evaluation of water projects. Their active engagement enhances a sense of ownership, responsibility, and ultimately, sustainability. Policies should be formulated to mandate the active inclusion of community voices in all stages of water project development and implementation, ensuring projects are tailored to the actual needs and conditions of the community. The majority of sustainable and impactful projects demonstrate strong community involvement in decision-making processes, so donors should prioritize funding these projects.

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