

## Stakeholder Engagement and Sustainability of Donor Funded Projects Among Non-Governmental Organizations in Kenya: Case of Toll-Free Lines Project

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### Abstract

Sustainability of donor-funded projects remains a critical challenge for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Kenya, particularly after the withdrawal of donor support. In this regard, the project team needs to employ strategies to ensure project sustainability and meet long term project goals. This study investigated the influence of stakeholder engagement on the sustainability of such projects, using FIDA Kenya's toll-free call lines initiative as case study. The study focused on the following specific research objectives; to determine the influence of stakeholder identification on sustainability of donor funded projects; to evaluate the extent to which stakeholder involvement impacts sustainability of donor funded projects in NGOs and to examine the stakeholder communication methods used to achieve project sustainability. The study was anchored on stakeholder theory, supported by sustainability theory, participatory development theory and institutional theory. The research adopted explanatory and cross-sectional research design to capture a snapshot of the effect of stakeholder engagement strategies and their impact on project sustainability. From a study population of 3,135, the target population of 90 stakeholders directly and indirectly involved was selected. The study used census sampling technique, the target population of 90 formed the sample size. The study achieved a response rate of 74%, with 67 completed questionnaires. Quantitative data was collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed with SPSS version 27, employing both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize stakeholder perceptions, while inferential statistics including correlation and regression analyses were employed to determine the strength and nature of relationships between stakeholder engagement variables and project sustainability. The analysed data was presented using tables and graphs for clarity. The findings revealed that stakeholder identification ( $\beta = 0.923$ ), stakeholder involvement ( $\beta = 0.587$ ) and stakeholder communication ( $\beta = 0.981$ ), significantly influence project sustainability, while legal and regulatory compliance ( $\beta = 0.161$ ) plays a supportive role. The regression model demonstrated that these factors collectively explain 82.2% of the variation in project sustainability ( $R^2 = 0.822$ ). The study concludes that structured and inclusive stakeholder engagement strategies is essential for long-term project viability. The study recommended that NGOs in Kenya should consider adopting evidence-based stakeholder engagement strategies by systematically identifying, involving, and communicating with stakeholders throughout the project phases. These insights are valuable for NGOs, donor agencies, and policymakers seeking to enhance the sustainability of donor-funded initiatives.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder identification, Stakeholder involvement, Stakeholder communication, Sustainability, Legal and regulatory and framework

### 1. Introduction

The projects implemented by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a critical role in promoting development and service delivery. The sustainability of these projects remains a major concern, particularly the donor-funded initiatives (Choto et al., 2020). According to the NGO Coordination Board (2023), the NGO sector in Kenya implements projects across different sectors with annual donor support amounting to around a hundred million Kenya shillings. Given the magnitude of these investments, ensuring sustainability is crucial to safeguard the long-term impact and value of the funded projects.

NGOs employ various strategies to ensure that the projects remain sustainable long after donor funds end. Stakeholder Engagement (SE) has emerged as a strategic approach to address this challenge, as it minimizes negative influences from stakeholders (PMI, 2021; Celma, 2021). Njue et al. (2021) highlights the need for projects in Kenya to employ SE strategies for austerity measures. These strategies include stakeholder identification, involving stakeholders in project activities, and stakeholder communication ensure that the stakeholder support is beyond donor funding cycle (Micheni et al., 2023; Zwikael et al., 2023). The strategies, when integrated into the projects, align stakeholder needs and interests towards a common project goal of sustainability.

On the other hand, sustainability of projects is conceptualized through project viability and impact (Salat & James, 2019). Based on the triple bottom-line model, project sustainability should demonstrate positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes (Larsson & Larsson, 2020). The project sustainability indicators are highlighted in the extent of project ownership by stakeholders, benefits derived from the project and continuity of the project after donor funds end (Kuchta & Mrzyglocka-Chojnacka, 2020; Njilu & Njilu, 2020).

However, despite recognition of the critical role of SE in fostering sustainability, limited studies in Kenya have examined how structured SE strategies within the confines of legal and regulatory framework influence the sustainability of donor-funded NGO projects (Juster, 2022; Okinda & Ondiwa, 2024). This study, therefore, investigated the influence of stakeholder engagement strategies on the sustainability of donor-funded projects among NGOs in Kenya.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

The study was carried out to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To establish the influence of stakeholder identification on sustainability of donor funded projects among NGOs in Kenya.
- ii. To evaluate the extent to which stakeholder involvement influences sustainability of donor funded projects among NGOs in Kenya.
- iii. To examine how stakeholder communication strategies influence sustainability of donor funded projects among NGOs in Kenya.

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## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

#### Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was developed in 1984 to highlight the needs and interests of other parties who are affected by the business or projects other than the shareholders (Freeman, 1984). In this regard, benefits of a project are not limited to the shareholders. Therefore, projects should maximise benefits for all parties affected by the outcomes. The theory emphasises the need to establish relationships with stakeholders for project success and positive project outcomes (Freeman et al., 2010). This way, the project is more sustainable as it has buy-in from the relevant stakeholders. Stakeholder theory informs this study to include the stakeholders in the project activities.

The theory posits that there is a need to employ strategies to influence all stakeholders towards the common project goal for effective management of project activities (Mahajan et al., 2023). The strategies include stakeholder identification or analysis, involvement in decisions, active communication among others. The theory alludes that to engage the stakeholders effectively, it is important to identify all the stakeholders to address their needs and interests and allocate relevant project roles. In this way, the project can manage each stakeholder based on how they affect the project. Stakeholder theory centres its operations on stakeholders' inclusion and involvement in the decision-making process, project activities such as meetings and collaboration with stakeholders in project activities to effectively run the project (Kujala et al., 2022; Mahajan et al., 2023). To maximise on stakeholder engagement, Leshinka and Nyaberi (2023) states that projects should have communication platforms that encourage all parties to share feedback. Also, projects should have timely communication to ensure that the relevant stakeholders are well informed.

Stakeholder theory elaborates further on the inclusive nature of projects in that they are classified as successful when the benefits are felt by most of the stakeholders (Micheni et al., 2023). The theory is relevant to this study as it helps to analyse the parties involved in the donor funded project. It also points out the need for projects to be accountable to all stakeholders, both internal and external, in order to win their trust and create good relationships within the project. It also provides insights into the strategies that may be used to ensure the parties involved remain interested in the project even upon completion. Additionally, it highlights the roles and responsibility of the project team towards the stakeholders in order to promote positive and lasting impacts in terms of project sustainability.

The theory also alludes to the need of having a guide that directs the organisation on best practices to engage stakeholders. In addition, the theory considers that stakeholders are both internal and external parties, therefore, policies are necessary for managing stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2020). Laparimoi and Ng'eno (2023) in their study recommended the need for policies to enhance objectivity in implementing the project. In this way, the policies help to streamline project goals in a way that enhances sustainability through stakeholder ownership. As such, organisations have adopted policies that direct the project teams on how to engage stakeholders effectively. The policies highlight that stakeholder management should be aligned to compliance and accountability to legal and regulatory frameworks.

On the other hand, critics raise the concern on the inconsistency of this theory in terms of application. The stakeholders in every project are different in terms of needs, influence and interests (Dwivedi and Dwivedi, 2021). Therefore, management has to change how they address stakeholders with each new project. The stakeholder theory assumes that the project stakeholders are the ones they have identified. In some instances, stakeholders are hidden yet they influence the primary stakeholders at the point of decision making. Lastly, the theory indicates that the project team makes decisions with stakeholders in mind (Bridoux & Stoelhorst, 2022). This poses a challenge as the project team cannot satisfy all the needs represented in the project. This is not practical to include all the interests of the various stakeholders in the project as it may lose objectivity.

In relation to sustainability of donor funded projects, stakeholder theory heavily emphasises on engaging stakeholders towards sustaining positive outcomes such as long-term benefits after project completion (Ndombi et al., 2020a). At project completion, project sustainability still relies on people for project continuity. In this regard, stakeholder theory provides insights on strategies to employ to engage the stakeholders so that they are still interested and can participate in the project activities. The strategies ensure that the project can still provide benefits after completion. Over the years, sustainability of donor funded projects is hinged on stakeholder participation. In this regard, there are policies and legal and regulatory frameworks in place that direct NGOs on handling SE in an effective manner (Njilu & Njilu, 2020). The policies help align the stakeholders towards the project goals leading to structures for continuous and long-term benefits. Through these policies, stakeholders can be influenced to take ownership of projects and continue with the project implementation after donor funding is terminated. In the context of the legal confines, the project after completion aims to generate benefits in a manner consistent with the benefits realised during the project implementation phase.

## 2.2 Empirical Literature Review

This section sought to review past studies that are related to the present study. The section provided knowledge as well as gaps as it pertains to the research questions. Cheluget and Ngari (2020) carried out a study on sustainability of donor funded projects in public hospitals in Kenya, a case of HIV/Aids projects at N country referral hospital. The study used census research design in which the target population was 137 respondents, census was carried out on the 137 respondents. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which was analysed using descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The findings of the study indicated that stakeholder involvement significantly influenced sustainability of donor funded projects. The study by Cheluget and Ngari (2020) focused on the donor funded projects in the health sector which cannot be generalised to the other sectors, this study filled the contextual gap in the donor funded project within the legal sector.

Matsika et al. (2022) conducted a study on stakeholder involvement during project initiation and sustainability factors of donor funded irrigation projects in Zimbabwe. The study sampled 56 respondents out of the population of 360 respondents using stratified and purposive sampling. The study used structured questionnaires, interviews, and review of project documents to collect data which was analysed through descriptive analysis. The study findings indicated that the irrigation project mainly focused on the donor and the regulator/government actors who comprised 90% of the project stakeholders while local stakeholders were 10%. 80% of the project beneficiaries felt overlooked. The study by Matsika et al. (2022) considered project sustainability in the project initiation phase, this study considered the post project completion to assess project sustainability. While Matsika et al. (2022) analysed data descriptively, this study analysed the data using both descriptive and inferential data to fill in the methodological gap and demonstrate the relationship between the variables.

Juster et al (2022) carried out a study on effects of stakeholders' involvement on sustainability of food security projects implemented by UN Agencies in arid lands, Kenya. The study sampled 203 respondents out of a target population of 413 in 8 arid counties within Kenya using stratified sampling. The study data collected through self-administered questionnaires and used descriptive and correlation methods to analyse the data ( $p < 0.05$ ,  $r = 0.781$ , adjusted  $R^2 = 0.593$ ). The study indicated that SE had a positive relationship on sustainability. In addition, the study findings showed that timely communication, transparency and response mechanisms build a good relationship with the stakeholders leading to sustainability. Juster et al (2022) recommended stakeholder identification and adequately engaging them in project activities for sustainability of which this current study sought to address the contextual gap.

Loparimoi and Ng'eno (2023) conducted a study on Community participation on sustainability of donor funded projects in South Sudan. The study used descriptive research design, a sample size of 75 people out of a population 300 using stratified random and purposive sampling. Descriptive and regression analysis was used to analyse data. The findings showed that 45% agreed that engaging stakeholders leads to project ownership and ultimately sustainability. 52% of the respondents supported meeting attendance influenced sustainability of projects ( $p\text{-value} = 0.003$ ,  $\beta = 0.334$ ). The study concluded that community participation influenced project sustainability positively. The study showed that inclusion of project beneficiaries in decision making encouraged ownership thus increasing sustainability. While Loparimoi and Ng'eno (2023) evaluated project sustainability in terms of project ownership only, they recommended that project sustainability should be assessed on continuity terms. This study sought to expound on sustainability based on continuity, ownership and benefits generated from the project. The study did not address the role of stakeholder communication in SE, this current study sought to fill the contextual gap by evaluating the communicating strategies for sustainability.

With reference to sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector, Micheni et al. (2023a) conducted a study assessing the influence of stakeholders' engagement on sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector. The

study used mixed methods for both qualitative and quantitative data using questionnaires. The data was collected from 230 respondents out of a target population of 700 respondents. The study also used descriptive and inferential data ( $p$ -value  $0.00 < 0.05$ ,  $r=0.637$ , adjusted  $R^2=0.329$ ). The study concluded that stakeholder engagement has a positive influence on sustainability of donor funded projects in the healthcare sector. However, the study limited the study scope to the health sector therefore, the findings cannot be generalised in other fields. Micheni et al. (2023a) used the ladder theory to explain the phenomenon of SE, this study used the stakeholder theory to analyse the influence of SE on sustainability to address the theoretical gap.

Matsa et al. (2023) conducted a study in sustainability of donor-funded projects in developing remote minority Tonga communities of Zimbabwe. The study adopted descriptive design, and data was collected through questionnaires. The sample size was 805 that was selected through random sampling of the target population of 8053. The data indicated that 77% of the stakeholders were engaged in project activities through information communication. 20% and 3% of the stakeholders were involved in running the project and decision making respectively. The study concluded that stakeholder engagement should be involved when setting up such projects to ensure that the beneficiaries take ownership and have the capacity to run the operations. Matsa et al. (2023) study was quite wide as it covered projects in various sectors including farming, health and sanitation in Zimbabwe. This current study aimed to narrow down to NGO in the legal sector and address the geographical gap by focusing on NGOs in Kenya.

In a study conducted by Karamunya and Karamunya (2023) on determinants of donor funded projects in arid and semi-arid lands in West Pokot County in Kenya. The study used descriptive survey research design. Random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 114, structured questionnaires were administered. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential analysis including Pearson correlation. The study findings concluded community support in terms of technical support had a moderate relationship with sustainability of donor funded projects ( $r=0.335$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $R^2=0.513$ ). While the study only highlighted the technical expertise of stakeholders as SE, the current study delved deeper into SE strategies.

Micheni et al. (2023b) carried out a study on the moderating influence of the legal and regulatory framework on precursors of sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. The study used explanatory research design, where mixed method research design was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The target population was 700, where a sample size of 230 respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique.

The study concluded that legal and regulatory framework has a moderating effect on the relationship between various factors, including SE, influencing sustainability of donor funded projects in the health sector in Kenya. They concluded that the influence of SE was stronger with the moderating effect of legal and regulatory framework ( $p$ -value = 0.001,  $R^2=0.62$ ,  $\beta=0.492$  - when moderated,  $p=0.000$ ,  $R^2=.625$ ,  $\beta=0.438$  when unmoderated). The study pointed out that moderating influence of legal and regulatory framework enhances sustainability of the donor funded projects. In their study, Micheni et al. (2023b) reviewed the legal and regulatory framework in terms of compliance. They, however, recommend further investigations on accountability as part of the legal and regulatory framework. This current study sought to address the contextual gap analysing the moderating influence of the legal and regulatory framework in terms of accountability and compliance.

Wanjala and Nyaberi (2024) conducted a study on stakeholder identification on the project performance of donor funded projects in Nakuru County. The research used survey design targeting fifty donor funded projects. Stratified random sampling was used on a sample size of 216 out of a population of 555 stakeholders. The study collected descriptive data using a survey questionnaire which was analysed descriptively and through ordinal regression and spearman Rho correlations. The study indicated that stakeholder identification indicated a positive increase of  $\beta=4.736$  ( $p$ -value=  $<0.05$ ). Therefore, the study concluded that stakeholder identification had significant influence on the project outcomes. Wanjala and Nyaberi (2024) recommended further assessment on stakeholder identification which this study sought to address the contextual gap of stakeholder identification.

### 2.3 Summary of Knowledge Gaps

There is little research conducted on the completed projects to determine project sustainability. In addition, the research studies did not evaluate the structures in place to ensure smooth running of the project once the donor funding is terminated. There is also limited information and studies on organisations that carry out women empowerment projects. Most of the studies relate to projects in sectors dealing with agriculture, construction and industrial projects. Therefore, the context and findings cannot be generalised to the women empowerment projects. In addition, some studies did not consider the internal stakeholders who are the implementing bodies of the project and the role they play after project completion.

## 2.4 Conceptual Framework

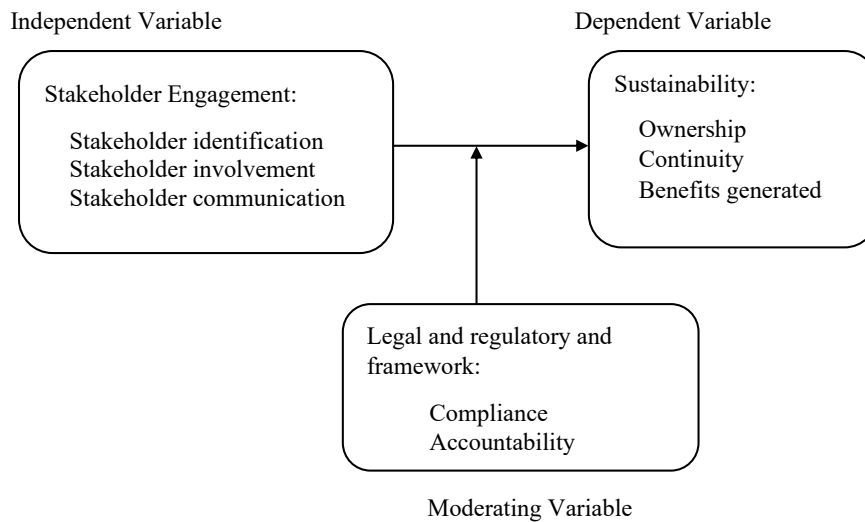


Figure1: Conceptual framework

## 3. Research Methodology

This study adopted a positivist research philosophy, which assumes that phenomenon is objective and can be measured through observable facts and quantifiable data (Ali, 2023). The study adopted cross sectional survey design and explanatory research design. The target population included managers, staff, volunteers and the project managers at the donor agency – DANIDA employees totalling to 90 respondents (Itad Limited, 2023; FIDA-Kenya’s Virtual Justice Centres - Justice Gone Virtual, n.d.). In this study, the sample size was based on the target population, 90 stakeholders.

Table 1: Sample Size

Toll-free line project stakeholders	Sample size
FIDA Kenya Executive Director	1
FIDA Kenya Deputy Director	1
FIDA Kenya Legal team	8
FIDA Kenya Heads of Department	5
FIDA Kenya PR/ Communications Officers	3
FIDA Kenya Finance Officers	2
FIDA Kenya Programs team	5
DANIDA Project managers (donor)	5
FIDA Kenya volunteers	60
Total	90

Source Author 2025

## 4 Research Findings

### 4.1 Correlations Analysis

The correlation analysis examined the relationships between the sustainability of donor-funded projects and key factors, including stakeholder identification, stakeholder involvement, stakeholder communication, and adherence to the legal and regulatory framework. The findings were as presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Correlations Analysis

		Sustainability of donor funded projects	Stakeholder identification	Stakeholder involvement	Stakeholder communication	Legal and regulatory framework
Sustainability of donor funded projects	Pearson Correlation	1				
Stakeholder identification	Pearson Correlation	.499**	1			
Stakeholder involvement	Pearson Correlation	.783**	.777**	1		
Stakeholder communication	Pearson Correlation	.773**	.856**	.827**	1	
Legal and regulatory framework	Pearson Correlation	.398**	.785**	.634**	.601**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to Egunjobi (2022), correlation values closer to +1 demonstrate strong relationship between the variable. The findings in table 15 above indicate strong positive correlations between sustainability and stakeholder engagement variables. Specifically, stakeholder involvement showed the strongest correlation with sustainability ( $r = 0.783$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), followed closely by stakeholder communication ( $r = 0.773$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and stakeholder identification ( $r = 0.499$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These results suggest that projects where stakeholders are properly identified, actively involved, and consistently communicated with are more likely to be sustainable.

The legal and regulatory framework also exhibited a positive correlation with sustainability ( $r = 0.398$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that adherence to laws, regulations, and accountability mechanisms contributes to the long-term viability of the project, though its effect is somewhat weaker than direct stakeholder engagement factors.

Further, strong interrelationships exist among the stakeholder engagement variables themselves. For example, stakeholder communication correlates highly with stakeholder involvement ( $r = 0.827$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and stakeholder identification ( $r = 0.856$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), suggesting that effective engagement is a multi-dimensional process where proper identification, involvement, and communication reinforce each other. Legal and regulatory framework also correlates significantly with all stakeholder engagement measures (ranging from 0.601 to 0.785,  $p < 0.01$ ), highlighting that regulatory compliance underpins and complements stakeholder-focused sustainability strategies.

The analysis demonstrates that sustainability of donor-funded projects is strongly influenced by stakeholder engagement, particularly involvement and communication. While the legal and regulatory framework supports sustainability, it is most effective when combined with active stakeholder participation. These findings underscore the importance of a holistic approach to project management where regulatory compliance and robust stakeholder engagement jointly drive long-term project success.

#### 4.2 Regression Analysis

The regression analysis examined the extent to which stakeholder identification, stakeholder involvement, stakeholder communication, and adherence to the legal and regulatory framework predict the sustainability of donor-funded projects.

Table 3: Model Summary

Model R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.907a	.822	.125

a. Predictors: (Constant), Legal and regulatory framework, Stakeholder communication, Stakeholder involvement, Stakeholder identification

The model summary indicates a strong overall relationship between the predictors and sustainability. The multiple correlation coefficient,  $R = 0.907$ , shows a very high positive correlation between the combined independent variables and the dependent variable, sustainability. The  $R^2$  value of 0.822 suggests that approximately 82.2% of the variation in project sustainability can be explained by the four predictors included in the model. After adjusting for the number of predictors, the Adjusted  $R^2$  is 0.810, which still reflects a very strong explanatory power, indicating that the model fits the data well. The standard error of the estimate (0.125) is relatively low, further confirming the precision of the predictions.

These results indicate that stakeholder engagement (identification, involvement, and communication) and adherence to the legal and regulatory framework collectively have a substantial impact on the sustainability of donor-funded projects. The high R<sup>2</sup> value implies that these factors are key determinants of project continuity and effectiveness. In practice, this underscores the importance of actively identifying and involving stakeholders, maintaining consistent communication, and ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements to enhance long-term project sustainability.

**Summary of ANOVA Results**

The ANOVA results were used to test whether the regression model, which includes stakeholder identification, stakeholder involvement, stakeholder communication, and adherence to the legal and regulatory framework, significantly predicts the sustainability of donor-funded projects. According to Egunjobi (2022), p values of <0.05 alpha level are considered to be statistically significant.

Table 4: Summary of ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	4.489	4	1.122	71.493	.000b
	Residual	.973	62	.016		
	Total	5.463	66			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of donor funded projects

b. Predictors: (Constant), Legal and regulatory framework, Stakeholder communication, Stakeholder involvement, Stakeholder identification

Source Author 2025

The regression sum of squares (4.489) with 4 degrees of freedom represents the variation in sustainability explained by the model. The residual sum of squares (0.973) with 62 degrees of freedom represents the variation not explained by the model. The mean square for regression is 1.122, while the mean square for residuals is 0.016.

According to Egunjobi (2022), p value of less than 0.05 is considered to be statistically significant. Table 17 shows the results indicating F-value is 71.493 with a significance level of p < 0.001, indicating that the overall regression model is statistically significant. This means that the combination of stakeholder engagement variables and legal and regulatory framework reliably predicts sustainability, and the likelihood that this result is due to chance is extremely low.

The ANOVA results confirm that the regression model is a good fit for the data. Stakeholder identification, involvement, communication, and compliance with the legal and regulatory framework collectively contribute significantly to explaining the sustainability of donor-funded projects. This reinforces the conclusion from the regression analysis that these factors are critical determinants of project sustainability.

**Regression Coefficients**

The regression coefficients provide insights into the individual contribution of each predictor. According to Egunjobi (2022), a standardized coefficient Beta closer to +1 is an indication of strong effect of the predictor. In the study, the predictors are stakeholder identification, stakeholder involvement, stakeholder communication and legal and regulatory framework to the sustainability of donor-funded projects.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	.668	.088		7.618	.000
	Stakeholder identification	.510	.076	.923	6.721	.000
	Stakeholder involvement	.260	.044	.587	5.844	.000
	Stakeholder communication	.425	.054	.981	7.849	.000
	Legal and regulatory framework	.110	.062	.161	1.777	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability of donor funded projects

The results indicate that all four predictors have a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainability. Stakeholder identification has a strong positive effect (B = 0.510, Beta = 0.923, t = 6.721, p < 0.001), highlighting the importance of accurately identifying relevant stakeholders for sustaining projects. Stakeholder involvement also positively influences sustainability (B = 0.260, Beta = 0.587, t = 5.844, p < 0.001), indicating that engaging stakeholders actively in project activities strengthens long-term outcomes. Stakeholder communication has the highest standardized effect (B = 0.425, Beta = 0.981, t = 7.849, p < 0.001), emphasizing that consistent communication and updates are critical for sustaining the project. Legal and regulatory framework similarly shows a positive and significant effect (B = 0.110, Beta = 0.161, t = 1.777,

$p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that compliance with laws and regulations contributes meaningfully to sustainability, albeit to a lesser extent than stakeholder engagement factors. Overall, these results underscore that while legal compliance is important, active stakeholder engagement through identification, involvement, and communication are the key drivers of sustainability in donor-funded projects.

The regression model for stakeholder engagement and sustainability of donor funded projects was derived as follows:

$$Y = .668 + .923X_1 + .587X_2 + .981X_3 + .161X_4 + e$$

## 5 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the stakeholder engagement strategies employed by FIDA Kenya on the sustainability of FIDA Kenya's toll-free call lines project. The study provided compelling evidence that SE strategies particularly in the areas of identification, involvement and communication had a significant effect in ensuring long-term project viability. In addition, legal and regulatory framework has a significant effect on how SE strategies influence the project sustainability. The findings not only validated the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study but also offered practical insights into how NGOs can structure their engagement strategies to enhance sustainability. The following conclusions summarize the key outcomes of the research and highlight the most impactful factors contributing to sustained success beyond the donor funding cycle.

The study concludes that by employing stakeholder identification as a strategy significant influenced on the sustainability of the FIDA Kenya toll-free project. Systematic stakeholder identification and assigning role in the project contributed towards ownership, continuity of the toll-free project 4 years after project completion. The stakeholder's interest in the project continues even post project phase underscoring the critical role of stakeholder identification in project.

On the extent of stakeholder involvement in the toll-free project, the study indicated that the toll-free project has taken an inclusive approach to its stakeholders. The findings showed that FIDA Kenya involved its stakeholder in project activities particularly in decision-making and collaborative activities. When stakeholders are actively engaged in shaping project activities, they are more likely to develop a sense of ownership and long-term commitment. However, the study revealed that the toll-free project may be excluding stakeholders in meeting participation based on the perceptions of the stakeholders.

The results concluded that stakeholder communication strategies was identified as the most influential predictor of sustainability of the FIDA Kenya toll-free project. The findings consequently showed that the project employed various communication methods such as regular updates, feedback mechanisms in place and transparent information sharing. were found to be vital in maintaining stakeholder engagement and trust. Effective communication strengthened the stakeholder support and participation towards sustainability of the project.

Although legal and regulatory frameworks were found to be less influential than direct stakeholder engagement strategies, the study concluded that they nonetheless provide essential structure for accountability. In addition, the findings indicated that stakeholders stated the project was accountable thus legitimatizing and enhancing project sustainability. The study also pointed out that legal and regulatory framework may not be the primary driver of sustainability for the toll-free project but it is a necessary support mechanism for sustainability. Therefore, by having the FIDA Kenya complying with the regulations reinforced the stakeholder engagement strategies influence on sustainability of the project to some extent.

## Declaration of Competing Interests

The authors declare that they are not aware of any competing financial interests or personal relationships that may have influenced the work described in this document.

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