

Assessing Constituents' Experiences and Community Participation in The Utilisation of Constituency Development Funds in Mufumbwe, Zambia

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Abstract

This study investigated the experiences of constituents in the utilisation of Constituency Development Funds (CDF) in Mufumbwe Constituency, Zambia, with the aim of assessing how community members engaged with CDF projects, identifying challenges affecting fund utilisation, and exploring strategies to enhance participation and effectiveness. The general objective was to assess constituents' experiences in the planning, implementation, and oversight of CDF projects and provide recommendations for improving community involvement and project outcomes. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to capture the lived experiences of 40 purposively selected participants, including community members, councillors, and district officials directly involved in CDF activities. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document review, and were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify key themes related to participation, project management, and fund utilisation. Findings revealed that community participation in CDF projects existed but was inconsistent across wards, with some communities actively involved in planning and decision-making, while others experienced limited consultation. The study identified major challenges affecting the effective utilisation of CDF resources, including delays in fund disbursement, procedural inefficiencies in planning and procurement, low technical capacity of committees, political interference, and inadequate monitoring and follow-up. Despite these challenges, constituents expressed moderate satisfaction with completed projects, although concerns about sustainability, maintenance, and transparency were highlighted. Strategies to enhance community participation and effectiveness included increasing awareness and education on CDF processes, building technical capacity for local committees and leaders, ensuring timely and predictable fund disbursement, strengthening monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and fostering collaboration among stakeholders to improve project relevance and sustainability. The study concluded that while CDFs had the potential to support local development and empower communities, their impact was limited by governance and operational constraints. The findings provide practical guidance for local authorities, policymakers, and development practitioners seeking to enhance participatory governance, improve the management of CDF projects, and promote sustainable community development in Mufumbwe Constituency.

Keywords: Constituency Development Fund, community participation, project effectiveness, Mufumbwe Constituency

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1. Introduction and Background

Constituency Development Funds (CDF) are designed to promote decentralised development by empowering local communities to identify, plan, and implement projects that address their specific needs. In Zambia, the CDF was introduced in 1995 as a mechanism to enhance inclusive development and strengthen local participation in decision-making processes (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2022). Unlike traditional top-down development approaches, the CDF framework places responsibility for development at the constituency level, with the expectation that this will foster community ownership, accountability, and responsiveness to local priorities.

Despite these intentions, the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Fund depends not only on the availability of financial resources but also on the capacity of communities to actively engage in project processes. Meaningful participation involves involvement in project identification, planning, implementation, and monitoring. However, existing literature has largely focused on the design, funding, and governance of CDF, with limited attention given to the lived experiences of constituents who are expected to drive these processes at the grassroots level.

Globally, constituency-based development funds have faced criticism for challenges such as limited participation, elite capture, and political interference (Keefer and Khemani, 2019). Similar concerns have been observed in African contexts, where weak institutional structures and inadequate communication have constrained community involvement. In Zambia, the CDF has undergone reforms aimed at strengthening decentralised development, increasing community involvement, and improving transparency and accountability (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2022). While these reforms present opportunities for enhanced local development, they also expose potential gaps in community capacity and engagement.

This study therefore explores the lived experiences of constituents in the utilisation of the Constituency Development Fund in Mufumbwe Constituency. Using a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to understand how community members engage with CDF processes, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies that can enhance participation and improve fund utilisation. By focusing on constituency-level experiences, the study aims to provide insights into whether CDF is achieving its intended purpose of empowering communities and supporting sustainable local development.

1.1 Background

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was established in Zambia in 1995 as a mechanism to address long-standing fiscal and developmental imbalances between the central government and local communities (MLGRD, 2022). It was later formalised through the CDF Act of 2010, which outlines procedures for fund allocation, utilisation, monitoring, and accountability. Under this framework, communities are expected to actively participate in identifying, planning, implementing, and monitoring development projects through established local structures such as Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and Area Development Committees (ADCs).

Recent national reforms have significantly increased CDF allocations from K1.6 million to K28 million in 2022/2023, and further to K40 million per constituency in the 2026 national budget. These reforms also expanded the scope of CDF to include bursaries, youth and women empowerment programs, and skills development initiatives. As a result, the expectations placed on communities have increased, particularly in terms of participation, accountability, and effective utilisation of resources.

However, national monitoring reports suggest that the intended participatory and accountable framework is not consistently achieved in practice. For instance, the Zambia Local Governance Monitoring Platform (ZLGMP, 2021) reported that approximately 40% of CDF projects across sampled constituencies were incomplete or of poor quality, citing limited community participation, weak oversight, and capacity gaps. While these findings provide a national overview, they do not sufficiently explain how these challenges manifest at constituency level.

In Mufumbwe Constituency, a predominantly rural area in North-Western Province, CDF resources play a critical role in addressing infrastructure deficits, improving access to education and health services, and supporting livelihoods. Local administrative observations and anecdotal evidence from community stakeholders indicate challenges such as limited awareness of CDF processes, low participation in decision-making forums, and difficulties in monitoring project implementation. In some cases, participation appears to be limited to consultation rather than active involvement in decision-making and oversight.

Despite these indications, there is limited empirical, constituency-specific evidence documenting how constituents in Mufumbwe experience CDF processes, the extent of their participation across different project stages, and the challenges they encounter. This creates a gap between policy expectations of participatory development and the actual lived experiences of constituents, which this study seeks to address.

1.2 Research gap

Despite the increasing allocations of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Zambia, from K25.7 million per constituency in 2022 to K36.1 million in 2025, its effective utilisation remains a persistent challenge (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, 2025; Republic of Zambia, 2022). In Mufumbwe Constituency, a predominantly rural area in North Western Province, CDF remains a critical resource for addressing development needs. Yet available evidence suggests participation is uneven, awareness of procedures is low, and tracking project implementation at community level is difficult (Phiri, 2016; ZLGMP, 2021; Mufumbwe Town Council, 2023).

Constituents, who are intended to be active participants in project identification, planning, and monitoring, often experience limited engagement, weak transparency, and inconsistencies in fund utilisation. It remains unclear how community members participate in CDF processes, perceive the transparency of fund allocation, confront challenges in accessing resources, and what mechanisms could enhance effective implementation (Transparency International Zambia, 2025).

This gap between the intended participatory framework and actual practice reveals a contradiction between the CDF policy framework, which emphasises decentralisation and community-driven development (Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019; Decentralisation Policy, 2013), and on-the-ground realities, where monitoring gaps, governance issues, and limited community involvement hinder intended developmental outcomes. Understanding these dynamics in Mufumbwe is therefore critical to identifying factors that constrain fund utilisation and devising strategies to strengthen participatory, transparent, and effective deployment of CDF resources.

This study therefore seeks to explore the lived experiences of constituents in Mufumbwe Constituency, examining how they

participate in CDF processes, the challenges they encounter, and strategies that could improve engagement and effective fund utilisation. By doing so, the research aims to provide evidence to enhance policy and practice in participatory local development.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Empirical Review

The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) model has been widely adopted in developing countries to decentralise resources and empower communities in local development planning and implementation. While the underlying intention of CDFs is to deepen participatory governance and improve public service delivery, effectiveness varies depending on governance quality, institutional capacity, and community engagement (Keefer and Khemani, 2019). This chapter critically synthesises literature on CDF utilisation, participation, governance, and developmental outcomes in global, regional, and Zambian contexts. It highlights theoretical, methodological, and empirical gaps that inform the present study and establishes the rationale for conducting research in Mufumbwe Constituency.

Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) were introduced in Zambia in 1995 to empower communities to identify and finance development initiatives at the constituency level (MLGRD, 2022). Their primary objective is to enhance participatory governance, decentralise development decision-making, and ensure local needs are directly addressed. Over time, allocations have increased, with K25.7 million per constituency disbursed in 2022, K28.3 million in 2023, K31.0 million in 2024, and K34.2 million in 2025 to support infrastructure, youth and women empowerment, bursaries, and community-driven economic initiatives (Republic of Zambia, 2022; ZLGMP, 2023; Ministry of Finance, 2024; ZLGMP, 2025).

The legal and policy framework guiding CDF includes the Decentralisation Policy (2013) and the Local Government Act No. 2 of 2019, which delineate the roles of Members of Parliament, local councils, Ward Development Committees (WDCs), and community members. While these policies establish a participatory framework, studies suggest that intended community engagement is often not fully realised. For example, Phiri (2016) and ZLGMP (2021) report low awareness of procedures, uneven participation, and limited monitoring of project implementation at the community level. This gap between policy intentions and practice underscores the need for constituency-specific empirical research.

Participation in CDF projects is a core principle intended to empower constituents and improve project relevance. Research indicates that participation tends to be selective, influenced by social networks, political affiliation, and gender dynamics (Chibamba, 2019; Mulenga, 2020). Quantitative studies reveal that while many citizens are aware of CDF, fewer are actively engaged. An Afro barometer survey found that 82 per cent of Zambians had heard of CDF, but over half could not identify any projects in their constituencies (INESOR, 2023). Similarly, only 20.5 per cent of women aware of CDF had applied for or benefited from its resources (Chanda, 2023).

Regional studies corroborate these findings. In Kenya, participation was stronger in education and health projects where inclusive processes were adopted, but political influence and delayed disbursements limited actual community control over resources (Njeru, 2021). In South Africa, participation was often symbolic when local elites dominated decision-making (Smith and Mbah, 2019).

Many existing studies rely on cross-sectional surveys that measure awareness or attendance at meetings without exploring the quality or depth of participation. This approach limits insight into the processes through which communities influence project decisions. Therefore, qualitative methods are necessary to capture lived experiences, power dynamics, and barriers to effective participation in rural constituencies such as Mufumbwe.

Evidence on CDF utilisation presents mixed outcomes. In Chinsali District, many microenterprise beneficiaries failed to comply with loan terms attached to CDF support, limiting sustainability and repayment performance (Phiri and Musonda, 2022). In Kabwe Central, infrastructure project success depended on stakeholder involvement, transparency, and robust monitoring systems (Mwamba, 2024).

Regional comparisons reveal similar challenges. In Uganda, funds intended for community priorities were diverted due to weak oversight (Okello, 2019). In Ghana, constituency development resources produced infrastructure gains only where independent monitoring bodies were functional (Ayee, 2018).

These studies indicate that utilisation depends on the interplay between institutional oversight, beneficiary capacity, and governance integrity. Where capacities are limited or monitoring is weak, fund utilisation often deviates from intended development objectives. However, many studies treat compliance as a technical challenge, overlooking political economy factors such as elite capture and resource competition.

Transparency and accountability in CDF utilisation remain significant challenges. Studies show that project selection and fund allocation are often dominated by MPs or local elites, limiting community oversight (Simatele et al., 2011; Chibamba, 2019; Phiri, 2016). The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (2022) found that Ward Development Committees were frequently excluded from decision-making, while Transparency International Zambia (2025) reported unspent funds due to weak financial controls and irregularities.

Comparative studies across the region show similar trends. In Tanzania, delayed disbursements and political influence undermined fund utilisation (Mkapa and Luvanda, 2018). In Kenya, politicisation of project selection reduced equitable access to benefits (Khaemba, 2020), while in Laisamis Constituency, poor audit mechanisms and limited public access to

information reduced accountability and trust (SaHado and Gekara, 2021).

Despite these studies, literature is predominantly descriptive and lacks analysis of why governance structures fail or how socio-political incentives shape outcomes. This highlights the need for context-specific research that examines power dynamics, institutional behaviour, and accountability deficits in rural Zambian constituencies.

Despite governance challenges, CDF can produce positive developmental outcomes where institutional capacity and participatory oversight are strong. In Chadiza District, funds supported road rehabilitation, market construction, and youth empowerment programmes contributing to local economic growth (Zambia National Information Services, 2024). In Kenya, CDF-funded schools and health facilities improved access to services where communities were actively engaged (Njeru, 2021). In Ghana, empowered local committees managing revenue-sharing funds improved service delivery (Kasimba and Lujala, 2022).

These cases suggest that development outcomes are maximised when financial allocation is paired with robust governance, participatory mechanisms, and institutional capacity. Positive outcomes are not automatic; they emerge where formal structures are reinforced by stakeholder engagement and accountability practices.

Despite substantial research on CDF initiatives, several gaps remain:

- **Qualitative experience gap:** Most studies emphasise quantitative indicators of participation or fund utilisation, providing insufficient insight into constituents' lived experiences, perceptions of transparency, and negotiation of power relations.
- **Context-specific evidence:** Limited research links participation, governance structures, and outcomes at constituency level in Zambia, particularly in rural settings such as Mufumbwe.
- **Governance process gap:** Literature often describes governance challenges without unpacking socio-political processes that shape monitoring, accountability, and elite influence.
- **Methodological limitations:** Predominant use of cross-sectional surveys restricts understanding of participation as a dynamic process over time.
- **Empirical gap:** No comprehensive constituency-level evidence explains how community members experience CDF processes, perceive transparency, encounter challenges, or identify strategies for effective fund utilisation.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

Sustainable Rural Development Theory

Sustainable Rural Development Theory posits that lasting rural development must be grounded in local resources, knowledge, and capacities rather than relying solely on top-down, externally driven interventions (IAMO, 2007; Hobo, 1996). The theory emphasizes four key capabilities. Economic capabilities involve improving agricultural and non-agricultural income, strengthening rural industries, and developing infrastructure to enhance livelihoods. Human capabilities focus on improving health services and expanding access to education. Protective capabilities relate to conserving the natural environment and mitigating risks such as disasters. Political capabilities emphasize decentralization and the active participation of local communities in decision-making processes (JICA, 2004).

In the context of Mufumbwe, this theory provides a lens to assess whether CDF projects enhance economic opportunities, social services, environmental protection, and local governance. It also highlights the importance of constituent experience and capacity in contributing meaningfully to project planning, implementation, and oversight.

Participatory Development Theory

Participatory Development Theory emerged as a response to the limitations of top-down development approaches, highlighting the importance of local ownership, inclusion, and empowerment in development initiatives (Chambers, 1983; Freire, 1970). The theory assumes that sustainable development requires active engagement of community members in decision-making, planning, and monitoring, with an emphasis on dialogue, shared responsibility, and capacity building (Chambers, 1997).

For this study, Participatory Development Theory frames constituents as active agents rather than passive recipients. It provides a framework for examining how residents in Mufumbwe Constituency are involved in identifying, implementing, and monitoring CDF projects. This perspective is crucial for understanding how participation shapes project outcomes, builds local capacity, and fosters sustainable development.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

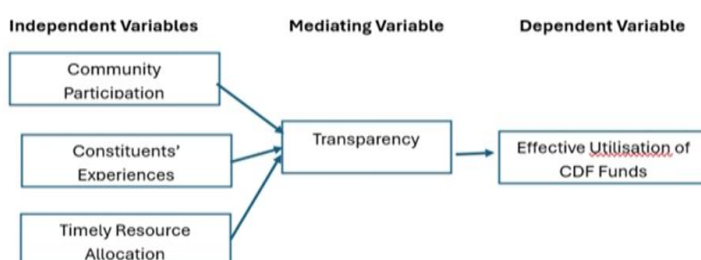


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between community participation, constituents' experiences, timely resource allocation, transparency, and the effective utilisation of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) resources. It provides a structured explanation of how these variables interact to influence the success or failure of CDF project implementation at constituency level.

Independent Variables

In this study, community participation, constituents' experiences, and timely resource allocation are the independent variables. These factors directly influence how CDF funds are managed and implemented. Community participation ensures that local people are involved in identifying and prioritising development projects. Constituents' experiences reflect the actual involvement and engagement of community members in CDF processes. Timely resource allocation ensures that funds are disbursed and projects are executed according to planned schedules. Together, these variables shape the governance environment within which CDF projects operate.

Mediating Variable: Transparency

Transparency serves as the intervening (mediating) variable in the framework. It explains how the independent variables translate into improved outcomes. When communities actively participate and have meaningful experiences in the CDF process, they are more likely to demand openness and accountability. Similarly, timely allocation of resources reduces uncertainty and opportunities for mismanagement. Transparency strengthens accountability mechanisms by ensuring that information about budgets, expenditures, and project implementation is openly shared. It therefore acts as a bridge linking participation, experiences, and resource allocation to effective fund utilisation.

Dependent Variable: Effective Utilisation of CDF Funds

The dependent variable in the framework is the effective utilisation of CDF funds. This represents the overall outcome of the interaction among the variables. Effective utilisation is achieved when funds are used efficiently, projects are completed on time, community needs are addressed, and development outcomes are realised. The framework suggests that improved participation, positive constituents' experiences, timely allocation of resources, and enhanced transparency collectively contribute to better management and successful implementation of CDF projects.

Overall, the framework demonstrates that effective utilisation of CDF funds is not influenced by a single factor but by the combined effect of multiple governance and implementation elements. The interaction between participation, lived experiences, timely financial processes, and transparency creates a system that either supports or hinders development outcomes. This conceptual model therefore guides the study in examining how these factors shape constituents' experiences in the utilisation of CDF funds.

3 Research Methodology and Design

The study employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology focuses on exploring and describing the lived experiences of individuals regarding a particular phenomenon. It seeks to understand how individuals perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences.

This design was appropriate because the study aimed to explore stakeholders lived experiences in the utilisation of CDF in Mufumbwe District. Unlike ethnography, which requires prolonged observation of cultural practices over time, the phenomenological design enabled the researcher to focus specifically on participants' experiences and perceptions of CDF processes. The study population consisted of stakeholders who were directly involved in or affected by the utilisation of CDF in Mufumbwe District. These included community members, councilors, Ward Development Committee (WDC) members, and district officials such as planners, accountants, and CDF committee representatives. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had direct experience with CDF processes. This technique enabled the researcher to identify information-rich participants who could provide detailed insights into the utilisation of CDF.

A total of 40 participants were included in the study. These comprised 30 community members, four councillors, two district planners, two district accountants, and two CDF committee members. Participants were recruited through local administrative structures, including ward leaders and district offices, who assisted in identifying individuals with relevant experience. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with councillors, district officials, and CDF committee members. An interview guide was used to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for probing emerging issues. The interviews focused on fund allocation processes, project implementation, monitoring mechanisms, and challenges encountered.

Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was conducted in a location convenient for the participant. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. Focus group discussions were conducted with community members who had benefited from CDF projects. Each group consisted of between 8 and 10 participants and was organised, where necessary, according to gender and age to encourage open discussion.

FGDs enabled participants to share and compare their experiences, thereby generating collective insights into community participation, project outcomes, and challenges. Each discussion lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was audio-recorded with consent. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis followed a systematic process. First, the researcher familiarises themselves with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts. Second, initial codes were

generated to identify meaningful units related to participants' experiences.

The codes were then organised into categories, and broader themes were developed to capture patterns across the data. Key themes that emerged included community participation, transparency, accountability, project implementation, and challenges in CDF utilisation.

NVivo software (Version 12) was used to support the organisation and coding of qualitative data. The software facilitated systematic data management but did not replace the interpretive role of the researcher.

4 Findings

4.1 To describe constituents' experiences in participating in CDF project identification, implementation, and monitoring

The distribution of participants as shown on figure 1 below across wards indicates a relatively broad spatial representation of respondents within Mufumbwe Constituency, with notable variation in participation levels. Kamabuta Ward accounted for the highest proportion of respondents (27.5%), followed by Kizela and Kalambu Wards (17.5% each), while wards such as Chizela, Kabimpu, and Kabipupu each contributed 10%, and Kashima East had the lowest representation (7.5%).

This distribution is analytically significant in relation to the study objectives, particularly the objective of assessing community participation in CDF utilisation. Wards with higher representation, such as Kamabuta, are likely to provide more extensive insights into participation processes, implementation experiences, and perceived challenges. Conversely, lower representation from wards like Kashima East may reflect either limited engagement with CDF processes or lower accessibility, which itself points to potential disparities in participation an issue central to the study.

Furthermore, the variation in ward representation aligns with the conceptual framework, particularly the dimension of community participation. Uneven representation suggests that participation is not uniform across the constituency, reinforcing findings in later sections that highlight disparities in consultation practices and involvement in decision-making. This indicates that structural and contextual factors influence how different communities engage with CDF processes.

In terms of leadership experience, the majority of councilors and committee members had served for three to four years. This suggests the presence of relatively experienced local leadership, which is critical to the effective management and implementation of CDF projects. Within the conceptual framework, this relates to the institutional capacity component, as experienced leaders are more likely to possess the administrative knowledge and procedural familiarity necessary for planning, coordination, and oversight. However, experience alone does not guarantee effectiveness, as later findings reveal persistent challenges in planning, procurement, and community engagement.

Additionally, participants reported diverse prior involvement in community development activities, including infrastructure development, water and sanitation initiatives, and social welfare programmes. This diversity of experience strengthens the analytical depth of the study, as it reflects varying levels of exposure to development processes. In relation to the study objectives, such experience enhances the credibility of participants' perspectives on project implementation, monitoring, and challenges.

At the same time, the presence of participants with no prior experience in community development highlights gaps in capacity at the grassroots level. Within the conceptual framework, this directly relates to the capacity and awareness dimension, suggesting that limited knowledge and skills among some community members may constrain effective participation in planning, implementation, and monitoring of CDF projects.

Overall, the demographic profile does not merely describe the sample but provides critical context for interpreting the findings. It reveals underlying inequalities in participation, variations in institutional capacity, and differing levels of community readiness, all of which shape how CDF processes are experienced and implemented across Mufumbwe Constituency.

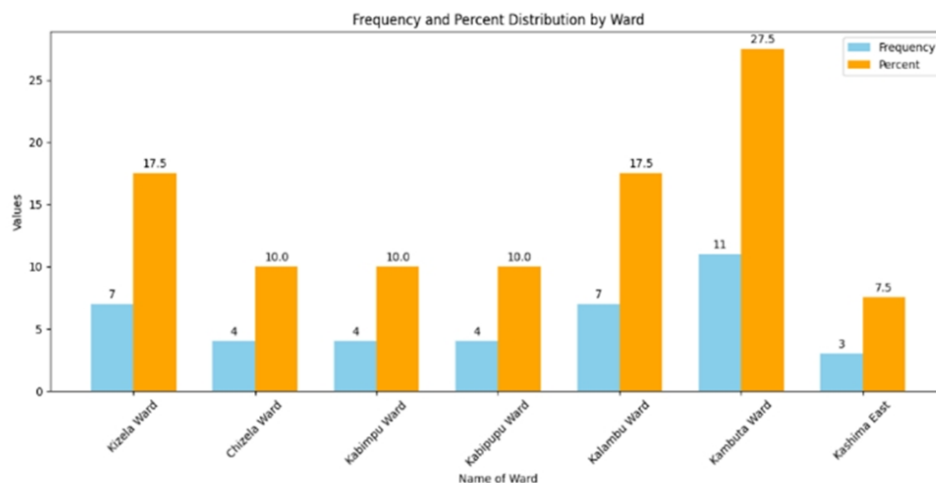


Figure 2: Distribution of Participants Across Wards

The findings as shown on the table below 1, indicate that participants possessed varied levels of prior experience in community development, reflecting a heterogeneous skills base within the study population. A notable proportion of respondents reported active involvement in development-related activities, including business engagement (15%), school construction and awareness initiatives (a combined 22.5%), and water and sanitation projects (10%). Others indicated experience in mobilizing communities for infrastructure development, monitoring social cash transfer programmes, and participating in corporate social responsibility initiatives.

This diversity of experience is analytically important in relation to the study objectives, particularly the objective of assessing community participation in the utilisation of CDF projects. Participants with prior exposure to development initiatives are more likely to possess practical knowledge of project planning, implementation, and monitoring processes. As such, their perspectives provide deeper insights into the effectiveness and challenges of CDF utilisation. Their involvement also suggests the presence of locally embedded capacity, which is critical for the success of participatory development programmes.

However, the findings also reveal that a segment of respondents (12.5%) reported having no prior experience in community development. This highlights a gap in grassroots capacity, which has implications for the inclusiveness and effectiveness of participation in CDF processes. Individuals without prior experience may face challenges in engaging meaningfully in consultations, decision-making, and monitoring activities.

Within the conceptual framework, these findings relate directly to the dimension of community capacity and awareness, which influences the extent and quality of participation. Communities with higher levels of experience and exposure are better positioned to contribute to identifying needs, overseeing implementation, and ensuring accountability. Conversely, limited experience may result in passive participation or exclusion from key processes.

Furthermore, the presence of individuals with leadership and organisational experience such as those involved in coordinating projects or managing community initiatives suggests potential for strengthening local governance structures. These individuals can play a facilitative role in bridging the gap between communities and formal institutions, thereby enhancing transparency, accountability, and project sustainability.

Overall, the variation in prior experience underscores both an opportunity and a challenge. While existing skills and experience can be leveraged to improve CDF implementation, the identified gaps point to the need for targeted capacity-building interventions to ensure more inclusive and effective community participation across all groups.

Moreover, local political and administrative actors were perceived to dominate decision-making processes, with council leaders frequently dictating project priorities. Participants suggested that political considerations sometimes outweighed community needs, creating a power imbalance that constrained grassroots participation. This dynamic undermines accountability and diminishes the responsiveness of CDF projects to local development priorities.

In response to these challenges, participants expressed a clear demand for more inclusive and transparent engagement mechanisms. They emphasised the need for greater opportunities for community members to participate actively in decision-making, noting that transparency would strengthen trust and enhance the effectiveness of CDF processes. The call for improved participation underscores a broader recognition that meaningful community engagement requires moving beyond formal consultations toward sustained and genuinely inclusive involvement.

The findings reveal that community involvement in project implementation manifests across three main areas: participation in committees, provision of labour and materials, and engagement in monitoring and accountability activities. Several respondents indicated that local committees play a central role in overseeing projects and ensuring that implementation aligns with planned objectives. For example, one participant explained that “community members are involved through project committees and supervision” (R6), while another noted that “local committees ensure projects progress as planned” (R11). Respondents highlighted that committee members often act as watchdogs, safeguarding the interests of the community throughout the project lifecycle (R21).

In addition to committee participation, community members contribute directly by providing labour and materials to support project completion. Participants shared that voluntary work and resource contributions are common, reflecting a strong sense of commitment to local development initiatives. Statements such as “people help by providing labour and materials for project completion” (R9) and “community members offer voluntary work during project phases” (R17) illustrate the practical ways in which the community actively supports project execution.

Finally, respondents emphasised their role in monitoring and accountability, demonstrating a proactive stance in ensuring transparency and quality. Participants reported that they help supervise contractors, report discrepancies, and support anti-corruption measures. For instance, one respondent noted, “we help make sure contractors are doing their work properly” (R14), while another stated, “community supervision helps reduce corruption” (R28). Such involvement strengthens governance at the local level by promoting oversight and ensuring that projects reflect community priorities.

Overall, the data indicate that community participation in project implementation is multifaceted, combining decision-making oversight, tangible contributions, and accountability measures. These forms of engagement foster ownership, enhance transparency, and ultimately improve the effectiveness of development initiatives within the constituency.

Table 1 previous experience in Community Development

Previous Experience in Community Development (if any)				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Business man for six years	6	15.0	15.0	15.0
Coordinated water and sanitation projects	4	10.0	10.0	25.0
Helped organize community boreholes and school projects	4	10.0	10.0	35.0
Involved in school building projects and awareness campaigns	5	12.5	12.5	47.5
Involved in school building projects and awareness campaigns.	4	10.0	10.0	57.5
Monitoring the use social cash transfer in the community.	3	7.5	7.5	65.0
Non	2	5.0	5.0	70.0
None	3	7.5	7.5	77.5
Served as the head teacher at a community school	3	7.5	7.5	85.0
Yes, managed to mobilise people to build a maternity annex	3	7.5	7.5	92.5
Yes, through corporate social responsibility as a director	3	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

4.2 To Examine the Challenges Constituents, Encounter in Engaging with and Utilizing CDF Resources

The study revealed several challenges that constituents face in the implementation of CDF projects, reflecting structural, procedural, and political factors that constrain effective project delivery and limit meaningful community engagement. One of the major concerns identified was funding delays and insufficiency. Respondents consistently highlighted that late or inadequate disbursement of funds disrupts project execution. For example, R13 reported that “funding delays often stall projects and affect progress,” while R19 noted that “sometimes funds come late, causing work stoppages,” and R24 added that “inadequate funding limits the scope of projects.” These responses indicate that financial bottlenecks not only delay project completion but also restrict the range of activities that can be undertaken, undermining the intended impact of CDF interventions.

Planning and procurement issues were also highlighted as critical obstacles to project success. Respondents explained that limited planning capacity and delays in procurement processes often impede timely project commencement. R20 observed that “slow planning and procurement processes cause project failures,” whereas R25 remarked that “procurement challenges delay project starts,” and R32 indicated that “planning deficiencies affect quality and timeliness.” These findings suggest that human resource limitations and procedural inefficiencies within local governance structures contribute significantly to project underperformance, highlighting the need for strengthened planning frameworks and streamlined procurement systems.

Political interference and low community participation emerged as additional challenges. Several respondents noted that local political interests sometimes take precedence over genuine community priorities. For instance, R25 explained that “council preferences override community needs; participation is often low due to poor awareness,” while R30 added that “political interests influence contractor selection,” and R37 highlighted that “community members lack information to participate fully.” These insights underscore the extent to which political dynamics can limit transparency and reduce grassroots involvement, weakening the effectiveness of participatory governance mechanisms.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that financial constraints, procedural inefficiencies, and political factors collectively hinder the successful implementation of CDF projects. Addressing these challenges requires timely disbursement of funds, capacity building in planning and procurement, and mechanisms that promote transparency and meaningful community engagement. Ensuring that community priorities guide project selection and oversight is essential for improving both project outcomes and constituent satisfaction.

4.3 To Explore Strategies that Can Enhance Community Participation and Improve Effective Utilisation of CDF Resources

Community Involvement in Monitoring and Evaluation

Community involvement in monitoring and evaluation is a key strategy for improving project outcomes. Respondents reported that monitoring is largely conducted by Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and project management teams. R33 stated that “WDC and project committees conduct regular site inspections,” while R36 noted that “monitoring visits ensure compliance with standards,” and R39 added that “committees provide oversight for project quality.” The involvement of these formal committees plays a crucial role in ensuring project compliance and fostering accountability among those responsible for implementation.

Despite active committee oversight, broader community participation in monitoring and evaluation was limited. Respondents highlighted a lack of awareness and engagement among the wider population, with R35 explaining that “most community members are not involved in monitoring beyond committee members,” R37 noting that “lack of awareness limits broader participation,” and R40 stating that “community engagement in evaluation is minimal.” This limited participation reduces the potential for collective input and suggests the need for community education and initiatives to enhance inclusive monitoring practices.

Feedback mechanisms, including public meetings and grievance channels, were reported as existing avenues for

community input. R38 stated that “feedback is collected during community meetings but not consistently acted upon,” R40 added that “grievance mechanisms exist but need strengthening,” and R32 remarked that “more systematic feedback would improve outcomes.” While these mechanisms indicate an attempt to incorporate community perspectives, inconsistent follow-up limits their effectiveness, highlighting the need for better structured and responsive channels to ensure that community feedback informs project improvements.

Strategies for Transparency and Accountability

Respondents emphasised that promoting transparency and accountability requires people-centered approaches, incorporating community input in project selection and oversight. R40 noted that “transparency is promoted through community meetings and council oversight,” R36 highlighted that “inclusive participation enhances accountability,” and R39 added that “community involvement deters mismanagement.” Strong adherence to reporting guidelines and regular auditing was also identified as essential for maintaining financial integrity. R36 explained that “proper reporting and audits help reduce misuse of funds,” while R37 commented that “auditing improves financial discipline,” and R34 indicated that “clear reporting structures build trust.”

Furthermore, respondents suggested the establishment of grievance redress mechanisms and independent monitoring to strengthen accountability. R32 remarked that “GRM and third-party monitoring are needed for unbiased evaluation,” R38 added that “independent oversight would improve transparency,” and R35 emphasised that “stronger mechanisms protect community interests.” These strategies collectively underline the importance of community participation, structured oversight, and institutional mechanisms to safeguard the proper use of resources, ensuring that projects are aligned with local priorities and delivered effectively.

Recommendations for Improvement

The findings indicate several critical strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects. A key recommendation is the enhancement of community awareness and participation. Respondents emphasised that educating communities and involving them fully in project planning and oversight fosters accountability and ensures that development initiatives reflect local needs. For instance, R29 noted, “*We need to educate communities more and involve them fully,*” while R31 observed that “*awareness campaigns would boost participation,*” and R33 highlighted that “*informed communities hold implementers accountable.*” These perspectives underscore the central role of community engagement in achieving meaningful participation and improving project outcomes.

Building technical capacity within local committees emerged as another important recommendation. Respondents suggested that training and skills development would improve the quality of planning and implementation. R21 explained that “*capacity building will improve planning and implementation quality,*” R24 noted that “*training enhances committee effectiveness,*” and R26 added that “*skilled teams reduce project delays.*” Enhancing technical competence among committee members strengthens their ability to manage projects efficiently, contributing to better decision-making and execution.

Timely fund disbursement and improved planning were also highlighted as essential for effective project delivery. Several respondents stressed that delays in releasing funds and inadequate coordination impede progress. R24 stated, “*Funds should be released on time and projects planned carefully,*” R27 added that “*efficient planning prevents bottlenecks,*” and R30 observed that “*coordination between stakeholders is crucial.*” These recommendations point to the need for both procedural efficiency and strategic collaboration to ensure that projects are implemented smoothly and achieve their intended impact.

Finally, a strong emphasis on sustainability and maintenance was identified as crucial for lasting project benefits. Respondents highlighted that incorporating maintenance plans and fostering community ownership ensures that infrastructure and services continue to serve the intended beneficiaries over time. R37 remarked, “*Maintenance plans and community ownership are critical for lasting impact,*” R38 noted that “*sustainability depends on local involvement,*” and R40 stated that “*ongoing monitoring supports project longevity.*” This underscores the importance of embedding sustainability measures into project design and management, supported by active community engagement and continued oversight.

Overall, these recommendations collectively address the challenges identified in earlier sections, emphasising community engagement, technical capacity, efficient planning and funding, and sustainability as pillars for improving the performance and impact of CDF projects.

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

In line with objective 1, the study concludes that community participation exists but is uneven. In some wards, Ward Development Committees, traditional leaders, and consultations ensure meaningful involvement, reflecting participatory governance principles. However, other wards show limited engagement, often dominated by councilors or higher-level decision-makers. Factors such as limited awareness, inconsistent processes, and unequal access to information contribute to these disparities. Enhancing participation mechanisms, transparency, and capacity of both citizens and local leaders is essential to improve ownership and alignment of projects with community priorities.

In line with objective 2, the study concludes that utilisation of CDF funds is constrained by multiple challenges. Delays and insufficiency of funds hinder timely implementation. Procedural inefficiencies in planning and procurement reduce project quality and timeliness. Political interference and low community sensitization further limit genuine participation.

Weak monitoring and accountability mechanisms undermine transparency and reduce trust in the CDF system. Addressing these challenges requires strengthened institutional capacity, predictable funding, reduced political influence, and effective oversight mechanisms.

In line with objective 3, the study concludes that improving participation and utilisation requires a multifaceted approach: increasing awareness, capacity-building for local committees and leaders, timely fund disbursement, inclusive participatory processes, transparent monitoring, and sustainability planning. Implementation of these strategies can improve community ownership, accountability, and alignment of projects with local priorities.

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Ethical considerations

The article followed all ethical standards appropriate for this kind of research.

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