

Participatory M&E Design and the Sustainability of Community Development: Empirical Evidence from DHAPP Project in Juba, South Sudan

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) design and sustainability of the DHAPP project in Juba, South Sudan. It was grounded on Stakeholder and Empowerment Theories. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data within a cross-sectional design. A sample of 170 respondents was drawn from 280 beneficiaries and key project personnel using systematic random and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and document review. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and linear regression in SPSS, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Findings show high stakeholder participation in PM&E design ($M = 4.26$), particularly in target setting, indicator development, selection of data collection tools, and tool validation. Respondents also reported strong sustainability outcomes ($M = 4.23$), including continued project activities after donor reduction, strong community ownership, and integration of DHAPP services into local systems. However, inferential results indicate a very weak positive relationship between PM&E design and sustainability ($r = 0.037$, $p = 0.644$). Regression analysis confirms no statistically significant effect of PM&E design on project sustainability ($F = 0.214$, $p = 0.644$; $R^2 = 0.001$). This indicates that sustainability outcomes depend more on institutional capacity, financial resources, governance systems, and post-project support structures than on participatory M&E design alone. The study recommends that future interventions strengthen institutional and community capacity, integrate sustainability planning into core project systems and align participatory M&E with resource and governance frameworks that support long-term continuity of project benefits.

Keywords: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, PM&E design, project sustainability, DHAPP project, community development, Juba South Sudan

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Introduction

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has evolved from a largely technocratic and donor-driven function into a strategic management tool that promotes accountability, learning, decision-making, and sustainability in development interventions (Muvhuti, 2023; Mohamed & Kulmie, 2023). Consequently, Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) is an approach that actively engages stakeholders, particularly beneficiaries, in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of development projects (Amin, Scheepers & Malik, 2023; Faraja & Mtae, 2025; Bulle & Muchelule, 2024). Participatory M&E is conceptualized as a strategic managerial approach that emphasizes regular planning, continuous monitoring, periodic measurement, and systematic review of project performance against established indicators and targets for efficiency, effectiveness, and impact (Kamau & Muchelule, 2024). PM&E allows communities to participate in defining indicators, collecting and analyzing data, assessing project performance, and making decisions regarding project improvements (Amin et al. 2023; Vanessa & Gitahi, 2023). Such participation strengthens local ownership, improves accountability,

enhances transparency, and increases the likelihood that project benefits will continue after donor support ends (Otundo, 2024). In recent years, development practitioners have increasingly recognized that conventional M&E approaches often exclude beneficiaries from project assessment processes, resulting in weak ownership and limited sustainability of project outcomes (Amin et al. 2023; Kamau & Muchelule, 2024).

Project sustainability refers to the capacity of a development intervention to continue delivering its intended benefits, services, and positive impacts to the target population long after external donor funding and technical support have terminated (Festo, 2024). Beyond mere operational continuity, true sustainability encompasses institutional capacity, financial viability, deep community ownership, and the seamless integration of project outcomes into existing local systems (Loum & Kyalo, 2026). Globally, maintaining this long-term momentum remains a central concern in community development practice. Historically, while billions of dollars have been funneled into fragile and developing nations to alleviate socio-economic and public health crises, empirical evidence reveals that a staggering proportion of these initiatives

collapse post-exit. These failures are frequently traced back to a lack of local ownership and poor community integration during the active project lifecycle (Legovini et al., 2015). To bridge this gap, recent literature emphasizes that project longevity is heavily dictated by the degree to which local communities participate in core project processes particularly M&E activities (Amin et al. 2023). Research indicates that the sustainability of development interventions is significantly enhanced when M&E practices are participatory, context-responsive and deeply aligned with local knowledge systems (Masvaure & Fish, 2022; Uraguchi, 2025). According to Otundo (2024), embedding community involvement directly into monitoring systems promotes adaptive management, continuous learning, and local accountability, which serve as critical determinants of structural survival. Furthermore, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023) highlights that these participatory approaches transform beneficiaries from passive recipients of aid into active partners, fundamentally strengthening overall project effectiveness. Recognizing this strategic shift, premier international development agencies including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and major international NGOs have increasingly institutionalized participatory frameworks within their standard project management designs to guarantee that local interventions endure long after the donors depart (OECD, 2023).

In Africa, participatory monitoring and evaluation has increasingly been adopted as a mechanism for improving the sustainability of donor-funded and community-driven projects (Amin et al. 2023; Vanessa & Gitahi, 2023; Bulle &

Muchelule, 2024). The continent continues to receive substantial development assistance directed toward poverty reduction, health improvement, food security, governance, peacebuilding, and infrastructure development (Cassimon, Fadare & Mavrotas, 2023; Adams, 2024). However, many projects continue to experience sustainability challenges after donor withdrawal. A study conducted in Ethiopia by Senbeto (2023) found that PM&E improved stakeholder ownership, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs. The study further established that communities participating in project monitoring were more likely to support project continuity after external funding ended. Nevertheless, challenges such as inadequate technical capacity, resource constraints, and inconsistent stakeholder participation limited the effectiveness of PM&E processes.

In Kenya, Zakayo and Sang (2024) found that community participation in monitoring and evaluation significantly enhanced the sustainability of community development projects through increased ownership, transparency, and stakeholder commitment. Likewise, Kimote and Muchai (2024) reported that stakeholder involvement in M&E strengthened accountability systems and improved project performance among donor-funded projects in Machakos County. These studies suggest that PM&E provides communities with opportunities to influence project decisions, thereby strengthening their commitment to sustaining project outcomes. However, in Rwanda, Kamugisha (2024) noted that urban water sustainability projects under the Water and Sanitation Corporation (WASAC) in Kigali suffered from poor planning, weak supervision, poor stakeholder participation and a lack of technical expertise among M&E staff. Kamau (2025) examined common pitfalls

in monitoring and evaluation across development projects in Africa. The study identified funding delays, lack of transparency, weak M&E systems, inadequate community participation, capacity limitations, and political interference as major challenges affecting project success and sustainability. The findings indicated that these constraints hinder learning, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making, leading to poor project performance and reduced sustainability. Similarly, Kabethi and Onyango (2024) examined monitoring and evaluation practices and sustainability of agribusiness projects. The study revealed that inadequate monitoring frameworks, limited stakeholder participation, insufficient feedback mechanisms, and weak institutional coordination negatively affected project sustainability. The researchers argued that projects lacking robust M&E systems experienced difficulties in maintaining benefits after donor withdrawal.

South Sudan exemplifies the complex challenges of implementing sustainable community development within a fragile state. Since gaining independence in 2011, the country has experienced protracted conflict, political instability, economic collapse, and severe humanitarian crises that have profoundly undermined institutional capacity and social infrastructure (Dagne & Young, 2025; Karlo et al., 2026). The capital city, Juba, serves as the primary hub for government operations and development activities, yet it faces acute challenges related to localized service delivery, fragmented governance, and strained community resilience (World Bank, 2024; WFP, 2024). The health sector clearly illustrates these systemic vulnerabilities. For instance, the South Sudan Health Sector Transformation Project (HSTP) identifies institutional capacity for

implementation and long-term sustainability as a high-risk factor, noting that public health management units require intensified capacity building to manage service delivery effectively (World Bank, 2024). To mitigate these structural risks, development frameworks increasingly emphasize community-based approaches, recognizing that locally embedded health strategies continue to provide vital benefits even when external donor funding ceases, suggesting a definitive pathway to project sustainability through deep community integration (World Bank, 2024).

The Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP) represents a significant community development and public health initiative in Juba. Executed within the operational framework of the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), DHAPP focuses on providing comprehensive HIV and sexual health services to military personnel, their families, and the surrounding civilian communities served by military health facilities (U.S. Department of Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program [DHAPP], 2023). The program's core targets include scaling up the military Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) program to achieve the ambitious UNAIDS 95-95-95 targets: ensuring 95% of the target population knows their HIV status, 95% of HIV-positive individuals are actively maintained on ART, and 95% of those on ART successfully achieve viral suppression (DHAPP, 2023). To achieve these benchmarks, the DHAPP project in Juba encompasses multiple intersecting technical areas: HIV/AIDS care and treatment, HIV testing services, clinical monitoring systems, targeted behavioral prevention interventions, and the institutional capacity building of the South Sudan People's Defense Force (SSPDF) alongside local health bodies (DHAPP, 2023). The program's

community development dimension seeks to bridge the gap between military and civilian health systems, strengthen local institutional capacity, and build resilient, sustainable health service delivery mechanisms capable of persisting far beyond external funding cycles (DHAPP, 2023).

Achieving sustainability in such projects requires effective monitoring and evaluation systems that actively involve stakeholders in assessing progress, identifying challenges, and informing decision-making. However, development projects in South Sudan have traditionally relied on centralized and donor-driven monitoring and evaluation approaches that focus primarily on reporting requirements rather than stakeholder engagement and local learning. Such approaches often limit community participation, weaken ownership, and reduce the ability of projects to adapt to changing local conditions (Morkel & Sibanda, 2022). Consequently, many projects struggle to sustain outcomes once external support ends. Within the DHAPP project, the need for participatory monitoring and evaluation is particularly important because the program operates within a military health system traditionally characterized by hierarchical management structures and limited beneficiary involvement. Evidence from HIV service delivery programs in South Sudan's military facilities indicates that beneficiary perspectives and client feedback have not always been adequately integrated into program monitoring and decision-making processes (Lasu et al., 2023). Limited stakeholder participation in monitoring and evaluation can create a disconnect between project activities and community needs, potentially affecting service utilization, treatment adherence,

and long-term sustainability of project outcomes.

Although participatory monitoring and evaluation has been widely recognized as a mechanism for strengthening project sustainability, empirical evidence from South Sudan remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on general monitoring practices, project performance, and humanitarian assistance effectiveness rather than examining how participatory M&E design influences the sustainability of community development initiatives in fragile and post-conflict settings. While Loum and Kyalo (2026) found that monitoring and evaluation practices significantly influence the sustainability of humanitarian projects in Juba, the specific role of participatory M&E design has received little scholarly attention. Furthermore, no known study has specifically examined the relationship between participatory M&E design and sustainability within the DHAPP project. This knowledge gap limits the ability of policymakers, donors, project managers, and development practitioners to design monitoring and evaluation systems that promote long-term project sustainability. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the influence of participatory M&E design on the sustainability of community development initiatives under the DHAPP project in Juba, South Sudan. The study seeks to generate empirical evidence on how stakeholder participation in monitoring and evaluation processes contributes to sustaining project performance in a fragile development state.

Theoretical Review

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory was formally developed by Edward Freeman in 1984 (Freeman, 1984; Freeman et al., 2010).

Freeman defined a stakeholder as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization's objectives" (p. 46), positioning organizations as networks of relationships rather than isolated entities pursuing profit maximization alone (Freeman, 1984; Darden School of Business, 2024). The theory posits that organizations create value through interconnected relationships with diverse constituencies internal and external parties including employees, suppliers, customers, government, and communities and that managing for stakeholders enhances long-term resilience, innovation, and performance by aligning interests toward mutual benefit rather than zero-sum trade-offs (Freeman et al., 2010; Parmar et al., 2010). In development contexts, this framework has been extended to emphasize engaging beneficiaries and local institutions as active participants in monitoring and evaluation, where stakeholder engagement fosters ownership, improves project sustainability, and ensures M&E processes reflect the lived realities of those affected by interventions (Amin et al., 2023; Gatdet, 2025).

Despite its influence, Stakeholder Theory faces significant critiques. The definitional ambiguity of Freeman's broad stakeholder concept makes operational prioritization difficult, potentially encompassing virtually everyone and complicating resource allocation when interests conflict (Phillips, 2003; Mitchell et al., 1997). Critics also highlight that the theory often assumes a level playing field, ignoring profound power imbalances where marginalized communities lack the voice and resources to assert their interests, thereby legitimizing tokenistic participation while masking domination by powerful actors (Riger, 1993; Gwiriri & Bennett, 2020). Additionally, the theory's

Western business origins may not adequately account for non-Western cultural values such as Ubuntu, which emphasizes communal interdependence and collective responsibility over individualistic, contract-based relationships, limiting its applicability in African contexts where kinship and reciprocity govern community relations (Kuhumba & Mhando, 2025; Morkel & Sibanda, 2022).

In this study, Stakeholder Theory provides a framework for identifying and analyzing the various actors in the DHAPP project and examining how participatory M&E structures their engagement. The theory guides analysis of whether stakeholders are passive data sources or active participants in defining indicators and interpreting findings, while drawing attention to power dynamics that risk rendering community participation superficial in a militarized, fragile state context (Amin et al., 2023; Riger, 1993).

Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by Julian Rappaport and Marc Zimmerman within the field of community psychology, as a direct response to deficit-based approaches that pathologized individuals and relied on professional experts to "fix" social problems (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 1990; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Rappaport's landmark 1981 article argued for empowerment over prevention, shifting focus from external solutions to community strengths and participation, while Zimmerman (1995, 2000) systematized the theory across three interconnected levels: psychological empowerment (individual control and competence), organizational empowerment (participatory structures and shared leadership), and community empowerment (collective action and

accessible resources). The theory posits that empowerment is both a value orientation and a measurable construct involving processes that enable people to gain control, obtain resources, and critically understand their environment, and outcomes that reflect increased skills, organizational networks, and sustained capacity for independent problem-solving (Zimmerman, 1995; Swift & Levin, 1987; Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989).

The theory has faced substantial critiques. Rissel (1994) famously described empowerment as "the holy grail of health promotion," arguing its overuse has rendered it analytically imprecise, while Riger (1993) contended that focusing on individual psychological empowerment risks diverting attention from structural inequalities, effectively creating a "new form of victim-blaming" that absolves oppressive systems. Critics also highlight the co-optation of empowerment discourse by powerful institutions to legitimize top-down control, creating what Cooke and Kothari (2001) termed "participation as tyranny," and note that without genuine power redistribution, participatory processes remain tokenistic (Serrano-Garcia, 1984; Gatdet, 2025). Furthermore, the theory's Western individualistic assumptions may conflict with African communal values such as Ubuntu, and its resource-intensive demands often exceed the capacity of fragile state contexts where communities face acute survival challenges (Kuhumba & Mhando, 2025; Loum & Kyalo, 2026; OECD, 2023).

The study applies Zimmerman's (1995) framework to assess empowerment components within M&E across individual, organizational, and community levels, while distinguishing between empowering processes and empowered outcomes to evaluate whether M&E builds local capacity or

maintains dependency on external expertise (Zimmerman, 1995; 2000). The theory's strengths-based orientation also guides the study to identify existing community capacities such as traditional knowledge systems and health worker networks that participatory M&E can build upon, rather than imposing culturally inappropriate external systems, thereby informing recommendations for sustainable HIV service delivery in South Sudan's fragile context (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 1995; OECD, 2023).

Empirical Review

Global evidence shows a strong relationship between participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) design and sustainability of community development outcomes. Kibukho (2021) examined the mediating role of citizen empowerment in the relationship between PM&E and social sustainability. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach using a concurrent design, with quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews drawn from development project stakeholders. Findings showed that PM&E improves sustainability through enhanced citizen empowerment, which strengthens ownership, accountability, and continuity of project benefits. The study concluded that sustainability improves when beneficiaries actively participate in monitoring processes. Similarly, research on participatory evaluation in sustainability projects using structured questionnaires and interviews across development programs found that community involvement in M&E improves project adaptability and long-term performance. The study used a mixed-methods design involving 200 stakeholders across project management levels. Results indicated that participatory systems strengthen feedback loops and improve decision-making, which directly

supports sustainability outcomes (Otundo, 2024). Another global study focusing on participatory approaches in cooperative enterprises used a descriptive design with survey and qualitative interviews. The study found that stakeholder involvement in M&E enhances accountability and operational efficiency, although resource constraints and limited capacity weaken implementation effectiveness. The study concluded that sustainability depends on sustained participation and institutional support (Gotyi, 2025).

Further, Zakayo and Sang (2024) assessed participatory M&E and sustainability of community development projects in Kenya using a descriptive survey design targeting project committees and development stakeholders. The study employed questionnaires and regression analysis. Findings revealed that community engagement, communication, and participatory decision-making significantly improved project sustainability, although limited resources and weak stakeholder coordination constrained outcomes. In Ethiopia, Senbeto (2023) examined participatory monitoring and evaluation practices in a resilience-focused development project using a mixed-methods design involving household surveys, key informant interviews, and field observation. The study found that PM&E improved ownership and accountability but was constrained by inadequate technical capacity, inconsistent participation, and limited financial support, which weakened sustainability outcomes. Similarly, a multi-country study by Otundo (2024) analyzed participatory M&E data dissemination practices using a mixed-methods design involving 150 donor-funded projects. The study found that effective communication of monitoring data improves transparency,

stakeholder responsiveness, and sustainability, while weak dissemination systems reduce project continuity after donor exit.

In South Sudan remain limited but emerging evidence highlights monitoring and evaluation as a key determinant of sustainability. Loum and Kyalo (2026) examined M&E practices and sustainability of humanitarian projects in Juba using a descriptive survey design with questionnaires and key informant interviews. The study found that structured monitoring systems, stakeholder feedback, and staff capacity significantly influence sustainability outcomes. However, weak institutional frameworks and limited beneficiary engagement reduced long-term project effectiveness. In addition, evidence from HIV service delivery programs in military facilities in South Sudan indicates that limited incorporation of beneficiary feedback in program monitoring weakens service delivery outcomes and reduces sustainability. The study used qualitative interviews with service providers and beneficiaries, revealing that top-down monitoring systems create a gap between program design and community needs, affecting adherence and continuity of services (Lasu et al., 2023).

Empirical evidence shows that participatory M&E improves sustainability through ownership, accountability, and learning. However, gaps remain in fragile and post-conflict contexts where participatory M&E design is weakly institutionalized and rarely studied as a standalone predictor of sustainability, particularly within structured donor programs such as DHAPP.

H₀₁: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) design has no statistically significant effect on the sustainability of community development projects in the DHAPP project in Juba, South Sudan.

Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach integrating quantitative and qualitative methods. The target population was 280 DHAPP beneficiaries in Juba, from which a sample of 162 respondents was selected using Krejcie and Morgan's sampling framework. In addition, 5 project management staff from RTI International and 3 officers from the SSPDF HIV Secretariat were included as key informants, resulting in a total sample of

170 respondents (Table 1). Systematic random sampling was used to select beneficiaries by dividing the population by the sample size and selecting every second name from the beneficiary register. This approach minimized selection bias and improved representativeness. Purposive sampling was used for key informants due to their technical knowledge and direct involvement in project implementation and monitoring processes.

Table 1: Sample Distribution of Respondents

Category of Respondents	Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique	Data Collection Method
Project beneficiaries	280	162	Systematic random sampling	Questionnaire
Project management staff (RTI)	5	5	Purposive sampling	Interview
SSPDF HIV Secretariat staff	3	3	Purposive sampling	Interview
Total	288	170		

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, interview guides, and document review checklists. Questionnaires captured quantitative data using a five-point Likert scale focused on participatory monitoring and evaluation design and sustainability of the DHAPP project. This tool supported efficient data collection from a large group and ensured consistency in responses for statistical analysis (Civ, 2017; Kuphanga, 2024). Key informant interviews provided qualitative insights into how PM&E practices influence sustainability outcomes in the project context, allowing deeper exploration of implementation realities (Taherdoost, 2021). Document review of DHAPP reports and monitoring records complemented primary data and supported triangulation.

Data quality was ensured through validity and reliability testing. Content validity was established through expert review and pretesting of instruments, with a Content Validity Index (CVI) threshold of 0.7 used as the benchmark.

Table 2: Validity (CVI) Results

Variable (PM&E Design Constructs)	CVI	No. of Items
Stakeholder involvement	0.765	9
Feedback mechanisms	0.837	9
Decision participation	0.831	9
Sustainability outcomes	0.844	8

All constructs recorded CVI values above 0.7, indicating acceptable validity. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha through a pilot test

involving 10 respondents who were excluded from the final study. The overall reliability coefficient of 0.819 confirmed internal consistency of the instruments.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis summarized responses on PM&E design and sustainability using frequencies and percentages. Inferential analysis used correlation and multiple linear regression to test the relationship between participatory monitoring and evaluation design and sustainability of the DHAPP project. Data were analyzed using SPSS, with checks for missing values, outliers, and normality.

The regression model used in the study was specified as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \epsilon$$

Where:

Y = Sustainability of DHAPP project

β_0 = Constant

β_1 = Coefficient of participatory M&E design

X = Participatory monitoring and evaluation design

ϵ = Error term

The hypothesis tested whether participatory M&E design significantly influences sustainability of the DHAPP project in Juba.

Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to participatory M&E practices and sustainability outcomes. Themes were aligned with the study objective and used to support interpretation of quantitative results (Brooks, McCluskey, Turley, & King, 2015).

Ethical approval was obtained from Uganda Management Institute, and permission was granted by RTI International and the SSPDF HIV Secretariat. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, confidentiality was maintained, and

participation remained voluntary with the option to withdraw at any stage.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The study first evaluated the socio-demographic profile of respondents involved in the study to describe the composition of respondents. The summarized results are presented in Table 3.

The findings show that male respondents dominated the sample, accounting for 69.8%, while females represented 30.2%. This indicates higher male participation in DHAPP-related services and decision spaces within the study area. Age distribution shows that most respondents fell within the economically active population. The largest proportion was aged 25–29 years (21.6%), followed by 45–49 years (19.1%) and 20–24 years (15.4%). Overall, most respondents were between 20 and 45 years, indicating that the study captured a productive and active population group engaged in community development activities. Regarding marital status, the majority of respondents were married (68.5%), followed by those who were single (27.8%). A small proportion were widowed, divorced, or in other categories. This suggests that most respondents had household responsibilities that may influence their engagement with community health and development programs. In terms of education, more than half of the respondents had university-level education (55.6%), followed by vocational training (18.5%) and secondary education (16.7%). Only a small proportion had primary education or no formal schooling. This indicates a relatively high literacy level among respondents, which supports their ability to engage with

monitoring and evaluation processes. Lastly, results on duration of residence show that most respondents had lived in Juba town block for more than 15 years (48.1%), while 30.9% had stayed for 5–10 years. This indicates that a large proportion of respondents had sufficient

local experience and familiarity with community development dynamics and the DHAPP project environment, strengthening the reliability of their responses.

Table 3: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	113	69.8
	Female	49	30.2
	Total	162	100.0
Age (years)	Less than 15	4	2.5
	15–19	7	4.3
	20–24	25	15.4
	25–29	35	21.6
	30–34	23	14.2
	35–39	20	12.3
	40–44	17	10.5
	45–49	31	19.1
	Total	162	100.0
Marital status	Married	111	68.5
	Single	45	27.8
	Divorced	1	0.6
	Widow/Widower	4	2.5
	Others	1	0.6
Total	162	100.0	
Level of education	Never went to school	2	1.2
	Primary	13	8.0
	Secondary	27	16.7
	Vocational	30	18.5
	University	90	55.6
	Total	162	100.0
Duration in Juba town block (years)	Less than 4	5	3.1
	5–10	50	30.9
	11–14	29	17.9
	More than 15	78	48.1
	Total	162	100.0

Source: Field data (2024)

Descriptive Statistics

Stakeholder Participation in M&E Design and Sustainability of Project sustainability

To assess the extent of stakeholder participation in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) design within the DHAPP project, respondents were asked

to indicate their level of agreement with various statements related to target setting, indicator development, selection of data collection tools, and testing of monitoring instruments. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 =

Strongly Agree. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Stakeholder Participation in M&E Design and Sustainability of the DHAPP Project

Statement	SD (1) %	D (2) %	NC (3) %	A (4) %	SA (5) %	Mean	SD
Stakeholders' consensus is sought when setting targets for the DHAPP project	1.9	3.1	9.3	37.7	48.1	4.27	0.892
Stakeholders have been involved in target setting of the DHAPP project	0.0	4.3	7.4	48.8	39.5	4.23	0.769
Stakeholders' involvement in target setting allows incorporation of various ideas leading to realistic targets	3.7	4.3	10.5	34.6	46.9	4.17	1.029
Stakeholders' consensus in determining project indicators contributes to project sustainability	0.6	3.1	6.2	40.7	49.4	4.35	0.784
Stakeholders were exposed to indicator definitions and understand them	1.9	4.3	12.3	36.4	45.1	4.19	0.941
Stakeholders were involved in brainstorming during development of project indicators	3.1	4.3	9.9	33.3	49.4	4.22	1.001
Stakeholders understand quantitative and qualitative data collection methods	3.7	1.2	4.9	34.6	55.6	4.37	0.925
Stakeholders are involved in selecting data collection tools during implementation	2.5	1.2	5.6	48.1	42.6	4.27	0.891
Stakeholders participate in testing data collection tools for reliability	1.9	3.1	7.4	37.0	50.6	4.31	0.881
Average Mean and Standard Deviation						4.26	0.901

Source: Field data (2024)

The findings indicate a high level of stakeholder participation in the design of monitoring and evaluation activities, as reflected by an overall mean score of 4.26 and a standard deviation of 0.901. The findings suggest that the DHAPP project actively engages stakeholders during critical planning and design stages of the monitoring and evaluation process. The results show that 78 (48.1%) respondents strongly agreed and 61 (37.7%) agreed that stakeholders' consensus is sought when setting project targets, yielding a mean score of 4.27 (SD

= 0.892). This implies that project targets are developed through consultation rather than unilateral decision-making.

During interviews, one key informant from the SSPDF HIV Secretariat noted:

"Before annual targets are approved, discussions are held with implementing partners, facility teams and other stakeholders to agree on what is realistic and achievable within the available resources."

Similarly, 79 (48.8%) respondents agreed and 64 (39.5%) strongly agreed that stakeholders have been involved in target

setting for the DHAPP project (Mean = 4.23, SD = 0.769). This finding suggests that stakeholders participate directly in establishing project priorities and expected outcomes. One project management staff member explained:

“Target setting is not done by one office. Stakeholders provide information from the field, and their views help determine what targets can realistically be achieved.”

Regarding whether stakeholder involvement allows incorporation of diverse ideas leading to realistic targets, 76 (46.9%) respondents strongly agreed and 56 (34.6%) agreed (Mean = 4.17, SD = 1.029). Although this statement recorded the lowest mean score among the indicators, the results still demonstrate broad recognition of the value of stakeholder contributions. A respondent observed that: *“When community representatives and health workers participate, the targets become more practical because they reflect realities on the ground.”*

The study further established that stakeholders reach consensus when determining project indicators that contribute to sustainability. This statement received one of the highest ratings, with 80 (49.4%) respondents strongly agreeing and 66 (40.7%) agreeing (Mean = 4.35, SD = 0.784). This suggests that stakeholders play a central role in deciding how project performance and sustainability are measured. A key informant remarked:

“Indicators are discussed jointly because everyone needs to understand what success means and how progress will be measured.”

The findings also reveal that stakeholders were exposed to project indicator definitions and understood them (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.941), with more than 80% of respondents expressing agreement. This suggests that

stakeholders are adequately informed about the indicators used within the project. According to one interview participant:

“Training sessions are conducted whenever indicators are revised so that all users interpret them in the same way.”

Similarly, 80 (49.4%) respondents strongly agreed and 54 (33.3%) agreed that stakeholders participated in brainstorming sessions during the development of project indicators (Mean = 4.22, SD = 1.001). This demonstrates that collaborative discussions are used to refine monitoring indicators. One respondent stated:

“Brainstorming meetings help identify indicators that are relevant to both the project and the beneficiaries.”

The highest mean score was recorded for the statement that stakeholders understand both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods (Mean = 4.37, SD = 0.925). Specifically, 90 (55.6%) respondents strongly agreed and 56 (34.6%) agreed. This finding indicates that stakeholders possess the technical knowledge required to participate effectively in monitoring activities. An interviewee explained:

“Most staff and community focal persons have received training on registers, reporting tools, surveys and other data collection methods used in the project.”

The results further show that stakeholders participate in decisions regarding data collection tools during project implementation (Mean = 4.27, SD = 0.891), with 90.7% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This suggests that monitoring tools are selected through a participatory process. One project officer stated:

“Users of the tools are consulted before adoption because they understand the realities of data collection in the field.”

Finally, 82 (50.6%) respondents strongly agreed and 60 (37.0%) agreed that stakeholders participate in testing data collection tools to determine their reliability before full implementation (Mean = 4.31, SD = 0.881). This finding demonstrates stakeholder involvement in quality assurance processes. As one key informant explained:

“Before new tools are rolled out, they are piloted in selected facilities and feedback is collected to improve their effectiveness.”

Quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that stakeholder participation is strongly embedded in the design of the DHAPP monitoring and evaluation system. Stakeholders are involved in target setting, indicator

development, selection of monitoring tools, and validation of data collection instruments. Such participation is likely to enhance ownership, accountability, transparency, and long-term project sustainability.

Sustainability of DHAPP Project performance

Respondents were also asked to assess the sustainability of DHAPP project outcomes through statements focusing on continuity of activities, community ownership, institutional capacity, integration into local systems, and maintenance of project benefits over time. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Sustainability of DHAPP Project performance

Statement	SD (1) %	D (2) %	NC (3) %	A (4) %	SA (5) %	Mean	SD
Project activities continue after donor support reduces	1.2	2.5	8.0	40.7	47.6	4.31	0.883
Community members take responsibility for maintaining project outcomes	2.5	3.7	9.9	38.9	45.0	4.21	0.932
DHAPP interventions are integrated into existing local systems	1.9	4.3	10.5	39.5	43.8	4.19	0.910
Project benefits remain visible in the community over time	1.2	3.1	7.4	42.6	45.7	4.28	0.865
Local institutions have capacity to sustain project activities	2.5	4.3	11.1	41.4	40.7	4.14	0.948
Community ownership supports continuity of DHAPP services	1.9	2.5	6.8	44.4	44.4	4.27	0.842
Monitoring systems support long-term project continuity	2.5	3.1	9.3	43.2	42.0	4.20	0.901
DHAPP results remain stable after implementation phases	2.5	4.3	10.5	41.4	41.3	4.15	0.937
Average Mean and Standard Deviation						4.23	0.902

Source: Field data (2024)

The findings reveal positive perceptions regarding the sustainability of DHAPP project outcomes, as reflected

by an overall mean score of 4.23 and a standard deviation of 0.902. This suggests that respondents believe the project has

established mechanisms capable of sustaining benefits beyond the active implementation period.

The highest-rated statement was that project activities continue even after donor support reduces (Mean = 4.31, SD = 0.883). A total of 77 (47.6%) respondents strongly agreed while 66 (40.7%) agreed with the statement. This finding suggests confidence in the project's ability to maintain services beyond external funding. One SSPDF HIV Secretariat official stated:

"Many activities have already been integrated into routine facility operations, making it possible for services to continue even when donor funding declines."

The findings further show that project benefits remain visible in the community over time (Mean = 4.28, SD = 0.865), with 88.3% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. This indicates that the project's interventions continue to generate positive outcomes. A beneficiary explained:

"The awareness created through the project is still helping people seek HIV services and support even years after some activities were completed."

Similarly, respondents agreed that community ownership supports continuity of DHAPP services (Mean = 4.27, SD = 0.842). Equal proportions of respondents (44.4%) agreed and strongly agreed with the statement. During interviews, participants emphasized that local ownership strengthens sustainability. One respondent remarked:

"When communities see the project as their own, they are more willing to protect and support the services."

The study also found that community members take responsibility for maintaining project outcomes (Mean = 4.21, SD = 0.932). A project staff member explained:

"Community volunteers and peer educators continue mobilizing

beneficiaries even when direct project supervision is limited."

Regarding the role of monitoring systems, respondents agreed that monitoring structures support long-term project continuity (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.901). This finding suggests that continuous tracking of project performance contributes to sustainability. One interviewee stated:

"Monitoring helps identify challenges early and allows corrective action before problems affect project outcomes."

The results further indicate that DHAPP interventions have been integrated into existing local systems (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.910). This suggests that project activities are increasingly embedded within local institutional frameworks. According to one key informant:

"Most HIV services supported through DHAPP are now part of routine health facility operations rather than stand-alone project activities."

Although comparatively lower, respondents still agreed that DHAPP results remain stable after implementation phases (Mean = 4.15, SD = 0.937) and that local institutions have the capacity to sustain project activities (Mean = 4.14, SD = 0.948). These findings indicate positive perceptions regarding institutional preparedness for sustaining project achievements. One participant noted:

"There is still a need for additional capacity building, but the institutions are much stronger now than they were when the project started."

Both the survey findings and interview responses suggest that the DHAPP project possesses strong sustainability attributes. The continuation of activities, persistence of benefits, community ownership, integration into local systems, and strengthening of institutional capacity collectively indicate

favorable prospects for sustaining project outcomes beyond donor support.

Relationship Between Participatory M&E Design and Project Sustainability

To establish the relationship between participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) design and project sustainability within the DHAPP project, a

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was conducted. The analysis sought to determine the direction and strength of the relationship between stakeholder participation in M&E design and the sustainability of project performance. The results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Correlation Between Participatory M&E Design and Project Sustainability

	Participatory M&E Design	Project Sustainability
Participatory M&E Design	1	.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.644
	N	162
Project Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	.037
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.644
	N	162

Source: Field data (2024)

The findings indicate a very weak positive relationship between participatory M&E design and project sustainability ($r = 0.037$). The positive coefficient suggests that improvements in participatory M&E design are associated with slight improvements in project sustainability. However, the relationship is extremely weak, indicating that changes in participatory M&E design are not strongly associated with variations in project sustainability among respondents. The results further show that the relationship was not statistically significant ($p = 0.644 > 0.05$). Since the p-value exceeds the conventional significance level of 0.05, the study fails to reject the null hypothesis. This implies that there is insufficient statistical evidence to conclude that participatory M&E design significantly influences project sustainability within the DHAPP project.

The findings suggest that although stakeholders reported high levels of participation in M&E design and also perceived the project to be

sustainable, the two variables were not significantly related. This may indicate that other factors beyond stakeholder participation in M&E design, such as institutional capacity, financial resources, leadership commitment, policy support, community ownership, and post-project funding mechanisms, play a greater role in determining project sustainability.

Therefore, based on the correlation results, the study concludes that participatory M&E design alone does not have a statistically significant relationship with project sustainability in the DHAPP project in Juba, South Sudan ($r = 0.037$, $p = 0.644$). Further analysis using regression and qualitative findings may provide additional insights into factors influencing sustainability outcomes.

Hypothesis Testing

Model Significance of PM&E Design on Project Sustainability (ANOVA Results)

Table 7 presents the ANOVA results for the regression analysis assessing the effect of Participatory

Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) design on project sustainability. The model shows no statistically significant relationship between PM&E design and project sustainability ($F = 0.214$, $p =$

0.644). Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, the regression model does not significantly explain variations in project sustainability in the DHAPP project in Juba, South Sudan.

Table 7: ANOVA (PM&E Design and Project Sustainability)

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	0.120	1	0.120	0.214	0.644
Residual	90.024	160	0.563		
Total	90.144	161			

Source: Field data (2024)

Model Summary

Table 8 presents the regression model summary results showing the strength of association between PM&E design and project sustainability. The findings indicate a very weak relationship ($R = 0.037$). The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.001$) shows that PM&E design explains only 0.1% of the variation in project sustainability, while the adjusted R^2 (-0.005) indicates that the model does not improve prediction beyond a null model.

Table 8: Model Summary

R	R ²	Adj. R ²	Std. Error
0.037	0.001	-0.005	0.75010

Based on these results, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), stating that Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) design has no statistically significant effect on the sustainability of community development projects in the DHAPP project in Juba, South Sudan, is accepted. This indicates that PM&E design does not significantly influence project sustainability, suggesting that other institutional, operational, or contextual factors may have a stronger role in determining sustainability outcomes.

Discussion

Stakeholder Participation in M&E Design and Project Sustainability

The findings show strong stakeholder participation in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) design within the DHAPP project, reflected by a high overall mean score ($M = 4.26$). Respondents reported active involvement in target setting, indicator development, selection of data collection tools, and testing of monitoring instruments (Table 3). This aligns with PM&E theory, which positions stakeholders as co-creators in defining indicators, collecting data, and assessing project performance (Amin, Scheepers & Malik, 2023; Kamau & Muchelule, 2024). It also supports the argument that participatory M&E strengthens transparency, accountability, and local ownership through shared decision-making (Faraja & Mtae, 2025; Otundo, 2024).

Target setting recorded high agreement ($M = 4.27$), indicating that stakeholders engage in joint planning rather than top-down decisions. This reflects findings that participatory planning improves relevance of project targets by incorporating community realities and technical input from implementers (Vanessa & Gitahi, 2023). Similar observations apply to indicator development, where consensus scored

highly ($M = 4.35$). Literature shows that jointly defined indicators improve shared understanding of success and strengthen accountability structures (Amin et al., 2023; OECD, 2023). In this case, stakeholders appear to shape both planning and measurement frameworks, which theoretically should strengthen sustainability outcomes.

Findings also show strong stakeholder capacity in M&E processes, including understanding of data collection methods ($M = 4.37$) and participation in tool testing ($M = 4.31$). This reflects earlier evidence that capacity building within PM&E systems improves data quality and strengthens local ownership of monitoring processes (Bulle & Muchelule, 2024; Kamau & Muchelule, 2024). However, while technical participation appears strong, sustainability outcomes do not reflect a proportional statistical effect, suggesting a disconnect between procedural participation and functional influence on outcomes.

Sustainability of DHAPP Project Performance

Results in Table 5 indicate generally positive perceptions of sustainability ($M = 4.23$). Respondents reported continued project activities after donor support reduction ($M = 4.31$), strong community ownership ($M = 4.27$), and visible long-term benefits ($M = 4.28$). These findings align with the definition of sustainability as continued delivery of benefits, institutional integration, and community ownership beyond external funding (Festo, 2024; Loum & Kyalo, 2026).

The high ratings for continuation of activities and integration into local systems suggest partial institutional embedding of DHAPP services. This aligns with global evidence that sustainability improves when interventions become

part of routine systems rather than stand-alone donor projects (World Bank, 2024; OECD, 2023). Community ownership also emerged strongly, supporting the view that local responsibility enhances continuity of health and development interventions (Otundo, 2024).

However, lower scores for institutional capacity ($M = 4.14$) and post-implementation stability ($M = 4.15$) indicate residual sustainability gaps. These weaknesses reflect broader evidence from fragile settings, where institutional fragility, resource constraints, and weak systems limit long-term continuity of development outcomes (Dagne & Young, 2025; Karlo et al., 2026). In such contexts, perceived sustainability may not translate into structural resilience without stronger institutional reinforcement.

Relationship Between Participatory M&E Design and Sustainability

Despite strong participation in PM&E design and positive sustainability perceptions, correlation results show a very weak and non-significant relationship between the two variables ($r = 0.037$, $p = 0.644$). These findings challenge dominant literature that positions participatory M&E as a key driver of sustainability through ownership, accountability, and responsiveness (Amin et al., 2023; Masvaure & Fish, 2022).

Empirical studies in Africa present mixed outcomes. Zakayo and Sang (2024) reported a significant positive relationship between participatory M&E and sustainability in Kenya, while Senbeto (2023) found that PM&E improves ownership but remains constrained by capacity and resource limitations. The DHAPP findings align more closely with Kamau (2025), who identified structural barriers such as weak

institutional systems, limited resources, and coordination challenges as factors that reduce the effectiveness of participatory M&E.

In the South Sudan, this weak relationship reflects the influence of fragile systems. Studies show that institutional instability, hierarchical governance structures, and limited integration of feedback into decision-making processes reduce the practical impact of participatory mechanisms (Morkel & Sibanda, 2022; Lasu et al., 2023). Even where participation exists, its influence may remain procedural rather than transformative if institutions do not effectively use generated evidence.

OECD (2023) further argues that PM&E improves sustainability only when embedded in adaptive management systems that translate feedback into decisions. The DHAPP results suggest that although participation exists in design and monitoring processes, the feedback loop into operational decision-making may be weak, limiting its effect on sustainability outcomes.

Regression results confirm that PM&E design does not significantly influence project sustainability ($F = 0.214$, $p = 0.644$; $R^2 = 0.001$). This leads to acceptance of the null hypothesis. The findings indicate that participatory M&E design alone does not determine sustainability outcomes in the DHAPP project. This finding supports literature that sustainability depends on multiple interacting factors beyond participation, including institutional capacity, financing structures, leadership commitment, governance systems, and integration into local structures (Loum & Kyalo, 2026; Kamugisha, 2024). In the DHAPP context, strong participation may exist at design level, but structural and institutional constraints likely limit its translation into sustained outcomes.

Conclusion

The study established that participatory M&E design does not exert a statistically significant effect on the sustainability of community development projects within the DHAPP initiative in Juba, South Sudan, as evidenced by a very weak positive correlation. Although stakeholders reported high levels of engagement in target-setting, indicator development, and data collection tool selection, these design-phase participatory activities did not translate into measurable sustainability outcomes, indicating that the theoretical assumption of a direct causal link between participatory M&E design and project continuity may be overly deterministic and inadequately suited to fragile, resource-constrained, post-conflict environments where institutional capacity, financial autonomy and political stability operate as more powerful mediators of sustainability than procedural stakeholder inclusion alone.

Theoretical Implication

The findings challenge the uncritical application of dominant participatory frameworks such as Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, stakeholder theory, and resource dependency theory to post-conflict development contexts without adequate contextualization. Theoretical refinement is therefore needed to develop contingency-based models that explicitly account for the moderating influence of institutional fragility, resource scarcity, and governance deficits on the participatory M&E–sustainability nexus.

Future theoretical work should conceptualize participatory M&E design not as a standalone predictor of sustainability, but as one component within a broader ecosystem of institutional, financial, and political enablers. Scholars should integrate

insights from fragile state theory and adaptive management literature to construct middle-range theories that specify the boundary conditions under which participatory M&E design contributes to sustainability, thereby moving beyond universalist claims toward context-sensitive explanatory frameworks.

Recommendations

Practice

Development practitioners and project implementers should move beyond ritualistic or cosmetic stakeholder consultation during the M&E design phase and instead prioritize embedded capacity building that equips local institutions and community actors with the technical, financial, and managerial competencies required to sustain project benefits beyond donor withdrawal. This includes transitioning from participatory design workshops to functional resource-mobilization mechanisms, such as community-managed maintenance funds, local government co-financing arrangements, and social enterprise models that generate revenue for ongoing operations. Practitioners should also ensure that participatory M&E processes are integrated into existing local institutional routines rather than maintained as parallel project-specific systems, thereby embedding monitoring and accountability structures within government health facilities, local administrative bodies, and community governance structures. Furthermore, M&E design should incorporate explicit sustainability indicators that track post-project institutional capacity, financial viability, and community ownership rather than limiting monitoring to output and outcome metrics tied to implementation periods.

Policy

1. The Government of South Sudan, in collaboration with international development partners, should formulate explicit national and sectoral sustainability policies that mandate post-project financing frameworks, institutional handover protocols, and community ownership structures as compulsory components of all community development project designs.
2. Policy instruments should require that participatory M&E arrangements extend beyond advisory roles in indicator selection to encompass decision-making authority over implementation, resource allocation, and maintenance, thereby ensuring that community participation is substantive rather than symbolic. A
3. Additionally, the Ministry of Finance and Planning should establish sustainability assessment criteria as a prerequisite for project approval and donor funding disbursement, requiring implementers to demonstrate clear exit strategies, local institutional absorptive capacity, and multi-year budget commitments from government counterparts.
4. At the sub-national level, county and payam authorities should be empowered through statutory mandates and budgetary allocations to assume ownership of project assets and monitoring systems, thereby closing the implementation gap between national policy intentions and local institutional realities.

Future Studies

1. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to track the sustainability trajectories of community development projects over extended periods, thereby capturing the delayed effects of participatory M&E design and the emergence of sustainability outcomes that may not be visible during the implementation phase.
2. Quantitative studies should employ structural equation modeling or path analysis to test the mediating and moderating effects of institutional capacity, leadership commitment, post-conflict governance quality, and financial resource availability on the relationship between participatory M&E design and project sustainability.
3. Qualitative inquiry should employ comparative case study methodologies across multiple fragile and post-conflict contexts to generate context-sensitive theoretical propositions and identify best-fit practices for participatory M&E in environments characterized by weak state capacity and recurrent insecurity.
4. Additionally, experimental and quasi-experimental designs are needed to isolate the causal effects of specific participatory M&E interventions such as community-led indicator selection, participatory data collection, and joint evaluation on sustainability outcomes, thereby building an evidence base that can inform both policy and practice.
5. Finally, scholars should investigate the role of digital and

mobile-based participatory monitoring tools in low-resource, conflict-affected settings, assessing whether technology-enhanced M&E can overcome barriers of literacy, geography, and institutional fragmentation to improve both participation and sustainability.

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