Factors Influencing the Performance of the Order of Saint Augustine (OSA) Agricultural Project in Evurore Ward, Embu County

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Abstract

This paper is premised on the findings of a study that aimed at investigating factors influencing the performance of the Order of Saint Augustine agricultural project in Evurore ward, Embu County. The specific objectives of the study were: to evaluate the influence of participation by key institutional community stakeholders on the performance of the OSA Project in Evurore ward, and to examine the influence of farmer group participation on the performance of the OSA Project in Evurore ward. The study was motivated by the growing concerns of the failed agricultural project performance of the OSA agricultural project in Mbeere North, Embu County. The study was based on participatory theory and employed a descriptive research design. The target population consisted of 300 farmers participating in the OSA agricultural project. The study collected quantitative data through structured questionnaires. Inferential and descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyse the quantitative data using SPSS, such as mean, percentages and standard deviation and were presented in tables. The results showed evidence of a significant positive relationship of farmer group participation (P =0.000, r =0.793) and project performance. Additionally, there

was positive relationship between community stakeholders (p =0.000, r =0.51) and project performance. The study recommended that policymakers should strategically emphasise farmer group participation and stakeholder participation to further improve the performance of the OSA agricultural projects in Evurore ward, Embu County

Keywords: Community participation, project performance, stakeholders, agricultural projects.

INTRODUCTION

The performance measure is the process of measuring the efficiency and effectiveness of action, according to Neely et al. (1995). Project performance is regarded as an interchange between numerous variables and scopes, notably emphasising what is completed, such as range and quality, vs the resources required to complete the project activities, such as time and cost (Ahmed, 2023; Zheng et al., 2019). In the context of project management, several performance metrics and dimensions associated with projects at the strategic, tactical, and operational levels are increasingly utilised to quantify project success (Ahmed, 2023; Szatmari et al., 2021). Furthermore, indicators used in project management are backwards-looking, as they assess performance information that has already been gathered (Zheng et al., 2019).

Western countries such as the United States and continental Europe have tackled food security through agricultural development (Wiggins, 2009). The success of agricultural projects in Asia and Latin America has largely contributed to reducing poverty and transforming the economies (Diao et al., 2010). Participatory approaches in agricultural research, notably in Asia, have proven effective at incorporating farmers' knowledge, resulting in locally relevant solutions and enhanced production (Kumar et al., 2024). Case examples, such as farm field schools, demonstrate how these strategies may be used

successfully, even though they need significant investment in capacity building. Targowski (2014) states that farming is widespread in rural sub-Saharan regions.

Agriculture is crucial to Kenya's economic growth and poverty reduction, as it creates jobs, ensures food security, enables exports, and promotes sustainable development (Nin-Pratt, 2023). In Embu County, particularly in the Mbeere North constituency, the government has made significant investments in agricultural projects, enabling farmers to increase production and boost their revenue and living standards. In particular, the OSA project in Evurore ward is one of the projects funded by catholic missionaries. Despite the implementation of the OSA Project, its overall performance and effectiveness appear to vary. This study aims to identify the factors influencing the performance of the OSA agricultural project in Evurore ward. In order to achieve this, two research objectives guided the study:

1. To evaluate the influence of participation by key institutional community stakeholders on the performance of the OSA Project in Evurore ward.
2. To examine the influence of farmer group participation on the performance of the OSA Project in Evurore ward.

Research questions

1. How does the influence of key institutional stakeholders' participation influence the performance of the OSA Project in Evurore ward?
2. How does the influence of farmer group participation influence the performance of the OSA Project in Evurore ward?

Theoretical and literature review

Participatory Theory

This study is supported by the participatory theory proposed by Robert Chambers in his 1983 book, Rural Development: Putting the Last First. Participatory theory emphasises local knowledge and empowerment while challenging traditional top-down development models. It focuses on involving local communities in decision-making processes that impact their livelihoods (Cornwall, 2016; Mansuri & Rao, 2018; Hickey & Mohan, 2020). According to the hypothesis, when beneficiaries actively participate in planning, implementation, and evaluation, development outcomes improve, and interventions become more sustainable, accountable, and owned (Mansuri & Rao, 2018; Hickey & Mohan, 2020; World Bank, 2020). A shift toward more institutionalised and rights-based approaches to participation is reflected in recent developments that have extended participatory theory beyond community engagement to encompass co-production, social accountability, and inclusive governance (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Fox, 2015; Gaventa, 2019). Furthermore, recent studies emphasise the incorporation of digital technologies and participatory monitoring tools, which expand stakeholder engagement, improve transparency, and enable real-time input into development initiatives (World Bank, 2020; Peixoto & Fox, 2016; Chambers, 2017). Overall, through ongoing engagement and cooperation among stakeholders, participatory theory has developed into a comprehensive framework that not only encourages inclusion but also fortifies trust, responsiveness, and efficacy in development practice (Gaventa, 2019; Hickey & Mohan, 2020; Mansuri & Rao, 2018).

According to the participatory theory of development, often referred to as participation, communities and societies have the necessary skills to make choices to address challenges that hinder their socioeconomic development and success (Doll, 2010). Thus, the

participatory theory of development focuses on developing positive, people-focused ways to advance participatory community progress (Syokau & Strathdee, 2010). The application of this theory is that participatory development involves coordinating people's efforts to take initiative and empower themselves toward self-sufficiency. In this regard, participatory theory supports the study's main variables, namely participation in farmer groups and stakeholder participation.

Empirical literature review

Farmer group participation and project performance

Farmer groups are known to enhance knowledge sharing, resource mobilisation and adoption of best practices. Eventually, this leads to development. Participation in farmer groups has been linked to a higher adoption rate of sustainable land management practices with a significant positive correlation (p=000) (Karaya et al., 2020). The group members reported better access to information and resources, thereby improving household income and food security. A study in Meru County found that group members apply the best horticultural farming products more efficiently than non-group members, with a mean score difference indicating substantial benefits from the membership (M=76.49 vs 67.71) (Gikunda & Lawver, 2019). This indicates that farmer groups play a crucial role in disseminating agricultural knowledge and practices. Capacity building in financial resource mobilisation significantly influences the performance of smallholder irrigation projects, with a strong correlation (r = 0.801) indicating that well-organised groups can access financial resources more effectively (Asawo et al., 2021). While the benefits of farmer groups are evident, challenges such as leadership quality and group dynamics can hinder effectiveness. Addressing these issues is crucial for maximising the potential of farmer groups in agricultural development.

In the context of OSA, agricultural projects rely on collective action. These studies highlight both opportunities and challenges. On the other hand, farmers can enhance the adoption of innovation, improving project outcomes. On the other hand, without attention to leadership, inclusivity and equal participation, such groups may fail to realise their full potential. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the quality of community participation, particularly its inclusivity, and its effect on the performance of the agricultural project in Evurore ward.

Community stakeholders and project performance

Effective stakeholder involvement significantly enhances project completion, implementation and overall efficiency. Irungu and Moronge (2016) on determinants of performance of agricultural projects in Kenya emphasise that public and stakeholder involvement has a direct and positive influence on project outcomes, particularly in enhancing completion and efficiency. In the sugar industry, stakeholder engagement has been shown to improve sustainable performance, with effective communication and relationship management being key factors (Thomas & Stephen, 2024). Stakeholder participation is crucial for the successful completion of government-funded agricultural projects, especially in arid and semi-arid regions. In Garissa County, factors such as stakeholder analysis and engagement were found to positively influence irrigation project performance, highlighting the importance of understanding stakeholder needs and motivations (DAKANE & Mutuku, 2023). This suggests that similar strategies could be beneficial across various agricultural projects. Their findings point to the practical value of inclusive participation in the Kenyan context, where agricultural projects rely heavily on community acceptance and ownership.

However, stakeholder engagement is not without its challenges. Eidt et al. (2020) argue that participation in agricultural platforms is shaped by underlying power dynamics.

Where dominant stakeholders have greater access and control over resources than small-scale farmers. Their study shows that the quality and equality of stakeholder participation matter as much as their mere presence. Conversely, these studies demonstrate both the advantages and disadvantages of stakeholder participation. Broad involvement improves project success; nevertheless, differences in influence can harm equality and sustainability. This shows a significant gap: while numerous studies support the value of stakeholder engagement, few investigate the depth, balance, and power dynamics that underpin such participation. Addressing this gap is critical to ensuring that agricultural initiatives incorporate stakeholders in a true, equitable manner that promotes both efficiency and social justice.

In the context of the OSA project in Evurore ward, agricultural projects involve different key stakeholders, including farmers, community leaders, government agencies and development partners. Therefore, understanding their different roles and the extent of their participation is crucial. This study, therefore, seeks to assess the quality of participation evaluated through the inclusiveness of diverse viewpoints across stakeholder groups that shape the performance of the OSA project, especially the agricultural project in the region.

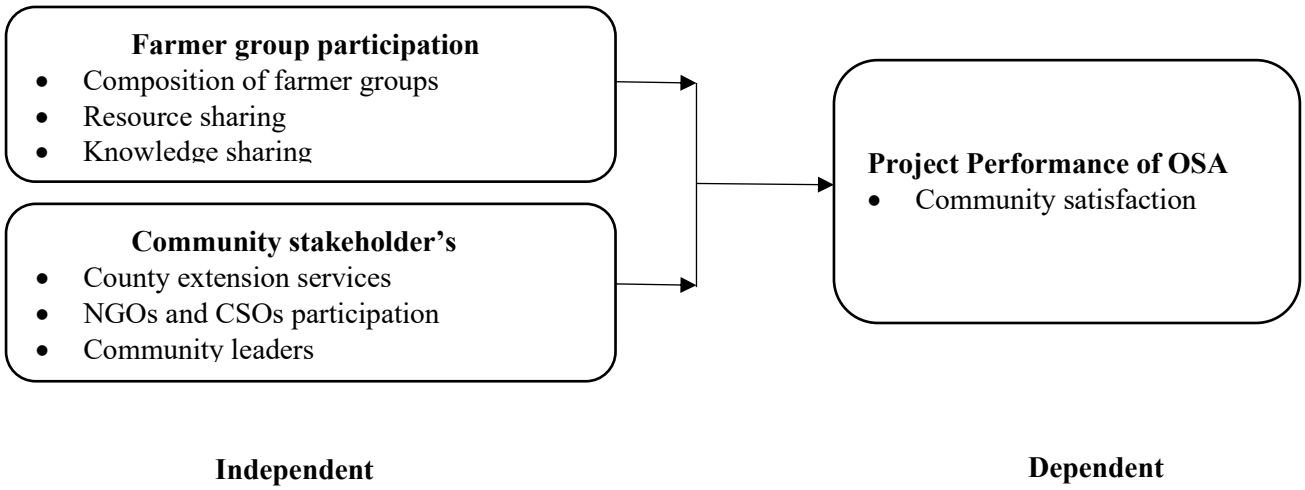

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher 2026

METHODOLOGY

This study utilised the quantitative method approach. Employing a descriptive research design, a method commonly used in sociological investigations. This design was used to establish the frequency of an occurrence or the connection between variables (Byrman & Bell, 2011). Thus, this methodology was suitable for this study, as it proposes to collect comprehensive information through descriptions, which will be beneficial for identifying the variables. Bryman and Bell (2011, pg. 4) assert that, "a descriptive design seeks to get information that describes existing phenomena by asking questions relating to individual perceptions and attitudes". In this study, surveys were used to examine whether participation of institutional community stakeholders and farmers' groups influences the performance of the OSA agricultural project for farmers in Evurore ward, Embu County.

Gall, Borg, and Gall (2003) define target groups as actual or hypothetical individuals to whom researchers want to generalise study findings. Creswell (1994) defines a population as a collection of persons who have common features that researchers are interested in studying. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a population is a group of humans, events, or things that have a common recognisable peculiarity. Creswell (1994) terms the target population as a trivial subset of the populace chosen for study and research. The Order of Saint Augustine (OSA) project comprises 300 registered farmers. The study conducted a census of all subjects in the population because the population size is manageable. Therefore, a sampling procedure for selecting the sample size from the population was not conducted in this study.

The researcher collected information via interviews with individual farmers. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions. A survey is a data collection technique that utilises questionnaires or individual interviews to gather data from a representative sample of

a population, from which the results of the data analysis will be generalised (Gall et al., 2007). The type of data gathered, the time available, and the study's objectives all influenced the selection of the questionnaire tool. It offers several benefits, including anonymity, time savings, and reduced interview bias. Further, questionnaires offer the advantages of being low-cost, easy to use, allowing for personal contact with widely scattered samples (Fowler, 1993), and providing measurable findings.

The extent to which variables affected the OSA project's performance was examined using a Likert scale. The Likert scale comprises five categories: strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The scale was then assigned numerical values as follows to calculate the mean and standard deviation: SA=5, A=4, N=3, D=2, SD=1.

Questionnaires were used to gather data from the OSA-registered farmers. The farmers participate in the operations of the project, hence the possibility of getting reliable information needed by the researcher. The questionnaires were controlled through the drop-and-pick method. Each respondent was approached independently, interviewed, and their responses recorded in the questionnaire by the researcher. This allowed the researcher to collect appropriate and accurate information on the project performance.

RESULTS

The study used descriptive and multiple regression analyses.

Farmer Group Participation and Project Performance

The study was to establish the factors that influence the participation of the farmer group on the performance of the OSA agricultural project in Evurore, and the results are shown in Table 1

Table 1: Farmer Group Participation and Project Performance

Farmer group participation	Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
The farmer group meets regularly	300	4.37	.918
The members participate in managing their group through decision-making	300	4.55	.618
The farmer groups participate in sharing knowledge during meetings	300	4.53	.603
The farmer group members participate in communal activities	300	4.66	.559
The group adopts best practices from other projects	300	4.43	.849
Overall		**4.5**	**.548**

Source: Researcher 2026

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation results from farmers' assessments of the influence of participation in farmer groups. In specific areas, the statement where 'the farmer group members participate in communal activities' has the highest mean of 4.66 with most strongly agreeing to collective engagement, with communal participation being the strongest aspect with a standard deviation of 0.559 indicating consistent agreement among the respondents, suggesting that the respondents generally feel involved in communal activities towards the OSA agricultural project as well as collective engagement in the project performance. Participatory governance had a high mean of 4.55, the statement 'members participate in managing their group through decision-making', and a standard deviation of

0.618, suggesting that decision-making processes are seen as inclusive and member-driven. The 'Knowledge group share knowledge during meeting' statement had a mean of 4.53 and a standard deviation of 0.603, indicating that knowledge exchange within groups is agreed upon and reflects the presence of spaces that facilitate learning and the spread of ideas. 'The group's willingness to adopt best practices from other projects' was rated as agreeable with a mean of 4.43, though responses showed greater variation (SD = 0.849), implying differences in how groups access, internalise, or implement externally sourced innovations. Regular meeting frequency also indicated as agreeable (the group meets regularly: M = 4.37 but exhibited the largest standard deviation (SD = 0.918), indicating that while regular meetings are generally reported, consistency may vary across groups with most able to identify the meeting periods and able to easily access the meetings Overall participation scored a mean of 4.50, (SD = 0.548), indicating strong agreement support for participatory group processes and a relatively tight clustering of responses around the mean

Therefore, the results of the analysis of farmer group participation, it can be concluded that communal engagement activities, was most agreed group participation activity that farmers participated. The results indicate that decision-making by the group members, and knowledge sharing practices during meetings is highly practiced in farmer Groups within the OSA agricultural project in Evurore ward.

Community Stakeholders' Participation and Project Performance

The study was to establish the factors influencing participation of community stakeholders on the performance of the OSA agricultural project in Evurore and the results shown in Table 2

Table 2: Community Stakeholders' Participation and Project Performance

Community Stakeholders Participation	Valid	Mean	Std. Deviation
Local leaders actively mobilized community participation	300	4.26	.845
County extension service officers provide regular technical support	300	2.96	1.430
NGOs /CSOs engage transparently in project decisions	300	3.15	1.450
Stakeholders are coordinated to avoid duplication of activities	300	4.00	1.076
Stakeholders are actively involved in contributing resources towards the project	300	3.95	1.116
Stakeholders rarely attend or follow through on commitments	300	3.76	1.22
Stakeholders communicate project progress in meetings	300	4.17	1.027
Stakeholders communicate challenges through various channels	300	4.18	1.003
Overall		3.804	.897

Source: Researcher 2026

Table 2 presents the descriptive results for the institutional community stakeholder participation variable, showing an overall response tendency towards neutrality (M = 3.804,

SD = 0.897) and considerable variation across specific stakeholder roles. Local leadership received positive ratings, with respondents largely agreeing that local leaders actively mobilise community participation (M = 4.26, SD = 0.845). This suggests that community-level political and social authority structures are seen as important enablers of engagement. Stakeholder communication practices were also rated favourably as agreeable: respondents reported that stakeholders communicate project progress in meetings (M = 4.17, SD = 1.027) and address challenges through various channels (M = 4.18, SD = 1.003), indicating that information flows are generally visible and institutionalised, although the standard deviations suggest notable variation across contexts. 'Coordination among stakeholders to avoid duplication of activities' also leans towards agreement (M = 4.00, SD = 1.076), implying that respondents perceive a relatively functional coordination framework, even if its effectiveness varies. Resource-related engagement leaned more towards a neutral tendency, with stakeholders perceived as actively contributing resources to the project (M = 3.95, SD = 1.116), once again showing variation in resource commitments.

In contrast, the perceived role performance of formal support actors was notably weaker and more polarised. County extension service support was rated as dissatisfactory (M = 2.96, SD = 1.430), suggesting that respondents tended towards neutrality or disagreement regarding the regularity of technical support, with the large standard deviation indicating significant differences between communities in access, intensity, or continuity of extension services. Similarly, perceptions of NGO/CSO governance practices were only neutral (NGOs/CSOs engage transparently in project decisions: M = 3.15, SD = 1.450), with high variability, implying that transparency and inclusion in decision-making are inconsistently practised or perceived. Finally, respondents mostly agreed that stakeholders rarely attend or follow through on commitments (M = 3.76, SD = 1.22), indicating that while stakeholder presence

and communication may be apparent, reliability and implementation fidelity are more likely to be problematic.

Inferential Statistics results

This subsection presents the correlation and multiple regression results of the relationship between farmer group participation, community participation and project performance of the OSA agricultural project in Evurore ward, Embu County.

Correlation Analysis

The results in Table 3 show the coefficients of determination for the relationships between the dependent variable and the independent variables.

Table 1: Correlation Analysis

Correlations				
		Farmer Group Participation	Community stakeholder	project performance
Farmer Group Participation	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	-		
	N	300		

Community stakeholder	Pearson Correlation	.421**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	-	
	N	300	300	
Project Performance	Pearson Correlation	.793**	.510**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	-
	N	300	300	300

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researcher 2026

The results in Table 3 above provide evidence of a significant positive relationship between project performance at the OSA Agricultural project and farmer group participation, as P (0.000) is less than 0.05 and r (0.793**) is positive. It is also evident from Table 3 that there is a significant positive relationship between project performance and community stakeholders, with p = 0.000 (less than 0.05) and r = 0.510**.

Multiple regression model

In this study, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between project performance and the predictor variables (farmer group participation, community stakeholder) using the regression model and results shown in Table 4.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-.720	.197		-3.654	.000
	Community stakeholder	.125	.037	.149	3.354	.001
	Farmer Group Participation	.478	.072	.349	6.663	.000

a. Dependent Variable: project performance

Source: Researcher 2026

Table 4 indicate that when all factors are held constant, project performance at OSA agricultural project is represented with a constant value of -.720. However, an increase in

community stakeholders with other factors remaining constant would contribute to the increase in project performance of the OSA agricultural project by a factor of 0.125. While an increase in farmer group participation, with other factors held constant, would improve project performance, the OSA agricultural project would increase by 0.478.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study sought to examine the extent to which participation in farmer groups affects the performance of the OSA agricultural project in Evurore ward. The study indicates a significant positive relationship (P = 0.000) between Farmer Group Participation and project performance at the OSA agricultural project in Evurore ward. This finding concurs with a study in Meru County that found that group members apply the best horticultural farming products more efficiently than non-group members, with a mean score difference indicating substantial benefits from the membership (M=76.49 vs 67.71) (Gikunda & Lawver, 2019). This indicates that farmer groups play a crucial role in disseminating agricultural knowledge and practices. Asawo et al. (2021) found that capacity building in financial resource mobilisation significantly influences the performance of smallholder irrigation projects, with a strong correlation (r = 0.801) indicating that well-organised groups can access financial resources more effectively. Asawo et al.'s (2021) findings concur with the study results.

Further, the study sought the extent to which community stakeholders' participation affects the performance of the OSA agricultural project in Evurore ward. The statistical evidence shows a significantly stronger positive relationship (P = 0.000) between community stakeholders and project performance at the OSA agricultural project in Evurore ward. The findings concur with a study done by Irungu and Moronge (2016) on determinants of performance of agricultural projects in Kenya that emphasise that public and stakeholder involvement has a direct and positive influence on project outcomes, particularly in

enhancing completion and efficiency. Additionally, in the sugar industry, stakeholder engagement has been shown to improve sustainable performance, with effective communication and relationship management being key factors (Thomas & Stephen, 2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Project performance is a dominant theme in both theoretical and empirical studies and is a central concern for decision-makers and strategists in contemporary organisations. It notably influences the performance of agricultural projects valued by management and stakeholders. The study recommended that policymakers strategically emphasise participation by farmer groups and other stakeholders to further improve the performance of the OSA agricultural projects in Evurore ward, Embu County.

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