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## DETERMINATION OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN TOWARDS WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS. A CASE OF MANYONI WATER PROJECTS.

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## ABSTRACT

Women's participation is crucial for achieving sustainable community development, yet in many rural settings they remain underrepresented in planning, decision-making, and leadership roles. This study examined women's perceptions of their participation in community development projects, focusing on community water initiatives in Manyoni District Council, Tanzania. Guided by Empowerment Theory and Social Inclusion Theory, the study employed a mixed methods approach using a descriptive research design and a case study strategy. Data were collected from 110 respondents, including 100 women beneficiaries and 10 key informants, through questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary reviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that 77% of respondents had positive perceptions of women's participation in community water projects. They believed women's involvement enhances project sustainability, fosters community ownership, strengthens relationships, boosts motivation, and promotes overall development. Despite these positive perceptions, actual participation remained low. Key barriers included socio-cultural norms, patriarchal structures, limited education, poverty, and restricted access to decision-making spaces. The study concludes that women in Manyoni District are willing and capable of contributing meaningfully to community development, but their involvement is hindered by structural and systemic challenges rather than lack of interest. It recommends strengthening gender sensitization efforts, improving women's education and economic

empowerment, enforcing gender-responsive policies, and adopting participatory development approaches to ensure women's meaningful and sustainable engagement in community development projects.

**KEYWORDS:** Participation, perception, women participation, community development and projects.

## BACKGROUND

Globally, women's participation in community development has increasingly been recognized as a critical driver for sustainable development, improved governance, and inclusive growth. Since the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, particularly SDG 5 on Gender Equality and SDG 6 on Clean Water and Sanitation, emphasis has been placed on promoting women's engagement in all spheres of development (UNDP, 2016; UN Women, 2020). Studies across Asia, Latin America, and Europe have shown that when women are actively involved in decision-making processes of community projects such as water supply, health, education, and livelihood programs, outcomes tend to be more sustainable, transparent, and responsive to community needs (Cornwall, 2014; Oxfam, 2019).

Despite this recognition, women remain underrepresented in leadership and decision-making roles in many societies due to enduring socio-cultural norms, patriarchy, limited access to education, and economic dependency (World Bank, 2018). Although women constitute nearly half of the world's population, their contribution to community development is often undervalued or confined to unpaid labor roles, particularly in rural settings (UN Women, 2019). These structural inequalities continue to shape women's perceptions of their roles and their actual participation in community development initiatives, including water and sanitation projects (Agarwal, 2010; Kabeer, 2016).

In Africa, women play a central role in sustaining household and community livelihoods, particularly in rural economies where they are primarily responsible for water collection, food production, childcare, and health-related activities (FAO, 2017). However, despite their essential role, African women are often excluded from formal participation in community development structures and project leadership due to cultural traditions, low educational attainment, and limited access to productive resources such as land, capital, and information (African Development Bank, 2015; Siema, 2016).

Studies conducted across Sub-Saharan Africa reveal that although women show high willingness and positive perceptions toward engaging in community projects, their participation is significantly hindered by gender discrimination and lack of institutional support (UNESCO, 2021). Siema (2016) revealed that more than 60% of African women remain economically marginalized and are concentrated in the informal sector, which limits their ability to influence development decisions. Nonetheless, research by Ndambiri (2018) in Kenya indicates that when women are empowered through education, political support, and access to information, their participation in community projects significantly increases and leads to improved project performance and sustainability.

In Tanzania, Perspective the government has made commendable efforts to promote women's participation in development through national policies such as the National Gender Policy (2002, revised 2023), the Water Sector Development Programme (WSDP), and the Tanzania Development Vision 2025. These frameworks emphasize the importance of gender mainstreaming and inclusive participation in all development initiatives (URT, 2016; URT, 2021). Women are encouraged to participate in planning, implementation, and management of development projects at the village, ward, and district levels.

However, evidence suggests that real participation remains minimal, especially in rural areas, where traditional gender roles and patriarchal systems continue to dominate decision-making spaces (Pallangyo & Rees, 2018). Women are often viewed as beneficiaries rather than decision-makers, particularly in water and infrastructure projects (Mashauri & Mbuligwe, 2019). Although women make up a large proportion of water users and managers at the household level, they are frequently underrepresented in Water User Associations and village development committees (UNICEF Tanzania, 2020). These factors not only affect their actual participation but also influence their perceptions towards involvement in such initiatives.

Manyoni District, located in Singida Region, is a semi-arid area characterized by recurrent droughts, limited water resources, and widespread poverty. Community water projects have therefore become essential for improving livelihoods, health standards, and agricultural productivity (Manyoni District Council, 2023). Women in the area are the primary collectors and users of water for domestic and economic purposes, yet their participation in the planning and management of water projects remains relatively low.

Although several water projects have been implemented by the government and development partners, reports indicate that women in Manyoni are still marginalised in leadership and decision-making structures due to strong patriarchal traditions, low literacy levels, and limited exposure to awareness programs (Tenga & Malyoncho, 2021). This contradiction between women's vital role in water usage and their limited involvement in decision-making creates a compelling area of investigation.

Therefore, understanding women's perceptions towards their own participation in community development projects becomes crucial. Perception shapes attitude, motivation, confidence, and willingness to engage. If women hold positive perceptions but are structurally constrained, then the problem lies not in their attitude but in the system itself. This study, therefore, aims to determine the perceptions of women towards their participation in community development projects, with specific reference to community water projects in Manyoni District Council, Singida Region, Tanzania.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Community Development Projects

Community development projects are core initiatives for intervention of common problems while enhancing development in most communities (Oino, 2020). With this in mind, different projects are formulated and carried every year with different purposes such as ensuring clean water supply, improving community health, reducing poverty, promoting human rights and peace, managing natural resources, climate change adaptation and many more. These projects work to provide solutions and hope to communities in need such as rural areas where majority of population in developing countries dwells (Mohammad, 2019).

Community Water Projects

These are initiatives that involve local communities in the planning, implementation and management of water supply and sanitation systems (Hope, 2015), these projects aim to provide sustainable and reliable access to clean water and sanitation services, particularly in rural or underserved areas. (WHO, 2019)

**Theoretical Literature Review**

This study is guided by Empowerment Theory and Social Inclusion Theory, which are central to understanding women's participation in development initiatives. The choice of these theories is deliberate, as they both advocate for the active involvement of women in

community development, emphasizing gender-sensitive approaches that address inequalities and foster equitable growth.

**Empowerment Theory**

Empowerment theory centers on the processes through which individuals and groups acquire the ability to make decisions, access resources, and influence outcomes that affect their lives. It is a multidimensional concept that encompasses social, economic, and political domains, emphasizing not only the enhancement of skills and knowledge but also the expansion of opportunities and control over one's environment. In the context of women's participation in community development, empowerment manifests as increased self-confidence, enhanced skills, improved access to information, and meaningful engagement in decision-making structures.

According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment involves the interplay of resources, agency, and achievements. Resources provide the material and non-material foundation for action, agency reflects the capacity to define goals and act upon them, and achievements are the outcomes resulting from these actions. Applying this framework to women in development projects, the theory suggests that interventions must provide both tangible resources (e.g., financial support, training programs) and intangible assets (e.g., confidence, knowledge) to enable effective participation.

The relevance of empowerment theory in this study is underscored by findings indicating that women are "willing and able to participate" in development initiatives but are often constrained by structural and societal barriers. These barriers include limited access to decision-making forums, traditional gender norms, and unequal distribution of resources. Empowerment theory explains that positive perceptions and willingness alone are insufficient; for participation to be meaningful, women must be granted both the authority and opportunity to translate these perceptions into concrete action. Therefore, the theory provides a critical lens for understanding the mechanisms through which interventions can transform women's potential into active participation.

**Social Inclusion Theory**

Theory focuses on ensuring that all individuals, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other social markers, are integrated into societal development processes. The theory addresses the systemic exclusion and marginalization that often prevent

women and other disadvantaged groups from participating fully in social, economic, and political activities. It emphasizes the importance of removing barriers related to discrimination, unequal access to resources, and social marginalization.

In the context of community development, social inclusion theory advocates for the creation of inclusive frameworks that actively recognize and incorporate women's perspectives at all stages planning, decision-making, and implementation. Inclusion is not merely about physical presence but about meaningful participation, where women's inputs influence outcomes and enhance project sustainability. Research indicates that development projects that fail to include marginalized groups often experience lower levels of ownership, accountability, and effectiveness.

Applying social inclusion theory in practice means that policymakers, community leaders, and development practitioners must intentionally design strategies that integrate women's voices, address structural inequalities, and ensure equitable access to resources. By fostering an inclusive environment, communities can achieve more holistic development outcomes that are responsive to the needs of all stakeholders, thereby reducing gender disparities and promoting social cohesion.

**Integration of Theories**

Together, empowerment and social inclusion theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding women's engagement in development initiatives. While empowerment theory focuses on equipping women with the skills, confidence, and agency to participate, social inclusion theory emphasizes the structural and systemic changes needed to ensure that participation is meaningful and equitable. By combining these perspectives, this study highlights that women's participation in development is both an individual and collective process, requiring both personal empowerment and inclusive societal structures.

Indeed, these theories collectively support the argument that fostering gender-sensitive development requires both empowering women to act and creating inclusive systems that recognize and value their contributions. They provide a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing the barriers and enablers of women's participation in community development projects, guiding both policy and practical interventions toward sustainable and equitable outcomes.

**METHODOLOGY APPLIED**

The study adopted a mixed methods research approach that integrated both quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to achieve a more comprehensive and reliable understanding of women's participation in community development projects. This approach made it possible to combine numerical measurement of women's perceptions and levels of involvement with in depth exploration of their attitudes beliefs motivations and lived experiences within the community context. The quantitative approach supported the generation of measurable data that could be summarized using statistical procedures while the qualitative approach provided detailed explanations of how and why women participate in or are excluded from development initiatives. According to Creswell and Plano Clark 2018 a mixed methods approach strengthens the validity of findings through triangulation and enables the researcher to capture the complexity of social phenomena particularly in studies dealing with human behaviour participation and empowerment.

A descriptive research design supported by a case study strategy was applied in this study in order to provide a clear and systematic description of women's perceptions and experiences regarding their participation in community development projects. The descriptive design was considered appropriate because it focuses on observing and describing the characteristics attitudes and conditions of a specific population without manipulating variables which aligns well with the objectives of this study as noted by Kothari 2014. The case study focused on Manyoni District Council with specific emphasis on the Manyoni Community Water Projects and this allowed for an in depth and context specific examination of women's involvement in planning implementation and management of water related development initiatives. Yin 2017 explains that the case study strategy is suitable when a researcher seeks to explore a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its environment are not clearly evident.

The target population of the study consisted of women who were direct beneficiaries of the Manyoni Water Projects where individual women formed the unit of analysis and households served as the unit of reference. From this population a total of 110 respondents were selected including 100 women who participated in the quantitative survey and 10 key informants who provided qualitative information based on their professional roles and experience in community development and project implementation. Simple random sampling was used to select the women respondents from the beneficiary households in order to give each woman

an equal chance of selection and to minimize sampling bias thereby increasing the representativeness of the sample as recommended by Sekaran and Bougie 2016. Purposive sampling was applied in the selection of key informants such as community development officers local leaders and project managers because of their specialized knowledge and direct involvement in the water projects which is consistent with the views of Etikan Musa and Alkassim 2016 who argue that purposive sampling is appropriate when rich relevant and context specific information is required.

Both primary and secondary data were collected in this study in order to ensure data triangulation and improve the credibility of the findings. Primary quantitative data were collected through the use of semi structured questionnaires administered to the selected women respondents to capture information on demographic characteristics socio economic status level of participation and perceptions towards involvement in community development projects. The use of semi structured questionnaires allowed for consistency in responses while also providing flexibility for clarification where necessary in line with Creswell 2014. Qualitative primary data were gathered through key informant interviews with community development officers' project coordinators and local leaders as well as focus group discussions with selected women participants which provided a platform for the women to freely express their views experiences challenges and expectations regarding participation in community development projects. Krueger and Casey 2015 highlight that focus group discussions are effective in capturing shared experiences and collective meanings in a community setting. Secondary data were obtained through documentary review of government reports district council documents project reports policy guidelines and existing literature on gender and community development which helped to provide background information and to support and validate the primary data as emphasized by Bowen 2009

Data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative procedures in line with the mixed methods approach used in the study. Qualitative data collected from interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed organized and analyzed thematically through a process of coding categorization and identification of recurring patterns and key themes relating to women's participation empowerment challenges and opportunities. Thematic analysis was suitable for interpreting the meanings embedded in the narratives of the participants as suggested by Braun and Clarke 2006. Quantitative data from the questionnaires were coded entered and analyzed using SPSS version 20 and the analysis was mainly descriptive

involving the use of frequencies percentages and measures of central tendency to summarized and present the data in a meaningful and understandable form. Descriptive statistics were considered appropriate because the purpose of the study was to describe and explain women's perceptions and levels of participation rather than to establish causal relationships as noted by Pallant 2020.

## FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION.

### Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

This study examined five key socio-economic and demographic characteristics of respondents: sex, age, education level, marital status, occupation, and income. These factors were considered important in understanding participation in community development projects, particularly water projects in Manyoni District.

**Table 1. Explain further; Socio-economic and Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents.(n = 100)**

| Categories | Frequency | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Age of Respondents | | |
| ≤ 20 | 1 | 1.0 |
| 20-29 | 18 | 18.0 |
| 30-39 | 37 | 37.0 |
| 40-49 | 24 | 24.0 |
| 50-59 | 14 | 14.0 |
| 60-69 | 4 | 4.0 |
| ≥70 | 2 | 2.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |
| Education Level of Respondents | | |
| No formal education | 5 | 5.0 |
| Primary education | 55 | 55.0 |
| Secondary education | 30 | 30.0 |
| Tertiary education | 10 | 10.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |
| Marital Status of Respondents | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Married | 89 | 89.0 |
| Not Ever Married | 5 | 5.0 |
| Divorced | 4 | 4.0 |
| Widow | 2 | 2.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |
| Main occupation of Respondents | | |
| Crop or and animal husbandry | 58 | 58.0 |
| Entrepreneurship | 35 | 35.0 |
| Business | 03 | 3.0 |
| Employed | 04 | 4.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |
| Income Level of Respondents (in TZS per adult equivalent per month) | | |
| 0 -10,000 | 20 | 20.0 |
| 11.000 -30,000 | 40 | 40.0 |
| 31,000 -50,000 | 30 | 30.0 |
| Above 50,000 | 10 | 10.0 |
| Total | 100 | 100.0 |

Source: Field data (2024)

**Age Distribution:** Age is a crucial determinant of labor availability, decision-making, productivity, and participation in community projects. Respondents ranged from below 20 to above 70 years. The majority, 61%, were aged 30–49, representing the most active and responsible participants. Younger respondents (≤20 years) and the elderly (≥70 years) were the least involved, as younger individuals had limited responsibilities, and older individuals often perceived themselves as less influential in community decisions. Age also influenced creativity, adoption of innovations, and women's economic participation, which in turn affected community productivity and development outcomes.

**Education Level:** Education enhances the ability to use knowledge, adopt innovations, and engage effectively in development projects. Most respondents (55%) had primary education, 30% had secondary education, and only 10% had tertiary education. Low education levels may limit awareness of gender equality and reduce effective participation in community

projects. Educated individuals are more likely to adopt improved techniques and challenge gender norms, contributing positively to community development.

**Marital Status:** Marital status affects responsibilities and labor availability. The majority of respondents (89%) were married, reflecting traditional family structures where married couples contribute labor and resources to community initiatives. Married respondents were generally more responsible and engaged, while widows (2%) were few. Marriage also supports gender-balanced participation, as families manage household duties collectively, enabling women to engage in development activities.

**Occupation:** Occupation determines income sources and availability of labor. Most respondents (58%) were engaged in crop and animal husbandry, while 35% participated in entrepreneurship, and smaller percentages were involved in business or formal employment. Farming, although labor-intensive and rain-dependent, provided accessible entry into economic activities. Occupation diversity, including off-farm activities, allowed households to supplement income, supporting participation in community projects.

**Income Level:** Income influences participation by enabling households to contribute to and benefit from community projects. Most respondents (40%) earned between TZS 11,000 and 30,000 per month, below the national poverty line of TZS 26,085. Income limitations can reinforce gender disparities and affect participation in development projects, as households with higher income have greater capacity to engage actively.

Overall, the socio-economic and demographic profile indicates that middle-aged, married, moderately educated farmers with low-to-moderate income were the most engaged in community development projects, while the youngest and oldest groups participated less due to limited responsibilities or perceptions of exclusion. Education, marital status, occupation, and income levels strongly influenced participation, gender balance, and overall effectiveness in community initiatives.

**Perception of Women towards Women Participation in CDPs ie water Projects**
**Women perceptions on public water project.**

The findings in Table 1 were used to establish Perception of Women towards Women Participation in water Projects into two levels: Positive and Negative**.** The respondents who **strongly disagreed and disagreed** were considered to have a **negative perception** in women participation in water projects and those who **strongly agreed and agreed** were considered to have **positive perception.**

Percentages were calculated for each statement .ie for sentence 1, 29% had negative perception while 62% had positive perception in Women participation in water projects.

**Table 2: Perception of Women towards Women Participation in water Projects**

| Statement | Response (%) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Strongly Disagree (1) | Disagree (2) | Agree (3) | Strongly Agree (4) |
| Women participation in water projects lead to sustainability | 13 | 16 | 24 | 38 |
| Women participation in water projects lead to community development | 8 | 14 | 26 | 35 |
| Women participation in water projects is an opportunity of sharing their views | 9 | 17 | 34 | 28 |
| Women participation in water projects is a way of building relationship | 15 | 18 | 30 | 34 |
| Women participation in water projects is a way of building ownership and security | 14 | 10 | 28 | 20 |
| Women participation in water projects increases motivation among members | 10 | 18 | 30 | 38 |
| Women participation in water projects intends to benefit leaders | 18 | 18 | 24 | 21 |
| Women participation in water projects is a means of | 24 | 16 | 8 | 12 |

| Govt escape responsibility | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Women participation in water projects is a means of legitimizing squidling project money | 24 | 26 | 6 | 8 |
| Women participation in water projects is a way of silencing community members | 24 | 20 | 16 | 10 |
| | **33 Negative** | | **77 Positive** | |

**Source: Field data (2024)**

Proportion of 77% of respondents, have positive perception on community development projects particularly in water project. Whereby, 33 %of respondents, have negative perception on community development projects particularly in water project as revealed in a table above.

Table 2 deploys women perceptions on participation in water project wherein; 77% which is the highest score are in positive perception and 33% score was for negative perception. This implies that women perceive positively towards women participation in water projects in Manyoni District. It shows therefore that women are aware, willing and able to participate in the projects if at all required by responsible authorities to do so. Other factors holding constant women can participate equally or nearly equally to men if at all enabled or empowered by the authorities. In elaborating this some of the respondent quoted by saying "Women are enthuastic, rigorous, heartfelt, optimistic, ground founded, willing and able to participate in water project, frankly having positive perceptions on the said project; but they were hindered in part, by the gender segregative system that favours more on men than women" [Interview conducted at MuhalalaWard on 26th March, 2024 in MDC],

The finding from the study, agree with Ndambiri (2018) who conducted a study on determinants of women participation in community development projects in Mombasa County, Kenya. The researcher revealed that; women participation in community projects were positively correlated to socio-cultural factors, political factors, education levels and media factors. From the study, it is recommended that the government and private

organizations should partner with the community to create more awareness on the need for women to participate in community development activities.

Also the comparative study of Siema, (2016) who did a research on Gender gap Costs Sub-Saharan Africa concluded that 61% of working African women is faced with economic exclusion since most of the women are found to be engaged in the informal sector. This signifies the perception towards women participation is positive regardless of the myth that men can perform better in development activities leading to economic exclusion for the women and consequently their participation in community development activities is largely limited.

This concludes that, Perception of Women towards Women Participation in water Projects is positive though some challenges such as inadequate resources, social norms and Poverty affect them at large.

## CONCLUSION.

The study clearly reveals that women in Manyoni District generally hold a **positive perception** towards their participation in community development projects, especially water projects. A significant 77% of respondents believe that women's participation leads to sustainability, enhanced ownership, stronger relationships, increased motivation, and overall community development.

Despite this positive perception, real participation is still constrained by persistent socio-cultural norms, patriarchal structures, low income levels, limited education, and restricted access to resources. These barriers prevent women from fully engaging in leadership and decision-making roles in development initiatives.

Therefore, the problem in Manyoni is not women's unwillingness or lack of interest, but rather structural and systemic limitations that restrict meaningful participation. Addressing these barriers is critical to achieving inclusive and sustainable community development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Although this study found that women in Manyoni District have positive perceptions toward participating in community development projects, especially water projects, their actual involvement is still limited by various social, cultural, and economic challenges. Therefore, there is a need for deliberate efforts from the government, non-governmental organizations,

community leaders, and other stakeholders to create an enabling environment that supports and promotes meaningful participation of women in development initiatives.

Specific Recommendations are like…

**Strengthen Gender Sensitization Programs**

The government and non-governmental organizations should conduct regular community awareness campaigns to challenge harmful cultural beliefs and gender norms that limit women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles.

**Enhance Women's Education and Training**

Adult education programs, leadership training, and skill-development workshops should be provided to improve women's confidence, knowledge, and ability to participate effectively in community development projects.

**Promote Economic Empowerment of Women**

Women should be supported through access to microfinance, savings and credit groups, and income-generating activities to improve their financial independence and capacity to engage in development initiatives.

**Enforce Gender-Inclusive Policies and Representation**

Local authorities should ensure that women are adequately represented in village committees, water user associations, and all community development structures as required by national gender policies.

**Support Participatory Development Approaches**

Project planners and implementers should adopt participatory approaches that actively involve women at every stage of a project, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

**Encourage Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration**

Strong partnerships should be built among government institutions, NGOs, community leaders, and women's groups to support, protect, and promote women's active participation in community development initiatives.

**Disclosure Statement.**

The author declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to the content of this manuscript.

**Data Availability Statement.**

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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