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Investigating the Effect of Stakeholder Engagement on the Performance of Constituency Development Fund Projects in Mufumbwe District, Zambia

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Abstract

Constituency Development Fund (CDF) resources deliver value only to the extent that stakeholders can meaningfully influence project decisions and implementation. This study investigated the relationship between stakeholder engagement and the performance of CDF projects in Mufumbwe District, Zambia. Specifically, it established the level of stakeholder participation, examined the relationship between stakeholder consultation and perceived project performance, identified challenges constraining engagement, and proposed strategies for strengthening stakeholder involvement. The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design within a cross-sectional timeframe. Data were collected from 70 purposively selected CDF stakeholders, including committee members, local authority officials, community leaders and project beneficiaries, using a structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended questions and one open-ended recommendation question. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, the chi-square test, Spearman's rank correlation, simple linear regression, one-way analysis of variance and the Kruskal–Wallis test at the 5% significance level, while qualitative responses were analysed thematically. Findings indicated moderate stakeholder participation ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.14$), with only 32.9% of respondents rating participation as high. Participation did not differ significantly by stakeholder role, $\chi^2(4) = 5.42$, $p = .247$. More frequent consultation was positively associated with perceived project performance ($\rho = .303$, $p = .011$), although it explained only 8.7% of the variation in perceived performance. Engagement challenges occurred often or always among 47.1% of respondents, with delayed fund disbursement (30.0%), political interference (25.7%) and elite capture (17.1%) emerging as the most frequently reported challenges. The perceived severity of challenges increased with their frequency ($\rho = .284$, $p = .017$), but did not differ significantly across stakeholder roles. Furthermore, lower ratings of committee efforts were associated with greater perceived need for improvement ($\rho = -.380$, $p = .001$). Transparent communication and predictable funding emerged as leading strategies for improving stakeholder engagement. The study concludes that although stakeholder engagement structures exist within CDF project implementation, participation remains limited in depth and consistency. Since the study was cross-sectional and relied on respondents' perceptions, the observed relationships should not be interpreted as causal effects.

Keywords: Constituency Development Fund, Project Performance, Stakeholder Consultation, Stakeholder Engagement, Stakeholder Participation, Mixed-Methods Research

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Public projects are delivered in crowded social settings. A clinic, a classroom block or a borehole involves funders, committees, contractors, local officials and the households that will use the asset, and each holds different information and expects different outcomes (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016; Bryson, 2004; Eskerod & Huemann, 2013; Freeman, 1984; Mitchell *et al*., 1997) [2, 9, 18, 22, 34]. Project scholarship has moved from managing stakeholders as constraints towards engaging them as contributors to value, a shift that places the quality of participation, communication and consultation at the centre of how projects are judged (Aaltonen *et al*., 2024; Freeman *et al*., 2025; Project Management Institute [PMI], 2021) [1, 21, 46]. Success is no longer read from cost, time and scope alone; it also covers benefits, satisfaction and sustainability (Ika & Pinto, 2022) [28].

Evidence from development projects points the same way but not with the same force: beneficiary engagement tends to accompany better outcomes, and the strength of the link depends on the level of engagement examined and on how much influence it gives people (Bandé *et al*., 2024; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Pretty, 1995) [5, 32, 45].

Participation can also be hollow. Arnstein's (1969) [3] ladder separated informing and consultation from partnership and delegated power, and later critics warned that participatory language can legitimise decisions taken elsewhere (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Cornwall, 2008; Fung, 2006; Reed *et al*., 2018) [14, 15, 23, 47]. Decentralisation raises the stakes because it moves spending decisions closer to citizens without guaranteeing that citizens gain a voice over them (Bardhan, 2002; Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Smoke, 2003) [6, 7, 51]. A systematic review of African experience reports real gains in local political structures and service delivery, alongside limited local autonomy and heavy dependence on central government (Rugeiyamu & Msendo, 2025) [49]. Community monitoring has a similarly mixed record: a large field experiment in Indonesia found that grassroots participation in monitoring did less to curb leakage than external audits did (Olken, 2007) [41], and work on community-driven development has long cautioned that elites can capture the process (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Platteau, 2004) [32, 43].

Zambia's Constituency Development Fund (CDF) is a clear case. Established in 1995 to finance small community projects, the fund was expanded sharply in 2021, when the allocation rose from K1.6 million to K25.7 million per constituency, and it has risen further since (National Democratic Institute [NDI], n.d.) [37]. A policy synthesis prepared at the request of government described the expansion as an opportunity to make service delivery more responsive and to strengthen local institutions, while stressing accountability and learning (International Growth Centre [IGC], 2022) [29]. The Constituency Development Fund Act No. 1 of 2024 now governs the management, disbursement and accountability of the fund and the committees through which communities take part (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2024) [25]. Recent Zambian studies agree that participation is formally embedded but thin in practice (Chungu *et al*., 2026; Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026; Khayi & Likando, 2026; Matipa, 2020) [11, 30, 31, 33], and work on Kenya's comparable fund has asked whether politicians steer constituency money towards their supporters (Harris & Posner, 2019) [26].

Mufumbwe District lies in North-Western Province and is largely rural, with communities spread across wards that are served through ward and constituency committees. Those structures are the channel through which CDF priorities are meant to travel from households to the constituency and back, which is why the quality of participation, communication and consultation is likely to shape what gets built, how well, and whether communities feel it is theirs (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Narayan, 1995; Oates, 1972; Pinto & Slevin, 1987) [32, 36, 39, 42]. Water, health and education projects are especially exposed to this: they are used daily, they need maintenance after handover, and their upkeep depends on users who know what was built and why (Narayan, 1995; Pretty, 1995; Reed *et al*., 2018) [36, 45, 47].

Decentralisation in Zambia has been pursued through successive policy and legal reforms, and the CDF is its most visible fiscal instrument at constituency level. The logic is the familiar one: place spending decisions near the people affected and public goods will better match local needs (Oates, 1972; Smoke, 2003) [39, 51]. The logic holds only if local decision-making structures are open to the people they serve, and the experience of many African countries is that openness is the weak link, because local autonomy is limited, capacity is thin and central or political actors retain influence over decisions (Bardhan, 2002; Rugeiyamu & Msendo, 2025; Ribot, 2002) [6, 49, 48]. The CDF therefore offers a test of whether decentralised financing translates into engaged communities and projects that they judge to be performing.

1.2 Problem Statement

Large sums now pass through CDF committees, yet the evidence on whether stakeholder engagement is related to how projects perform is thin and mostly qualitative. The only dedicated study of constituents' experiences in Mufumbwe is a phenomenological inquiry with 40 purposively selected participants; it reports moderate satisfaction with completed projects and concerns about sustainability, maintenance and transparency (Khayi & Likando, 2026) [31]. Studies elsewhere in Zambia show participation concentrated at project identification and largely consultative thereafter (Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026; Matipa, 2020) [30, 33], or uneven between rural and urban settings (Chungu *et al*., 2026) [11]. No study has measured, across stakeholder groups in Mufumbwe, how much participation and consultation take place, how they relate to perceived project performance, and what stakeholders themselves would change. Without that evidence, committees and the Ministry have little to go on when deciding where to invest in engagement.

The consequences of weak engagement are practical. When committees do not hear from users, priorities can drift away from need; when communication is thin, rumours and mistrust fill the gap; and when beneficiaries are not consulted during implementation, defects and delays go unreported until they are costly to fix (Aaltonen *et al*., 2024; Fox, 2015; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Olken, 2007; Pinto & Slevin, 1987) [1, 20, 24, 41, 42]. For a fund that has grown as quickly as the CDF, the margin for that kind of drift has narrowed, and a district such as Mufumbwe needs evidence it can act on.

This gap matters for three audiences. Committees need to know which engagement practices are associated with better-regarded projects. Local authorities and the Ministry need to know which constraints stakeholders themselves consider most binding. And researchers need quantitative baselines against which later, more rigorous designs can be compared (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Matipa, 2020) [16, 32, 33].

1.3 Objectives and research questions

General Objective

1. To investigate the effect of stakeholder engagement on the performance of Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District, Zambia.

Specific Objectives

1. To establish the level of stakeholder participation in Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District.

2. To evaluate the effect of stakeholder consultation on the performance of Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District.
3. To investigate the challenges associated with stakeholder engagement in Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District.
4. To propose strategies for improving stakeholder engagement in the implementation of Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of stakeholder participation in Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District?
2. What is the effect of stakeholder consultation on the performance of Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District?
3. What challenges are associated with stakeholder engagement in Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District?
4. What strategies can be adopted to improve stakeholder engagement in the implementation of Constituency Development Fund projects in Mufumbwe District?

1.4 Contribution of the study

The article contributes in three ways. It supplies district-level survey evidence from North-Western Province, a region that is thinly covered in the CDF literature. It tests the consultation–performance relationship with methods suited to ordinal data and reports effect sizes alongside significance, so that readers can judge practical weight and not only statistical weight. And it cross-checks stakeholders' preferred strategies by asking the same question in closed and open-ended form, which guards against the preferences simply reflecting the options on the questionnaire. The study is confined to stakeholder perceptions in one district, and its claims are limited accordingly.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. Section 2 reviews the theory and evidence and states four hypotheses. Section 3 describes the design, sampling and analysis. Section 4 presents and discusses the results objective by objective and then draws them together. Section 5 states the conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical foundations and conceptual framework

The study rests on stakeholder theory, which holds that organisations and projects depend on relationships with the groups that can affect, or are affected by, their activities (Freeman, 1984) [22]. Salience models added the idea that groups differ in power, legitimacy and urgency, and so in the attention they receive (Mitchell *et al*., 1997) [34]. Project scholars have applied the theory to temporary organisations, mapping stakeholder landscapes and arguing for engagement rather than control (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016; Aaltonen *et al*., 2024; Eskerod & Huemann, 2013) [2, 1, 18]. The most recent statement sets out principles for creating value with all stakeholders, including those who are easily overlooked (Freeman *et al*., 2025) [21]. For a fund whose purpose is to serve communities, the theory implies that beneficiaries are co-creators of project value and not just recipients of outputs.

Stakeholder theory says that engagement matters; it does not say how deep engagement has to be. Participation theory fills that gap. Arnstein's (1969) [3] ladder ranges from manipulation through informing and consultation to partnership and citizen control, and Pretty's (1995) [45] typology runs from passive participation to self-mobilisation. Both warn that being present is different from having influence (Cornwall, 2008; Cooke & Kothari, 2001) [15, 14]. Fung (2006) [23] adds that participatory designs differ in who takes part, how they communicate and how much authority they carry, while Reed *et al*. (2018) [47] argue that effective engagement is built on empowerment, equity, trust and learning. Performance, finally, is treated as multidimensional: efficiency and quality of delivery, benefits to users, satisfaction and durability all count (Ika & Pinto, 2022; PMI, 2021) [28, 46].

Terms need care. Participation, consultation and communication are often used interchangeably, but they describe different things: participation concerns the share of decisions and stages in which people take part; consultation concerns whether their views are sought and used; communication concerns the flow of information in both directions. The participation literature has long argued that such words can conceal very different realities, from nominal inclusion that legitimises decisions to transformative involvement that shifts power (Cleaver, 1999; Hickey & Mohan, 2005; Mohan & Stokke, 2000; White, 1996) [12, 27, 35, 53]. Research on project implementation likewise identifies client consultation and communication as critical success factors (Pinto & Slevin, 1987) [42], and the stakeholder literature stresses that engagement has to be sustained across the project life and not confined to its start (Bourne & Walker, 2005; Olander, 2007; Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016) [8, 40, 2]. This study therefore measures participation as an overall level and a mode of involvement, consultation as a frequency during implementation, and treats communication as part of the strategies stakeholders recommend.

Fig 1 summarises the framework used here. Participation and consultation are the engagement variables; perceived project performance is the outcome; challenges constrain engagement; and strategies describe what stakeholders think would raise it. The framework is deliberately modest. It treats engagement as one influence on performance among many, and it measures performance as stakeholders perceive it.

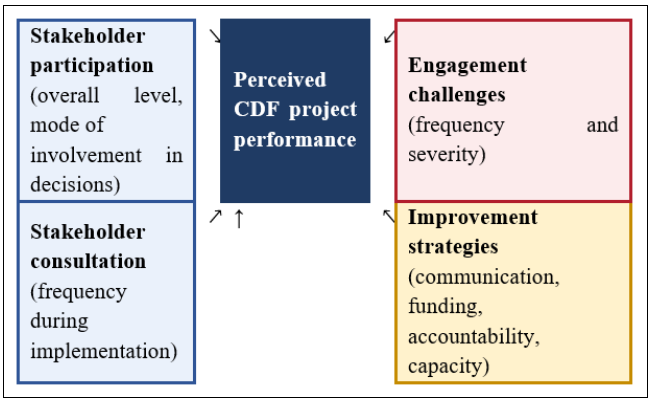


Fig 1: Conceptual framework linking stakeholder engagement, constraints, strategies and perceived CDF project performance

2.2 Level of stakeholder participation

Zambian studies of CDF participation share a pattern. In Mwense, a survey of 140 respondents analysed with chi-

square tests found that community participation in project identification amounted mostly to being informed of what had been planned, while councillors and the Member of Parliament identified the projects (Matipa, 2020) [33]. A mixed-methods study of 70 respondents in selected constituencies found participation strongest at identification and declining through implementation and monitoring, with moderate satisfaction (M = 3.54, SD = 0.96) and a conclusion that participation was largely consultative (Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026) [30]. A comparison of rural Rufunsa and urban Lusaka Central found partial success in the former and significant deficits in the latter (Chungu *et al*., 2026) [11]. In Mufumbwe itself, constituents expressed moderate satisfaction with completed projects (Khayi & Likando, 2026) [31]. Wider evidence on community-driven development reaches a compatible conclusion: participation that is induced from above is often shallow and unevenly distributed (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Pretty, 1995; Reed *et al*., 2018) [32, 45, 47].

The international literature adds a cautionary note about who participates. Reviews of community-driven development find that participation is frequently dominated by better-educated, better-connected and male members of a community, and that induced participation can reproduce existing hierarchies (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Platteau, 2004; Cooke & Kothari, 2001) [32, 43, 14]. Where committees are drawn from established residents, as in many ward-level structures, this bias would show up as a gap between committee members and beneficiaries in how much influence they report. Whether that gap exists in Mufumbwe is an empirical question that earlier qualitative work in the district did not set out to answer (Khayi & Likando, 2026) [31].

Two points follow. First, a single aggregate rating can hide the stages at which people are involved, so measures should capture both the overall level and the mode of involvement in decisions. Second, whether participation varies by stakeholder role has rarely been tested. If committee members and officials report materially higher participation than beneficiaries, the problem is one of distribution; if all groups report similar moderate levels, it is one of institutional design (Arnstein, 1969; Fung, 2006; Smoke, 2003) [3, 23, 51].

Decentralisation theory supplies the rationale for placing these decisions locally: authorities close to citizens are better placed to match services to local preferences (Oates, 1972) [39], provided that local actors are accountable to those they serve (Bardhan, 2002; Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Ribot, 2002) [6, 7, 48]. Where that condition fails, local control can be captured as readily as central control (Platteau, 2004) [43]. A multi-country study of 121 rural water supply projects found that beneficiary participation in decisions was associated with project effectiveness (Narayan, 1995) [36], a result often cited in support of participation and equally often qualified by later work that distinguishes real influence from formal presence (Cleaver, 1999; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; White, 1996) [12, 32, 53].

Comparative studies of participation in public programmes show why the form of engagement matters as much as its presence. Fung (2006) [23] distinguishes designs by who participates, how they exchange information and how much authority their input carries, and shows that outcomes differ accordingly. Gaventa and Barrett (2012) [24], synthesising case studies of citizen engagement, find that results are strongest where engagement strengthens citizens' capacity to act and where institutions are prepared to respond. This is consistent with the stakeholder literature's view that the value of engagement lies in what is done with the views gathered (Aaltonen *et al*., 2024; Freeman *et al*., 2025; Reed *et al*., 2018) [1, 21, 47]. For CDF committees the implication is that two committees holding the same number of meetings can produce quite different engagement, depending on who is invited, whether information is shared beforehand and whether feedback is acted upon.

2.3 Stakeholder consultation and project performance

Consultation is the mechanism through which engagement principles reach day-to-day practice. The PMBOK Guide treats stakeholder engagement as a performance domain whose quality is expected to show in delivery outcomes (PMI, 2021) [46], and syntheses of citizen-engagement cases find positive outcomes most often in citizen capacities, participatory practices and state responsiveness (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012) [24]. Research on beneficiary engagement in international development finds a positive link with project success while noting that it depends on the level and form of engagement (Bandé *et al*., 2024) [5]. Social-accountability research adds that voice alone seldom changes outcomes; it works when it is tied to the capacity to demand answers and to institutions that respond (Fox, 2015) [20].

The Zambian evidence is more guarded. Kamanga and Masaiti (2026) [30] did not find a statistically significant effect of participation on successful CDF implementation and attributed the gap to procedural participation, limited civic awareness and weak community capacity. Olken's (2007) [41] Indonesian experiment likewise showed that adding community participation in monitoring was no substitute for credible external audits. Taken together, the literature supports a positive but conditional expectation: more frequent consultation should accompany more favourable views of performance, but its practical weight is likely to be modest where funding, capacity and accountability are weak (Fox, 2015; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Platteau, 2004) [20, 32, 43].

A further difficulty lies in how performance itself is measured. The classic triple constraint of cost, time and quality has been criticised as too narrow (Atkinson, 1999) [4], and later work treats success as multidimensional and partly subjective, dependent on whose view is taken and when (Ika & Pinto, 2022; Pinto & Slevin, 1987) [28, 42]. Perception-based measures are therefore common in studies of stakeholder engagement, and they capture something that audits do not: whether users believe the project serves them. Their weakness is that they can reflect general satisfaction as much as project quality, which is a reason to report effect sizes and to avoid causal language (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) [44].

Evidence on communication in particular is consistent across settings. Information that is timely, accessible and two-way builds trust and enables oversight, while opaque or infrequent communication erodes both (Fox, 2015; Fung, 2006; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Pinto & Slevin, 1987) [20, 23, 24, 42]. In decentralised financing, information about allocations, disbursements and project progress is the raw material for community monitoring, so gaps in information weaken the accountability that decentralisation is meant to provide (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Olken, 2007; Reed *et al*., 2018) [7, 41, 47]. This is the mechanism behind the

common recommendation to publish allocations and progress at the level where people live.

Consultation is also a means of managing risk. Stakeholders who live next to a project, use its outputs or supply its labour often notice problems early, such as design flaws, poor workmanship or deviations from the agreed scope, and a channel to report them can prevent costly rework (Bourne & Walker, 2005; Olander, 2007; Pinto & Slevin, 1987) [8, 40, 42]. The same logic underlies community monitoring in decentralised programmes, although the Indonesian evidence shows that monitoring by communities works best where they have the information and incentives to act and where there is some credible threat of sanction (Olken, 2007) [41]. In a CDF setting, this means that consultation should be linked to a route through which concerns are recorded, answered and, where necessary, escalated.

2.4 Challenges associated with stakeholder engagement

Challenges cluster into political, fiscal, capacity and information problems. Reviews of decentralisation in Africa point to weak policy and legislation, limited political will, restricted local autonomy and overdependence on central government (Rugeiyamu & Msendo, 2025; Smoke, 2003) [49, 51], and economic models show how local officials can capture decisions when accountability is weak (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006) [7]. Elite capture is a recurrent concern in community-driven development, where better-connected people tend to steer benefits and discussion (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Platteau, 2004) [32, 43]. Research on construction projects in South Africa classes the hindrances to stakeholder engagement as individual, organisational and government-related (Ebekozien *et al*., 2024) [17]. Zambian CDF studies report political interference, weak technical capacity, limited civic awareness and procedural participation (Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026) [30], and Khayi and Likando (2026) [31] conclude that governance and operational challenges constrain what the fund achieves in Mufumbwe.

What is missing is a ranking from stakeholders themselves. Qualitative studies identify challenges but do not show which one respondents consider most significant, how often they are met, or whether groups experience them differently. That matters for targeting: a problem felt mainly by beneficiaries calls for a different remedy from one felt across the system (Aaltonen *et al*., 2024; Bardhan, 2002; IGC, 2022) [1, 6, 29].

Political economy adds a layer that technical accounts omit. Funds allocated through constituencies sit close to electoral politics, and research on Kenya's equivalent fund has examined whether projects follow political loyalty (Harris & Posner, 2019) [26]. Theory predicts that local capture is more likely where information is scarce and monitoring is weak (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Olken, 2007; Platteau, 2004) [7, 41, 43], and critiques of participation warn that engagement structures can themselves become instruments of control (Cleaver, 1999; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Hickey & Mohan, 2005) [12, 14, 27]. Such arguments make it important to ask stakeholders directly which constraints they experience most, instead of assuming that a technical shortfall in capacity or communication is the main one.

2.5 Strategies for improving stakeholder engagement

Proposed remedies fall into three groups. The first is information and capacity: Kamanga and Masaiti (2026) [30] recommend civic education, capacity building for local actors and enforceable accountability, and Chungu *et al*. (2026) [11] call for localised knowledge dissemination and capacity building among community structures. The second is accountability and responsiveness, where social-accountability research stresses pairing voice with consequences (Fox, 2015; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012) [20, 24]. The third is design: engagement is more effective when it is planned as a process, institutionalised and attentive to equity and trust (Fung, 2006; Reed *et al*., 2018) [23, 47]. Policy analysis of the CDF similarly emphasises accountability mechanisms and learning built into the fund's design (IGC, 2022; Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2024) [29, 25].

Each group of strategies has a different cost and a different dependency. Communication and consultation routines can be changed by committees themselves, at little cost, and are therefore the most immediately available (Fox, 2015; Fung, 2006) [20, 23]. Capacity building needs funding and trainers, and is usually organised by local authorities or partners (Reed *et al*., 2018; Chambers, 1997) [47, 10]. Predictable disbursement and safeguards against interference sit mostly outside local control and depend on decisions at ministry and national level (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Rugeiyamu & Msendo, 2025; Smoke, 2003) [7, 49, 51]. Understanding which strategies stakeholders prefer, and how they map onto the constraints they report, helps decide who has to act and in what order.

Taken together, these strands suggest that strategies work when they address the specific constraint in play. Communication and information strategies matter where the problem is opacity, accountability mechanisms where it is impunity, predictable financing where it is uncertainty, and capacity building where committees lack skills (Chambers, 1997; Fox, 2015; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Reed *et al*., 2018) [10, 20, 24, 47]. A district-level ranking of constraints and strategies therefore has direct practical value, because it shows which of these levers stakeholders consider most binding.

2.6 Critique, research gap and hypotheses

Three limits stand out in the studies reviewed. Most Zambian evidence is qualitative or small-scale (Chungu *et al*., 2026; Khayi & Likando, 2026) [11, 31], so magnitude and significance are rarely reported. The mixed-methods and survey studies concentrate on other provinces (Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026; Matipa, 2020) [30, 33]. And no study triangulates stakeholders' preferred strategies across question formats. The gap, then, is district-level quantitative evidence from Mufumbwe on the level of participation, the consultation–performance relationship, the ranking and severity of challenges, and stakeholder-defined strategies.

Four hypotheses were derived from the literature and tested at the 5% level. H1 (null): the level of participation is independent of stakeholder role. H2: more frequent consultation is associated with a more positive perceived effect on project performance. H3: more frequently experienced challenges are associated with greater perceived severity, and severity does not differ across stakeholder roles. H4: lower ratings of current committee efforts are associated with a larger perceived scope for improvement.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a convergent parallel mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative data

collected within the same study period. The quantitative component examined stakeholder participation, consultation, engagement challenges and perceived CDF project performance, while the qualitative component explored respondents' recommendations for improving stakeholder engagement. The study was conducted using a cross-sectional timeframe, as data were collected at one point in time without manipulating the study variables. The target population comprised stakeholders directly involved in, or knowledgeable about, CDF projects in Mufumbwe District, including Constituency Development Committee (CDC) and Ward Development Committee (WDC) members, local authority officials, project committee members, community leaders, beneficiaries and three church leaders who monitored the utilisation of project funds. The accessible population was estimated at 85 stakeholders. Criterion-based purposive sampling was used to select 70 respondents with relevant experience and knowledge of CDF project implementation and stakeholder engagement. The intended sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) [54] formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2} = \frac{85}{1+85(0.05)^2} \approx 70 \quad (1)$$

Where n is the sample, N the accessible population and e the 5% precision level. The calculated figure guided the sample size, while purposive selection determined respondent eligibility. Consequently, the sample was not treated as statistically representative of all CDF stakeholders.

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered to the 70 respondents. The instrument contained closed-ended questions covering respondent characteristics, stakeholder participation, consultation, perceived project performance, engagement challenges and improvement strategies, alongside one open-ended question inviting recommendations for strengthening stakeholder engagement. Quantitative responses were coded and analysed using descriptive statistics, Chi-square tests, Spearman's rank correlation, simple linear regression, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the Kruskal–Wallis test. The qualitative responses were analysed thematically by identifying recurring ideas and grouping similar recommendations into common themes. The two sets of findings were analysed separately and integrated during interpretation to identify areas of convergence and complementary insights. Statistical tests were evaluated at the 5% significance level. Permission was obtained before data collection, participation was voluntary, informed consent was secured, and respondents' information was treated confidentially and used exclusively for academic purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondent profile

Beneficiaries were the largest group (n = 23, 32.9%), followed by WDC members (n = 14, 20.0%), project committee members (n = 13, 18.6%), community leaders (n = 8, 11.4%), CDC members (n = 5, 7.1%), local authority officials (n = 4, 5.7%) and church leaders monitoring funds (n = 3, 4.3%). For inferential work these were collapsed into three groups, shown in Table 1. Men made up 70.0% of the sample, and 61.5% had been involved with CDF projects for three years or more, so most respondents spoke from experience.

Table 1: Respondents by stakeholder role group (N = 70)

Role group	n	%
Committee members and officials (CDC, WDC, project committee, local authority)	36	51.4
Community leaders (including church leaders monitoring funds)	11	15.7
Beneficiaries	23	32.9
Total	70	100

Source: Field data, 2026.

4.2 Level of stakeholder participation

Respondents rated overall participation on a five-point scale. Moderate was the most common rating (n = 22, 31.4%), 32.9% (n = 23) rated it high or very high, and 35.7% (n = 25) rated it low or very low. The mean was 3.00 (SD = 1.14), with a 95% confidence interval of 2.73 to 3.27. Because sampling was purposive, the interval describes this sample's precision and should not be read as a population estimate. Table 2 and Fig 2 show the ratings by role group.

Table 2: Overall participation rating by role group, with chi-square test (N = 70)

Role group	Low / very low	Moderate	High / very high	Row total
Committee members and officials	13 (36.1%)	12 (33.3%)	11 (30.6%)	36
Community leaders	1 (9.1%)	4 (36.4%)	6 (54.5%)	11
Beneficiaries	11 (47.8%)	6 (26.1%)	6 (26.1%)	23
Total	25 (35.7%)	22 (31.4%)	23 (32.9%)	70
$\chi^2(4) = 5.42$, p = .247, Cramér's V = .20; mean rating = 3.00, SD = 1.14, 95% CI [2.73, 3.27]				

Source: Field data, 2026. Three of nine cells (community-leader row) had expected counts below five.

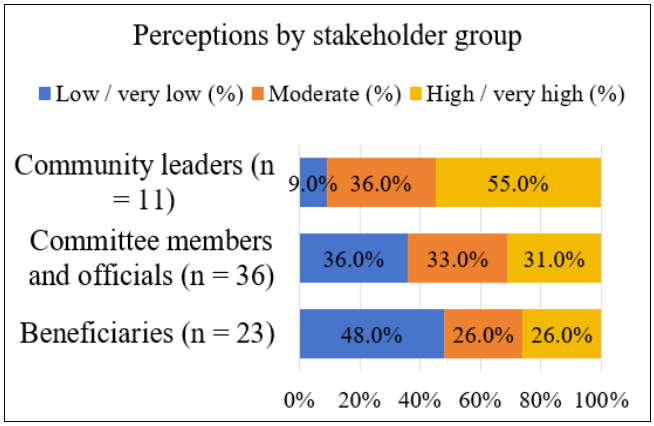


Fig 2: Participation rating by stakeholder role group (row percentages)

The chi-square test did not reject H1: participation level was not significantly associated with role, $\chi^2(4) = 5.42$, p = .247. Community leaders reported high participation more often than beneficiaries (54.5% against 26.1%), but the groups are small, and three cells had expected counts below five, so the test has limited power and the result is indicative. What the data do show is that no group reported consistently high participation. Mode of involvement sharpens this (Table 3). While 37.1% said they were actively involved throughout decision-making and 15.7% said they held control over key

decisions, 41.4% were only informed after decisions were made or consulted for opinions with no further role.

Table 3: How stakeholders are usually brought into project decision-making (N = 70)

Mode of involvement	n	%
Informed only after decisions are made	9	12.9
Consulted for opinions only, with no further role	20	28.6
Actively involved throughout decision-making	26	37.1
Given control over key project decisions	11	15.7
Other (mainly WhatsApp group updates)	4	5.7

Source: Field data, 2026.

Moderate participation, spread across roles, matches the Zambian pattern of formally embedded but largely consultative engagement (Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026; Matipa, 2020) [30, 33] and the moderate satisfaction found in Mufumbwe (Khayi & Likando, 2026) [31]. In Arnstein's (1969) [3] terms, a large minority sits on the rungs of informing and consultation, and a smaller group reaches partnership or delegated control. That the shortfall is shared across roles is consistent with a design problem and not a problem of exclusion of one group (Fung, 2006; Smoke, 2003) [23, 51]. The male-dominated sample also fits the observation that participatory structures often under-represent women (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Reed *et al*., 2018) [32, 47].

Mode of involvement also helps interpret the participation rating through Pretty's (1995) [45] typology. Respondents who are informed after the fact sit at the passive end, those consulted for opinions are in the consultative middle, and those who are involved throughout or hold control approach functional or interactive participation. That 52.9% of respondents are in the last two groups is encouraging, but the more than four in ten who are not suggests that practice is mixed even within the same committees and wards. The four respondents who reported being involved mainly through WhatsApp updates point to a further issue: informal digital channels can widen reach but do not necessarily give people a say, and they exclude those without phones or data (Fung, 2006; Reed *et al*., 2018) [23, 47].

A mean rating that sits on the midpoint can conceal two quite different stories: a district where most people hold moderate views, or one that is polarised between enthusiasts and sceptics. The distribution here is closer to the second than the first. About one in three respondents rated participation high or very high, a similar share low or very low, and the remainder moderate, so the average of 3.00 summarises a spread of experiences and not a consensus. That spread helps explain why the role comparison found no significant difference: within every role group there are people at both ends of the scale, which points towards practices and conditions that vary between committees, wards and projects (Fung, 2006; Pretty, 1995) [23, 45].

4.3 Stakeholder consultation and perceived project performance

Consultation during implementation was uneven (Table 4). Whereas 48.6% said stakeholders are often or always consulted, 28.6% said rarely or never. Perceptions of the effect on performance leaned positive: 60.0% reported a positive or strongly positive effect, 17.1% reported none, and 22.9% reported a negative or strongly negative effect.

Table 4: Frequency of consultation and perceived effect on project performance (N = 70)

Scale point	Consultation frequency, n (%)	Perceived effect on performance, n (%)
1	Never: 4 (5.7)	Strongly negative: 4 (5.7)
2	Rarely: 16 (22.9)	Negative: 12 (17.1)
3	Sometimes: 16 (22.9)	No noticeable effect: 12 (17.1)
4	Often: 19 (27.1)	Positive: 26 (37.1)
5	Always: 15 (21.4)	Strongly positive: 16 (22.9)

Source: Field data, 2026.

Table 5: Consultation frequency and perceived performance effect: inferential results

Test / statistic	Result
Spearman's ρ (n = 70)	ρ = .303, p = .011
Simple linear regression: slope (b)	0.288
Intercept (a)	2.575
R / R^2	R = .295; R^2 = .087 (8.7%)
Model significance	F(1, 68) = 6.48, p = .013
Decision on H2	Supported

Source: Field data, 2026. F is computed from R^2 and n.

H2 was supported. Consultation frequency and perceived effect were positively correlated, ρ = .303, p = .011, a moderate association by Cohen's (1988) [13] benchmarks. In the regression, each step up the consultation scale was associated with a 0.29-point rise in the perceived effect, so the fitted gap between "never" and "always" is about 1.15 points on a five-point scale; consultation frequency nevertheless explained only 8.7% of the variance. The honest reading is that consultation is related to better perceived performance but is far from the whole story. Funding, procurement, technical capacity and oversight plausibly account for the rest, and because the data are cross-sectional and both variables come from the same respondents, the association should not be read as a causal effect (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003) [44].

The result sits between the optimistic and cautious strands of the literature. It supports the expectation that engagement tends to accompany better outcomes (Bandé *et al*., 2024; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Mansuri & Rao, 2013) [5, 24, 32], and its modest size is consistent with the finding in other Zambian constituencies that participation alone did not significantly predict implementation success (Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026) [30] and with evidence that consultation without accountability has limited bite (Fox, 2015; Olken, 2007) [20, 41]. Within Mufumbwe, the practical implication is that consultation should be sustained through implementation and paired with feedback, not confined to the start of a project.

Two further points are worth making about the consultation result. First, the two analyses agree: the rank correlation and the regression both indicate a positive and statistically reliable association of modest size, which gives more confidence than either would alone. Second, the fitted difference of roughly one scale point between "never" and "always" consulted is not trivial on a five-point scale, but it also leaves most of the variation unexplained, which is consistent with the multidimensional view of performance in which cost, time, quality, benefits and satisfaction all play a part (Atkinson, 1999; Ika & Pinto, 2022) [4, 28]. For committees, the lesson is that consultation is a low-cost lever whose benefit is real but bounded, so it should be

pursued alongside work on funding, procurement and oversight.

4.4 Challenges associated with stakeholder engagement

Delayed or inadequate fund disbursement was most often named the most significant challenge, ahead of political interference and elite capture (Table 6, Fig 3). Financial and political-governance factors, rather than communication or technical capacity, dominated.

Table 6: Challenge that most significantly affects stakeholder engagement (N = 70)

Challenge	n	%
Delayed or inadequate fund disbursement	21	30
Political interference	18	25.7
Elite capture or exclusion of vulnerable groups	12	17.1
Low technical capacity of committees	10	14.3
Poor communication channels	7	10
Other (distance to venues, language barriers)	2	2.9

Source: Field data, 2026.

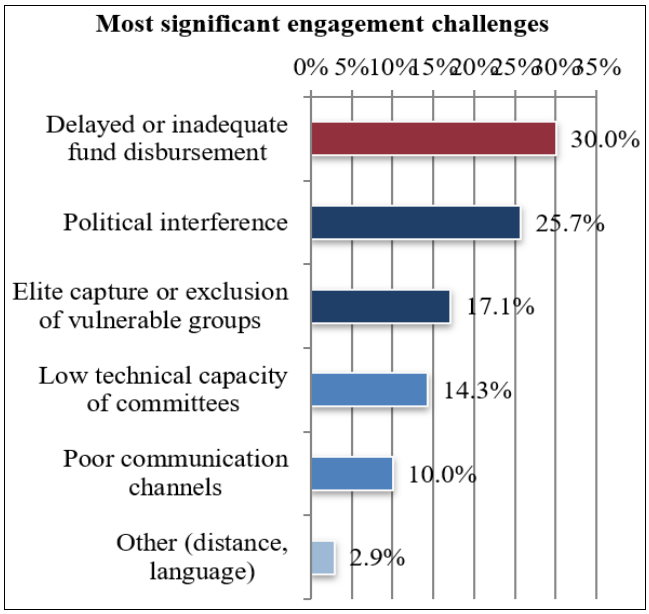


Fig 3: Most significant challenge to stakeholder engagement (% of respondents)

Challenges were recurrent: 47.1% of respondents met them often or always, a further 31.4% sometimes, and only 4.3% never (Table 7). Half (50.0%) rated their impact on project performance as severe or very severe, and only 1.4% rated them not severe.

Table 7: Frequency and perceived severity of engagement challenges (N = 70)

Scale point	Frequency of challenges, n (%)	Perceived severity of impact, n (%)
1	Never: 3 (4.3)	Not severe: 1 (1.4)
2	Rarely: 12 (17.1)	Slightly severe: 11 (15.7)
3	Sometimes: 22 (31.4)	Moderately severe: 23 (32.9)
4	Often: 16 (22.9)	Severe: 22 (31.4)
5	Always: 17 (24.3)	Very severe: 13 (18.6)

Source: Field data, 2026.

Table 8: Challenges: inferential results

Test / group	Result
Spearman's ρ, frequency × severity (n = 70)	ρ = .284, p = .017
Mean severity (SD): beneficiaries (n = 23)	3.74 (0.92)
Mean severity (SD): committee members and officials (n = 36)	3.42 (1.08)
Mean severity (SD): community leaders (n = 11)	3.27 (1.01)
One-way ANOVA	F(2, 67) = 1.03, p = .362
Kruskal-Wallis	H(2) = 2.18, p = .336
Decision on H3	Supported: association significant; no role differences

Source: Field data, 2026.

H3 was supported in both parts. Respondents who met challenges more often judged them more severe, ρ = .284, p = .017, a small-to-moderate association, which suggests that severity reflects repeated experience and not a one-off grievance. Severity did not differ by role on either the parametric or the rank-based test. Beneficiaries scored highest on average (3.74), but the gap is within what chance could produce at these group sizes. The challenges are felt across the system, which is the pattern one would expect if their roots lie in funding and governance arrangements and not in the behaviour of a single group (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Rugeiyamu & Msendo, 2025) [7, 49].

The ranking agrees closely with the literature. Fiscal unpredictability and political interference are the problems most often attached to decentralised funds in Africa (Rugeiyamu & Msendo, 2025; Smoke, 2003) [49, 51], and elite capture is the classic risk of community-driven development (Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Platteau, 2004) [32, 43]. They also echo the governance and operational constraints reported for Mufumbwe and the political interference, weak capacity and procedural participation reported elsewhere in Zambia (Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026; Khayi & Likando, 2026) [30, 31]. The South African classification of hindrances as individual, organisational and government-related (Ebekozien *et al.*, 2024) [17] is a useful lens: respondents' top two choices are government-related. Political interference is a reported perception here and not an independently verified cause of poor performance.

Disbursement delay deserves particular attention because it plausibly works through engagement itself. When funds arrive late, committees may postpone meetings, contractors may slow or stop work, and communities lose confidence that what was agreed will happen, which in turn weakens the incentive to take part (Bardhan & Mookherjee, 2006; Rugeiyamu & Msendo, 2025; Smoke, 2003) [7, 49, 51]. The data cannot show this pathway, but the combination of delayed funding at the top of the challenge ranking and timely disbursement near the top of the strategy ranking is what such a pathway would predict. Political interference and elite capture, ranked second and third, point to a different mechanism, in which engagement is available on paper but the agenda is shaped by those with influence (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Platteau, 2004) [14, 32, 43]. Together, the three account for nearly three

quarters of first-choice answers (72.8%).

The severity results also carry a practical message about prioritisation. Because challenge frequency and severity move together, interventions that reduce how often problems occur should also reduce how serious they are judged to be, and the most frequent problems are the ones respondents named: late funding and interference. At the same time, roughly one in five respondents rated the impact as very severe, and a further three in ten as severe, so even a modest improvement in the most frequent problems could shift many people's assessment of project performance. This is a perception-based argument and not a measured one, and the next step would be to link the reported problems to documented delays, cost changes or quality defects for specific projects (Atkinson, 1999; Ika & Pinto, 2022) [4, 28].

4.5 Strategies for improving stakeholder engagement

Stakeholders saw a wide gap between current practice and potential (Table 9). Two in five (40.0%) rated current committee efforts low or very low and 27.1% moderate, against 32.9% high or very high. At the same time, 54.3% believed better engagement could raise project performance by more than 60%. Those who rated efforts lowest saw the most room to improve, $\rho = -.380$, $p = .001$, a moderate inverse association that supports H4.

Table 9: Rating of current committee efforts and perceived improvement achievable (N = 70)

Scale point	Current efforts, n (%)	Improvement achievable through better engagement, n (%)
1	Very low: 5 (7.1)	0–20%: 2 (2.9)
2	Low: 23 (32.9)	21–40%: 15 (21.4)
3	Moderate: 19 (27.1)	41–60%: 15 (21.4)
4	High: 15 (21.4)	61–80%: 25 (35.7)
5	Very high: 8 (11.4)	81–100%: 13 (18.6)
Spearman's $\rho = -.380$, $p = .001$; decision on H4: supported		

Source: Field data, 2026.

Respondents' own percentage estimates of achievable improvement should be treated as expressions of optimism, not forecasts; what the correlation shows is that dissatisfaction with present effort travels with a sense of unrealised potential. Strategy preferences were stable across question formats (Table 10, Fig 4). Timely and transparent communication led both the closed and open-ended items (25.7% each; 95% CI for the closed-item proportion 15.5% to 36.0%), followed by timely disbursement (22.9%), with awareness and capacity building trailing. Accountability ranked third on the closed item (18.6%) but lower when respondents wrote their own answers (10.0%), and independent monitoring rose from 4.3% to 8.6%.

Table 10: Strategies to improve stakeholder engagement: closed and open-ended responses (N = 70)

Strategy	Closed-ended, n (%)	Open-ended, n (%)
Timely and transparent communication	18 (25.7)	18 (25.7)
Timely disbursement of funds	16 (22.9)	16 (22.9)
Stronger accountability mechanisms	13 (18.6)	7 (10.0)
Community awareness and education	10 (14.3)	10 (14.3)
Capacity building for committees	9 (12.9)	9 (12.9)
Independent monitoring or auditing	3 (4.3)	6 (8.6)
Other (devolved ward budgets; localised meetings; representation of women and youth)	1 (1.4)	4 (5.7)

Source: Field data, 2026.

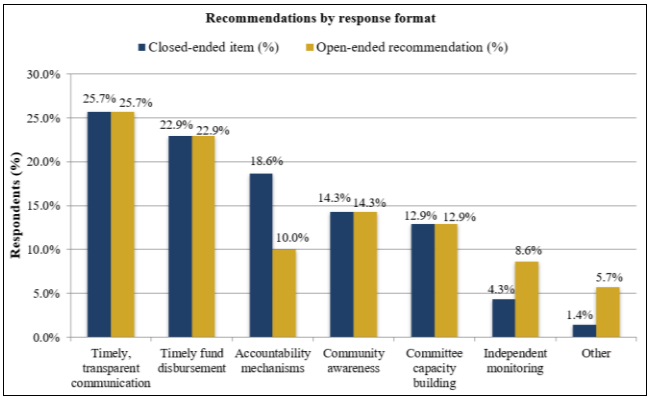


Fig 4: Preferred strategies to improve stakeholder engagement, closed-ended and open-ended responses (% of respondents)

The preferred strategies line up with the diagnosed problems. Communication was the top strategy, and poor communication channels were also the fifth-ranked challenge, but delayed funding was the top challenge and timely disbursement the second strategy, so respondents are asking for fixes to the fiscal pipeline as well as to engagement practice. This is consistent with recommendations for civic education, capacity building and enforceable accountability in other Zambian studies (Chungu *et al*., 2026; Kamanga & Masaiti, 2026; Khayi & Likando, 2026) [11, 30, 31] and with the social-accountability argument that voice needs consequences (Fox, 2015; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012) [20, 24]. It also matches the accountability and learning emphasis of the fund's policy framework (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2024; IGC, 2022) [25, 29]. The relatively low placing of capacity building (12.9%) contrasts with the weight given to it in the literature and may reflect respondents' focus on conditions they feel they cannot influence.

For practice, the ordering of strategies is useful because the cheapest are also the most requested. Regular, public progress updates and routine consultation at project milestones require little money and can begin immediately, whereas disbursement reform depends on decisions above the district. A sensible sequence is to start with communication and consultation routines now, press for a published disbursement schedule, and add accountability and capacity measures as committees mature (Fox, 2015; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; IGC, 2022; Reed *et al*., 2018) [20, 24, 29, 47]. Respondents' preference for communication over formal training should not be read as a case against capacity building; it more likely signals that people want visible, near-term improvements to the way committees deal with them.

4.6 Summary of hypothesis tests and overall discussion

Table 11: Summary of hypothesis tests

No.	Hypothesis	Statistic	Decision
H1	Participation level is independent of stakeholder role	$\chi^2(4) = 5.42$, $p = .247$	Not rejected
H2	More frequent consultation is associated with a more positive perceived performance effect	$\rho = .303$, $p = .011$; $R^2 = .087$	Supported
H3	Frequent challenges are perceived as more severe; severity does not differ by role	$\rho = .284$, $p = .017$; $F(2, 67) = 1.03$, $p = .362$	Supported
H4	Lower ratings of current efforts are associated with greater perceived scope for improvement	$\rho = -.380$, $p = .001$	Supported

Source: Field data, 2026.

Read together, the results describe engagement structures that exist but do not yet deliver consistent influence. Participation is moderate for every group; consultation is uneven but its frequency tracks better perceptions of performance; challenges are frequent, serious and shared; and stakeholders want transparency, predictable funding and accountability. The strongest findings are the consultation–performance association and the system-wide spread of challenges. The weakest are the role comparisons, where small cells limit power. Two cautions apply. All measures are self-reported perceptions from a purposive sample in one district, and performance is a single perceptual item; the study therefore speaks to association and to stakeholder experience, not to measured project outcomes or causal effects (Podsakoff *et al*., 2003; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) [44, 16].

In terms of the framework, the findings place Mufumbwe's CDF engagement in the middle of the participation continuum: beyond the nominal end on which people are only informed, since most are at least consulted and over half report some active involvement, yet short of the delegated or collaborative end on which communities consistently shape decisions (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; White, 1996) [3, 42, 53]. The challenges ranking shows why that middle position is sticky. Funding delays and political interference act on committees from outside the engagement process, so even well-intentioned consultation can be undermined by events it does not control. The strategy ranking shows that stakeholders understand this, since they ask for both better engagement practice and better financial and governance conditions.

Several threats to validity are worth stating. Selection is a concern, because purposive sampling may have favoured people who are more engaged or more willing to speak. Self-report may be shaped by social desirability, particularly for committee members rating their own efforts. Single-item measures cannot be assessed for internal reliability, and the collapsing of role groups for the chi-square and ANOVA tests reduces detail. None of these threats reverses the main pattern, which is consistent across descriptive and inferential results and across closed and open-ended items, but they do argue for treating the effect sizes as indicative. Replication with random sampling and multi-item scales would show how robust they are.

The differences between closed-ended and open-ended answers deserve a brief comment. Where respondents chose from a list, accountability came third; where they wrote their own recommendation, independent monitoring and auditing gained ground while the communication, disbursement, awareness and capacity-building shares were unchanged. One reading is that people reached for accountability when it was offered as a named option but described it in more specific institutional terms, such as audits and monitoring, when they had to write their own answer. Either way, the stability of the leading strategies across formats lowers the risk that the ranking is an artefact of the questionnaire (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Saunders *et al*., 2019) [16, 50].

4.7 Implications for practice

Table 12 translates the evidence into actions, each tied to a finding and to the body best placed to act. The aim is to make the results usable by committees and authorities and not only by researchers.

Table 12: Findings, implications and responsible actors

Finding	Implication for practice	Lead actor
Participation moderate for all roles; 41.4% informed or consulted only	Move from one-off meetings to engagement at planning, implementation and monitoring; record who took part and what changed	Project and ward committees
Consultation frequency associated with better perceived performance ($\rho = .303$)	Schedule consultation at project milestones and report back on how views were used	Project committees; local authority
Delayed disbursement is the leading challenge (30.0%)	Publish a disbursement calendar and explain delays to communities	Ministry; local authority
Political interference and elite capture rank second and third (25.7%, 17.1%)	Open meetings, published project lists and a ward-level grievance route	CDF committees; councillors; civil society
Communication is the leading strategy in both question formats (25.7%)	Use noticeboards, ward meetings and local-language briefings alongside digital updates	Project and ward committees
Awareness (14.3%) and capacity building (12.9%) each chosen by roughly one respondent in seven or eight	Target training at facilitation, record keeping and financial oversight; run awareness sessions on CDF processes	Local authority; development partners

Source: Authors' synthesis of the results above.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study set out to establish how stakeholder engagement relates to the performance of CDF projects in Mufumbwe District. Its central finding is that engagement structures exist but are shallow and uneven. Participation was moderate (M = 3.00 on a five-point scale), only about a third of respondents rated it high, and four in ten experienced it as being informed or consulted without a continuing role. Participation did not differ significantly across stakeholder roles, so the shortfall appears to belong to the system and not to one group. Consultation mattered: more frequent consultation was associated with more favourable views of project performance ($\rho = .303$, $p = .011$), although it explained under a tenth of the variation, which makes it one contributor among several. Challenges were frequent and serious. Nearly half of respondents met them often or always, delayed disbursement, political interference and elite capture ranked highest, and perceived severity rose with frequency but was the same across roles. Respondents who rated current committee efforts poorly saw more room for improvement, and they named timely, transparent communication, predictable funding and stronger accountability as the strategies most likely to help.

The practical implications follow from those findings. Committees should treat consultation as a continuing activity tied to project milestones and not an event at the start, and they should record who was consulted, what was raised and what changed as a result. Communication should be routine and public, with progress and spending information posted at ward level and presented in meetings in the languages people use. The Ministry and local authorities should make disbursement more predictable and publish the schedule, because uncertain funding undermines every other engagement effort. Accountability should be built into implementation through feedback channels, grievance handling and independent monitoring, not left to end-of-project review. Training for committees should concentrate on the functions that engagement actually requires, such as facilitation, record keeping and financial oversight, and committees should make deliberate efforts to bring in women, young people and other groups that the sample and the challenge ranking suggest are under-represented.

Against the four objectives, the conclusions can be stated briefly. On participation, the level is moderate, uneven within every role group and more consultative than collaborative. On consultation, more frequent consultation goes with more favourable perceptions of performance, with a modest but reliable effect size. On challenges, the leading problems are delayed funding, political interference and elite capture, they are frequent, and they are experienced as serious by all kinds of stakeholders. On strategies, stakeholders favour transparent communication and timely disbursement, supported by accountability, awareness and capacity building, and their preferences were stable across question formats.

The study adds to the literature in two ways. It shows, with district-level survey data from a province that is rarely studied, that the pattern of moderate and uneven participation found elsewhere in Zambia also holds in Mufumbwe and is shared across stakeholder groups. And it shows that stakeholders place the binding constraints on engagement in funding and governance, not in the technical skills of committees alone, which suggests that reform aimed only at training would miss much of what respondents report. Responsibility for action is shared: committees can change how they consult and communicate, local authorities can improve information and monitoring, and the Ministry and its partners can address the predictability of disbursement and the safeguards against interference.

The findings carry limits. They rest on self-reported perceptions from 70 purposively selected stakeholders in a single district, so they cannot be generalised statistically to other constituencies. The cross-sectional design establishes association and not causation, and the outcome was measured by one perceptual item from the same respondents who reported on consultation, which invites common-method bias. Some role groups were small, and in the participation test three cells had expected counts below five, so that result should be read cautiously. Future work should combine perceptions with documentary indicators of project cost, time and quality, use multi-item validated scales, sample more randomly or by project, add qualitative interviews to explain why delayed funding and political interference weigh so heavily, and follow projects over time to test whether improved consultation precedes better delivery.

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