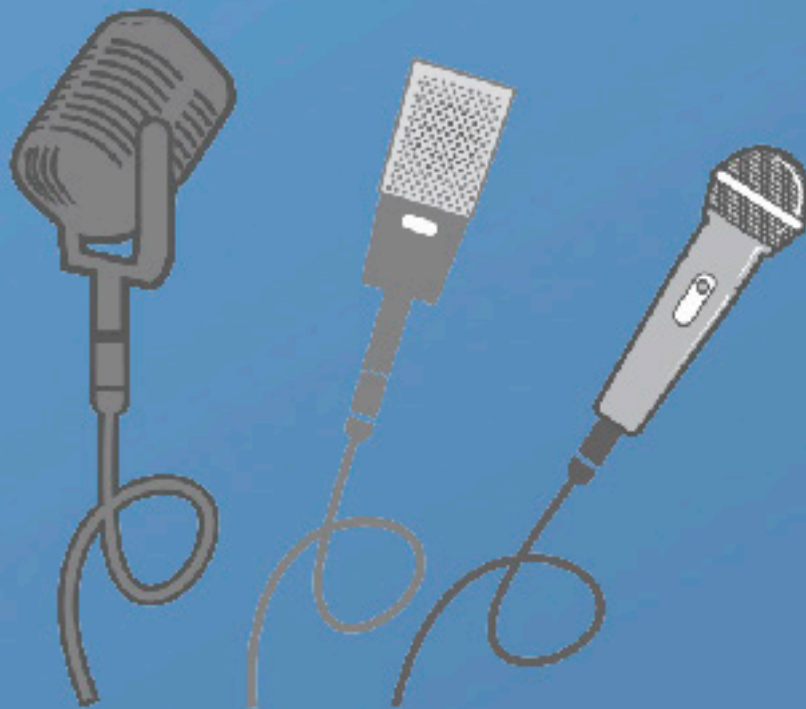




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## Evaluating the Use of Participatory Development Communication Model in the Implementation of the Kinondoni District Vocational Training Centre Project, Dar Es Salaam

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### ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to evaluate the use of the Participatory Development Communication (PDC) Model in implementing the Kinondoni District Vocational Training Centre (DVTC) project in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to assess the extent and effectiveness of community participation in project planning and execution. Findings reveal that while mechanisms for public engagement existed, participation was largely symbolic and limited to information dissemination rather than genuine dialogue or decision-making. Weak institutional responsiveness, low awareness, and inadequate feedback mechanisms hindered full community involvement. The study concludes that effective participatory communication requires two-way interaction, transparency, and early stakeholder engagement. It recommends strengthening local communication structures and institutionalizing participatory frameworks to enhance ownership, trust, and project sustainability.

### INTRODUCTION

Community involvement in development initiatives is essential for achieving sustainability, operational efficiency, and social acceptance. According to Abah and Nwokwu (2021), participatory development ensures that projects align with community needs, leading to greater ownership and long-term success. Global institutions such as the United Nations and the World Bank endorse participatory development as a foundation for effective project planning and implementation (Servaes, 2008). However, experiences from countries like Sweden and the United States reveal that community participation often remains symbolic rather than empowering (Ako, 2017; Enghel, 2011). While public hearings and consultations exist, they rarely provide citizens with real influence over decision-making, resulting in gaps between policy goals and practical outcomes. Similar challenges persist across Africa, where weak governance structures, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and cultural barriers hinder true participatory engagement, leading to resistance and project failures (Wilkins, 2008; Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006).

In Tanzania, community participation in municipal construction projects faces several obstacles. According to Enghel (2011), the institutional framework for citizen involvement remains limited, with engagement often confined to formal stakeholder events. Many residents are unaware of ongoing projects and lack effective channels for expressing their views. Challenges such as language barriers, low literacy levels, and limited administrative capacity further restrict meaningful participation.

Municipal leaders sometimes fast-track project approvals without adequate consultation to avoid the costs and delays associated with participatory processes (Servaes, 1999). Nevertheless, some projects, such as the Kigamboni Bridge in Dar es Salaam, have demonstrated that involving local leaders and stakeholders can enhance project success (Chaligha, 2021). Conversely, the failure of the Mwanza market stalls project illustrates the consequences of neglecting community input, which led to underutilized and unsuitable infrastructure (Gumucio-Dagron & Tufte, 2006).

These experiences underscore the importance of integrating participatory communication models in municipal project planning to ensure alignment with community needs and foster public support. Involving communities early in decision-making helps reduce opposition and enhances project sustainability. Municipal authorities should adopt legal and policy measures mandating public consultation for major infrastructure projects, leveraging digital tools such as e-participation platforms to enhance accessibility (Ako, 2017). Tanzania's policy framework already promotes participatory development, but gaps in implementation continue to undermine efficiency and inclusiveness. Therefore, this paper evaluates the effectiveness of a participatory development communication model in implementing the Vocational Training Centre project at Kinondoni Municipality, aiming to identify best practices and lessons for improving community engagement in local development initiatives.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Participatory Communication Theory, which emphasizes the active involvement of community members in all stages of development initiatives. According to Servaes and Malikhao (2020), participatory communication shifts the development process from a top-down approach where decisions are made by authorities or experts to a bottom-up model that values dialogue, mutual learning, and shared decision-making. The theory posits that communication should not merely be about disseminating information but rather facilitating interaction that empowers communities to influence decisions affecting their lives. This participatory paradigm aligns with democratic ideals and human-centered development, where local voices contribute to defining goals, strategies, and solutions.

The theory is rooted in the works of Paulo Freire (1970), who advocated for dialogical communication as a means of liberation and empowerment. Freire's concept of "communication as dialogue" argues that sustainable development cannot be achieved when people are treated as passive recipients of information; instead, they must be active participants in identifying their own needs and shaping interventions. Recent scholars such as Manyozo (2022) and Melkote and Steeves (2015) further elaborate that participatory communication enhances ownership, reduces resistance to change, and fosters transparency in project implementation. By integrating these principles, participatory development communication becomes a transformative tool that not only informs but also mobilizes communities toward collective action.

In the context of the Kinondoni District Vocational Training Centre (DVTC) project, the Participatory Communication Theory provides a framework for understanding how two-way communication between municipal authorities and community members contributes to project success. As argued by Tufte and Mefalopulos (2017), effective participatory communication ensures that projects are socially inclusive and reflect the priorities of local beneficiaries. Applying this theory helps to assess whether the Kinondoni DVTC project used communication practices that encouraged dialogue, feedback, and collaboration key indicators of participatory development. Thus, the theory underpins this study by linking meaningful communication processes with community empowerment and sustainable project outcomes.

### Application of Participatory Development Communication Model-An overview

In the East African context, academically oriented participation development communication theory has found some utility in public project implementation. Tufte (2018) emphasizes the transformation that community awareness has for rural Kenya. He found that people became active supporters of community projects (and became mobilized to take action) when people were

informed via community radio, local meetings, and public campaigns. A key example comes from Kitui County, where women became mobilized to support a health centre project after they were educated on the project and its benefits. Illustrating the connection between awareness and action, this study serves its intended purpose.

Similarly, Kaswamila and Mwita (2020) investigated the influence of communication on public participation in Dar es Salaam. Like Tufte, their study affirms that communication methods particularly public meetings, social media, and radio are effective in increasing civic engagement. A compelling example from Ilala Municipality showed that even the simple act of sending text messages about budget meetings significantly improved attendance. This supports the argument that timely and targeted communication can foster participatory culture in urban settings.

However, upon closer examination, this study also exhibits a notable limitation: its primary focus is on the dissemination of information rather than fostering genuine engagement. The research predominantly examines how communication strategies were employed to convey messages to participants, yet it does not investigate whether these strategies facilitated a two-way dialogue between the organisers and the audience. There is no assessment of whether participants had opportunities to contribute their perspectives, provide feedback, or influence subsequent decisions. Moreover, the study does not explore the extent to which participants perceived their input as valued or whether it had any tangible impact on outcomes. Consequently, although the findings indicate that communication initiatives can enhance awareness among the target population, they do not provide insight into whether this heightened awareness translates into meaningful participation or active involvement in decision-making processes. In other words, while the study highlights the informational aspect of communication, it leaves unanswered questions about its effectiveness in promoting inclusive and participatory engagement.

In the same trail, Mbilinyi (2019) offers a more targeted exploration by focusing on communication strategies used to enhance community participation in vocational training initiatives in Kigamboni. Using surveys and interviews, she found that communication tools such as WhatsApp, Facebook, leaflets, and face-to-face meetings successfully engaged youth and increased their involvement in local skills training programmes. Notably, the study found that when youth received timely and relevant information, they not only participated in workshops but also became ambassadors within their peer networks. This points to the empowering potential of well-structured participatory communication. However, much like the previous studies, Mbilinyi stops short of investigating whether this initial engagement was sustained over time or whether community members perceived themselves as part of the decision-making processes. Thus, while the research adds value in identifying effective tools, it leaves

unexplored the sustainability and depth of community involvement, particularly from a decision-making and ownership perspective.

In the similar case, Hickey and Mohan's (2020) global meta-analysis, "Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Provides a comprehensive examination of participatory tools such as participatory rural appraisal (PRA), community score cards, and social audits. Their findings emphasise the transformative potential of dialogic mechanisms like open village forums and citizen juries, particularly when these tools are inclusive and reflective. A notable case in India demonstrated how gram sabhas empowered marginalised women to confront corruption a powerful illustration of participatory development in action. However, despite its global reach and analytical depth, the study falls short in addressing the influence of digital tools such as SMS and social media.

In contrast, Agyemang and Asare (2019), in their study on public participation in Ghanaian local governance, adopt a more localized and mixed-methods approach. Their analysis identifies conventional tools such as town hall meetings, community durbars, and suggestion boxes as one of the main methods of citizen engagement. In districts where these tools were effectively organized, they fostered meaningful dialogue and tangible policy outcomes, exemplified by the successful community lobbying for a borehole in the Ashanti Region. However, similar to Hickey and Mohan, Agyemang and Asare overlook the role of modern communication technologies. Moreover, they highlight the inconsistent application of these tools, particularly their exclusionary impact on youth and people with disabilities. This mirrors a broader challenge in participatory development ensuring equitable access and representation.

Additionally, Chaligha (2021) brings the discussion closer to home with a Tanzanian context, offering a practical exploration of engagement tools within the Dodoma City Council. The study innovatively includes both traditional methods (e.g., ward meetings, notice boards) and emerging digital channels (e.g., WhatsApp groups). It finds that while notice boards remain effective for literate adults, mobile-based platforms resonate more with younger, informal-settlement dwellers. The use of WhatsApp broadcasts to inform residents about sanitation projects yielded higher participation rates, suggesting that digital platforms can enhance responsiveness and inclusivity.

Mwagani and Mwakilasa (2020), in their exploration of community participation in Ilala Municipal Council, underline the instrumental role of issue relevance and communication platforms in fostering citizen responsiveness. Their findings indicate that when development projects directly address tangible, everyday concerns such as drainage or market infrastructure citizens tend to engage more actively, as seen in Buguruni Ward. The use of community radio and SMS alerts to mobilise participation illustrates the role of decentralised communication methods.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study used a mixed research approach to evaluate the participatory development communication model in the Kinondoni DVTC project. Quantitative methods measured participation and communication efficiency, while qualitative interviews provided deeper insights into stakeholder experiences. Likewise, a case study design captured the real-life complexities of the model's implementation.

The target population included key municipal officials and residents of Mabwepande Ward, ensuring both implementers and beneficiaries were represented. The research was conducted at Kinondoni Municipal Council, chosen for the presence of the Vocational Training Centre project and its strategic location. A mixed sampling strategy was employed, with purposive sampling for officials and simple random sampling for residents, resulting in 381 quantitative respondents and eight qualitative key informants. Moreover, the sample size consisted of 381 respondents for the quantitative component, determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sampling table for a population range of 50,000 to 75,000 people. For the qualitative part, eight key informants were selected to provide in-depth insights until data saturation was reached, as recommended by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews, with secondary sources supplementing primary data. Analysis combined content analysis for qualitative responses and descriptive statistics for quantitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of participatory communication in the project.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1 Application of Participatory Development Communication Model in Kinondoni DVTC Project

This objective sought to examine the application of the participatory development communication model at Kinondoni DVTC project. The findings reveal a significant lack of effective communication and awareness campaigns, which are crucial components of this model. The data presented in the table below indicate that the majority of community members disagree or strongly disagree with statements related to the application of the model.

### Communication of Objectives of Kinondoni DVTC project

The results show that most respondents (53.0% strongly disagreed and 29.1% disagreed) felt that the objectives of vocational education and training (DVTC) projects were not clearly communicated through meetings and media. With a mean of 1.60, the responses reflect a communication gap between project implementers and community members. This implies that the flow of information within the project cycle is neither participatory nor inclusive, but rather characterised by a top-down approach. In such a context, project goals and objectives appear to have been formulated at higher levels

**Table 1:** Application of Participatory Development Communication Model

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	S t d . Deviation
The objectives of Kinondoni DVTC project are clearly communicated to the public through meetings and media	1 4 2 (53.0%)	7 8 (29.1%)	28 (10.4%)	12 (4.5%)	8 (3.0%)	1.60	1.05
Media platforms are used appropriately to raise awareness about Kinondoni DVTC project.	1 3 1 (48.9%)	8 5 (31.7%)	34 (12.7%)	10 (3.7%)	8 (3.0%)	1.63	1.03
Involvement of community members in the ownership of the Kinondoni DVTC project	1 5 8 (59.0%)	6 5 (24.3%)	20 (7.5%)	15 (5.6%)	10 (3.7%)	1.50	1.05
Structured consultations are held with community members before project implementation.	1 7 0 (63.4%)	5 5 (20.5%)	25 (9.3%)	10 (3.7%)	8 (3.0%)	1.45	1.01
Local government institutions respond promptly to community concerns regarding Kinondoni DVTC project.	1 6 0 (59.7%)	6 8 (25.4%)	20 (7.5%)	12 (4.5%)	8 (3.0%)	1.49	1.04

of authority, often by policy makers, donors, or technical experts, without adequate consultation of the intended beneficiaries. As a result, information is disseminated in a selective manner, where only a few individuals, often local leaders or representatives, receive the details, while the majority of community members remain uninformed. Selective forms of communication can result in a mismatch between the outcomes a project aims to achieve and the outcomes the local community expects. It also violates the tenets of participatory development, which are the first and second pillars around which ownership and sustainability of an intervention are built. When community members are not adequately briefed on a project's objectives, pathways, and anticipated outcomes, their disengagement is normative and practically pervasive. To add, limited communication may impede feedback so that implementers do not appreciate local realities, priorities, and issues that are essential for the success of a project.

A number of authors, for example, Mwangeni and

Mwakilasa (2020), relate the non-sustainability of development projects in Tanzania to a failure to design communication strategies that will empower the local people. In the same vein, Tufte (2018) argues that participatory communication—when the flow of information is bidirectional between implementers and the beneficiaries—is indispensable in the construction of trust, accountability, and understanding between the parties. The communication gaps are, therefore, not a result of design, but a governance issue that reflects an unequal power dynamic in which decision-making is top-down, while the local community's role is restricted to a non-participatory audience.

#### Use of Media Platforms

Moreover, the research showed that more than half of the respondents were dissatisfied with the use of media platforms to promote the Kinondoni Vocational Training Centre (DVTC) projects, particularly in the Mabwepande area. Specifically, 48.9% of respondents strongly

disagreed, while 31.7% disagreed, with the statement that the media channels used to promote DVTC initiatives were effective. The 1.63 mean score indicates that respondents held negative perceptions of the media's role in communicating the projects. This could mean that the project implementers used media platforms to a lesser degree, which could help in communicating vital information to beneficiaries, or the platforms used were inaccessible or unsuitable for the target audience, thus information could not get to them because the audience was not targeted. These findings suggest a need for more effective use of media to increase awareness and participation in Kinondoni DVTC project.

The importance of what Mbilinyi (2019) studied in Kigamboni is also illustrated here, especially on how the use of radio, community noticeboards, and digital communication tools tailored to the context resulted in increased outreach and understanding of the vocational training opportunities in the region. In addition to providing access to training information, these tools fostered feelings of belonging and community ownership. The absence of, or poorly coordinated, media outreach may result in the neglect of certain audiences, particularly those that are marginalised. In these contexts, women, youth, and persons with disabilities tend to become invisible. This is especially problematic because development initiatives are built on the premise that the community will be willing to participate in large numbers. As observed by Tufte (2018), participatory communication involves more than simply sending out information. It involves the creation of two-way interactive tools for the engagement of civil society and beneficiaries in actual conversation, deliberation, and response. Absent these actionable steps to engagement, the information flow is simply the provision of unidirectional communication and the community becomes a passive receiver, rather than an active participant in the development continuum. With regard to the Kinondoni DVTC project, poorly integrated and mono-formatted media activities culminated in communities missing out on project information in a timely and meaningful information flow. Resultantly, the community failed to embrace the project, prospective trainees were not enrolled, and the initiative faded from the public sphere.

Communication that is of low quality and uncoordinated in the negative social and economic order for the system, generates, and maintains inequities by empowering those in the dominant communication class, thus excluding those at the bottom and, by more informal and local means, communicating systems. Recognizing this gap is the first advance towards a well articulated communication plan, and a system of communication that is responsive to community needs. The Kinondoni DVTC and similar projects stand to improve inequities, provide systems and project transparency, and promote the goals of project sustainability.

#### **Community Ownership and Participation**

A majority of participants indicated that community

members were not meaningfully involved in the ownership of the Kinondoni DVTC project at Mabwepande area (59.0% strongly disagreed and 24.3% disagreed). Attaining a mean score of 1.50, the results imply that the community members of the site being served by the project and the project implementers are highly disconnected. Such a mean score, in this case, is indicative of a situation where community members are almost wholly disqualified from any substantial role in the planning and design, and the execution phases of the development activities. Meaning that development activities in this case are likely to be implemented through a vertically mandated approach, leaving very few chances for locals to contribute, influencing ownership to be very low. Leaving community members with a lack of awareness results in psychosocial project attributes being ignored, weakening the project attainments. This outcome relates with the citing by Mwageni and Mwakilasa (2020) when they state that not having the community involved results in negative project impacts, increases the relevance gap, and diminishes success levels.

Community distrust and lack of legitimacy for development efforts stems from absence of participation or inclusion in decision-making processes (Kaswamila & Mwitwa, 2020). Sustainability and improved participation are evident when communities are incorporated into their development ventures (Mbilinyi, 2019). Furthermore, Tufte (2018) describes participation as inclusion of decision-making power, which goes beyond mere information. The results of this study indicate a lack of community ownership which, in turn, undermined the participatory aspect of development communication.

#### **Structured Consultations before Implementation**

The research finds that 63.4% of respondents indicating 'strongly disagree' and 20.5% indicating 'disagree' means structured consultations with the community were held before implementation. The average of 1.45 suggests the consultative processes had low engagement, and most likely absence or poorly executed. This suggests project implementers planners did not involve the community to any degree in the projects. Consequently, the insights, interests, and local expertise of the community were likely missed, which in turn could affect the relevance and acceptance of project initiatives. Poorly developed consultations tend to low community ownership and participation, which are critical for the sustainability and successful implementation of development projects. This correlates with Mwageni and Mwakilasa (2020) wherein conclusion were drawn that, when local communities are not actively engaged in project planning, projects tend to face challenges that involve resistance, low uptake, and misalignment with local needs.

This illustrates Tufte's (2018) assertion that numerous developmental initiatives within Africa operate under a vertical communication framework, where engagements are approached more as a formality than authentic discourse. Kaswamila and Mwitwa (2020) similarly noted

that a lack of properly organized consultations diminishes the potential for inclusiveness to be realized in projects aimed at the community. With regard to the Kinondoni DVTC project, the lack of consulting with locals meant that their priorities and their local knowledge systems were disregarded, resulting in minimal community buy-in.

### **Responsiveness of Local Government Institutions**

The mean score of 1.49 suggests weak responsiveness of the institutions to the context within which they operate. Such a low mean suggests that the government institutions may operate a largely one-way communication system and only provide information to the members of the communication and do not listen to, rest, and act on the feedback, complaints, or suggestions of the communities. This situation implies that the citizens do not have a significant role in the decision-making processes and the government is likely to be unauthorized in decision-making which may circulate the functional responsiveness of the government institutions. Such situation could create a situation where the citizens may have low participatory governance, trust, or reliability on the system of the institutions. Consequently, lack of two-way communication may be of their developmental policies and services which do not meet the local needs of the communities, bearing testimony to the lack of functioning structural and procedural order of response of the institutions. This is similar to what Mbilinyi (2019) observed, that functional responsiveness is one of the key elements participatory communication. Tufte (2018) noted that systems of feedback and the lack of response allows passive communities to exist in the development of their systems.

### **Discussion**

The findings of the study shows that communication, media use, community ownership, structured consultations, and responsiveness are indicators that all had low mean scores and reflect negatively. The situation indicates that the Participatory Development Communication Model of Kinondoni DVTC project has not advocated for dialogue, inclusiveness, and the communication of equals. Instead, the project has adopted a top-down, information-driven approach, facilitating little community voice and ownership. Information transmission, as Tufte (2018) characterizes it, is only a very small part of what each party is involved in. Instead, the process should be viewed as a continuum of interaction, negotiation, active participation, joint decision-making, and feedback. Sustainable development is only possible when communities actively participate in decision-making rather than waiting for a passive receipt of benefits. Participatory communication seeks and enables these objectives by evidence dialogue and series of consultations. Participatory communication is based on the principles of fostering an understanding, the empowerment of local development, and the development of the responsiveness to the real needs,

priorities, and socio-cultural contexts of the people. Understandings of objectives, scope and timelines of development projects within a community can be greatly impaired by a lack of purposefully crafted and well-situated information boards. During development projects, the absence of such communication tools makes community members less informed about the initiative's goals, current activities, time frames and completion of the projects. Such a situation is bound to diminish project transparency and increase the potential for misunderstandings and mistrust of the implementing agencies within the community. This lack of upfront communication encourages the spread of misinformation, and ultimately unengaged, apathetic communities.

It is possible to develop project documents that can be nothing more than a brochure or information sheet yet, without proper dissemination protocols, the project documents will do nothing for community awareness and uninformed project participation. Dissemination tools and protocols for community awareness should be purposefully designed, and materials strategically placed in readily accessible public locations such as community centres, schools, places of worship and other venues where the public traditionally gathers. The lack of such dissemination protocols will significantly weaken the enhanced opportunities for participatory engagement that practitioners of inclusive development strive to provide to all stakeholders in a project.

Under such situations, communities are kept uninformed about issues that concern them directly and are kept out of critical and pivotal decision-making processes. This erodes trust from local decision-makers, since the decision-makers are perceived to be unresponsive to the voices of the people affected by the decisions. In addition, the frustration that is seen in the figure reflects the residents' experiences of little to no consultation and no meaningful inclusion. This absence of engagement is demotivating and, in some cases, disengagement from the initiatives sought by the decision-makers, and in extreme cases, it may even lead to counter-productive actions in development practice.

Referring to the concept of participation, it has not been clearly indicated whether it is the government or the community that ought to be involved. In reality, citizens should always be engaged from the very beginning of any project to ascertain whether they genuinely support it, so that they can become part of the initiative and contribute effectively to its successful and timely completion. Considering the nature of projects implemented through the force account method, which relies on local artisans available within the project area, failure to involve the community raises a critical question: if they are not consulted, are these local artisans then excluded from participating in the project?

The findings reveal a notable discrepancy in perceptions regarding community participation in the Kinondoni DVTC project. Though the Community Development Officer noted that local residents assisted with the

provision of some construction materials and offered ongoing education to help residents comprehend the benefits of the project, documented evidence indicates that real local engagement was far more limited. Most of the community members revealed that they participated little, especially at the beginning of the project, suggesting that the first round of consultations and the needs assessments were conducted with minimal attention.

The perspective of the local government chairperson reinforces this observation. He acknowledged that the community was not consulted at the outset to determine the necessity of the project but noted that engagement improved once implementation commenced. He further underscored the importance of involving citizens from the beginning to sustain their participation and foster a sense of ownership. Overall, the findings suggest that while mechanisms for community involvement existed in theory, in practice, participation was delayed and limited. Effective community engagement requires early consultation, clear communication, and sustained involvement to ensure that local needs are adequately addressed and that residents develop a genuine sense of ownership over development initiatives. The Kinondoni DVTC project illustrates the critical role of proactive, inclusive strategies in achieving meaningful community participation.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the application of the Participatory Development Communication (PDC) Model in the Kinondoni DVTC project has been weak and largely top down in nature. Findings reveal significant deficiencies in key aspects of participatory communication, including information dissemination, community consultations, media engagement, and institutional responsiveness. The low mean scores across all indicators suggest that project implementers did not adequately involve community members in planning, decision-making, or feedback processes. As a result, the project lacked inclusivity, ownership, and trust among the intended beneficiaries. These shortcomings have undermined the potential benefits of participatory development, which depend on mutual dialogue, shared decision-making, and community empowerment. Genuine participation anchored in two-way communication and early stakeholder engagement is crucial for the sustainability and long-term success of development initiatives like the Kinondoni DVTC project.

The study recommends that the Kinondoni Municipal Council and project implementers adopt a more inclusive communication strategy rooted in the principles of the Participatory Development Communication Model. Specifically, community engagement should begin at the earliest stages of project design through structured consultations and continuous dialogue, ensuring that local voices shape project objectives and implementation. Media platforms both traditional and digital should be effectively utilized to enhance public awareness and

feedback mechanisms. Local leaders, civil society groups, and residents should be empowered with relevant information to promote transparency, accountability, and shared ownership. Furthermore, government institutions must strengthen their responsiveness by establishing clear channels for community feedback and timely action. By institutionalizing participatory communication practices, future projects can enhance legitimacy, improve sustainability, and ensure that development outcomes align with community priorities and socio-cultural contexts.

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