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Examining the Effectiveness of Stakeholder Engagement in Projects: A Case Study of Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 5 Improvement Project

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published on 30th Jan 2026 **Keywords:** Stakeholder Engagement Communication Inclusivity Accountability Water Sanitation project	Urban infrastructure development plays a crucial role in promoting sustainable socio-economic growth, environmental health, and public well-being in rapidly expanding cities. In Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, the government implements large-scale projects such as the Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 5 Improvement Project to improve water supply and sanitation systems. Despite significant financial investment and institutional support, these projects often face challenges, including community resistance, implementation delays, operational inefficiencies, and concerns about long-term sustainability. This study examined the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in the Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 5 Improvement Project, its analyze the stakeholder engagement strategies employed, assesses the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement on the project's outcomes and determine limitations in engaging stakeholders in project, used a qualitative descriptive research design. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaires from 50 purposively selected participants, including community members, LWSC staff, project officials, and local authorities. the results indicated that although engagement was generally seen as crucial for enhancing service delivery, its potential was curtailed by multiple challenges. Notably, 30% of respondents pointed to a lack of information, 24% to insufficient feedback mechanisms, and 20% to inconvenient meeting schedules, all of which reduced participation and diminished accountability. The project achieved several successes, with 36% of respondents reporting improved water supply, 30% noting greater hygiene awareness, and 20% highlighting better sanitation facilities; however, about 14% stated they experienced no benefits at all, revealing deep-rooted inclusivity problems. The study also determined that communication approaches and language issues had a substantial influence on involvement, as many participants described how unclear messaging hindered their engagement. In summary, the findings illustrate that stakeholder engagement drives ownership, accountability, and long-term sustainability, but in Lusaka, it is limited by ineffective communication and the sidelining of marginalized communities. The research emphasizes that engagement needs to surpass mere symbolic consultations, transforming into an inclusive, context-aware, and persistent process to ensure equitable and viable urban services.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Stakeholder participation is recognized as a crucial component for ensuring success and longevity of development projects. According to the World Bank (2019), involving stakeholders at all stages of a project significantly increases the likelihood of achieving sustainable outcomes. The World Bank's report emphasized that projects with higher levels of stakeholder engagement are 20% more likely to meet their goals compared to those with minimal involvement. Stakeholder engagement ensures that the diverse needs and interests of various groups are considered, leading to more inclusive, effective, and sustainable results. Jones et al. (2020) further support this claim, showing that projects with strong stakeholder participation in South Asia experienced a 30% higher sustainability rate, highlighting the global importance of participatory development approaches.

Project stakeholders consist of both individuals and organizations actively involved in the program or project and maybe affected by the outcomes by the execution or completion (Olander & Landin, 2015). Drawn to the project with invested interest, stakeholders can reflect influence given their vested interest, stakeholders can exercise influence over the project's objectives and

results. To ensure the project's success, the project team must diligently identify and engage all stakeholders, understand their expectations and needs, and effectively manage their influence in alignment with their respective requirements (Irvin & John, 2015). This entails acknowledging and addressing stakeholder concerns and contributions throughout the project's lifecycle to foster positive project results.

In developed nations, project management and governance procedures now heavily incorporate stakeholder participation. In nations like the United States, Canada, and several European countries, active engagement of stakeholders is seen as essential for transparency, accountability, and informed decision making. According to Smith and Brown (2023), renewable energy projects in these nations with strong stakeholder participation have a 60% higher chance of long-term success. For these projects to be successful in the long run, cooperation between various groups from local communities to governmental organizations is crucial. Adopted by many industries, including energy, healthcare, and infrastructure, the strategy shows that stakeholder engagement is crucial to ensuring sustainability in developed countries.

In Africa, the role of stakeholder participation is becoming increasingly recognized as essential for achieving sustainable Stakeholder participation is the practice of applying stakeholder inclusiveness in a project (Kelly et al, 2017). All project stakeholders should be included in the formulation of the development problem and the suggested development solution. Stakeholders' involvement is extremely important in the advancement tasks of the projects. However, complete stakeholder integration, especially in rural and underserved areas, remains a challenge due to resource constraints and institutional limitations. According to Ochieng and Awiti (2021), projects in Africa with high stakeholder participation had a 75% sustainability rate, while those with low engagement had a 40% sustainability rate. Mensah and Antwi (2020) further support this, showing that in Ghana, the involvement of stakeholders in decision making processes resulted in a 30% increase in project sustainability. This demonstrates the necessity of increased stakeholder participation in African development initiatives in order to promote ownership. Even though minor decisions and emergency circumstances are generally not ideal for stakeholder involvement, it is important to include as the aspect of the stakeholders (Keshkamat, Looijen & Zuidgeest, 2016) . Locatelli, Invernizzi and Brookes (2017) noted that lack of stakeholder participation will certainly lead to inadequately established techniques or more resistance within.

If stakeholders lose interest in a project as a result of poor level of involvement, there is high possibility that the project may not succeed. It is therefore important to always have in mind that the stakeholders are critical to the accomplishment or letdown of a project (Chinyio & Olomolaiye, 2010). The most effective way of reducing waste is by enhancing high stakeholder participation. Stakeholder participation increases the chances of identifying the setbacks that may affect the project during the project implementation (Paloniemi, Apostolopoulou, Cent, Bormpoudakis, Scott & Pantis, 2015).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

For rapidly expanding cities to achieve socioeconomic development, environmental sustainability, and public health, urban infrastructure development, particularly in the water supply and sanitation sector where community engagement and institutional collaboration are important for sustainability. Many of these projects have faced challenges, such as delays, low community uptake, operational inefficiencies, and concerns about long-term sustainability, despite significant investments and policy support. Rees(2006). Amoatey(2017).Claims that an increasing amount of research highlights the significance of Stakeholder engagement as a critical determinant of project success, particularly in the public sector. Stakeholder engagement encompasses the inclusion and participation of all parties affected by or capable of influencing a project, including government agencies, local communities, civil society organizations, and service providers. When effectively implemented, stakeholder engagement enhances transparency, fosters ownership, reduces resistance, and improves the alignment of project outcomes with stakeholder expectations. However, despite the project's significance, there is limited empirical evidence evaluating how stakeholder engagement is practiced in government projects and how it influences their success..

Therefore, using Lusaka's water and sanitation phase 5 improvement projects as a case study; this paper aims to investigate the efficiency of stakeholder involvement in the success of projects. The study intends to pinpoint areas of strength and weakness in present engagement strategies, evaluate their influence on project results, and offer suggestions for more inclusive and successful stakeholder management in future projects. This research seeks to address this gap by examining the existing stakeholder engagement strategies employed in selected Lusaka water and sanitation projects, identifying the perceived barriers and enablers to their effectiveness, and ultimately determining the relationship between the quality and nature of stakeholder engagement and the overall success of these critical infrastructure initiatives. A clearer understanding of this relationship is essential for informing future project planning and implementation, optimizing resource allocation, and fostering more impactful and sustainable improvements in Lusaka's water and sanitation sector.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

to examine the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in projects.

1.4 Specific objectives of the study

i. To analyze the stakeholder engagement strategies employed in Lusaka's water supply and sanitation phase 5 improvement projects.
ii. To assess the impacts of stakeholder engagement on the outcomes of the project

To determine limitations in engaging stakeholders in Lusaka's water supply and sanitation phase 5 improvement projects

1.5 Research Questions
i. What stakeholder strategies are employed in Lusaka's water supply and sanitation improvement project?
ii. What impact does stakeholder engagement have on the project's planning, implementation and outcomes?
ii. What are some of the limitations encountered in engaging stakeholders?

1.6 Conceptual Framework.
Stakeholder Theory
Stakeholder Theory was presented by Edward Freeman (1984). This theory underpins concerns such as organizational management and the ethical considerations implemented to enhance achievement of project goals. Project managers should consider the views and opinions of various persons and groups since this can have a significant impact on decision-making and, as a result, on the attainment of project objectives (Gibson, 2015). Stakeholder theory describes how project managers and stakeholders communicate and relate with each other for project success. (Filippone,2016). Stakeholders may be internal or external (Bourne, 2018). Staff, contractors, donors, government, local leaders, and the local community, are all stakeholders in a project. Stakeholder theory may be employed to gain community trust in a project by providing beliefs that identify, analyze, and serve the community's interests as a stakeholder. An organization's decisions to align their efforts towards offering answers for the community are based on the interests of the community (Hill & Jones, 2018). Therefore stakeholder theory as described by Freeman takes into consideration all individuals and parties that have interests in or are affected by the operations of a specific organization.

Involving stakeholders promotes empowerment and shared project ownership. In order to comprehend the needs and expectations of the local community, CBC project designers must concentrate on ongoing engagement and communication. According to Sterling, Betley, Sigouin, Gomez, et al. (2017), local community involvement is crucial to biodiversity conservation initiatives around the world. According to Bal, Bryde, Fearon, and Ochieng (2013), local stakeholders are essential to achieving project goals because they frequently have a wealth of knowledge, can enhance the project's reputation, foster relationships, and have a far better understanding of local priorities and needs. The researcher employed inclusion, incorporating local values into traditional knowledge, and involving locals in resource management.

Stakeholder theory is applicable in private, public and not-for-profit sectors. The study by Fischer, Brettel and Mauer (2020) used the stakeholder theory to discuss the dimensions of sustainability in business organizations. According to the literature, entrepreneurs are forced to balance stakeholder involvement, business and external expectations to establish successful and sustainable ventures. In another study, Uribe, Ortiz-Marcos and Uruburu (2018) wrote that there was a close relationship between stakeholder theory, project management and sustainability related knowledge, skills and tools. The scholars demonstrated that prioritizing the relationship between stakeholder theory and project sustainability promoted inclusivity policies, corporate social responsibility and shared value among stakeholders. Stakeholder theory was crucial in this study since it provided the foundation for research on stakeholder assessment and engagement. As presented in the literature by Uribe, Ortiz-Marcos and Uruburu (2018), stakeholder theory aligns with sustainability-related knowledge, skills and tools. Therefore, validate the need for stakeholder engagement in the sustainability of development projects. The fundamental tenets of accountability, inclusivity, and interdependence form the foundation of stakeholder theory. Stakeholder engagement and satisfaction are critical to an organization's long-term survival because it depends on their resources, legitimacy, and support (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The theory has a strong ethical component as well because it pushes organizations to prioritize the rights and interests of all stakeholders rather than giving preference to one group over another. Since balancing social, economic, and environmental concerns is crucial in fields like corporate social responsibility (CSR), sustainability, governance, and project management, this ethical viewpoint has led to its growing application (Freeman, Harrison & Wicks, 2007).

Additionally, there are normative and instrumental aspects to stakeholder theory. According to the normative perspective, which is based on the ideas of justice and fairness, organizations have a moral duty to take stakeholders' interests into account as a goal unto itself. The instrumental view, on the other hand, emphasizes the practical advantages of stakeholder engagement and contends that companies that actively cultivate relationships with their stakeholders are more likely to see improvements in their operational and financial performance (Jones, 1995). The theory's descriptive dimension highlights the reality of interdependent relationships in modern business and public-sector environments by explaining how organizations actually function within stakeholder networks (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

Stakeholder theory has gained practical relevance in tackling the issues of inclusive development, sustainability, and globalization. For instance, stakeholder theory offers a helpful framework for identifying important players, encouraging participatory decision-making, and resolving possible conflicts in project management, particularly in public infrastructure and community-based initiatives. The theory helps organizations to increase legitimacy, foster trust, and guarantee long-term success by coordinating organizational objectives with the expectations of various stakeholders. In the end, stakeholder theory emphasizes that organizations function within dynamic social systems rather than in a vacuum, and that the sustainability of results is contingent upon striking a balance between the interests of the organization and those of its stakeholders.

2. Literature Review
2.1 Stakeholder engagement strategies.
Stakeholder engagement strategies vary widely depending on the nature of the project, institutional capacity, and socio-political context. In water and sanitation projects, engagement is especially critical because these services directly impact communities on a daily basis. Effective engagement strategies typically begin with stakeholder mapping and analysis. This involves identifying relevant actors, understanding their interests and levels of influence, and assessing how they might contribute to

Engagement tools commonly employed in water and sanitation projects include community consultations, participatory rural appraisals, citizen report cards, community scorecards, and local user committees. These mechanisms are designed not only to gather feedback but to foster co-ownership of project processes. IRC (2013) outlines how participatory tools such as community-led total sanitation and local hygiene education campaigns have improved community uptake and behavior change. Furthermore, participation...

Although measuring the impact is difficult, global experience indicates that well-designed stakeholder engagement tends to improve project outcomes. Scholars stress that sincere involvement can foster local ownership and "social capital," both of which promote sustainability (Moreira et al., 2024). For instance, case studies frequently reveal that projects encounter fewer conflicts and see a greater uptake of new services when communities are involved in decision-making. Ad hoc, tokenistic engagement "threatens the long-term sustainability" of water services, according to a Brazilian Frontiers case study. On the other hand, initiatives with significant feedback loops report higher infrastructure adoption and use. Countries with active multi-stakeholder platforms saw "improving progress in access to services" and even policy changes that would not have happened otherwise, according to the SWA multi-country synthesis (Willetts et al. 2022).

Stakeholder management strategies can have a positive impact on community satisfaction, which is important for projects' long-term viability, especially in areas like sanitation and water supply. L. Taing and N. Dang (2020). Global Health: Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene Despite the established importance of stakeholder management, there remains a significant gap in research regarding specific strategies and practices that contribute to high levels of community satisfaction. This variability underscores the need for more targeted research that examines how these strategies can be effectively implemented in diverse environments, particularly in rural areas where access to resources and infrastructure may be limited – Chohen, H. (2019).

Rajhans (2018) conducted a study on communication management that was effective in maintaining stakeholder relations in organizations. Communication management involves monitoring and controlling all communication channels, adoption of corporate communication strategies, planning and designing the internal and external communication systems and managing information flow. The researcher collected data using questionnaires and interviews with stakeholders in different project-based organizations. The results indicated that communication is a useful tool to manage stakeholder relations, avoid information distortion and miscommunication and build trust. The study created conceptual gaps since the perspective of communication management was not assessed on effect on sustainable performance and there are also methodological gaps because the study did not disclose who were the respondents and the data type and how it was collected and treated. Atambo and Momanyi (2016) research was on internal communication and its effect on employee performance, case of KPLC in South Nyanza Region.

Zambia's National Water Policy (2010) advocate for stakeholder platforms and catchment-level planning processes. In theory, projects under institutions like the Lusaka Water Supply and Sewerage Company (LWSC) and the Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation integrate community engagement through Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs), public disclosure forums, and community development officers. However, independent evaluations suggest a gap between policy and practice. Often, engagement is reduced to formal compliance rather than genuine empowerment (Mutale & Mweemba, 2019).

Donor-funded programs such as the Millennium Challenge Account-Zambia (MCA-Z), which supported parts of the Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Improvement Project (LWSSIP), explicitly required stakeholder engagement plans. However, challenges related to capacity, communication, and coordination limited their effectiveness. The MCA-Z 2018 final report noted that while stakeholder strategies were designed well on paper, execution was often constrained by insufficient localization.

2.2 Effectiveness of stakeholder engagement on the outcomes of the project.

Engagement of stakeholders leads to empowerment and to joint-ownership of the project. Based on this premise, CBC project designers must focus on constant and continuous engagement and communication with the local community to understand their needs and expectations. Sterling, Betley, Sigouin, Gomez et al. (2017) admit that local community participation featured centrally in biodiversity conservation projects globally. On the indispensability of local stakeholders in achievement of project objectives, Bal, Bryde, Fearon and Ochieng (2013) opine that the latter often possess a wealth of information, they can promote project reputation, help build relationships and by far better understand local priorities and needs. The researcher used inclusion, the integration of local values in terms of traditional knowledge and the participation of locals in the management of resources as indications of stakeholder engagement that influence the performance projects.

The World Bank's 2021 report supports this, noting that proactive stakeholder engagement during implementation allows for prompt feedback and necessary adjustments, thereby improving overall project performance. Projects that foster open communication with stakeholders typically benefit from enhanced monitoring and achieve more successful outcomes.

Furthermore, several studies highlight the importance of specific elements in project success. Phiri (2015) found that leadership's role in monitoring and evaluating projects significantly influences their effectiveness, based on an analysis of two successful projects by the African Virtual University. Yona, Nyonje, and Inyega (2022) also explored the impact of routine program monitoring on curriculum instructional projects in Kenyan TVET institutions. Ouma and Kamaara (2019) identified effective stakeholder engagement, community involvement, and adaptable program strategies as key contributors to the success of Pathfinder International initiatives in Kenya.

effective stakeholder engagement contributes to higher levels of community ownership, better maintenance of infrastructure, and sustained service delivery. When communities are actively involved in decision-making and oversight, they are more likely to protect and maintain the systems that have been put in place. The World Bank (2017) notes that co-produced services in which communities play an active role in service delivery tend to yield more sustainable results in sanitation projects. Waiharo Grace, Dr. Otieno Kenneth (2025) The SWA report provides instances of how cooperative planning produced tangible results, such as contributions to national sanitation regulations and better-coordinated investment strategies. Similar to this, a study of WASH

initiatives across several African nations discovered that those with organized community involvement had better facility upkeep and higher usage rates because participants felt more invested   (Chohen, 2019)).. According to a different review, donor-funded WASH initiatives with robust stakeholder frameworks such as incorporating NGOs in their implementation reported improved project sustainability and local capacity building, but few counterfactual comparisons are presented in studies. Although the evidence is primarily descriptive, African analyses generally indicate that stakeholder engagement can enhance project relevance (better meeting local needs) and infrastructure adoption. Interestingly, Willetts et al. point out that nations like Niger and Kenya made faster progress on drinking water targets because of trust and commitment, which are developed through engagement.

A recent study of the Kanyama Sanitation project in Zambia found that community members' involvement at every stage "fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to the project's goals," which results in more sustainable outcomes. In a similar vein, national WASH programs observe that increasing latrine coverage in rural growth centers has been made possible in large part by community mobilization (via local committees). In conclusion, even though there is little quantitative data for Lusaka, the general consensus is that the city's multi-channel engagement efforts have probably helped by facilitating project acceptance in spite of resettlement and by coordinating the project with community needs (e.g., determining the location of boreholes and modifying construction plans). Although more information may be revealed by future assessments (such as MCC/LWSC impact surveys), the literature currently indicates that Lusaka's stakeholder efforts are in line with those anticipated to enhance service sustainability and uptake.

 Additionally in Lusaka a study done by Alex H Mwilenga 2025 adds that while the LWSSIP has made strides in involving communities, several evaluations indicate that meaningful participation has been inconsistent. In peri-urban settlements such as Kanyama and George Compound, residents have reported limited involvement in decision-making and dissatisfaction with the outcomes. This suggests that while engagement frameworks exist, the depth and quality of participation remain critical challenges. According Alex H Mwilenga(2025) effective stakeholder management begins with the accurate identification and classification of stakeholders. The research emphasizes that understanding the interests, influence, and needs of various stakeholders is crucial for tailoring engagement strategies. Stakeholders, including community members, government agencies, NGOs, and project managers, must be actively involved throughout the project lifecycle to foster a sense of ownership and commitment to the project's goals.

2.3 limitations in engaging stakeholders.

Despite its recognized benefits, effective stakeholder engagement faces numerous challenges, particularly in developing countries where institutional and systemic constraints are significant. One of the primary barriers is the lack of capacity both financial and human within government institutions to design and manage inclusive engagement processes.

 Limitations in engaging stakeholders in water and sanitation projects include inadequate stakeholder engagement practices, geographical inequalities, and insufficient financing. Additionally, climate change and lack of knowledge about stakeholder dynamics further complicate engagement efforts. Targeted research that identifies effective strategies for improving stakeholder engagement in various contexts is required to address these challenges. Stakeholders can increase their involvement and contribute to more successful project outcomes by comprehending and overcoming these obstacles. Rudebeck, T . (2019).

Mosse (2001) argues against this conception by contending that local knowledge is simply a reflection of local power relations such that what is considered to be local knowledge is just a construction of the planning context that cover a complex micro-politics of knowledge production and use in local communities. Mosse (2001) justifies this by insisting on the public character of participation and also on its open-endedness. These characteristics of participation facilitate the control of knowledge by powerful people. Thus, participation while expressed as the view of the poor or marginalized people, in reality this knowledge is manipulated by power relationships. This brings in Arnstein's first rung on the ladder of participation where participation is equal to manipulation of the locals. Here, the locals are just used by development practitioners. This implies that negotiations that take place in participatory arenas and claim to produce local knowledge are never between equals as some people (e.g. women and children) and other issues (e.g. gender relations, class) get suppressed. As a consequence, what is claimed to be local knowledge is simply views of the minority powerful local elites who can easily hijack participatory processes.

In Africa, the local context frequently exacerbates these limitations. Due to their inexperience with participatory methods, governments and utilities may conduct tokenistic "rubber-stamp" consultations. Long-term engagement is frequently hampered by institutional flaws like poor interagency coordination, high employee turnover, and bureaucratic hold-ups. Socioeconomic barriers also come into play. Without special efforts, certain communities are unable to attend meetings or comprehend technical plans due to poverty, illiteracy, and rural isolation. Political meddling and corruption can distort whose interests are taken into consideration. According to the SWA study, "a lack of trust and the presence of unhealthy competition" among stakeholder groups hindered collaborative planning throughout Africa. Other issues include informal urbanism and the gap between urban and rural areas. The urban poor are not consistently included by many utilities. Furthermore, the use of donor-driven models has led to the development of parallel systems that aren't always in line with regional accountability frameworks (Booth, 2012). Community meetings and surveys may be used in projects, but they turn into performative procedures if there are no ways to act upon the feedback.

A recent case study by Mwilenga examined stakeholder management in the Kanyama Sanitation and Water Supply project in Lusaka, Zambia. This 2025 thesis used a mixed-methods case-study approach with purposeful sampling and reported a sample size of 54 participants spanning project managers, government officials, and community representatives. The thesis found that inadequate engagement practices, geographic inequalities in outreach, insufficient financing, and information and capacity gaps undermined stakeholder participation and recommended targeted communication strategies, sustained capacity building, and early, continuous involvement of affected communities to improve project outcomes

There are a few systemic and practical restrictions in Lusaka, Zambia. On the ground, challenges emerge despite official plans that pledge widespread engagement. Because of Lusaka's fast population growth and the spread of informal settlements, for example, many urban poor people are migrant or do not have official addresses, making it difficult to invite them to meetings. According to a number of NGO reports, there is a mixed level of community trust in water authorities; some people are dubious of project promises because of previous water shortages and billing disputes. In terms of resources, utilities such as LWSC frequently have little money set aside for outreach outside of their primary service delivery mission; this can result in brief consultations a Niederberger & Glanville-Wallis, 2019. Radio programs and community radios in Zambia have indicated that many rural or peripheral areas rarely hear about proposed projects, so engagement often misses the most remote or deprived groups. Local observers have noted that "resource constraints" (financial and human) and weak communication channels are major obstacles. In fact, in order to close existing gaps, a participatory radio dialogue in Eastern Province identified the necessity of enhancing "effective communication channels, structured reporting systems, and community involvement." Other constraints in Lusaka include sometimes unclear responsibilities between the Ministry of Water and municipal councils, as well as bureaucratic hold-ups in allocating funds for community gatherings.

The Bauleni project EPB recognizes that public participation is an "active and continuous process," but it also entails difficulties: it establishes stringent deadlines for eligibility for resettlement and specifies that continuous PAP (project-affected persons) consultation is necessary to handle complaints. This implies that it is not easy to guarantee that all voices especially those of the most vulnerable are heard during the multi-year Phase 5. In conclusion, the main obstacles in Lusaka seem to be institutional and logistical in nature: a lack of funding for outreach, trouble reaching disadvantaged or temporary populations, and coordination between numerous government agencies. These reflect more general sub-Saharan problems, such as the need for more transparent communication systems, capacity limitations, and the possible exclusion of certain groups. Some community members complained that they were not given enough information during the LWSSIP regarding project design modifications, timelines, or compensation. Furthermore, despite being directly impacted by project outcomes, some groups particularly renters or informal settlers were not always acknowledged as valid stakeholders (Mulenga&Cleaver,2022).

2.4 Establishment of Research Gap

Public service delivery in Zambia has consistently been hampered by inadequate infrastructure, a lack of funding, and a lack of institutional coordination, particularly in the water and sanitation sector. These financial and technical obstacles have been the subject of numerous studies (e.g., Mulenga et al., 2011; Banda & Mweemba, 2019), but the influence of stakeholder engagement on project outcomes especially from a grassroots and participatory governance perspective has received relatively little attention. Stakeholder engagement is frequently a formal requirement of government-led infrastructure projects, such as those carried out by the Ministry of Water Development and Sanitation or the Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Company (LWSC). Rarely, though, are the breadth, inclusivity, and real impact of these engagement processes investigated. Reports typically concentrate on output metrics (such as the number of kilometers of pipe laid or the number of households connected), with little consideration given to how communities were involved, whether their input influenced implementation, or whether engagement promoted sustainability and ownership. Furthermore, the literature that is currently available in Zambia tends to focus more on the results of projects than the steps that lead to them. Understanding how stakeholder engagement is planned, carried out, and experienced not only from the viewpoint of project personnel, but also from that of the communities that are directly impacted is seriously lacking. This restricts policymakers' and practitioners' capacity to enhance future engagement tactics in a context-sensitive manner.

3. Methods and Procedures

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a purposive research design. A purposive research design involves selecting specific participants or cases that are most relevant to the research objectives, allowing for in-depth investigation of particular phenomena (Creswell, 2014). This design enabled the researcher to focus on key stakeholders directly involved in the Phase III Road expansion project in Lusaka, ensuring the collection of detailed and relevant information on the effectiveness of risk management processes. It was appropriate for capturing the current practices, mitigation measures, and challenges experienced by those directly engaged in the project. By using both quantitative and qualitative data within a purposive framework, the study provided a comprehensive understanding of how risk management is implemented and perceived across the selected stakeholder groups.

3.2 Target Population

According to Saunders (2007) and Baldwin (2018) defines population as the entire set of groups from whom a sample is drawn. The study targets, Community Members:. Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Company (LWSC) representatives, project personnel, local authorities, and other parties engaged in community involvement and project implementation.

3.3 Sampling Design

Sampling design is a researcher's method for choosing items for a sample, with the likelihood of each element or respondent being included known, (Lim and Ting, 2012)? The Lusaka water supply and sanitation company and the community members were chosen using a non-probability sampling. In this case convenient sampling method was applied. The quickest and most accessible place to reach the target population is Lusaka water supply and sanitation company, hence as a researcher chose this convenient sample approach.

Sample Size: 50 people made up the study's total sample size, and they were split up as follows:40 members of the community were chosen because they were direct beneficiaries, attended community meetings, or participated in project-related consultations. 10 important parties that are involved in planning and decision-making include LWSC employees, project managers, local government officials, and community representative.

3.4 Data Collection Method
The data used in this research was collected using Questionnaires. Written Questionnaires was used to enter any responses from all the 50 correspondents. The procedure of data collection involved question and answer sessions with all involved respondents.

3.5 Data Collection Tools
Structured Questionnaires: These include both closed and open-ended questions designed to capture quantitative and qualitative data. Document Review Checklists: Designed to extract relevant data from existing literature, regulatory frameworks, and policy documents.

3.6 Triangulation
Data triangulation, which involves gathering information from several sources and contrasting the results, (Kadushin, C., etel, 2008) was utilized to guarantee the validity of the study. Furthermore, member checking was employed, providing participants with the chance to examine the data and confirm its accuracy. Data triangulation and researcher triangulation was employed to guarantee the validity of the study. Triangulating researchers entails having several researchers, examine the data to make sure the conclusions were unbiased. (Patton, 1999) .

3.7 Data Analysis
Data was processed using statistical tool STATA, and Excel respectively. Descriptive statistics like mean, standard deviation, and frequency distribution was employed, alongside inferential statistics for hypothesis testing. And also, Data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, themes, and insights related to risk management practices and challenges.

4. Presentation of Findings
4.1: Demographic Characteristics

Figure 4.1 Gender Distribution of the Respondents
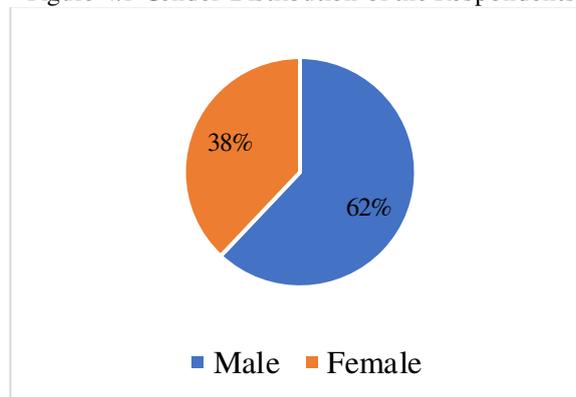
The results tell us that 62% of the respondents were male, while 38% were female. This indicates that men were more represented in the study compared to women, which reflect greater male participation in community meetings, project consultations, or decision-making activities related to the Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 5 Improvement Project.

Figure 4.2 age group of respondents
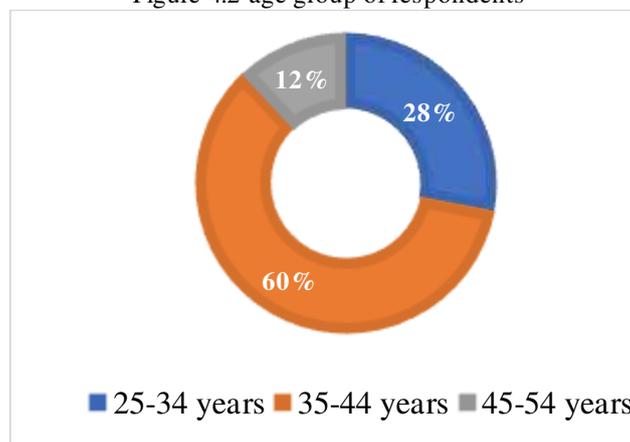
The results tell us that 60% of the respondents were aged 35–44 years, 28% were aged 25–34 years, and 12% were aged 45–54 years. This indicates that the majority of participants were in the 35–44 years age bracket, suggesting that middle-aged adults were more actively involved or accessible during the Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 5 Improvement Project engagements.

Figure 4.3 Highest Level of Education
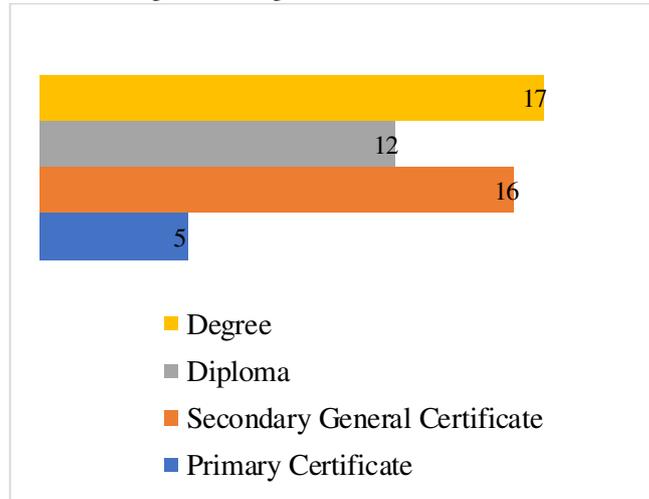
The results tell us that 17 respondents (34%) held a degree, 12 respondents (24%) had a diploma, 16 respondents (32%) had a secondary general certificate, and 5 respondents (10%) had a primary certificate.

Figure 4.4 How Long Have You Lived in Lusaka?
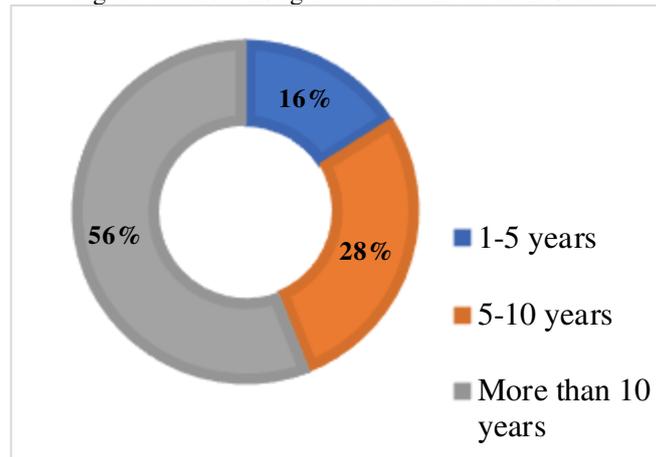
The results tell us that 56% of respondents had lived in Lusaka for more than 10 years, 28% for 5–10 years, and 16% for 1–5 years. This indicates that the majority of participants were long-term residents, individuals who have lived in the area for an extended period are likely to have first-hand experience with water supply and sanitation challenges.

Figure 4.5 Role in Relation to Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 5 Project
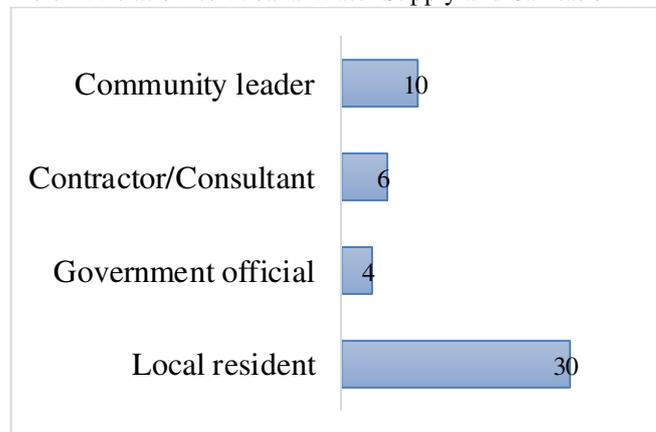
The results tell us that 30 respondents (60%) were local residents, 10 respondents (20%) were community leaders, 6 respondents (12%) were contractors or consultants, and 4 respondents (8%) were government officials. This indicates that the majority of

participants were direct beneficiaries of the project, which is relevant to the project objectives because the perspectives of local residents are crucial in assessing the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement.

4.2 Stakeholders' Engagement Strategies

Fig 4.6 stakeholders' engagement strategies used
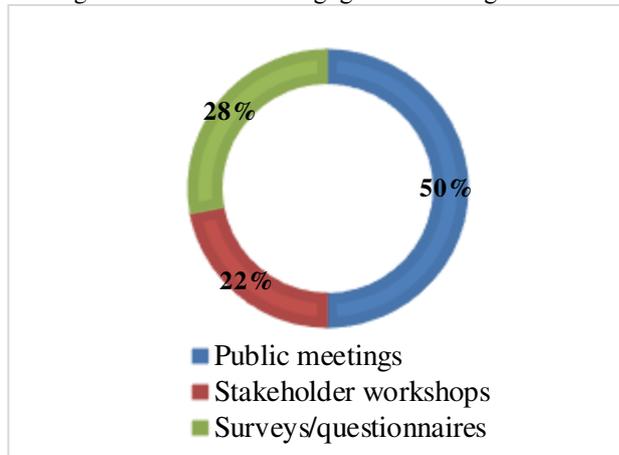
The results tell us that 50% of respondents indicated that public meetings were used, 28% identified surveys or questionnaires, and 22% mentioned stakeholder workshops. This indicates that public meetings were the most commonly employed engagement strategy, which is important as it highlights the methods through which stakeholders were informed and involved..

Fig 4.7: How Frequently Were You Engaged During This Project?
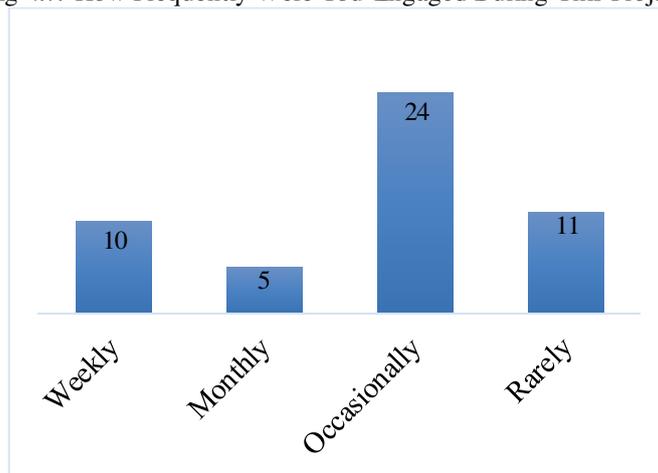
The results tell us that 24 respondents (48%) were engaged occasionally, 11 respondents (22%) were engaged rarely, 10 respondents (20%) were engaged weekly, and 5 respondents (10%) were engaged monthly. This indicates that most stakeholders experienced irregular engagement.

Fig 4.8: What Extent Do You Feel Adequately Informed About Project Activities
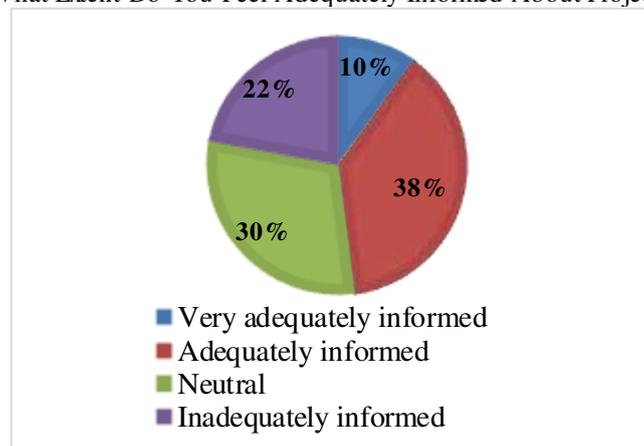
 The results shows that 10% of respondents felt very adequately informed, 38% adequately informed, 30% were neutral, and 22% felt inadequately informed. This indicates that while nearly half of the respondents (48%) felt adequately informed, a significant proportion either remained neutral or felt inadequately informed. Adequate flow of information is critical for meaningful participation, trust-building, and ownership of project outcomes.

Fig 4.9: At What Stage Were You First Engaged in the Project?
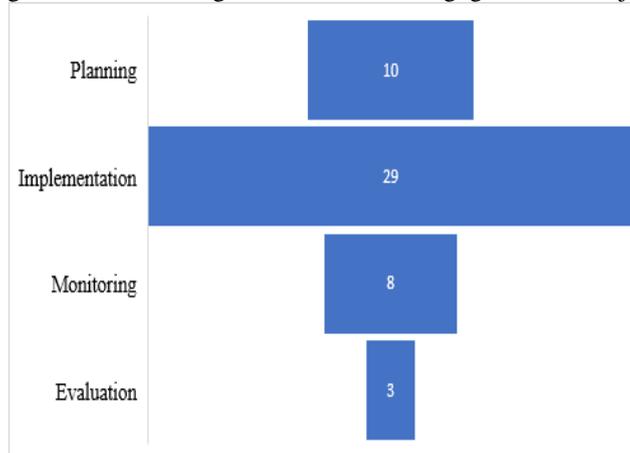
The results indicate that 29 respondents (58%) were engaged at the implementation stage, 10 respondents (20%) during planning, 8 respondents (16%) during monitoring, and only 3 respondents (6%) at the evaluation stage. This distribution shows that engagement was heavily concentrated in the implementation phase, with limited involvement at the earlier planning stage and minimal input at evaluation.

Fig4.10: Level of Satisfaction with Communication Between Project Implementers and the Community?
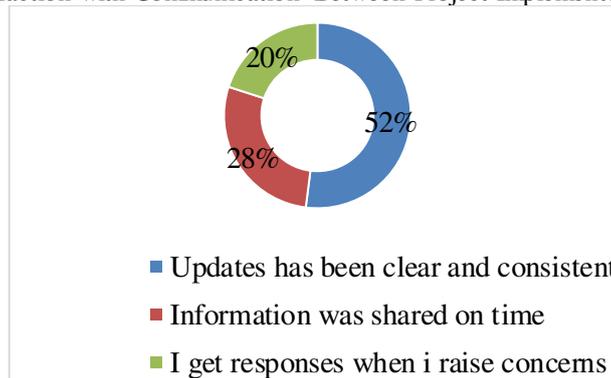
The results show that 26 respondents (52%) indicated that project updates were clear and consistent, 14 respondents (28%) stated that information was shared on time, while only 10 respondents (20%) reported that they received responses when they raised concerns. the findings indicate that while communication efforts existed, they were not sufficiently responsive or interactive, potentially affecting trust, participation, and overall satisfaction with stakeholder engagement.

Fig 4.11: Which type of community engagement method do you find most effective?
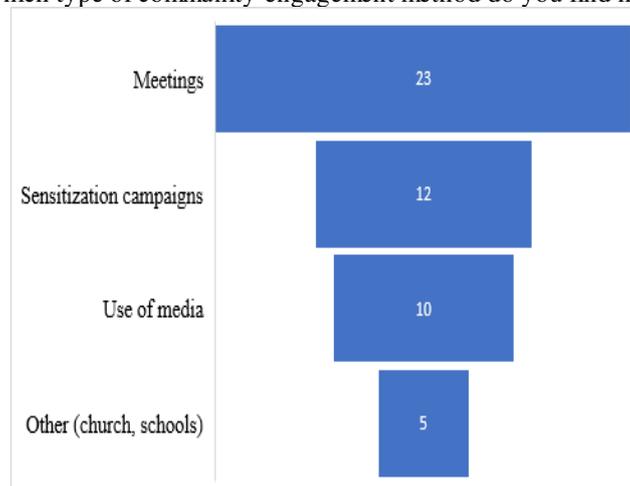
The findings show that 23 respondents (46%) preferred meetings, 12 respondents (24%) pointed to sensitization campaigns, and 10 respondents (20%) favored the use of media, while a smaller group highlighted other platforms such as churches and schools (10%) as effective.

4.3 Effectiveness of Stakeholder Engagement on the Projects Outcome

Fig.12: How Would You Rate the Effectiveness of Stakeholder Engagement in The Project?
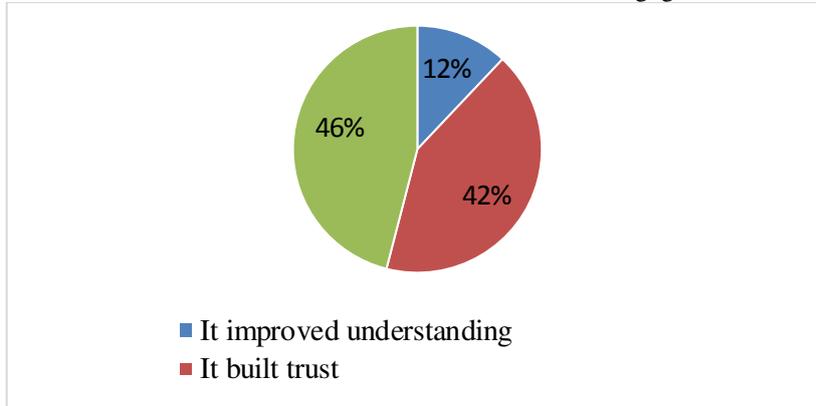
The results reveal that 23 respondents (46%) believed stakeholder engagement increased participation, 21 respondents (42%) felt it helped build trust between the community and project implementers, while 6 respondents (12%) indicated that engagement improved their understanding of the project. This distribution shows that the majority of respondents experienced tangible benefits from engagement, particularly in enhanced participation and strengthened trust critical elements for successful project implementation.

Fig4.13: To What Extent Do You Feel Your Opinions or Concerns Were Taken into Account?
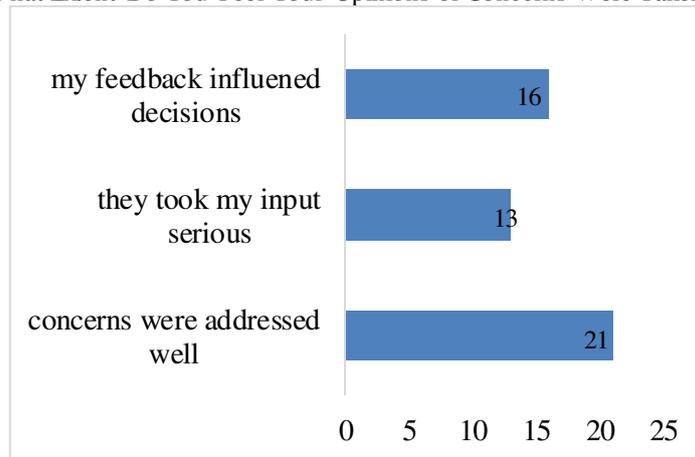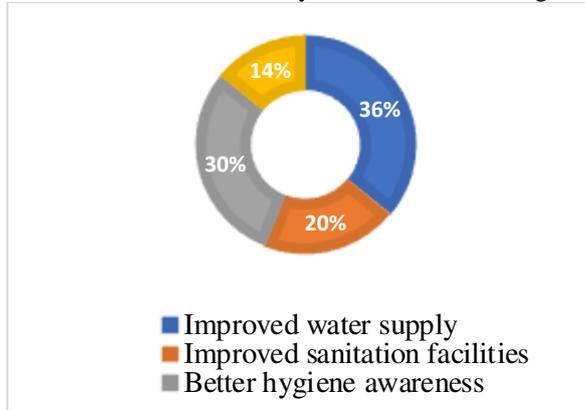

The results show that 21 respondents (42%) indicated that their concerns were well addressed, 16 respondents (32%) felt that their feedback influenced decision-making, and 13 respondents (26%) believed that their input was taken seriously by project implementers. These findings reveal that most respondents perceived the engagement process as meaningful, with a sizeable proportion acknowledging that their concerns led to visible responses or actions.

Table 4.1 How Community Participation Improved Access to Clean Water and Sanitation Services

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Early involvement in planning (identifying priority areas)	10	20.00
Enhanced ownership & maintenance of facilities	15	30.00
Improved equity & inclusion (women, youth, vulnerable)	9	18.00
Increased awareness & hygiene practices	10	20.00
Transparency in decisions making	6	12.00
Total	50	100.00

The results tell us that 15 respondents (30%) reported enhanced ownership and maintenance of facilities, 10 respondents (20%) highlighted early involvement in planning and identifying priority areas, 10 respondents (20%) indicated increased awareness and hygiene practices, 9 respondents (18%) cited improved equity and inclusion of women, youth, and vulnerable groups, and 6 respondents (12%) emphasized transparency in decision-making.

Fig 4.14: How Has Your Household Personally Benefited from Being Engaged in the Project?

The results show the majority of respondents, 36%, indicated that their main benefit was improved water supply, followed by 30% who highlighted better hygiene awareness, while 20% noted improved sanitation facilities, and 14% stated that they had not received any direct benefit.

4.4 Limitation of Engaging Stakeholders

Fig 4.15: What Are the Main Challenges That Prevent Participation in the Project Activities?
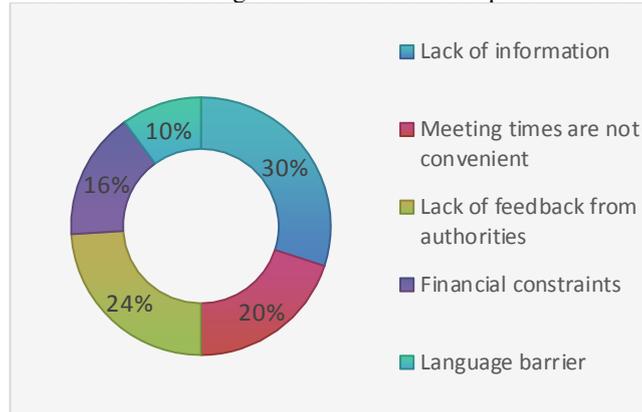
The findings show that the most cited challenge was lack of information (30%), followed by lack of feedback from authorities (24%), and inconvenient meeting times (20%). Financial constraints were reported by 16%, while language barriers (10%) were the least mentioned..

Figure 4.16:What Extent Do You Consider Lack of Feedback from the Authorities as a Discouragement in Your Participation?
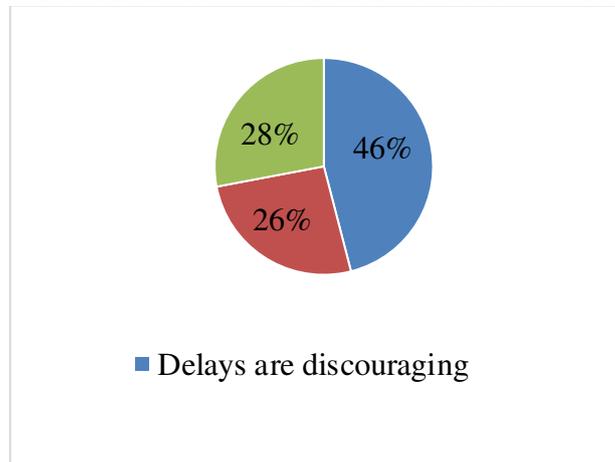
Results indicates that feedback mechanisms significantly influenced community participation in the project. Nearly half of the respondents (46%) stated that delays in receiving feedback were discouraging, suggesting that slow communication weakened motivation and trust in the process. Meanwhile, 26% felt that responses were mostly timely, and 28% acknowledged that feedback

usually came, though perhaps not consistently. This aligns with literature highlighting that timely responsiveness is essential in participatory projects, as delays can erode trust, reduce participation levels, and limit the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement.

Figure 4.17: Do Language and Communication Styles Used During Engagement Affect Your Participation?
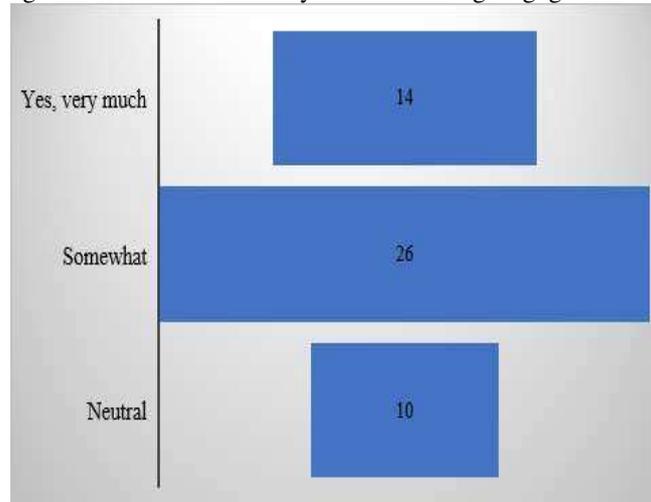
The results indicate that 26 respondents reported being somewhat affected, while 14 respondents stated they were very much affected, and 10 respondents remained neutral. This suggests that while language and communication did not completely hinder engagement, they played a significant role in shaping the quality and depth of participation.

Figure 4.18: In Your Opinion, Which Groups in the Community Face the Greatest Barriers to Participating in This Project?
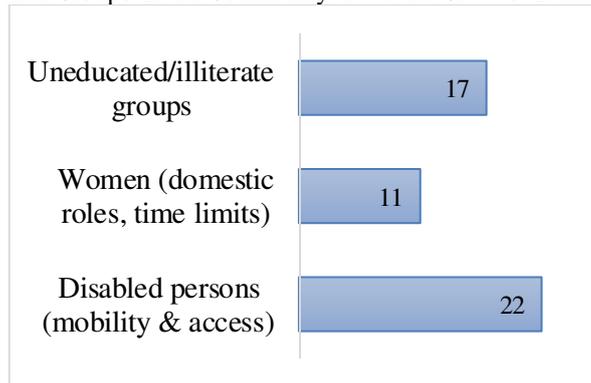
The findings show that 22 respondents identified disabled persons, particularly due to mobility and access challenges, while 17 respondents pointed to uneducated or illiterate groups who struggle with understanding technical information and communication used during engagement. Additionally, 11 respondents highlighted women, who often face domestic responsibilities and time limitations that restrict their participation.

Table 4.2 What Do You Think Could Have Been Done to Improve Stakeholder Engagement in the Project?

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Improved communication and feedback	16	32.00
Inclusive participation (women, youth, etc.)	11	22.00
Convenient meeting times	10	20.00
Capacity building (training community)	8	16.00
More transparency (budgets, plans shared)	5	10.00
Total	50	100.00

The results indicate that the most common suggestion was improved communication and feedback (32%), reflecting the importance of regular updates and two-way information flow between the project implementers and the community. This was

followed by calls for more inclusive participation of women, youth, and other vulnerable groups (22%), as well as ensuring more convenient meeting times (20%) to allow broader involvement. A further 16% of respondents suggested capacity building through training for community members, while 10% emphasized greater transparency in terms of sharing project budgets and plans.

4.5 Discussions

This study examined the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in the Lusaka Water Supply and Sanitation Phase 5 Improvement Project (LWSSIP, with a particular focus on how inclusiveness, communication, and community participation influenced project outcomes. The findings from the survey and frequency charts demonstrated that while most respondents acknowledged the importance of engagement in shaping service delivery, barriers such as limited feedback mechanisms, inconvenient meeting times, and social exclusions undermined the process. These outcomes confirm the central argument in the literature that participation must go beyond token consultation to meaningfully influence project planning, implementation, and sustainability (Reed, 2008; Cornwall, 2008).

The study highlighted that communication plays a critical role in participation. As indicated in Figure 4.22, a majority of respondents reported that language and communication styles affected their ability to participate, with 26 respondents saying "somewhat" and 14 stating "yes, very much." This shows that poorly designed communication approaches reduce inclusivity and limit the effectiveness of engagement. Similar concerns are seen in Reed (2008), who stresses that clarity in communication is fundamental for stakeholder buy-in, and Bryson et al. (2013), who argue that two-way dialogue builds legitimacy and cooperation. In Lusaka, the evidence confirms that where communication methods were adapted to local realities, participation improved.

The findings also demonstrated that inclusiveness remains a challenge. Figure 4.23 revealed that disabled persons (22) and uneducated or illiterate groups (17) faced the greatest barriers, followed by women (11), mainly due to domestic responsibilities and time constraints. These findings support Chambers (1994) and Cleaver (2001), who argue that socio-economic inequalities and cultural roles often limit participation. For Lusaka, this is significant because it highlights that although engagement frameworks exist within institutions like LWSC, structural inequalities still prevent full representation of marginalized groups. This directly addresses the research gap, as existing Zambian studies often focused on project outcomes (such as water connections) rather than on the inclusivity of the engagement process itself.

Community ownership and accountability also emerged as important outcomes of engagement. Respondents in areas where monitoring committees were active reported greater satisfaction with services and were more likely to report issues such as leakages or illegal connections. This finding aligns with Willetts et al. (2017) and World Bank (2017), who report that engagement processes fostering ownership enhance sustainability. The Lusaka evidence shows that bottom-up monitoring improved both efficiency and accountability, thus filling the literature gap on how engagement is experienced by communities themselves.

Barriers to participation further reinforced institutional and resource challenges. Figure 4.20 indicated that lack of information (30%), inconvenient meeting times (20%), lack of feedback (24%), financial constraints (16%), and language barriers (10%) were major obstacles. These constraints confirm Awortwi's (2013) observation that decentralization often transfers responsibility without adequate capacity, and Booth (2012), who noted that donor-driven models can weaken local accountability. In Lusaka, these barriers created disillusionment among residents, as shown in Figure 4.21 where 76% of respondents felt greatly or very greatly discouraged by lack of feedback. This reflects the persistent gap between formal engagement structures and their practical effectiveness in Zambia.

The study also found that while projects generated positive benefits such as improved water supply (36%), better hygiene awareness (30%), and improved sanitation facilities (20%) a significant minority (14%) reported no benefit at all (Figure 4.17) this looks small figure but very crucial to note, this is because mixed up outcome suggests that while engagement has potential to improve community welfare, its uneven implementation leaves some groups behind. This resonates with Mosse (2001), who warned that engagement processes risk reproducing exclusions unless they are deliberately inclusive. For Lusaka, the findings add new empirical evidence on how perceived benefits are directly linked to the quality of stakeholder involvement, thus contributing to the identified research gap.

The study findings overall demonstrated that while stakeholder engagement improves ownership, accountability, and sustainability of water and sanitation services, its effectiveness in Lusaka is undermined by communication challenges, lack of inclusivity, and institutional weaknesses. These findings not only confirm global and regional literature but also contribute new, context-specific insights by documenting how engagement is planned, experienced, and constrained in Zambian urban service delivery. This addresses the research gap identified in Chapter Two, which emphasized the need to move beyond output-focused assessments to understand the processes that shape project outcomes from both institutional and community perspectives.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The study established that while stakeholder engagement was recognized as important in enhancing ownership, accountability, and sustainability of the project, its implementation faced notable challenges. Findings showed that communication gaps, limited inclusivity of vulnerable groups, and lack of consistent feedback mechanisms discouraged meaningful participation. The results align with literature emphasizing that participation often remains tokenistic if not well-planned (Mosse, 2001; Cornwall, 2008). Despite these limitations, effective engagement strategies such as community monitoring committees demonstrated positive impacts, including improved accountability and reduced project resistance. The conclusion therefore highlights that stakeholder engagement is not merely a procedural requirement but a critical determinant of project success when designed to be inclusive, context-sensitive, and continuous.

5.2 Recommendations

1. Strengthen Communication and Feedback Mechanisms – Regular updates through community radio, public forums, and digital platforms should be prioritized to keep stakeholders informed and involved throughout the project cycle.

2. Promote Inclusive Participation – Special attention should be given to women, youth, persons with disabilities, and marginalized groups through targeted outreach and flexible meeting arrangements.

3. Capacity Building for Communities – Training and sensitization should be provided to empower local communities with knowledge on their roles and rights in project implementation.

4. Institutional Coordination and Policy Support – Stronger collaboration between LWSC, the Ministry of Water, and local councils should be fostered to reduce duplication and bureaucratic delays in engagement processes.

5. Allocate Adequate Resources for Engagement – Dedicated budgets for stakeholder engagement should be established to ensure activities such as consultations, grievance redress, and monitoring are effectively implemented.

6. SStrengthen Monitoring and Evaluation – Community-based monitoring committees should be institutionalized to enhance transparency, accountability, and ownership of water and sanitation projects..

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