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Stakeholder Involvement in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation for Sustainability of Voluntourism Projects in Coastal Region, Kenya

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Abstract

Bearing in mind the often negative impacts of voluntourism, it is worth exploring stakeholder involvement in participatory monitoring and evaluation as a predictor of the sustainability of voluntourism projects, representing a significant contribution to stakeholder theory. This research focused on how stakeholder involvement (SI) in participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) influences the sustainability of voluntourism projects (SOP) in the Coastal region of Kenya. A pragmatic paradigm and a descriptive cross-sectional design were applied. The target population comprised 20 voluntourism projects, with 1,004 respondents, including 20 project managers, 452 employees, and 532 community representatives. All 20 project managers were interviewed, while 130 employees and 154 community representatives completed semi-structured questionnaires.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were incorporated in processing, analysing, and interpreting the data, with SPSS used to generate percentages, frequency distributions, and measures of central tendency. The combined influence was analysed using multiple regression tests. Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables using means, percentages, frequencies, and standard deviations. Inferential statistics comprised simple regression, multiple regression, stepwise regression (R^2), Pearson's product-moment correlation (r), and hypothesis testing using the t-test.

The findings indicated a positive relationship between stakeholder involvement and the sustainability of voluntourism projects, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The findings are expected to guide government policymakers and project practitioners in designing effective collaboration models between communities and voluntourists, enabling communities to achieve improved livelihoods aligned with stakeholders'

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preferences and needs. As this gap has not been adequately addressed, the findings contribute to the existing literature, particularly in project management, participatory monitoring and evaluation, and the voluntourism industry. Future studies could explore alternative variables and dimensions of stakeholder involvement and PME implemented in other sectors, such as resource execution and utilisation, supply and demand dynamics, state agencies' perceptions, and community protection. Additionally, comparative studies involving developed and efficient economies may yield further insights.

Keywords: Stakeholder Involvement (SI), Sustainability of Voluntourism Projects (SOP), Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME), Coastal Region of Kenya.

I. Introduction

Universally, tourists are increasingly observed to adopt different travel trends. Many tourists are diverting from conventional travel agendas and diversifying into humanitarian aid, community development, or ecological conservation projects in host destinations. Voluntourism encompasses structured ways of undertaking holidays that may involve engaging in aid activities to alleviate material poverty, restoring environments, or exploration (Bakker & Lamoureux, 2018; Muhamad Khair, Lee, & Mokhtar, 2020). Voluntourism is motivated by philanthropic spending aimed at transforming emerging economies (Butcher & Smith, 2015). Like many community projects, voluntourism is also entangled in stakeholder conflicts where donors fail to integrate local stakeholders into projects. Despite the positive impacts of voluntourism on local communities, these initiatives often fail to represent the voices of host populations (Lyons et al., 2017). Stakeholder involvement enhances receptiveness and facilitates a conducive project environment for smooth implementation (Mdee & Emmott, 2008).

Among the attributes of voluntourism is its generation of impacts within host destinations and the creation of shared mutual benefits in host–guest relationships in tourist destinations (Zahra & McIntosh, 2017; Mostafanez, 2016). Existing guidelines address critical aspects of collaborating with residents, implementation, monitoring, measurement, estimation, assessment, generation of timely information on program impacts, and the use of local narratives to demonstrate volunteer effects. Stakeholder involvement is realized when a project engages individuals who may be positively or adversely affected by decisions made, or when individuals significantly influence implementation decisions (Ngare & Cheluget, 2018). Stakeholders may range from elected officials to key influencers, policymakers, and third-party contacts (McGee, 2017). Prior to influencing and engaging stakeholders, it is essential to understand participants at all phases of the project life cycle (Ngare & Cheluget, 2018; Ochunga & Awiti, 2017).

Local ownership is a key component of successful interventions in recognizing capacity and knowledge building. Sustaining program participation can be particularly challenging when participants feel excluded and perceive that their opinions do not matter in decision-making processes (Laythorpe, 2016). Local involvement is widely believed to enable broader and more balanced economic opportunities for communities, thereby increasing tolerance and positive attitudes toward development (Sampedro & Garcia, 2019). This approach has been particularly elusive in voluntourism contexts. Stakeholder involvement creates balanced economic opportunities for local communities by enhancing cultural tolerance, fostering positive attitudes toward tourism development, and facilitating implementation (Saarinen, 2016; Brown & Lehto, 2015).

To operationalize stakeholder involvement, this study identifies five key indicators. Inclusivity emphasizes the importance of granting stakeholders a voice in matters that affect them. Materiality refers to identifying and clarifying issues that are most significant to stakeholders (Filho & Brandli, 2018). Transparency is a crucial element of involvement and is reflected through responsiveness. Engagement with stakeholders should generate positive outcomes for local populations, all stakeholders, and the wider community, as reflected in project impact (Harrison, 2010).

Statement of the Problem

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES, 2012) established guiding principles recommending the monitoring, reporting, and measurement of voluntourism impacts within communities. Despite these efforts, concerns regarding the potential adverse effects of voluntourism on host destinations persist (Amsterdam, Wearing, & McGehee, 2015; Bramwell & Lane, 2018). Another challenge arises from the prioritization of volunteer tourist interests over those of host communities, resulting in limited emphasis on monitoring and evaluation practices within volunteering groups (Tomazos & Cooper, 2012; Lyons et al., 2017), thereby creating conceptual gaps. There is growing recognition of the effects of volunteer tourism on local communities (Sin, 2018). However, appropriate mechanisms for measuring voluntourism project impacts remain underdeveloped, with most evaluations being largely circumstantial.

According to Briedenhann and Wickens (2004), the increasing ambiguity surrounding voluntourism has contributed to the stagnation of many projects. While supporting underprivileged populations remains central to voluntourism, evolving dynamics in volunteer initiatives are increasingly shaped by emerging contextual factors (Australian Government, 2024). The growth of voluntourism has likely contributed to the initiation of numerous projects aimed at supporting vulnerable communities in Kenya's coastal region. However, many such projects fail to thrive or endure over time, raising concerns about their sustainability. In some cases, communities intended to benefit are excluded from project initiation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, thereby undermining project ownership (Arnett, 2013). Materiality and environmental considerations are often overlooked during project initiation. Amoo et al. (2025) argue that it is also critical for projects to establish appropriate strategies for planning, controlling, and monitoring project resources.

Key aspects of community-based tourism initiatives have revealed biased power relations between local communities and foreign actors, resulting in inadequate community participation (Mowforth and Munt, 2016), Although governments hosting underprivileged communities provide policy direction, their agendas frequently differ from or conflict with local interests. Despite considerable effort and good intentions, aid interventions have often produced disappointing outcomes (Laythorpe, 2016). This research seeks to address these emerging concerns.

Relevant literature and identified knowledge gaps are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Literature and Knowledge Gaps Highlights

Variable	Authors(Year)	Focus	Findings	Knowledge Gaps
Conventional M&E and PME.	Agbenyo al. (2021).	Role of PME in projects in Ghana. Interviews were conducted and data was analysed qualitatively.	Findings revealed that PME gives core stakeholders power and control over project execution and monitoring.	This study focuses on PME and sustainability of voluntourism projects, using mixed methods: Questionnaires and interviews, while the Ghana study employed different models.
Community participation, Systematic involvement.	Haldane et al. (2019).	Implications for participation.	Participation was not systematically practiced by project stewards.	Focused on voluntourism projects. Tested more variables.
Community participation, implementation of programs, projects, and activities.	Wanjue (2023).	Importance of PME in enhancing sustainability and project impact on communities in Kenya.	In developing countries, communities are involved only in program implementation. Community participatory role in plans and budgets permits stakeholders to identify resources and reduce dependence on donors.	Current study focused on privately funded voluntourism interventions in local communities. While their study focused on community participation, this study envisions broader perspective of PME and incorporates the moderating effect.
Voluntourism in Ghana: Regulatory Framework.	Mbaiwa (2016).	Voluntourism in Ghana Used primary data.	No effective formal framework. Although voluntourism organizations monitored projects and did evaluations.	Focus was on sustainability of voluntourism projects versus PME.

Variable	Authors(Year)	Focus	Findings	Knowledge Gaps
				A Ghanaian setting, while this was a Kenyan context.
PME approaches and voluntary commitment.	Williams (2009).	Interviews primarily focused on learning about M&E processes.	All of the organizations interviewed were part of M&E.	Study integrated quality assurance as PME but did not explain the standpoint of stakeholders. This research delved into voluntourism context.
Voluntourism - focused evaluation.	Love, et al (2017).	The impact of voluntourism-focused evaluation on the welfare projects' secondary data	Majority of organizations practiced voluntourism-focused evaluation. Monitoring host partner organizations was vital.	This research incorporated more variables of PME. The context of the study is also different.
Voluntourism in children's charity.	Arnett (2013); ANFPC (2024).	The mapping of the Australian NGO sector. Primary data.	Charities working overseas received big support from voluntourists. Children benefited from charities involved overseas.	Focused on NGOs in Australia, which is a developed economy. This is Kenya's context. The current study tested the moderating effect, while they used fewer variables.

Note: Author's own work

To examine how stakeholder involvement in participatory monitoring and evaluation (PME) influences the sustainability of voluntourism projects in the Coastal region of Kenya.

H01: There is no significant relationship between stakeholder involvement in PME and the sustainability of voluntourism projects in the Coastal region of Kenya.

The purpose of the study was to investigate how PME and environmental factors influence the sustainability of voluntourism projects in the Coastal region of Kenya.

Voluntourism projects worldwide are initiated and implemented by tourists with the aim of assisting host local communities. However, such projects may lack appropriate structures or primarily benefit voluntourists who portray themselves as helpers. Challenges associated with voluntourism projects include limited integration into local communities, rigid cultural contexts, constrained funding, government restrictions, and community resistance (Arnett, 2013; Bramwell & Lane, 2018; Mdee & Emmott, 2008). Volunteer projects are generally short-term in nature, with only a few demonstrating long-term sustainability. In some cases, these projects fail to equip communities with basic skills necessary for self-reliance.

In Kenya, voluntourism projects are largely initiated and funded by volunteers, with minimal contributions from local communities and other stakeholders. Funding is often sourced from host countries, friends, and donors, who typically require formal project proposals (Sally & Rosemary, 2017; Haldane et al., 2019). These projects are intended to support community development initiatives aimed at poverty alleviation and self-reliance. Nevertheless, many such projects lack appropriate organizational structures, particularly participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) systems aligned with volunteer needs (Mwaura & Ngugi, 2014).

Primarily, this research contributes to theory and knowledge, specifically stakeholder theory as popularized by Freeman (1984). It reinforces the argument that stakeholders including employees, community representatives, customers, suppliers, and investors must be actively involved to foster transparent, long-term mutual relationships, acceptability, and sustainability. The findings also contribute to management practice, policy formulation, and community development, while opening new avenues for future research (Wanjue, 2023).

II. Literature Review

This study is anchored in stakeholder theory, as articulated by Freeman (1984), who proposed that an institution's sole responsibility is not limited to maximizing outcomes and profits. Conceptually, stakeholders comprise individuals and groups who benefit from or are harmed by an organization's actions. Mainstream literature incorporates stakeholder concepts related to "external contributors," investments, "interest groups," and "inputs," positioning an institution as a central actor. Stakeholder theory underscores the widely held conviction that conflicts may arise between serving project owners and serving stakeholders (Argenti, 1997; Freeman, 1984; Wanjue, 2023). There is also a theorized misconception regarding the equitable management of all stakeholders (Gioia, 1999).

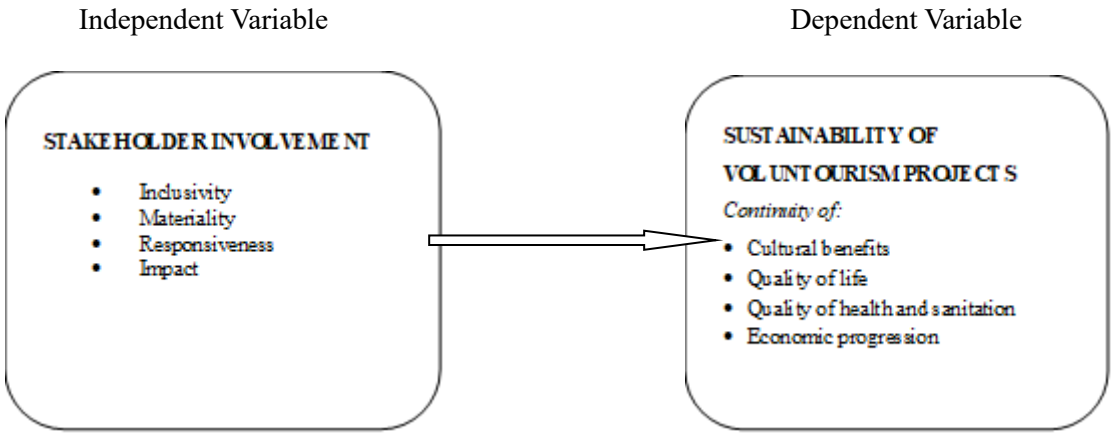
Stakeholder theory provides a coherent framework for understanding how projects should navigate relationships with diverse stakeholder groups in order to mobilize resources and generate broad-based value. Stakeholder perspectives also explain how an institution's stakeholder network can contribute to sustainability (Harrison, 2010). Moreover, stakeholder-based logic offers a practical rationale for organizations to undertake responsible actions that address both organizational interests and humanitarian concerns. Given that sustainability is a multidimensional construct involving multiple stakeholders, stakeholder theory is well suited to understanding the diverse roles stakeholders play in value creation processes (Bosse & Elfenbein, 2006). Harrison (2010) extended this perspective by demonstrating how stakeholder treatment can translate into the success of community-based projects. Within this theoretical context, voluntourists are expected to consider the participatory role of all stakeholders throughout the entire project lifecycle.

The effects of voluntourism on host destinations are diverse and often difficult to measure. Numerous studies recommend the use of ancillary indicators as a means of assessing these impacts (Budruk & Phillips, 2011; Roberts & Tribe, 2008). Development initiatives should recognize stakeholder heterogeneity when developing indicators and defining temporal dimensions of implementation. Guijt (2014) further posited that as more diverse stakeholder groups become involved in tracking change, compromises are often required to achieve the desired social transformation, particularly in contexts such as Kenya, where voluntourism projects are typically short-term.

A study by Ochunga and Awiti (2017), involving 113 respondents from organizations partnering with Plan International, found that stakeholder participation and sustainability of community projects were limited but moderately correlated. While Plan International projects tend to be more structured, voluntourism projects may not consistently adhere to formal organizational frameworks. The present study focuses specifically on voluntourism projects and introduces additional variables into the analysis.

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) have been shown to improve rural incomes, health, and literacy levels, thereby acting as intermediaries between governments and citizens and demonstrating greater responsiveness to community concerns than many private enterprises or government agencies (Mwaura & Ngugi, 2014). Ngare and Cheluget (2018) studied a population of 137 employees involved in HIV/AIDS programs and found that the regression model explained 46.6% of the variation in project sustainability. Their findings indicated that stakeholder involvement adversely influenced project sustainability. However, these projects were publicly funded hospital initiatives that were closely monitored by funders, unlike voluntourism projects, which are typically financed by tourists.

In this study, stakeholder involvement constituted the independent variable, while project sustainability served as the dependent variable.



Note: Author's own work

III. Methodology

The pragmatist paradigm supports mixed methods by avoiding rigid debates about the nature of reality and instead focusing on what works in addressing the research questions under investigation (Biesta, 2010). This paradigm reflects a shift toward mixed-methods research designs that integrate both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection (Creswell, 2007). Pragmatism has gained wide acceptance in mainstream research due to its emphasis on methodological pluralism (Denzin, 2010).

This study adopted a pragmatist paradigm because of the nature of the research questions being examined (Creswell, 2007). The paradigm allows researchers to address questions that do not fully align with either purely qualitative or purely quantitative frameworks. A similar approach was adopted by Mesa et al. (2025), based on the recognition that people and phenomena cannot be analyzed entirely objectively, as the researcher, context, and social reality influence research outcomes. Likewise, Olwenyi et al. (2024) adopted this paradigm because it is suitable for triangulating data from diverse respondents, thereby ensuring that findings are both empirically grounded and practically applicable. The epistemological stance of pragmatism enabled flexible engagement with research participants, while its ontological perspective facilitated a balanced assessment of the study variables, reducing potential bias (Gillespie et al., 2024).A descriptive cross-sectional research design integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods was employed. The qualitative component, using open-ended questions, sought to generate in-depth information to validate inferential and descriptive findings. A cross-sectional survey design is considered more economical than a longitudinal design and is therefore suitable for academic research conducted under budgetary constraints (Rindfleisch et al., 2008).

The cross-sectional design enables a comprehensive description of a population and enhances validity, as all respondents are exposed to standardized data collection instruments (Bryman & Cramer, 1997). This research design has similarly been applied by Olwenyi et al. (2024) and Mesa et al. (2025).

The target population comprised 20 voluntourism projects with established monitoring and evaluation processes. The unit of analysis consisted of 1,004 individuals involved in these projects, including 20 project managers, 452 employees, and 532 community representatives.A representative sample is essential for accurately describing a target population (Cooper & Schindler, 2014). Nachmias and Nachmias (1996) emphasized that it is often impractical to include all units of analysis in a study, thereby necessitating the use of sampling techniques.

The sample size was derived from the study population using a formula proposed by Israel (2009). The adoption of this formula is supported by Cooper and Schindler (2003), who underscored the importance of including appropriate elements from the target population. The sample size for this study was determined using the following formula by Israel (2009):

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e^2)}$$

Where:
n = Preferred sample size
N = Population size
e = Margin of error at 5%

All 20 project managers were treated as key informants.

Sample size:

$$n = \frac{984}{1 + 984\,(0.05^2)}$$

$$= 284 \text{ individuals}$$

Number of employees = 452 / 984 × 284 = 130
Number of community representatives = 532 / 984 × 284 = 154

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed in data processing, cleaning, coding, entry, analysis, and interpretation. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to generate percentages, frequency distributions, and measures of central tendency. Correlation analysis was conducted to assess relationships between independent and dependent variables. The F-test p-value was used to evaluate these relationships, while the Spearman rank correlation coefficient was applied to determine the direction and magnitude of the relationships.

Separate sampling frames were prepared for project managers or management members, employees, and community representatives. The sample size for each category was determined proportionally based on the population distribution across the voluntourism projects.
An interview guide was developed to collect qualitative data from project managers or management members serving as key informants. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to employees and community representatives. Both closed- and open-ended questions were developed in line with the study objectives and organized into two sections: Part I, which captured demographic information, and Part II, which comprised subsections A, B, C, D, and E. The data outcomes were discussed in relation to both the quantitative results obtained from the questionnaires and the qualitative insights derived from interviews.A pilot test was conducted using a randomly selected sample.
Validity was enhanced by phrasing questions in clear and simple language. Construct validity was established through expert judgment and the collection of adequate supporting evidence (MacKenzie et al., 2011). Expert opinions from university supervisors further contributed to instrument validation.
The Spearman–Brown Split-Half Reliability Coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaires (Nachmias et al., 2014; Bryman & Cramer, 1997). A randomly selected 5% of the sample, based on prime numbers, was used for the pilot study. Reliability testing was subsequently conducted, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient above 0.7 was considered acceptable.
To enhance familiarity with the research instruments, research assistants underwent training sessions focusing on research ethics and data collection skills. The researcher obtained informed consent from all respondents and secured approval from relevant authorities prior to developing the data collection schedule and administering the instruments.
The response rate is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Response

Response rate	Managers	Employees	Comm. rep	Frequency	Percentage
Response rate	18	116	116	250	82%
Non-response	2	14	38	54	18%
Total				304	100%

Note: Author's own work

Stakeholder involvement recorded Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α = 0.870). As a result, the research instrument was considered to be reliable enough as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Summary Of Alpha (α) Reliability Coefficients

Variable	Number of items (N)	Cronbach's alpha (α)	Decision
Stakeholders' involvement	10	0.870	High reliability

Note: Author's own work

Stakeholder Involvement (SI)

Indicators used to measure SI were Inclusivity, materiality, responsiveness, and impact. Ten items (statements) were used to operationalize SI based on a 5-point Likert scale, wherein the scale represented 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Descriptive statistics: minimum values, maximum values, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis were computed. This is indicated in Table 4.

Table 4. Stakeholder involvement findings

Indicator	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D	SK	KU
Inclusivity	2	5	4.490	0.539	-0.861	0.376
Materiality	1	4	3.990	0.906	-0.705	-0.344
Responsiveness	1	5	3.970	0.896	-0.633	-0.130
Impact	2	5	4.380	0.731	-1.042	1.957
Aggregate mean	1.5	5	4.207	0.768	-0.810	0.701

Note: SD = Standard deviation; KU=Kurtosis;
SK =Skewness.

Note: Author's own work

The aggregate mean score of statements describing inclusivity score was high meaning that respondents agreed that their projects had integrated inclusiveness concerns into their voluntourism projects (Min = 2, Max = 5, M = 4.490, SD = 0.539, SK = -0. 861, KU = 0.376). The distribution was moderately skewed to the left and flatter at the same time. Individual scores for all the attributes used to proxy the indicator assumed the lowest score of 2 and the highest score of 5. Materiality dimension scores indicate that organizations had incorporated materiality concerns into their project undertakings (Min = 1, Max = 4, M = 3.990, SD = 0.906, SK = -0.705, KU = -0.344). The individual scores for all the attributes used to operationalize the materiality dimension assumed different values. The distribution was almost asymmetrical and platykurtic. Responsiveness dimension scores, stakeholder responsive concerns are an integral part of voluntourists' project activities (Min = 1, Max = 5, M = 3.970, SD = 0.896, SK = -0.633, KU = -0.130). The individual scores for all the items used to measure the responsiveness dimension assumed the lowermost value of 1 and the uppermost value of 5. The distribution was almost symmetrical and slightly flatter than normal. The summative mean score of features (statements) depicting impact dimension score was high, signifying that those respondents agreed that their institutions had incorporated stakeholder impact concerns into their projects (Min = 2, Max = 5, M = 4.380, SD = 0.731, SK = -1.042, KU = 1.957). Individual scores for the entire statements utilized to capture the impact dimension assumed the lowest value of 2 and a maximum value of 5. The distribution was highly skewed to the left and platykurtic. Overall, the mean score for the stakeholder involvement (SI) composite score (Min = 1.5, Max = 5, M = 4.207, SD = 0.768, SK = -0.810, KU = 0.701) was high, implying that respondents agreed that their institutions had embraced SI practices as part of their principal strategy's impact on societies.

Sustainability of Voluntourism Projects

The indicators used were cultural benefits, quality of life, quality of healthcare and sanitation, and economic development. Descriptive statistics such as minimum and maximum scores, mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis are depicted in Table 5.

Table 5. Sustainability of projects

Indicator	Min.	Max.	Mean	S.D	SK	KU
Cultural benefits	1	3	2.796	0.900	-0.970	0.886
Quality of life	2	4	3.670	0.910	-0.902	-0.994
Quality of water and sanitation	2	3	2.440	0.793	-0.901	1.107
Economic progression	1	4	3.711	1.024	-1.802	0.985
Aggregate mean	1.5	3.5	3.154	0.906	-1.143	0.993

Note: SD = Standard deviation; KU= Kurtosis; SK = Skewness.

Note: Author's own work

As indicated in Table 5, the mean score of four items denoting sustainability of voluntourism projects signifies that respondents agreed that project cultural benefits aspects with project constituents were (Min = 1, Max = 3, M = 2.796, SD = .900, SK = -.970, KU = .886). Data distribution was negatively skewed with a moderate positive kurtosis. These items assumed diverse scores ranging from the lowest score of 1 to the highest score of 3.

Overall distribution for the quality-of-life aspect metric was highly skewed to the left and peaked. The average mean score for the attributes used to operationalize this construct was (Min = 2, Max = 4, M = 3.670, SD = 0.910, SK = - 0.902, KU = 0.994), inferring that those respondents agreed that the information flowed well in their firms. The scores for individual attributes ranged from the lowest average score of 2 to the highest score of 5.

Similarly, the respondents agreed that their access to clean water and sanitation mean scores were (Min = 2, Max = 3, M = 2.440, SD = 0.793, SK = -0.901, KU = 1.070). The individual scores for all the statements used to measure the indicator assumed the lowest score of 2 and the highest score of 3. The distribution was fairly symmetrical with a considerably positive kurtosis. Overall distribution for the economic progression metric was highly skewed to the left and moderately peaked. The average mean score for the attributes used to operationalize this construct was (Min = 1, Max = 4, M = 3.711, SD = 1.024, SK = -1.802, KU = 0.985), inferring that those respondents agreed that economic progression was of the essence. The scores for individual attributes ranged from the lowest average score of 1 to the highest score of 4. Overall, the average composite score for the sustainability of voluntourism projects was (Min = 1.5, Max = 3.5, M= 3.154, SD = 0.906, SK = -1.143, KU = 0.993) was relatively moderate, meaning that respondents agreed that their projects were favorably sustainable.

Stakeholder Involvement (SI) and Sustainability of Voluntourism Projects (SOP)

SI composite score was obtained by aggregating the individual scores of inclusivity, materiality, responsiveness, and impact into an index. Overall SOP was computed by compositing scores of cultural benefits, quality of health and sanitation, quality of life, and economic impact into a single composite score. The Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis was employed as the principal estimation technique for assessing the SI-SOP relationship. The null hypothesis (H01) was tested as specified below;

H_{01}: The relationship between stakeholder involvement and sustainability of voluntourism projects in the coastal region of Kenya is not significant.

For estimation, a general linear model is specified as follows;

$$SOP = \beta O + \beta 1SI + \mathcal{E}1$$

Note: The variables are as delineated in the estimation model. (3.10.1)

Table 6. Stakeholder involvement and sustainability of voluntourism projects

SOP	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.879	0.421	4.52	0.002	1.051	2.618
SI	0.486	0.112	4.35	0.000	0.244	0.557
R2	0.253					
Adj. R^2	0.231					
MSE	0.429					
F (1, 17)	21.68					
Prob > F	0.000					
N	18					

Note: Author's own work

SOP-Sustainability of Voluntourism Projects; SI=Stakeholder Involvement; B=Unstandardized Regression coefficient; SE=Standard Error; P=P-Value; t= t-Statistic; LLCI= Lower Level of the Confidence Interval; ULCI= Upper Level of the Confidence Interval; R2= Coefficient of Determination; Adj. R2; Adjusted R-Squared; MSE=Mean Squared Error; F=F-Statistic; Prob > F= Probability of observing the F-statistic under the null hypothesis.

Table 6 shows the empirical findings relating to the estimated effect of SI on SOP. The overall regression model was significant as confirmed by the adjusted R2 = 0.253, F (1, 17) = 21.68, $p < 0.05$. The adjusted coefficient of determination (R2) reveals that SI simply explained 23.1% of the variance in SOP, while the remaining 76.9% was predicted by other explanatory variables omitted in the empirical model. The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.486$, $t = 4.35$, $p < 0.05$) shows that SI was a significant positive predictor of SOP. Based on the estimated results, it can therefore be concluded that there was significant positive relationship between SI and SOP, leading to eventual rejection of null hypothesis one (H_{01}).

Qualitative data set gathered from project managers was presented in narrations. The managers reported that they had worked in voluntourism projects for five years or above.

Questions and responses focused on stakeholder involvement and the sustainability of voluntourism projects. Respondents were asked to describe the success of stakeholder involvement, with respect to its presence or absence, based on the metrics provided across different stakeholder categories. The number of stakeholder categories ranged from four to seven; however, respondents noted that not all categories actively participated in project activities. Common stakeholder categories across all projects included children, parents or guardians, employees, government representatives, local community members, religious organizations, and suppliers or contractors.

Respondents were also asked to provide an overview of stakeholders' backgrounds in relation to the sustainability of voluntourism projects. The majority indicated that stakeholders are central to the survival of voluntourism projects and emphasized that funders must understand local dynamics and integrate communities from the outset. Failure to do so often results in challenges that may lead to project rejection or complete failure. When asked about projects that were highly influenced by stakeholders, managers reported that such projects were predominantly focused on education and accommodation for children. Stakeholders expressed a strong preference for tangible outcomes, particularly improvements in children's progress and well-being.

To assess the elements of stakeholder involvement, managers were requested to comment on how individual opinions were communicated within their respective projects. Responses indicated that stakeholders' views were conveyed with the support of local authorities and Nyumba-kumi (residential groups) played a role in identifying

needy households with young or orphaned learners. Assessments were also conducted by local leaders in collaboration with teams of voluntourists to verify conditions at the grassroots level. Stakeholder views were conveyed to the projects through representatives of each stakeholder group, subject to approval. In most cases, the voices of children were represented and communicated by their guardians, who were permitted to visit them at the facilities.

Managers were required to comment on the provision of resources for monitoring and evaluation throughout the project cycle. They indicated that resources were allocated based on priority, including M&E activities. In situations where resources became scarce, project managers were expected to be innovative in sourcing and utilizing locally available resources. When asked to comment on the responsiveness of voluntourists to stakeholders, managers reported that voluntourists were highly responsive and open to issues raised by stakeholders. These issues were documented, and feedback was provided based on priority and urgency. Managers further noted that such responsiveness was critical to the long-term sustainability of the projects. When asked how project impact was evaluated, managers reported that evaluations were conducted biannually or annually, depending on relevance, and focused on impacts related to health, education, poverty reduction, and self-reliance. Communities also benefited through supply opportunities and employment. The primary purpose of evaluation was to assess the extent to which projects contributed to improving local livelihoods and to determine whether project objectives were achieved.

The researcher examined whether voluntourists were flexible during project implementation and evaluation, and managers reported that voluntourists were indeed flexible. They allowed project adjustments where necessary to facilitate the achievement of objectives, particularly in relation to M&E reports, feedback, proposals, and recommendations. In cases of major disagreements between voluntourists and local communities, managers cited omission or complete withdrawal. The views expressed by project managers were consistent with responses from community representatives and employees. Both datasets revealed a link between stakeholder involvement (SI) and the sustainability of voluntourism projects in the Coastal region.

These findings imply that voluntourism projects that practice stakeholder involvement, particularly from initiation through completion and during M&E processes, have a greater likelihood of long-term sustainability. It was also evident that both external and internal stakeholders advocated for full participation in project activities, including jointly defining evaluation criteria, determining indicators of success, collecting data, and interpreting results, given that both actions and omissions would have direct or indirect consequences for them (Agbenyo et al., 2021). The qualitative findings support existing arguments that stakeholder involvement during planning, implementation, and M&E enhances participation and leads to greater utilization of M&E results by project stakeholders (Ombisa et al., 2022).

The findings are consistent with those of Sally and Rosemary (2017), who examined community-based organizations (CBOs) in Kenya and noted their increasing role in grassroots project implementation. Their study found that CBOs positively influence rural transformation by contributing to improved income levels, health outcomes, and literacy among stakeholders. Similarly, Mwaura and Ngugi (2014) observed that community projects serve as a link between governments and citizens and are more responsive to community concerns than most private enterprises or government agencies, particularly when stakeholders are involved from early stages. Ngare and Chelugut's (2018) study on stakeholder involvement and the sustainability of publicly funded hospital projects also resonates with the present findings. Their regression model indicated that 46.6% of the variation in project sustainability was explained by the predictors in the model, concluding that stakeholder involvement adversely influenced sustainability. However, these findings relate to publicly funded hospital projects that are closely monitored by funders, unlike voluntourism projects, which are largely funded by tourists.

Comparable findings were reported by Laskar and Maji (2017), who identified a significant impact of stakeholder involvement on rural development projects in India. In the local context, Kamau et al. (2020) found that stakeholder involvement positively influenced development projects among arid and semi-arid communities. This aligns with Mi et al. (2021), who reported a significant positive correlation between weighted stakeholder involvement ratings and project success in Vietnamese irrigation projects. Likewise, Mishra and Suar (2010) established that increased aggregate stakeholder involvement enhanced performance in Indian school projects.

Conversely, Ochunga and Awiti (2017), in their study of community development projects implemented by Plan International in Homabay Town Sub-County, found that project sustainability was poor and unclear. These findings nonetheless support the broader argument that stakeholder involvement is essential for the success of community-based projects. Governments, donor agencies, and other implementing stakeholders operating in informal settlements require community buy-in for effective fund utilization and active participation in project activities (Munene & Severina, 2020). Overall, these findings reinforce the core tenets of stakeholder theory and highlight its relevance in tracking changes resulting from PM&E interventions in voluntourism projects.

IV. Conclusion

The conclusions were drawn from the empirical findings and the theoretical propositions of stakeholder theory. The findings revealed a positive linkage between SI and SOP, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H01). The results were further supported by the views of managers or members of management, who indicated that involving stakeholders from the project's onset provided projects with a comparative advantage in terms of long-term sustainability. However, the findings both converged with and diverged from prior empirical studies, suggesting that the SI–SOP relationship remains debatable due to mixed empirical evidence.

A plausible explanation is that well-planned stakeholder involvement determines how effectively projects navigate future challenges. Investment in stakeholder involvement activities strengthens project capacity to attract a competent workforce, save time, enhance acceptability, and facilitate the achievement of project objectives within projected time frames. This, in turn, has positive implications for project sustainability.

Overall, the findings extend the literature by contributing to theory and knowledge development, policy implications, and management practice.

Government community collaborative approaches would provide a conducive environment in which PME practices can responsibly thrive with minimal government intervention in addressing societal concerns. Formulating social performance and environmental indices among voluntourism projects would ensure parity with other developed states in assessing and rating projects' environmental impacts.

Policies that require voluntourists to allocate a certain percentage of their budgets to PME would be beneficial. The findings are particularly useful to management, as they provide evidence that project success is largely dependent on a satisfied and thriving community, employees, customers, local leaders, and other actors who play a critical role in project sustainability. Additionally, project managers would recognize that PME is an important practice that generates positive ripple effects across multiple stakeholder groups.

Although the study offers several theoretical, practical, and methodological implications, caution is warranted due to certain limitations. The study was conducted within a single regional context, which allowed environmental effects to be held relatively constant but limited the generalizability of the findings. Given the influence of cultural factors on voluntourism projects and PME implementation, future research could adopt a cross-country design to examine institutional, political, economic, and cultural influences through multivariate analysis.

In addition, cross-sectional datasets are limited in their ability to test the directionality of relationships between study variables, as they capture only a snapshot in time and focus on correlations rather than causation. Consequently, longitudinal studies are recommended, including panel, cohort, or retrospective designs, to better capture temporal dynamics. Future research could also explore additional measures of project sustainability that reflect project impacts from diverse stakeholder perspectives and account for the unique characteristics of voluntourism projects. Furthermore, studies could investigate alternative variables and dimensions of PME implemented in other sectors, such as resource execution and utilization, supply and demand dynamics, state agencies' perceptions, and community protection. Replication of the study at both local and regional levels, including in developed countries, is also recommended.

Data Availability Statemen

The data supporting the findings of this study is not publicly available due to privacy and commercial considerations but is available from the corresponsing author upon reasonable request.

Competing Interest Statement

The research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest among the authors. The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest. No funding was received for the preparation of this manuscript.

Author(s) Contribution Statement

Anne Polly Kithinji contributed to the study concept and design; wrote the introduction and literature review; collected the data; performed the statistical analysis; interpreted the results and drew the conclusions; prepared the manuscript; and reviewed all versions of the manuscript. Professor Christopher Gakuu and Professor Harriet Kidombo contributed to the study design and reviewed, proofread, and approved all versions of the manuscript prior to submission. The corresponding author signed on behalf of all authors after they had reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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