

## The Impact of Stakeholder Engagement on Political Project Development in the Mion District of the Northern Region, Ghana.

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### Abstract

Stakeholder engagement is widely advocated as a critical component of successful project development. However, its specific impacts on the performance of political projects, particularly in decentralised governance contexts of low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), remain underexplored (Miller et al., 2020; Sachs & Kujala, 2021). This study assessed the impact of stakeholder engagement on the development and performance of political projects in the Mion District of Ghana's Northern Region. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was employed. A sample of 390 household heads, selected via systematic random sampling, along with key informants from donor agencies, implementing bodies, and Project Implementation Committees (PICs), provided data through questionnaires and interviews. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis (Yamane, 1967; Ruslin et al., 2022).

Stakeholder engagement during project initiation and implementation phases positively influenced project performance, enhancing acceptability, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability. Conversely, engagement during the planning phase was negatively correlated with performance, potentially due to technical complexity. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) engagement showed a weak positive influence. Key barriers to effective engagement included a lack of stakeholder skills, illiteracy, and rigid organisational policies. The study concludes that while stakeholder engagement is beneficial, its impact varies significantly across different phases of the project cycle. A phased, capacity-sensitive approach to engagement is recommended to optimise the performance of political projects in similar LMIC contexts.

**Keywords:** Stakeholder Engagement, Political Projects, Project Performance, Project Cycle, Decentralised Governance, Ghana

**Citation:** Yakubu, F. R. A. & Klime, E. E. (2026), "The Impact of Stakeholder Engagement on Political Project Development in the Mion District of the Northern Region, Ghana.", *The Nexus Journal*, 2026, 6(1): pp.10-18. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.64839/tmj.v6i1.2>

Submitted: 01 December, 2025 | Accepted: 30 December, 2025 | Published: 28 January, 2026

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Research Problem

The success of political development projects in Ghana's decentralised system is often undermined by ineffective stakeholder participation. Despite governmental mandates and recognised benefits, projects in districts such as Mion frequently face delays, cost overruns, and unsustainable outcomes due to ad hoc, inconsistent, or poorly structured engagement processes (Ackah, 2020; Sakyi-Darko & Mensah, 2020). This gap between policy and practice highlights a critical need to understand how and when stakeholder engagement tangibly impacts project performance.

## 1.2 Background

Stakeholder engagement, defined as the active involvement of individuals or groups affected by or interested in a project, is a cornerstone of participatory development and democratic governance (Freudenreich et al., 2020). Its theoretical benefits include increased project ownership, improved accountability, better alignment with community needs, and enhanced sustainability (Correia Loureiro et al., 2020; Nair, 2020). In Ghana, the shift towards decentralised governance underscores the importance of community involvement in political projects. However, empirical evidence on the nuanced impact of engagement across the entire project cycle, initiation, planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E), remains limited, particularly at the district level (Boakye et al., 2020; Veta, 2021).

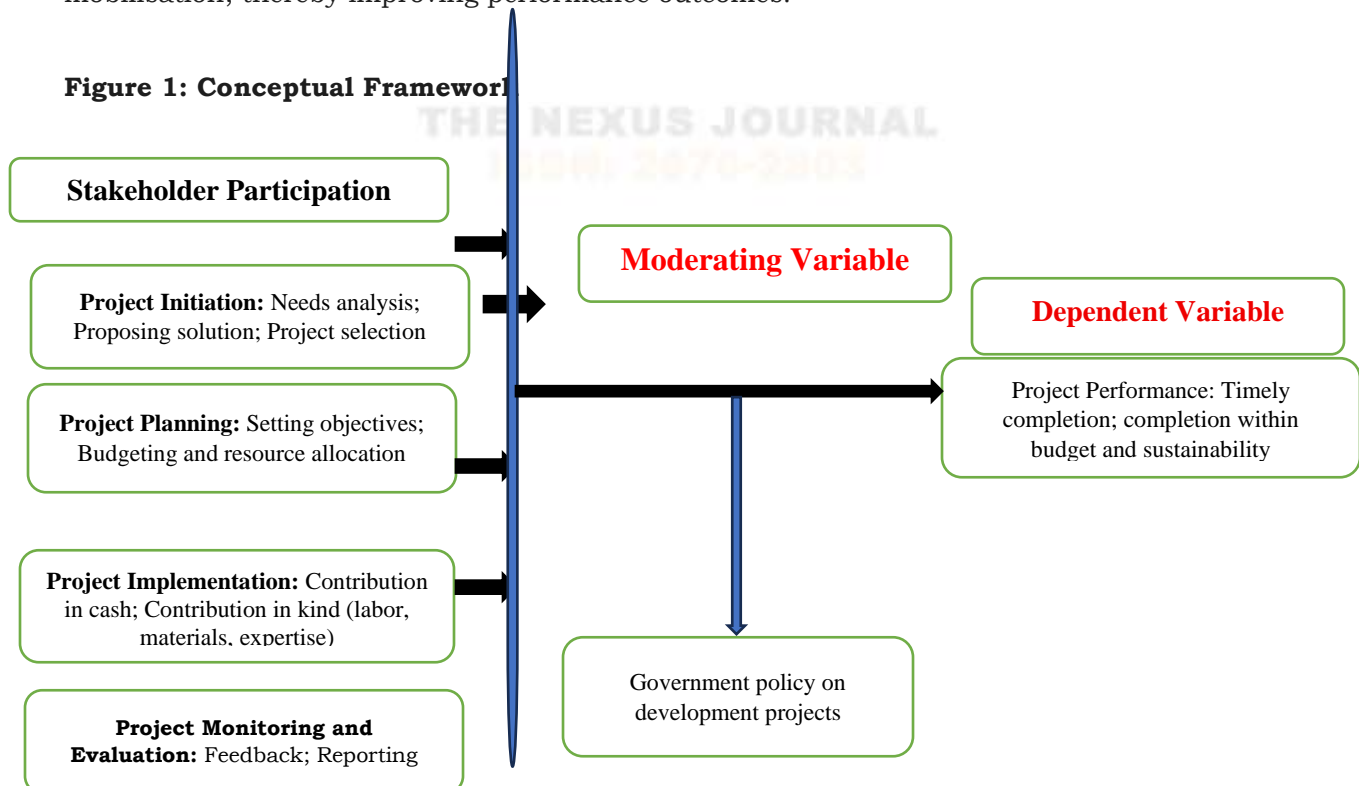
## 1.3 Objectives

The main objective of this study was to assess the impact of stakeholder engagement on political project development in the Mion District. The specific objectives were to: Examine how stakeholder engagement in project initiation influences political project development. Understand how stakeholder engagement in project planning influences political project development. Determine how stakeholder engagement in project implementation influences political project performance. Understand how stakeholder engagement in monitoring and evaluation influences political project performance.

## 1.4 Conceptual Framework

The study is guided by a conceptual framework integrating Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) and Resource-Based Theory (Barney, 1991). The framework posits that stakeholder engagement (the independent variable) across four project phases, Initiation, Planning, Implementation, and M&E, directly influences Project Performance (the dependent variable), measured through timely completion, cost-effectiveness, and sustainability. This relationship is moderated by Government Policy, which can either enable or constrain effective participatory processes. Active engagement is hypothesised to foster ownership, accountability, and resource mobilisation, thereby improving performance outcomes.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework**



## 1.5 Significance of the Study

This study provides evidence-based insights for district assemblies, development partners, and policymakers in Ghana on how to structure stakeholder engagement to optimise project outcomes. It contributes to the academic literature on participatory development in decentralised LMIC contexts. It offers practical strategies to overcome barriers to effective engagement, ultimately aiming to reduce project failure rates and promote sustainable development.

### 1.6 Research Gap

Previous studies have often focused on stakeholder engagement in isolation or on single project phases (e.g., planning or M&E). A comprehensive analysis of its differential impact across the entire project cycle in the context of political projects within Ghana's districts is lacking. This study addresses that gap by providing a phased analysis of engagement and its performance implications in the Mion District.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The Concept and Importance of Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement extends beyond mere consultation, encompassing active participation in decision-making and implementation. It is recognised as both a means of improving project efficiency and an end in itself, thereby promoting democratic governance and equity (Miller et al., 2020; Alvesson & Sandberg, 2020). Effective engagement builds social capital, ensures relevance, and leverages local knowledge and resources, which are crucial for sustainability (Wondirad et al., 2020; Bendell & Huvaj, 2020).

### 2.2 Stakeholder Engagement Across the Project Cycle

- **Initiation:** Early engagement in needs assessment and project identification ensures alignment with community priorities, fostering early ownership and reducing later resistance (Nair, 2020).
- **Planning:** While participatory planning can enhance feasibility and commitment, excessive or unskilled involvement in technical planning (e.g., budgeting, detailed design) can lead to conflicts, delays, and compromised quality (Daudigeos et al., 2020).
- **Implementation:** Engagement through in-kind or cash contributions reduces costs, utilises local resources, and solidifies a sense of ownership, directly contributing to timely progress and sustainability (Gupta et al., 2020; Watson et al., 2020).
- **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E):** Participatory M&E enhances transparency, accountability, and facilitates adaptive management. It allows for real-time feedback and fosters collective responsibility for project outcomes (Leonidou et al., 2020; Pantano et al., 2020).

### 2.3 Barriers to Effective Engagement

Common barriers include stakeholders' lack of technical capacity or skills, illiteracy, poverty, rigid bureaucratic procedures, and complex community politics (Freudenreich et al., 2020; Ackah, 2020). These barriers often limit engagement to tokenistic or induced participation rather than genuine, empowered involvement.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Study Design

Descriptive survey research was used in this study. To gather, compile, present, and evaluate data for clarity, descriptive survey research designs are employed in both exploratory and introductory investigations. According to Ruslin et al. (2022), descriptive research establishes and documents the current state of affairs. According to Wondirad et al. (2020), the goal of descriptive surveys is to generate statistical data on multiple facets of education that can inform educators and policymakers.

### 3.2 Setting

The study was conducted in the Mion District of the Northern Region, Ghana. The district, with a population of about 94,930 (GSS, 2021), relies on agricultural and political development projects, making it a relevant site for examining participatory development challenges.

### 3.3 Study Population and Sampling

The target population comprised stakeholders involved in political projects: household heads (beneficiaries), donor representatives, implementing agency staff, and members of the Project Implementation Committee (PIC). Using Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 390 household heads was calculated from a total of 15,399 households. Systematic random sampling was used to select households, whereas purposive sampling was used to select key informants.

### 3.4 Data Collection and Quantitative Metrics

Primary data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires administered to household heads and interview guides for key informants. The instruments covered demographics, levels and forms of participation across project phases, perceived impacts, and barriers.

### 3.5 Governance and Oversight

Quantitative data from questionnaires were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) summarised the data. Inferential statistics (Pearson's correlation and multiple regression analysis) were used to test relationships between engagement variables and project performance.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw. The study protocol adhered to standard ethical research guidelines.

## 4.0 RESULTS

### 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Of the 324 household respondents (81.6% response rate), 61.7% were male. The majority (62.8%) were between 30 and 49 years old, and 79% were married. Education levels varied: 36.4% had basic education, and 24.7% had attained tertiary education.

Table 4.1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency (N)	Per cent (%)
<b>Age of the Respondents</b>		
20-29	64	19.8
30-39	120	37
40-49	84	25.9
50-59	46	14.2
60+	10	3.1
Total	324	100
<b>Gender of the Respondents</b>		
Male	200	61.7
Female	124	38.3
Total	324	100
<b>Marital Status of the Respondents</b>		
Single	36	11.1
Married	256	79
Divorced	6	1.9
Separated	10	3.1



Widow	16	4.9
Total	324	100
<b>Educational Level of the Respondents</b>		
No formal education	26	8
Basic education	118	36.4
Secondary education	100	30.9
Tertiary education	80	24.7
Total	324	100

Source: Field data, 2025

#### 4.2 Nature and Level of Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement was highest during implementation (Mean=4.53 for in-kind contributions) and initiation (Mean=4.50 for project identification). It was lowest during M&E, particularly in evaluation activities (Mean = 3.18). Tangible benefits and community empowerment were the strongest motivators for participation.

Table 4.2: Ways beneficiaries participate in projects

	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>Project Initiation</b>		
Project identification	4.6	0.545
Proposing solution	4.45	0.504
Needs assessment	4.45	0.846
<b>Project planning</b>		
Setting objectives	3.75	0.494
Budgeting	3.32	0.526
<b>Project implementation</b>		
In-kind contribution	4.63	0.54
Cash contribution	4.42	0.636
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>		
Providing feedback	3.35	0.533
Evaluation	3.18	0.446

Source: Field data, 2025

#### 4.3 Impact of Engagement on Project Performance

- Initiation Engagement: Showed a weak positive correlation with project performance ( $r = 0.049$ ).
- Planning Engagement: Exhibited a negative correlation with performance ( $r = -0.244$ ), suggesting complexities in this phase.
- Implementation Engagement: Demonstrated a positive correlation ( $r = 0.261$ ), indicating its strong role in cost-saving and ownership.
- M&E Engagement: Showed a weak positive correlation ( $r = 0.225$ ).
- Regression Analysis: The regression model ( $R^2 = 0.152$ ) indicated that engagement variables collectively explained 15.2% of the variance in project performance. Implementation ( $\beta=0.090$ ) and M&E ( $\beta=0.153$ ) engagement had positive coefficients, while initiation ( $\beta=-0.010$ ) and planning ( $\beta=-0.132$ ) had negative coefficients.

Table 4.3: Factors determining the level of beneficiary participation

Mean	Std. Deviation
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Tangible benefits	4.68	0.616
Level of community engagement	4.38	0.774
flexibility of organisation procedures	3.80	0.758
Others	1.18	0.781

*Source: Field data, 2025*

#### 4.4 Barriers to Engagement

The most significant barriers were a lack of skills among stakeholders (Mean=3.90), followed by illiteracy (Mean=3.70) and rigid organisational policies (Mean=3.23).

*Table 4.4: Importance of beneficiary participation*

	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Project Initiation</b>		
Accountability	4.85	0.549
Empowerment	4.55	0.504
Project acceptability	4.55	0.504
Sense of ownership	4.4	0.545
Sustainability	3.8	0.758
<b>Project Planning</b>		
Empowerment	4.4	0.545
Project acceptability	4.1	0.496
Sense of ownership	3.97	0.53
Accountability	3.5	0.816
Sustainability	3.43	0.781
<b>Project Implementation</b>		
Project acceptability	4.58	0.501
Sense of ownership	4.38	0.74
Empowerment	4.35	0.622
Accountability	3.67	0.859
Sustainability	3.57	0.781
<b>Project Monitoring and Evaluation</b>		
Project acceptability	3.55	0.552
Sense of ownership	3.45	0.597
Empowerment	3.37	1.314
Accountability	3.28	0.877
Sustainability	3.05	0.677

*Source: Field data, 2025*

#### 4.3 Discussion

The findings confirm that stakeholder engagement is not a monolithic concept; its impact varies decisively across the project cycle. The positive influence of engagement during initiation and implementation aligns with stakeholder theory, which posits that early involvement builds legitimacy and that resource contributions enhance commitment (Freeman, 1984). The cost-sharing and local resource use during implementation directly address resource constraints, as per Resource-Based Theory.

The negative association between planning engagement and performance is critical. It suggests that without adequate technical capacity, stakeholder involvement in complex planning decisions can lead to inefficiencies. This highlights a potential "participation paradox," in which

well-intentioned inclusion, absent adequate facilitation or capacity building, can hinder project effectiveness.

The modest impact of M&E engagement, despite its theoretical importance, points to a common practice gap in which communities are less involved in the oversight and learning phases. Overcoming the identified barriers, especially skill deficits and institutional inflexibility, is essential for transforming engagement from a procedural requirement into a driver of performance.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that stakeholder engagement significantly impacts the development and performance of political projects in the Mion District, but this impact is highly phase-dependent. Engagement is most beneficial for fostering ownership and cost-effectiveness during initiation and implementation. However, its role in technical planning requires careful management to avoid adverse outcomes. Limited capacity and restrictive policies remain key impediments to optimal engagement.

### 5.1 Recommendations

*For District Assemblies & Implementers:* Adopt a differentiated engagement strategy—Prioritise inclusive participation in initiation and implementation. During the planning phase, provide targeted capacity-building training for community representatives in basic project planning and budgeting to enhance their effectiveness.

*For Policymakers:* Review and revise local government policies to mandate and guide meaningful stakeholder engagement throughout the project cycle, with specific guidelines for participatory M&E. Allocate resources for regular stakeholder capacity-building programs.

*For Future Research:* Further studies should investigate the specific types of capacity-building needed for effective engagement in the planning phase. Longitudinal research is also needed to assess the long-term sustainability outcomes linked to different engagement models.

### Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the support of my supervisor, Eng. Prof. David Ackah, the staff of UBIDS, the authorities of the Mion District, and all study participants.

### Funding Statement

This research was self-funded by the author.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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