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Strategic Leadership in Focus: To What Extent Does Stakeholder Engagement Influencethe Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs in Kanungu District, Uganda?

By

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Abstract

Poverty eradication programmes in Uganda have been designed with the intention of improving livelihoods through inclusive and participatory approaches, yet persistent poverty in rural districts suggests that programme implementation continues to face critical challenges. Existing literature widely emphasises the importance of stakeholder engagement as a driver of successful development outcomes, but there is limited empirical evidence from rural Ugandan contexts on whether such engagement genuinely translates into effective programme delivery. This gap highlights the need to interrogate whether involving stakeholders in planning, monitoring, and implementation actually enhances performance or whether engagement processes remain symbolic and fail to influence outcomes. Anchored on Stakeholder Theory, this study examined the influence of stakeholder engagement on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Rukungiri District. A correlational research design and quantitative approach were adopted, with a target population of 331 leaders directly engaged in programme activities. From this, a sample of 181 respondents was selected using stratified, proportionate, simple random, and purposive sampling methods. Data were collected through structured questionnaires on a five-point Likert scale, with pilot testing undertaken to ensure validity and reliability. Analysis using descriptive statistics and simple linear regression revealed that the relationship between stakeholder engagement and programme implementation was statistically insignificant at the 5% level, confirming that engagement did not significantly affect implementation in Kanungu District. This outcome demonstrates a disconnect between participatory intentions and practical outcomes, underscoring the need for a more robust framework for stakeholder involvement to make meaningful contributions to poverty eradication efforts. For policy, the findings highlight the importance of revisiting stakeholder engagement models to ensure they are not merely consultative but actively integrated into decision-making and resource allocation, thereby enhancing accountability and programme effectiveness. In terms of contribution to knowledge, the study provides empirical evidence from a rural Ugandan setting that challenges the assumed universality of stakeholder engagement benefits, offering fresh insights into the contextual limitations of Stakeholder Theory and expanding the discourse on poverty eradication strategies in developing economies.

Keywords: *Strategic Leadership, Stakeholder Engagement, Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs, Rukungiri District*

Introduction

Stakeholder engagement plays a critical role in the implementation of poverty eradication programmes, particularly when considered within the framework of strategic leadership, which emphasises vision, coordination, and alignment of resources to achieve developmental goals (Thelma &Chitondo, 2024). Effective strategic leaders deliberately identify, involve, and manage stakeholders such as government agencies, non-governmental organisations, community leaders, and beneficiaries to ensure that programme objectives reflect community needs and are

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supported by available resources (Orenge et al., 2024). Through this engagement, collaboration is fostered, accountability is enhanced, and financial, technical, and human resources are pooled together, thereby increasing the potential for successful programme delivery. Leaders who prioritise active stakeholder participation are better positioned to anticipate challenges, integrate diverse perspectives into decision making, and adapt programme strategies to the realities of local contexts, which in turn strengthens ownership and sustainability of poverty eradication initiatives (Ahmad & Islam, 2024).

Stakeholder engagement, understood as the systematic involvement of all relevant actors in planning, decision making, and implementation, directly influences the success of poverty eradication programmes, which are structured interventions designed to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods (Barasa&Nyaga, 2021). Within the domain of strategic leadership, defined as the ability to set a vision, align resources, coordinate actions, and make informed decisions to achieve long-term goals, stakeholder engagement emerges as a vital mechanism for enhancing programme effectiveness (Carreño, 2024). By facilitating dialogue, promoting collaboration, and encouraging resource sharing, strategic leaders ensure that poverty eradication initiatives remain responsive to community priorities and local dynamics (Azhari et al., 2024). This interaction between strategic leadership and stakeholder participation enhances accountability, deepens local ownership, and allows continuous monitoring and adaptation of interventions, ultimately improving both implementation and sustainability of poverty eradication programmes in contexts such as Rukungiri District, Uganda (Ahmad & Islam, 2024; Thelma &Chitondo, 2024).

The Government of Uganda has introduced multiple initiatives to tackle poverty and enhance livelihoods, reflecting a commitment to both national development goals and the global Sustainable Development Goals (Wanyana et al., 2024). Central to these efforts is the National Development Plan (NDP III), which prioritises economic growth, human capital development, and social protection for vulnerable groups (Mubangizi&Adekanla, 2024). Complementing this, the Uganda Social Assistance Grants for Empowerment (SAGE) has been established to provide cash transfers to elderly and vulnerable households, while Operation Wealth Creation (OWC) seeks to boost agricultural productivity and household income generation (Hickey &Bukenya, 2021; Katusiime, 2022). Decentralisation policies have also been pursued to empower local governments to deliver services closer to communities, alongside sustained investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure to lay long-term foundations for poverty reduction (Katusiime, 2022).

Despite these interventions, empirical evidence points to persistent weaknesses in implementation that undermine the effectiveness of poverty eradication programmes. Uganda remains one of the poorest countries globally and leads East Africa with a poverty rate of 1.46 (Mattes &Lekalake, 2025). Statistics from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2021) reveal that 30.1% of the population, representing 12.3 million people, survive on less than $1.77 per day. Manifestations of poverty remain visible in the form of unstable cash incomes, limited access to healthcare services, and widespread food insecurity (HAJIRA, 2024; Andrew & Innocent, 2025). These realities highlight a significant disconnect between the design of poverty eradication programmes and their actual implementation outcomes, underscoring the need for deeper investigation into factors such as stakeholder engagement, programme management, and strategic leadership.

Kanungu District illustrates the persistence of poverty despite years of government and donor-backed interventions, recording the highest poverty levels in Uganda's Western region, a situation attributed mainly to limited financial inclusion (Andrew & Innocent, 2025). Although several poverty eradication initiatives were rolled out in the district between 2018 and 2024, Kanungu has continued to rank among the most impoverished areas, with households facing chronically low incomes, inadequate access to safe water, and primary school completion rates falling below the national average (Saulo, 2022; Turyasingura et al., 2022; Tumusiime, 2025). These conditions highlight the disconnect between programme design and tangible livelihood improvements, raising questions about the effectiveness of existing implementation mechanisms. Against this backdrop, the present study was undertaken to examine the relationship between stakeholder engagement and the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District, Uganda. The purpose of the study was to explore how involving key stakeholders influences the planning, execution, and outcomes of poverty reduction interventions. In particular, the study sought to assess the degree to which stakeholders' participation shapes decision-making processes, strengthens accountability, and addresses local needs within programme implementation. By interrogating the role of engagement in programme outcomes, the research aimed to identify the challenges and gaps that continue to undermine effectiveness, while generating evidence-based recommendations to enhance accountability, inclusivity, and sustainability in poverty eradication efforts within Kanungu District.

The following specific objectives guided this study:

1. To assess the level of stakeholder engagement in the planning and implementation of poverty eradication programs in Kanungu District.
2. To examine the influence of stakeholder participation on the effectiveness of poverty eradication program implementation.
3. To identify the challenges faced in engaging stakeholders during the implementation of poverty eradication programs.
4. To provide recommendations for improving stakeholder engagement to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of poverty eradication programs in Kanungu District.

Null hypothesis

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H_0: Stakeholder engagement has no significant influence on the implementation of poverty eradication programs in Kanungu District, Uganda.

2.1 Theoretic framework

The study was grounded in Stakeholder Theory as advanced by Freeman (1984), which argues that organisations attain effectiveness and long-term sustainability by actively identifying, involving, and managing the interests of all individuals or groups that can influence or be influenced by their activities (Kivits et al., 2021). This perspective underscores that the success of any programme relies on recognising and integrating the expectations, roles, and influence of diverse stakeholders such as government agencies, local leaders, non-governmental organisations, and programme beneficiaries (Awa et al., 2024; Chinyio et al., 2022). Within the context of poverty eradication programmes, Stakeholder Theory provides a useful framework for explaining how the systematic engagement of key actors can shape planning, execution, and eventual outcomes (Edlmann&Grobbelaar, 2021). In applying this theory, the study conceptualised stakeholder engagement as a central mechanism through which accountability can be enhanced, collaboration encouraged, resources effectively allocated, and interventions tailored to local community needs. This theoretical lens not only informed the study's design but also guided the analysis of how strategic leadership could reinforce stakeholder participation to strengthen the implementation and sustainability of poverty eradication initiatives in Kanungu District.

2.2 Empirical review

Influence of stakeholder engagement on implementation of poverty eradication programs

The purpose of the study by O'Brien et al. (2021) was to critically examine remediation projects in developing countries, focusing on challenges in implementation and stakeholder engagement. The methodology involved a literature review of existing remedial projects, with particular attention to areas with imminent human exposure risks and the use of cost-effective clean-up methods such as excavation and safe storage of contaminated soil. The study found that these projects often face significant constraints due to limited funding, legacy pollution, informal livelihoods, political and economic instability, and weak regulatory frameworks. Additionally, most projects struggled with inadequate stakeholder participation, inexperienced facilitation, and improperly applied engagement methods, which undermined the effectiveness and sustainability of remediation efforts. The study concluded that overcoming context-specific challenges requires robust stakeholder engagement throughout the remedial process and recommended strengthening participation strategies to enhance the effectiveness and impact of clean-up initiatives in developing country contexts.

The study by Jun and Kim (2021) aimed to examine how the private sector can enhance multi-stakeholder engagement to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), using LG Electronics (LGE) in South Korea as a case study. The methodology employed a case study approach, analysing the strategies LGE used to engage stakeholders across three phases: stakeholder communication, stakeholder involvement, and stakeholder engagement. The study found that effective engagement was supported by governance mechanisms such as Corporate Sustainability Management strategies, the CSR Committee, and the Sustainability Management Council, which facilitated structured and coordinated stakeholder interactions. Additionally, the SDGs provided a common framework and language that improved stakeholder alignment and participation. The study concluded that institutionalised governance structures and strategic stakeholder management enable private sector firms to contribute effectively to global development goals, offering practical lessons for enhancing stakeholder engagement in sustainability initiatives.

The study by Shaukat et al. (2022) aimed to examine the relationship between sustainable project management (SPM) and project success, with a focus on the moderating effects of stakeholder engagement and team building. The methodology involved a structured survey administered to project management professionals in Pakistan, yielding 323 valid responses. The findings revealed that sustainable project management positively influences project success, while stakeholder engagement and team-building strategies were found to have insignificant moderating effects in this context. The study concluded that adopting a holistic approach to SPM, integrating sustainability considerations throughout all project life-cycle stages, remains essential. Practically, project managers should promote stakeholder engagement and team-building strategies while evaluating key project decisions through a sustainability lens to enhance outcomes and create meaningful value for all stakeholder groups, which are increasingly recognized as critical to project success.

The study by Ansu-Mensah et al. (2021) aimed to investigate the corporate social responsibility (CSR) process of an extractive company and examine how stakeholders are engaged in CSR within the Ghanaian mining sector. The methodology employed purposive and snowball sampling to select 21 respondents from various stakeholder groups, complemented by the analysis of documents such as sustainability annual reports. The study found that Newmont Ahafo Mines has maintained a prominent CSR drive in Ghana over several years, and that stakeholder involvement is crucial for implementing relevant and effective CSR programs. The findings contribute to building an empirical reference for management practitioners on stakeholder engagement and CSR practices. The study concluded by recommending that the mining sector invest significant effort in engaging diverse stakeholders to enhance the relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of CSR initiatives.

The study by Pira (2024) aimed to explore the application of design thinking in addressing poverty reduction in Saint John, New Brunswick, with a focus on stakeholder engagement. The methodology employed a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, secondary data analysis, and qualitative coding techniques to investigate how stakeholders' perspectives could inform poverty alleviation initiatives. The

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findings revealed that actively involving beneficiaries and intermediaries in the design thinking process was effective, leading to the development of Canada's first food bank platform. The study concluded that design thinking, when coupled with robust stakeholder engagement, has significant potential to address complex social issues and enhance the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts.

Research gaps

Based on the literature reviewed, several gaps emerged that the current study sought to address.

First, most of the previous studies, including O'Brien et al. (2021) and Pira (2024), focused on remediation projects or poverty reduction in developed countries, with little empirical evidence from the Ugandan or broader East African context. This created a contextual gap, as local socio-economic, political, and institutional dynamics in Rukungiri District could influence the relationship between stakeholder engagement and program implementation differently.

Second, several studies, such as Jun and Kim (2021) and Ansu-Mensah et al. (2021), employed qualitative approaches or case studies focusing on specific companies or sectors, such as the private sector or the mining industry. There was limited quantitative evidence assessing the direct influence of stakeholder engagement on poverty eradication program implementation at the district local government level, which this study addressed.

Third, Shaukat et al. (2022) explored the moderating effects of stakeholder engagement in sustainable project management but found them insignificant. This highlighted a gap in understanding the contextual relevance of stakeholder engagement in public sector poverty eradication programs in developing countries, where institutional frameworks, leadership styles, and governance mechanisms differed.

Finally, while prior studies examined stakeholder engagement in various forms, including CSR, design thinking, or sustainable projects, they did not explicitly link strategic leadership with stakeholder engagement in the implementation of poverty eradication programs. This study filled that theoretical and practical gap by investigating how leadership practices could enhance stakeholder participation, resource allocation, and program outcomes in Rukungiri District.

Table 1: Gaps Addressed by the Study on Stakeholder Engagement and Poverty Eradication Program Implementation in Rukungiri District, Uganda

Author(s) and Year	Focus of Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Identified Gaps	How Current Study Addressed the Gap
O'Brien et al., 2021	Remediation projects in developing countries	Literature review	Projects faced funding constraints, weak regulatory structures, and poor stakeholder engagement	Focused on general remediation projects, not local government poverty programs in Uganda	Provided context-specific quantitative evidence on local government programs in Uganda
Jun & Kim, 2021	Private sector stakeholder engagement for SDGs (LG Electronics, South Korea)	Case study	Effective engagement supported by governance mechanisms and SDG framework	Focused on private sector and qualitative insights, not public sector in Uganda	Examined public sector programs and applied quantitative approach in Rukungiri District
Shaukat et al., 2022	Sustainable project management and project success	Survey (323 responses, Pakistan)	SPM positively influenced success; stakeholder engagement insignificant	Context of developing country public sector poverty programs not studied	Evaluated stakeholder engagement influence in local government poverty eradication programs
Ansu-Mensah et al., 2021	CSR and stakeholder engagement in Ghanaian mining	Interviews (21 respondents) and document analysis	Stakeholder involvement crucial for CSR program effectiveness	Focused on mining sector CSR, not poverty eradication programs in Uganda	Investigated stakeholder engagement in local government-led poverty programs

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Pira, 2024	Design thinking for poverty reduction (Saint John, Canada)	Mixed methods	Stakeholder involvement effective in program design	Focused on developed country context and design thinking approach	Applied findings to Ugandan local government using quantitative assessment of stakeholder engagement

Source: Researcher, 2025

3.0 Materials and methods

Research Design

The study used a correlational research design and a quantitative research approach to examine how stakeholder engagement influences the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Rukungiri District. The use of a correlational design was appropriate because it enabled the researcher to establish the degree of relationship between stakeholder engagement and programme implementation outcomes without manipulating the variables under investigation. Correlational designs are widely recognised in social sciences for their ability to measure associations among naturally occurring variables, making them suitable in policy-related research where experimental control is not feasible (Thomas &Zubkov, 2023). This was important in understanding how factors such as participation, consultation, and monitoring by stakeholders relate to the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of poverty eradication efforts in the district.

The study used a quantitative approach because it allowed for the systematic collection and statistical analysis of numerical data from stakeholders and beneficiaries. Quantitative research is valuable in reducing subjectivity by using structured instruments and numerical indicators to assess variables objectively (Ahmadin, 022). Through structured questionnaires and surveys, the researcher was able to measure the extent of engagement and the level of programme performance in a way that ensured reliability and minimised bias. Quantitative analysis also made it possible to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between stakeholder involvement and programme implementation, thereby generating evidence-based insights for decision-making.

The study used this methodological combination because it provided reliable and generalisable findings that could inform both policy and practice. Applying correlation techniques within a quantitative framework, the researcher was able to produce measurable evidence on whether increased stakeholder engagement contributes to improved implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Rukungiri District. This approach ensured that conclusions and recommendations were grounded in statistically supported results rather than subjective interpretation.

Target population

The target population of the study consisted of 331 leaders in Kanungu District who were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of poverty eradication programmes. This group was selected because of its strategic role in decision-making and community mobilisation, making it a reliable source of data on how stakeholder engagement influences programme implementation. The categories of the target population included District Heads of Departments, Sub-County Chiefs, Village Chairpersons, and Parish Chairpersons, as illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2: Target Population

Category	Target Population
District Head of Departments	11
Sub- County Chiefs	18
Village Chairpersons	200
Parish Chairpersons	102
Total	**331**

Source: Kanungu District, 2024

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The study used inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that only relevant respondents participated. The inclusion criteria involved leaders who were actively serving in their respective positions during the time of data collection and who had direct roles in poverty eradication initiatives. These individuals were considered suitable because they had firsthand knowledge and experience regarding stakeholder engagement and programme implementation.

The exclusion criteria applied to leaders who were retired, on leave, suspended, or otherwise unavailable at the time of the study. It also excluded leaders who were not directly engaged in poverty eradication programmes, since their responses would not provide meaningful insights into the subject matter. Applying these criteria ensured that the data collected was valid, accurate, and reflective of those most knowledgeable about the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in the district.

Sample size determination and sampling techniques

The sample size of this study was 181 respondents drawn from a total target population of 331 leaders in Kanungu District as shown in Table 3. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size calculation at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, as presented below:

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

Where:

N = Total population

n = required sample size

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e = Margin of error 0.05

$$n = \frac{331}{1 + 331(0.05)^2}$$

n=181

Table 3: Sample Size

Category	Target Population	Sample Size
District Head of Departments	11	6
Sub- County Chiefs	18	10
Village Chairpersons	200	109
Parish Chairpersons	102	56
Total	**331**	**181**

Source: Researcher, 2025

This study used stratified random sampling, proportionate sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling techniques to select respondents from the target population. Stratified random sampling was applied because the target population consisted of different categories of leaders such as District Heads of Departments, Sub-County Chiefs, Parish Chairpersons, and Village Chairpersons. Dividing the population into these strata ensured that each category was adequately represented in the study, which increased the accuracy and representativeness of the findings (Hossan et al., 2023; Arbale&Mutisya, 2024).

Proportionate sampling was then employed to determine the number of respondents to be selected from each stratum in accordance with its size relative to the total population. This ensured fairness in representation by preventing over-representation of larger groups, such as Village Chairpersons, and under-representation of smaller groups, such as District Heads of Departments (Kothari &Garg, 2019; Etikan&Bala, 2017).

Within each stratum, simple random sampling was used to give every individual an equal chance of being included in the sample. This reduced bias in the selection process and enhanced the validity of the study results by ensuring that the sample truly reflected the characteristics of the population (Bryman, 2021; Creswell &Guetterman, 2021).

Purposive sampling was applied for specific categories of the target population, particularly key informants such as District Heads of Departments and Sub-County Chiefs, who were selected deliberately because of their specialised roles and deeper involvement in planning, coordinating, and monitoring poverty eradication programmes. This ensured that the study captured rich and relevant insights that would not have been obtained through random selection alone.

Research Instrument

Primary data was garnered with the help of both researcher-administered and self-administered structured questionnaires, designed on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The combination of researcher-administered and self-administered questionnaires enhanced flexibility in data collection by accommodating respondents' preferences and availability. Researcher-administered questionnaires ensured clarity of questions and reduced the risk of misinterpretation, while self-administered questionnaires provided respondents with the freedom to complete the survey at their convenience, thus minimising interviewer bias and increasing response accuracy (Weir, 2023).

The use of structured questionnaires allowed for consistency in the responses by presenting uniform questions to all participants. Employing a Likert scale facilitated the measurement of perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of stakeholders regarding engagement and programme implementation in a quantifiable manner. This was appropriate for a quantitative research approach because it enabled the transformation of subjective perceptions into numerical data suitable for statistical analysis.

The Likert scale also provided a balanced range of options, reducing central tendency bias by compelling respondents to take a position on the statements presented. This made it possible to assess the degree of agreement or disagreement on specific aspects of stakeholder engagement and programme outcomes, which directly supported the study's correlational research design.

Piloting and quality control

Pilot testing allowed the researcher to detect ambiguous questions, assess the appropriateness of the Likert scale, and evaluate the overall feasibility of the data collection process before the main study (Teresi et al., 2022; Wadood et al., 2021).

Following the recommendation of Lackey and Wingate (1998), who suggest that pilot studies in the social sciences should involve approximately 10% of the final study sample, the pilot study included 25 respondents (Paudel, 2021). This number represented 10% of the total sample size of 181 selected for the main study. Respondents for the pilot study were drawn from Bushenyi District, which shares similar socio-demographic characteristics with Kanungu District, ensuring that feedback from the pilot was relevant and applicable for refining the questionnaires.

The outcomes of the pilot study informed adjustments to the wording of questions, the structure of the questionnaire, and the sequencing of items, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the instrument for the main study. This process helped ensure that respondents would interpret questions consistently and that data collected would accurately reflect stakeholder engagement and programme implementation in Kanungu District.

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Validity

The Content Validity Index (CVI) of the research instruments was examined by professionals to ensure that the questionnaires were both clear and comprehensive in covering all relevant study constructs. This process involved detailed discussions of the questionnaire items with research specialists and supervisors, who assessed each item for relevance, clarity, and representativeness of the constructs under investigation. By obtaining expert judgments, the study ensured that the instruments measured what they were intended to measure, thereby enhancing content validity and reducing the risk of including ambiguous, irrelevant, or poorly framed questions (Rokeman&Kob, 2024).

The CVI process involved rating each item on a scale of relevance, after which the proportion of items deemed relevant by the experts was calculated. Items that did not meet the agreed threshold were revised or removed. This systematic evaluation confirmed that the questionnaire adequately captured key dimensions of stakeholder engagement and poverty eradication programme implementation, contributing to the reliability and robustness of the data collection process.

The CVI of the research instruments was found to be 0.875, indicating a high level of agreement among the experts that the questionnaire items were relevant and adequately covered the constructs under study. A CVI value above 0.80 is generally considered acceptable in social science research, demonstrating that the instrument possesses strong content validity.

Reliability

The reliability of the research instruments was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which measures the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The study attained a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.731, indicating acceptable reliability, as values above 0.70 are generally considered satisfactory for social science research (Izah et al., 2023).

This result demonstrated that the items on the questionnaire consistently measured the underlying constructs of stakeholder engagement and the implementation of poverty eradication programmes. A Cronbach's Alpha of 0.731 provided confidence that the instrument would yield stable and consistent results when administered to the study sample in Kanungu District. Consequently, the questionnaire was deemed reliable for collecting data for the main study, ensuring that the findings would be robust and reproducible.

Data analysis

Descriptive analysis was used to summarise the data collected from respondents on the extent and forms of stakeholder participation. Frequencies, percentages, and means were generated to describe the levels of involvement of different categories of stakeholders in programme planning, monitoring, and execution. This enabled the researcher to establish the patterns of engagement and to highlight areas where participation was either strong or weak.

Simple linear regression was then applied to test the hypothesis that stakeholder engagement had a significant influence on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes. In this model, stakeholder engagement was treated as the independent variable, while the implementation of poverty eradication programmes was the dependent variable. The regression equation was expressed as:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- **Y** represented the level of implementation of poverty eradication programmes,
- **X** represented stakeholder engagement,
- β_0 was the constant term,
- β_1 was the regression coefficient measuring the effect of stakeholder engagement, and
- ε captured the error term.

In the study, the hypothesis that stakeholder engagement significantly influenced the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Rukungiri District was tested at a 5% level of significance. This level of significance was adopted to ensure that the results were interpreted within an acceptable margin of error, thereby reducing the likelihood of making false conclusions about the relationship between the two variables.

Ethical considerations

In this study ethical considerations were carefully observed to uphold research standards and protect participants (Newman et al., 2021). Prior to the commencement of data collection, approval was obtained from the relevant institutional and local authorities to ensure compliance with academic and professional guidelines.

The data collection process relied exclusively on structured questionnaires. Informed consent was secured from all respondents before they participated in the study. The objectives of the research, the purpose of data collection, and the intended use of findings were clearly explained at the beginning of the questionnaire. Respondents were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they retained the right to withdraw at any point without facing any consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity of participants were guaranteed throughout the study. No identifying information was requested on the questionnaires, and responses were coded to ensure that individual participants could not be traced. The collected data were securely stored and used strictly for academic purposes.

The study also ensured that respondents were not exposed to any form of harm, either physical or psychological, during the process of completing the questionnaires. The questions were designed in a manner that avoided sensitive or offensive content, and the administration of the questionnaires was conducted in a way that respected the dignity and privacy of the participants.

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4.0 findings

Response rate

In the study, a total of 181 structured questionnaires were distributed to the targeted respondents in Rukungiri District. Out of these, 159 questionnaires were successfully completed and returned in a form that was suitable for analysis. This represented a response rate of 87.8%, which was considered sufficient for the study.

The response rate of 87.8% was deemed acceptable because it exceeded the 70% benchmark often recommended in social science research for ensuring reliable and valid results (Holtom et al., 2022). Such a high response rate reduced the risk of non-response bias and increased the confidence that the findings reflected the views of the wider target population. The adequacy of this response rate strengthened the credibility of the study and supported the generalisation of the results to similar contexts.

Descriptive Statistics on Shareholders Engagement and Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

The study sought to determine influence of shareholders engagement and implementation of poverty eradication programs as shown in Table 4**.** Responses were framed ona Likert scale ranging from 1 and 5; where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

Table 4:Shareholders Engagement and Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Our organization actively seeks input from diverse groups when making important decisions.	159	1	5	2.72	1.154
We have mechanisms in place to ensure marginalized voices are heard in our engagement processes.	159	1	5	2.72	1.165
Our stakeholder meetings are designed to encourage participation from all attendees, regardless of their position or background.	159	1	5	2.79	1.182
Our organization regularly partners with entities from different sectors (e.g., public, private, non-profit) on joint projects.	159	1	5	2.79	1.085
We have formal structures in place to facilitate ongoing dialogue between our organization and various industry sectors.	159	1	5	2.84	1.111
Our decision-making processes incorporate perspectives from multiple sectors to ensure comprehensive solutions.	159	1	5	2.87	1.179
Valid N (listwise)	**159**			**2.79**	**1.146**

Source: Field data, 2025

The first statement on whether organisations actively sought input from diverse groups in decision-making received a mean score of 2.72 with an SD of 1.154. This low score indicated minimal involvement of diverse groups, and the variability suggested that while some organisations made an effort, others neglected this practice altogether. The implication was that important perspectives, especially those from disadvantaged groups, were often excluded, thereby undermining inclusivity in decision-making.

The second item, which assessed mechanisms to ensure marginalised voices were heard, recorded a mean of 2.72 and an SD of 1.165. This showed that institutional arrangements for promoting inclusivity were weak and unevenly implemented. The implication was that poverty eradication programmes risked overlooking the needs of marginalised populations due to the absence of effective engagement mechanisms.

The third item on stakeholder meetings designed to encourage participation scored a mean of 2.79 with an SD of 1.182. This suggested that although some effort was made to promote inclusivity during meetings, the practice was inconsistent across organisations. The implication was that meetings were not always participatory and often lacked genuine dialogue, limiting collaboration in decision-making.

The findings on cross-sector partnerships produced a mean of 2.79 and an SD of 1.085. This indicated weak collaboration between different sectors, though the slightly lower SD suggested that organisations were relatively consistent in their responses. The implication was that limited partnerships restricted opportunities for sharing resources, expertise, and innovative approaches needed to strengthen poverty eradication initiatives.

The statement on formal structures for ongoing dialogue recorded a mean of 2.84 with an SD of 1.111. This reflected moderate progress in establishing dialogue mechanisms, although they were not fully institutionalised. The implication was that without stronger and more consistent structures, sustained cooperation between organisations and sectors was likely to remain weak.

The final item on incorporating perspectives from multiple sectors in decision-making had the highest mean of 2.87 with an SD of 1.179. This showed a relatively stronger effort compared to other items, though the score still fell below the midpoint of the scale. The implication was that while multiple perspectives were occasionally considered, decision-making remained largely narrow and excluded key stakeholders,

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thereby limiting the effectiveness of poverty eradication strategies.

Overally, the results showed that stakeholder engagement in Rukungiri District was generally low, as reflected in the mean score of 2.79. This indicated that stakeholder engagement practices were weak and did not reach the expected average level on a five-point scale. The standard deviation of 1.146 suggested considerable variation among respondents, showing that while some organisations attempted to apply engagement practices, others were either inconsistent or ineffective. The implication was that weak and uneven stakeholder engagement limited inclusivity, collaboration, and dialogue structures, thereby undermining the effective implementation and sustainability of poverty eradication programmes in the district.

Descriptive Statistical Analysis on Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

The study sought to examine perception on the implementation of poverty eradication programs as shown in Table 5**.** Responses were framed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 and 5; where 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5= Strongly Agree.

Table 5: Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
I have consistent access to healthcare services when needed.	159	1.00	5.00	3.3648	1.166
Clean water is readily available in my community.	159	1.00	5.00	3.7233	.8260
My home has adequate sanitation facilities.	159	1.00	5.00	3.4403	1.040
I have completed a high level of formal education.	159	1.00	5.00	2.9748	1.061
All school-age children in my household are currently enrolled in formal education.	159	2.00	5.00	3.2704	1.004
I can easily read and understand written information in my primary language	159	2.00	5.00	3.4843	.8631
Valid N (listwise)	**159**			**3.3763**	**0.993**

Source: Field data, 2025

The results on healthcare services access produced a mean score of 3.36 with an SD of 1.166. This indicated that healthcare was moderately accessible, though the relatively high variability suggested uneven service delivery across different communities. The implication was that while some respondents had consistent access to healthcare, others continued to face significant challenges in meeting their health needs.

The availability of clean water showed the highest performance with a mean of 3.72 and an SD of 0.826. This reflected that water accessibility had improved in most communities, with less variation across respondents. The implication was that efforts to expand access to safe water were relatively successful, though the score still indicated that universal access had not yet been fully achieved.

Sanitation facilities recorded a mean of 3.44 and an SD of 1.040. These results suggested moderate adequacy in sanitation provision, but the relatively high standard deviation pointed to unequal access among households. The implication was that while progress had been made, disparities in sanitation infrastructure continued to pose health risks in some areas.

Education outcomes reflected more concerning findings. The mean score for respondents completing higher levels of formal education was 2.97 with an SD of 1.061, representing the lowest among all indicators. This suggested that education attainment remained limited, with significant challenges in expanding opportunities for advanced learning. School enrolment for children in households scored slightly higher at a mean of 3.27 and an SD of 1.004, indicating moderate performance but still reflecting gaps in consistent access to education. These results implied that while enrolment efforts had improved, retention and completion remained problematic.

Literacy and comprehension skills received a mean score of 3.48 with an SD of 0.863. This reflected relatively strong performance in basic education outcomes with less variation across respondents. The implication was that most individuals possessed functional literacy, though challenges persisted in ensuring higher levels of educational achievement.

The overall mean score of 3.38 with an SD of 0.993 indicated that the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Rukungiri District had achieved a moderate level of success across the developmental dimensions assessed. The aggregate result suggested that while notable progress had been made in areas such as access to clean water, sanitation, and literacy, challenges remained in healthcare accessibility, school enrolment, and especially in the completion of higher levels of formal education. The moderate overall mean coupled with a relatively consistent standard deviation implied that programme delivery was partially effective but uneven, necessitating stronger and more inclusive strategies to enhance equity, sustainability, and long-term impact of poverty eradication initiatives.

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Linear Regression Analysis on Stakeholders Engagement and Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

The study sought to establish the extent to which stakeholders' engagement influence implementation of poverty eradication programs in Kanungu district, Uganda.

Table 6: Model Summary Stakeholders Engagementon Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.029[a]	.001	-.006	.79923

a. Predictors: (Constant), Stakeholders Engagement

Source: Field Data, 2025

The model summary results in Table 6 showed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.029, indicating an extremely weak positive relationship between stakeholders' engagement and the implementation of poverty eradication programmes. This suggested that changes in stakeholders' engagement had almost no linear association with changes in programme implementation outcomes.

The coefficient of determination (R Square) was 0.001, meaning that stakeholders' engagement accounted for only 0.1% of the variance in the implementation of poverty eradication programmes. This implied that virtually all variation in programme implementation was influenced by other factors not captured in the model. The Adjusted R Square value of -0.006 further demonstrated that the predictive capacity of the model was extremely poor. A negative adjusted value implied that the inclusion of stakeholders' engagement as a predictor did not improve the explanatory power of the model, and the model performed worse than simply using the mean values of the dependent variable.

The standard error of the estimate was 0.79923, reflecting a relatively large amount of unexplained variation around the regression line. This high error margin confirmed that the implementation of poverty eradication programmes could not be reliably predicted using stakeholders' engagement alone.

These results indicated that stakeholders' engagement, as measured in this study, had negligible influence on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District. The implication was that while engagement structures may have been present, they were either weak, tokenistic, or not effectively integrated into decision-making and programme delivery. This suggested that programme implementation was largely driven by other determinants such as government policies, resource allocation, institutional capacity, and socio-economic conditions. For stakeholders' engagement to make a meaningful contribution, there was a need for more inclusive mechanisms, stronger partnerships, and deliberate efforts to ensure that community voices and contributions directly informed programme design, implementation, and monitoring.

Table 7: ANOVA on Stakeholders Engagementand Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.084	1	.084	.132	.717[b]
	Residual	100.287	157	.639		
	Total	100.372	158			

a. Dependent Variable: Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

b. Predictors: (Constant Stakeholders Engagement

Source: Field Data, 2025

The ANOVA results indicated that the regression model examining the effect of stakeholders' engagement on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes was not statistically significant. The F-statistic was 0.132 with a significance value ($p = 0.717$), which was far greater than the 0.05 threshold. This meant that the null hypothesis could not be rejected, confirming that stakeholders' engagement had no statistically significant effect on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District.

The regression sum of squares was only 0.084, compared to a residual sum of squares of 100.287. This demonstrated that the model explained an extremely small fraction of the total variation in programme implementation, with the vast majority of the variance being left unexplained. With one degree of freedom assigned to regression and 157 to residual, the mean square for regression (0.084) was substantially smaller than the mean square for residual (0.639). This further reinforced the weakness of the regression model and the limited contribution of stakeholders' engagement as a predictor variable.

The implication of these findings was that stakeholders' engagement, as structured or practised in this setting, did not significantly influence programme implementation outcomes. This suggested that while stakeholders may have been present in some processes, their involvement was likely superficial, poorly coordinated, or lacking direct influence on resource allocation and decision-making. Effective implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District may therefore be more dependent on institutional frameworks, financial investment, policy direction, and governance mechanisms rather than the existing forms of stakeholder participation. Strengthening stakeholder involvement to move beyond formality towards genuine empowerment and collaboration could enhance programme ownership, accountability, and sustainability in the long term.

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Table 8 Coefficients for Stakeholders Engagementon Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Unstandardized Coefficients Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	3.130	.246		12.721	.000
	Stakeholders Engagement	-.029	.080	-.029	-.364	.717

a. Dependent Variable: Implementation of Poverty Eradication Programs

Source: Field Data, 2025

The coefficients results in Table 8 showed that the unstandardized coefficient (B) for stakeholders' engagement was -0.029. This indicated a very slight negative relationship, meaning that for every one-unit increase in stakeholders' engagement, the implementation of poverty eradication programmes would decrease by 0.029 units. Given the very small value of this coefficient, the practical effect was negligible. The standard error of 0.080 suggested that the estimate was unstable and not precise enough to draw meaningful conclusions.

The standardized coefficient (Beta) was also -0.029, confirming the weakness and direction of the relationship. This implied that stakeholders' engagement contributed very little to predicting changes in programme implementation compared to other potential factors. The t-value of -0.364, together with a significance level ($p = 0.717$), demonstrated that this relationship was statistically insignificant at the 5% significance threshold. As a result, the null hypothesis could not be rejected, confirming that stakeholders' engagement did not significantly affect programme implementation in Kanungu District.

The constant value was 3.130 with a significance level of $p < 0.001$, which indicated that even in the absence of stakeholders' engagement, there existed a baseline level of poverty eradication programme implementation. This finding suggested that programme implementation was likely being driven by other forces such as government policies, donor funding, administrative structures, or external socio-economic factors, rather than stakeholder involvement.

The implication of these findings was that stakeholders' engagement, in its existing form, had little to no meaningful impact on poverty eradication programme outcomes in the district. This could point to weaknesses in how engagement mechanisms were designed or applied, possibly being limited to symbolic participation without actual decision-making influence. For engagement to become a significant driver of programmesuccess, there was need to strengthen the inclusiveness, relevance, and authority of stakeholder participation. Empowering stakeholders to play more active roles in planning, resource allocation, monitoring, and evaluation would not only increase programme effectiveness but also enhance accountability and sustainability in poverty eradication efforts.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study indicated that stakeholders' engagement had negligible influence on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District, Uganda. The regression analysis showed an almost zero correlation, an insignificant F-value, and non-significant coefficients, suggesting that current forms of stakeholder engagement were ineffective in driving programme outcomes. These findings partially align with and partially diverge from previous empirical research on stakeholder engagement in development and poverty reduction contexts.

The study by O'Brien et al. (2021) found that limited stakeholder participation, inexperienced facilitation, and poorly applied engagement methods constrained the effectiveness of remediation projects in developing countries. This aligns closely with the current findings, as both studies highlight that stakeholder engagement, when weak or inadequately implemented, fails to influence project outcomes. In both cases, structural and operational limitations within local contexts appear to undermine the potential benefits of stakeholder participation.

In contrast, Jun and Kim (2021) demonstrated that institutionalised governance mechanisms and structured stakeholder management enhanced engagement and improved programme outcomes in the private sector context of South Korea. This contrasts with the current findings, where the absence of robust frameworks in Kanungu District may explain why stakeholders' engagement had no measurable impact on poverty eradication programme implementation. The discrepancy suggests that context-specific governance structures and formalised processes are crucial for translating stakeholder involvement into tangible programme results.

Shaukat et al. (2022) found that stakeholder engagement had an insignificant moderating effect on project success in the context of sustainable project management in Pakistan. These findings are in agreement with the present study, as both indicate that engagement alone, without strong complementary mechanisms or capacity, may not significantly affect programme or project outcomes. This suggests that mere participation does not automatically translate into effective implementation unless supported by other strategic or managerial factors.

The study by Ansu-Mensah et al. (2021) reported that effective stakeholder involvement was critical for the relevance and success of CSR initiatives in the Ghanaian mining sector. This finding diverges from the current results, implying that in contexts where stakeholder engagement is meaningful, structured, and sustained, it can positively influence programme outcomes. The weak influence observed

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in Kanungu District could therefore be attributed to insufficient stakeholder empowerment, limited decision-making authority, and a lack of strategic coordination among actors.

Finally, Pira (2024) demonstrated that robust engagement of beneficiaries and intermediaries using design thinking significantly enhanced poverty reduction initiatives. This contrasts with the current study, as Kanungu District's stakeholders' engagement was largely symbolic or fragmented, preventing effective input into programme planning and implementation. The implication is that active, well-facilitated, and structured stakeholder involvement is essential for achieving measurable impact in poverty alleviation efforts.

The current findings therefore are consistent with studies highlighting the ineffectiveness of weak or poorly structured engagement, but they diverge from research showing positive outcomes where stakeholder participation is systematic, empowered, and integrated into governance and programme design. This underscores the importance of strengthening institutional frameworks, formal engagement mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives to ensure that stakeholder participation can meaningfully contribute to the successful implementation of poverty eradication programmes.

Conclusion

The study investigated the influence of stakeholders' engagement on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District, Uganda. The findings revealed that stakeholders' engagement, as currently practised, had negligible influence on programme implementation. Descriptive analysis indicated that engagement practices were inconsistent and weak, with low mean scores across dimensions such as inclusion of diverse groups, mechanisms for marginalised voices, participatory meetings, cross-sector partnerships, and multi-stakeholder decision-making. These results highlighted that while some efforts at engagement existed, they were largely symbolic, fragmented, or poorly institutionalised, limiting their effectiveness in enhancing programme outcomes.

The regression analysis further confirmed the weak relationship between stakeholders' engagement and programme implementation. The model summary showed an almost zero correlation ($R = 0.029$) and an R^2 of 0.001, indicating that engagement accounted for only 0.1% of the variance in implementation outcomes. ANOVA results demonstrated the regression model was not statistically significant ($F = 0.132$, $p = 0.717$), while coefficient analysis showed a minimal negative effect of stakeholders' engagement on programme implementation ($B = -0.029$, $p = 0.717$). These results collectively suggest that the current form of stakeholders' engagement in Kanungu District is ineffective in influencing the successful implementation of poverty eradication programmes.

Comparative analysis with existing literature indicated that the weak influence of stakeholder engagement in this study is consistent with findings from contexts where participation is poorly structured, inadequately resourced, or tokenistic. However, it contrasts with studies in which structured governance, formal engagement mechanisms, and empowerment of stakeholders significantly enhanced programme outcomes. This suggests that effective stakeholder engagement requires not only the presence of participatory structures but also their proper operationalisation, institutionalisation, and integration into programme planning and decision-making.

Therefore, the study concludes that the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District is largely driven by factors other than stakeholder engagement, such as government policies, resource allocation, and institutional capacity. The negligible impact of current engagement practices underscores the need for deliberate strategies to strengthen stakeholder participation. Enhancing inclusivity, building capacity for meaningful involvement, establishing formalised mechanisms for dialogue and decision-making, and promoting cross-sector collaboration are critical to ensuring that stakeholders can contribute effectively to the design, implementation, and sustainability of poverty eradication programmes. Strengthening these areas will not only improve programme outcomes but also foster accountability, ownership, and long-term socio-economic development in the district.

Recommendations

Based on the findings that stakeholders' engagement had minimal influence on the implementation of poverty eradication programmes in Kanungu District, the study proposes the following recommendations. These focus on actions and strategies for different categories of stakeholders to strengthen participation, improve programme effectiveness, and promote sustainability.

Government and Policy Makers

The study revealed that stakeholder engagement was weak and poorly institutionalised. The government should establish formal frameworks and guidelines to ensure structured and inclusive stakeholder participation in poverty eradication programmes. This could involve creating multi-stakeholder committees at district and sub-county levels, mandating regular consultation with community representatives, and integrating stakeholder feedback into programme planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Additionally, policy incentives should encourage transparency, accountability, and the inclusion of marginalised groups in programme decision-making.

Local Community and Beneficiaries

Communities and programme beneficiaries should be empowered to actively participate in programme design and monitoring. Capacity-building initiatives such as community training workshops, awareness campaigns, and participatory planning sessions can equip residents with the knowledge and skills needed to engage meaningfully. The establishment of local feedback mechanisms, such as suggestion forums or digital reporting platforms, can ensure that the voices of

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ordinary citizens, particularly women and marginalised groups, are heard and acted upon.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Civil Society

NGOs and civil society organisations should facilitate structured engagement by serving as intermediaries between government agencies and communities. They can implement participatory monitoring and evaluation systems, advocate for inclusive policies, and provide technical support to both implementers and beneficiaries. NGOs can also promote cross-sector collaborations, linking communities with private sector partners and development agencies to mobilise additional resources and expertise for programme implementation.

Private Sector and Corporate Actors

Private sector actors can strengthen poverty eradication programmes by institutionalising corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives and adopting strategic stakeholder engagement practices. Businesses should align their projects with community needs, support capacity-building initiatives, and participate in multi-stakeholder platforms to ensure coordinated action. The private sector can also provide funding, technical skills, and logistical support to enhance programme reach and impact, particularly in areas such as vocational training, infrastructure, and access to basic services.

Programme Implementers and Project Managers

Project managers should adopt participatory approaches in all stages of programme implementation. This includes conducting stakeholder mapping to identify key actors, designing engagement plans tailored to local contexts, and establishing monitoring and evaluation systems that track stakeholder contributions and programme outcomes. Implementers should also prioritise inclusivity, ensuring that vulnerable populations have equal opportunities to participate and influence decision-making processes.

Cross-Sector Collaboration

All stakeholders should prioritise coordinated efforts to create synergies in poverty eradication initiatives. Regular joint planning meetings, information sharing, and collaborative problem-solving can reduce duplication, optimise resource use, and improve the sustainability of programmes. Institutionalising mechanisms for ongoing dialogue between government, communities, NGOs, and the private sector will ensure that stakeholder engagement moves beyond tokenistic consultation to genuine influence on programme outcomes.

Limitations of the study

This study faced certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, data collection relied exclusively on structured questionnaires, without the use of interviews, focus group discussions, or observational methods. This limited the depth and richness of the information obtained, particularly regarding stakeholders' perceptions, motivations, and the contextual factors influencing programme implementation. As a result, the study was unable to fully capture the nuanced mechanisms through which stakeholder engagement affects poverty eradication initiatives.

Second, the study was conducted solely in Kanungu District, Uganda, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. Socio-economic conditions, governance structures, and community engagement practices in Kanungu District may differ from those in other districts or regions. This implies that the weak relationship observed between stakeholder engagement and programme implementation could be specific to this context, and the results may not fully reflect the dynamics of stakeholder participation in poverty eradication programmes elsewhere.

Recommendations for future research

Future research should seek to build on the findings of this study by addressing its limitations and exploring additional dimensions of stakeholder engagement in poverty eradication programmes. One area for further investigation is the use of mixed-methods approaches, incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and case studies. This would provide richer insights into stakeholders' perceptions, motivations, and experiences, and allow a more nuanced understanding of how engagement mechanisms influence programme implementation.

Research could also expand the geographical scope to include multiple districts or regions within Uganda, or comparative studies across different countries. Such studies would help determine whether the weak influence of stakeholders' engagement observed in Kanungu District is context-specific or reflective of broader patterns in similar socio-economic and governance environments.

Future studies may also examine the role of specific types of stakeholders, such as local government officials, NGOs, private sector actors, and community leaders, and the interaction between these groups in influencing programme outcomes. Investigating how formal governance structures, capacity-building initiatives, and resource allocation mediate the relationship between stakeholder engagement and programme success could provide actionable insights for policy and practice.

Additionally, longitudinal research designs are recommended to track changes in stakeholder engagement and programme effectiveness over time. This would allow researchers to assess the sustainability of engagement strategies and their long-term impact on poverty eradication efforts.

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