

Examining Project Cycle Management in the Community Projects Under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Zambia: Case Study of Chipata City Council, Eastern Province

Dr. Lewis Mwape¹, Prof. Dr. Atanga Desmond Funwie²,
Prof. Pelekelo Kabundula³

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²Kesmond International University (KIU)- Lead Supervisor

³Kesmond Research Institute Limited, Zambia (Associate Supervisor)

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Project Cycle Management (PCM) in community projects funded under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Zambia, focusing on Chipata District. The research examined the extent of PCM application, governance structures, challenges, and strategies for improvement.

Methodology: A descriptive research cross-sectional approach was applied. The study utilized structured interviews, focus group discussions, and surveys targeting key stakeholders, including Ward Development Committees (WDCs), Constituency Development Fund Committees (CDFCs), contractors, and other community formations. Data collection was conducted through structured questionnaires. The target population for the study was 150 stakeholders, and a sample size of 74 respondents was selected using stratified random sampling. Quantitative data was analyzed descriptively and inferentially using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS v23.0). Results were then presented in tables, diagrams, and charts.

Findings: The results showed that governance structures, stakeholder participation, and project monitoring significantly impact project success. Weak governance mechanisms, political interference, and bureaucratic delays negatively affect project implementation. Strengthening accountability mechanisms, enhancing capacity-building programs, and ensuring participatory governance were identified as critical improvement areas.

Contribution to Theory, Policy, and Practice: The study recommends that CDF projects adopt structured PCM approaches to enhance transparency and accountability. Strengthening governance frameworks, improving community engagement, and digitalizing project monitoring can lead to more effective project outcomes. This study contributes to PCM theory by highlighting governance and participatory challenges in decentralized funding models.

Keywords: Project Cycle Management, Community Development, Constituency Development Fund, Governance, Zambia

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Globally, Project Cycle Management (PCM) is a crucial framework used to plan, implement, and evaluate development initiatives effectively (European Commission, 2004). PCM provides a structured approach for managing projects, ensuring accountability, transparency, and efficiency. International organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have emphasized the importance of PCM in improving development outcomes, particularly in community-driven projects (World Bank, 2019).

In Africa, PCM has been widely applied in community-based development projects funded through decentralized financial mechanisms, such as the Constituency Development Funds (CDF). Many African countries, including Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa, have adopted CDF as a strategy to enhance local development and empower communities (Kimenyi, 2005). However, studies indicate that weak governance structures, corruption, and limited community participation have hindered the effectiveness of these fund (Chinsinga, 2009). Despite these challenges, PCM remains a vital tool for enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of development projects in Africa (UNDP, 2021).

In Zambia, the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was introduced in 1995 as part of the government's decentralization efforts to improve service delivery at the grassroots level (Government of Zambia, 2018). The fund aims to support community-initiated projects in various sectors including; education, health, and infrastructure. However, despite increased allocations in recent years, CDF-funded projects continue to face challenges related to poor planning, weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and political interference (Zulu & Mphande, 2020). Understanding the application of PCM in these projects is critical to improving their impact and ensuring sustainable development outcomes in Zambia.

1.2 Problem Statement

The implementation of community projects under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Zambia faces significant challenges. Despite increased allocations, many projects suffer from inefficiencies, delays, and mismanagement due to weak governance structures, poor project planning, and inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Zulu & Mphande, 2020). The absence of clear accountability frameworks often leads to misallocation of funds and project failures (World Bank, 2019).

These challenges have far-reaching implications for various stakeholders, including community members, local government authorities, and project implementers. Communities that rely on CDF projects for essential services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, often experience service delivery failures, leading to dissatisfaction and underdevelopment (Government of Zambia, 2018). Additionally, local government officials and project implementers face difficulties in ensuring effective resource utilization, resulting in project inefficiencies and reduced trust in public institutions (Chinsinga, 2009).

This study is crucial in addressing existing knowledge gaps regarding the effectiveness of Project Cycle Management (PCM) in CDF-funded projects. While previous studies have examined financial allocations and corruption risks, limited research has focused on the role of PCM in improving project governance, efficiency, and sustainability (Kimenyi, 2005). By evaluating the PCM framework within CDF-funded projects, this study provides practical recommendations for strengthening governance structures, enhancing stakeholder participation, and improving overall project performance in Zambia.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Project Cycle Management (PCM) is underpinned by several theoretical frameworks that guide its application in community development projects.

1) Decentralization Theory

Dennis A. Rondinelli (1981). This theory posits that decentralization improves governance by bringing decision-making closer to the people, enhancing local participation and accountability (Rondinelli, 1981). It identifies political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization as key dimensions. The study applies this theory to assess how decentralized CDF projects impact community development in Zambia and the extent to which local governance structures enhance or hinder PCM effectiveness (Zulu & Mphande, 2020).

2) Project Cycle Management Framework

European Commission (2004) PCM provides a structured methodology for planning, implementing, and evaluating projects, ensuring transparency, accountability, and efficiency (European Commission, 2004). While PCM offers systematic project implementation, critics argue that rigid adherence to phases may limit adaptability in dynamic project environments (Chinsinga, 2009). This study assesses how the PCM framework can be adapted to improve governance and project execution under the CDF model in Zambia.

3) Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, formulated by Robert D. Putnam (1993), emphasizes the role of social networks, trust, and civic engagement in enhancing governance and development outcomes. Other theorists, including Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1990), and Fukuyama (1995), have expanded on this concept. However, Kimenyi (2005) critiques social capital, arguing that it can reinforce inequalities if access to networks is exclusive. The theory's primary tenets include bonding social capital, which strengthens ties within homogeneous groups, bridging social capital, which connects diverse groups for resource sharing, and linking social capital, which builds relationships between communities and institutions. This study applies social capital theory to assess how stakeholder engagement and community participation influence the success of CDF projects in Zambia.

4) Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory, introduced by Julian Rappaport (1987), explains how individuals, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives through participation in decision-making and capacity-building. Other proponents include Zimmerman (1995), Perkins & Zimmerman (1995), and Freire (1970). Critics, such as Freire (1970), argue that empowerment efforts may be undermined by systemic inequalities and resistance from powerful elites. The key principles of this theory include personal empowerment (building self-efficacy and confidence), community empowerment (strengthening collective agency and participation), and political empowerment (advocating for systemic change and equitable resource distribution). This theory provides insights into designing CDF projects that promote local ownership, participation, and sustainable community development.

5) Development Communication Theory

Development Communication Theory, pioneered by Wilbur Schramm (1954), highlights the role of communication in engaging communities, promoting participation, and facilitating social change. Other significant contributors include Rogers (1962), Servaes (2008), and Gumucio-Dagron (2003). Critics such as Melkote & Steeves (2001) argue that development communication often prioritizes external agendas over grassroots perspectives. The major tenets of this theory include participatory communication (encouraging community dialogue and decision-making), transparency and accountability (promoting

open information-sharing), and the use of media and technology (enhancing outreach and feedback mechanisms). This study employs development communication theory to guide strategies for engaging stakeholders and ensuring transparent communication in CDF project implementation.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a conceptual framework that links governance structures, PCM methodologies, and project outcomes. Effective PCM practices, enhanced stakeholder participation, and improved accountability mechanisms are expected to lead to successful project implementation and community development.

2.3 Key Components of the Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables

Community Participation in CDF Projects: This variable examines the level of community engagement in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects. Community involvement ensures that projects address local needs and enhance sustainability (Chambers, 2006; Moser, 2005). In Chipata District, assessing community participation provides insights into how grassroots involvement impacts project success.

Governance Structures: Effective governance mechanisms at the community, district, and provincial levels are critical for ensuring project coordination, accountability, and transparency. The study investigated the decision-making processes and roles of various stakeholders in CDF-funded projects in Chipata District (Bryson et al., 2013; Kabeer, 2005). Strong governance structures are essential for minimizing corruption and enhancing project efficiency (Mayne, 2008).

Project Management Frameworks: This component analyzes methodologies, tools, and best practices for planning, executing, monitoring, and evaluating projects under the CDF. Examining existing frameworks in Chipata District provides insights into their adequacy and impact on project performance (Sommerville & Sibbald, 2007; European Commission, 2010). Strong project management frameworks contribute to timely, cost-effective, and high-quality project delivery (Gertler et al., 2011).

Application of PCM Principles: This variable assesses adherence to PCM principles, such as structured planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation, in project implementation (Gasper, 2000; Mikkelsen, 2005). The study evaluates the effectiveness of PCM methodologies in ensuring systematic project management and sustainable development outcomes in Chipata District (Bryson et al., 2013).

Dependent Variable

Project Outcomes: The overall success of CDF-funded community projects is measured based on four key indicators:

Timeliness: Ensuring projects adhere to set schedules and deadlines is critical for maintaining community trust and optimizing resource utilization (Kerzner, 2013; Pinto, 2010).

Cost-effectiveness: Efficient budget management is essential in achieving project objectives within financial constraints, particularly in resource-limited CDF-funded projects (Flyvbjerg, 2014).

Success of the Project: Evaluating whether projects meet predefined objectives helps determine their overall effectiveness and impact (Turner, 2009).

Quality of Delivery: Assessing the standard of project outputs ensures long-term sustainability and compliance with required specifications (Jafari & Dlamini, 2016; Meredith & Mantel, 2017).

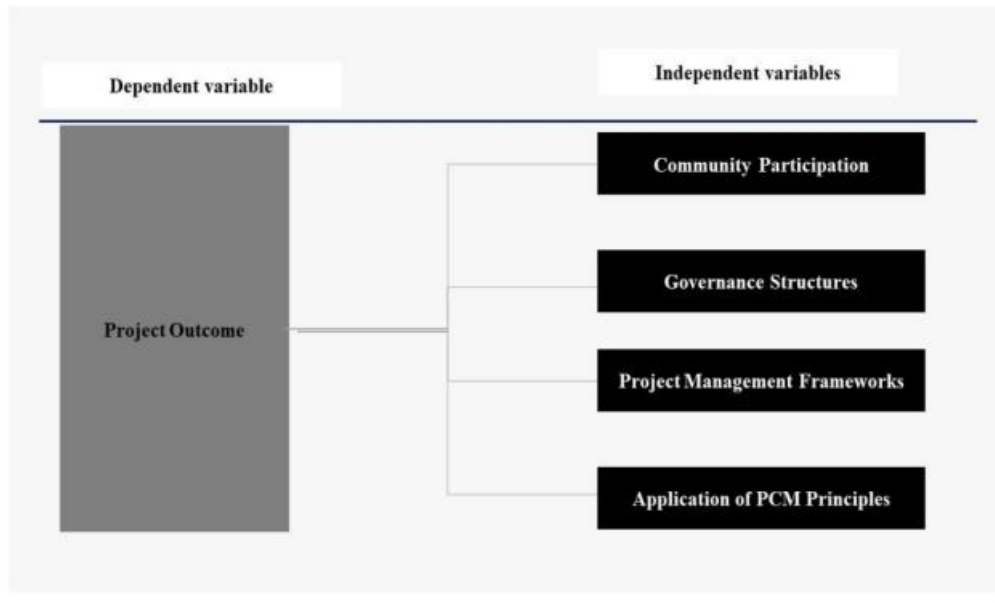


Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher 2024

2.3 Research Gaps

Existing studies on CDF in Zambia have largely focused on financial allocations and corruption risks (World Bank, 2019). However, limited research has examined how PCM methodologies impact project governance and efficiency. This study addresses this gap by analyzing PCM practices and their effectiveness in the Zambian context.

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a descriptive, explanatory, and prospective open-label observational study design. The research was conducted in Chipata District, Zambia, focusing on community projects funded under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). The target population comprised CDF stakeholders, including Ward Development Committees (WDCs), Constituency Development Fund Committees (CDFCs), council officials, contractors, and community members. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 74 respondents from a total population of 150 stakeholders. This approach ensured that only individuals with direct involvement and expertise in CDF project implementation were included in the study.

4.0 FINDINGS

This chapter presents the key findings from the study on the implementation of Project Cycle Management (PCM) in Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects. The findings are structured based on thematic areas, including PCM knowledge and understanding, project identification and design, project implementation and monitoring, evaluation and closure, capacity building, and stakeholder collaboration. Data was collected through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with selected members of Ward Development Committees (WDCs), Constituency and Development Fund Committees (CDFCs), and other relevant stakeholders. The results provide insight into the level of awareness, challenges faced, and areas for improvement in PCM processes within CDF projects.

Table 1: PCM Knowledge and Understanding among Community

Question	Response	Frequency (n=22)	Percent (%)
Understanding of PCM	Poor	10	45%
	Fair	5	22%
	Good	4	18%
	Very Good	3	13%
	Excellent	0	0%

Table 1 PCM Knowledge and Understanding

Source: Researcher 2024

The data indicates that most respondents have limited knowledge of Project Cycle Management (PCM). 45% of respondents reported a poor understanding of PCM especially community structures mainly WDCs and CDFs, while 22% had a fair understanding and this was largely from a mix of Provincial and District Heads of Departments (HoDs). Only 18% rated their knowledge as good, and 13% as very good and this was mainly from Provincial Heads of Department (PHoDs), with none rating their knowledge as excellent. This suggests that while respondents may have general knowledge of project management cycle of Community Projects under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), there is a knowledge gap specifically related to PCM methodology of managing Community Projects.

Table 2: Project Identification and Design

Question	Response	Frequency (n=74)	Percent (%)
<i>Frequency of assisting WDC in identifying projects</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	30	40.5%
	<i>Sometimes</i>	20	27%
	<i>Often</i>	15	20.3%
	<i>Always</i>	9	12.2%
<i>Role in ensuring project design aligns with community needs</i>	<i>Facilitating Community Engagement</i>	20	27%
	<i>Conducting Needs Assessments</i>	15	20.3%
	<i>Providing Technical Guidance</i>	10	13.5%
	<i>None of the Above</i>	29	39.2%
<i>Methods for stakeholder engagement</i>	<i>Public Meetings</i>	18	24.3%
	<i>Community Surveys</i>	10	13.5%
	<i>Focus Groups</i>	8	10.8%
	<i>No Engagement</i>	38	51.4%

Table 2 Project Identification and Design

Source: Researcher 2024

The results indicate a lower level of engagement in project identification and design. A significant portion (40.5%) of respondents rarely assist in identifying projects, and only 12.2% are always involved. Additionally, 39.2% do not contribute to ensuring that project designs align with community needs, and over half (51.4%) report no stakeholder engagement. This suggests major gaps in participation, which could negatively impact project relevance and effectiveness.

Table 3: Project Implementation and Monitoring

<i>Question</i>	<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency (n=74)</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
<i>Challenges in project implementation</i>	<i>Limited Community Participation</i>	30	40.5%
	<i>Inadequate Funding (Project costing was underestimated)</i>	16	21.6%
	<i>Poor Coordination</i>	10	13.5%
	<i>Delayed Funding</i>	18	24.3%
<i>Frequency of project monitoring</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	30	40.5%
	<i>Sometimes</i>	25	33.8%
	<i>Often</i>	12	16.2%
	<i>Always</i>	7	9.5%
<i>Methods used for project monitoring</i>	<i>Site Visits</i>	20	27%
	<i>Regular Meetings</i>	15	20.3%
	<i>Digital Tracking Tools</i>	10	13.5%
	<i>No Monitoring Conducted</i>	29	39.2%

Table 3 Project Implementation and Monitoring

Source: Research 2024

Limited Community Participation accounted for close to half of the respondents, about 40.5 percent showed that most projects lacked proper community consultation, leading to an absence of ownership and resistance from beneficiaries. The Study revealed that community participation is mostly compromised along the way during the approval processes of Community Projects under the CDF. The 2022 CDF guidelines provide a clear guidance that all community projects should be initiated by the community themselves through established WDCs (MLGRD, 2022). However, the Study disclosed that even though WDCs submitted their community prioritized projects, the CDFCs through the area Members of Parliament often had a significant influence over what was determined to be community needs. The challenge with this is that community participation was compromised at the grassroots as WDCs are the closest structures to the people. The challenge of limited community engagement was further observed in the way contractors are mobilized on sight. Respondents indicated that they were often caught unaware when contractors were mobilized on site and start to work without their knowledge and whenever inquiry

was done, they would be told to contact the Local Authority (Chipata City Council Management). *This already sidelines the community from getting involved in the implementation process of the project at an initial stage. This also to a larger extent compromised the extent of community participation in the project monitoring and evaluation.*

Delayed Funding (24.3%) emerged as another most significant issue, causing disruptions in project timelines, increased costs, and difficulties in sustaining community trust. Many projects stalled due to prolonged fund disbursement processes. Inadequate Funding was largely due to poor project costing, where initial estimates did not accurately reflect actual financial needs. This led to unfinished projects or forced budget cuts. On the other hand, **Local Government Administration Circular No. 001 of 2022** instructed Councils to manage CDF resources through centralized account aimed at ensuring efficient and transparent use of CDF resources. However, the process of requisitions of funds from the centralised account has attendant challenges mainly delayed disbursement affecting timely implementation of projects. Inadequate Funding was another challenge highlighted by respondents, accounting for 21.6 percent respondents out of 74 interviewed regarding funding to the CDF Community projects indicated that inadequate funding allocated to projects compromised quality and timeliness. Inadequate funding that is being talked about in this study relates to funding allocated by the Constituency Development Fund Committees to a project and not funding that is given to Constituencies to manage community projects. CDF funding generally has expanded with community project component getting over seventeen million kwacha (K17, 657,020.74) for the 2025 funding as presented by the Minister of Finance during the budget presentation (GRZ, 2024). The challenge comes in when the CDFCs prioritize more projects for that particular year circle which would subsequently result in stumpy funding given to a particular project. Directly, this results in delays in the project implementation process as project would start going through variations and further approvals for the changes. This relates to complaints raised by Engineers from the Council who indicated that:

“At times we made Bills of Quantities (BOQs) with such consideration, but that during the approval processes of a project, the project allocated amount were revised by some approving authorities, mainly the CDFC claiming overrated pricing,” Engineers at Chipata City Council said.

As a result of this, a compromise in resource commitment to various Community Projects takes precedence and project completion within the scheduled time fail and projects end up crossing over into another year.

This challenge was also highlighted in the 2023 Auditor general’s report (Auditor General’s report on CDF, 2023) and goes against the stipulated guidelines for the CDF which indicates that all projects must be procured and completed within a year (MLGRD, 2022).

Poor Coordination (13.5%) was a notable challenge, as miscommunication among key stakeholders such as WDCs, CDFCs, and funding bodies delayed decision-making and resource allocation.

Project Monitoring Frequency: Concerning, Project Monitoring Frequency, about 40.5% of respondents rarely conducted monitoring, increasing the risk of mismanagement and delays. Only 9.5% always monitored projects, showing a need for stronger oversight mechanisms.

Table 5: PCM Capacity Building and Support

Question	Response	Frequency (n=74)	Percent (%)
Training programs attended	Project Review Workshops	30	40.5%
	Capacity Building Training	25	33.8%

	<i>Mentorship Programs</i>	19	25.7%
<i>Additional support needed</i>	<i>Technical Assistance</i>	34	45.9%
	<i>More Training Programs</i>	22	29.7%
	<i>PCM Guidelines and Tools</i>	18	24.3%
<i>Effectiveness of technical assistance</i>	<i>Not Effective</i>	8	10.8%
	<i>Moderately Effective</i>	15	20.3%
	<i>Effective</i>	28	37.8%
	<i>Very Effective</i>	23	31.1%

Table 4 PCM Capacity Building and Support

Source: Researcher

Workshops (40.5%) were the most common training format, but mentorship programs (25.7%) are less frequent. Many respondents (45.9%) feel they need more technical assistance, and 31.1% rate existing support as "Very Effective," while 10.8% find it ineffective. There is room for improvement in resource availability and support systems.

The analysis highlights key strengths and areas for improvement in CDF project management. While understanding and application of PCM are generally strong, challenges persist in project sustainability, funding, and coordination. Strengthening stakeholder engagement, increasing digital monitoring, and providing additional training and technical support can enhance project outcomes.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This research explored the application of Project Cycle Management (PCM) in managing Constituency Development Fund (CDF)-supported community projects in Chipata District, Zambia. The study confirmed PCM's crucial role in enhancing project efficiency, transparency, and accountability. However, challenges such as political interference, weak governance structures, inadequate community participation, and insufficient monitoring and evaluation were identified as major barriers to effective project implementation.

To address these issues, the study recommends the adoption of structured PCM tools, including the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), Results-Based Management (RBM), and robust Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks. Additionally, stakeholder capacity-building and improved governance mechanisms are essential to ensuring the success of CDF-funded projects.

A key contribution of this research is the introduction of the Constituency Development Fund Community Project Participatory (CDF-CPP) Model, a comprehensive framework designed to enhance community involvement throughout the project cycle

The CDF Community Project Participatory (CDF-CPP) Model

Model Overview

The Constituency Development Fund Community Projects Participatory (CDF-CPP) Model is a comprehensive framework that has been developed to ensure active community involvement in all stages of project development and implementation of the Community Projects under CDF. This model aims to promote empowerment, sustainability, and accountability.

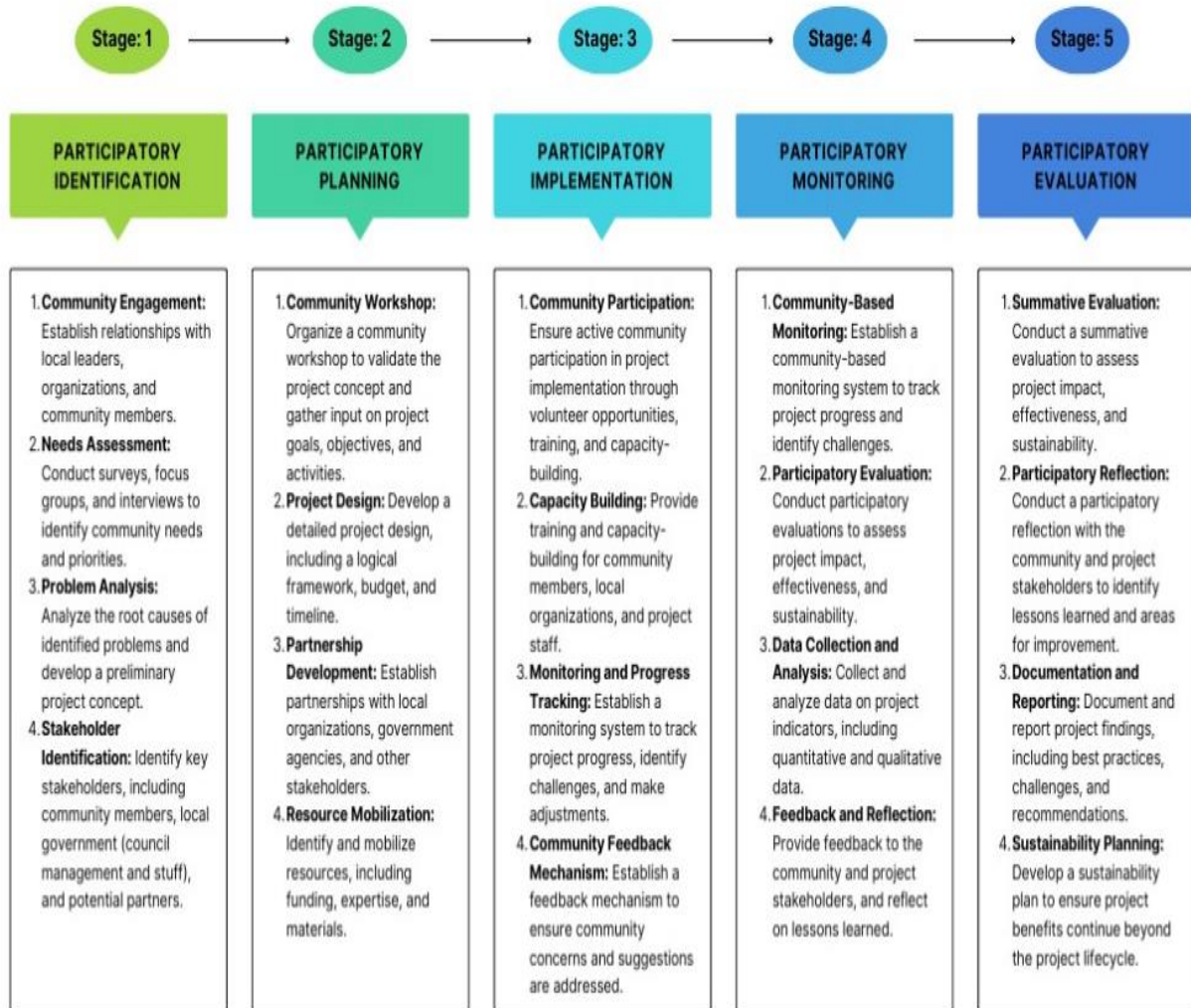


Figure 2 Constituency Development Fund Community Project Participatory (CDF-CPP) Model

Source: Researcher 2024

The model emphasizes participatory identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. It fosters community empowerment, sustainability, and accountability by embedding local knowledge into development processes. By implementing the CDF-CPP Model, stakeholders can ensure that CDF projects align with community needs, improve resource allocation, and create long-term developmental impact.

5.2 Recommendations

To improve the management of Constituency Development Fund (CDF)-supported community projects using Project Cycle Management (PCM), the study proposes the following policy measures:

- a. **Capacity Building for Local Committees** – Policymakers should enhance financial and technical training for Ward Development Committees (WDCs) and Constituency Development Committees (CDFCs) to improve local project management.
- b. **Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Enhancement** – Local authorities should implement structured systems for tracking project progress, assessing impacts, and ensuring proper utilization of CDF enhancing quality assurance.
- c. **Citizen Feedback Mechanisms** – Establishing platforms for community feedback on completed projects will help improve project planning and future fund allocations.
- d. **Inclusive Fund Distribution** – Priority should be given to marginalized groups such as women, youth, and people with disabilities to ensure equitable development focusing also on both economic and social infrastructure.
- e. **Digital Financial Management** – Implementing computerized payment systems will improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency in CDF fund distribution.
- f. **Financial Management Training** – Continuous capacity-building programs for local finance officers will ensure better financial accountability and prevent mismanagement of funds. Digitalisation will also be cardinal as this will also contribute to proper resource tracking and enhance transparency and accountability.

Areas for Further Research:

The study suggests additional research in the following areas to enhance PCM implementation:

- a) **Sustainability in PCM** – Examining ways to integrate long-term sustainability, climate resilience, and financial viability into PCM frameworks.
- b) **Risk Management** – Investigating adaptive risk management models for unpredictable environments, including political instability and economic shifts.
- c) **Agile and Adaptive PCM Approaches** – Exploring how agile methodologies and hybrid models can improve flexibility in project execution across different sectors.

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