

PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN GENDER EQUALITY ADVANCEMENT IN GARISSA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Despite decades of development efforts, gender inequality remains a persistent challenge in Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), including Garissa County. Women and marginalized groups continue to face limited participation in public decision-making and inadequate inclusion in project planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes. This exclusion undermines not only gender equity goals but also the effectiveness and sustainability of development interventions. Although participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) has gained traction as a people-centered and inclusive approach, its actual application in promoting gender equality at the local governance level remains underexplored, particularly in culturally conservative and resource-constrained regions like Garissa. This study sought to investigate the role of participatory monitoring and evaluation in advancing gender equality in Garissa County. Specifically, it examined how socio-economic factors, stakeholder collaboration influence the participation of women in M&E processes. The study was grounded in participatory development theory and gender-transformative evaluation frameworks. The research adopted a descriptive and exploratory design, utilizing a census approach to collect data from all 137 targeted respondents, including Ugatuzi na Kazi project beneficiaries, elected county assembly members, ward administrators, field supervisors, and a sub-county administrator. Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire that combined closed-ended Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative patterns and qualitative insights. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple regression analysis and correlation testing, with results presented in tables and charts. Diagnostic tests were also conducted to ensure model reliability. The qualitative responses were thematically analyzed to contextualize statistical findings. Descriptive results showed strong agreement that socio-economic and institutional factors shape women's involvement, with aggregate means above 3.8 across all variables. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between all independent variables and gender equality (r -values ranging from 0.642 to 0.792, $p < 0.05$). Regression results confirmed that the four predictors jointly explained 70.8% of the variance in gender equality advancement ($R = 0.861$, $R^2 = 0.709$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.708$, $n = 106$). The study concluded that participatory M&E is strongly influenced by socio-economic conditions, collaboration among stakeholders. It recommends targeted financial support to women, stronger multi-stakeholder frameworks, to enhance women's effective participation in M&E processes.

Key Words: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation, Gender Equality, Garissa County, Socio-Economic Factors, Stakeholder Collaboration

Background of the Study

In the pursuit of sustainable development, gender equality remains a cornerstone for inclusive progress (UN Women, 2023). In Sub-Saharan Africa, including Kenya, entrenched gender disparities continue to hinder the achievement of equitable social and economic development. Despite constitutional advancements and international commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), women especially in marginalized counties like Garissa often face systemic barriers in leadership, resource access, and project participation (UN Women, 2023; Mwangome, 2025).

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has emerged as a transformative strategy to bridge these gaps by ensuring that stakeholders, particularly women and marginalized communities, actively engage in the assessment, design, and feedback cycles of development programs. Recent studies underscore the significance of participatory approaches in producing context-specific data, fostering accountability, and promoting empowerment outcomes, especially in fragile or underserved regions (Tufan et al., 2022; Mungai & Wamai, 2021).

Evidence from Kilifi and Garissa counties in Kenya shows that involving women in participatory M&E processes enhances transparency, improves project ownership, and supports gender-responsive policy-making (Mwangome, 2025). Additionally, participatory M&E frameworks help challenge cultural norms that suppress women's voices in development interventions by embedding local perspectives into evaluative decisions (Nzomo & Omollo, 2023). These participatory dynamics shift power structures, enabling women not just as beneficiaries, but as co-creators of development impact.

However, the implementation of such frameworks is not without challenges. Contextual constraints, such as limited technical capacity, sociocultural resistance, and inadequate resource allocation, often limit the depth of women's participation in M&E processes in pastoralist regions like Garissa (Kariuki & Were, 2021). Furthermore, traditional M&E practices still dominate most county-level planning systems, which limits the transformative potential of more inclusive, bottom-up approaches.

This study, therefore, aimed to explore how participatory M&E contributes to gender equality advancement in Garissa County. By investigating the role of stakeholder collaboration, socio-economic factors, the research sought to provide an empirical basis for promoting gender-responsive M&E systems that are aligned with Kenya's devolved development priorities and global equality frameworks.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Kenya's strong legal and policy framework advocating for gender equality, enshrined in the 2010 Constitution, the National Gender and Equality Policy, and Vision 2030, persistent disparities remain, particularly in marginalized counties like Garissa. Nationally, as of 2023, only 23.5% of county assembly members are women, far below the constitutionally mandated two-thirds gender threshold (IEBC, 2023). In Garissa County, women occupy less than 10% of key leadership and public service positions, and their representation in community planning processes is minimal (County Government of Garissa, 2022). Patriarchal socio-cultural norms, low literacy levels, and restricted economic participation further marginalize women and girls, perpetuating their exclusion from decision-making arenas that affect their lives and communities.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) has emerged globally as a transformative tool to promote accountability, inclusivity, and gender equity in development processes. However, in Garissa and other arid and semi-arid lands (ASALs), these frameworks remain underutilized or inadequately institutionalized. According to a 2021 KIPPRA study, over 68% of development initiatives in ASAL counties are implemented without meaningful community-

led monitoring mechanisms, often excluding women's voices and reinforcing top-down approaches (KIPRA, 2021). Additionally, gender-disaggregated data is rarely collected or used in evaluation activities, limiting the ability of both governments and NGOs to assess the gender-specific impacts of development investments. For example, although the 2022 Garissa County Budget Review and Outlook Paper (CBROP) reports over KES 500 million allocated to gender-responsive programming from 2020 to 2022, there is no accompanying monitoring framework to evaluate whether those funds translated into tangible benefits for women and girls (CBROP, 2022).

Empirical studies underscore the potential of participatory M&E in enhancing gender equity across sectors. Gichuhi et al. (2022) demonstrated that inclusive M&E systems in Kenya's education sector enhanced local accountability and increased gender-sensitive data use. Mgoba and Kabote (2020) found that women's involvement in water project evaluation in Tanzania improved outcomes and built community trust. In Uganda, Bryan et al. (2022) reported that participatory gender audits in agricultural extension services resulted in more responsive and equitable resource distribution. Similarly, Woldearegay and Amedvor (2021) found that when local women were embedded in maternal health monitoring committees in Ghana, access to and uptake of reproductive health services significantly improved. While these findings are promising, they are often context-specific, sector-limited, or focused on national-level systems.

There remains a critical gap in empirical understanding of how participatory M&E contributes to gender equality within the devolved governance systems of Kenya's ASAL regions, particularly in Garissa County. Most existing literature does not capture how factors such as stakeholder collaboration, socio-economic structures, and institutional capacity intersect within community-level M&E systems to influence gender outcomes. This study therefore sought to fill this gap by investigating the role of participatory M&E in advancing gender equality in Garissa County, with a focus on how inclusive monitoring mechanisms can empower women, promote accountability, and improve gender-responsive development planning at the county level.

General Objective

To establish the effects of participatory monitoring and evaluation in gender equality advancements in Garissa County, Kenya

Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- i. To determine the effect of socio-economic factors on gender equality advancement in Garissa County, Kenya
- ii. To assess the influence of stakeholder collaboration on gender equality advancement in Garissa County Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Social Feminist Theory

Social Feminist Theory, as articulated by Calás and Smircich (2007), offers a structural analysis of gender inequality by situating it within the wider contexts of class, race, economic systems, and institutional power. Unlike liberal feminism, which centers on equality through legal reform, social feminism challenges the social reproduction of inequality and focuses on how socio-political structures reinforce patriarchy and disadvantage women, especially in marginalized communities. The theory asserts that women's oppression is maintained not only through gender norms but also through economic dependence, labor division, and exclusion

from power structures, all of which must be addressed to advance gender equality (Calás & Smircich, 2007).

Over time, the theory has evolved by integrating intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 2000), which expanded its analytical lens to consider how multiple axes of identity, such as ethnicity, religion, geography, and class, interact to produce differentiated experiences of gender-based exclusion. This evolution has been instrumental in analyzing women's varied realities across contexts, such as rural vs. urban, pastoralist vs. formal sector, or indigenous vs. mainstream communities. In the African context, social feminism has increasingly emphasized postcolonial and indigenous feminist critiques, recognizing that mainstream Western feminist frameworks may overlook localized patriarchies and cultural complexities (Mama, 2020; Tamale, 2020).

In this study, Social Feminist Theory is directly linked to the dependent variable: Gender Equality. It allows the researcher to critically assess how women's advancement in Garissa County is hindered by intersecting structural barriers including cultural norms, clan politics, limited access to capital, and exclusion from decision-making spaces. Gender inequality in this context is not viewed as a matter of individual agency alone but as a product of systems that systematically marginalize women's voices and participation, particularly in participatory M&E processes.

Despite its strengths, Social Feminist Theory has faced several critiques. One key criticism is its tendency to overgeneralize women's experiences or treat women as a homogeneous group, without sufficient attention to internal diversity (Tong, 2022). Others argue that the theory may risk ideological rigidity, privileging structural critique over practical solutions or policy design. Furthermore, critics from the postmodern feminist tradition contend that social feminism can unintentionally reproduce a victim narrative, emphasizing oppression without adequately recognizing women's agency and resistance in informal and indigenous contexts (McRobbie, 2009).

Nonetheless, Social Feminist Theory remains a powerful analytical framework for development research. It challenges the technocratic tendencies of M&E by insisting on gender-transformative approaches, those that seek to reframe power relations, not merely count participation. In this study, it provides a compelling foundation for examining why gender inequality persists despite formal mechanisms for participation, and how participatory M&E can serve as a platform for collective empowerment, if structured with equity at its core.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory, originally proposed by Freeman (1984), argues that organizations and institutions should consider the interests, rights, and participation of all stakeholders, beyond just shareholders or central authorities, in order to create value, legitimacy, and sustainable outcomes. A stakeholder, in this context, is any individual or group that can affect or is affected by the organization's actions. The theory challenges traditional hierarchical and profit-centric models by promoting inclusive decision-making, dialogue, and accountability. In development planning and evaluation, it provides a robust framework for examining how diverse actors, government officials, local communities, development partners, civil society, and beneficiaries, can jointly shape policies and programs through participatory engagement.

This theory directly explains the variable "stakeholder collaboration" in the current study, as it emphasizes that collaborative engagement among diverse groups, particularly those traditionally excluded, such as women, can improve not only the fairness but also the effectiveness of development processes. Applied to participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E), Stakeholder Theory advocates for meaningful inclusion of all affected groups at every stage: from project design and implementation to monitoring and feedback. It suggests that ignoring the perspectives of stakeholders, especially marginalized ones, leads to shallow

ownership, resistance, or failure of projects (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Mainardes et al., 2011).

In the context of Garissa County, where traditional governance is often male-dominated and top-down, Stakeholder Theory provides a strong conceptual basis for evaluating the extent to which women are genuinely engaged as partners in M&E processes, rather than being treated as passive recipients. Evidence shows that when women and community members are involved as stakeholders in development monitoring, outcomes are more reflective of local needs and more likely to be sustained (Cornwall, 2016; Brixiová et al., 2022). For instance, stakeholder-driven M&E in public health programs has led to better service delivery, greater transparency, and improved gender outcomes in various Sub-Saharan contexts (Kamau & Wamugo, 2021).

Furthermore, Stakeholder Theory stresses mutual accountability, meaning both the project implementers and the beneficiaries are accountable to each other through transparent information sharing and feedback loops. In this regard, it aligns closely with participatory M&E principles that promote collective reflection, co-ownership of data, and shared responsibility for learning and adaptation (Reed et al., 2009). This is critical for gender equality advancement, as it encourages women and other marginalized stakeholders to exercise agency in shaping the trajectory of interventions intended to benefit them.

However, the theory has limitations. Critics point out that not all stakeholders have equal power or influence, and that institutional cultures or political hierarchies may undermine inclusive collaboration despite well-intentioned frameworks (Bryson, 2004; de Gooyert et al., 2017). In practice, participation may be symbolic or restricted to information sharing, without real decision-making power. In the context of Garissa, power asymmetries rooted in patriarchy, clan structures, and education disparities can hinder meaningful collaboration, particularly for women in conservative or pastoralist communities.

Nevertheless, Stakeholder Theory remains a valuable guide for this study in examining how the quality and structure of stakeholder collaboration affect women's participation in monitoring and evaluating county-level development initiatives. It supports the argument that empowering women as active stakeholders, rather than passive observers, is essential for achieving inclusive, gender-equitable development outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework refers to a logically constructed model that illustrates the relationship between key variables in a study. It serves as a visual and theoretical guide that connects the research objectives, theoretical foundations, and empirical evidence, thereby helping to clarify the pathway through which the study variables are expected to influence one another (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In this study, the conceptual framework illustrates how socio-economic factors, stakeholder collaboration, influence the dependent variable, gender equality advancement, within the context of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in Garissa County. The conceptual framework is as shown in Figure 2.1.

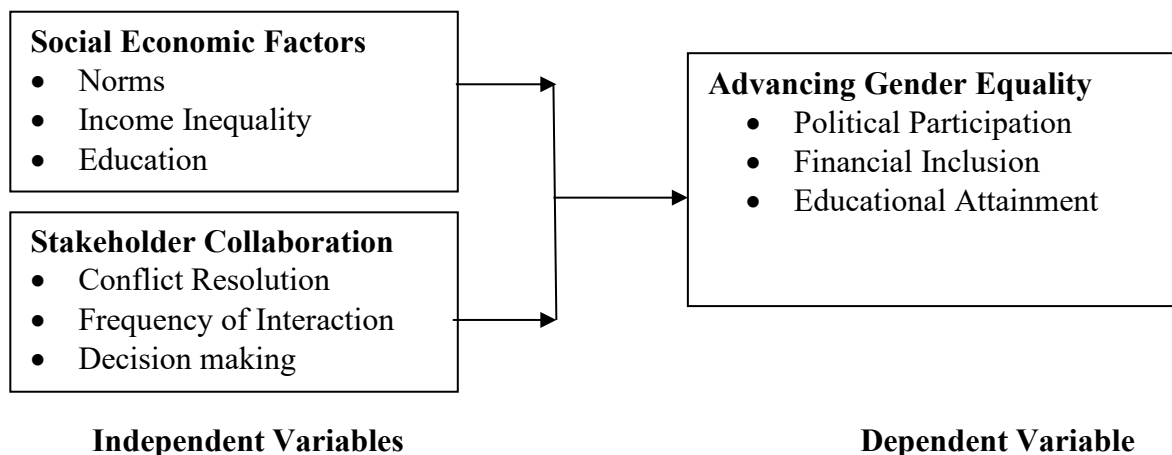


Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework

Socio-Economic Factors

Socio-economic factors are a composite set of conditions that define an individual's or group's position within a social structure, and strongly influence access to resources, opportunities, and power. These include aspects such as wealth, education, occupation, and social capital, which together shape an individual's ability to engage meaningfully in public life (OECD, 2021). These factors are widely recognized in development theory and practice as fundamental determinants of inclusion, capability, and agency (UNDP, 2022). In gender-focused participatory development, socio-economic factors play a crucial role in enabling or hindering women's engagement in public affairs, including participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Within this study, socio-economic factors are understood as structural and contextual conditions that shape women's capacity to engage meaningfully in the planning, oversight, and feedback processes of county-level development interventions.

The relevance of socio-economic factors in participatory M&E lies in their ability to determine who gets to participate, to what extent, and with what influence. Individuals with higher levels of education, income, social standing, and mobility are more likely to access participatory platforms, articulate informed opinions, and hold decision-makers accountable (World Bank, 2022). Conversely, women who face socio-economic exclusion are often rendered invisible in such forums, even when mechanisms for participation formally exist (Kabeer, 2021). These disparities are particularly pronounced in marginalized and pastoralist regions like Garissa County, where structural inequities compound gender-based vulnerabilities. For analytical clarity, this study focuses on three core indicators of socio-economic factors: social norms, income inequality, and education.

Social norms are culturally embedded expectations that define acceptable roles and behaviors for men and women in a given society. These informal rules shape not only individual attitudes but also institutional practices and governance outcomes (Boudet et al., 2021). These norms are critical in shaping gender dynamics, as they influence perceptions of authority, participation, and mobility. In conservative societies such as Garissa, prevailing norms often associate women with domestic roles while public decision-making is viewed as a male domain. As a result, women are discouraged, both implicitly and explicitly, from speaking in public forums, engaging with government institutions, or challenging existing hierarchies (Marcus & Harper, 2020; UN Women, 2022). Even when invited to participate in M&E activities, women may self-censor or defer to male voices due to internalized subordination. Thus, social norms not only influence external access but also affect internalized confidence and self-efficacy, both of which are necessary for meaningful participation (Pereira et al., 2020).

Income inequality represents disparities in economic resources across gendered lines and directly affects access to participatory opportunities. Gender income gaps persist across most sectors in Sub-Saharan Africa, and are further exacerbated by occupational segregation, unpaid care work, and limited asset ownership among women (ILO, 2021). Women with limited or no income are less likely to afford the indirect costs of civic engagement, such as transportation, childcare, or time off from income-generating work. These constraints are particularly acute in ASAL regions where livelihood insecurity is high and economic dependence on male relatives is common. According to the African Development Bank (2023), income inequality undermines women's ability to engage with public service providers or demand transparency in local development. Moreover, economic dependency reinforces power imbalances that discourage women from expressing critical opinions or asserting their rights in public forums (World Economic Forum, 2022). For participatory M&E to be inclusive, it must account for these economic barriers and ensure that women are not only present, but also resourced to participate meaningfully.

Education is a cornerstone of empowerment and a critical enabler of participation in governance and development processes. It provides foundational knowledge, civic awareness, and technical capacity needed for decision-making in M&E contexts (UNESCO, 2022). Formal education enhances literacy, analytical skills, and confidence, capabilities that are essential in participatory M&E contexts where stakeholders are expected to interpret data, understand project goals, and contribute to evaluative discussions. In regions like Garissa, where many women have not completed primary education due to early marriage, poverty, or cultural restrictions, this gap directly limits their ability to engage in technical or policy-focused platforms (KNBS, 2023). Moreover, the lack of educational qualifications often leads to exclusion from formal M&E roles such as enumerators, committee members, or facilitators, further entrenching gender inequality in monitoring systems (World Bank, 2021). Education thus functions not only as a knowledge enabler, but also as a social credential that signals competence and legitimacy in institutional spaces.

These indicators offer a multidimensional understanding of the socio-economic landscape within which participatory M&E takes place. They do not operate in isolation but reinforce one another to produce cumulative disadvantages for women. For instance, social norms may justify low investment in girls' education, which in turn limits women's income-generating potential, reinforcing dependence and disempowerment (Boudet et al., 2021). As Kabeer (2021) argues, socio-economic constraints are not just material but deeply relational, embedded in systems of power that shape what is possible for different groups. Therefore, in this study, socio-economic factors are conceptualized as both structural determinants and mediating variables that influence whether and how women participate in M&E processes. Addressing these factors is crucial for transforming participatory M&E from a symbolic gesture to a genuine mechanism for gender equality advancement in Garissa County.

Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholder collaboration refers to the systematic and sustained interaction between various actors, government institutions, non-governmental organizations, private sector players, community leaders, and beneficiaries, toward a shared development goal. It is defined as the process through which diverse interests engage in joint planning, decision-making, and accountability to ensure mutual ownership of outcomes (Glass et al., 2023; Mulema et al., 2022). Within participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E), stakeholder collaboration is foundational to ensuring inclusion, legitimacy, learning, and responsiveness. Particularly in gender-focused development, collaboration ensures that marginalized voices, especially those of women, are integrated not only as beneficiaries but as active contributors. In this study, stakeholder collaboration is assessed using three critical dimensions: conflict resolution, frequency of interaction, and participatory decision-making.

Conflict resolution is a key functional element in collaborative frameworks, referring to mechanisms through which disputes, disagreements, and differing perspectives among stakeholders are identified, addressed, and transformed constructively. According to the International Land Coalition (2022), in multi-stakeholder partnerships, particularly those operating in resource-constrained or patriarchal contexts, unresolved conflict often leads to disengagement by less powerful actors such as women and youth. Conflict resolution processes, such as facilitated dialogue, grievance redress mechanisms, and culturally sensitive arbitration, help preserve inclusivity and mutual respect in M&E spaces (Kalas & Jansen, 2020). In participatory settings like Garissa, where gendered power asymmetries are deeply entrenched, conflict resolution is also a gender equity tool, ensuring that dominant groups do not override women's voices in planning and feedback loops (Mulema, Cramer, & Huyer, 2022). This study treats the presence, accessibility, and effectiveness of such mechanisms as a proxy for assessing the depth of collaborative engagement.

Frequency of interaction captures the regularity and continuity with which stakeholders engage with each other throughout the M&E lifecycle. It is a key predictor of trust, shared understanding, and the institutionalization of inclusive norms (Chirwa et al., 2023). High-frequency engagement, whether through community meetings, joint field assessments, or digital platforms, builds stakeholder familiarity, strengthens transparency, and improves adaptive learning (CIFOR-ICRAF, 2020). In contrast, infrequent or sporadic interaction often limits participation to elite stakeholders, and excludes those with lower mobility, such as women in rural communities. According to Estrella and Gaventa (2020), successful participatory M&E demands not only diverse representation but repeated interaction over time to ensure that feedback loops are closed and that decisions are informed by ongoing reflection. Within this study, frequency of interaction is conceptualized as both a procedural and relational indicator of collaboration quality.

Decision-making in participatory M&E refers to the degree to which stakeholders share power in shaping project design, setting evaluation criteria, allocating resources, and determining corrective actions. Unlike consultation, which often ends at input collection, decision-making implies co-ownership and joint accountability (Asare-Nuamah et al., 2025). This distinction is particularly important in gender-sensitive evaluation, where technical actors often dominate evaluative conversations, sidelining local knowledge and lived experiences (Abuga, 2024). Empowering women and grassroots actors in decision-making enhances the relevance, equity, and sustainability of development outcomes (CGIAR Gender Platform, 2023). Studies by Mulema et al. (2021) and Sachdeva et al. (2022) have shown that when women actively participate in defining indicators and interpreting results, project accountability improves, and feedback is more likely to lead to programmatic change. In this study, the extent of collaborative decision-making serves as a lens for evaluating whether participatory M&E structures are merely procedural or genuinely transformative.

Taken together, the indicators of conflict resolution, frequency of interaction, and decision-making offer a multidimensional framework for analyzing the quality and inclusivity of stakeholder collaboration in M&E systems. In contexts like Garissa, where historical, social, and institutional inequalities persist, collaboration cannot be assumed, it must be cultivated through deliberate facilitation, capacity-building, and policy enforcement. As emphasized by Glass et al. (2023) and Mulema et al. (2022), true collaboration transcends symbolic inclusion and seeks to rebalance power, amplify marginalized voices, and co-create knowledge. Therefore, in this study, stakeholder collaboration is not just an operational requirement but a normative commitment to equity, learning, and mutual accountability in development.

Advancing Gender Equality

Gender equality refers to the state in which individuals of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in all spheres of life. It implies that women and men enjoy

equal conditions for realizing their full potential and human rights (UN Women, 2023). In development and governance, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a prerequisite for effective and inclusive institutions. Participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes that integrate gender considerations contribute to dismantling systemic barriers, enabling women to access, influence, and benefit from public resources and decision-making (Lwamba et al., 2022). This study conceptualizes the advancement of gender equality through three dimensions: political participation, financial inclusion, and educational attainment, each of which serves as a practical and measurable indicator of gender-responsive development.

Political participation encompasses the involvement of women in formal political institutions, decision-making bodies, and public policy formulation. It includes representation in elective and appointive positions, participation in public dialogue, and influence over community decisions (Ndiga et al., 2024). In Kenya, despite constitutional provisions like the two-thirds gender rule, women remain underrepresented in both national and county governments. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2023) reports that women held only 23% of elected political positions after the 2022 general elections. Barriers include patriarchal norms, financial constraints, limited education, and lack of access to political networks. Effective M&E systems that promote accountability in gender commitments can track disparities in representation and support affirmative interventions such as quotas, gender-responsive budgeting, and participatory forums (Kenyatta, 2023). Thus, political participation is not only an outcome of equality but also a driver of inclusive governance systems.

Financial inclusion refers to the availability and usage of affordable financial services, such as credit, savings, insurance, and digital banking, by individuals and businesses, particularly those historically excluded from the formal financial sector. For women, financial inclusion enables autonomy, resilience, and economic participation (Ojo, 2022). In Kenya, strides have been made through mobile banking platforms like M-Pesa, yet disparities persist. The World Bank (2023) notes that women are still 9% less likely than men to own a bank account, and fewer women access formal credit due to lack of collateral or financial literacy. According to Mpfu (2023), gender-blind M&E systems often fail to reveal these nuances. However, participatory M&E frameworks that integrate sex-disaggregated data and local knowledge can reveal systemic barriers and guide inclusive financial programming. For example, tracking loan repayment rates and financial literacy levels by gender can enhance the responsiveness of microfinance schemes and county enterprise funds.

Educational attainment is a foundational dimension of gender equality, affecting women's agency, employment prospects, health outcomes, and civic engagement. It is defined as the highest level of formal education completed by an individual and is often used as a key indicator in development indices (UNESCO, 2022). In Kenya, although enrollment rates have improved, completion and transition rates for girls remain low, particularly in arid and semi-arid regions like Garissa. The KNBS (2023) shows that only 34% of women in North Eastern Kenya complete secondary education, compared to a national average of 66%. Factors include early marriage, cultural restrictions, poverty, and insecurity. Educational attainment directly impacts women's ability to participate in M&E processes, understand technical information, and contribute to policy conversations (Chikwe et al., 2024). Gender-aware M&E must therefore assess educational disparities and incorporate training, mentorship, and simplified tools to enable inclusive evaluation processes.

Together, these three indicators (political participation, financial inclusion, and educational attainment) offer a multidimensional framework for understanding and assessing the advancement of gender equality. They are mutually reinforcing: educated women are more likely to demand financial services and participate politically; politically active women often advocate for gender-equitable education and economic policies. As highlighted by Ojo (2022) and Chikwe et al. (2024), effective M&E systems must integrate these dimensions into their

frameworks to ensure that gender equality is not only monitored but meaningfully advanced. In this study, these indicators are treated as both outcomes and enablers of participatory M&E processes in Garissa County, positioning gender equality as central to sustainable and inclusive development.

Empirical Review

Socio-Economic Factors in Advancing Gender Equality

Hellqvist and Heubaum (2024) conducted a comprehensive gender analysis of renewable energy development initiatives across Kenya, India, and Peru, with a strong case focus on rural Kenyan communities. The study applied a qualitative case study design, using document analysis, gender audit tools, and semi-structured interviews with women involved in energy access programs. It revealed that women's participation in the implementation and oversight of development projects was significantly limited by income inequality, unequal asset ownership, and deeply rooted gender norms. While the study offered valuable insights into the interaction between socio-economic exclusion and gender equity outcomes, it did not incorporate a structured participatory M&E component. This reflects a critical conceptual gap, where women's inclusion is viewed primarily through service delivery and benefit access, rather than through their capacity to contribute to project evaluation and accountability processes.

Chikwe et al. (2024) explored socio-economic inclusion through community-based approaches across Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. Using a comparative cross-sectional design and drawing on a sample of 200 women selected through multistage cluster sampling, the researchers employed focus group discussions (FGDs), observation guides, and semi-structured interviews. The study found that collective financial mechanisms, such as savings groups, significantly enhanced women's ability to participate in community decision-making. However, it also highlighted that limited access to formal education and economic marginalization continued to restrict deeper engagement, especially in structured program oversight. While the study acknowledged women's empowerment in informal participatory spaces, it did not investigate their presence in formal M&E systems, exposing a methodological and conceptual gap that this study seeks to address.

Adeola and Picou (2023) analyzed the role of social capital in facilitating socio-economic empowerment among women in post-conflict African settings. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, their study integrated household surveys with participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques in selected fragile states including South Sudan and Mali. They found that social networks, education, and informal support systems were critical enablers of women's resilience and participation in grassroots development. However, the study largely framed participation as a matter of community inclusion and economic survival, without exploring how women's social capital could be leveraged for institutional feedback or M&E. This signals a conceptual oversight, particularly for projects aiming to incorporate women as evaluators and not merely as beneficiaries.

Within Kenya, Ndiga, Ojore, and Kajimba (2024) conducted a study in Nyatike Sub-County, Migori County, to assess determinants of women's participation in devolved governance. The study applied a descriptive survey design targeting 150 women leaders and community members, sampled through purposive and stratified methods. A pilot was conducted with 10 women leaders to validate the research tools. Using structured questionnaires and key informant interviews, the study revealed that low literacy levels, patriarchal household norms, and economic dependency severely limited women's participation in planning and governance meetings. While the study effectively unpacked social and cultural constraints, it lacked an M&E lens, thereby presenting a conceptual gap in connecting governance participation with evaluative agency.

Stakeholder Collaboration in Advancing Gender Equality

Morkel and Sibanda (2022) explored participatory M&E systems through the lens of co-production in South Africa. Using a qualitative case study approach, they examined how inclusive governance principles shaped national evaluation frameworks. Their findings underscored the transformative potential of including non-state actors, particularly civil society and marginalized women groups, in decision-making and accountability. However, the study also noted that the persistence of class and gender inequalities weakened collaborative intentions. The authors called for stronger accountability mechanisms that prevent elite capture within M&E platforms. While the study offered policy insights, it provided limited empirical data on women's participation in rural and devolved project contexts, a gap that this study seeks to address.

Odhiambo, Jerald, and Harriet (2020) examined stakeholder collaboration strategies in the implementation of girls' educational empowerment projects in Homa Bay County. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design, targeting local government officials, teachers, parents, and female students through stratified sampling. Data were collected via questionnaires and interviews. Findings revealed that frequency of stakeholder engagement, joint decision-making, and inclusive feedback mechanisms significantly enhanced project outcomes. However, the study also found that patriarchal perceptions and inconsistent engagement timelines often marginalized women and girls in strategic planning and M&E. Although the study centered on stakeholder inclusion, it did not explore how collaboration dynamics affect adult women's roles in M&E, especially in leadership or evaluative functions.

In the education sector, Mulwa and Kyalo (2020) conducted research on stakeholder engagement in M&E for literacy and numeracy programs in public primary schools in Nairobi. Employing a descriptive survey design, with data gathered from headteachers, education officers, and parents, the study found that gender-balanced stakeholder selection and collaborative planning were significantly correlated with improved learning outcomes and inclusive performance tracking. Although the study recognized the importance of gender equity in stakeholder roles, it did not delve into the power asymmetries that affect how different stakeholder groups contribute and influence project evaluation outcomes.

Another local study by Maina (2023) assessed participatory M&E in government-funded Women Enterprise Fund (WEF) projects in Kenya. Through a case study in three constituencies, using interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews, the study found that while project documents mandated stakeholder involvement, actual practice was top-down, with limited participatory decision-making. The study highlighted that women's participation was often symbolic and constrained by lack of capacity, unclear M&E guidelines, and time poverty. These findings underscore the need to go beyond formal representation to understand the quality and influence of stakeholder collaboration especially in marginalized and ASAL regions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An exploratory research design was adopted to gain in-depth understanding of the relatively under-researched link between participatory M&E and gender equality in Garissa County. The design allowed flexibility and the use of mixed methods to combine quantitative precision with qualitative depth. This approach was particularly suited to unpack the complex social, institutional, and cultural interactions shaping gender participation within M&E frameworks in arid and semi-arid regions of Kenya. The study targeted 137 individuals directly involved in participatory M&E and gender equality initiatives in Garissa County. These included 116 female beneficiaries of the *Ugatuzi na Kazi* project, 12 County Assembly Members (MCAs), four ward administrators, four field supervisors, and one sub-county administrator. This diverse

composition enabled the study to capture perspectives from both community-level actors and institutional stakeholders.

The sampling frame consisted of verified lists from the Garissa County Assembly, *Ugatuza na Kazi* project offices, and sub-county administrations, identifying all 137 individuals engaged in participatory M&E and gender-related governance. A census approach was applied, covering the entire population of 137 respondents. This ensured complete representation, accuracy, and inclusiveness across the stakeholder groups, aligning with recommendations for small, diverse populations where comprehensive participation enhances validity.

Data were gathered using a semi-structured questionnaire containing both closed-ended and open-ended items. Closed-ended questions used a five-point Likert scale to quantify perceptions on stakeholder collaboration, and socio-economic participation. Open-ended items captured respondents' personal experiences and contextual insights. This combination ensured both analytical precision and depth of understanding. Ethical clearance was obtained from JKUAT and a research permit from NACOSTI before fieldwork commenced. Questionnaires were administered face-to-face by trained research assistants over four weeks, with respondents' informed consent. Instruments were translated into English, Kiswahili, or Somali as needed, and confidentiality was strictly maintained throughout data collection.

A pilot involving 10% of the target population tested the questionnaire's clarity, relevance, and reliability. Feedback informed revisions to enhance the tool's usability and accuracy. Content validity was established through expert review by supervisors and gender/M&E specialists to ensure alignment with study objectives and cultural context. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients of 0.7 or higher deemed acceptable. This confirmed internal consistency across questionnaire items.

Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 28. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic and variable data, while inferential statistics, specifically multiple regression, assessed relationships between participatory M&E variables (socio-economic factors, stakeholder collaboration) and gender equality outcomes. The model was tested at a 95% confidence level, with diagnostic checks for normality, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and autocorrelation ensuring analytical robustness. Results were presented using tables and charts for clarity.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The study targeted 137 respondents drawn from Ugatuza na Kazi project beneficiaries, elected county assembly members, ward administrators, field supervisors, and a sub-county administrator in Garissa County. Out of these, 106 respondents successfully completed and returned the questionnaires, yielding a response rate of 77.8%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a response rate of 70% and above is considered adequate for analysis in social science research. Therefore, the achieved response rate was deemed sufficient to provide reliable results and generalizable insights for the study.

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Socio-Economic Factors

Socio-economic conditions often determine the degree to which individuals, particularly women, can meaningfully participate in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes. Factors such as income levels, employment status, social class, and access to resources either enhance or limit involvement in development programs. This subsection sought to establish how respondents perceived socio-economic factors as influencing participation in participatory M&E. Responses were analyzed using means and standard deviations, where higher means reflect stronger agreement with the statements. Table 1 presents summary of findings obtained.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Socio-Economic Factors

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
1. My economic status affects my ability to participate in M&E activities	3.742	0.865
2. Women in my community face financial barriers to engaging in M&E	4.018	0.796
3. Employment influences one's access to M&E forums and feedback	3.811	0.722
4. Limited resources prevent women from attending M&E meetings	3.934	0.781
5. I have access to resources that enable me to engage in evaluation work	3.623	0.889
6. Social status determines who contributes to monitoring decisions	3.774	0.821
7. Income-generating women are more active in local M&E structures	3.849	0.797
8. Low-income women are rarely consulted during evaluations	3.972	0.834
Aggregate Score	3.840	0.801

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings show that respondents agreed that economic status affects their ability to participate in M&E activities, with a mean of 3.742 (SD = 0.865). This indicates that individuals with stronger financial capacity are better positioned to attend meetings and contribute meaningfully compared to those with limited means. Respondents also strongly agreed that women in the community face financial barriers to engaging in M&E (M = 4.018, SD = 0.796). This underscores the perception that financial challenges such as transport costs, lack of childcare support, and competing household demands limit women's involvement in participatory processes. Similarly, a mean of 3.811 (SD = 0.722) confirmed that employment influences access to M&E forums and feedback. This suggests that employed individuals, particularly women with stable jobs, have better opportunities to access decision-making spaces and evaluation platforms than their unemployed counterparts.

The results also indicated that limited resources prevent women from attending M&E meetings (M = 3.934, SD = 0.781). Respondents largely acknowledged that without resources such as allowances, materials, or logistical support, women may be unable to actively participate in monitoring processes. When asked whether they personally had access to resources enabling participation in evaluation work, respondents gave a lower mean of 3.623 (SD = 0.889) compared to other items. This shows that access to resources is not equally distributed among respondents, with some benefiting while others remain disadvantaged. The study further revealed that social status determines who contributes to monitoring decisions (M = 3.774, SD = 0.821). This suggests that community hierarchies and positions of influence shape whose voice is heard in evaluation processes, often marginalizing low-status individuals.

Respondents also agreed that income-generating women are more active in local M&E structures, with a mean of 3.849 (SD = 0.797). This reflects the empowerment effect of economic independence, where women with income-generating activities are better able to assert themselves and participate effectively in M&E processes. Finally, the finding that low-income women are rarely consulted during evaluations received a mean of 3.972 (SD = 0.834). This indicates strong agreement that poor women are consistently excluded from critical decision-making processes despite being key stakeholders in development projects.

The aggregate mean score of 3.840 (SD = 0.801) confirms that socio-economic factors exert a strong influence on women's participation in M&E within Garissa County. These findings resonate with recent literature. For instance, Hellqvist and Heubaum (2024) found that income inequality and entrenched gender norms constrained women's involvement in development oversight, while Chikwe et al. (2024) emphasized that financial collectives improved women's decision-making power but did not fully resolve exclusion from formal M&E systems. Similarly, Adeola and Picou (2023) highlighted the role of social networks in enabling resilience, yet noted that economic marginalization still restricted women's ability to contribute in institutionalized feedback mechanisms. Local studies, such as Ndiga et al. (2024) and Muli (2020), have also shown that poverty, low literacy, and financial dependency severely limit

women's agency in governance, confirming the current study's results. What this research contributes is a sharper focus on participatory M&E structures, revealing that without addressing socio-economic inequalities, women's inclusion will remain symbolic rather than substantive.

Stakeholder Collaboration

Stakeholder collaboration plays a critical role in ensuring that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) processes are inclusive, transparent, and reflective of diverse perspectives. In participatory M&E frameworks, collaboration between community members, local leaders, project officers, and women's groups is essential for enhancing accountability and building ownership of development projects. This section sought to establish the extent to which respondents perceived stakeholder collaboration as influencing women's participation in M&E. The responses were measured using means and standard deviations, where higher means indicate stronger agreement with the statements. Table 2 presents a summary of the findings.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Stakeholder Collaboration

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
1. M&E processes involve collaboration among various stakeholders	3.911	0.802
2. There is strong coordination between women's groups and project officers	3.864	0.788
3. Stakeholder forums encourage participation from both men and women	3.972	0.756
4. Local leaders support inclusive collaboration during evaluations	3.783	0.845
5. I feel consulted in decisions related to monitoring and evaluation	3.701	0.861
6. Information sharing between stakeholders is effective in M&E	3.842	0.795
7. Community feedback is integrated into M&E reports	3.936	0.774
8. Stakeholder diversity enhances the quality of monitoring efforts	4.027	0.732
Aggregate Score	3.880	0.794

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings revealed that respondents agreed M&E processes involve collaboration among various stakeholders ($M = 3.911$, $SD = 0.802$). This suggests that evaluation processes in Garissa County are not conducted in isolation but incorporate a variety of actors, creating a more inclusive and representative framework for decision-making. On whether there is strong coordination between women's groups and project officers, the respondents reported a mean of 3.864 ($SD = 0.788$). This implies that women's associations play a meaningful role in bridging project beneficiaries and implementers, though the degree of coordination is not uniformly strong across all settings. Respondents also agreed that stakeholder forums encourage participation from both men and women ($M = 3.972$, $SD = 0.756$). This reflects recognition that forums are generally gender-inclusive, providing opportunities for women to contribute, though actual participation levels may vary depending on cultural and socio-economic contexts.

The study established that local leaders support inclusive collaboration during evaluations ($M = 3.783$, $SD = 0.845$). This indicates that leadership endorsement is important for women's engagement, as local leaders often act as gatekeepers who either facilitate or hinder participation. A slightly lower mean of 3.701 ($SD = 0.861$) was reported regarding whether respondents feel consulted in decisions related to M&E. This shows that while collaboration structures exist, not all stakeholders feel adequately represented in decision-making, signaling a gap between consultation and actual influence. Regarding information flow, respondents agreed that information sharing between stakeholders is effective in M&E ($M = 3.842$, $SD =$

0.795). This highlights that communication channels function fairly well, ensuring stakeholders remain updated and aligned on project monitoring activities.

Respondents also indicated agreement that community feedback is integrated into M&E reports ($M = 3.936$, $SD = 0.774$). This points to responsiveness in M&E practices, where local perspectives are acknowledged and reflected in final outputs, thereby enhancing legitimacy. Finally, the highest score was observed on the statement that stakeholder diversity enhances the quality of monitoring efforts ($M = 4.027$, $SD = 0.732$). This underscores the recognition that the involvement of different groups, including women, youth, elders, and marginalized populations, strengthens the inclusivity and comprehensiveness of evaluations.

The aggregate mean of 3.880 ($SD = 0.794$) confirms that stakeholder collaboration exerts a strong influence on M&E processes in Garissa County. These findings are consistent with prior studies. For instance, Kusters et al. (2022) and Morkel & Sibanda (2022) noted that multi-stakeholder platforms enhance inclusivity and adaptive decision-making but often fail to fully empower marginalized women. Odhiambo et al. (2020) found that inclusive feedback mechanisms improved educational empowerment projects, while Kamau (2020) highlighted the role of participatory M&E in promoting accountability, though women remained under-represented in key committees. Similarly, Maina (2023) and Mbogo (2023) observed that although formal provisions for stakeholder engagement exist in Kenyan development projects, women's involvement is often symbolic rather than transformative. The current study strengthens this evidence by demonstrating that while collaboration frameworks are functional in Garissa County, greater emphasis is needed on meaningful consultation to ensure women's voices shape M&E outcomes substantively.

Gender Equality

Gender equality is an essential dimension of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E), ensuring that both women's and men's voices are considered in decision-making processes. Equitable involvement not only enriches the quality of evaluation outcomes but also enhances fairness, inclusivity, and sustainability of development projects. This subsection sought to examine respondents' perceptions of how gender equality is manifested within participatory M&E practices in Garissa County. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for this construct.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Gender Equality

Statement	Mean	Std. Dev
1. Women and men participate equally in project monitoring	3.687	0.871
2. M&E activities reflect gender-balanced views	3.811	0.834
3. Gender roles affect who is involved in project evaluation	3.972	0.798
4. There is equity in accessing M&E information	3.726	0.862
5. Gender-sensitive indicators are included in evaluations	3.918	0.783
6. Women's views influence how projects are assessed	3.842	0.819
7. My voice is considered equally regardless of gender	3.768	0.847
8. Participatory M&E has promoted gender inclusion in my community	4.036	0.776
Aggregate Score	3.845	0.824

Source: Field Data (2025)

The findings revealed moderate agreement that women and men participate equally in project monitoring ($M = 3.687$, $SD = 0.871$). This indicates that while progress has been made toward gender balance, disparities persist, particularly where cultural norms restrict women's active involvement. Respondents agreed that M&E activities reflect gender-balanced views ($M = 3.811$, $SD = 0.834$), suggesting that evaluation processes are increasingly designed to capture the perspectives of both men and women. However, the finding that gender roles affect who is involved in project evaluation scored higher ($M = 3.972$, $SD = 0.798$), showing that despite

efforts toward inclusivity, socially ascribed roles still shape participation levels, often marginalizing women.

The study further showed that there is equity in accessing M&E information ($M = 3.726$, $SD = 0.862$). This reflects moderate progress, but the variability suggests that some groups, particularly women in rural or disadvantaged settings, remain excluded from information flows. Respondents strongly agreed that gender-sensitive indicators are included in evaluations ($M = 3.918$, $SD = 0.783$). This suggests that evaluation frameworks are increasingly adopting measures that account for gendered outcomes, thereby making gender a visible part of the monitoring process.

On whether women's views influence how projects are assessed, respondents agreed ($M = 3.842$, $SD = 0.819$), indicating that women's contributions are increasingly shaping evaluation findings, though not yet to the extent of full equality. When asked whether their voice is considered equally regardless of gender, respondents gave a mean of 3.768 ($SD = 0.847$), suggesting moderate confidence in gender equity at the individual level. The strongest agreement emerged on the statement that participatory M&E has promoted gender inclusion in the community ($M = 4.036$, $SD = 0.776$). This demonstrates that participatory frameworks are perceived as effective in bridging gender gaps by offering women opportunities to influence community development.

The aggregate mean of 3.845 ($SD = 0.824$) confirms that gender equality is moderately realized in participatory M&E, with notable progress in gender-sensitive practices but persistent challenges related to traditional roles and unequal access to opportunities. These results are consistent with wider literature. For instance, UN Women (2021) and Cornwall (2022) found that participatory mechanisms enhance gender inclusion but require deliberate institutionalization to overcome entrenched inequalities. Oloo and Akinyi (2023) emphasized that while gender-sensitive indicators improve visibility of women's concerns, social norms continue to limit their decision-making power. Similarly, Kabeer (2020) argued that true gender equality in development spaces demands both structural reforms and attitudinal change. Local studies, such as Mwangi and Hassan (2024), also confirmed that women's involvement in evaluation is often symbolic unless backed by training, resource access, and community sensitization. The present study affirms these insights, highlighting that participatory M&E has the potential to drive gender equality in Garissa County, but structural, cultural, and informational barriers still constrain full inclusivity.

Correlation Analysis

Table 4: Correlation Results

		Gender equality advancement	Socio-Economic Factors	Stakeholder Collaboration
Gender equality advancement	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	106		
Socio-Economic Factors	Pearson Correlation	.531**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	106	106	
Stakeholder Collaboration	Pearson Correlation	.612**	.048	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.117	
	N	106	106	106

Source: Field Data (2025)

The correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between socio-economic factors and project performance ($r = 0.531$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that improvements in

socio-economic conditions, such as access to income, employment, and resources, significantly enhance women's ability to contribute meaningfully to M&E processes, which in turn improves project outcomes. These findings align with Kabeer and Huq (2021), who argued that women's socio-economic empowerment creates pathways for greater inclusion in community accountability processes, resulting in more effective project delivery. Similarly, Rahman (2022) noted that financial independence enhances women's agency in participatory governance, thereby improving developmental impact.

Stakeholder collaboration demonstrated a strong positive relationship with project performance ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that inclusive coordination, regular feedback, and joint decision-making between community members, project officers, and women's groups significantly improve project monitoring and success. This resonates with findings by Torres and Preskill (2020), who emphasized that collaborative M&E frameworks foster collective ownership and learning, thereby improving sustainability of projects. Additionally, Nyenje, Kyalo, and Mugambi (2021) observed that participatory decision-making enhances accountability and transparency, ensuring that marginalized voices, particularly women's, are integrated into monitoring structures.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to determine the joint and individual influence of the independent variables, socio-economic factors, stakeholder collaboration, on the dependent variable, gender equality advancement in Garissa County. Multiple linear regression was applied since the study involved more than one predictor variable.

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Variable	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-value	Sig.
Constant	0.417	0.118	3.534	0.001
Socio-Economic Factors	0.281	0.074	3.797	0.000
Stakeholder Collaboration	0.309	0.078	3.962	0.000

Source: Field Data (2025)

The regression equation is therefore:

$$Y = 0.417 + 0.281X_1 + 0.309X_2 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Gender Equality Advancement

X_1 = Socio-Economic Factors

X_2 = Stakeholder Collaboration

Socio-Economic Factors ($\beta = 0.281$, $p < 0.05$): Socio-economic empowerment significantly predicts gender equality outcomes. A one-unit improvement in socio-economic status leads to a 0.281 increase in gender equality advancement. This suggests that income-generating opportunities, financial inclusion, and reduced poverty enhance women's ability to participate in decision-making. These findings echo Adesina and Bello (2023), who showed that financial access increased women's representation in community governance structures in West Africa.

Stakeholder Collaboration ($\beta = 0.309$, $p < 0.05$): Collaboration emerged as the strongest predictor. This means inclusive platforms where women's groups, leaders, and officers work together have the greatest effect on gender equality advancement. These results align with Mendoza and Ortega (2024), who found that community-wide collaborations in the Philippines led to measurable improvements in gender inclusion in local development councils. Locally, Hassan and Muriithi (2023) observed that structured collaboration between women's networks and county officers in Kenya enhanced gender responsiveness in project evaluation.

Conclusions

Socio-Economic Factors

The study concludes that socio-economic conditions significantly shape the extent to which women participate in participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The findings revealed that financial barriers, limited resources, and employment status either enhance or restrict women's involvement in M&E processes. The regression results confirmed that socio-economic factors have a positive and significant influence on gender equality advancement in Garissa County. This suggests that without addressing issues of poverty, unemployment, and resource inequality, women's participation in monitoring and evaluation will remain constrained. Thus, socio-economic empowerment remains a critical foundation for meaningful gender inclusion in participatory development processes.

Stakeholder Collaboration

The study concludes that collaboration among stakeholders is a vital determinant of gender equality advancement. The results showed that women's groups, project officers, community leaders, and other stakeholders must work in synergy to ensure that women are meaningfully represented in evaluation activities. Stakeholder forums that promote joint decision-making were found to strengthen inclusivity, while lack of coordination risks perpetuating exclusion. Regression analysis confirmed that stakeholder collaboration significantly influences gender equality advancement, although its effect was weaker than that of leadership and capacity building. This highlights the importance of strengthening multi-stakeholder approaches to amplify women's voices in participatory M&E.

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Recommendations

Socio-Economic Factors

The study revealed that socio-economic conditions, including income levels, employment status, and access to resources, strongly shape women's participation in participatory M&E. Respondents noted that financial barriers such as lack of transport, household responsibilities, and resource inequalities often prevent women, especially those from low-income households, from contributing meaningfully to monitoring processes. Based on these findings, it is recommended that Garissa County government, together with development partners, establish

economic empowerment programs that enhance women's financial capacity. Such initiatives could include microfinance opportunities, cooperative savings schemes, and income-generating projects that provide women with the means to attend meetings and engage in evaluation activities without financial strain. Furthermore, logistical support such as transport allowances, childcare provisions, and stipends should be institutionalized within projects to minimize structural barriers. Lastly, policies should be designed to ensure equitable allocation of project resources so that women, particularly those from vulnerable groups, gain equal access to participatory spaces. Addressing these socio-economic inequalities would create a more inclusive environment for women to engage in project monitoring and decision-making processes.

Stakeholder Collaboration

The study established that stakeholder collaboration, though not the strongest predictor, significantly influences gender equality advancement in participatory M&E. Respondents highlighted that collaboration across community members, local leaders, project officers, and women's groups improves inclusivity and accountability. However, weaknesses in coordination and information sharing often limit the impact of collaboration. To address this, it is recommended that multi-stakeholder platforms be strengthened to deliberately include women's organizations and grassroots representatives in M&E processes. County government departments, civil society, and development agencies should also institutionalize structured coordination mechanisms, such as inter-agency committees and quarterly consultative forums, to improve synergy and minimize duplication of roles. Importantly, communication systems must be enhanced to promote transparency in reporting, including through digital dashboards, mobile-based platforms, and community feedback sessions. By fostering more inclusive and effective collaboration, stakeholder participation would not only amplify women's voices but also ensure that their perspectives are reflected in final project reports and decision-making structures.

Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research should therefore explore other determinants such as cultural norms and traditions, political and institutional frameworks, and the role of technology in shaping gender participation. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to assess the sustained impacts of participatory M&E, while intersectional analyses could provide insights into how gender intersects with age, disability, or displacement to influence inclusion.

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