

Community Engagement and Sustainability of Faith-Based Social Enterprises: A Study of Consecrated Women in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Social enterprises managed by consecrated women (Catholic religious sisters) play a vital role in education, healthcare, hospitality and community development. However, their long-term sustainability remains a challenge, particularly in resource-constrained settings. This study examined the influence of community engagement on the sustainability of social enterprises managed by Consecrated Women in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The study was anchored on Sustainability Theory, which explains how stakeholder participation enhances long-term organisational viability through shared responsibility and resource mobilisation. A concurrent mixed-methods design was employed, combining a cross-sectional survey and a phenomenological inquiry. Data were collected from 69 respondents (administrators, finance managers, assistant administrators, and regional superiors) using structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics (SPSS v.29), while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Community engagement had a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship with sustainability ($R = .595$, $R^2 = .354$, $\beta = 0.584$, $p < .001$). Qualitative findings revealed that Community engagement fosters ownership, trust, resilience, and beneficiary participation in decision-making, which in turn enhances project relevance and long-term viability. Community engagement is a key driver of sustainability for faith-based social enterprises. Strengthening participatory approaches, feedback mechanisms, and stakeholder collaboration is recommended to enhance impact and continuity.

Keywords: Community engagement; sustainability; social enterprises; consecrated women; Catholic sisters; stakeholder collaboration; participatory approaches; Kenya

1.1 Introduction

Community engagement (CE) has emerged as a crucial determinant of the long-term sustainability of social enterprises, particularly those operating in marginalised or resource-constrained settings. CE aims to enhance organisational resilience, financial autonomy, and social impact. For social enterprises led by Consecrated Women (Catholic Sisters), especially within Catholic contexts where charisms are deeply intertwined with service, CE is both a strategic and theological imperative, rooted in the principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and the preferential option for the poor.

Faith-based models provide rich illustrations of the role of community engagement in sustaining social enterprises. The Sisters of Mercy, through the Nairobi Catholic Women's Initiative (2021), have demonstrated that culturally resonant community engagement strategies such as oral testimonies, storytelling, and music-driven awareness campaigns significantly enhance participation, visibility, and retention. Over the past 25 years, as a consecrated woman within the Society of Apostolic Life of Donum Dei, the researcher has witnessed significant shifts in the landscape of missionary work, particularly in financial sustainability and community impact. Historically, the expansion of missions was facilitated by substantial support from European missionaries, whose resources enabled congregations to address community needs in education, healthcare, hospitality, and empowerment without incurring significant financial pressure. However, the current context reflects growing challenges in financial independence and sustainability, as declining external funding has created financial vulnerability and compelled congregations to rethink their approaches.

This changing reality has necessitated a transition towards social entrepreneurship, not merely as an alternative funding mechanism but as a transformative means of fulfilling mission sustainably and autonomously. While consecrated women recognise the growing importance of social entrepreneurship as a driver of social and economic change, many congregations continue to face challenges such as inadequate financial autonomy, limited resource generation, weak strategic planning, and insufficient innovation. What is required is a deliberate shift toward hybrid models that integrate mission-driven values with market-oriented strategies and partnerships. Despite possessing unique strengths, including community trust, strong local networks, and ethical foundations, these assets have not been fully leveraged to ensure sustainability. Central to unlocking this potential is community engagement, which serves as a strategic and relational mechanism for strengthening local ownership, enhancing trust, and ensuring that social enterprises remain responsive, resilient, and sustainable within the communities they serve (Burchi et al., 2021; Kato, 2024; Halsall et al., 2022).

Scholars underscore the role of community engagement (CE) in enriching sustainability and effectively achieving their social missions. For instance, in the United States, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJ) operate the St. Joseph Worker Program. This social enterprise prepares young women for leadership through full-time service placements. The initiative, as documented by the St. Joseph Worker Program (2020), sustains itself through a hybrid financial model comprising congregational investment, private donor partnerships, alumni endowments, and revenue from space rentals. This shows that community-based approaches, grounded in continuous stakeholder engagement, enhance responsive management, promote adaptability and relational continuity, secure financial buy-in, and support the long-term viability of social enterprises.

Similarly, in Canada, Vázquez-Parra et al. (2022) revealed that Community-Based Networks (CBNs) leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) demonstrate that effective community engagement is a continuous process involving diverse stakeholders, which fosters a responsive management approach. The study concludes that while ICTs enhance connectivity and coordination, the true engine of sustainability lies in continuous stakeholder engagement and the cultivation of social capital.

In Europe, Alonso-Martinez et al. (2021) found that enterprises that embedded community representatives into governance structures, such as advisory boards and strategy committees, were more effective in developing locally adaptive solutions and enjoyed broader community legitimacy. It further affirms that social enterprises are more sustainable when community members are not merely beneficiaries but co-creators of vision and structure a practice that resonates deeply with the mission-based approach of many women religious congregations.

Stefańska and Hafenmayer (2021) established that sustained community engagement enabled continuous feedback loops, allowed iterative service redesign, and enhanced adaptability to shifting local needs. It emphasised that such practices enabled enterprises to avoid stagnation and mission drift, two common threats to sustainability. By fostering deep connections with local people, social enterprises can gather valuable insights into the root causes of issues and develop sustainable, equally impactful solutions. This aligns with the mission of consecrated women's social enterprises, which often aim to bring sustainable, positive change within their respective communities.

In Asia, Tialan and Sanqin (2022) revealed that enterprises with high community participation, particularly in decision-making and service co-production, reported 32% higher sustainability scores than those with low engagement. The study concluded that CE is a foundational mechanism for cultivating social capital and organisational resilience, especially in enterprises addressing complex social challenges. This finding highlights the significance of CE for social

enterprises led by consecrated women, whose sustainability often relies on relational networks within ecclesial and local communities.

The Religious of the Good Shepherd (RGS) have developed a world-renowned social enterprise: Good Shepherd Convent Products in the Philippines, to examine an impact assessment using business performance indicators, staff interviews, and beneficiary focus groups. The study highlighted that sustained community engagement through participatory training and feedback sessions improved product quality, marketing strategies, and worker satisfaction. This enterprise illustrates how CE can be embedded not only in social programming but also in operational and commercial functions, a crucial insight for Kenyan religious social ventures navigating both ministry and market realities (Reyes, 2020). Similarly, Manglal-lan and Racca (2019) demonstrated that institutions that embraced community co-ownership frameworks, including local advisory councils, parish-based monitoring, and open budget consultations, experienced 45% fewer project discontinuities than those with hierarchical delivery models. This aligns closely with the structural aspirations of many Kenyan congregations, who have shifted from paternalistic charity to participatory empowerment.

Kim et al. (2018) revealed a positive correlation between CE intensity and long-term viability across economic, social, and institutional sustainability metrics. The study's statistical analysis strengthens the case for participatory structures within faith-based enterprises, suggesting that sustainability is not merely a function of funding levels but of relational embeddedness and shared agency.

In Africa, community engagement is increasingly recognised as a critical factor in enhancing the sustainability and impact of social enterprises. Littlewood and Holt (2020) highlight the importance of social entrepreneurs acting as cultural intermediaries, individuals capable of navigating both community expectations and external stakeholder demands such as those of donors and investors. Their findings reveal that social enterprises deeply embedded within local norms, cultural practices, and power structures are more successful in scaling their impact and sustaining operations, even in the face of political and economic uncertainties. This suggests that community engagement goes beyond participation to include cultural alignment and contextual understanding. It further pointed out that for social enterprises managed by consecrated women in Kenya, effective community engagement requires not only theological grounding but also strong local cultural fluency to enhance acceptance, resilience, and long-term sustainability.

Faith-based social enterprises and community engagement are central to achieving sustainability within mission-driven initiatives. Mathuva et al. (2025) emphasised that achieving sustainability in faith-based social enterprises requires moving beyond charitable mindset and adopting a specific blend of economic and social competencies. The study focusing on Catholic nuns'

congregations across Kenya, Uganda, and Zambia, identified five critical competency clusters necessary for successful transition and sustainability. These include effective communication, managerial and leadership skills, business knowledge and analytical thinking, customer and commercial acumen, and financial analytics for business cases. The findings highlight that strengthening community engagement alongside these competencies is essential, as it fosters local ownership, enhances trust, and ensures that social enterprises remain responsive, resilient, and sustainable within their communities.

Studies on social entrepreneurship have established that community engagement strongly influences the sustainability of social enterprises (Omoredede & Axelsson, 2022). Other studies indicate that effective community engagement enhances trust-building, local ownership, and continuous innovation within enterprises. For instance, Ashraf et al. (2019) and Farhoud et al. (2023) found that enterprises that foster regular community interaction, such as holding monthly meetings to discuss goals and outcomes, experienced lower dropout rates among staff and beneficiaries. Similarly, Arkorful et al. (2023) identified that participatory approaches, including consultation, participatory planning, and co-decision-making, significantly strengthen engagement and sustainability outcomes. This is important to transform beneficiaries into active stakeholders, fostering shared responsibility, accountability, and long-term commitment. By embedding participation and dialogue into organisational processes, social enterprises enhance their adaptability, legitimacy, and resilience, which are essential for achieving sustainable impact.

Moreover, the positive impact of community engagement on the sustainability of social enterprises alludes to its central role in enhancing organisational performance and long-term viability. Different forms of community engagement promote sustainability through co-creation, stakeholder participation, and inclusive governance structures (Hlady-Rispal et al., 2021; Carlton et al., 2025; Migwi & Atikiya, 2017; Miriti & Karithi, 2020). This means that whether social enterprises are operated by governments, NGOs, or faith-based organisations such as consecrated women's congregations, understanding how community engagement influences sustainability is very important. For example, a study in Togo by Hlady-Rispal et al. (2021) found that enterprises adopting co-creation models that integrate economic, social, cultural, and spiritual values achieved greater stakeholder loyalty and intergenerational participation. Similarly, findings from Tanzania by Carlton et al. (2025) revealed that sustainability improves significantly when community engagement extends beyond planning into monitoring, evaluation, and feedback stages, especially when traditional and religious leaders are involved in governance.

In the Kenyan context, Migwi and Atikiya (2017) found that limited community involvement across project phases led to weak sustainability outcomes, while Miriti and Karithi (2020) established that community and stakeholder involvement are significant determinants of project sustainability. These studies show that community engagement has a strong effect on the

achievement of social enterprises because it aligns organisational goals with community needs and enhances legitimacy, ownership, and resilience. Thus, within social enterprises managed by consecrated women, community engagement can become a powerful mechanism for sustainable social transformation and mission continuity.

Kwamboka and Njeru (2021) describe community engagement as a critical outcome for ensuring sustainability in social enterprises, particularly in relation to exit strategies and long-term continuity. It further establishes that community engagement shapes how stakeholders participate, take ownership, and assume leadership roles, especially during transitions such as donor exit. It is strengthened through practices such as co-governance, succession planning, and gradual transfer of responsibility to local actors. Similarly, community engagement can be effective when intentionally integrated into project design, but it may be ineffective when local participation is minimal or poorly structured. Thus, when social enterprises fail to incorporate community-based leadership and engagement mechanisms, they risk collapse after external support is withdrawn due to weak local ownership and limited continuity. This understanding is further reinforced by theological perspectives, in which community engagement is viewed not merely as a management tool but as an expression of shared responsibility, relational accountability, and a collective mission rooted in cultural identity and solidarity (Magesa, 2018).

Past studies on how community engagement influences the sustainability of social enterprises conducted in diverse contexts are consistent in their findings with consistent findings (Kimanjara et al., 2024; Odero & Maluki, 2023; Wangila & Mburu, 2020). Community engagement is the pathway to achieving stakeholder participation, ownership, and continuity, whereas limited engagement often results in weak sustainability outcomes. Evidence shows that enterprises integrated into community structures such as parish groups, local committees, and participatory networks experience higher financial self-sufficiency, stronger community support, and improved institutional resilience. Similarly, sustained engagement practices such as feedback mechanisms, co-governance, and culturally grounded approaches enhance adaptability, legitimacy, and long-term impact.

Mbai et al. (2024) highlighted that stakeholder engagement and satisfaction are crucial for project sustainability. Effective project management, including a thorough understanding of stakeholder needs and efficient resource organisation, was a key determinant. The study recommended increasing community engagement by clearly communicating roles and expectations and implementing robust user-fee collection systems to support sustainability. Clear financial policies and project goals are also necessary for project success. This study establishes how CE influences the sustainability of social enterprises run by consecrated women in the Archdiocese of Nairobi.

However, studies on social enterprises managed by consecrated women do not sufficiently examine how community engagement is implemented and sustained as a driver of sustainability. Moreover, the literature is limited on how spiritual authority, cultural context, and participatory governance interact to influence the sustainability of these enterprises. This study, therefore, explored the influence of community engagement on the sustainability of social enterprises managed by Consecrated Women in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya.

Methods

This study was conducted in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, a major ecclesiastical and socio-economic hub in Kenya, characterised by diverse contexts ranging from urban informal settlements to more affluent areas. The region hosts numerous consecrated women's congregations engaged in social enterprises, including education, healthcare, hospitality centres, microfinance, skills development, and community-based income-generating initiatives. The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design to examine how community engagement influences the sustainability of social enterprises, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide comprehensive insights.

The target population comprised 676 Consecrated Women drawn from 134 congregations and 280 social enterprises within the Archdiocese. A total of 84 congregations were selected, including Administrators, Finance Managers, Assistant Administrators, and Regional Superiors. Stratified sampling was used to ensure representation across different levels of authority, while purposive and non-probability sampling techniques were applied for the qualitative strand to capture in-depth perspectives. This approach ensured that participants provided relevant insights based on their roles and experiences in managing social enterprises.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires for the quantitative component and in-depth interview guides for the qualitative component. The mixed-methods approach enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings by combining statistical analysis with lived experiences, thereby providing a holistic understanding of how community engagement contributes to the sustainability of social enterprises managed by Consecrated Women.

Data Collection Procedures: The researcher obtained a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and sought authorisation from the relevant superiors of the selected Consecrated Women's congregations within the Archdiocese of Nairobi. Thereafter, research assistants were engaged to support data collection. The researcher and assistants worked closely with Administrators and relevant leaders in each congregation to administer structured questionnaires to Administrators, Finance Managers, and Assistant Administrators. They also conducted in-depth interviews with Regional Superiors of

selected congregations. Data were collected on-site within the respective social enterprises to ensure accuracy and contextual relevance.

Data Analysis and Presentation: Quantitative data collected from the respondents were analysed using SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics, such as percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data, while inferential statistics, including correlation, regression, and ANOVA, were employed to test the influence of community engagement on sustainability. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and presented in narrative form, supported by direct quotations. The findings were presented using tables, charts, and thematic narrative descriptions to provide a comprehensive understanding of the results.

Results

Demographic information

The researcher sought background information on social enterprises to deepen understanding of their characteristics in relation to the study's findings. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic information of respondents

Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Position	Regional Superiors	7	10.14%
	Administrators	20	28.99%
	Finance Managers	19	27.54%
	Assistant Administrators	23	33.33%
	Total	69	100%
Sector	Education	22	34.92%
	Hospitality	17	26.98%
	Healthcare	12	19.05%
	Agriculture/Farming	7	11.11%
	Religious shops	5	7.94%
	Total	63	100%
Enterprise size (Number of employees)	1 - 10 employees	57	31.32%
	10 - 20 employees	34	18.68%
	20 - 30 employees	46	25.27%
	30 - 40 employees	4	2.19%
	40 Plus employees	41	22.54%
	Total	182	100%

Top-earning enterprise	Education	76	39.58%
	Hospitality Centre	58	30.21%
	Agriculture/Farming	33	17.18%
	Hospitals	25	13.03%
	Total	192	100%
Staff Qualification Distribution (Average Number of Employees)		PhD Level	1
		Masters Level	1
		Bachelor’s Level	2
		Diploma Level	2
		Certificate Level	3

The results from Table 1 indicate a balanced representation across leadership and management positions within the social enterprises. Assistant Administrators represented 23 (33.33%) of the respondents, followed by Administrators with 20 (28.99%) and Finance Managers with 19 (27.54%), while Regional Superiors were the least represented at 7 (10.14%). This means that the majority of participants were middle-level managers directly involved in daily operations and financial oversight. In terms of sector distribution, education accounted for 22 enterprises (34.92%), followed by hospitality (17, 26.98%) and healthcare (12, 19.05%), while agriculture/farming and religious shops represented smaller proportions. This indicates that education remains the dominant area of engagement among Consecrated Women, although there is diversification into other sectors to meet community needs.

Further, the results show that most social enterprises are small-scale, with 57 (31.32%) employing between 1–10 employees, compared to 41 (22.54%) employing more than 40 employees. This suggests that many enterprises operate in limited-resource environments yet maintain flexibility and adaptability. In terms of top-earning enterprises, education recorded the highest proportion at 76 (39.58%), followed by hospitality centres at 58 (30.21%), agriculture/farming at 33 (17.18%), and hospitals at 25 (13.03%). This means that education and hospitality contribute significantly to revenue generation among the enterprises. Moreover, staff qualification distribution indicated that the majority of employees possessed lower to mid-level academic qualifications, with an average of three employees holding certificates, two diplomas, two bachelor’s degrees, one master’s degree, and one PhD. This implies that while the workforce is largely practical and cost-effective, it may limit advanced innovation and strategic capacity within the enterprises

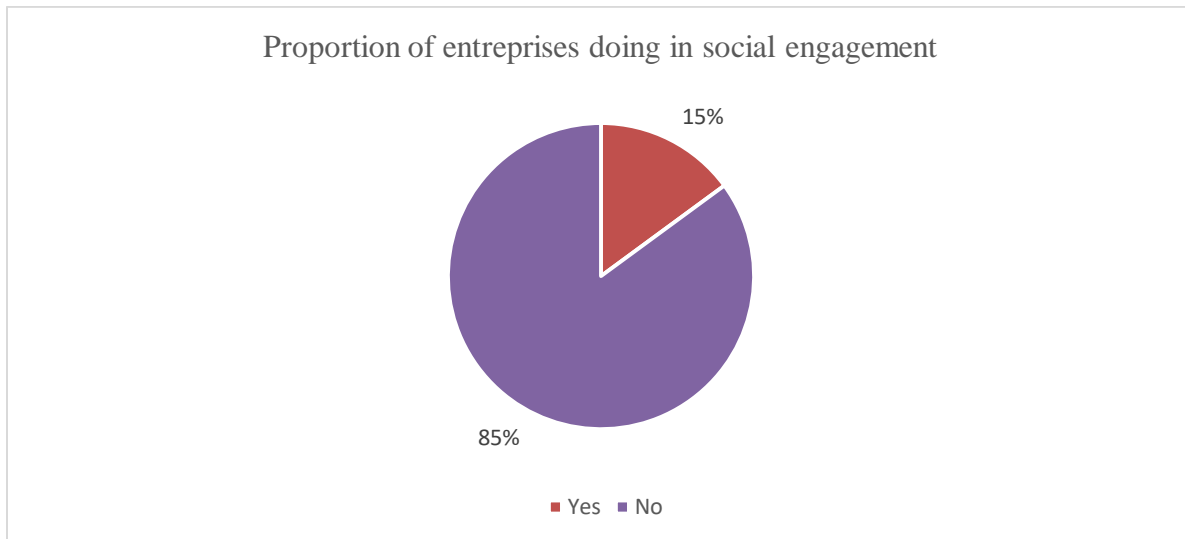
The primary objective of this study was to investigate the influence of community engagement on the sustainability of social enterprises managed by Consecrated Women (Catholic Sisters) in

the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. Hence, the participants were provided with structured questionnaires and interview guides to assess the extent of community engagement practices and determine whether they had a significant effect on the sustainability of these social enterprises. The instruments captured key dimensions such as stakeholder participation, local ownership, co-decision-making, and feedback mechanisms, alongside indicators of sustainability including financial stability, continuity, and social impact. The results from the descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, as well as thematic qualitative findings, are presented in Table 2 and Figure 1.

Table 2. Community Engagement and Sustainability of Social Enterprises

Community Engagement Elements	SA (%)	A (%)	U (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Community engagement plays a significant role in the long-term sustainability of our social enterprises	60.99	18.68	4.95	8.79	6.59	4.19	1.256
The active involvement of community members significantly enhances the effectiveness of our social enterprises	58.80	24.76	8.25	5.50	3.00	4.29	1.050
The participation of the local community is crucial for the success of our social enterprises	51.65	25.82	6.04	8.24	8.24	3.86	1.597
Regular feedback from community members helps in improving the outcomes of our social enterprises	50.00	22.50	16.50	5.00	6.00	4.07	1.180
Community engagement strategies are effectively implemented in our social enterprises	30.77	28.02	20.33	12.64	8.24	3.60	1.269
Community members are actively involved in the decision-making process of our social enterprises	33.52	37.91	13.19	10.99	4.40	3.85	1.135

Figure 1. Social enterprises' involvement in community engagement, networking, and advocacy



The results from Table 2 indicate that, on aggregate, community engagement was rated highly across all measured sustainability indicators among respondents in the current study. The highest mean score was recorded for active involvement of community members (Mean = 4.29, SD = 1.050), followed by the role of community engagement in long-term sustainability (Mean = 4.19, SD = 1.256) and the contribution of regular feedback in improving outcomes (Mean = 4.07, SD = 1.180). Other elements, such as participation of the local community (Mean = 3.86, SD = 1.597), involvement in decision-making (Mean = 3.85, SD = 1.135), and implementation of engagement strategies (Mean = 3.60, SD = 1.269), also recorded mean scores above the midpoint. These results show that community engagement is a dominant and positively perceived factor influencing the sustainability of social enterprises. This implies that participants recognise the importance of collaboration, participation, and shared responsibility in enhancing the effectiveness and continuity of their enterprises.

Figure 1 indicates that only a small proportion of social enterprises are actively engaged in structured community engagement activities. Specifically, 15% of enterprises reported conducting community engagement through networking, advocacy, and training opportunities, while a significant majority (85%) indicated that they do not engage in such activities. This shows that although community engagement is widely recognised as important for sustainability, its practical implementation remains limited among many social enterprises.

The study also utilised regression analysis to examine the relationship between community engagement and the sustainability of social enterprises, with the results presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3. Community Engagement and Sustainability

Model Summary	R	R Square	Adjusted R-Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.595 ^a	0.354	0.351	0.72810	0.694

a. Predictors: (Constant), Community Engagement
 b. Dependent Variable: Sustainability

Table 4. ANOVA Test on Community Engagement

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	52.355	1	52.355	98.759	.000 ^b
	Residual	95.423	180	0.530		
	Total	147.779	181			

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability
 b. Predictors: (Constant), Community Engagement

Table 5. Regression Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.062	0.240		8.599	0.000
	Community Engagement	0.584	0.059	0.595	9.938	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Sustainability

The results in Table 3 indicate that community engagement has a moderate positive relationship with sustainability (R = .595), explaining 35.4% of the variance (R² = .354), with the adjusted R² (.351) confirming the model's stability. The ANOVA results in Table 4 further indicate that the

model was statistically significant, $F(1, 180) = 98.759$, $p < .001$, indicating that community engagement is a significant predictor of sustainability.

The findings from Table 5 reveal that community engagement has a positive and statistically significant effect on sustainability ($B = 0.584$, $\beta = 0.595$, $t = 9.938$, $p < .001$). This implies that an increase in community engagement leads to a corresponding increase in the sustainability of social enterprises. Overall, the results confirm that community engagement is a strong and significant predictor of sustainability, contributing meaningfully to the long-term success of social enterprises.

Discussion

The findings from this study showed that community engagement is a central and dominant factor influencing the sustainability of social enterprises managed by Consecrated Women. The quantitative results indicated a strong and significant positive relationship between community engagement and sustainability, while the qualitative findings provided deeper insight into how this relationship is experienced in practice. Participants consistently described community engagement not merely as participation, but as a relational process that fosters ownership, trust, and shared responsibility. For instance, respondents emphasised that when community members are involved in decision-making, “they feel valued and take greater responsibility for the project’s success,” highlighting that sustainability is rooted in inclusion and co-creation rather than in top-down implementation. These findings are consistent with those of Ahmed (2024), Sluzalec (2024), and Kim et al. (2023), who affirm that meaningful stakeholder engagement enhances legitimacy, strengthens commitment, and improves long-term outcomes across diverse contexts.

Furthermore, the qualitative findings revealed that community engagement contributes to sustainability through multiple pathways, including capacity building, economic empowerment, and social cohesion. Activities such as health outreach, agriculture, vocational training, and hospitality services were not only income-generating but also served as platforms for empowering communities and strengthening resilience. Respondents noted that initiatives like farming and skills training “bring people together to work, learn, and share,” illustrating how engagement builds both social and economic capital. These findings resonate with Littlewood and Holt (2020), who argue that social enterprises embed communities through cooperative models and shared governance structures, and with Kimanjara et al. (2024), who emphasise that genuine engagement fosters enduring relationships that support sustainability.

However, the findings also revealed important nuances. While community engagement was widely valued, its implementation was not always structured or consistent across all enterprises.

Some initiatives lacked formal mechanisms such as feedback systems, networking platforms, and inclusive governance structures, which are necessary for fully institutional engagement. This aligns with Carlton et al. (2025), who note that engagement must move beyond transactional participation toward strategic and sustained relationships. Additionally, challenges such as resource constraints, climate risks in agricultural projects, and unequal distribution of benefits underscore the need to manage community engagement strategically to ensure inclusivity and long-term sustainability. Overall, the study demonstrates that community engagement is not only a practical tool but also a foundational and transformative element for sustaining mission-driven social enterprises (Arkorful, Hilton & Awaah, 2023).

Conclusion

The key conclusion from this study is that community engagement has a strong and significant influence on the sustainability of social enterprises managed by Consecrated Women in the Archdiocese of Nairobi. The findings demonstrate that sustainability is not merely a function of financial performance, but is deeply rooted in relational dynamics such as trust, ownership, participation, and social cohesion. Community engagement emerged as a foundational driver of sustainability, as it enhances local capacity, promotes economic empowerment, and strengthens resilience through initiatives such as health outreach, agriculture, and skills development. This finding aligns with Sustainability Theory, particularly the social dimension of the Triple Bottom Line, which emphasises that long-term viability depends on strong social embeddedness. It is also consistent with Stakeholder Theory, which posits that organisational success depends on meaningful engagement with stakeholders, and with Social Entrepreneurship Theory, which highlights innovation and value creation through community-driven approaches. Thus, the study concludes that community engagement is not only a strategy but a relational infrastructure essential for achieving sustainable, mission-driven social enterprises.

The study made recommendations in two broad areas of practice and policy formulation. In practice, leaders of Consecrated Women's congregations should strengthen structured community engagement mechanisms by institutionalizing participatory decision-making, feedback mechanisms, and inclusive governance structures. This will enhance ownership, accountability, and long-term commitment among beneficiaries. Management of social enterprises should also integrate community engagement into their operational models through activities such as training, employment creation, and cooperative initiatives, which build local capacity and resilience. Furthermore, there is a need to develop competencies in strategic planning, financial management, and innovation to complement relational strengths, ensuring that engagement translates into tangible sustainability outcomes.

In the area of policy formulation, the study recommends developing frameworks that promote structured and inclusive community engagement as a core component of sustainability strategies. Religious congregations and supporting institutions should adopt policies that encourage co-creation, partnership-building, and a gradual transition towards local ownership, particularly in donor-funded projects. Additionally, there is a need to integrate risk-sensitive approaches that address challenges such as resource constraints, climate risks, and unequal benefit distribution to ensure inclusivity. At a broader level, stakeholders including Church authorities, development partners, and government agencies should support capacity-building initiatives and provide enabling environments for social enterprises to thrive. Ultimately, sustainability is achieved not merely through participation, but through strategic, well-managed community engagement that balances empowerment, accountability, and resilience while remaining grounded in the values of solidarity, subsidiarity, and the common good.

The study further recommends strengthening community engagement-driven participatory monitoring and evaluation systems. Social enterprises should incorporate continuous feedback loops, community scorecards, and participatory evaluation mechanisms that actively involve community members in tracking progress, identifying challenges, and improving service delivery. This will not only enhance transparency and accountability but also ensure that community voices remain central in shaping the direction and effectiveness of social enterprises. Such community engagement-centred systems will further reinforce ownership, build trust, and promote adaptive learning, which are essential for long-term sustainability.

The study also recommends investing in capacity building and leadership development that integrates community engagement principles among Consecrated Women (Catholic Sisters) and their collaborators. Training programmes should focus on entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, innovation, and partnership development, while also equipping leaders with competencies to effectively mobilise, engage, and collaborate with communities. Building these capacities will strengthen leaders' ability to balance mission and market demands through inclusive approaches, thereby enhancing both sustainability and impact. This recommendation aligns with Social Entrepreneurship Theory, which emphasises innovation, participation, and adaptive capacity in achieving sustainable development outcomes.

Lastly, the study recommends fostering stronger networks and partnerships that are grounded in community engagement frameworks at local, national, and international levels. Collaboration with government agencies, private-sector actors, non-governmental organisations, and other faith-based institutions should be structured to actively involve community stakeholders as co-creators and partners. Such engagement-driven partnerships will reduce isolation, enhance scalability, and create opportunities for shared learning and innovation. By embedding community engagement within collaborative ecosystems, social enterprises managed by

Consecrated Women can expand their reach, deepen their impact, and ensure sustained relevance in addressing complex social challenges.

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