PARTICIPATORY MONITORING AND EVALUATION PRACTICES AND PERFORMANCE OF AJIRA DIGITAL PROGRAM IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The AJIRA Digital Program, initiated by the Government of Kenya, aims to equip youth with the digital skills needed to participate in online work opportunities. This program addresses the high youth unemployment rates in Kenya by providing training in digital skills and facilitating access to online job platforms. Despite the significant efforts and resources dedicated to the AJIRA Digital Program, its effectiveness in addressing youth unemployment in Nakuru County remains underexplored and potentially underutilized due to inadequate Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) practices. The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of participatory monitoring and evaluation practices and performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to determine the influence of participatory decision making and participatory capacity building in enhancing the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program. This study was guided by Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and Diffusion of Innovations Theory. This study used a descriptive research design. This study was conducted in Nakuru County, Kenya and focused on Ajira Digital Program. According to County annual report (2023), Nakuru County has 6 ajira digital centres. This study therefore targeted a ajira digital manager and 30 ajira representatives in every centre. The total population was therefore 186 respondents. The study's sample size was reached at using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination formula. Therefore, using the formula, the sample size for the study was 125 respondents. The respondents were chosen with the help of simple random sampling technique. Data that was used in the study was collected by way of structured questionnaires. This study piloted the questionnaire on 13 respondents which represents 10% of study sample size. Data obtained from the field was coded, cleaned, and entered into the computer for analysis using the SPSS version 25. Data analysis was done through use of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistical included frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistical analysis used was regression analysis and correlation analysis. The study results were presented through use of tables and figures. The study concludes that participatory decision making has a positive and significant effect on the success of the AJIRA Digital Program. Further, the study concludes that participatory capacity building has a positive and significant effect on enhancing the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program. Based on the findings, the study recommends that the management of AJIRA Digital Program in Kenya should institutionalize inclusive decision-making forums that regularly involve youth beneficiaries, trainers, and key stakeholders in shaping the direction of the AJIRA Digital Program

Key Words: Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Practices, Participatory Decision Making, Participatory Capacity Building, Performance of Ajira Digital Program

Background of the Study

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation is a collaborative approach that actively engages stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation processes of programs and projects (Vernooy et al., 2023). This method emphasizes inclusivity, ensuring that the views and experiences of all stakeholders, particularly the beneficiaries, are integrated into the evaluation framework. PM&E has been shown to enhance accountability, transparency, and program effectiveness by fostering a sense of ownership among participants and promoting continuous feedback mechanisms (Estrella & Gaventa, 2020).

The AJIRA Digital Program, initiated by the Government of Kenya, aims to equip youth with the digital skills needed to participate in online work opportunities. This program addresses the high youth unemployment rates in Kenya by providing training in digital skills and facilitating access to online job platforms. As of 2023, youth unemployment in Nakuru County was estimated at approximately 40% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). This high unemployment rate underscores the urgent need for effective programs like AJIRA to create sustainable employment opportunities for the youth.

However, the success of such programs heavily relies on robust PM&E practices. Effective monitoring and evaluation are crucial in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the program, ensuring that it meets its objectives, and making necessary adjustments based on real-time data and stakeholder feedback. Traditional M&E methods often fall short in capturing the complex, dynamic nature of program environments, particularly in regions with diverse socio-economic challenges (Chambers, 2019). PM&E addresses these gaps by leveraging the insights and experiences of those directly involved in and affected by the program.

Studies have shown that participatory approaches in M&E lead to improved program outcomes. For instance, a study by Cornwall and Jewkes (2019) highlighted that participatory techniques in health programs resulted in more accurate data collection, enhanced stakeholder buy-in, and better program sustainability. Similarly, in the context of educational programs, PM&E practices have been linked to higher levels of engagement and improved performance outcomes (Bruns et al., 2021).

The AJIRA Digital Program's focus on digital skills training and online job placements makes it a prime candidate for the implementation of PM&E practices. By involving the youth, program implementers, and other stakeholders in the monitoring and evaluation process, the program can ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of its beneficiaries and adapts to the changing digital landscape. This approach not only enhances the effectiveness of the program but also empowers the participants by giving them a voice in the program's development and evaluation processes.

Capacity building through participatory approaches ensures that stakeholders acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute effectively to program implementation and evaluation. Méndez et al. (2017) highlight that participatory capacity building in agricultural projects resulted in improved skills and increased productivity among farmers. For the AJIRA Digital Program, participatory capacity building might include training sessions where beneficiaries are not just passive recipients but active participants who share their experiences and learn from each other, enhancing their digital skills and employability. Accurate baseline data is crucial for effective monitoring and evaluation. Engaging stakeholders in data collection processes ensures the data's relevance and accuracy. Tall et al. (2018) emphasize that participatory baseline data collection in climate services projects led to more effective monitoring and improved project

performance. In the AJIRA Digital Program, participatory baseline data collection could involve surveys and interviews with program beneficiaries to gather initial data on their skills, employment status, and expectations from the program. This data serves as a benchmark for measuring the program's impact over time.

Problem Statement

Despite the significant efforts and resources dedicated to the AJIRA Digital Program, its effectiveness in addressing youth unemployment in Nakuru County remains underexplored and potentially underutilized due to inadequate Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) practices. The youth unemployment rate in Nakuru County stands at approximately 40% (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2023), indicating a critical need for effective intervention programs. The AJIRA Digital Program, which aims to equip young people with digital skills and provide access to online job opportunities, has the potential to significantly reduce unemployment rates. However, several challenges hinder its full impact.

According to a study by the Ministry of Information, Communications, and Technology (2021), about 65% of the data collected from the AJIRA Digital Program is either incomplete or inconsistent. This data fragmentation makes it difficult to get a comprehensive view of the program's performance and impacts, thereby limiting the ability to make informed decisions and improvements. In addition, a report by the Youth Employment Service (YES) Kenya (2022) highlighted that only 30% of the program's beneficiaries feel that their feedback is taken into account in the program's decision-making processes. This lack of participatory decision-making can lead to misalignment between the program's objectives and the actual needs of the beneficiaries, reducing the program's overall effectiveness. Additionally, there is inadequate technical capacity among both the program implementers and the beneficiaries. A survey conducted by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2021) found that 55% of the trainers involved in the AJIRA Digital Program lacked sufficient skills in modern digital technologies and PM&E practices. This skills gap limits the ability to effectively train the beneficiaries and monitor the program's progress.

Resistance to change and the adoption of new technologies also pose significant challenges. A study by the Kenya Youth Empowerment Project (2020) indicated that 47% of the program implementers were reluctant to adopt new monitoring and evaluation technologies due to a lack of familiarity and confidence in these tools. This resistance undermines the potential benefits of innovative PM&E practices that could enhance the program's effectiveness. Privacy and data security concerns are a major hindrance to the effective implementation of PM&E practices. According to the Kenya Data Protection Act Compliance Report (2022), 60% of the program's data management systems do not fully comply with data protection regulations, posing risks of data breaches and loss of trust among the beneficiaries.

These challenges necessitate a systematic evaluation of how participatory approaches in monitoring and evaluation can improve the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program. By addressing these issues, the program can better align its objectives with the needs of its beneficiaries, enhance stakeholder engagement, improve data accuracy, and ultimately reduce youth unemployment in Nakuru County.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the influence of participatory monitoring and evaluation practices on performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Specific Objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

  i.   To determine the influence of participatory decision making on the success of the AJIRA Digital Program.
  ii. To assess the influence of participatory capacity building in enhancing the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program.

Theoretical Review

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Richard Ryan and Edward Deci in 1985 is a psychological framework that focuses on human motivation and well-being, emphasizing the importance of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. According to SDT, individuals have an intrinsic drive to fulfill these needs, which in turn contributes to their psychological growth, satisfaction, and overall well-being. Autonomy refers to the need to feel in control of one's own actions and choices, competence involves the need to feel effective and capable in one's pursuits, and relatedness pertains to the need to feel connected and valued by others (Adeigbe, *et al*, 2024).

One assumption of Self-Determination Theory is that humans are inherently proactive and seek opportunities to fulfill their psychological needs in their environments. This assumption suggests that individuals are not passive recipients of external rewards or punishments but rather actively engage with their surroundings in ways that promote their autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Additionally, SDT posits that the satisfaction of these psychological needs leads to more optimal functioning and greater well-being, while the frustration of these needs can result in decreased motivation, psychological distress, and maladaptive behavior (Nyindo, 2023). Critiques of Self-Determination Theory often focus on its generalizability across cultures and contexts, as well as its potential to overlook other factors that may influence motivation and behavior. Some critics argue that SDT's emphasis on autonomy may neglect the role of social and cultural influences on individual behavior, particularly in collectivist cultures where interdependence and social harmony are prioritized over individual autonomy (Kimeli, Ngugi & Paul, 2024). The theory is relevant in determining the influence of participatory decision making on the success of the AJIRA Digital Program.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Innovation Diffusion Theory (IDT) is a framework that seeks to explain how new ideas, practices, and technologies spread within and between social systems. Developed by Rogers (1962), the theory emphasizes the process by which innovations are communicated over time among the members of a social group. At its core, IDT identifies several key elements that influence the adoption of innovations, including the characteristics of the innovation itself, the communication channels used to disseminate information, the social system in which the innovation is introduced, and the individual adopter's characteristics (Muragwa & Njenga, 2023). One of the central

components of IDT is the attributes of innovations, which are factors that determine how likely an innovation is to be adopted. Rogers identified five key attributes: relative advantage (the perceived benefits of the innovation compared to existing solutions), compatibility (how well the innovation aligns with existing values and practices), complexity (the perceived difficulty of using the innovation), trialability (the ease with which the innovation can be tested), and observability (the visibility of the innovation's results to others). These attributes play a critical role in shaping perceptions and, consequently, the rate of adoption among potential users (Ojokuku & Adegbite, 2023).

Another significant aspect of IDT is the adoption process, which occurs in several stages: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation, and confirmation. During the knowledge stage, potential adopters become aware of the innovation. In the persuasion stage, they form opinions about the innovation, which can lead to a decision to adopt or reject it (Muriithi, Ndung'u & Kidombo, 2021). Implementation involves putting the innovation into practice, and confirmation is the stage where adopters seek reinforcement of their decision, either strengthening their commitment or leading to discontinuance if the innovation does not meet expectations. IDT also emphasizes the importance of social networks and communication channels in the diffusion process. Innovations are often spread through interpersonal communication among peers, opinion leaders, and early adopters who influence others within their social networks. This social aspect highlights that the diffusion of innovations is not merely a linear process but rather a complex interplay of individual choices and social dynamics (Lesiamiti & Ombui, 2024). This theory is relevant in assessing the influence of participatory capacity building in enhancing the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program.

Conceptual framework

A conceptual framework is a system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs research. It provides a visual representation of the relationships between key variables or concepts in a study. This framework helps researchers outline what they plan to study and the expected relationships among the variables, thereby guiding the research design and methodology (Miles & Huberman, 2019). The Figure 1 shows the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.
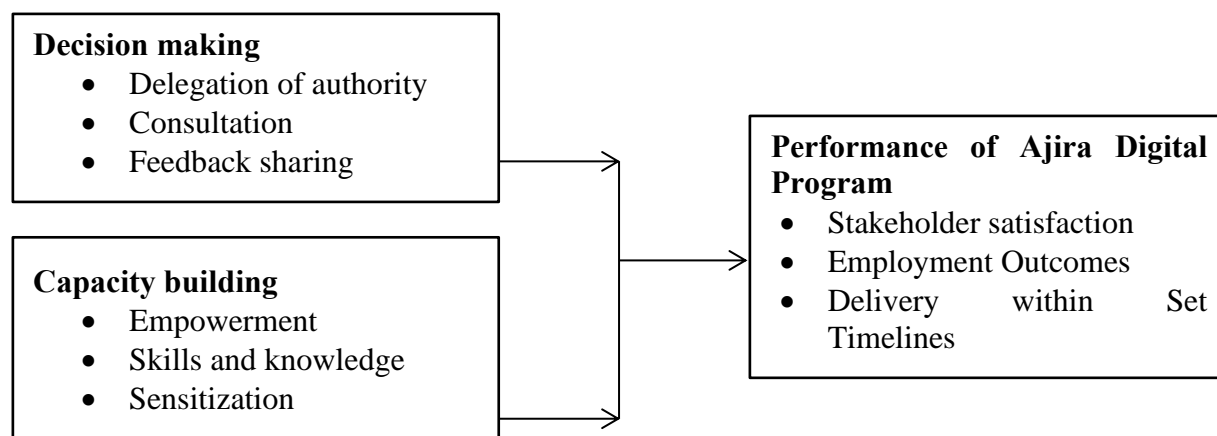
Independent variables   **Dependent variable**

Figure 2. 1: Conceptual Framework

Participatory Decision Making

Decision making is the process of selecting a course of action from among multiple alternatives in order to achieve a specific goal or solve a problem. It involves evaluating information, considering potential outcomes, weighing risks and benefits, and choosing the option that best aligns with the decision maker's objectives, values, or preferences (Adeigbe, *et al*, 2024). Delegation of authority refers to the process by which a leader or manager assigns responsibility and decision-making power to others within an organization. It allows managers to focus on higher-level tasks while empowering team members to take ownership of specific duties. By delegating authority, leaders can create a more efficient workflow, foster employee development, and increase overall organizational productivity (Nyindo, 2023). Consultation is the process of seeking input, advice, or feedback from others before making a decision or taking action. This could involve engaging team members, stakeholders, or experts to gather diverse perspectives, clarify uncertainties, or generate new ideas. Consultation can be an informal or formal process, and it is often used to ensure that decisions are well-informed and consider multiple viewpoints (Taparor & Atambo, 2020). In a work environment, consultation can be especially important when decisions affect a wide range of people or have significant long-term consequences. Through consultation, decision-makers can not only gather valuable insights but also promote a culture of inclusiveness, trust, and collaboration.

Feedback sharing is the practice of providing constructive information to individuals or teams regarding their performance, behavior, or work outcomes. It plays a crucial role in improving skills, enhancing productivity, and fostering continuous learning within organizations. Feedback can be both positive, reinforcing desired behaviors and achievements, and corrective, pointing out areas that require improvement (Adeigbe, *et al*, 2024). For feedback to be effective, it should be timely, specific, and actionable, offering clear guidance on how to improve. Regular feedback sharing encourages open communication and supports a culture of continuous improvement, where individuals feel valued and empowered to make adjustments based on clear guidance.

Participatory Capacity Building

Capacity building refers to the process of developing and strengthening the skills, abilities, resources, and organizational structures of individuals, groups, or institutions to enable them to effectively meet their goals and perform tasks (Muriithi, Ndung'u & Kidombo, 2021). It focuses on enhancing the capabilities of people and organizations to solve problems, make decisions, adapt to changes, and deliver results in the face of challenges. Empowerment is the process of giving individuals or groups the authority, resources, and confidence to make decisions, take action, and control their own lives. It involves creating an environment where people can access opportunities and feel capable of overcoming challenges, contributing to their own well-being and development. Empowerment is not just about granting power; it's about enabling others to develop the skills and self-assurance necessary to exercise that power effectively (Lesiamiti & Ombui, 2024).

Skills refer to the practical abilities acquired through training or experience, such as technical proficiency, communication, leadership, and problem-solving abilities. They can be specific to certain tasks or more generalized across different contexts. Knowledge, pertains to the information, understanding, and expertise accumulated over time, often through education or hands-on experience. Skills and knowledge are critical for personal and professional growth (Muragwa & Njenga, 2023). For example, in the workplace, employees with the right skills can perform their jobs effectively, while knowledge of industry trends, best practices, and organizational goals helps

them make informed decisions. Sensitization refers to the process of raising awareness and fostering understanding about specific issues, challenges, or social injustices (Muriithi, Ndung'u & Kidombo, 2021). It involves educating individuals or communities about topics that they may be unaware of or may not fully understand, in order to encourage empathy, change attitudes, and prompt action. Sensitization efforts are often used to address social issues like gender inequality, human rights violations, environmental sustainability, and public health concerns.

Empirical Review

Participatory Decision Making and Program Performance

Adeigbe, *et al* (2024) examined on participatory decision-making and organisational performance of selected ministries in Ondo State Civil Service. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study with the population of 1726 civil servants from selected ministries in Ondo State. Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the 400 sample size, the respondents were randomly selected for the study. The study found that employees participation in work decision has positive impact on service quality of Ondo State Civil Service. There was a positive relationship between consultative participation and operational efficiency of Ondo State Civil Service. The study concluded that participatory decisions-making is a necessary requirement for organisation performance in Ondo State Civil Service.

Nyindo (2023) investigated on participatory decision making and organizational performance of Uganda Martyrs University (UMU). Quantitative and qualitative study approach was used in this research. Data was collected by means of questionnaires from a sample of 267 respondents drawn from employees of Uganda Martyrs University. The study found a positive relationship between participatory decision making and organizational performance. The study found a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between participatory decision making and organizational performance. The study concluded that employee participation in decision making will have positive effect on employee commitment which leads to organizational performance.

Taparor and Atambo (2020) researched on the influence of participatory decision making on employee performance: a study of state corporations in Kenya. The study used descriptive survey design. The research targeted one hundred and thirty five respondents. The study found that participatory decision making is an operative mechanism to increase employee productivity. The study concluded that allowing all employees to participate in decision making is the best and it helps increase commitment level of employees as well as promoting creativity and innovation in the organization.

Omar, Uzel and Ibua (2021) conducted a study on the effect of participatory decision making on employee satisfaction in parastatals in Mombasa County. The study used a cross-sectional research design. A total of 74 employees were sampled from a total of 37 Parastatals. The study found that job autonomy had an average positive relationship with employee satisfaction while transformational leadership and employee empowerment had a strong positive relationship with employee satisfaction. The study concluded that job autonomy, transformational leadership and employee empowerment had a significant effect or otherwise on employee satisfaction.

Participatory Capacity Building and Program Performance

Muragwa and Njenga (2023) investigated on participatory capacity building and performance of non-governmental organizations in Rwanda: a case of Free Methodist Church in Rwanda, Kigali City. The study employed a mixed methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative

data collection methods. The population of this study was 270 employees of Free Methodist Church. The sample size of this research was selected using the formula of Slovene formula as 84 respondents. The study found that participatory capacity building has statistical significant and high positive effect on the organisational performance of the church. The study concluded that participatory capacity building has a significant influence on organisational performance of the church.

Ojokuku and Adegbite (2023) researched on the impact of participatory capacity building and manpower development on staff performance in selected organisations in Nigeria. Data was gathered from 128 managers of randomly selected firms in South western Nigeria, with the aid of a questionnaire. The study found a significant positive relationship between participatory capacity building and staff performance in the selected organisations. The study concluded that participatory capacity building impact staff performance in the selected organisations.

Lesiamiti and Ombui (2024) assessed on participatory capacity building and performance of agriculture projects in Samburu County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The study targeted agricultural projects in Samburu County. The study found that there is a strong significant relationship between participatory capacity building and performance of agriculture projects in Samburu County. The study concluded that participatory capacity building statistically and significantly improves performance of agriculture projects in Samburu County.

Kanyi and James (2023) examined on participatory capacity building and performance of donor-funded projects in Nairobi City County Kenya. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The target population was 55 donor-funded projects and the units of observation were 311 project personnel and sampled 94 people. The study found that participatory capacity building has a significant influence on the success of donor-funded projects in Nairobi County. The study concluded that participatory capacity building had a favourable and substantial influence on the success of donor-financed projects in Nairobi County.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used of a descriptive research design. Mugenda and Mugenda (2018) explained the descriptive design is a process of collecting data in order to test a hypothesis or to answer the questions of the current status of the subject under study. Its advantage is that, it is used extensively to describe behavior, values, attitude and character. The description research design aspect of it attempted to provide more details and insights from the respondents on how the dependent variables impact on the independent variable. This descriptive research design enabled the researcher to analyze the findings and draw informed conclusions.

Population of the Study

This study was conducted in Nakuru County, Kenya and focused on Ajira Digital Program. According to County annual report (2023), Nakuru County has 6 ajira digital centres. This study therefore targeted a ajira digital manager and 30 ajira representatives in every centre. The total population was therefore 186 respondents.

Table 1: Target Population

Category	Target Population
Ajira Digital Managers	6
Ajira Representatives	180
Total	**186**

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study's sample size was reached at using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination formula (Russell, 2020). The formula used for arriving at the sample size is;

$$n = \frac{x^2 N P (1 - P)}{\left(ME^2(N-1)\right) + (x^2 P(1 - P))}$$

Where:

n=sample size
x^2=Chi-square for the specified confidence level at 1 degree of freedom
N=Population size (186)

P = is the proportion in the target population estimated to have characteristics being studied. As the proportion was unknown, 0.5 was used.

Chuan and Penyelidikan (2019) indicate that the use of 0.5 provides the maximum sample size and hence it is the most preferable. 178.6344/1.4254

ME=desired margin of Error (Expressed as a proportion)

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \, 186 * 0.5 * 0.5}{(0.05^2 * 186) + (1.96^2 * 0.5 * 0.5)}$$

$$n = 125$$

Therefore, using the formula, the sample size for the study was 125 respondents. The respondents were chosen with the help of simple random sampling technique.

Data Collection Instrument

Data that was used in the study was collected by way of structured questionnaires which was made up of close-ended questions that were standardized in order to enable comparisons of the results from the different respondents. The questionnaire used a Likert scale point slanting scale with fixed responses used to measure respondents' agreement to the questions. It was made up of two parts. Part one captured the profile of the demographic and respondents while the second part captured the applied turnaround strategies. Data, in this case, is the information gathered in the course of the research (Yin, 2020). A questionnaire is a document that contains a list of questions that are used to gather information from the respondents. By use of the questionnaire, there was high uniformity all through the data collection process due to the fact that all the respondents respond to a similar type of questions. It also gives time to the respondents to respond as they were given enough days to return the questionnaires. The answers given are more likely honest due to

the element of anonymity that comes with the questionnaire (Kothari, 2020). Hence this made the use of questionnaires in this research very efficient and appropriate.

Pilot Study

Pilot test is a replica and rehearsal of the main study. The pilot testing unveils the fore weaknesses or otherwise of the questionnaire for respective improvements to be made. This test was used to ensure reliability and validity of the research tools. According to Lancaster, Dodd, and Williamson (2019), the sample size for high precision pilot studies should be between 1% and 10%. This study piloted the questionnaire on 13 respondents which represents 10% of study sample size. Such tests help identify possible problems, clarity on the instruments and appropriateness of the language during the main study, Kvale, (2020). The pilot test assesses the relevance of the research objectives as it tests the understand ability of the research tools.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data obtained from the field was coded, cleaned, and entered into the computer for analysis using the SPSS version 25. The data was summarized in order to see emerging trends and issues around specific themes, which are dependent on the variables and objectives. Presentation of data was done in form of quantitative and qualitative reports which was presented in forms of tables and essay. For the quantitative reports, the tables consisted of mean and standard deviation values that were used to make interpretation of the analysis. Percentage, mean and standard deviation was used to show the frequency of responses. Tables were used to display the rate of responses and to facilitate comparison. Qualitative reports were presented in form of essay which was discussed as per the study objectives aligned with the theories and empirical study.

Descriptive statistical included frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistical analysis to be used was regression analysis and correlation analysis. The significant of each independent variable was tested at a confidence level of 95%. Both multiple linear regression and simple linear regression model that was utilized are shown below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_i X \ (i = 1, 2)$$
Where:
Y represents dependent Variable,
β_0 represents a constant or Intercept
β_i represents the estimated regression coefficients
X represents the predictor variable

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$$
Where:
Y represents dependent Variable (performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya),
β represents a constant or Intercept
$\beta_1, \beta_2,$ represents the estimated regression coefficients
X_1 Represents participatory decision making
X_2 Represents participatory capacity building
ε Represents error term (represents the effect of the variables that were not covered by the equation)

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Participatory Decision Making and Program Performance

The first specific objective of the study was to determine the influence of participatory decision making on the success of the AJIRA Digital Program. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on participatory decision making and the success of the AJIRA Digital Program. The results were as shown in Table 2

From the results, the respondents agreed that delegation of authority is aligned with the skills and expertise of the team members (M=3.759, SD= 0.931). In addition, the respondents agreed that delegated decision-making powers are regularly reviewed and adjusted as needed (M=3.741, SD=0.709). Further, the respondents agreed that stakeholder feedback is carefully considered and integrated into the decision-making process (M=3.680, SD=0.842).

The respondents also agreed that there is a clear process for escalating issues or seeking further consultation when needed (M=3.673, SD=0.777). Further, the respondents agreed that decision-making outcomes are communicated transparently to all relevant parties (M=3.658, SD=0.818). In addition, the respondents agreed that feedback is used as a tool for reflection and improvement in the decision-making process (M=3.644, SD=0.587).

Table 2: Participatory Decision Making and Program Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Delegation of authority is aligned with the skills and expertise of the team members.	3.759	0.931
Delegated decision-making powers are regularly reviewed and adjusted as needed	3.741	0.709
Stakeholder feedback is carefully considered and integrated into the decision-making process.	3.680	0.842
There is a clear process for escalating issues or seeking further consultation when needed	3.673	0.777
Decision-making outcomes are communicated transparently to all relevant parties	3.658	0.818
Feedback is used as a tool for reflection and improvement in the decision-making process	3.644	0.587
Aggregate	**3.693**	**0.777**

Participatory Capacity Building and Program Performance

The second specific objective of the study was to assess the influence of participatory capacity building in enhancing the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program. The respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement on various statements relating to participatory capacity building and enhancing the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program. The results were as presented in Table 3.

From the results, the respondents agreed that participants take on leadership roles after the program (M=3.878, SD= 0.824). In addition, the respondents agreed the program fosters ownership and responsibility (M=3.852, SD=0.911). Further, the respondents agreed that participants report

increased competence in their field (M=3.788, SD= 0.798). From the results, the respondents agreed that the program updates participants on current industry trends (M=3.768, SD= 0.800). In addition, the respondents agreed that participants understand the importance of inclusivity and diversity (M=3.733, SD=0.853). Further, the respondents agreed that the program increases awareness of cultural and gender dynamics (M=3.681, SD=0.679).

Table 3: Participatory Capacity Building and Program Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Participants take on leadership roles after the program.	3.878	0.824
The program fosters ownership and responsibility.	3.852	0.911
Participants report increased competence in their field.	3.788	0.798
The program updates participants on current industry trends.	3.768	0.800
Participants understand the importance of inclusivity and diversity.	3.733	0.853
The program increases awareness of cultural and gender dynamics	3.681	0.679
Aggregate	**3.783**	**0.811**

Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics in the current study focused on correlation and regression analysis. Correlation analysis was used to determine the strength of the relationship while regression analysis was used to determine the relationship between dependent variable (performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya) and independent variables (participatory decision making and participatory capacity building).

Correlation Analysis

The present study used Pearson correlation analysis to determine the strength of association between independent variables (participatory decision making and participatory capacity building) and the dependent variable (performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya). Pearson correlation coefficient range between zero and one, where by the strength of association increase with increase in the value of the correlation coefficients.

Table 4: Correlation Coefficients

		Program Performance	Participatory Decision Making	Participatory Capacity Building
Program Performance	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	109		
Participatory Decision Making	Pearson Correlation	.879**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	109	109	
Participatory Capacity Building	Pearson Correlation	.868**	.513	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.011	
	N	109	109	109

From the results, there is a very strong relationship between participatory decision making and performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya (r = 0.879, p value =0.000). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The

findings conform to the findings of Nyindo (2023) that there is a very strong relationship between participatory decision making and program performance.

Further, the results revealed that there is a very strong relationship between participatory capacity building and performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya (r = 0.868, p value =0.001). The relationship was significant since the p value 0.001 was less than 0.05 (significant level). The findings are in line with the findings of Lesiamiti and Ombui (2024) that there is a very strong relationship between participatory capacity building and program performance.

Regression Analysis

Multivariate regression analysis was used to assess the relationship between independent variables (participatory decision making and participatory capacity building) and the dependent variable (performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya).

Table 5: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.878	.771	.772	.10129

a. Predictors: (Constant), participatory decision making and participatory capacity building

The model summary was used to explain the variation in the dependent variable that could be explained by the independent variables. The r-squared for the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable was 0.771. This implied that 77.1% of the variation in the dependent variable (performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya) could be explained by independent variables (participatory decision making and participatory capacity building).

Table 6: Analysis of Variance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	27.106	2	13.553	152.281	.000[b]
1	Residual	9.419	106	.089		
	Total	36.525	108			

a. Dependent Variable: performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya
b. Predictors: (Constant), participatory decision making and participatory capacity building

The ANOVA was used to determine whether the model was a good fit for the data. F calculated was 152.281 while the F critical was 3.082. The p value was 0.000. Since the F-calculated was greater than the F-critical and the p value 0.000 was less than 0.05, the model was considered as a good fit for the data. Therefore, the model can be used to predict the influence of participatory decision making and participatory capacity building on performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.288	0.077		3.740	0.000
participatory decision making	0.377	0.098	0.376	3.847	0.000
participatory capacity building	0.368	0.095	0.369	3.874	0.001

The regression model was as follows:

$Y = 0.288 + 0.377X_1 + 0.368X_2 + \varepsilon$

According to the results, participatory decision making has significant effect performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya, $\beta_1 = 0.377$, p value= 0.000). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.000 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings conform to the findings of Nyindo (2023) that there is a very strong relationship between participatory decision making and program performance

Furthermore, the results revealed that participatory capacity building has significant effect on performance of Ajira Digital Program in Nakuru County, Kenya $\beta_1 = 0.368$, p value= 0.001). The relationship was considered significant since the p value 0.001 was less than the significant level of 0.05. The findings are in line with the findings of Lesiamiti and Ombui (2024) that there is a very strong relationship between participatory capacity building and program performance.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study concludes that participatory decision making has a positive and significant effect on the success of the AJIRA Digital Program. Findings revealed that delegation of authority, consultation and feedback sharing influences the success of the AJIRA Digital Program.

Further, the study concludes that participatory capacity building has a positive and significant effect on enhancing the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program. Findings revealed that empowerment, skills and knowledge and sensitization influence the effectiveness of the AJIRA Digital Program.

Recommendations

The study recommends that the management of AJIRA Digital Program in Kenya should institutionalize inclusive decision-making forums that regularly involve youth beneficiaries, trainers, and key stakeholders in shaping the direction of the AJIRA Digital Program.

Further, the study recommends that the management of AJIRA Digital Program in Kenya should adopt a peer-to-peer learning model within the AJIRA Digital Program as part of participatory capacity building. By empowering successful program alumni and digitally skilled youth to mentor and train new participants, the program fosters a collaborative learning environment that encourages knowledge sharing and practical skill development.

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