



A First-Person Account:

Construction in Kenya as a Female Leader

Author: Judy Musisia *Project Manager, Construction for Change*

The challenges and opportunities faced by construction project managers in rural and underserved regions are immense, with valuable lessons emerging from these experiences. This white paper highlights key takeaways from leading community-focused projects in Kenya, where project management extends beyond construction and into community engagement, cultural integration, sustainability, and gender empowerment. Drawing from firsthand accounts and experiences shared by Judy Musisia, Project Manager for Construction for Change (CfC), this document offers actionable insights applicable to project managers and organizations working in similar contexts.



Key Takeaways

Community Involvement Enhances Project Success: Engaging the local community through regular meetings, open discussions, and feedback integration ensures that construction projects align with community needs, build trust, and foster local ownership.

Women in Leadership Drive Positive Change: Employing women in construction, particularly in leadership roles, can challenge traditional gender norms, inspire local women, and contribute to broader social change. This is crucial in regions where female participation in the workforce is low.

Local Hiring Benefits Both Project and Community: Prioritizing local employment and on-site training creates immediate job opportunities, supports economic growth, and builds a skilled workforce that can sustain future development.

Cultural Sensitivity Strengthens Community Ties: Understanding and respecting local traditions and customs during project planning and execution helps build stronger relationships and reduce resistance, making the construction process smoother and more accepted.

Sustainability and Quality are Non-Negotiable: High standards of quality control, coupled with sustainable practices, are essential for ensuring that projects serve their intended purpose for years to come and contribute positively to the local environment and community resilience.

“The community has not only welcomed the project but also contributed insights that have helped us build in a way that honors local traditions and meets the residents’ real needs,” Judy Musisia notes.



Learnings from Field-Based Construction Management in Kenya

Working in rural and underserved areas presents unique challenges and opportunities for project managers. Lessons learned from community-focused construction projects in Kenya can offer valuable insights into best practices for managing similar projects worldwide.

One of the most impactful lessons from managing construction projects in remote Kenyan communities is the importance of involving the local community at every stage. Regular stakeholder meetings, open discussions, and integrating local feedback ensure that projects are aligned with community needs.



“Being a woman in a lead construction role has added a unique dynamic to the project, helping to inspire other women in the community. By working alongside men, I’m able to challenge and change gender stereotypes directly,” says Judy.

Breaking Barriers and Inspiring Change

Gender equality in construction is an ongoing challenge, especially in regions where traditional roles remain entrenched. Globally, women make up only about 10% of the construction workforce, with even lower participation in leadership roles. In Africa, the numbers are often even more disparate, reflecting significant gender gaps. However, research has shown that employing more women in construction contributes to higher productivity, diverse perspectives, and improved problem-solving capabilities.

Experiences from the field show that having women in leadership roles on construction projects can shift perspectives and inspire broader participation among local women.

This representation provides young girls with role models and encourages them to pursue careers in STEM fields, fostering long-term social change.

According to a study by McKinsey & Company, companies with gender diversity are 25% more likely to outperform their peers in profitability, showcasing the tangible benefits of promoting gender inclusivity in traditionally male-dominated industries.



“By prioritizing local hiring, we’re providing employment opportunities for men and women alike,” Judy shares. “Women in particular, who are often marginalized in rural areas, have been able to gain skills, break barriers, and earn income through roles on-site.”

Staffing on Projects: A Local Approach

Hiring locally and training workers on-site has proven to be a dual strategy that benefits both the project and the community. Employing local residents helps mitigate logistical challenges — such as sourcing skilled labor in remote areas — and provides valuable income and skill development for the workforce. These gains are particularly impactful in African countries where the unemployment rate can be high, and opportunities for women are often limited.

Research supports this approach, showing that involving women in the workforce can lead to greater economic stability. A World Bank report noted that increasing women’s participation in the labor force could boost economies by as much as 34% in some African nations.



“Though I come from a region far from here and a different culture altogether, I have felt welcomed by the local community. I’ve had the pleasure of learning the local language and immersing myself in their unique cuisine,” Judy explains.

Cultural Sensitivity and Integration

For projects in areas with distinct cultural practices, understanding and respecting local traditions are key to successful execution. Integrating cultural insights into project planning and execution fosters better relationships and minimizes resistance.

This cultural respect must be accompanied by high standards of execution. Maintaining quality involves rigorous checks, daily inspections, and collaboration with contractors. Project managers play a crucial role in upholding these standards to ensure projects serve their purpose for years to come.

Leaving a Legacy of Empowerment

The most successful projects go beyond the structure itself; they leave behind a legacy of empowerment, skill development, and community improvement. By prioritizing inclusivity, sustainability, and community engagement, organizations can create environments that inspire and uplift local communities for generations.

“I’m proud to be part of an effort that embodies progress, resilience, and community empowerment,” Judy reflects. “I hope that as we finish these projects, we leave behind not only completed structures but also a strengthened, inspired, and more inclusive community.”



About Construction for Change

Construction for Change (CfC) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building essential infrastructure that empowers communities around the world creating an impact Bigger Than Buildings. Through partnerships, sustainable practices, and a commitment to local empowerment, CfC goes beyond construction to foster long-term growth, resilience, and opportunity. By working with local leaders and prioritizing community engagement, CfC ensures that its projects are tailored to meet real needs and inspire meaningful change.

About Judy Musisia

Judy Musisia is a seasoned construction project manager based in Nairobi, with a degree in construction management and more than six years of experience in the field. Her work at CfC focuses on site and field-based project management, where she ensures the seamless execution of community-focused construction projects. Passionate about giving back, Judy has used her expertise to create job opportunities and train local workers, fostering sustainable growth and inspiring future generations in construction and STEM fields.