

Community Participation in Infrastructural Development in Africa: The Role of Community Development Experts

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Abstract

African societies, during the pre-colonial era, mobilized their local structures, such as council of chiefs, youth, women, elders to participate in development projects, and sustainability in such projects was guaranteed. The colonial era brought about urbanization, which in turn, bred individualization. The 'we feeling' of the communities was eroded. Government, alone, now planned, implemented, monitored, evaluated and handed development programmes/projects to beneficiaries. Acceptability and sustainability of most of such programmes/projects were lost until government could no longer meet the 'needs' of the people. This continued into independent era of African nations. Presently, community participation in its development process is seen as panacea to achievement of sustainable infrastructural development programmes/projects. Africans, having imbibed and diffused urbanization and individualization of the colonial perspectives into the rural areas, now grapple with technical knowhow of community participation in development process amidst various inhibiting factors resulting in unsustainability of development programmes/projects. This paper, using available secondary data, gave an overview of community participation in African nations, effects of community participation, identified factors inhibiting community participation in development process, methods of achieving active community participation in development programmes/projects were highlighted, and recommendations for enhancement of active community participation in development process were proffered.

Keywords: Community, Participation, Development, Programmes, Africa, Development Experts

Introduction

Community participation could be defined as the involvement of a target community members or beneficiaries in a development process of a given programme/project in order to attain its objectives and sustainability. Community participation in infrastructural development programme/projects has been strongly associated with development process geared towards attainment of sustainability since pre-colonial African societies, predating scholars' debates and its adoption by practitioners between 1950's and 1970's. Binswanger et al. (2010) pointed out that community participation debates emerged in the 1950's in many countries. Community participation is all about involvement in identification of problems, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of what has been done (Boon, Bawole & Ahenkan, 2013). For Omoruyi (2016) community participation is all about the members taking part in community's affairs. Community participation in infrastructural development does not take place in the open air or in the desert. This is because infrastructural development programmes and projects are always targeted at a given community or group of people, and as such, community participation exists in the target community development process. The members of the target community for such programmes/projects are referred to as the beneficiaries who are expected to participate actively in any development process that has to do with their lives, community participation improves the standard of living of the people, and all their structures. It should not be focused on sensitization and mobilization of selected persons but the involvement of the community members (Howard-Grabman., Miltenburg, Marston & Portela, 2017). Community participation is accepted as a method of attaining project success and raising the living standard of the beneficiaries or the poor (Kimengsi, Azibo & Gwan, 2016; Mansuri & Rao, 2012).

Scholars have argued that participation is of two types, these are based on the intentions of the donor agency. For instance, in a situation where the programme/project is totally selected and planned by the agency and merely needs the beneficiary to join at the stage of implementation to fulfil the goals as planned, such participation is seen as a means. On the other hand, when the agency leaves programmes' /projects' identification, its objectives, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and sharing of the projects' benefits to the community, and promotion of self-reliance, it could be seen as participation as an end (Owusu, 2014). Participation as an end builds and strengthens the beneficiaries' capacity to identify, design and implement other projects on their own while sustaining the previous project after the donor agency had withdrawn its support. It becomes imperative for community members to, actively, get involved in decision making, implementation of their prioritised development programmes/projects, monitoring, evaluation, and to effect good governance at the local level (Tau, 2013).

The major objective of community participation is to ensure that beneficiaries have the power to determine and direct development process and its outputs or services. Thus, in spite of variations in conceptual perspectives, community participation should embrace all sectors, encourage accountability and transparency, participants must be allowed to be creative (Asian Development Bank, [ADB], 2012). Community participation in infrastructural development process that is not tied to creativity, innovation and self-reliance of participants, in most cases, end up abandoned or unsustainable as soon as the donor agency withdraws its support.

However, there is no community without certain endowed characteristics, such as people, geographical location, common language, culture, belief system, common interest, leadership system, and 'we feeling'. These

characteristics are necessary for communal and active participation for the good of the majority and of the community as a whole. Thus, a community could be defined as a group of people living in a geographical area (location), sharing a common culture, belief system, common language, norms, values, common interest, under a leadership system, and having a 'we feeling'.

In pre-colonial African societies these characteristics, especially the 'we feeling', were positively harnessed and utilised for easier sensitization and mobilization of local structures, such as council of chiefs, youth, women, elders, etc in the various communities (Imhabekhai, 2009) towards execution of development projects by means of personal and joint contributions in cash and kind. There was active participation of community members and sustainability of such projects (Veta, 2012), this is contrary to non-involvement of community members in development process during colonial and post-colonial eras. The colonial era brought about urbanization, which in turn, bred individualization. The 'we feeling' of the communities was eroded. Government, alone, now planned, implemented, monitored, evaluated and handed development programmes/projects to beneficiaries. Acceptability and sustainability of most of such programmes/projects were lost until government could no longer meet the 'needs' of the people. This continued into independent era of African nations. Presently, it is being advocated that community participation in its development process is a panacea to achievement of sustainable infrastructural development programmes/projects. Africans, having imbibed urbanization and individualization from the colonial perspective, diffused into the rural areas, now grapple with technical knowhow of active community participation in development process amidst various inhibiting factors resulting in unsustainability of development programmes/projects

An Overview of Community Participation in Infrastructural Development in Africa

Kimengsi, Azibo and Gwan (2016) in their study carried out in Central Ejagham of Cameroon, noted that a number of challenges such as poverty, mismanagement, limited government support, conflicting interest and difficulties in sustaining the projects, hindered effective community involvement in community development programmes/projects. Bakari and Nuhu (2018) in their study conducted in Tanzania, observed that the communities had inadequate knowledge on monitoring and evaluation, inadequate sharing of information between Tanzania Social Action Fund (TASAF) and communities, and among sub project beneficiaries themselves. Furthermore, they noted that communities did not participate in designing of TASAF project phase II and inappropriate trainings were provided to communities, time was a major challenge for communities to participate fully. Similarly, in Meru District, Arusha in Tanzania, it was discovered that lack of administrative and project management skills impacted negatively on the community participation and sustainability of projects (Muro, & Namusonge, 2015).

An investigation conducted in Kenya revealed some participatory problems which include inadequate needs assessment, misappropriation of project funds and other resources, lack of useful skills for effective participation, lack of leadership skills, imposition of projects on beneficiaries, lack of motivation, corruption among project officials, lack of fund and political interference inhibited participation in the development of schools and income generating projects in rural areas in Kenya (Kimani & Kombo, 2011). Contrarily, Hassan, Ong'ayo, and Osore (2018) in their study in Coastal Kenya found out that a significant majority of the coastal communities actively participated in the implementation of the Hazina Ya Maendeleo Ya Pwani (HMP) projects. The level of community participation was also high showing an elevated level of participation by the community. However, the study also revealed that community participation in project

identification was low during the process of proposal development probably due to the high illiteracy levels among the communities. The study concluded that the CDD approach seems to be an effective approach for enhancing active community participation in development programmes/projects.

In Duhera District, Zimbabwe, Chifamba, (2013) found out that low-to-average project productivity was due to poor community participation in project conception, implementation and operation. The study revealed that lack of capable local organizations, lack of resources, and lack of information are some of the factors contributing to limited community participation in community development initiatives. In Limpopo Province, South Africa, findings showed that the local municipalities role was limited in promoting community participation due to low sense of ownership of development initiatives, limited capacity of the municipality, absence of voluntary community associations, non-functionality of ward committee, and exclusion of some groups (Aklilu, Belete & Moyo, 2014).

In Ghana, a study indicated that if programme planners had involved community members from the planning to utilisation level, it would have led to the empowerment of the community members so as to enable them to take total control, ownership, maintenance and sustainability of the water facilities and eliminate barriers to real and effective participation in water delivery services in Savelugu-Nanton Municipality (Mahama & Badu-Nyarko, 2014). Also, Mohammed, Alhassan and Kanlisi (2018) in their assessment of SaveluguNanton Municipality, Ghana, described level of participation as consultation and tokenistic and did not represent deeper levels of participation. The study concluded that Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies in Ghana need to re-think stakeholder participation in development process to ensure effectiveness and efficiency in projects' and programmes' service delivery.

Furthermore, a study carried out in Bishoftu town, Ethiopia revealed that participation in policy formulation, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of development programmes/projects were not evident; and thus became obstacle to community participation. The study also found out that there was poor communication and relationships which affected the possibility for fostering active community participation in the City and hampered the synergy of the growing trend of participation in the development of the City (Meskerem, 2019). Muhammad, Noraini, and Abu (2011) in their study conducted in Pakistan pointed out that external factors such as authoritarian role of developmental professionals, authoritarian role of country government, donor agencies biasness while presenting data, and selective sample choice hindered community participation.

Nigeria being one of the African countries is not free from poor community participation in infrastructural development programs/projects. For instance, Obar, and Nkwocha (2017) in their study executed in Ibadan, Oyo state, found out that there was minimum youth participation in community development process. It was observed that males participated more in community development than females, and sustainability of projects was low. Laah, Adefila and Yusuf (2014) in their study conducted in Riyom Area, Plateau State showed that inadequate awareness, poor and inefficient leadership, illiteracy, insufficient funds and lack of encouragement from government as major constraints to community participation in development projects. In the same vein, a study under taken in the Niger Delta region revealed that there was a low level of community participation in development programmes/projects (Okinono, & Badariah, 2015).

Effects of Community Participation in Infrastructural Development Programmes/Projects

The ultimate principle of community participation is to ensure that target community members for any infrastructural development programmes/projects get actively involved in development process that has

to do with their lives. This would achieve a meaningful and sustainable development. Active people's participation increases the efficiency, effectiveness, self-reliance, wider coverage in decision making and resultant effect of sustainability in development projects/programmes. Abiona and Bello (2013) made it clear that when the people are not involved in a project, it cannot be sustained for lack of commitment on their part. In other words, community participation leads to sustainability of development programmes/projects and long terms delivery of its services to the beneficiaries. Thus, one of the basic principles of community participation is that when the marginalised are involved in programmes/projects that affect them, such development is prone to be sustainable (Oina, Towett, Kirui. & Luvega, 2015) and also accelerates successful execution of programmes/ projects (Scott, 2015).

Furthermore, it has been made clear that if target community members are involved in development programmes/projects, it would be more cost effective and there would be improved income opportunities, skill training, increased sense of ownership and ensured sustainability of the programmes/projects. It could be argued that it is not easy to attain sustainable development programmes/projects without the involvement of the beneficiaries (Kimengsi, Azibo & Gwan, 2016) It is also a crucial strategy of ensuring that responsibility and benefits of programmes /projects are shared among target beneficiaries (Barasa & Jelagat, 2013) and socio-economic benefits must be tangible to beneficiaries to ensure active community participation (Maraga, Kibwage, & Oindo, 2010).

Community participation guarantees that projects/programmes are well planned, implemented, monitored, evaluated and sustained for the benefit of the present and future generations. Community participation has the advantage of considering prioritised needs of the community for implementation (Mbyemeire et al., 2016), and as such, when community members, as many as are willing, are given the chance to participate in

development process, it creates consensus, explores a wide range of needs, goals, necessary means of achieving the programmes'/projects' objectives, sense of ownership and instill capacity building (Adekola, 2011; Omoruyi, 2016). For Kilewo, and Frumence (2015) community participation gives the people knowledge of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of programmes/projects. Also, it ensures effectiveness and efficiency, transparency and sustainability of development Programmes/projects (Mwanzia & Strathdee, 2010). Similarly, Sherman and Ford (2014) assert that community stakeholder engagement in project design and implementation led to higher effectiveness, efficiency, equity, flexibility, legitimacy, sustainability, and replicability. Adequate community participation in development programmes/projects promotes capacity building in the beneficiaries because it increases their skills, competencies and abilities for self-reliance.

Factors Inhibiting Community Participation in Infrastructural Development Programmes/projects

There are several factors inhibiting active community participation in infrastructural development programmes/projects, particularly, in developing countries. These inhibiting factors have led to unacceptability and unsustainability of several programmes/projects by target beneficiaries resulting in vicious circle of failed and abandoned programmes/projects in African nations. Some of these factors include lack of awareness about a programme/project, illiteracy, poor economic conditions, lack of trust in a programmes/projects, subsidy culture, politics, low interest in money contribution, lack of transparency and accountability, poor and inefficient leadership, lack of encouragement from government and inadequate funding (Brahmi & Thakur, 2011; Laah, & Yusuf 2014). Muhammad and Abu (2011) observed that community participation is constrained by internal and external factors. The internal factors, according to them are lack of skills in members, contradictory interests of group members, agate-keeping by community local elites, lack of community interest in

participation and low capacity to implement programmes/ projects, while the external factors are authoritarian role of developmental professionals, authoritarian role of country government, donor agencies biasness while presenting data, and selective sample choice. Similarly, lack of enthusiasm to participate in development process could be due to lost confidence in community leaders based on high level of unaccountability and mismanagement of resources which are meant for infrastructural programmes/projects (Kimengsi, Azibo & Gwan, 2016).

Social factors including poverty, ignorance, unemployment, inequality, illiteracy inhibit people's participation in community development programmes/projects. Awortwi (2013) pointed out that income levels and housing status have effects on community participation. According to Chifamba (2013) poverty, contradicting approaches used by different development agencies, inadequate resources, inadequate information, and imposition of projects are the hindrances to active community participation in development programmes and projects. Ahenkan Bawole, and Domfer (2013) posited that lack of provision for beneficiaries to participate in development process has constrained the effective, responsive and committed governance at the local level for improved standard of living and that acceptable procedures and structures for community involvement in monitoring and evaluation of development programmes/projects is a mirage. There are individuals who are indifferent when it comes to community issues. These categories of persons hardly get involved in community development matters, thereby hindering active participation. Inadequate community development experts in most developing countries has inhibited sensitisation and mobilisation of community members to actively participate in infrastructural development programmes/projects, and in most cases, participants do not know their roles. However, due to differing social backgrounds, people are likely to react differently to community development programmes/projects (Omoruyi, 2016) thereby hindering community participation.

Methods of Achieving Active Community Participation in Infrastructural Development Programmes/Projects

It has been strongly argued that democratisation, transparency and accountability have great effect on enhancing community participation in development programmes/projects (Handley & Howell-Moroney, 2010). Community members participate in development activities when they see positive change to be gained, when they are enabled to express their opinions; when aspects of their way of life are threatened, when they are committed to the activity, when they are well informed or have a better knowledge of the situation at hand, and when they are comfortable in the group (Adekola, 2011). The community members would participate effectively when they know that the programmes/projects would address their felt needs as prioritised by them (Chifamba, 2013). For Waweru (2015) factors could enhance active community participation in development include material benefits, development interest, development need, previous development experience, wanting to serve the community, and when the projects/programmes meet needs of beneficiaries.

Also, ownership, adequate consultation, collaboration, enlightenment and capacity building are cardinal factors for enhancement of community active participation in developing countries (Okinono, & Badaria, 2015); economic empowerment can provide needed opportunity for community participation (Omoruyi, 2016). Mansuri and Rao (2012) advocate for changes in structures and incentives within development agencies to promote participation and the willingness to learn among personnel. Kimani and Kombo (2011) enumerated the following strategies for achieving active community participation in development programmes/projects:

- Improvement of project performance and input,
- Ensuring the realisation of the expected project benefits,
- Awareness creation of the need for all members to effectively participate in their development projects, regardless of gender, social-economic and educational status,
- Ensuring gender sensitivity in the involvement of the community members in the entire project cycle and related activities, especially in the allocation of roles and responsibilities,
- Regular capacity building through seminars and refresher courses for members and officials,
- Regular and effective communication between project members and officials,
- Transparency and accountability of project officials and community leaders,
- Frequent review of project objectives to ensure that they are addressing community's felt needs,
- The government is to encourage the citizenry to actively participate in their development, process through awareness raising and creating an enabling environment for them.

Criticisms of Community Participation in Infrastructural Development Programmes/Projects

In spite of the popularized significance of community participation in development processes, there are perspectives which hold that it does not always guarantee empowerment of the poor or marginalized. In other cases, agency staff do not encourage community involvement because of their structured top-down approach upheld as *modus operandi* which allows officials to direct development process, exclusively, while using the participants to fulfill the agency's planned goals, thereby hindering active participation. Cornwall and Pratt (2010) argued that PRA practice seem not to be empowering as it is expected. Rather, it is utilized mainly for gathering information. So, at the long run what is claimed to be involvement is

actually non-participation in the true sense of it. This is because the community members are manipulated to support and work towards the agency's goals. Thus, Participation in infrastructural development has no predetermined outcomes; it can result in transformation in the social-cultural patterns and otherwise, it can maintain or trigger the antithesis of community liberation, devolution and distribution of power among different stakeholders (Chifamba, 2013).

However, community participation in development process continue to gain popularity amidst other methods of community development. This is because it attains capacity building, skill development, self-reliance, ownership and sustainability of programmes/projects when the needed strategies are adequately applied by community development experts.

The Roles of Community Development Experts in Enhancing Community Participation in Infrastructural Development Programmes/Projects

Dhavaleshwar (2016) noted that community development experts take on the role of caseworker, group worker, community organizer, need analyser, project manager, facilitator, middle manager, counselor, and researcher to ensure active community participation in development programmes/projects. The Ministry for Public Service and Administration (as cited in Mokoena, and Moeti, 2017) itemized the roles of community development experts in enhancing community participation in development programmes/projects as follows:

- (a) to assist in the smooth delivery of services by identifying and removing obstacles
- (b) to strengthen the social contract between government/donor agencies and communities
- (c) to link communities with government/donor agencies' services

- (d) to pass on communities' concerns and problems to government/agencies
- (e) to support and nurture the increased exchange of information
- (f) to improve government/agencies–community networks.

In conclusion, this paper explored and established the relevance of active community participation in infrastructural development programmes/projects. However, community participation was inherent and synonymous with African pre-colonial societies, but colonization shortchanged it with urbanization, and individualization as its brainchild. This triggered the freedom for governments/agencies to manipulate development process and delivered its benefits to 'beneficiaries' at the detriment of sustainability. This is because creativity and sense of ownership and sustainability of such programmes and projects were not attained. Active community participation in infrastructural development in African nations are bedeviled with a lot of identified inhibiting factors. Thus, there is need to address and reduce these inhibiting factors to the barest minimum to enable enhancement of active community participation in development programmes/projects in Africa.

This paper, having explored community participation in development process, advanced the followings to further enhance active community participation in infrastructural development programmes/projects in Africa and other continents:

1. There is need for government at all levels to create enabling environment for all communities to actively participate in all development programmes/projects that is affecting their well-being.
2. Community development experts should be employed to man all development agencies, this will enable adequate sensitisation and

mobilisation of community members to participate actively in development process.

3. Efforts should be made to ensure that all community members, as many as are willing, irrespective of their status, religion and gender, should be encouraged to get involved in development programmes/projects in their communities.
4. Seminars and trainings should be organised periodically, for development agency officials and community members. This will help to equip them with updated and best practice and it will enable community members to know their roles in development process.
5. Reliable measures should be enshrined to ensure transparency and accountability among agency officials and community leaders.
6. Decisions and suggestions coming from the community members must be entertained and duly considered. This will instill trust in the programmes/projects and encourage active community participation.
7. Consultative meeting should be extensive and intensive, considering all available options to enable the community to identify its felt need(s), plan, implement, monitor, evaluate and enjoy the benefits of the development. This will make them to regard the programme/project as theirs and guard it jealously.
8. Government or donor agencies must not interfere with development process of any infrastructural development programmes/projects.
9. There is need for re-orientation of African communities to enable them to see themselves as one. This will reawaken the 'we feeling' against extrapolated individualisation. This we enable the communities to participate actively in development programmes/projects.

10. Adequate fund should be provided, and infrastructural development programmes/projects should be simple and necessary contributions should be affordable.

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