

The Realities and Barriers of Community Participation in Rural Community Development Projects

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Abstract

This paper reports on the barriers and realities confronting community participation in community development. This paper aims to explore the barriers to community participation and provide recommendations to enhance sustainability in community development. The paper provides possible suggestions on how inclusive participation may aid the sustainability of community development projects. Community participation refers to the involvement of individuals or groups in activities, initiatives, or decision-making processes that affect their community. It is about engaging with others to contribute ideas, resources, and efforts towards common goals and improvements within a community. This paper adopted a focused mapping review synthesis to gather the critical tenets of community participation. As an outcome of this paper, the author has demonstrated that community participation is mainly used as a procedural issue without really using it to canvass the views of rural community people. Mainly, it is applied as a "tick a box" exercise in which authorities do not use it to empower the community members nor adopt their views for decision-making. Moreover, this paper demonstrates that community participation is more effective and has the potential to result in empowerment when the primacy is on training and building the capacity of beneficiaries. The author argues that community participation that is not inclusive and does not link the views of beneficiaries to decision-making is likely to result in programs that do not address the needs of beneficiaries.

Keywords: Community Participation; Community Projects; Beneficiaries; Community Development

INTRODUCTION

Community participation is an active process by which beneficiary or client groups influence the direction and execution of a development project to enhance their well-being regarding income, personal growth, self-reliance, or other values they cherish (Abegunde, 2009). Contemporary development approaches perceive community participation as one of the key ingredients for poverty reduction. One effort to stimulate community development through participation is to address the increasing poverty and disempowerment that accompany the modernistic development discourse (Bryld, 2001). The intention of community participation in development policy and practice is to promote the active engagement of individuals working in collectives to change problematic conditions and influence policies and programmes that affect

the quality of their lives or the lives of others (Mansuri & Rao, 2003). There are many forms of community participation, ranging from volunteering for local projects, attending town hall meetings, joining neighborhood associations, participating in clean-up events, contributing to online discussions, and organizing grassroots campaigns for social change. Community participation fosters a sense of belonging, ownership, and empowerment among its members. It can lead to stronger social ties, increased civic responsibility, and more sustainable and resilient communities. Encouraging and facilitating community participation is crucial for building vibrant, inclusive, and thriving communities where individuals feel valued and connected (Macharia, 2015; UNDP, 2009).

Concerning rural development, participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes, and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes (UNDP, 2009). Participation concerns the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.

Collectively, the above statements encapsulate the breadth of the participation debate, an understanding of participation in terms of economic incentives to participate and be rewarded by some tangible economic benefit. Participation in this sense often occurs in the form of some input or contribution to a project to enhance its chances of success and, correspondingly, personal economic benefit. It has been widely influential among government- and international agency-supported development projects (Kwamie & Nabyonga-Orem, 2016). It helped launch a whole form of analysis that took decision-making, implementation, benefits, and evaluation as the key elements in the participation process. A new analysis genre was launched, particularly among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) whose approach to participation has been less tied to the notion of immediate economic benefit. While it would be wrong to argue that the above statements are mutually exclusive and that all participatory projects would be located within one statement or the other, experience suggests that the main thrust of participatory projects would tend to emphasize one or other of the above statements. Apart from efforts to distinguish definitions of participation, we can use several other broader approaches to help differentiate alternatives within such an all-embracing concept. One major form of differentiation is distinguishing between participation as a means or an end, a goal, or an objective (Thomas, 2013). In other words, participation is a way of harnessing rural people's existing physical, economic, and social resources to achieve the objectives of development programmes and projects. Participation as a means stresses the results of participation in that achieving predetermined targets is more important than the act of participation. Government and development agencies often see participation in improving the delivery systems of the projects they seek to implement. In these cases, the participation is essentially a short-term exercise: the local population is mobilized, and there is direct involvement in the task at hand, but the participation evaporates once the task is completed (Lockwood & Smits, 2011; Sida, 2009). In many ways, it could be argued that participation as a means is a passive form. Participation as an end is an entirely different concept. Here, we see participation essentially as a process that unfolds over time, the purpose of which is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of rural people to intervene more directly in

development initiatives. Such a process may not have predetermined measurable objectives or even direction, as an end participation should be a permanent feature of any development project. This intrinsic part grows and strengthens as the project develops. Wasilwa (2015) alludes that participation as an end is an active and dynamic form that enables people to play an increasing role in development activities. When put into practice, participation appears to take on different forms. Participation is such an unwieldy concept that distinguishing between these forms is impossible. However, in a review of both government and NGO development projects, UNICEF and WHO (2012) and Mansuri and Rao (2004) suggested three broad and different forms of the practice of participation: contribution, organization, and empowerment.

Problem Statement

One barrier that challenges community participation initiatives is their ability to inspire society to actively participate in community development to improve sustainability. It is clear today that most people do not want to participate in community development programmes because of various unfavorable factors, including socio-economic, cultural, and religious ones, and a lack of awareness. Nonetheless, empowering people to recognize the impact of community involvement will aid in lowering these compelling factors. Any community's level of development is based on how many of its immediate citizens participate effectively to accomplish shared objectives.

In South Africa, community participation appears to be a "tick a box" exercise in which political and authority interests influence community participation, and the views of ordinary people are hardly incorporated into policy development. Community participation is often a rubber stamp process, especially in rural areas, with little interest from the community members due to many socio-economic challenges such as poverty, lack of knowledge, inaccessibility, and unfulfilled promises by authorities.

To improve people's social, economic, political, educational, and cultural well-being and enable them to live better lives, community development entails uniting people. People's participation is, therefore, a crucial component of successful community development. Within development efforts, people's participation cannot be disbursed (Mohammad, 2010; Wasilwa, 2015). As a result, the process of human empowerment and development is seeing an increase in the involvement of people in community development. As the name suggests, participation is regarded as essential to the implementation of community development programmes. Participation and other related concepts like sustainability and empowerment are at the centre of development discourse (Blackman, 2003), and it may be argued that participation is as old as democracy itself. For community participation to be successful, inclusive, and holistic, an approach needs to be employed that recognizes people's culture, views, and socio-economic challenges, and this is the gap that the study has identified (UNDP, 2009).

The purpose of the study

This study aims to explore the barriers to community participation and provide recommendations to enhance sustainability in community development.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study include the following:

Exploring the nature and impact of community participation in community development projects,
To ascertain and describe the barriers to community participation in community development

projects in rural areas.

METHOD

The research was conducted logically using a focused review mapping synthesis (FRMS). The process commenced with a review of academic literature. The search focused on publications circulated and disseminated between 2022 and 2023, focusing on studies conducted in Africa, which possessed the inclusion criteria in the study (Fawcett, 2013). Similarly, the FMRS addresses epistemological questions related to a particular research field. This requires attention within the review process to theoretical and methodological issues and often ethical and political issues (Soares & Yonekura, 2011). There are four key features of FMRS. It (1) focuses on a defined field of knowledge rather than a body of evidence; (2) creates a descriptive map or topography of key features of research within the field rather than a synthesis of findings; (3) comments on the overall approach to knowledge production rather than the state of the evidence; and (4) examines this within a broader epistemological context.

FMRS does not aim to synthesize the evidence of "what works" in the way that systematic reviews might aim to do. Still, it seeks to identify the assumptions, boundaries, and contours (its shape and form) within a body of research (theoretical, methodological, epistemological) and to develop a critical commentary on these assumptions, their application, and their limitations.

According to Brandury-Jones (2017) and Grant and Booth (2009), a focused mapping review explores a sample of literature in detail to explore common trends and identify contemporary practices. The researcher selected potentially relevant papers through academic scholastic searches. This process assisted the researcher in successfully identifying recent articles, focusing on recognizing the indigenous and Afrocentric approach to social work. To identify studies meeting our criteria, a literature search was conducted from 1 January 2024 to 31 April 2024 using the following databases: ProQuest Applied Social Science Index & Abstracts, EBSCO CINAHL, EBSCO Medline, EBSCO PsycINFO, EBSCO SocIndex, EBSCO Family, Google Scholar, Society Studies Worldwide and Scopus.com. Using the specific inclusion criteria, the following terms were searched within each database:

"Community," "community participation," "community development," "community projects," "community consultation," "community interest in social welfare," "poverty alleviation projects," and "African social work intervention."

The identified papers were then read to ensure that they met the inclusion criteria: research articles that discussed original research with participants who are social workers practicing within an African context. Articles were scrutinized against the inclusion and exclusion criteria as stated below.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To be included in our analysis, studies had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) The study had to be conducted in the field of community development; (b) the majority of study participants had to be community members; (c) the study had to be described as an outcome study; (d) the intervention had to be described as community-based; and (e) the study had to be published within a peer-reviewed journal. Studies excluded from our analysis were as follows: (a) those that

only reported community work in general, (b) unpublished studies, (c) studies lacking an experimental design, and (d) dissertations or master's theses. The search was intentionally limited to peer-reviewed publications since experts in the field have assessed these studies for methodological quality and accuracy and are thus considered to be rigorous and ready for future evaluation by scholars (Rhoden, 2019).

Challenges of Community Participation in Rural Areas

Poverty level

People living in poverty may feel marginalized or overlooked in decision-making processes within their communities, leading to a sense of disenfranchisement and reduced motivation to engage in community development efforts. Addressing poverty is crucial for fostering inclusive and sustainable community development (Samah & Aref, 2009; Wasilwa, 2015). Efforts to alleviate poverty through economic empowerment, access to education and healthcare, social inclusion, and community engagement can help increase participation in community development initiatives among all members of society. Poverty can lead to social isolation, as individuals may feel disconnected from their community due to financial struggles or the stigma associated with poverty (Barasa & Jelagat, 2013). This isolation can reduce their motivation or ability to participate in community development initiatives. Individuals living in poverty may have to work multiple jobs or long hours to make ends meet, leaving them with little time or energy to participate in community activities or volunteer work. Poverty can limit access to education, which is crucial for effectively understanding and engaging in community development efforts (Schafft & Greenwood, 2003). Without education, individuals may lack the knowledge or skills to participate meaningfully (Barasa & Jelagat, 2013).

The level of education

Education can increase awareness and understanding of community issues and development initiatives. Individuals with higher levels of education may better grasp the importance of community development projects and may be more inclined to participate actively (Botes & Rensburg, 2000). Education equips individuals with skills and knowledge that can be valuable in contributing to community projects. For instance, those with technical or managerial skills gained through education may be better equipped to lead or support various aspects of development projects. Education often improves communication abilities, which can be crucial for advocating for community needs and mobilising resources. Individuals with higher levels of education may be more effective at articulating the benefits of a project to others, thus garnering greater support and participation. Education can also provide individuals access to valuable networks and resources for community development efforts (Carter, Tyrrel & Howsam, 2009). People with higher levels of education may have broader social networks, financial resources, or access to information that can facilitate project implementation (Fung, 2006; Sheely, 2015). Higher levels of education often foster critical thinking and problem-solving skills, essential for addressing the complex challenges inherent in community development. Individuals with these skills may be better able to analyze issues, identify solutions, and adapt to changing circumstances during project implementation. However, it is essential to note that while education can be a significant factor,

other socio-economic factors such as income level, social status, cultural beliefs, and resource accessibility also play crucial roles in determining participation in community development projects (Sheely, 2015). Therefore, effective community development strategies should address various factors to ensure inclusive participation and sustainable outcomes (Wasilwa, 2015).

Socio-economic engagement

Engaging in commercial activities often demands significant time commitments, leaving people with less time to dedicate to community development projects. This can decrease participation, especially if the projects require regular attendance or ongoing involvement. In many cases, individuals involved in commercial activities prioritize earning income to sustain themselves and their families over participating in community projects, which may be seen as less immediately beneficial financially. Commercial activities may align with personal or business interests that conflict with the goals of community development projects. For example, a business owner might prioritize maximizing profits over supporting initiatives that could hinder their commercial interests (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Communities heavily reliant on commercial activities may experience a drain of skilled individuals and resources from community projects to commercial endeavors. This brain drain can weaken the talent pool and resources for community development initiatives. Commercial activities can foster individualistic mindsets focused on personal gain, which may hinder community cohesion and collective action. People may be less inclined to participate in projects requiring collaboration and cooperation if they focus primarily on their commercial pursuits (Chang, 2007). Depending on the nature of the community development project, individuals engaged in commercial activities may perceive it as less relevant to their immediate needs or interests. This perception can diminish motivation to participate actively in such initiatives. Addressing these challenges often requires thoughtful planning and community engagement strategies that consider the realities of local economic activities and community members' needs in commercial pursuits (Martin, 2012). Finding ways to align the goals of community development projects with the interests and priorities of those engaged in commercial activities can help foster greater participation and support (Hakelius & Hansson, 2016; Dan & Zimin, 2017; Sun et al., 2022).

Marital status of women

Due to domestic responsibilities, married women, particularly those with children, may have less time to dedicate to community development projects. Notably, unmarried women or those without children may have more flexibility with their time and thus be able to participate more actively. In some cultures, married women may be expected to prioritize their roles within the household over involvement in community activities. This could be due to traditional gender roles that assign women primarily domestic duties (Green & Haines, 2008). Unmarried women may face fewer expectations in this regard and may feel more empowered to engage in community development projects. In certain contexts, married women may have limited decision-making power within their households, which could influence their ability to participate in community projects. Conversely, unmarried women may have more autonomy in decision-making and, therefore, may find it easier to engage in such activities. Married women may have limited access to resources such as transportation or financial support, which could hinder their participation in community development initiatives (Avolio, 2005). Unmarried women may have more control over

their resources and thus face fewer participation obstacles. Married women may have access to support networks within their families or communities that facilitate or inhibit their participation in community projects. Unmarried women may rely more on external networks for support and face different dynamics regarding encouragement or discouragement to participate (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2007). While marital status can certainly influence women's participation in community development projects, it is essential to recognize that it is just one of many factors at play. Creating inclusive and supportive environments that address women's diverse needs and circumstances, regardless of marital status, is crucial for maximizing their participation and contributions to community development (Sabin & Annemarie, 2009; Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2007).

Cultural factors and traditional beliefs

According to Smith (2008), women face a patriarchal system whereby males have the decision-making powers. The patriarchal gender system was initially linked with pre-capitalist forms of social organization and remained in rural in Asia and North Africa. In the places of patriarchal restraint, veiling, and sex segregation, patriarchal (conservative) gender ideology is dominant in rural communities and is believed to be the root of the patriarchal social structure in the country, which hinders women from participating in community development-related activities (Hayes, 2008; Maria & Helisse, 2010; Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Moreover, Karim (2006) alludes that traditional, religious norms limit women from joining activities outside the home, especially participating in community development activities. Traditionally, women were not permitted to move freely. It is considered that the husband's foremost responsibility is to maintain their family financially, and the wife's key duty is to take care of their family members. The husband is, therefore, supposed to be the breadwinner and is also expected to be his wife's guardian, at the same time as the wife is expected to obey her husband (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). This has affected the participation of women in community-based development projects. Hayes (2008) further highlighted that rural communities might be bound by traditional beliefs and cultural norms that discourage active participation, particularly among marginalized groups such as women and minorities. These norms can limit inclusivity and diversity within community decision-making processes. Murphy (2010), in agreement with the above author, asserted that cultural values and beliefs also shape individuals' perceptions of the importance of community involvement; in some cultures, collectivism and a sense of duty towards the community may encourage active participation, while in others, individualism and personal pursuits may take precedence. Participation in community-based development projects is a redefinition of women's typical gender roles in rural communities since it proposes that women to be co-breadwinners of the households. Previous studies unveiled that their husbands mostly controlled the loans given to married women (Goetz, 2004). This might be related to the patriarchal gender ideology prevalent in rural communities, where men are expected to be the household breadwinners. Therefore, their husband's gender ideology may influence women's participation in community-based development projects. Cultural norms dictate acceptable behaviors within a society. These norms can either facilitate or hinder participation in community projects. For instance, individuals may be more inclined to engage in development initiatives in cultures where community service is highly valued and expected. Cultural differences in communication styles can affect how information about community projects is disseminated and received (Murphy, 2010). Effective

communication strategies must be sensitive to cultural preferences for language, tone, and communication channels. Cultural attitudes towards authority and leadership can influence how community development projects are organized and led. In some cultures, hierarchical leadership structures may discourage grassroots participation, while in others, decentralized decision-making processes may empower local communities (Hewlett & Luce, 2005). Cultural traditions and rituals may intersect with community development efforts, either facilitating or hindering participation. Projects that align with cultural traditions are more likely to garner support and participation from community members (Sabin & Annemarie, 2009; Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2007).

One of the notable aspects that hinders participation is that cultural attitudes towards ownership and control over resources can impact participation in community projects. Communities may be more willing to engage if they feel a sense of ownership and control over the project's goals, processes, and outcomes. Moreover, cultural norms regarding gender roles can influence who participates in community development projects and in what capacity. In some cultures, traditional gender roles may limit women's involvement in decision-making processes, while in others, efforts to promote gender equality may encourage more inclusive participation. Understanding and addressing these cultural factors is crucial for designing community development projects that resonate with local values, norms, and aspirations, ultimately enhancing participation and fostering sustainable outcomes (Hayes, 2008; Maria & Helisse, 2010; Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Community conflicts

According to White (2011), inter-community conflicts can significantly impact people's participation in community development projects. These conflicts can create divisions, distrust, and fear among community members, making it difficult to come together and work towards a common goal. Lack of trust by some community members may cause conflicts between communities, eroding trust between individuals and groups. People may be hesitant to engage in activities involving cooperation with members of other communities for fear of betrayal or further conflict, which may also degenerate into feelings of fear and feeling unsafe. In areas where inter-community tensions are high, people may feel unsafe participating in community development projects that require them to interact with members of other communities (Yang & Liu, 2012; Ma & Abdulai, 2016). Moreover, concerns about violence or retaliation can deter individuals from getting involved, and this may also result in the diversion of resources that could otherwise be allocated to community development projects. These resources may be diverted towards managing or mitigating inter-community conflicts. This can leave fewer resources available for initiatives aimed at improving the community. Ma & Abdulai (2016) further highlight that community conflicts usually fracture and erode social cohesion, making it difficult to build consensus or mobilize support for development projects. Without a sense of unity and shared purpose, participation rates may decline. Effective communication is essential for mobilising community participation in development projects. However, inter-community conflicts can create communication barriers, as individuals may be unwilling to engage in dialogue with members of other communities (Fahad & Wang, 2018; Liu, 2019). Addressing inter-community conflicts requires a multifaceted approach that involves conflict resolution, reconciliation efforts, and building bridges between communities. By fostering dialogue, promoting understanding, and

creating opportunities for collaboration, it may be possible to overcome the barriers to participation and promote inclusive community development.

Political affiliation

Political affiliation can indeed influence people's participation in community development projects. People may be more inclined to participate if the project is aligned with the ideology or priorities of their political party or if they perceive that their participation will benefit their party or preferred political candidate. On the other hand, individuals who are not affiliated with the political party in power may be less motivated to participate if they feel marginalised or excluded from decision-making processes (Kumorotomo, 2005). Additionally, political polarisation can sometimes hinder cooperation and collaboration between individuals or groups with different political affiliations, making garnering widespread support for community development initiatives challenging. Understanding the political landscape and dynamics within a community is essential for effectively engaging residents in community development projects and ensuring broad-based participation. The old paradigm of the top-down approach still dominates every level of government planning. This supports Davies's (2001) view that the axiomatic desire to participate in developing countries' planning development is still shallow. Although participation in planning is increasingly recognised as a more consensual decision-making system, it has yet to demonstrate a "revolution in its implementation" (Davies, 2001; Wasilwa, 2015).

External forces

In South Africa, many development projects are initiated by outsiders. They are rarely founded spontaneously by the community itself. Often, professional experts dominate decision-making and manipulation instead of facilitating development processes. The trademark of "development experts" is often that they always know best; therefore, their prime function is to transfer knowledge to communities who, by definition, "no less." This is because professionals are predominantly trained in ways that disempower and tell others what they should do and think (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Scoones, 2007). This has contributed to professionals (unconsciously or consciously) regarding themselves as the sole owners of development wisdom and having the monopoly of solutions, which consistently underrate and under-value the capacities of local people to make their own decisions and determine their own priorities. It is, therefore, difficult for development planners to view community needs and opportunities through "the eyes of end-beneficiaries" (Kilewo & Frumence, 2015).

In some instances, community participation is not a genuine attempt to empower communities to choose development options freely but rather an attempt to sell preconceived proposals. Participation processes often begin only after projects have already been designed. The process is not an attempt to ascertain the outcome and priorities but to gain acceptance for an assembled package. Consultation with the community may be to legitimate existing decisions, that is, to tell people what will happen by asking them what they think. In these cases, community participation is nothing more than an attempt to convince beneficiaries what is best for them. Suppose a development professional is the pivot around which development initiatives are built. In that case, any community can easily become dependent on the presence and ideas of such a development champion, who may hinder participatory development by undervaluing the input and experiences of non-professionals (Gitari, Mbabazi & Jaya, 2016).

Nature of government process vs community participation

Although Kilewo and Frumence (2015) generally agree with the benefits of popular participation, they believe that its achievements in practice have often been vastly exaggerated, and its outcomes have often damaged the interests of the weaker groups in society, mainly because its advocates have often played down the political dimension of community participation. In African societies, there are many examples where governments have used community participation to maintain existing power relations.

The authors also point out that the benefits derived from participation depend primarily on the political interests involved and conclude that participation can be very dangerous when placed in the wrong hands. For the state, it appears that the main aim of community participation programs is less about improving conditions for the poor or modifying forms of decision-making than maintaining existing power relations in society and ensuring the silence of the poor. Governments often use community participation to legitimize the political system and as a form of social control. The level of commitment by many governments to community participation has often been dubious or extremely limited. Formal channels of community participation have not always generated major benefits for local communities. Participation is often constrained at the state level by partisanship, funding limitations, rigidity, the resistance of local and national bureaucrats, and the state's inability to respond effectively to the felt needs of the populace (Gitari, Mbabazi & Jaya, 2016). Government bureaucrats, as the instruments of nation-states, are very much in a hierarchical way of thinking, inhibiting participatory development and undermining the people's governing abilities (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Scoones, 2007).

Selective participation

Carter, Tyrrel, and Howsam (2009) assert that without making significant and continuous efforts to find less obvious partners, the wealthiest, most vocal, articulate, and educated groups are frequently permitted to participate as development partners. The practice of many development agencies only working with groups as community representatives has been cautioned against by Friedman, Lukasiewicz, and Baldwin (2017). Carter, Tyrrel, and Howsam (2009) also noted that one of the main barriers to community participation is poor community penetration by NGOs and CBOs. The participation of local leaders frequently represents the voice of a group of self-appointed individuals. It may not accurately reflect the views and perspectives of the larger community because many community organizations are not democratically elected. This carries a risk that easily leaves an ambiguous feeling of a one-sided view in which consultation is only with specific people. The fact that those who do not personally experience poverty in society are determining the needs and issues at hand could be problematic. These groups are even referred to as marginal participants by Isham and Kahkonen (2009). It is a well-known social anthropological fact that people on the periphery of their own society are frequently the community's most gregarious and approachable members. Ensuring that those lacking the ability or the desire to participate are included in the development process continues to be one of the most difficult tasks. Known as "community renting", one of the worst examples of selective participation is when a development agency "buys" the support and goodwill of important interest groups in the community. This often results in community involvement exercises being susceptible to manipulation and misappropriation (Bartecchi, 2016). In most African countries, it has been

noted that communities may knowingly consent to co-optation to obtain resources. Another practice that can quickly result in exclusive or biased development is when a donor organisation or developer names the community partners rather than the community members. Development professionals typically use this selective identification technique when they invite the community's "best-known" individuals to join committees (Bartecchi, 2016). Since the developer's involvement is primarily motivated by convenience, finding a partner to support the project's continuation is the main goal; vetting the partner's representativeness is, at most, incidental.

Conflicting interest groups

Notably, in most communities' different groups have different interests, which also influences the authenticity of community development. Development almost always exposes marginalised communities to opportunities and limited resources, which raises the possibility that development will be a dividing factor. Development is always the outcome of choices about whose needs should take precedence; frequently, advancing certain interests can only come at the expense of developing other interest groups or community segments. Conflict also occurs when certain groups feel left out of decisions that impact their lives. This could increase the likelihood of conflict between various interest groups within a single community. One of the main obstacles to proper participation is competition among community-based organisations and other popular movements for limited development resources and power. Most political and civic movements wish to discourage processes for which they cannot take sole credit because they know that development, for which they can take credit, will increase their base of support (Gitari, Mbabazi & Jaya, 2016). Several instances of development initiatives being hacked, sabotaged, or undermined in the South African urban development scene because a particular interest group feels it was given an inadequate role. Another reason disparate stakeholders in a development initiative could be at odds with one another is because they might be involved in the same development drive for different reasons. Lukaszewicz and Baldwin (2017) speak of a "difference in rationalities" in this regard. Interest groups frequently lack a shared vision and goals for the future growth of their community since they participate in meetings and development initiatives for various reasons. This is practically a surefire recipe for conflict. When weighing the benefits and drawbacks of participatory development, it is common for one interest group to interpret something positively that another finds objectionable.

Power dynamics and leadership

Power dynamics within rural communities, including entrenched hierarchies and dominance by certain individuals or groups, can discourage broader participation and lead to decision-making processes that do not reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of the community (Martin, 2012). It is commonly known that the likelihood of a project succeeding is significantly higher when community leaders support it than when they oppose it. But frequently, a certain organisation, possibly the most powerful in a target area, may stand in the way of the development agency's efforts to interact with the beneficiaries, thwarting any efforts made by the latter. Because doing so would jeopardize local elites' control, they may be able to thwart attempts to interact directly with beneficiaries successfully. Thus, despite their occasionally beneficial function as intermediaries for the urban impoverished, they generally restrict the direct and active involvement of low-income individuals. This behaviour by more dominant groups has often

deprived the weaker and more vulnerable social segments of participation in community affairs. This may also lead to self-centeredness and selfish development decisions. Experience has taught us that reaching the poorest people can be extremely challenging and that people with higher social status typically take the initiative and show leadership. Gitari, Mbabazi, and Jaya (2016) highlight their concern regarding the monopolization of power and development resources by certain groups and individuals in the South African context. This results in the exclusion, prevention, or limitation of participation by other groups and individuals. There is always a chance that a small, self-serving clique will control community decision-making and act solely in its best interests, disregarding the larger community's needs. In this regard, Friedman (1993) has used the term "positioning for patronage". In developing countries, South Africa included, the peculiar dynamics of informal settlements often lend themselves to an autocratic style of leadership based on patronage, reinforcing the prevailing inequality of the existing social structure (Nientied et al., 1990). Many residents in informal settings struggle for survival in absolute or relative poverty, which results in competition for scarce resources. This is not favorable for a community organization. Leaders in informal settlements adapt well to these circumstances, frequently monopolizing the information channels (Lukasiewicz & Baldwin, 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is often a rush or pressure for immediate results, which makes a consultation process or community participation a "tick a box" exercise. There appears to be a conflict between product and process in which concerns are centered around cost, time, resources, and continuous debates. An obsession for immediate results usually undermines the quality and the process of community participation and the quality of the outcomes, which, in return, will impact the efforts of community initiative programmes to improve the community's social welfare (O'Mara-Eves et al., 2013). The fixation with immediate results may cause community development workers to take shortcuts for immediate gratification; for example, they may skip or rush some of the activities or steps of community participation or complete some of the tasks themselves (Mutua, 2015). For example, food distribution is much more quickly achieved than teaching people how to grow it themselves. Anticipated results that are often too short a term have also been the cause of many of the world's most inappropriate development initiatives.

The lack of public interest in becoming involved

One of the challenges that impact community participation is the approach that is used by those with power, which at most is a top-down approach that views community members as candidates who should only rubber stamp the process rather than actively participate in the process, which in turn results in a long-term lack of interest in the process. This results in an ambiguous perspective towards community participation, which results in a multi-perspective. For example, others allude that generally, community members are just not interested in community participation, while other perspectives raise questions such as: "Do community members know what community participation entails?" and "Do they know their community needs, what they want and how to prioritize what they want?" (Robertson, Mushati, et al., 2014) These factors result in authorities making decisions on behalf of the community and citing that community members need to be protected against themselves. This notion implies that people are ignorant and need

to be steered in the right direction by those who “know better”, presumably the professional experts. A lack of willingness to participate may also result from past experiences of involvement where expectations were not fulfilled. Gaventa and Barrett (2012) say that the World Bank has learned the difficulties for beneficiaries to be active in community participation when the country does not have a social tradition supportive of participation; inadequate technology inhibits proper service delivery; beneficiaries perceive the government as a satisfactory medium; and when governments are reluctant to build participation into their project designs (Gaventa & Barrett, 2013).

Limited access to resources

Rural communities often lack access to essential resources such as transportation, technology, funding, and information. This can hinder participation as community members may struggle to attend meetings, access online resources, or contribute financially to projects (Gaventa & Barrett, 2013). The author further cited lack of funding as one of the factors that can hinder the ability of community organisations to carry out development projects. Without money for materials, labour, and administrative costs, initiating and sustaining community development initiatives becomes difficult. This can discourage participation from both community members and external partners. O'Mara-Eves, Brunton et al, (2014) allude that limited access to education and training opportunities can hinder community members' ability to participate effectively in development projects. Without the necessary skills and knowledge, individuals may feel unprepared or unqualified to contribute meaningfully to initiatives to improve their community. Discrimination, corruption, and unequal distribution of resources can further marginalise already vulnerable groups and hinder their ability to participate in development efforts (Asia Development Bank, 2015). The author believes that addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that involves improving access to resources, building community capacity, fostering collaboration between stakeholders, and addressing underlying structural inequalities. By addressing these barriers, communities can enhance their capacity to participate in and benefit from development initiatives.

Geographical isolation

Rural areas are often geographically dispersed, making it challenging for community members to join regularly for meetings, events, or collaborative projects. Geographically isolated communities often have limited access to infrastructure, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. This lack of resources can hinder community members from actively participating in development initiatives due to barriers like transportation difficulties or lack of communication infrastructure. Geographical isolation can either enhance or diminish social cohesion within a community. In some cases, isolation fosters a strong sense of community identity and solidarity, leading to increased participation in development efforts as community members come together to address common challenges. However, in other cases, isolation may lead to social fragmentation and disconnection, reducing overall participation. Geographically isolated communities may have fewer opportunities for networking and collaboration with external organisations, experts, or neighbouring communities. This lack of external connections can limit access to knowledge, funding, and technical assistance, making it more challenging for the community to initiate and sustain development projects (Gaventa & Barrett, 2013). Limited access to communication

infrastructure, such as internet connectivity or phone coverage, can hinder communication within the community and with external stakeholders. This can impede the dissemination of information about development initiatives, coordination of activities, and engagement of community members in decision-making processes. Geographically isolated communities may become overly reliant on external support from government agencies, NGOs, or philanthropic organisations for development interventions. While external assistance can be beneficial, it can undermine local autonomy and ownership of development initiatives if community members are not actively involved in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes. Generally, the impact of geographical isolation on community development participation depends on various factors such as the level of social cohesion, access to resources, communication infrastructure, and external support networks. Effective strategies to mitigate the challenges posed by geographical isolation may include investing in local capacity building, strengthening communication channels, fostering partnerships with external stakeholders, and promoting community-led development approaches that empower residents to drive positive change (Schilling, 2014).

Limited trust in institutions

Historical experiences of neglect or exploitation by external institutions, such as government agencies or NGOs, can erode trust and diminish enthusiasm for participating in community development efforts. Communities with high levels of mistrust in institutions may experience exacerbated social and economic inequalities. Limited trust can perpetuate a cycle of marginalisation and disempowerment among certain groups, hindering their meaningful participation in community development efforts (Harris, Croot, Thompson & Springett, 2015). Individuals may hesitate to invest their time, resources, or effort in community development activities if they perceive a high risk of exploitation, corruption, or institutional mismanagement. Limited trust can increase risk aversion and discourage participation in initiatives that could otherwise benefit the community. Institutions are crucial in ensuring transparency and accountability in community development efforts. When trust in institutions is low, there may be suspicions regarding the intentions or integrity of these institutions, leading to a lack of confidence in the transparency and accountability of their actions (Gaventa & Barrett, 2013). When individuals lack trust in institutions, they may feel disillusioned or disconnected from the decision-making processes within their community. This can decrease motivation to participate in community development initiatives or activities. Trust is essential for collaboration and cooperation among community members and institutions. Limited trust can hinder the willingness of individuals to work together with institutions, resulting in a lack of collective action towards community development goals (Development Bank, 2015).

Enhancing Community Participation.

Participation as empowerment

For community participation to be effective, it must be empowering, especially for rural people. It is, however, a term difficult to define and gives rise to alternative explanations. Some see "empowering" as the development of skills and abilities to enable rural people to manage better, have a say in, or negotiate systems; others see it as more fundamental and essentially concerned with enabling rural people to decide upon and take the actions they believe are essential to their development. Whatever the disagreements in perspective, the relationship between participation

and power is now widely recognised. It could be argued that defining the nature of the participation it hopes to bring about is the essential first step of any participatory project. However, the practice seems to suggest that this does not always happen. Indeed, it is not uncommon to review the details and explanations of a project that supposedly has "participation" as an objective and to find little, if any, evidence of what the project understands by the term (Development Bank, 2015). For too many rural development projects, participation is seen as yet another input to be programmed and managed along with other inputs. Not surprisingly, it is often difficult to assess the project's outcome in terms of participation. The overall conclusion must be that projects that seek to promote participation must be clear at the start of the project regarding the nature of the participation they expect to promote. If nothing else, such an analysis will help projects determine the appropriate methodologies to promote participation in existing development delivery (Gaventa & Barrett, 2013).

Effectiveness of community participation

Participation will also make projects more effective as instruments of rural development. Projects are invariably external instruments that are supposed to benefit the rural people of a particular area. Participation, which allows these people to have a voice in determining objectives, supporting project administration, and making their local knowledge, skills, and resources available to the project, must result in more effective projects. A major reason why many projects have not been effective in the past in achieving objectives is because local people were not involved. Effectiveness equals the successful completion of objectives, and participation can help ensure this (O'Mara-Eves, Brunton, McDaid, Oliver, Kavanagh, Jamal, Matosevic, Harden & Thomas, 2013).

Efficacy Participation implies a greater chance that resources available to development projects will be used more efficiently. Participation can, for example, help minimize misunderstandings or possible disagreements. Thus, the time and energy often spent by professional staff explaining or convincing people of a project's benefits can be avoided. Participation is also cost-effective since, if rural people are taking responsibility for a project, inexpensive outside resources will be required, and highly paid professional staff will not get tied down in the details of project administration. Participation, therefore, allows for more efficient use of resources available to a project. There is, however, another side to the coin – arguments to justify the resource efficiency of participation in development projects can be met with accusations that this cost-effectiveness often results in governments and agencies making fewer funds available for development work and, indeed, transferring the burden of project costs to local people.

Self-reliance

This all-embracing term covers a wide range of benefits that participation can bring. Self-reliance is the positive effects of participating in development projects on rural people. Participation helps break the dependence mentality that characterizes much development work and, as a result, promotes self-awareness and confidence and causes rural people to examine their problems and think positively about solutions. Participation increases people's sense of control over issues that affect their lives, helps them learn how to plan and implement, and, on a broader front, prepares them for regional or national participation. In essence, participation is a "good thing" in that it prevents people's isolation and lays the groundwork for them to have a more substantial influence

on development (O'Mara-Eves et al., 2013: 46).

Community participation is undeniably vital in development (Østergaard et al., 2003). Community participation in development is advocated for various noble reasons, but it is often permeated by empty rhetoric and has little impact (Botes & Rensburg, 2000). Beneficiary community participation, besides enhancing cost-effectiveness for project implementation and resource distribution to a wider coverage of weaker sections of society, is a crucial strategy for ensuring that responsibility and benefits trickle down to the beneficiaries (Barasa & Jelagat, 2013). Community participation does not just happen, nor is it an idle principle; rather, it needs some form of strategy and planning approach, resources and time allocation, and commitment to the course (Burns, 2004). Samah and Aref (2009) observe that participation in community development activities means individuals are involved in initiating, deciding, planning, implementing, and managing development processes and their activities; they are also involved in meeting their collective needs and expectations to overcome their common development challenges. Communities that have chosen to participate in development discourses derive more satisfaction from the joy of involvement. However, they also achieve more results more rapidly and with more significant benefits to the community. Communities participating in development initiatives report better success than those that only pay lip service to this important principle (Reid, 2000). Beneficiary community participation in development discourses and processes is considered critical to the success of the community's well-being because it is valued as one of the key ingredients of empowering development (Reid, 2000). It can greatly contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of projects and help improve the living conditions of low-income communities (Botes & Rensburg, 2000).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

To effectively participate in community development programmes, effective communication must be organised. This will allay participants' fears regarding these socially beneficial initiatives. Active public mobilization is necessary to ensure effective participation in community development programs because it informs members about all development initiatives in their community. Furthermore, it is crucial to remember that members must effectively participate in the planning, assessing, and carrying out their community development activities for a programme to be successful. Whether in an urban or rural setting, community members must take part in their programmes for community development.

The mass media, religious organisations, mosques and churches, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, and traditional institutions should all raise public awareness and educate people about the benefits of communal participation in community development. To improve awareness raising in every corner of the state, the government ought to schedule frequent meetings with the affected communities' religious organisations and traditional leaders. Additionally, it is important to promote rural residents' participation in project conception, planning, and execution, not only during project execution and implementation. In conclusion, the government should establish a conducive atmosphere where the public can actively engage in decision-making processes impacting their quality of life. This will foster a cooperative relationship between the government and community members as collaborators in

advancement.

Moreover, diverse perspectives need space in society where consultation allows decision-makers to gather insights and perspectives from diverse stakeholders. Different people bring different experiences, expertise, and viewpoints to the table, which can lead to more well-rounded and informed decisions. When multiple voices are heard, it fosters a culture of creativity and innovation. Brainstorming sessions and discussions can generate novel ideas and solutions that may not have been considered otherwise. The authorities should focus on increased ownership and commitment; when individuals feel that their opinions have been valued and considered in the decision-making process, they are more likely to feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the outcome. This can lead to greater buy-in and support for the decision, making it easier to implement. Consulting with relevant stakeholders helps identify potential risks and drawbacks of different options. By considering various perspectives, decision-makers can anticipate challenges and mitigate risks more effectively, leading to better outcomes. Building trust and relationships is very important in enhancing community participation; engaging in consultation demonstrates respect for the expertise and opinions of others. This can help build trust and strengthen stakeholder relationships, fostering collaboration and cooperation in future endeavors. Regarding alignment with values and objectives, consultation ensures that decisions are aligned with all stakeholders' values, goals, and priorities. By seeking input from those affected by the decision, decision-makers can better understand their needs and preferences, leading to outcomes more aligned with overarching objectives. Regarding legitimacy and transparency, involving stakeholders in the decision-making process enhances the legitimacy and transparency of the decision. When people understand how and why decisions are made, they are more likely to accept them, even if they do not fully agree with the outcome. Overall, consultation in decision-making promotes inclusivity, creativity, risk mitigation, trust-building, and alignment with values, all of which contribute to better decision outcomes and stronger relationships among stakeholders.

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