

Community Participation in NGO “Development Projects” in Zimbabwe: Myth or Reality?

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ABSTRACT For Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to bring about development to the communities they work with, it is imperative that they effectively employ participatory methodologies for their beneficiaries to take initiative and action in planning for the development of their communities. This paper sought to evaluate community participation in NGO development projects in Masvingo province from a participatory development theoretical perspective. Participation entails ownership and empowerment, therefore lack of ownership and empowerment hinders development. The researchers used the qualitative research methodology guided by a case study design. A case of one international NGO (which requested anonymity) was used. Results revealed lack of “real participation” in the identified development projects. Beneficiaries are merely “task takers” from the NGO officials rather than drivers of the projects. It was observed that participation in the project is at the implementation stage and is lacking at identification, design and monitoring and evaluation of the projects. Moreover, the NGO lacked a defined tool on participation which is necessary when working with beneficiaries. With these observations, the paper recommends that NGOs should institutionalize participation by employing participatory methodologies to guide them when working with their beneficiaries for their development projects to be successful.

INTRODUCTION

Community participation has been widely recognized as a necessary ingredient in a development strategy among Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) since the 1970s (Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) 1992, see also Tremblay and Gutberlet 2012; Eversol 2012; Kessy 2014). The FAO highlights how NGOs have been able to provide structures and mechanisms for the involvement of the people. Leinbernbeg (1997) also highlights how NGOs have come as a sector that observes more humanistic principles, therefore, being more participatory and action oriented (see also Chan 2013). Community participation, as NGOs have empirically shown, has been an approach, advocating for local people (beneficiaries) to be among other stakeholders in decision-making when designing development strategies. This means, for this approach to work, it has to unleash the potential of the local people by enlarging their capabilities, and this implies empowerment of people and enabling them to participate actively in their own development. This includes empowering the poor with experiences, capacities, and skills that will allow them to improve their situation long after development donors have left (Monroe 2009). NGOs have also advocated for people centred development (Chan 2013) and not the

top-down approach which avoids the imposition of priorities from those that are not part of the community which Chambers (1983) names the outsiders.

However, despite the importance that has increasingly been attached to the NGOs’ role as being facilitators of development their effort towards participatory development has come under heavy scrutiny. Moreover, the extent to which NGOs engage their beneficiaries throughout the process of identification of the projects to design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation has been questioned. In this light therefore, this paper sought to investigate the extent to which communities participate in NGOs’ development projects.

Numerous development agencies operate in the area under investigation for more than a decade but the indicators that reveal that there is development taking place are from minimal to none. Rural areas in developing countries have attracted many NGOs and this is so because most of the world’s poor live in the rural areas and the situation will remain so as long as the right strategies towards addressing this situation are not adopted (World Bank 2003). Even in Zimbabwe, poverty is also prevalent in rural areas where, 75 percent of the rural households are poor (Makumbe 2000). It is encouraging that recent reports show that the rural poor are 62.6 percent (Zimstat 2013).

This paper is therefore premised on the participatory approach to development built on the basis that those intended to benefit from development must be trusted to shape their own future, therefore participatory development uses local decision making and capacities (Robinson and Notara 2015) to steer and define the nature of development (Blanchet-Cohen 2015; Jennings 2000). It is salient therefore to have participation that is all inclusive from the conceptualisation of the project to the beneficiaries measuring the impact of the community projects in monitoring and evaluation of these projects to eventually coming up with development projects that bring results in the rural areas. This paper focused on an International NGO in Zimbabwe which has been operating since 1992 covering 2 provinces and 9 districts. The paper mainly focused on Masvingo District and closely looked at the project activities of the Protracted Relief Programme (PRP) run by this NGO funded by the Department for International Development (DFID).

Conceptual Framework

Conceptualizing Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

The World Bank has defined NGOs as including many groups and institutions that are entirely or largely independent of government and that have primarily humanitarian or cooperative agendas rather than commercial objectives. They also include independent cooperatives, community associations, water-user societies, women's groups and pastoral associations and also citizen groups (World Bank 1990). Therefore, they are seen as private agencies, indigenous groups organized regionally or nationally, member-groups in villages that support their communities with development or humanitarian aid. Tvedt (1998) gives a more elaborate definition that NGOs are a common denominator for all organizations within the aid channel, whether humanitarian or development aid that is institutionally separated from the state apparatus and is non-profit distributing. Coming to the context of this paper this NGO's work fits into Tvedt's definition as an NGO for both humanitarian (relief) and development purposes. For the purpose of the paper, analysis will be made on the development projects that this organization has

embarked on since development of rural areas is the main quest for the paper.

There is need again to discuss the classification of NGOs. Liebenberg (2000) classified NGOs into five broad categories which include the evolutionary category in which NGOs move swiftly from being a relief organization to welfare to small scale self-reliant local development then sustainable systems development and then to advocacy work. Scholars such as Eade (2000) and Robinson and Notara (2015) have also agreed to this. NGOs especially established in developing countries have been identified with one particular agenda that Liebenberg highlights. The next classification is the organizational category where according to Liebenberg (2000) an NGO can be a voluntary organization, public service contractor, people's organization or governmental and non-governmental organization. In the geographical category NGOs are classified as being international NGOs, regional NGOs, national NGOs and local NGOs, therefore, functioning within their geographical boundaries.

There is the membership classification where organizations are classified according to their membership status this entailing who will benefit from the NGO. Lastly, there is the functional category which entails NGOs performing specialized, welfare, developmental, and advocacy work. This include activities such as human physical development that is housing agriculture and information communication technology, health and food relief and welfare and advocacy which entails awareness, consultation services as well as human rights advocacy. For example NGOs in Zimbabwe set up themselves with a particular mission, for instance Action Aid comes as a relief organization for food relief, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) establish themselves as self-reliant local development organizations, and the NGO under study has established itself as a humanitarian and development NGO.

In the Zimbabwean context, there are also five types which include CBOs, Intermediary NGOs, Service NGOs, Trusts and Unions and lastly International NGOs (Makumbe 2000). In terms of development, CBOs have had a positive mark in terms of developing their localities (Robinson and Notara 2015). Participation within CBOs is prevalent since they emerged during the colonial era and instilled a sense of partici-

pation and solidarity amongst the disempowered blacks (Tostensen 2001). Service NGOs serve the purpose of technical services to other NGOs in the form of training, consultancy, research, project design and formulation. However, their impact on development is not easily measurable in the community. Examples of these include Silveira House and The Development Partner in Consultancy in Zimbabwe. Trusts and Unions are also another type of NGO classified by Makumbe whose roles include fundraising. These have not been very common in the NGO sphere as their achievements are not very visible to date.

The last two categories are currently the most common in the development sphere within Zimbabwe and their effort and impact is visible around the country especially after 2000. The intermediary organizations such as Action Aid, Christian Care, and Plan Zimbabwe are involved in facilitating the activities of development within rural communities. These usually target rural areas and have a large geographical coverage. These have become popular amongst rural communities because of their efforts towards enriching the livelihoods of these communities and have gained comparative advantage over government (Tvedt 1998). Lastly there are international organizations which include, Save the Children Fund, Oxfam, World Food Programme and various UN agencies. These are funding organizations that support intermediary organizations in their work. However, there are fine lines in this classification which were also evidenced in Liebenberg's classification. NGOs such as Action Aid and Care International fall under Intermediary NGOs although they are also International NGOs. Therefore, this classification could be characterized by size and budget.

Theoretical Framework for Development

Participatory Development

Participatory development has been on the agenda of development management since the 1960s and is still being perpetuated today, emphasizing on the need to engage the local communities in development planning. Participatory development came in as a new initiative from international aid organisations as a means to revitalise the strategy of development that was

top down and non-inclusive of the beneficiary, to a bottom up and all-inclusive approach (Munsaka 2015; Iroz-Elardo 2015; Blanchet-Cohen 2015). This was a swift response after the realisation of the failing of the top down disempowering approaches which were prevalent within the spheres of development (Mohan 2002). The state was seen to have red tape, bureaucratic and undemocratic tendencies towards the course of development in localities. Therefore, the international aid community prescribed this approach to the NGOs which were already perceived as being more effective in delivering development and had correct working relationships with the communities they were involved with.

In view of the fact that the international development agencies had come up with an all-inclusive approach to development, development aid increased and the number of NGOs emerging in developing countries also increased (Makoba 2002). Following the realization of NGOs' ability to mobilize people within communities partnered with the participatory approach to development, the international agencies viewed this as the panacea for rural development in developing countries. Although it is not the main focus of this paper, the over emphasis of the role of NGOs in development and the ever increasing number of them has been questioned as these organizations being angels of mercy or middlemen pursuing western agendas (Makumbe 2000).

The participatory approach to development emerged with the purpose of empowering people (Blanchet-Cohen 2015) who were previously marginalized and letting the poor take part in decisions affecting their lives (Thomsen 2005 and Iroz-Elardo 2015). This therefore became a popular approach and promised that with the involvement of beneficiaries in development planning and implementation as well as monitoring and evaluation the development efforts were to be realized and measured. This approach again, was seen as essential in human growth as well as community solidarity (Liebenberg 1997) and enhances the development process (Puri and Sahay 2007; Blanchet-Cohen 2015). Human growth in this instance according to Liebenberg would mean self-confidence, self-reliance, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and cooperation and this would be the essence for true development. With all this time that NGOs have operated in these communities, it is paramount

to question if they have been able to measure the true development, human growth and community solidarity? Furthermore, this approach advocated for local people, community organizations, NGOs and other stakeholders decide together what methods they want to use in executing the development interventions as well as measuring results and impact of these interventions (Jennings 2000; Kessy 2014; Blanchet-Cohen 2015). This involvement of the local people throughout all the important stages of the project cycle makes it possible to utilize their knowledge about the path and pace their development should take and to solve their problems more efficiently and effectively. Therefore, according to Osmani (1997) development problems should not be defined by experts in isolation but should be based on dialogue with all affected stakeholders.

Authors such as Chambers (1983) and Pitt (1976) have also recommended the participatory approach envisaging the fact that participation offers a means of empowering the poor in decision making without external influence. Chambers has been viewed as the chief proponent of the participatory approach to development. He argues against the top down processes of development, advocating for development that emanates from the grassroots. Chambers (1983) posits that the “outsiders” who are the development technocrats, should abandon the biased relationship between them and the communities and have a two way relationship where people are empowered to choose and define their course of development. Chambers believes in the poor being empowered to make decisions without external influence.

Conversely, participatory development has its shortfalls. Firstly, participatory development has been criticized for failing to take into account power relations and different levels of access to opportunities within communities. The approach has an insufficiently sophisticated understanding of how power operates and is constituted and accordingly of how opportunities and empowerment may occur (Kothari and Cooke 2001). Communities are shaped by different dimensions of relations and therefore they should be approached in the knowledge of these. It has been evident in societies of different power relations that exist and in trying to implement participation by all, opportunities are grabbed by those with power and more often

than not, a small segment of the community participate. This usually includes the rural elites, especially males, as a result women and the disadvantaged are left out (Liebenberg 1997). Development will in turn not take place since the efforts would have been directed towards a few who are advantaged already.

On a broader perspective, participatory development is said to have an obsession with the ‘local’ as opposed to wider structures of injustice and oppression (Mohan 2004). This is to mean operations out of the ‘local’ can have a bearing within. Therefore, the environment that participatory development takes place should not be taken in vain. There are other factors such as government policies that impede the issue of participation. For example in Zimbabwe, all NGOs are to abide by the policies of the government including the NGO bill, that was passed and had more stringent conditions on how NGO activities are carried out. The IBA (2004) also contends that in many respects, the Zimbabwe NGO Bill is self-evidently restrictive and prohibitive rather than enabling, in the pursuit of political interests. Rather than focusing on development of the rural poor, focus is given to political agendas.

NGOs are involved in all sectors of the economy and have provided public services including health, education, sanitary, funds for entrepreneurship, therefore, creating employment, relief in terms of food and intervention in situations of natural disasters as well as development aid. NGOs in Zimbabwe, according to Wellard (1993) have been majoring in an integrated approach to development which involves empowerment and providing opportunities for training, provision of assistance for example funds and materials to needy areas thus assisting and complementing government efforts, creation of employment within the NGOs and in beneficiary projects, provision of capital goods, vehicles, computer hardware, infrastructure and scientific material, enabling the government of Zimbabwe to focus on those areas which it previously had given low priority to such as child welfare, the disabled, the rural aged and other vulnerable in society. According to Tvedt (1998), who also did studies in Zimbabwe, NGOs have been seen to be better at reaching the poor, obtaining true meaningful participation of intended beneficiaries, responsive and flexible to their work and achieving outcomes at less costs (see also Blanchet-Cohen 2015).

However, coming to the concern of their role as participatory development facilitators, Tvedt's views are heavily criticized. The exceptional increase of NGOs and their role as facilitators of community participation has come under heavy scrutiny. After the wake of participatory development approach almost all NGOs became unanimously associated with having adopted this approach that Julia (2008) has actually advised on taking heed the danger of romanticizing this approach. Despite the importance that is increasingly attached to their facilitative role, there is very little understanding of how NGOs actually engage their beneficiaries in the decision-making processes (Makuwira 2004). This means facilitating participation in making decisions from identification, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the projects that affect their beneficiaries' lives. Evidently development has been impeded due to lack of development practitioners' engagement of local people's input in identifying the projects, design, monitoring, as well as evaluation of the projects. Therefore, coming up with development projects without the participation of locals and their indigenous knowledge will cause a failure of understanding of the project's goals and values as well as a sense of ownership which will result in the failure of the planned development (Gareau 2007).

NGOs have been deemed as being blind of the existing power relations especially within rural communities and therefore development ends up benefiting those that are better placed in societies (Liebenberg 1997). Again failing to use techniques of participation such as Participatory Learning Approach is another hindrance. The technique advocates for NGOs to come in communities, share information, observe, learn, and then come up with strategies from observing the livelihoods of the prospective beneficiaries (Liebenberg 1997; Chan 2013 and Blanchet-Cohen 2015). This avoids blueprint strategies that rural people will not be able to decipher. In this light, NGOs have been criticized of drafting projects in offices rather than in the field, in which they have earned the name "desk programmers" (Porter 1997).

In spite of the increased popularity of NGOs as being able to observe participatory principles, their critics question why the effects of their capabilities have not been noticed. Though we cannot dispute the fact that NGOs practice

participation, but when they do it they often do not practice it consistently throughout the cycle of the development project which might lead to its failure. Diverse explanations are posited for this dearth of consistent participatory practices; these have to do with the functioning of administrative bureaucracies, the difficulties of working between continents and cultures, and the impediments to true partnerships and empowerment created by Western actors and their empiricism and egocentrism (Ariyaratne 1999; Chambers 1993; Jackson and Kassam 1998). This goes back to the fact that other wider aspects of NGO relations can affect their capability for community participation.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted the qualitative research. Data were gathered using interviews. The case study in this paper was based on the activities of an International NGO (which requested anonymity and hereby referred to as such) in Zimbabwe Masvingo. A case study is an object of study and an exploration of a bounded system (Vaus 1990). The population of this research included beneficiaries of the NGO from all the 30 wards of the district. The units of analysis were the district supervisors and field officers for the project who provided information such as what role the organization plays in the process of developing these communities from the beginning of the project cycle to the end. Project beneficiaries of the PRP project are also units of analysis and were selected through selected sampling technique and they provided information such as their role in the project from project start to project end since they are the beneficiaries of the development. This researcher used the purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using interviews, and the interviews were administered to the NGO's field officers as well as administering questionnaires to a sample of the community beneficiaries

Background Information on the PRP Project

The PRP project started in 1992 when the NGO initially started its operations in Zimbabwe. After the 1992 drought, that is when the NGO came to support the government which had lost its capacity to provide social services to the people. After a survey done by the NGO in partnership

with the Agricultural Research and Extension Services (AREX) and Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZIMVAC) they identified that dams had been lying idle and decided to adopt these and teach locals how to conserve them, avoiding siltation and also use them for irrigation to cushion them from the drought. The project ran along to 2003 when there was the introduction of PRP II. PRP II is now an integrated project that has several interventions within it. The interventions are:

Conservation Farming

This intervention is a farming system that conserves resources such as soil and water. It entails efficient use of nutrients therefore an increase in yields. Seeing that lack of draught power and unreliability of rains in this province, this project was seen fit. The NGO trains the key farmers who will in turn train other farmers on conservation farming methods. They also provide agriculture inputs, farmers are trained on crop diversification as they plant not only maize but sorghum, finger millet, cowpeas, ground nuts, sunflower as well as being provided with fertilizer and they are assisted by an AREX officer.

Community Gardens

The NGO implemented the idea of community gardens in 2004. This was an initiative like the Ujamaa of Tanzania, where villages in the community come together and joined their household gardens into one big community garden. They are provided fence around and a well within the garden. They are given 'starter packs' which include a variety of nutritious vegetables such as beans, onions, carrots, peas and other vegetables. Community coordinators are trained on how to do this and coordinate the other members in the garden and they are also trained on leadership skills. The NGO tries to link them with markets. They have separate gardens for the chronically ill and orphans at the homesteads.

Sweet Potato and Cassava Project

This is in partnership with African Programme for Onchocerciasis Control (APOC) an agricultural organization which comes to train beneficiaries in this project on how to rear these tubers. From this project beneficiaries harvest

sweet potatoes and cassava which are used to make cassava porridge; chips; flour; and the same for sweet potatoes. This is to improve on the food security of the beneficiary households.

Water and Sanitation (WATSAN)

The International NGO in partnership with Pump Aid provides clean water to the communities through the installation of elephant pumps. These provide safe clean water to the community. They also see the revamping and training of water point committees to repair and maintain pumps, training of latrine builders and supply of tools as well as training on Participatory Health and Hygiene Education (PHHE).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Participation

It is important to firstly view how the organization's staff understands participation and how the beneficiaries understand what participation is. Firstly, in an interview with the District Supervisor (D.S) from the NGO, what they understand by the term 'participation' entails engaging communities in coming up with sustainable projects of their own choices (Tremblay and Gutberlet 2012; Chan 2013; Munsaka 2015; Blanchet-Cohen 2015; Iroz-Elardo 2015). It entails involving all stakeholders from RDC to members of the household. The officer was of the opinion that a good project must be able to include the community as a whole. The field officer from the same organization said 'participation is talking with communities at the household level in order for them as a village to arrive at a consensus on issues of common interest. Thus it is clear that 'participation' has been operationalized to denote 'inclusion' (Munsaka 2015; Iroz-Elardo 2015), 'consensus-building' (Tremblay and Gutberlet 2012) and 'consultation' (Rosato 2015) with communities by the NGO officials. Most beneficiaries understood participation as being fully involved in the projects. That meant complete dedication to their work, actively being involved and having a good relationship with their officers.

Participation in the Identification of PRP II

The participation of the community in development projects entails a process where the

community takes initiative and takes action that is inspired by their own thinking and deliberation and which they can exert control over (Rahman 1993; Kessy 2014; Munsaka 2015). It is important for outside experts to take a facilitative role in identifying projects within communities. Local people should be the main players in the identification of their problems and then design how they want to solve them (Munsaka 2015). Although this is what is to be done, NGOs have not fully embraced how participation should happen.

This is evidenced in the identification process of PRP II, it can clearly illustrate the contradictions, claims, and counterclaims regarding community participation of the beneficiaries in the establishment of the programme. PRP II was started in 2004 which was an upgrade from the initial project that they had commenced its operations in 1992. It meant to have another holistic programme which included many interventions from food security to hygiene and development. According to an interview with the D.S, PRP II was established after a needs assessment and a number of people were involved in this assessment. He highlighted that this was done by experts from their organization AREX, the Rural District Council and of course the beneficiaries through regular household livelihood surveys (HHLS) which are carried once a year and that is where programming and upgrading of PRP II came from. He went to further highlight that beneficiaries were obviously consulted to identify which programmes they preferred.

This meant that the organization was conscious of the need to include beneficiaries in their development and to take stand in identifying their needs. However, contrary to this statement, the other official confirmed that PRP II was the brainchild of one of the organization's international staff who saw the need for a big programme that would address all the needs of the poor, from there the organization went through the right protocol to initialise the programme.

This therefore shows that the idea of PRP II had been formulated before the beneficiaries were consulted. Data gathered from the interviews with these officials revealed that the intended beneficiaries had little or no influence in the identification of this project. There was lack of decision making in the identification process by the beneficiaries. This highlights the lack of

participatory development methodologies advocated by scholars such as Chambers (1983) and Leibenberg (1997), Kessy (2014) and Munsaka (2015), such as the participatory Rural Appraisal Techniques (PRA). Only the traditional leaders were consulted since they are in the hierarchy of the entry point of a ward by any organization willing to work in the area. The processes shows how the approach is top down and decisions are made without the participation of the community.

Members of the community expressed great appreciation for the programme and how most interventions have helped them in their livelihoods. However, their responses only revealed that they had no knowledge about how the project was started. One of the respondents who was the first beneficiaries to participate when the project started highlighted that she was not aware of how they came up with PRP II. She went on to mention that her village only knew of the programme when the officials came to introduce their new programme and how they were going to benefit from it.

Statements like '...to introduce their new programme' just shows that this was a programme by the organization for the people, not a programme for the people by the people and therefore is in contradiction with participatory development principles. Of the beneficiaries interviewed none of them had knowledge of how the project came about. They had no knowledge of how the officials had initiated the programme. Responses such as these reveal how beneficiaries knowledge is undermined in coming up with projects. Local people become merely recipients of aid rather than people who are actively involved in the decision making process. According to Munsaka (2015), lack of involvement amounts to exclusion in the process of development.

The Design of the Project

Although it can prove to be a strenuous task, consultation of the people is a necessity in formulation of development projects. Beneficiaries should be consulted at every stage of the project cycle. The design stage usually involves technical knowledge of planning how the project will be implemented but not only technical skills are required but those that have in-depth knowledge of the area of operation. This means that

although locals lack academic and professional knowledge on planning they know what suits their community best. In this instance, in an interview with the D.S revealed that on the design stage, beneficiaries are given feedback during the processes of designing the project.

After identification of the project, specialists write a concept paper which is a framework of the project. After the concept paper is written, beneficiaries are consulted and asked if the design framework in the concept paper is what they want and are allowed to make valuable input before the proposal is taken to donors. This showed that in as much as the implementing organisation, through their specialists, has the leeway to direct the project design framework; the community also has substantial authority in turning down ideas raised in the concept paper which are not in line with their initial inputs. This was very impressive because development is not shaped by the helpers but by the ones being helped.

However, contrary to this claim, another officer within the organisation after being questioned on how their organisation designed this programme pointed out that “consultation of beneficiaries is not an easy task” considering that we do not work with only one province”. After being questioned on the issue of a concept paper that is presented to beneficiaries before being passed on as a project proposal, the officer who has worked with the NGO for the past 5 years had no knowledge of such. He in fact highlighted that the idea of thoroughly including beneficiaries in making decisions on what they want would be a very good idea but not viable considering the large geographical area they cover. Statements like these show how these NGO workers do not understand the need for community participation.

Community members also had knowledge only of the day the NGO officials came to introduce them to the “new programme”. Therefore, it shows that despite NGOs’ claim to involve their beneficiaries in the participatory development process, the findings above contrast with Tvedt’s (1987) view of NGOs having comparative advantage in actively engaging the beneficiaries in participation. What seems to be confirmed in these findings is a common observation that the poor generally remain excluded from decision-making processes. This is in line with Munsaka’s (2015) findings. Findings show that

the local communities are last in being consulted when projects are being formulated. Although there was some sort of consultation through traditional leaders, the design of PRP II shows that the way in which the project was established and designed is not in conjunction with the adopted understanding of participatory development which advocates for citizen participation.

Participation in the Implementation of PRP II

The implementation stage is where inclusivity of the beneficiaries is noticed in most NGO development projects (Munsaka 2015). Within this project, operations started in 2004. Though recently people are more engaged in the project, beneficiaries were sceptical at first. This was because this project was to a greater extent an imposition within the community. Another beneficiary highlighted that in the first years people were not completely turning up for their projects. Only a few who were the most vulnerable were the first to respond because the rest of the community did not understand the NGO operations and made an assumption that the programme did not apply to them.

Again what outsiders consider very relevant can be received with scepticism. Beneficiaries had mixed feelings for the intervention because they were not the brains that came up with this. Another beneficiary admitted that when PRP II first started, others went for curiosity’s sake because no one wants to be left out in these new programmes that NGOs “come and introduce.” She went on to say they were not really in it and thought it just belonged to the organization. The curiosity of beneficiaries highlighted is largely attributable to the desperation.

On the WATSAN project, one elderly woman confessed to preferring underground water purified using traditional means. Another beneficiary shared the same sentiments that water from the pumps had an awkward taste compared to the water they had been used to and used this water to wash clothes only. This shows lack of consultation on community preferences. Further, it demonstrates how technocratic staff downgrade indigenous knowledge based on preconceived and modernist notions of development. Most beneficiaries were singing the same tune of initial scepticism since it was a not a project formulated by the community.

However, with time beneficiaries began showing enthusiasm towards the interventions. Greater participation is noticed in this implementation stage of the project as observed in literature. This is the stage in the project cycle where typically NGOs involve the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries mentioned that with time they saw the benefits of being part of the programme. The NGO provides agriculture inputs for the farming season to all households in the conservation farming project as well as train lead farmers through AREX. They are given a fence for their garden as well as starter packs with seedlings for the garden, at the beginning of each reporting year, all water points are rehabilitated. Again they are given the tubers for sweet potato and cassava as well as training. Those that had joined were benefiting through their harvested grains and vegetables from the gardens, safe water to drink as well as a variety of food, from the cassava and sweet potato to cereals from the conservation farming project.

On being asked what they have done to complement the efforts of the organization, they mentioned that they have come up with other forms of manure that they put in the gardens, they have come up with a water rationing system since water from the wells dries up most of the time. Again, beneficiaries expressed how most of them have been working with commitment in the gardens and in the conservation farming project. They actually managed to put poles around their garden to protect it because the fence came late. This community initiative demonstrates their interest.

Field officers highlighted that every project has coordinators for instance the conservation project has lead farmers who are trained to lead others in case officers are not there and to communicate all their problems. Thus at the grass-roots level, lead farmers are empowered to drive the project in the absence of field officers. In community gardens, community heads have been trained to lead their subjects in running the gardens. The NGO also has water point community heads for the WATSAN project.

However, real participation is lacking. Coordinators have been undermined as being decision makers. Though the coordinators of the project were chosen by the community their role in the implementation of the project stands to be questioned. The coordinators themselves are actually not even sure of their role. This was

unearthed when interviewing one of the coordinators on their role; they responded that from their understanding their role was to merely pass information to other beneficiaries from the field officers, to guide other beneficiaries whilst progressing with the project, to keep the peace amongst project beneficiaries and to avoid disputes.

Even on being asked on how they deal problems such as disputes or lack of resources in their project another coordinator answered that they have confidence in their supervisor and they tell them what their problem is so that they can be amicably resolved. These responses show that coordinators do not necessarily have the decision making role within the project. They have been left to be only assistants within the project, rather it is supposed to be the opposite, and field workers are to assist the community in the community projects.

Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

The project PRP II reports briefly availed during the research revealed that beneficiaries do not participate in the monitoring and evaluation process. Many stakeholders and partners that work together with the NGO are part of the monitoring and evaluation structure. There is an M & E specialist in the NGO who is responsible for this task as well as their partners from Pump Aid, ARDRA, APOC and the local AREX officer. The field officer interviewed revealed that the NGO did not have a formal participatory tool that had been implemented in the project, but recently there was the Local Inclusive Monitoring and Evaluation (LIME) system that was put in place. The district supervisor believes that it has already been implemented but was not quite sure. Monitoring and evaluation for the organization does not rest heavily on the beneficiaries but rather on the field officers as well as the M & E specialist. Almost all the beneficiaries who were interviewed admitted having taken no part in monitoring and evaluation that is, actively participating in ascertaining the progress of the program and the loopholes to be addressed.

Villagers were of the opinion that it was the NGO which did most of that work. Some expressed ignorance on that issue saying the project officers were responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the project of the project. One beneficiary said "they come very often to check on our progress and we try to do

things so that they see our work progressing". This shows a non-inclusive M & E process since beneficiaries keep saying "they" as if it is "their" (the organisation) project. They actually believe it is not their role but officers' role to monitor and evaluate the project. As highlighted in the implementation of the project, coordinators mostly performed the function of a medium of communication between the community members and the NGO officials and not those who oversee the major monitoring and evaluation of the project. It is evident that the coordinators, report verbally to the officer on problems that arise in the gardens, at water points, and at every other project. They do not have regular and specific meeting days with field officers to discuss their problems and map the way forward on what needs to be done. They do not submit regular progress reports. This shows that beneficiaries are not part of the M & E system.

The views expressed by the organisation's officials and the beneficiaries show that the monitoring and evaluation of the programme rests on the NGO officials rather than a participatory union amongst community members, NGO officials as well as their partners of. Though coordinators give verbal reports to the officials their contribution in giving direction to the progress of the programme is minimal, demonstrating that the beneficiaries are not subjects to the monitoring and evaluation processes thereby contravening the fundamental principles of participatory monitoring and evaluation. From the foregoing findings several observations can be made.

CONCLUSION

Participation within the NGO seems to be understood as merely consultation rather than a process throughout the project cycle where beneficiaries are actively involved in the decision making of how they need the project and which direction should the project take. The findings in this paper have shown that the concept of participation is applied in a much narrower sense. Though the NGO officers seemed to have an understanding of what participation is, real participation is lacking in the project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This has negative repercussion on the development of the community. Participatory development entails the beneficiaries having the power to in-

fluence development in their communities. However this is not evident in these communities.

The ignorance of participatory development principles as highlighted above led to lack of proper planning, which subsequently ignored participation as a policy. Theoretical knowledge of what entails participatory development, according to this study, is lacking not only among low ranking NGO staff but even the senior members of such NGOs. This probably explains why beneficiary involvement during the planning stage was overlooked. As highlighted in the analysis, the organisation did not presumably let the beneficiaries take initiative and take action in the identification of the project as well as designing it. If beneficiaries were involved, this was done at a micro level since most beneficiaries had only encountered the organisation on the day of the introduction of the programme. This overlooked the complexities and ethical issues that the organization is now facing during implementation. The organisation again does not have a working participatory development tool. They therefore lack guidance on how to involve their beneficiaries. It is evidenced again by the non-inclusivity of beneficiaries in the monitoring and evaluation of the project.

Another observation is that the NGO, through its minute inclusion of beneficiaries, has resulted in the community being incapacitated to make decisions within the project and this has long term negative results towards the development of the community. Beneficiaries revealed how they wholly depended on the officers to make decisions within the project. Problems that they encountered within the project were dealt with by the officers, progress was monitored by the officers and their duty is just to implement the project for the organisation. This has promoted a dependency syndrome on the organization since community members depend on the officers to make decisions. Lack of resources such as hoes, or seedlings, or disputes within the garden are issues that the community can resolve but they have depended on the officers. At the end of the day the project's sustainability will be compromised and development will not be realised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For real participation within communities to be realised NGOs need to institutionalize partic-

ipation so that community participation becomes a policy which clearly articulates how their beneficiaries will be part of the decision making process. This entails NGOs coming up with specified participatory development tools that they use to engage their beneficiaries. For example, the laid down participatory methodologies such as the Participatory Rural Appraisal Techniques. These should again be sensitized to all employees. This will remove NGO field workers from the position of decision makers and be facilitators of the type of development that beneficiaries want. There is also need for NGOs to work closely in partnership with the government in the planning stage. This can be done through the already established government structures within communities. For example government has already set Village and Ward development committees (VIDECO and WADCO) which include members of the community. These committees include the general community members and not only leaders. They have indigenous knowledge and have worked in the leadership role and understand the needs of the community. What NGOs may consider relevant might be irrelevant for the beneficiaries. Therefore they need to work in close partnership with these structures rather than to duplicate government's work by formulating their own structures which might cause conflicts with their own established structures.

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