

An Analysis of Community Participation in Handicraft Projects in Lesotho

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ABSTRACT The aim of this study was to examine the extent to which communities in Lesotho participate in income generating projects as a means of poverty alleviation. A case study of a handicraft project at Malealea community was examined with respect to the involvement of the participants in all project stages and the role of vulnerable members of the community (women, elderly and disabled). The study is anchored on Golden Munyaka's Grassroots Community Development Theory (GCD). Using in-depth interviews with 26 interviewees: 20 project members and six key informants, the findings show that even though the project was initiated by an outsider in 1998, an American Peace Corps volunteer, the participants were actively involved in all the stages of the project. The project succeeded to an extent in alleviating poverty among its members but not to the satisfaction of everyone. Also, the project embraced the following categories of community members: the elderly, disabled and women, though the latter dominated the project. The domination of the project by women is an indication that Lesotho still holds firmly to the traditional stereotype gender roles where women are very visible in home related chores. Nonetheless, the findings are consistent with the grassroots theory that people at that level should use their indigenous knowledge in projects' initiation and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

Community development has been in existence as an integral part of development for decades. De Beer and Swanepoel (1998) posit that the notion of community development has its origins in the post Second World War era, when the modernisation school was becoming very popular. Community development was promoted by the United Nations as well as other rich countries in an effort to alleviate poverty in the Third World and was, as such, widely accepted as a model for development. Community development programmes were designed for the purpose of mobilising people in their local communities as an integral part of medium term plans made by national planners and operated under centralised management and fund allocation. However, according to Campfens (1997), community development was seen by successive administrations in the United States as a tool to promote American interest in the Third World. It was viewed as

a propaganda campaign designed to indoctrinate African populations with colonial values that undermined African culture by implanting the culture of the coloniser.

It becomes apparent, therefore, that community development was initially carried out to maintain the status of exploitative and oppressive practices which enslaved people in deprived and disadvantaged circumstances. For example, during the apartheid era in South Africa, community development was a tool of exploitation used by the whites on black communities (De Beer and Swanepoel 1998). The local groups did not have any say in setting projects' goals and as such were bound to fail because they were not based on the needs of the people. The apparent failure of community development models is attributed to the centralised, top-down approach that over-emphasise the capacity for self-help in impoverished communities and fails to establish a suitable institutional framework for participation (Asian Development Bank 1996). As this approach is adopted, active community participation in development suffers and development goals not realised as a result.

Community participation in development is far more than community contribution, of either labour or supplies, which is, however, still important as it ensures that community members feel

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that they own the project, hence helping them to become more responsible for the development activity in which they invest their own resources. Shepherd (1998) argues that although the governments and non-governmental organisations have since been making noise about the need to involve people in development activities, participation is usually not demonstrated, but only asserted. This calls for the need to develop clearly defined indicators of how participation happens and how it affects the participants as well as the wider society. It has always been emphasised that true participation should be tightly knit with empowerment so that at the end the communities would be in the position to plan as well as implement their own development.

The history of community development in Lesotho can be traced back to so many decades and one of the villages where this is very prominent and well documented is Malealea. The history of Malealea dates back to 1905 when the present Malealea lodge was established as a trading post by Mervin Bosworth Smith. James (1991) indicates that Smith fell in love with Malealea during one of his visits in Lesotho and, as a result, decided to open a trading store. The small Malealea village developed around this trading store and since Smith's death, the latter changed hands several times, until it was transformed into a fully operational and increasingly popular lodge. James (1991) posits that, as one development activity, pony (horse) trekking was officially established in 1991, as a request by the visitors and since then, community development activities have intensified in the village. In 2002, the owners of Malealea Lodge initiated the establishment of the Malealea Development Trust (MDT) with the aim of financing different development activities in the village. According to Attwood (2003), initiatives that have since been financed through this fund are infrastructure building, education, health and HIV and AIDS, environmental as well as income generating projects which among others focus on production of handicrafts.

Attwood (2003) indicates that Malealea is one of the villages in which several community development projects are taking place with the aim of alleviating poverty. Nevertheless, De Beer and Swanepoel (1998) have indicated that for a long time, many community development projects in the poor communities have failed to meet the expectation of alleviating poverty and raising

people's standards of living. This, according to them, has resulted from lack of active participation of the people in making their own projects decisions and plans. Despite the many projects and the relatively long history of Malealea in community development, poverty still prevails. In Lesotho poverty threshold is put at M148 per adult per month. Therefore, the important question is whether projects in this village are actually taking into consideration the multi-faceted approach required for successful and active participation of the concerned people and their felt needs. The main objective of the study was to find out the extent to which the members of Malealea community participate in the handicraft projects. More specifically, to determine the level of participation in community projections, assess the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants and to establish whether these projects are meeting the poverty alleviation goal of the participants.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

According to Fung (2002), participation is the active involvement of the community, particularly the disadvantaged groups such as women, children, elderly, disabled and the poorest of the poor, in the decision making, planning, implementation, and evaluation of their own development activities. Meanwhile, the Asian Development Bank (1996) maintains that participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect them. White et al. (1994) states that the word participation changes according to the meaning attached to it by those involved. It can also be very fragile and elusive, and thereby changing from time to time. White et al. (1994) further argue that participation is contextual, such that local participation can differ from non-local participation. Generally speaking, however, participation can be defined as a "process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect their lives" (Cooke and Kothari 2001:5).

Nelson and Wrights (1995) posit that participation can be used to mean empowerment of the weakest and the poorest so that they can objectively make decisions that affect their lives. Arrossi (1994) also maintains that while the term participation can be used in different ways, such

as a means to reduce cost of the project, provision of cheap labour and a means of mobilising support, a very different understanding of participation is the one that encourages the community to become involved in the project's decision making process and to influence the manner in which resources are used, as well as make choices about what should be done. Warburton (2000) maintains that with the failure of the top-down approaches to development to solve the problems of poverty, environmental degradation and urban decline, the emphasis shifted from imported technical professional solutions to community development based on valuing the skills of the people living in poverty, and making efforts to engage them in new and more participatory programmes. Cooke and Kothari (2001) hold that participatory development is viewed as emerging out of the realisation of the shortcomings of the top-down development approaches which became increasingly evident in the 1980s. During this period, the major donors and development organisations began to adopt participatory research and planning methods, with the recognition that the externally imposed and expert-oriented forms of research and planning were ineffective. This, therefore, marked the birth of the bottom-up approaches to development as opposed to top-down blue print.

Community empowerment is about increasing capacity of a community, hence increasing its ability to do things for itself. Empowerment cannot come about by charity or donation of resources from outside. The principle of empowerment suggests that people participate because it is their right to do so. The principle also stipulates that participation is the natural result of empowerment (De Beer and Swanepoel 1998). Empowerment does not simply mean giving people facilities that were previously not available to them, or giving them the skills they lacked. It is on the contrary the acquisition of power and ability to give it effect. Nelson and Wrights (1995) argue that in 1991, the World Bank Learning Group developed a schema which was used to determine the intensity at which people participate in their own development. The World Bank uses four levels of intensity of participation which relate to information sharing, consultation, decision making and initiating action. According to the World Bank, information sharing occurs when the information about the aims of the project and the way it will affect them is shared with the

beneficiaries. This puts people in the picture and can help facilitate individual and collective action. Participation is an important tool in community development because it calls for active involvement of all stakeholders in the planning, implementation and evaluation of new development projects. Community participation brings stakeholders together to share and discuss project goals and objectives so that they eventually make combined project or policy decisions, depending on the interests and needs of each.

Despite an important role played by community participation, it is on the other hand associated with some problems. Connor (1997) maintains that one of the problems relates to coordination and integration of diverse interests into the project plan and implementation. When community participation involves many diverse groups, bringing together their different needs in the design and implementation of the project can prove to be very challenging. Diverse interests may give rise to collective action problems as well as conflict among participants as others may feel that they are not well integrated when the final outcomes seem to be significantly different from what they perceived in the outset of planning process. Connor (1997) further shows that lack of stakeholder involvement can also be problematic in the planning and implementation of the project. Lack of stakeholder involvement, particularly in the early stages of the project development, may lead to the decision making that does not benefit other groups, hence problems may arise in accepting and complying with the outcomes.

Literature shows that active participation of the people in activities that affect them is crucial because their involvement in the appraisal, decision-making, planning, implementation and evaluation of their own development projects gives them the sense of ownership and control. The literature reveals a paucity of research in community participation development projects in Lesotho. Hence, this study attempts an assessment of community participation in income generating projects in Lesotho as a means of alleviating poverty which is endemic.

The study is informed by Golden Munyaka's (2003) Grassroots Community Development Theory (GCD). This theory evolved in reaction to community development models which are predominantly top-down in nature and character. According to Munyaka (2003), the GCD theory was built around the history of rural and urban

communities in Zimbabwe in particular and Southern Africa in general. It is an idea grounded in the real life experiences of disadvantaged and marginalised communities. It assumes that there is no theory at present (at least in the context of rural communities in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa) that leads to the genuine involvement of all community members in issues of development. It goes on to assume that popular participation approach to development is only a political model used by elites to mobilise resources for purposes of achieving their own hidden and political agendas. The fundamental principle of GCD theory is that all community members are responsible for shaping their own destiny. According to the GCD, rural community members know what is good for them more than anyone else. Likewise, the so-called poor are seen as having the ability to improve their own conditions given the necessary opportunities and resources. They have their own norms to define acceptable levels of poverty and the indigenous communities have the capacity to define and effect development from their own perspectives.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the rural village of Malealea, which is situated in the eastern part of the district of Mafeteng, about 83 km from Maseru, the capital of the Kingdom of Lesotho. The history of Malealea dates back to 1905 when the now Malealea Lodge was established as a trading post by an English man called Mervin Bosworth Smith. Presently, Malealea is divided into 13 sub-villages. The local people are largely dependent on agriculture and livestock rearing as a means of earning a living. This village was selected purposefully because of its long history in community development projects in Lesotho.

The handicraft project has 40 members from whom a sample of 20 interviewees was selected; and six key informants giving a total of 26 interviewees. The six key informants constituted of two committee members, one member of Malealea Development Trust (MDT) committee; one community councilor; the area chief and a school principal. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of key informants while participants in the handicraft project were selected using stratified sampling procedure. This was done in order to include the different strata of the project management structure.

In-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with individual members of the community who participated in the project as well as with the key informants. An in-depth interview guide and an informant interview schedule were used to gather information from project participants and key informants respectively. The interviews involved asking the subjects of study orally and recording the answers as they provided them. Interviews lasted for 45 minutes on average per session. Questions asked to project participants included among others their role in decision making, implementation and control of resources, and whether their involvement was active or not. They were also asked whether they were satisfied with the manner in which they took part in the project. Regarding the key informants, they were asked among others as to who initiated the project and how the idea was communicated to community members. Apart from the demographics that are presented quantitatively, all other data are analysed qualitatively according to the themes that emerged. Informed consent was sought and ethical issues taken into consideration in dealing with the interviewees.

RESULTS

The study was interested in only four demographic characteristics of interviewees and includes their gender, marital status, age, and educational level. Of the total interviewees of 20, 19 (97.5%) were female and only 1 (2.5%) was male. The rest of the demographics are presented in Table 1. The Table indicates that 16 (80%) interviewees who took part in handicraft project were married, 2 (10%) were separated and another 2 (10%) widowed. Table 1 also indicates that for the handicraft project, there were only 10% of interviewees who were aged 30 – 35, 4 (20%) aged 36 – 41 and another 4 (20%) aged 42 – 47. The highest frequency of 10 (50%) was of the interviewees aged 48 and above.

Finally, Table 1 reveals that of the 20 interviewees in the handicraft project, 2 (10%) never attended school at all; 16 (80%) had primary education and 2 (10%) secondary or high school education. None of the interviewees had tertiary education.

Project Initiation

In addressing the issue of who initiated the project, the area chief indicated that Malealea

Table: 1 Demographics of project's participants

Variable	Participants	
	Frequency	Percent
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Married	16	80
Never Married	0	0
Separated	2	10
Divorced	2	10
Widowed	0	0
Total	20	100
<i>Age</i>		
30 – 35	2	10
36 – 41	4	20
42 – 47	4	20
48 & above	10	50
Total	20	100
<i>Education</i>		
None	2	10
Primary	16	80
Secondary/high	2	10
Tertiary	0	0
Total	20	100

handicraft project was initiated in 1998 by an American Peace Corps volunteer who came to do field work in Malealea. A male key informant stated that the volunteer started this project because she had become aware of poverty that prevailed in this village and as such the project was aimed at motivating the members of the community to work together so that they could share and solve problems brought by poverty. In further explaining the purpose of the project, a male member of Malealea Development Trust committee maintained that “the project was meant to help community members create jobs that could generate income which they would use to meet their needs such as food and paying for their children’s school fees.” The school principal also mentioned that the project was aimed at helping community members to do things for themselves, hence be able to improve their lives. All the key informants confirmed that the main goal of the handicraft project was for the community members to engage in the production of crafts which would be sold in order to raise income which they could use to attend to their needs.

Meanwhile, some interviewees stated that the handicraft project was the initiative by the American volunteer who arrived in Malealea in 1998. Others maintained that it was the volunteer’s desire to motivate them to do things for themselves. This initiative was communicated to them in a public gathering, locally referred to as “pitso” and they were asked to give their opinions about it. A female interviewee revealed that “it was

after lengthy discussions that we agreed to it as we were convinced that it would be of great help to us.” Furthermore, almost all the interviewees explained that they were involved in setting the goals of the project and that these goals were to make craft work from stone, wire, wood, metal, wool, mohair, grass and beads. Another interviewee maintained that “we decided to make brooms, Basotho hats, wall and floor mats, ornaments, dolls, necklaces and earrings which we would sell mainly to the tourists in order to raise money.” Other interviewees also posited that they made a decision to share the money generated from the sales and each of them was to be allowed to use it depending on his or her needs. Another portion of the money received from the sales would be used to buy more craft material to ensure continuity and sustainability of the project.

Level of Participation in Decision Making, Implementation and Control of Resources

In responding to the issue of decision making, all the key informants were of the view that since community members were informed about the desire to start a handicraft project and that since the project took-off because they agreed to it, then, community members indeed participated in decision making about that project. According to the chief of Malealea,

After the decision to go on with the project was reached, the volunteer asked all the people who were interested in getting involved in the project to come together so that they could plan how they would carry out the project as well as set the goals.

A project committee member added by explaining that in order to enable project participants to decide on the path to take to achieve project’s goals, the volunteer organized a two weeks training workshop for them where they were provided with planning skills. One of the committee members further said, “as committee members, we are a product of members’ decision because we were elected into the committee by project’s participants themselves not by anyone else who did not take part.” The councilors and the MDT committee members held the same view when they indicated that getting involved in decision making by the participants did not end at the start of the project. However, they continued to hold regular meetings where they shared views about what should be done as the project went on.

In explaining their role in decision making, majority of interviewees who are members of the handicraft project argued that although the project was not their idea, they were the ones who made a decision to go on with it as they had realised that it would help them improve their lives. Others stated that after they had agreed to take part in the project, they sat down to decide on what it was that they would produce and how they would produce it as well as what it was that they were aiming to achieve through the project. One of the interviewees said, "we decided that each and everyone should produce depending on the skills s/he had. If one had skills to make brooms or Basotho hats with the use of grass, then s/he would focus on that." All the crafts produced would be sold and the money used to buy more craft material while the rest would be shared.

All interviewees went further to explain that they elected their own committee which is responsible for running the project. It was also decided that the committee should do financial reporting on a monthly basis. The committee would also be responsible for taking disciplinary action against the people who misbehaved in the project. They chose Mondays for their regular meetings in order to review progress in the project.

In the case of implementation of the handicraft project, people who already had craft skills were asked by the Peace Corps volunteer to come at the forefront so that they could start working. An interviewee revealed that "participants were also allowed to come up with ideas and suggestions on what it was that they could possibly produce and be able to sell." The MDT committee member stated that at the start of the project, individual participants first contributed a certain amount of money and then applied for funding from the donor. Other key informants indicated that after participants had received donations, they began to work and produced crafts which were sold mainly to tourists. On the same issue, majority of interviewees stated that they began by each contributing M25 as an annual subscription. One interviewee explained that:

Our initial membership of the project was 40 and as such, we collected M1000 and thereafter made donation proposals to American Peace Corps with the intent to show that we were not expecting to be provided with everything toward the start of their project.

They, as a result, received donations in the form of wool and fabrics, as well as machinery and equipment which they needed to start their work. Most of them said they already had craft skills and as such, they contributed their ideas and suggestions on how the work could be done. Some of them said they assisted in training one another in the area of craft specialization that each possessed. Once everything was in place, they begun working on a daily basis to produce brooms, mats, Basotho hats and dolls, which were sold mainly to the tourists, who visited Malealea. With the money they received, they were able to buy more work material.

On the control of resources, one of the key informants stated that the project had committees elected by participants and that these committees were charged with the responsibility of running the day-to-day activities in the project as well as managing finances. The school principal was of the view that:

There is, however, a problem when it comes to taking care of people's money. Committee members, more especially treasurers, do not work well as they misuse project's fund. This is one of the reasons why the project struggle to reach their goals.

A few key informants pinpointed that MDT committee was not working satisfactorily on the issue of finances as the community did not have a say in the management of such finances as well as in deciding on who should be in the committee. They were of the view that MDT committee had a hidden agenda with regards to the use of financial recourses.

Still on financial management, it was explained by the majority of interviewees that it was not a problem for them to manage material resources such as tools, craft material as well as already produced craft work. Some of them stated that although they experienced housebreaking in the previous years, where some craft work was stolen, they had now managed to find a secure place for their equipment to be kept. The majority of the interviewees were mostly worried about management of finances. Some interviewees stated that they initially had a treasurer who was responsible for looking after their money. The treasurer did not work well because he could not account for the money used. With the realisation that keeping their money with an individual was not working for them, they opened a bank account hoping that the money would yield inter-

est in the saving account. However, keeping money in the bank became expensive for them as they had to cater for traveling costs of two or three people whenever they wanted to access the money. A few interviewees mentioned that bank charges were also heavy on them as they were not making large sums of money. As a result, they had to go back to keeping money with individuals but this time, they had to be very careful. One of the interviewees stated that *we are now taking weekly turns to sell and keep the money from the sales. Financial reporting is also done on weekly basis which has made financial reporting to be better than before.*

The Role of Women, the Elderly, the Disabled and the Poor in the Project

All key informants explained that almost all participants in the project were poor women who were working hard to earn a means of living for their families. The chief explained that:

It is only women who take part in the project and they are the ones who work hard to ensure that the project succeeds for the sake of their families. They are more hard working than men who say handicraft is women's work.

Other key informants held the same view as the chief with regards to important role played by women. They indicated that since women were the ones who ran the project, they were responsible for all activities that took place in the project. They made decisions, plan and implement the project, manage project's resources as well as ensure continuity of their project. Meanwhile, all interviewees stated that all members in the project, except one, were women, many of who were sole breadwinners in their families. All of them revealed that there were six elderly women and only one physically disabled woman in the project. One interviewee said that 'the disabled participant seem to be more dedicated and hard working than most able-bodied participants because she wanted to prove that she is capable of working like any other ordinary person.' They, therefore, take major decisions and plans regarding the project as well as manage financial, human and material resources. They further took necessary disciplinary measures against those who misbehaved as such undertook conflict resolution where there were conflicts in the project.

Achievement of Project's Goal

The ultimate goal of the project was to alleviate poverty and make the community self-sufficient and self-reliant, with improved standard of living. It was indicated by some key informants that although it was the aim of the handicraft project to enable its members to raise income that would help them earn a decent living, it has proved not to be easy to achieve. Nevertheless, the amount of money that was raised through the sales was not enough to help improve standard of living of the people. One interviewee maintained that "the project has managed to sustain itself since its inception in 1998, but one could not easily differentiate between project participants and non-participants." Most of them stated that in the early 2000s, each member still managed to earn M200 on a monthly basis from the sales which was now no longer the case. Some showed that their sales had dropped such that each received at least M50 on a monthly basis. One of the interviewees lamented that "my children are now out of school because I cannot afford to pay their high school fees." Nonetheless, the majority of the interviewees maintained that they were poor and unemployed and as such making ends meet out of the project.

DISCUSSION

Overwhelming majority of the women in the project is testimony of the fact that in Malealea, they are the caretakers of families and always the ones who bother to care about the wellbeing of their families. More-so handicrafts have always been considered by local community as women's work. Men would rather participate in activities such as dams building and roads construction as those are considered more masculine in nature. The participation of mostly adults in the project shows that the youth still have the nonchalant attitude of not actively participating in community projects, especially as most of them do not have any dependents to care for. However, in Lesotho, most youths move to the South African mines though the situation is not attractive given the recent wave of retrenchment.

It was quite a brave move by an American Peace Corps volunteer to come up with the idea of a handicraft project aimed at assisting the community members to solve the problem of poverty. Nevertheless, while that was a brave initia-

tive, one could argue that the project was not the choice made by the community itself. The project was the choice of an outsider who did not necessarily know exactly the community felt need. While it has been argued that community participation means involvement of the community in choosing a development project that it needs and that, most importantly, community participation aims at ensuring that decisions affecting the community are taken by all, not only a few and not by an outside agency, this study has revealed that handicrafts project was not initiated by the Malealea community. On the other hand, although the project was not the initiative of Malealea community, it was evident that this idea was communicated to them and they were asked to voice their views about it. Thus, the project took off because the community agreed to its intended goals of poverty alleviation and improved standard of living. This view is supported by Vasoo (1997) who strongly argues that citizen participation in development projects should among other things be aimed at helping community members to improve their standard of living, be self-reliant, self-sufficient as well as be independent of charity.

The fact that people who took part in the project were the ones who actually made choices and decisions about what they wanted is in line with Nelson and Wright's (1995) argument that decision making in the project occurs when people are involved in making decisions about all aspects of the project including project design and implementation from the beginning and that in this manner, they influence the present not just the future. It can, therefore, be argued that the level of community participation in decision making was high in the project.

Participants in the project did not wait to be provided with everything that they needed for actual project execution but they took initiative to use whatever resources that were in their possession to ensure that their project could take-off. Contributions made by project's participants in the implementation stage signaled their commitment and dedication towards their project. Moreover, it was apparent that their active involvement in decision making boosted their morale such that they felt they owned the project and were willing to take responsibility towards ensuring their successful implementation. Implementation stage in projects was, therefore, marked by the situation where project's partici-

pants took initiative to contribute something towards the start of their project. The project's participants did not wait to be 'spoon-fed' by being assisted with all that was needed to start the project. On the contrary, they showed some dedication in working towards achievement of their goals.

It was quiet interesting to learn that members of the project were satisfied with the manner in which material and human resources were managed. Participants in the handicraft project were able to overcome the problems associated with burglary of their homes in relation to the crafts which occurred in the previous years. This was an indication that they had learnt from their mistakes and were able to resolve this problem without assistance from anyone. Moreover, making rules that governed participants and taking disciplinary measures against participants in the case of misconduct was also a clear indication that members were dedicated and wanted to ensure that everything was going according to plan. Meanwhile, the ability of participants in the handicraft project to resolve the initial problem of mismanagement of financial resources within the project signaled their maturity and faithfulness to their initial commitment to the project. Their present arrangement of taking weekly turns to sell and keep money as well as make financial reports seemed to be the best option as it was working for them.

The role played by women, the elderly, the disabled and the poor in the project generally indicates that the disadvantaged groups received the same treatment like other members of the projects. This implies that there was no discrimination against these disadvantaged groups. The goal of poverty alleviation was not achieved by the project as the participants could not boost of increased standard of living.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the project was producing the intended results of generating income for members on a very small scale such that they still struggled to earn a decent living. As a result, improving their standard of living was still a problem and poverty alleviation was not yet realised. This situation does not come as a surprise as Swanepoel (1997) indicated that many community development projects have rarely met the expectation of alleviating poverty and

improving peoples' standards of living. They attributed this non-achievement of projects' goals to lack of community participation in the projects that affect their lives. However, the Malealea project had a total of 40 participants with most of them being women. Perhaps, the participation of more men with experience in managing projects could have made a difference.

The fact that the handicraft project was not initiated by Malealea community but by an outsider revealed the situation where top-down approach to development was used. Nevertheless, involvement of the community in deciding whether to proceed with the project or not, gives one the hope that things would eventually be done in a proper way. Furthermore, participants in the project actively took part in decision making and implementation of the project. Nevertheless, while they took total control of resources within the project, they did not have any control of resources in the hands of MDT committee. This was a sign of lack of transparency on how MDT committee conducted its business and this could possibly impact adversely on development goals in the long run. It can, therefore, be concluded that since community members participated in all activities except for the control of resources handled by MDT committee, their level of participation was average in that regard. As such, an overall level of community participation in the project was average because a high level of participation was only achieved in two activities which were decision making and implementation.

This level of community participation is quite satisfactory when one considers the fact that in the past, many community development efforts failed to meet the expectation of alleviating poverty and improving standard of living in poor communities due to total lack of community participation. With this level of community participation, therefore, one could expect that by now, Malealea community would be close to achieving the project's goal. However, the opposite was the case. That is, the project was hardly achieving the goal for which it was intended although community participation seemed to be satisfactory. This was manifested in the situation where project's participants were still struggling to make ends meet and earn a decent living. This, therefore, leaves a room for other possible reasons behind the failure of the project to realise its development goal. Again, active in-

volvement of disadvantaged groups of women, the elderly, the disabled and the poor in the handicraft project signaled improvement in that regard because in the previous years, these groups were not afforded such opportunity. Generally, these groups did not suffer discrimination but had the opportunity to actively participate in the project like all other members. However, a lot still needs to be done in order to ensure that the number of disabled members increase in the project.

In addressing the theory (GCD) that informed this study, the findings are to a large extent consistent with its assumptions. The theory argues that people at the grassroots level should be given the opportunity to take control of their development and that community elite should not take part in projects for their own agenda only. It further indicates that women should be in the forefront of development projects as they had always been effective leaders. Again, the GCD theory supports the idea that local people should use their own indigenous knowledge in making decisions about their projects rather than relying on people from outside. In this study, therefore, people at the grassroots level were indeed the ones who took control of their project. The community elite such as the chief and councilors did not make decisions for the people. Nevertheless, the assumption of the theory was inconsistent with the findings of this research when it came to the control of human and financial resources in the hands of MDT committee because the participants or members of the project did not have considerable control in that area. Moreover, the findings of the study are in support of the theory in that women were in the forefront and took control of the project. Again, the findings are consistent with the theory for the fact that people at the grassroots level used their own indigenous knowledge in making decisions and implementing the project. It was found out that although the handicraft project was proposed by an outsider, members who already had crafts skills at the start of the project were allowed to use them as well as train those who did not.

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