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An Investigation of Community Participation in the Development of Schools and Income Generating Projects in Rural Areas in Kenya

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Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Background: There is a worldwide realization that development beneficiaries are important resources in the rural development process. Many countries in their development policies have stressed the need to encourage communities to participate in their development agenda. The rationale for this is that communities, especially those in rural setting cannot prosper fully without full engagement of its members. To achieve this, community members must be allowed to take initiative and action that is stimulated by their own thinking and deliberations so that they are able to exert effective control of their development. Enhancing community participation in development projects involves effective co-ordination of local activities to enable people come together to achieve common development goals.

Aim: The major task of this study was to investigate factors, which may enhance community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in Kiambu District, Central Province of Kenya.

Methodology: Kiambu District, which is in Central Kenya was purposively selected to represent rural areas in Kenya. The study was both a case study and exploratory. The study sample comprised of schools and income-generating projects, selected in each of the seven divisions in the district. The projects selected were in four categories, primary schools, secondary schools, youth polytechnics and income generating projects. From each of the selected projects, ten ordinary members were selected as respondents, to a total of 280 members, although only 275 were successfully interviewed. Three project officials from each project were also interviewed, giving a total 84. Also interviewed were 59 divisional local

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leaders/administrators. The instruments used to collect data were interview schedules for project members, officials and local leaders/administrators. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with some selected project members. There were also checklists for project observation and focus group discussions.

Results: Study findings indicated that some socio-economic factors such as marital status, level and source of income impacted upon the community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in the district. Other factors also found to affect participation were safety and accountability of project funds, project-related skills, quality of leadership, and gender dynamics. The existing government policies and guidelines were also found to be critical in this process. The study highlighted some strategies for enhancing community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects.

Conclusion: It was concluded that there is a need to enhance community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in rural areas. Most important of these strategies were transparency and accountability of project officials, effective communication with project members, eradication of corruption and ensuring the realization of the expected projects' benefits.

Keywords: Community; participation; development; schools; income-generating projects; rural; Kenya;

1. INTRODUCTION

Development policies world over seek to improve the living standards of the rural communities. This has been perceived to be a positive move particularly in the developing countries where majority of the population live in rural areas, (Kimani and Muia , 2004). It is in rural areas where the bulk of the foreign exchange and investment surplus are produced (UNDP, 2004).

During the 1980s, worldwide economic recession and external debt forced many countries to cut back development programmes and instead give priority to structural adjustment. In the process, the number of rural poor has risen (World Bank, 2003). The result has been an increase in unemployment and poverty in countryside, causing mass exodus of rural people to the already over-crowded cities, with potentially explosive consequences.

International community has been seeking new strategies to revitalize rural development. One such a strategy is people's participation in the development process (UNDP, 2000). This means that development efforts must aim at releasing the energies of rural people and fully guarantee their share in the fruits of their efforts. This can only be achieved by enabling the poor to take charge of their lives, make full use of resources and manage their own development activities. However, for proper development to occur, motivation, knowledge, skills, organization and willingness of the people have to be tapped. In this respect, people's will in their development process is paramount. It is, however recognized that the mobilization of the people has been the most obvious problem facing development process in many countries (UNDP, 2000).

Community participation in rural development involves an act of sharing common to all participants as stakeholders of the development process. In this case, each participant is directed towards a specific goal, which is shared by others within the development process.

This is what is defined as popular participation in the development process, and which has been thought to be a positive move in the running of affairs that directly concern and affect people (Tandon, 1991). Internationally, there have been some attempts to operationalize and extend the participation of people in rural areas' development process. Over the years, participatory development approach has been a major concern for United Nations Agencies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agriculture and Development (IFAO) and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Since 1970s, for instance, the ILO assistance to rural workers organizations and support for their educational activities to bring about effective participation has been important programmes. As early as 1976, World Employment Conference (WEC) identified issues of basic needs and the crucial role of participation programmes in the improvement of rural life. Similarly in a conference held in Alma-Ata, USSR, in 1978, WHO stressed the importance of community participation in extending primary health care. In their programmes UNESCO is known to involve the beneficiaries and other stakeholders in their development programmes, since 1970s.

Outside the United Nation's systems, promotion of people's development process has become a major plank of activities of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community and Faith Based Organizations. In Africa, the participatory theme in the development process has become very prominent, such that development is virtually defined in terms of people's participation. As early as 1978, in a conference organized by UNESCO in Lima, Peru, African governments were encouraged to allow small-scale farmers to participate in rural development policies, and decision-making through organizations such as co-operatives. The reality therefore has been that Africa has not only increased development activities in rural areas but has also had an increase in people's participation in development projects. This explains why much of African countries' foreign aids have been directed to rural development (World Bank 2002).

In Kenya, as in most other African countries, development policies seek to improve the conditions of the majority of rural communities. Soon after independence, the Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1965 on African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya, under scored the importance of participation by all Kenyans in the development process. The paper defines community participation in terms of social responsibility by society and its members in the struggle for prosperity. This is an appreciated effort as majority of the Kenyans live in rural areas where their livelihood is mainly from agriculture, the main stay of the country's economy. Additionally, the Kenya Development Plan of 1989-1993 carried the theme, "*Participation for Progress*" and emphasized on the importance of tapping the energies of individuals and various socio-economic entities and institutions in the economy.

This study was however initiated because despite the emphasis and the good intention of participatory development approach, Kenya has experienced some participatory problems, especially in rural areas, where massive development projects are proposed and introduced in communities with little or no consultation with the people. At times individuals, especially politicians propose massive development projects, which obviously display inadequate needs assessment and planning at completion. At other times, huge national and regional projects are initiated and a lot of emphasis placed on the material aspects of development especially visible and fiscal, without considering the central place of the people as a key resources, which needs to be nurtured and actively involved in shaping their own destiny.

A general survey of Kiambu District, Kenya, the focus of this study, reveals an existence of many development projects involved in social welfare and income generating activities. As in many other parts of the country, some of the projects have been initiated by the local communities on self-help basis or by individuals or either partly or wholly by the government and/or NGOs, Community or Faith Based Organizations. The concern for this was that there are disparities in the successes of these projects from one area to the other within the district. At the same time, some projects seem to attract more participation than others; hence a need to investigate and establish what can enhance participatory development in all the existing development projects in Kiambu District.

2. THE STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The factors and problems related to community participation in development projects formed the problem of this study. The major task of the study was therefore to investigate the factors, which may enhance or inhibit community participation in development projects in Kiambu District, Kenya. The study focused specifically on the development of schools and income –generating projects in the district.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- Determine the socio-economic background of the community, which participates in the development of schools and income –generating projects in Kiambu District.
- Investigate factors, which determined community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects among the people of Kiambu District.
- Establish the gender dynamics in the community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects.
- Identify the existing Kiambu District policies in enhancing people’s participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects.
- Determine strategies for enhancing rural people’s participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects among the people of Kiambu District.

4. STUDY METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study design of one district, which gave deep insight into existing facts about grassroots’ community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects. It was also an exploratory study in that the findings brought out issues, which can be vigorously tested with a larger sample. The study sample comprised of local community members of schools and income generating projects in Kiambu District.

The school projects studied were categorized into primary schools, Provincial secondary schools and youth polytechnics. One project in each of the four categories was randomly selected in each of the seven divisions in the district, to a total of 28 projects. From each project, ten ordinary members were selected as study respondents, to a total of 280 members, although only 275 members were successfully interviewed. Three project officials from each project were also interviewed, giving a total of 84. Also interviewed were 59 local leaders/administrators.

Instruments used to collect the data were interview schedules for project members, officials and local leader/administrators. There were also checklists for project observation and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Secondary data was generated from project records, especially the minutes of meetings and account records.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study are presented in terms of:

- Socio-economic background of the community participants in schools and income-generating projects, as reflected by the study respondents.
- Factors which determined community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects among the people of Kiambu District:
- Gender dynamics in the community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects:
- Existing policies in incorporating rural communities in the development projects:
- Strategies for enhancing rural people's participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in Kiambu District:

5.1 Socio-Economic Background of the Community Participants in Schools and Income-Generating Projects, as Reflected by the Study Respondents

Majority of the project members interviewed were females 168 (61.1%) as compared to 107 (38.9%) males. Majority of these were in the age cohort of 31-40, 121 members (44%) and married, 257 (93.5 %). However the members were fairly distributed in all projects although the widowed and the divorced were mainly found in income-generating projects and village polytechnics, respectively.

In most cases participants with post secondary education were few, only 27 (9.8%) and 31 members (11.3%) who had no formal education. Participants with post secondary education were few in schools and income generating projects because they worked in urban areas, while the study focused on rural communities. It was also observed that they were too busy to be active participants in local projects. Majority of project participants were of primary and secondary school level that comprised of 188 members (68.4%). The study findings indicated that the level of education was a factor in the community participation in rural areas. Specifically the number of projects' participants reduced with the level of income as demonstrated in the table 1.

Table 1. Project member respondents by level of income

Income	Less Ksh,1000	Ksh.1000- 2000	Ksh.2000- 3000	Ksh.3000- 4000	Over Ksh. 4000
Respondents	33	42	26	60	114
N=275					

As indicated in the table, level of income seemed to be positively related to participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in rural areas.

5.2 Factors Which Determined Community Participation in the Development of Schools and Income-Generating Projects among the People of Kiambu District

The following factors were found to determine community participation in the development of schools and income development projects:

5.2.1 Safety and accountability of the project funds and other resources

Misappropriation of project funds and other resources by officials was identified as a factor that inhibited effective participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects. Members' participation thrived in projects in which there was guaranteed safety and accountability of resources and funds.

5.2.2 Project related skills and training needs

Lack of useful skills for effective participation in the schools and income-generating projects hindered the members from effective participation. The much-needed skills were different but specific to the projects, for example the need for skills in poultry, horticulture and mixed farming. On the other hand, simple accounts and record keeping were identified as important skills in enhancing participation within income generating projects, while reading, writing, leadership, management skills were identified as key in enhancing participation in all development projects.

5.2.3 Quality of leadership

Quality of leadership was found to impact on the community participation in the development of schools and income generating projects. Project members felt that to enable effective participation, project planners and especially officials should be equipped with adequate participatory knowledge and skills. It was also observed that ability of a leader to influence group action depended largely on the leadership skills. On the other hand, lack of leadership skills was found to result in:

- Conflicts among members and officials.
- Procedures, which were not accepted by majority members.
- Hasty decisions making before thorough analysis was made.
- Lack of proper co-ordination of project activities.
- Lack of control over events and resources.

5.2.4 Lack of involvement at the start of projects

The ideal way to start the project, as expressed by members is to involve the would-be beneficiaries and stakeholders at the initial stage and throughout the project cycle. The involvement was seen as crucial for all development projects as it facilitates collective ownership and sustainability. Besides, the success of any development projects depends on its beneficiaries. Unfortunately it was established that politicians, local leaders or a few opinion leaders in the community imposed many projects in rural areas without consulting the beneficiaries. Women in particular were least involved unless the project was meant for women only. The reason for this was that issues of development in rural Kenya tend to be discussed in public and political meetings, "*rallies or chiefs barazas*", usually thought to be a

male reserve. The study thus established that there were specific ways in which projects officials involved beneficiaries as shown in table 2.

Table 2. Ways in which project officials involved beneficiaries at the start of the project

Ways of involvement	Responses (Officials)	Response In %
Only asked for membership enrolment fee	9	10.7
Local leaders called a meeting	20	23.8
Asked for financial contribution	30	35.7
Requested for moral support or materials/space	6	7.1
Only asked for labour contribution	1	1.2
Asked to elect officials	9	10.7
Asked to buy shares	9	10.7
Total	84	100s
N=84		

5.2.5 Lack of motivation to participate in the project activities

Failure by officials to motivate the project members to participate featured as a factor that inhibited participation. The indices that measured motivation as perceived by the members were mainly the activities of officials and project outcomes. Although forms of motivation varied from project to project, beneficiaries felt that they needed to be informed of project undertakings and accounts. They also expected the officials to be efficient, accountable and active. The project officials interviewed concurred with the members that motivation was critical in enhancing participation in the development projects. However, asked whether they would say that their members were motivated to participate in their respective projects, 69 out of 75 officials (92%) said that they were not sure while only 6 members (8%) said that their members were sufficiently motivated.

Local leaders confirmed that there was a problem of motivation but observed that different projects would need different methods of motivation although some methods like keeping the members informed, officials' involvement in the projects' activities and keeping proper accounts were common to all. For schools, however community project members felt that it is important to maintain discipline and aspire to perform well in national examinations for parents to participate effectively in programmes and activities.

5.2.6 Corruption of project officials

The issue of corruption among the project officials was identified as causing laxity in members' participation. Although the problem was found to exist in all the categories of the projects studied, it was most pronounced among income-generating projects. While all the local leaders interviewed accepted that corrupt officials existed and discouraged members' participation, only 22 out of 84 officials interviewed saw this as a problem. Other officials held the view that the issue was exaggerated as any misunderstanding between officials was often interpreted to mean a misappropriation of funds since money remained a sensitive issue in any development project.

5.2.7 Lack of money

Lack of funds was seen to affect participation of project members as well as officials. The observation made was that there were some projects, which were started with a hope that funds would be solicited from the government, NGOs or individuals. With such hopes, the projects' objectives were made very broad and ambitious in terms of activities and financial needs. On the same note, members' expectations were very high. But when the funds were eventually not forthcoming, the morale of the members and officials went down. Eventually the projects were abandoned and members described the initial funds used to start them as "misdirected".

5.2.8 Political interference

Political interference had caused some problems to the officials and local leaders as they attempted to enhance members' participation in development projects. Generally the problem of political interference was found to be widespread in all the divisions. The general observation was that while all the divisions in Kiambu District experienced the political interference in participatory development, it was felt most in some specific areas than others, namely Kikuyu, Limuru and Thika, which were evidently near Nairobi City.

5.3 Gender Dynamics in the Community Participation in the Development of Schools and Income-Generating Projects

The study established a gender disparity in terms of community participation in the development projects. Women were found to be less involved at the start of those projects meant for both women and men. While consultation for planning and implementation of development projects was done in public rallies, which many women hardly attend. Female project members interviewed also felt that marital problems affect their participation within the following reasons:

- Lack of time to participate in projects due to over-burdened gender roles.
- Restrictions from husbands to attend project meetings.
- Lack of economic empowerment coupled with strict financial control by male partners, made it difficult for women to contribute financially.

Gender dynamics in the participation was more felt in income-generating projects than in schools. The reason given for this was that participation of schools was taken as responsibility for both women and men while income generating activities were taken as men's domain and responsibility. It was also felt that men resented women's participation in income generating projects as this would empower them economically with the result that men would not only feel threatened but also unable to "control" women.

5.4 Existing Policies in Incorporating Rural Communities in the Development Projects

It was found that there existed clear policies and guidelines on rural community participation in their development process. The District Development Officer (DDO), in the office of the District Commissioner (DC) is in charge of planning, implementation and co-ordination of all the development projects in the district. The District Social Development Officer (DSDO), in the Ministry of Culture and Social services plans, implements and co-ordinates all the

district's social development activities. On the other hand, the District Education Officer (DEO) plans, implements and co-ordinates activities of the categories of schools studied.

In order to ensure that local communities are involved in the district development process; planning is carried out through a process of the development committees at each administrative level in the district. Two basic documents are used namely; the two-year District Development plan and the Annual Annex to that plan. All the development strategies and activities in the district development plan are usually in harmony with the five-year national development plan. Additionally, special policy papers are issued by the government ministries for further guidance on the development process in their respective sectors. Ministries are also responsible for preparing annual guidelines and selection criteria for use by the district in selecting priority community projects and ways to implement them.

Other policy guidelines used to enhance rural development are sessional papers and circulars from the central government. These aim at encouraging and maintaining rural community participation in development projects by providing checks and balances. The ministry of Culture and Social services is in charge of all community social services programmes, which include youth polytechnics and income-generating projects. In order to engage the community in the development process, the ministry follows the guidelines of the District Focus strategy for Rural Development (DFSFRD), which has been operational since 1983. These guidelines help to ensure local representation at all levels of administration in the district.

Within the education sector, the policy of user charges and the attainment of Education for All (EFA) imply the involvement and commitment of all the stakeholders including parents. Most of the policies in education including Kenya Education Act Cap 211 have clauses creating avenues for community participation, especially through School Boards of Governors (BOGs) and Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs). The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) have also underscored community involvement in the sector strategic plans in which community participation in the affairs of schools is overly emphasized.

5.5 Strategies for Enhancing Rural People's Participation in the Development of Schools and Income-Generating Projects in Kiambu District

The following strategies were identified as effective in enhancing community participation in the development of schools and income –generating projects among the people of Kiambu District in Kenya:

- Ensured accountability of funds/resources for all development projects.
- Eradication of corruption in development projects.
- Improvement of project performance and input.
- Ensuring the realization of the expected project benefits.
- Awareness creation of the need for all members to effectively participate in their development projects, regardless of gender, social-economic and educational status.
- Ensure gender sensitivity in the involvement of the community members in the entire project cycle and related activities, especially in the allocation of roles and responsibilities.

- Protection of members' interest in terms of benefits and decision-making processes.
- Regular capacity building through seminars and refresher courses for members and officials.
- Regular and effective communication between project members and officials.
- Transparency and accountability of project officials.
- Frequent review of project objectives to ensure that they are addressing community's felt needs.
- The government to encourage the citizenry to effectively participate in their development process through awareness raising and creating an enabling environment for them to do so.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that:

- Participatory development approach is an important element in facilitating rural development.
- There is need to encourage community participation in projects meant to improve community's social-economic and political welfare. This not only ensures collective responsibility but also projects' sustainability.
- Community participation in development projects as a goal-oriented phenomenon should not only be nurtured but also held as an ideal.
- The participation in essence ensures collective empowerment of the entire community through projects' benefits.
- The problems that hinder community participation as well as factors that enhance it should not be underrated in any way as participation entails responsibility by the entire community to do their best in support of each other and for a common purpose.
- The Government's commitment and goodwill in the encouragement on the community participation is noted through the existence of well-intended policies and guidelines on community participation in their own development projects.
- For the community to effectively participate in their development projects, facilitators need to deliberately create an enabling environment for the participation.

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