

There is a worldwide realization that people are important resources in the development process. Many countries in their development policies have stressed the need to encourage communities to participate in their development projects. The rationale for this lies in the acknowledgement that the society cannot prosper without full co-operation of its members. To achieve this, members of a society must be allowed to take initiative 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 to help themselves to achieve certain objectives to bring about development.

The major task of the study was to investigate factors, which may enhance or inhibit community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in Kiambu District. It was both a case and exploratory study.

The study sample comprised members of schools and income-generating projects in Kiambu district. The school projects studied were categorised into primary schools, district secondary schools/government assisted schools (Harambee 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. This gave a total of 28 projects.

From each project, ten ordinary members were selected as respondents. This gave 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 divisional local leaders/administrators.

Instruments used to collect data were interview schedules for project members, officials and local leaders/administrators. There were also checklists for project observation and focus group discussions. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Science Programme (SPSS). Data presentation took the form of numerical percentage, frequencies and tables.

From data analysis, it was found that some socio-economic factors such as marital status, household size, level and source of income impacted upon the community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in Kiambu district. Other factors also found to affect participation were safety and accountability of project funds, project-related skills and quality of leadership.

There were some social, economic, political and educational benefits that members reaped from participating in the development of schools and income-generating projects. Such benefits include acquiring leadership skills and improved lifestyle.

There were also problems found to be experienced by project members, officials and local leaders. Some of these problems were financial constraints, gender dynamics, political interference and lack of time and space. The study, however, highlights some strategies, which could enhance community participation and the existing government policies and guidelines to achieve these.

From the findings, it was concluded that there is a need to enhance community participation in the development of schools and income-generating projects in Kiambu District. Thus, factors found to determine participation need to be nurtured in order to give people more empowerment and control over their own development affairs.

On the strength of these conclusions, the study recommends that local people as actors and beneficiaries of participatory development should be enlightened on the expectations of participatory development. While local leaders should be equipped with adequate participatory knowledge and skills, government officials should monitor activities of all development projects so as to check on their performances, costs and expenditure.