THE NATURE AND FORMS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN THE AJUMAKO-ENYAN-ESSIAM DISTRICT OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This study accessed the extent of community participation in development projects within the Ajumako-Enyan -Essiam District of Ghana. Development projects selected were water systems, market structures and KVIP's. The descriptive survey research design was adopted, using semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion guide and observation checklist to gather data from 72 respondents in six selected communities within the district. The findings indicated that both Development Agencies and beneficiaries 'participated' in the development projects as a means to an end. The end to the Development Agents was to meet externally induced welfare targets and to the communities, the end being meeting immediate socio-economic deficiencies. Both choose a course of action that best suited their interest, as explained by the rational choice theory. It is recommended that the District Assembly should sensitize the communities on their roles as channels in the decentralization process, to encourage them to fully participate in the development process.On project sustainability, it is recommended that the communities take token fees from users of the facility handed over to them by the Development Agents. This will enable them to maintain the projectsproperly and hence sustain them.

Keywords: Community Participation, Development Projects, Functional, Empowerment, Sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Various governments in Ghana have, in their decentralization programme, used political, administrative and decentralized planning to enhance development in rural communities in particular and the nation as a whole. Currently there are 260 districts in the country. To give more meaning to them, the principal Local Government Law (Republic of Ghana, 1988) was passed. It was amended by Act 462 of 1994. As a result,successive governments in Ghana have sought to use rural development as the engine of growth in bringing the necessary improvement in the living conditions of its people; especially those in the rural communities(Debrah, 2013). In Ghana, the decentralization programme attempts to promote local participation in decision making and development. This ensures the active participation of the beneficiary communities and Development Agents in the definition of development priorities and the implementation and management of development programme. According to Muniu*et al*. (2018),community participation in development projects leads to sustainable results. In order to enable the community become directly involved in the development efforts, Wedchayanon and Chorkaew(2014) suggested development projects should be people centred. In the context of poverty reduction

projects decentralization involves reforming government structures to facilitate local interaction (Likwelile and Assey, 2018; Eaton, Kaiser and Smoke, 2010). After decades of implementing the decentralization policy, it appears some development programmes and projects were designed and implemented without the full involvement of the beneficiaries (Amoako-Atta *et al*, 2020; Adjei-Mensah *et al*, 2017; Osei, 2017).In the Ajumako-Esiam-Enyan District, for example, there are questions regarding the extent to which the development process can be justified as having been shaped and owned by the community. The specific aim of this study is to assess the nature of community participation in development projects within the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District and analyze the various forms of community participation within the district.Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions: In what ways do the communities participate in the development process and what strategies do Development Agents employ in their developmental activities?

Participatory democracy and community participation as concepts and principles have in the latter part of the 20th century occupied centre stage in the debate on democracy and governance. This is governance that is participatory, responsive and accountable and which seeks to promote

human development (Pateman, 2012; Talpin, 2011). In the past, development failures were experienced, because development practitioners neglected the human factor (Adjibolosoo, 2020). The new thinking which has emerged advocates the participation of communities in their own development efforts (Osei, 2017). Community participation is now recommended as a strategy by some development theorists and practitioners to correct the wrongs of the past (Adjibolosoo, 2020; Pateman, 2012).This approach enables the community to build their own capacity, self-reliance and ensure sustainable development (Noori, 2017; Ofuoku, 2011).As a bottom-up approach, it encourages the involvement of all stakeholders relevant to the development process by recognizing the skills and resources of the local people (Ofuoku, 2011). According to Mazzurco and Jesiek (2017) the principles relevant for the practice of community participation can be summed up into five major principles:

1. The need to collaborate with the local partner to break language barriers (Chisolm et al., 2014) and assure project sustainability (Jue, 2011).
2. Harnessing local resources and expertise to ensure project sustainability (Mattson and Wood, 2014; McDaniel et al., 2011; Ramirez et al., 2011) and identify local resources (Aslam et al., 2014; Barb and Everett, 2014) and materials.
3. Integrating ethics and social justice by incorporating ethical issues in their work (Mazzurco and Jesiek, 2017).
4. Building trusting relationships, which is achieved through fair distribution of money and time among all partners (Aslam et al., 2014) and respecting and having open and honest conversation (Chisolm *et al*., 2014) with all partners involved in the project.
5. Creating an inter-disciplinary team since the problem confronting development agents are multi-dimensional (Mattson and Wood, 2014).

Besides the principles,the International Association for Public Participation [IAP2] (2018) adds these core values of community participation which Development Agents need to recognize and implement in order to ensure authentic community participation in developing programmes and projects in the district.

1. *The community should have a say in decisions about actions that affect their lives.*

2. *Community participation should include the promise that the community's contribution will influence the decision.*
3. *The community participation process communicates the interest and meets the process needs of all participants.*
4. *The community participation process seeks out and facilitates the engagement of those potentially affected.*
5. *The community participation process entails participants in defining how they participate*
6. *The community participation process communicates to participants how their input affected the decision.*
7. *The community participation process provides participants with the information they need in order to participate in a meaningful way.*

Development Agents can only address community participation in development projects if staff members bear in mind these principles and core values.

The theoretical perspective for this article is the Rational Choice theory, which assumes human behaviour as guided by instrumental reason. Accordingly, individuals always choose what they believe to be the best means to achieve their given end. According toElster (2007), individualism is an assumption that rational choice theorists make; that individual social actions satisfy an individual desire.Another assumption are the beliefs of the individual. It is assumed that with the required information, the individual chooses a preferred course of action over others. In rational choice theory, individuals are seen as motivated by the wants or goals that express their 'preferences'. They act within specific, given constraints and on the basis of the information that they have about the conditions under which they are acting. Rational choice theory holds that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action and calculate that which will be best for them. The last assumption is that of self-regard. This assumption holds that, the actions of the individual are concerned entirely with his or her own welfare. These sentiments could be cooperation, altruism or self-sacrifice, charity, or self-denial. Rational choice theorists assert that ultimately, such sentiments are in the pursuit of some type of self-interest. The individual's actions are therefore all geared towards satisfying a desire.

The basic premise behind the literature reviewed is that the community is empowered when they are involved in

all spheres of the project cycle, as a result, the projects are sustained and that community participation can be successful where the community has genuinely been part of the process. This process involves equality in decision-making throughout the project cycle (Chisolm *et al.*, 2014). The theoretical perspective used has been able to establish a relationship with the phenomenon under study; employing rational choice and making inferences to the fact that in the community participation process, individuals behave in ways which are determined by their own self-interest based on choices opened to them.For effective or authentic community participation to be achieved, the principles and core values of community

participation should be adhered to by all Development Agents. These principles and values basically set sovereignty on the people in the community. Development Agents approach to community development should be based on the peoples' needs, their analysis of issues and their discussions. These principles and core values also influence community participation because their presence makes community participation possible.In all these, the community makes a rational choice as to the extent of their participation in the development project by weighing the benefits that are opened to them. This is illustrated in Figure 1 below.
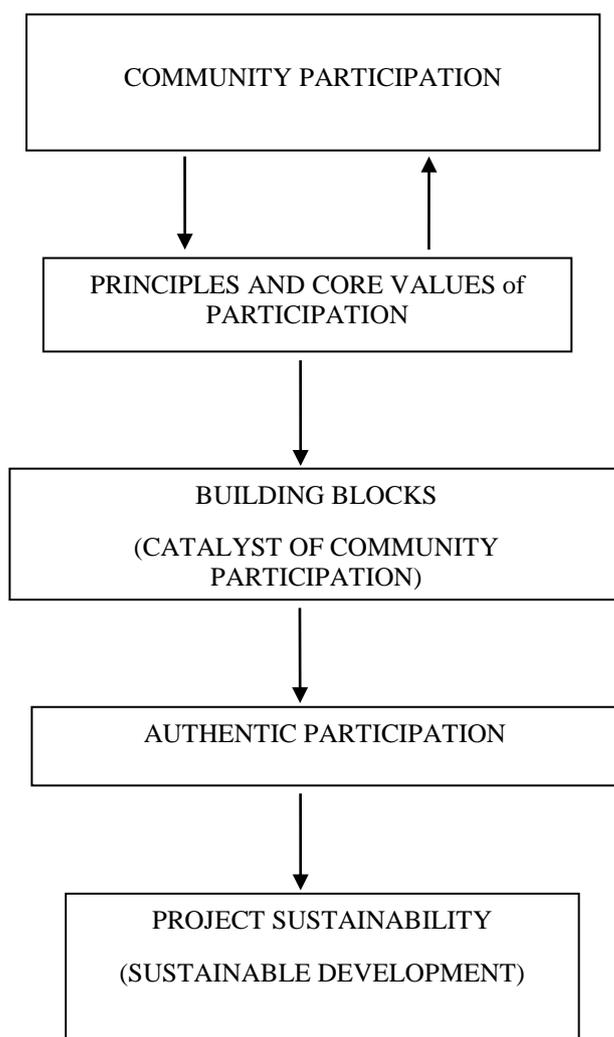

Figure 1: Project sustainability framework

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design: The main design employed for this study was the descriptive survey as it seeks to assess the opinion of community members on their participation in development projects in the district. Specifically, the research approach seeks to establish out how community participation works in the district and ultimately, its effect on projects in the district. The descriptive survey design allowed the use of multiple data collection tools in seeking to address the research questions in an in-depth manner. Qualitative data was therefore sought and utilised to assess opinions, attitudes and perceptions of people in the case study area. This referred to seeking knowledge on; relationship between Development Agents' activities and people's needs, community perceptions about Development Agents approaches, and also community perceptions on sustainability of Development Agents pioneered projects.Walia (2015) rightly pointed out that, in order for the researcher to capture the essence of the descriptions rooted in the life-worlds of participants and produce insider perspective of the actors and their practices, it is best to use qualitative methods.It is against this background that this study used the qualitative methodology.

Sample and Sampling Procedure: As a qualitative study, the research did not have a large sample. The number of respondents was arrived at after considering the information needed for the study. Moser and Korstjens (2018)are of the view that information maximisation guides the selection of respondents, who are unique key persons and are known to have particular knowledge. Acting on this, the research subjects were as follows;

1. Six (6) representatives of Development Agents working within the studyarea
2. Six (6) representatives of the District Assembly. These are the Assembly members for theselected communities
3. Twenty-four (24) opinion leaders from the six communities where the study was carriedout (4 opinion leaders each were selected from the six communities) and
4. Thirty-six (36) respondents for the six sessions of focus group discussions.

A purposive sampling technique was used to pick 6 area councils out of the 9 in the district. This was necessary since some area councils were so close to each other that the area tended to have the same characteristics. To avoid having respondents giving the same responses, the area councils were purposively selected. The selected area councils were Abaasa, Ajumako, Bisease, BremanEssiam, EnyanDankyira and EtsiiSunkwa.The study was interested in the following development projects whose delivery had community participation elements: market structures, water systems and toilet facilities. Communities that had these projects were purposively selected. A community each was selected from an area council. The selected communities were Abaasa, Abrofua, Bisease, EssiamAnaafo, Nkodwo and Ekwamase. The purposive sampling was again used to pick the respondents from the district assembly and the representatives of the Development Agents. From the district assembly, the assembly members whose jurisdiction covered the selected communities were purposively selected. Representatives of the Development Agents whose projects formed the basis for this paper were also selected purposively.

The snowball method was used to select four opinion leaders from each of the six communities. Four opinion leaders were chosen since the study was interested in leaders of the community (chief/regent); women's leader, youth leader and a prominent citizen of the community. This method became necessary since the opinion leaders were unknown to the researchers. The chief/regent of a community was first contacted for the interview, after which they directed researchers to another opinion leader who in turn directed us to another after the interview.The focus group discussions were homogeneous in structure as they were made up of beneficiaries of a particular project. This was to ensure some flexibility in the group discussion and to help respondents remain focused on the issue at stake. Respondents were selected using the quota sampling technique. The basis of choice being sex and the number needed in each community. For each project, a focus group discussion had six males and six females from the two communities that had the development project in question. The research subjects were selected based on the type of data required, accessibility and convenience within the study period. The main selection procedure was therefore non-random.

Data collection Instruments: Three instruments were used for the study, namely, semi-structured interview guide, focus group discussion and an observational checklist. Data was collected by the researchers. During each interview, the interviewers manually marked, recorded and wrote down responses to the questions as the

respondents answered each question face-to-face. The average interview duration per respondent was 35 minutes, and 1hour, 25 minutes for a focus group discussion.

Data Processing and Analysis: Data collected had to undergo a series of actions before they could be used for the purpose of the investigation. The raw data collected came in the form of notes taken from FGDs, interviews and observations. It also came from transcripts of proceedings at the group discussions as well as from some recorded interviews. The first step in the data management stage was to obtain transcripts of all electronically recorded information. This was done by listening to the audio tapes and writing down responses verbatim. To ensure that the right responses were written, the tapes were listened to several times during the transcription process. Field notes were also reconciled after a debriefing session after each discussion and after each day's interviews.

The transcripts and notes from the field provided a significant amount of information which still be needed to be processed before any analysis could be carried out. A manual sorting out was carried out, this involved reading the notes and transcripts several times, identifying and writing down major points and themes emerging from each question from the discussions and interviews. The aim was to put the information into easily identifiable categories that would make it simple for analysis. Quotes that were judged to be very interesting were written down into a response sheet to be used in the text of the analysis to support the arguments being made.

Interview responses were taken through similar processing. They were sorted into those that had transcriptions, those recorded and those that had response sheets and notes. After this, the responses were coded, recoded and processed into the appropriate themes.

Ethical Issues: Permission was sought from the chiefs in the communities selected for the research to gain access to their subjects. Individuals sampled for this study were subjected to voluntary participation and they were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. They were also informed they could withdraw at any point in the data collection process. Respondents were interviewed after their informed verbal consent was sought.

RESULTS

Development Agents approach and strategies for Community Participation in Activities

Development Agents were asked the strategies they employed to involve the communities in their activities. The question, "Do you involve the community in the planning process?" was asked the staff of Development Agents. It was reframed for the assembly members, opinion leaders and direct beneficiaries. Sixty-three respondents, representing 87.5 percent responded that they were involved. A follow up question was to ascertain their level of involvement in the project cycle. At the identification stage, all respondents said they were highly involved. Only 27.8 percent felt their involvement was moderate. The level of involvement was therefore very high at the identification stage. The high level of involvement indicates that the community was involved in selecting their own projects, which is key to identifying their problems or felt needs.

At the preparation stage, 16.7 percent were either not involved or were poorly involved, while 83.4 percent were involved. Participation at the implementation stage of the project cycle was low. Only 25 percent actively participated at this stage. It was realised that 30.6 percent were poorly involved while 44.4 percent did not participate at all at this stage of the project cycle. It was realised that participation at the monitoring and evaluation stage was equally poor. Only 16.7 percent participated, while 11.1 percent poorly participated. A colossal 72.3 percent were not involved at this stage of the project cycle.

A close look at the results revealed that the strategy of the Development Agents in roping in the community to participate in their activities was simply to involve them in project identification, preparation and to some extent, implementation. This is contrary to the assertion of Osei (2017) that participation means allowing communities direct and ultimate control in deciding their own affairs. The analysis suggests that apart from project identification and preparation, the communities did not play any meaningful role in the project cycle. An indication they were not in control in deciding their own affairs. Their views are shown in Table 1below.

Table 1: Level of Communities Involvement in Project Cycle

Level of Involvement	Identification		Preparation		Appraisal		Implementation		M&E	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
None	0	0	6	8.3	18	25	32	44.4	52	72.3
Poorly	0	0	6	8.3	40	55.6	22	30.6	8	11.1
Moderately	20	27.8	12	16.7	6	8.3	12	16.7	6	8.3
Deeply	52	72.2	48	66.7	8	11.1	6	8.3	6	8.3
Total	72	100	72	100	72	100	72	100	72	100

Planning process (n= 72)

Communities' Perception on its Participation in the Projects

The communities' perception on its participation in the activities of the Development Agents was put into two categories. Their perception on activities they participated in before the project was completed and those they took part in after the projects were completed.The forms of participation before project completion were the offer of land, labour, ideas, materials (sand, stones, and water) and artisan skills. Table 2 shows the forms of community participation before projects are completed. In the case of projects within the Ajumako-Anyan-Essiam district, the research results revealed that the projects cannot be sustained as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Table 2: Forms of community participation before projects are completed

Forms of Participation	Number (n=72)	Percentage (%)
Labour	60	83.3
Materials	54	75
Land	48	66.7
Artisans	46	63.9
Ideas	16	22.2

Note: Total responses were more than the number of respondents due to multiple responses; n = 72
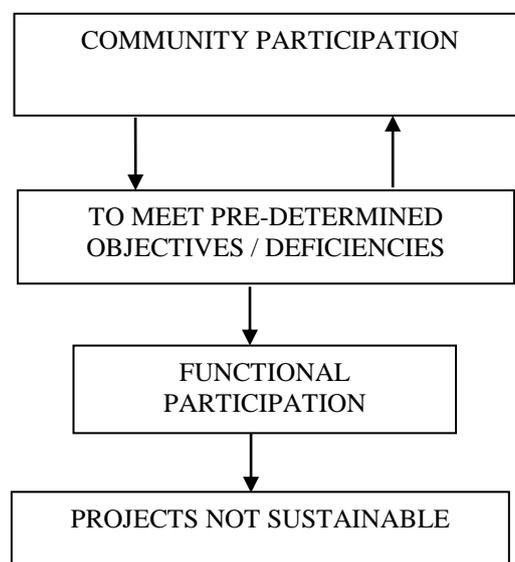

Figure 2: Project Sustainability Framework derived from Findings

DISCUSSION

The findings give a clear indication of the extent of community participation within the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam district in the Central Region of Ghana. It is clear that the community participates in the project cycle of development projects in the district; however, it is the extent of participation that was uncertain. The results relating to the knowledge of the Development Agents by the community members revealed that, the community members knew next to nothing about the operations of the Development Agents. Apart from the respondents working with the Development Agents, only two (2) other respondents from the community had knowledge of the Development Agents. This is at variance with the view of Ofuoku(2011) who holds the view that the involvement of all stakeholders is relevant to the development process. This act by the Development Agents show that the initial trust and openness required for effective community work was absent. In analysing data on the communities' perception on their participation in the project cycle, it was found that their participation before project completion was that of mainly providing materials that ultimately reduces project cost: land, stones, gravel and sand corroborating the assertion of some scholars (Ford, 2017; Chastoney, 2011). Interestingly, they saw their participation as a matter of course since they provide those materials on every communal day. Their motivation was therefore neither monetary nor to help the Development Agents. It was a means to help better their way of life.

With the conceptual framework introduced in (figure 1), it was noticed after careful evaluation that community participation is possible and effective when the principles and core values of community participation are adhered to by Development Agents (Chisolm *et al*., 2014). These principles and values highlight indigenous knowledge and as such, Development Agents approach to development should be based on the communities' needs, their analysis of issues and their discussions. According to Noori (2017) adherence to these principles makes community participation possible. Using the study results to analyse the conceptual framework, it showed that participation in the communities was functional and not authentic. Ofuoko, (2011), maintains that authentic participation leads to project sustainability, but sadly, that is not the case in the study areas.

Sociological Analysis

From a rational choice perspective, both parties considered the benefits that accrue to them in the partnership. To the Development Agents, the provision of labour, sand and gravel by the communities greatly reduced project cost. The communities also saw the arrangement as beneficial since it did not 'cost' them anything to have those projects in their communities. In a poverty-stricken district, as a result of high unemployment, (DistrictPlanning Coordination unit 2017), the provision of materials that were readily available to them at no cost was highly beneficial to them; a rational choice. Finally, the study revealed that communities were not empowered by the Development Agents to promote project sustainability. The communities therefore felt it was the duty of the Development Agents to maintain the projects. The sociological perspective on this is that, the communities made a rational choice after weighing the cost and benefits of maintaining the projects, and decided it was the duty of the Development Agents to maintain them. In communities where unemployment and poverty levels are high, the best option was to cede maintenance to the development agent; a rational choice.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions based on the findings of the study are presented in this section. It should however be noted that these conclusions are applicable to the population from which the sample was drawn. Based on the data analysed, a primary conclusion was that community participation in the study area is functional. The community members' participation in the development process was limited to providing labour and materials readily available in their communities within the project cycle, their participation was restricted to project identification and implementation. The main strategy of the Development Agents was to reduce project cost by cashing in on what community members provided. The involvement of Development Agents in the district contributed to meeting the communities' needs, however, the capacity of the community members was not enhanced by the Development Agents. Juxtaposing the findings against each other showed that both the communities and the Development Agents worked with each other after weighing the cost and benefits of their activities; a central theme in the rational choice theory.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and observations, the following recommendations are made:

Firstly, as implementers of the decentralisation policy in the district, the district assembly should sensitize

community members of their roles as channels in the decentralisation process. This will encourage them to fully participate in the development process in their communities. Secondly, development agents must encourage the participation of the community in decision making processes, by building the capacity of the community and ensure a sense of ownership as this will lead to increased sustainability of projects and programmes. Thirdly, in terms of project ownership, there should be a clear understanding between the project beneficiaries and the organization responsible for coordinating and managing the projects. This understanding should be made at the start of a project and stressed throughout the project cycle. The district assembly should see to that; and lastly, with regard to project sustainability, it is recommended that the communities take token fees from users of the facility handed over to them by the Development Agents. This will enable them to properly maintain the projects and hence sustain them.

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AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION:

Sakyi-Darko, M. was involved in the sample collection, sample processing/analysis and data analysis. Mensah, R.O. was involved in sample collection and provided the required critical technical assistance.

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