

Assessment of Applicability of Participatory Planning in Improving Rural Livelihoods in Tanzania: The case of Utalingolo and Igesi Villages of Njombe and Wanging'ombe Districts

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Abstract: A study was conducted at Igesi and Utalingolo in Njombe and Wanging'ombe Districts, aimed to assess the applicability of participatory planning in improving rural livelihoods. The study employed a case study approach. The study used purposive and convenient sampling techniques. Data collection instruments included questionnaires and focus group discussions. Questionnaires were administered to 50 respondents and focus group discussions were organized for the same group of people. The major findings of the study are of two categories; strengths and weaknesses. Strengths: the village development committees were well represented in terms of gender and that, members were well informed on the participatory planning process. On the other part the study revealed that, the majority of the members lacked proper education, expertise in planning among the committee members, poor leadership and monitoring and evaluation techniques to established projects. The study recommended that all village members should be given mandatory training on the process of planning to.

Key terms: participatory, community based planning, local governance, local government capital development grant.

Introduction

Community participatory planning in Tanzania is not a new concept. The process has been adopted at urban and rural levels, in an attempt to improve livelihoods. A notable community participatory planning was undertaken near Golden Pride mine in Nzega District in 2000s. The communities around this area depended on subsistence farming and suffered from a lack of infrastructure and income-generating opportunities. Resolute Mining Limited, an Australian company, took measures to alleviate some of the most immediate features of the poverty by rehabilitating and equipping the local schools by supplying uniforms, books, desks, and planting of fruit trees to supplement the children's diet (PMO-RALG, 2004). It was later realized that, it would be more effective - in the long term, if communities could be encouraged to empower themselves and take responsibility for their own development plans. The Tanzania government

has overtime emphasized on participatory planning through training and supporting local communities by extending special grants to foster rural development.

Rural participatory planning entails that, local communities have obligations to mobilise local resources, plan and implement their projects. The emphasis is on bottom- up planning as opposed to top-down approach. To achieve this, the government - through local governments, offer training to local people in villages on the same. Overtime, the government has further been allocating funds to local governments to support projects initiated and run by local communities. Despite all these efforts, rural communities still experience rampant poverty. A few projects raised by local communities meet funding criteria through Local Government Development Capital Grant. However, there have been no studies so far done to assess the applicability of participatory planning approach in improving rural livelihoods; a gap this study sought to bridge.

The participatory approach does not assume the target beneficiaries to be ignorant; rather it tries to understand and assess indigenous knowledge, values and belief systems which may be good, or need to be improved, or perhaps need to be discouraged. In short, it follows the well-known principles of rural reconstruction: "*start with what people already know*", and "*build on what they already have*" (Robert, 2009; Walker, 2009). The approach increases the degree of relevance, and thus acceptability of extension messages or recommendations among intended beneficiaries who are consulted during the planning process regarding their priority concerns and needs.

Historical Perspective on Participatory Planning in Tanzania

Since independence in 1961, the Government sought to have participatory planning in the economic planning process, with a view to attaining a bottom-up planning. The first period, 1961–1966, was guided by the Independence Vision whereby the goal was to attain higher standards of living by fighting illiteracy, disease and poverty. People were encouraged to work hard and involve themselves in self-help projects as their contribution to national development (Nyerere, 1968). The second period, 1967–1992, was guided by the Arusha Declaration, which articulated on the philosophy of socio-economic liberation based on socialism and self-reliance as a long-term national development goal.

The strategy for implementing Arusha Declaration was also to devolve powers to the people. As a result, the Local Government Authorities of the colonial administration were abolished in 1972 to pave way for the introduction of the regional decentralization (MacCallum, 2010). Under regional decentralization, village governments, district development committees and regional development committees were established to enable more participation in decision-making. This was provided for by the Regional Decentralization Act of 1972 (Nyerere, 1978).

In order to enhance the decentralization process by devolution, the Local Government Authorities were re-established by Act No.7 – 10 of 1982 (PMO-LARG, 2004). This was in

accordance with the constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania of 1977 under articles No.145 and 146 which allowed the establishment of Local Government Authorities to facilitate transfer of authority to the people. The Local Government Authorities have the right and power to participate, and to involve people in the planning and implementation of development programmes within their jurisdiction and generally throughout the country.

Despite the government's effort to continuously set up a conducive environment for the people to participate as explained above, yet government planning continued to be dominated by government planners/economists, bureaucrats and donors who harbour illusory assumption of control and efficiency, based on 'we know they (communities) do not know' (PMO-RALG, 2004). Therefore, effective participatory planning and implementation for decision making remained a remote illusion. This study objective aimed to assess the impact the practice of participatory planning has on livelihoods of the rural the rural people.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The Opportunities and Obstacles to Development (O&OD)

Opportunities and obstacles to development methodology is a participatory planning process which has the following salient features: Positive outlook at the community, the community identifies available resources to overcome obstacles and therefore fosters the spirit of self-reliance. Participatory tools are; the village map, transect walk, historical time lines, seasonal calendar, institutional analysis, daily activities calendar by gender and household wealth ranking, focus groups and identification of sources of income and expenditure. A planning model- enables the community to identify in logical frame work. The community will realize specific objectives, opportunities, obstacles causes, interventions, and steps for implementation as well as expenditure which should determine what they can do and what they cannot. It helps members of communities become aware of their own resources and how to make better use of them. The process uses the Tanzania Development Vision 2025, as a broad national policy guide. The output of the O&OD process is a comprehensive plan rather than an action plan. It has both a rural and urban process (Susskind and Ozawa, 1984; Tauxe, 1995; URT, 2000; PMO-LARG, 2004).

Rural Planning Participation

Participation means togetherness, or joining in the planning process (Tauxe, 1995). There are many ways that people can join in though not all of the ways are positive. Participation is viewed as a public involvement in development with varying degrees of people involvement.

According to planning theory, participation is understood as giving a space for the public to discuss own problems and priorities. The degree of community participation in planning process depends on the dynamics of knowledge, actors, and spaces within the planning process (LogoLink, 2002). The three elements above become important in understanding participatory

planning processes. Participatory planning usually involves a different range of stakeholders with their own knowledge and interest. The knowledge used in the process also varies based on the stakeholders involved. The space refers to all opportunities that influence the planning processes including formal and informal organizations and policy making processes (LogoLink, 2002). The benefit of public participation in planning is to bring closer relations between local authority and community. Decentralized planning, is believed to overcome all the limitations created by centralized planning (Samaratungge, 1998). Despite the government and development partners' initiatives to support financing of rural projects under participatory planning, its impact on improving rural livelihoods remain minimal. The practice has failed to live to people's expectations.

General objective

The main objective of this paper was to assess the problems which hinder the villages' access to government development funds for rural projects.

Specific Objectives

- i) To evaluate the community's participation in the planning process
- ii) To establish the reasons as to why rural community fail to attract the LGCDG
- iii) To suggest the alternative strategy to PRA

Empirical Studies on Participatory Planning

Current political trends and scholarly research increasingly promote collaborative and participatory governance in multi-level systems as a way to more sustainable and effective environmental policy. However, empirical findings as well as conceptual works from different academic fields remain ambiguous about this claim (Kiduanga, 2014). Several studies have been done on environmental, forest, and participatory budgeting which is the basis for planning in urban and rural areas. In this regard, review studies in the world have been done for the understanding of planning concept. This study centered on examining the usefulness of participatory planning on rural development in Tanzania.

Studies in Asia and Africa

In a study of participatory planning, scientific priorities and landscape conservation in Madagascar Lee (1997) assessed the knowledge and the participation of stakeholders in setting priorities. The study found that surrounding local communities were not involved during project planning. Such practices happen in many developing countries where local people are ignored in planning process. The practice of neglecting the surrounding community causes non-ownership of the projects. Decisions about growth and future development are complex and embedded in dynamics of social, economical, political and environmental systems and therefore call for greater attention during planning (Seitz, 1989). Also within communities it is known to have values, perceptions group power which are complex and can affect the planning process at local level.

Ida (2005) examined the practice of participatory planning in decentralized local governments in Indonesian schools. The findings of the study revealed that participatory planning paradigm was a crucial tool to planning as it involved key stakeholders before prioritizing projects' given resources. The author further comments that implementation of participatory planning reduces the risks of conflicts of interests.

The paper concluded that, the practice of participatory planning opens a new track towards harmonizing society and a shift in development process paradigm of bottom-up planning. Participatory planning requires top officials to share their power with other development stakeholders. The main strength of the finding in this paper was the lesson learnt in the importance of local government to change the way they behave and develop new relations with the community. All stakeholders of a project in decentralized government should be involved in planning and prioritizing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation to improve the ownership by local people and projects' sustainability.

Studies of participatory in Tanzania

The concept of participatory planning was hatched in the mid-1970s. Many assessments on development concluded that a significant change in approach was required if conditions among the poor, largely rural population, were to realize their development efforts. During the 1980s, development programmes increasingly emphasised on participation by targeting groups and beneficiaries. However, the desire to incorporate participation into development planning was often frustrated by a lack of practical tools. Participatory development activities were often found to be difficult in terms of planning and in fitting such into organized development programmes. As a result, too many different interest-groups had to be accommodated and the time-scale for activities was frequently long and unpredictable (Chambers, 1983).

In a study of participatory planning for local development in Tanzania, Mollel (2010) examined the legal framework of the participatory planning process and governance. The study used cross section case studies examining six projects in three districts. The study found that the failure of bottom-up participatory planning for development was of twofold: the institutional framework impeding the implementation of devolution policy, that is the existence of parallel structures of central government and local government and the dependence of local government on central government for funding. It was further found that the institutional framework failed to control the central government's officials in interfering into the local government plans. The author suggested for constitutional protection of local authorities from interference by central government. However, the paper is criticized for its weak points of the governmental institutions without bringing out the challenges experienced with the bottom-up planning.

Mabula (2007) did a study on participatory approach and development planning process in Maswa district. The study was focused on assessing the extent to which stakeholders were informed about participatory planning for rural development. The study looked at how the community participated in planning for their projects given local resources. The study found that 48% of respondents were not aware about the concept of participatory planning. The study

further showed that, 71% of respondents didn't attend village general assembly where plans are made though the majority of local communities participated in the implementation of the projects. The study concluded that approach to planning is a useful means of attaining sustainable development.

Further, the study unveiled some weaknesses in project implementation including inadequate funding for identified and prioritized projects as well as poor accountability and transparency. This study is a good standing for reference to rural planning in Tanzania.

Methodology

This study employed explanatory research design. The study sought to explore why rural villages failed to access local government capital development grants. The choice of the research design was to enable the researchers to generate information from the community on the reasons that make local people fail to observe standards of O&OD in their development plans. The study was carried out in two villages in Njombe and Wanging'ombe districts namely, Utalingolo and Igosi respectively. The choice of the area for study was based on the fact that, the development committees of both villages attended some training on participatory rural planning.

The sample for this study was obtained through judgmental sampling where all members of the village development committee were included in the sample. The standard number of village development committee members per village was 25, hence making the sample to 50. Closed ended questionnaires were prepared and administered to respondents. The study also used focus group discussions where three groups were formed, each comprising 5 members. This method was employed in order to capture some views and opinions of respondents that would not be captured through questionnaires. Both quantitative and qualitative techniques were used to analyze the collected data. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was employed in data analysis. In addition, Ms Excel was also employed to analyse multiple responses. The data were then presented in percentages, tables and figures for ease of interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The data summary is based on the primary data collected from Utalingolo and Igosi villages as representatives of Njombe and Wanging'ombe districts. In terms of demographic statistics, the study results indicate that 49% of the respondents were men while 51% of all, were women. These statistics show that, the composition of village development committees is gender sensitive. Both men and women in the villages under study were well represented. This was a good feature because equal participation in decision-making is important to minimize biasness in priority setting.

Education Level

Education is key to development. Villages whose people are well educated are likely to participate actively in planning for their projects. Education is important as it can enable the village planners (village development committees) come up with fundable business plans. The study sought to explore the educational status of the members for VDC. Results depicted that 97% of all respondents were standard seven leavers. Only 3% of the rest had at least attended secondary or tertiary education. This information indicates that the level of understanding among members was low due to low education. People with low education are less creative, and less innovative, and they face difficulties in coping with the pace of the fast changing world. The researchers were interested to know as to why village development committees were mainly composed of standard seven leavers. The findings from focus group discussion revealed that most of the educated youngsters flow to urban areas in search for greener pastures - thus decimating the potential work force in rural areas.

Selection of Village Development Committee

The researchers wanted to know whether there were criteria in place which was used to select a member of the village development committees. A question was therefore administered to all respondents in both committees and the results indicated that each village had developed some criteria for selection of members.

About 57% of the responses indicated that work performance and experience in leadership were important criteria for selection and 22% of the responses pointed the volunteering and personal commitment. On the other hand, education (19%) and creativity (14%) seemed to be less important. This could be attributed to the fact that, nearly all members had primary level education. It was observed that, the well-educated members rarely come back to their villages. If this is the case, then, the question comes 'will work performance and experience in leadership help villagers design fundable projects and implement them successfully?' The question remains unanswered. Planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the projects at village levels require knowledge, experience, skills and positive attitude. Short of these, can lead to poor management of the projects thus defeating the purpose of improving rural livelihoods.

Familiarity of Participatory Planning at Village Level

Participatory planning calls for awareness of individuals involved in the process. Under such approach, rural communities are extensively involved in identification and planning for projects, implementation, and evaluation of the same. To be able to plan, villagers need to be equipped with the knowledge and skills of the concept itself. In this respect, village development committees were tested to ascertain whether they were familiar with what participatory planning entailed. The findings revealed that, 65% of the respondents were aware of the concept, 35% of them indicated to have no idea with the concept. From these statistics, one may deduce that, the majority of the village committees were familiar with the concept. With that knowledge at hand,

it would be easier for them to comprehend the planning process and thereafter, participate positively in identifying the opportunities available and prioritizing.

Involvement of VDC Members in Planning

The study went further to investigate whether the members of the village development committees were involved in planning processes. The study shows that, of all respondents 92% were fully involved in the planning process, 5% did not participate while 1 (3%) did not respond to the question. The study concludes that, the members of the committees in the villages were involved in the planning process. This is a positive feature for the achievement of the approach. It is the rural people who know well their potentials available, if well involved, the programs would be sustainable.

Participatory Planning Training

The authors explored the provision of support in terms of training. The findings revealed that, 43% of the responses ascertained to have attended participatory planning training once, 14% of the responses attended more than two and 11% attended twice. On the other hand, 32% of the rest did not attend any. Based on the view of the above information, frequency of training is not adequate as many have attended either one or none at all. Village members require frequent training to empower and broaden their understanding of the concept.

The problems pertinent to training programmes are attributed to inadequate members' participation and insufficient transparency in the management of the training programmes. The training needs to be explained to all members so that they understand the basis and constraints of its design. All stakeholders should be involved in the whole training process. When information is not disclosed, members tend to accuse management of favoritism, tribalism, and even bribery (Ngirwa, 2005). Owing to this fact, the researchers were interested to know whether or not members participated in training. Village Development Committees were requested to state whether or not they were involved in any training on participatory planning.

Knowledge of the LGCDG

If someone knows a certain opportunity exist somewhere, he/she will strive hard to fetch it. The central government allocates fund to local government with the view that once the villages have identified projects according to set criteria, the grant will be secured to support those projects. To be able to take seize the opportunity, information on the existence for the grant needs to be known by village communities. In this view, the VDC were asked to state whether they had any information regarding the existence the grant.

The results showed that, of all 37 respondents who answered the question on the knowledge of existence of LGCDG, 12 (32.4%) said they had knowledge of the fund, while 25 (67.6%) said

they were aware of the fund. It can therefore be inferred that the majority of the members of the village development committees at Igosi and Utalingolo were not aware of the existence of the grant. Given these findings, the idea that committees will be able to initiate and plan projects which would attract support from the local government, will remain a remote dream.

Village Projects

For decades, the government has been planning and implementing projects at village level with the view of improving the living standard of rural population. The adoption of the new approach, (participatory planning) was meant to build capacities among rural people to mobilize their resources within their localities. The authors were interested to know whether there existed projects funded by Local Government Capital Development Grant (LGCDG). About 51.4% of the respondents said the village projects were funded by LGCDG, 40.5% of them had the view that there was no funding from local government while 8.1%, had no knowledge on the funding. The study further interviewed the District and the Town Planning Officers on the matter. The officers agreed to have received funds from central government and development partners for supporting projects at village level. The officers support the study findings that villages' projects are funded based on the projects shopping lists supplied to them from the ward development committee. However, other projects developed at village level do not meet standards to qualify for LGCDG support.

Planning Constraints at Village Level

Planning is a profession; not everyone can do it and meet set criteria. The local government needs well detailed project write-ups before the support is extended to them. The study showed that, 56.8 % of respondents said there were some problems experienced during planning process, and 40.5 % were of the view that there were no problems. However, 2.7 % of the respondents did not respond. Based on the above statistics, it can be deduced that village development committees faced a number of problems in the planning process. Such problems can be attributed to the low level of education most village committees are equipped of. It can be recalled that, the majority (97 %) of these members are primary school leavers. Writing elaborative business plan is an art, it needs one to be equipped with knowledge something what the village development committees in both villages miss.

CONCLUSION

The general objective of the study was to assess the applicability of participatory planning in the quest of improving rural livelihoods. The specific objectives for the study were to; evaluate the community's participation in the planning process, establish the reasons as to why rural community fail to attract the LGCDG and suggest the alternative strategy to PRA.

One of the objectives of the researchers was to evaluate the community's participation in the planning process in order to gain insight as to whether rural people were involved in planning and implementing rural projects. The results concluded that members were fully involved in the process and both sexes (male and female) were well represented in the village decision making organ (Village Development Committees). However, it was revealed that villages experienced some problems in project planning and prioritizing. The reasons advanced for their failure was lack of proper education.

Recommendation

The recommendation of this work is based on the information gathered from the respondents. Despite its short comings, participatory planning is an ideal approach for sustainable development of rural projects. The study recommends that the rural think tanks (village development committees) need to be well trained on planning, implementation and monitoring of projects. The members of the committees should be selected based on educational qualifications and as well be offered frequent trainings on participatory planning. Besides, the training should be extended to all villagers in order to improve their participation in project implementation and monitoring.

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