



International Journal of Current Research and Academic Review

ISSN: 2347-3215 Volume 1 Number 2 (2013) pp. 01-19

www.ijcrar.com



Confronting the challenges and barriers to community participation in rural development initiatives in Duhera district, ward 12 Zimbabwe

Ephraim Chifamba*

Great Zimbabwe University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Rural Development,
Post Box :1235, Masvingo, Zimbabwe India.

*Corresponding author e-mail: ephchifamba00@gmail.com

KEYWORDS

Community Participation;
Rural Development;
Decentralization;
Sustainable Development;
Zimbabwe.

A B S T R A C T

Community participation in rural development is widely recognized as a basic operational principle of rural development, although debates about this concept are fervent. Beneficiaries of community projects have been seen as consumers of services, and their role in rural development has been accorded less importance. Community participation has been limited to consultation, thereby stifling the creative capabilities and potential of community members at all levels of the society. A descriptive case study design was used to collect primary data in addition to secondary data. Questionnaires were administered to participants selected through proportionate sampling to ensure representation and stratification at all levels. Two hundred respondents were interviewed. The data collected was analyzed numerically and descriptively and is presented in the sum of text and tables. The study revealed that there is relatively low degree of community influence or control over organizations in which community members participate, especially given that the services are usually controlled by people who are not poor or recipients of services. Community members are usually going through an empty ritual of participation; hence they have no real power needed to affect the outcome of rural development process. The study noted that participatory rural development has no predetermined outcomes; it can lead to transformation and change in the social patterns and sometimes it perpetuates and trigger the antithesis of 'community liberation,' devolution and distribution of power among various stakeholders. Thus, the form of participation in rural development initiatives in Buhera has transformed and modified the relations of power that objectify and subjugate people, leaving them without a voice. The study recommended that community participation should be centered on the role of the community as primary actors who should be allowed and enabled to influence and share the responsibility (and possibly costs) of rural development process.

Introduction

Community participation is considered as an imperative feature for successful and Prosperity of rural development. To better address the complexity of poverty in rural areas, and to explore that programmes

respond to the needs of beneficiaries, participatory approaches introduced in the 1970's have become core components, albeit with various development levels of success in many rural poverty reduction

programmes (Stoker, 1997). These approaches recognize that the poor themselves are the key agents of change for the transformation of rural areas. Although most development agencies agree on the importance of adopting a participatory approaches in rural development initiatives, evidence suggest that participation as a concept and as a methodology is quite complex and its success depends on many interrelated factors (Patel, 1998).

Local assessment of community participation in Buhera suggests that most projects have not been successful in enhancing participation. Projects have not managed to supply even the minimum drinking water, food and fodder needs of the inhabitants. Continued lack of meaningful development in Buhera shows that participatory interventions have not generated significant impacts. Furthermore, the disappointing results of participatory rural development are largely due to the flaws in the decentralization of projects management, financing and implementation mechanisms currently used by stakeholders. Rural development projects' multiple objectives caused the local authority to channel limited investments into a range of on-and off- farm activities, often involving tradeoffs among the interests of different stakeholders (Burns and Taylor, 2000). Participatory interventions in Buhera have presented a package of measures, from building check dams to promoting income generation activities and these have been found to be too large and difficult to manage, and the spreading of funds over many actions has made actions slow to materialize and intangible.

Participatory rural development in Buhera lacks sustainability and equity. Rural Development projects in the study area

have no approach for maintaining assets after the projects support end; the only benefit that the communities derive from participating in rural development initiatives is the benefits of short term paid work (Harvey, 1989). Communities in Buhera see no long term benefits from rural development projects, so have little interest in operating and maintaining project assets. The obscure land tenure systems have inhibited meaningful participation in development initiatives and land is inequitably distributed and resource rights are bundled with landownership. Existing rural development initiatives are not successful in stimulating poor people's participation as they are unable to address their primary concerns such as a secure source of portable water, employment and access to resources for agricultural purposes (Macfarlane, 1993). Integrated rural development in Buhera will not achieve the intended objectives unless these issues are placed at the center of a participatory process and initiate negotiations among different stakeholders and beneficiaries to avoid conflicts and duplication of projects.

Statement of the problem

Despite two decades of tireless effort and the adoption of several approaches to raise the development and economic growth of rural areas in Zimbabwe by integrating the rural population, who are largely peasants, into mainstream rural development (through community involvement and participation in rural development projects), development projects and the conditions of living of the rural poor are still deteriorating. This has led to a number of questions which have prompted people to interrogate the role of community participation in rural development. In Buhera poverty has manifested itself in the

form of hunger, illiteracy and lack of access to basic education, drinking water, minimum health facilities and shelter. Finding creative solutions to cope with poverty is one of the greatest challenges facing the rural development agencies in Buhera. Without urgent prioritization of community participation in rural development initiatives, it will be difficult to achieve sustained rural growth in the study area.

To assess the role of community involvement in rural development initiatives in order to enhance democratic, service accountability, sustainability and promote local - driven rural development in Buhera.

The following specific objectives guide discussion in this study: to assess the level of community involvement in rural project cycles; examine the factors that promote and hinder community participation; and recommend various strategies through which effective community participation could be facilitated in rural development process.

Justification

The research gathered information on the challenges and barriers to community participation in rural development initiatives in Buhera. The information gathered is important to stakeholders in rural development. These stakeholders include farmers, government, quasi government institutions such as local authorities and non-governmental organizations. These institutions will see the importance of redistributing rights and benefits to local communities and the value of involving beneficiaries of rural development initiatives. The current level of participation is not conducive for

sustained rural development and the continued alienation of community members is the breeding ground for poverty, household food insecurity and economic stagnation.

Conceptualizing Community Participation

Macfarlane (1993) defines community participation as collective efforts to increase and exercise control over resources on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from control. Thus, community participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over rural development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affects them. In the context of rural development, community participation involves an active process whereby beneficiaries influence the direction and the execution of development projects rather than merely receive a share of project benefit. Community participation is therefore an active engagement of individuals and groups to change problematic conditions and to influence policies and programmes that affect the quality of their lives or the lives of others (Skinner, 1995).

Winstanley (1995) views community participation as a means used by stakeholders to control rural development by contributing to project design, influencing public choices and holding public institutions accountable for the goods and services they provide. It is also seen as the direct engagement of affected populations in governance systems. Participation seen as an operating philosophy that puts affected populations at the heart of humanitarian and development activities as social actors with insights, competencies, energy and ideas of their

own. Arnstein (1969) for example, argue that the term participation has been used to build local capacity and self reliance, but also to justify the extension of control of the state. It has been used to devolve power and decision making away from external agencies, but also to justify external decisions. It has been used for data collection and also for interactive analysis. But more often than not, people are dragged into participating in operations of no interest to them, in the very name of participation.

The concept of community participation is not a new phenomenon as far as rural development is concerned; it has been talked and written about since the 1950s or even before (Burns, 1994, Burton, 2003). In recent years however, there has been a convergence of opinion as to the significance of participation in rural development and there now exists a widely collective set of participatory approaches and methods. Participatory approaches have been widely incorporated into policies of organizations from multilateral agencies like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), bilateral agencies, to the smallest people's organizations (Hillery, 1955). Indeed, some observers have argued that, in terms of thinking and practice about rural development, people are currently in the 'age of participation' and it is the 'paradigm of people' (Chambers, 1984, Hart, 1997).

Another important milestone in community participation in rural development was the world conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD – Rome, 1979), which declared participation by rural people in institutions that govern their lives. Participation was considered to be a basic human right. After the WCARRD, and throughout the 1980's, participation in

rural development, as well as in development at large, gradually become more established among governments, donors and international organizations, to such an extent that as Skinner (1995) puts it "it is now difficult to find a rurally based development project which does not in one way or another claim to espouse a participatory approach involving bottom up planning, acknowledging the significance of indigenous knowledge, and claiming to empower local people."

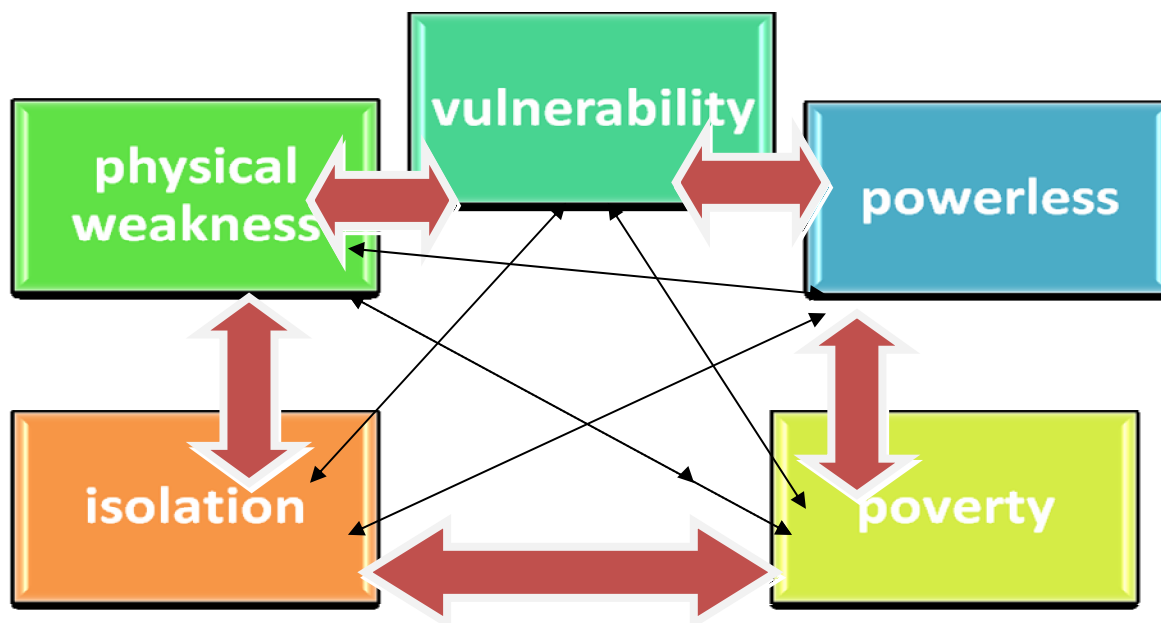
While many authors and rural development agencies argue that authentic people's participation in rural development can increase the efficiency, effectiveness, self-reliance, coverage and sustainability of development projects and programmes (Civil Renewal Unit, 2003), there is a wide range of views on the concept of participation and the ways of achieving it. One unambiguous example is given by Harvey (1989) who remarks that, "notwithstanding the increase in the number of rural development agencies, participatory methodologies, and after many years of poverty alleviation, poverty continues to be endemic and communities continue to languish in poverty". There is no doubt then, that something is wrong. It must either be that rural development agencies and/or participatory approaches are ineffective, or that rural development agencies use participatory approaches wrongly.

Chambers (1984) notes that it seems despite the aims of participatory rural development which is to involve people in development that affects them directly, evidence shows the reality of participation differs from the rhetoric. According to Stoker (1997), the dilemma for many rural development agencies is that they need and fear people's participation. They need

Table.1 Comparative Analysis: community participation as Means vs. End

Community Participation as Means	Community Participation as End
It implies use of participation to achieve some predetermined goals or objectives.	Endeavors to bestow power to people to participate more evocatively.
It is an attempt to utilize the existing resources in order to achieve the objectives of programmes/projects.	The approach tries to ensure the increased role of people in rural development initiatives.
The stress is on achieving the objective and not so much on the act of participation itself.	The focus is on improving the ability of the people to participate rather than just in achieving the predetermined objectives of the project
It is more common in government programmes, where the main concern is to mobilize the community and involve them in improving of the delivery system.	This view finds relatively less favor with the government agencies. Rural development agencies in principle agree with this viewpoint
Participation is generally short term	Viewed as a long term process
Appears to be a passive form of participation	Relatively more active and long term
Source: Adapted from Kumar, 1984	

Figure.1 Community Deprivation Trap



Source: Adapted from Chambers, 1986

Table.2 Levels of Participation

Level	Characteristics of each type
1.Passive participation	People participate by being told what is going to happen or has already happened. It is a unilateral announcement by leaders or project management without listening to people's responses or even asking their opinion.
2.Participation in Information living	People participate by answering questions posed by extractive researchers using questionnaire surveys or similar approaches. People do not have opportunity to influence proceedings, as the findings of the research are neither shared nor checked for accuracy.
3.Participation by Consultation	People participate by being consulted, and external people listen to views. These external professionals define both problems and solutions, and may modify these in light of people's responses. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
4.Participation for Material Incentives	People participate by providing resources, for example labor, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging activities when the incentives end.
5.Functional Participation	People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project, which can involve the development or promotion of externally initiated social organization. Such involvement does not tend to occur at the early stages of project cycles or planning, but rather after major decisions have been made. These institutions tend to be dependent on external initiators and facilitators, but may become self-dependent.
6.Interactive Participation	People participate in joint analysis, which leads to action plans and the formation of new local institutions or the strengthening of existing ones. It tends to involve interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systematic and structured learning processes. These groups take control over local decisions, and so people have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
7.Self-Mobilization	People participate by taking initiatives independent of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Such self-initiated mobilization and collective action may or may challenge existing inequitable distributions of wealth and power.

Source: Adapted from Pretty (1995) and Kumar (2002).

people's agreements and support, but they also fear that this wider involvement is less controllable, less precise and so likely to slow down planning and implementation process. Ashley and Winstanley (1995) argues that, participation is usually asserted, not demonstrated, as few rural development organizations have time to examine the indicators or follow the process of how participation happens, and what its effects are on participants and in the wider society. The major question in many development programmes and projects as Arnstein, (1969) postulates is therefore not whether to increase participation but how to achieve effective participation.

Community Participation as Means or as End

One of the common distinctions made by rural development practitioners is that of 'community participation as a means and community participation as an end (Skinner, 1995). Participation as means implies the use of participation to achieve some pre-determined goals. It is a way of harnessing rural people's physical, economic and social resources to achieve the aims and objectives of development programmes and projects more efficiently, effectively or cheaply (Burns and Taylor, 2000).

Community participation as an end is viewed as an active, dynamic and genuine process which unfolds over time and whose purpose is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of rural people to intervene more directly in development initiatives (Skelcher, 1993). As an end, participation is seen as the empowerment of individuals and communities in terms of acquiring skills, knowledge and experience, leading to greater self-reliance. The proponents of this view often maintain that development

for the benefit of the poor cannot occur unless the poor themselves control the process. It is argued that by establishing a process of genuine participation, rural development will occur as a direct result (Burton, 2003). Table 1 provides a comparative analysis which summarizes the differences between these two concepts.

The distinctions between these concepts are neither clear-cut nor mutually exclusive. They represent different purposes and approaches to promoting participatory development. While many development agencies give equal weight to both, some emphasize on one or the other. Hillery (1955) for example, observes that until recently the notion of 'participation as means' dominated rural development practice. Although he concedes that some economic rural development was achieved as a result of this strategy, he also argues that, only a few rural development projects achieved meaningful community participation and benefits by this means. In his view, this strategy has not resulted in meaningful participation of the poor. Arnstein (1969) believes that the extent of empowerment is more limited in 'participation as means' than it is in 'participation as an end'. Rural development projects have been driven by broader economic goals, whereas fulfilling basic community needs has received less priority, commonly assuming that economic growth will trickle down to the most marginal elements of community and space. However, lack of community participation has often resulted in community poverty deprivation trap which exacerbate underdevelopment. Figure 1 below shows deprivation trap.

Rural development projects which are far from empowering people, supplying their basic needs and raising their living

standards have produced greater inequality, poverty and unemployment. It is essential therefore that rural development projects and strategies should be built upon indigenous knowledge systems and participation of the local people in problem identification, implementation and monitoring and evaluation.

Community Participation as Contribution or as Empowerment

Drawing lessons on Brownill and Darke (1998), perspectives on community participation in rural development projects may also be captured by juxtaposing two notions, participation as contribution and as empowerment. Participation as contribution may be enlisted primarily in the implementation of programmes and projects or in the operation and maintenance of created facilities. The contribution may be entirely voluntary, induced to various extents or even enforced. It may be provided in the form of ideas, judgments, money, materials, or unpaid or lowly paid labor (Patel, 1998). Indeed, this idea may also be seen as participation as means to get things done.

According to Mc Arthur (1996), participation is an empowering process in which people, in partnership with each other and those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilize resources, and assume responsibility to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon. As a process of empowerment, participation is concerned with development of skills and abilities to enable the rural people to manage rural development process and have a say in or negotiate with existing rural development systems. As Atkinson and Cope (1997) argues, powerlessness is a central element

of poverty, and any focus on poverty, inequality, injustice, or exclusion involves analysis of and/or challenging/changing power relations. Community participation as empowerment can therefore help to amplify unacknowledged voices by enabling the rural people to decide upon and take the actions which they believe are essential to rural development. Small informal groups consisting of members from similar socio-economic backgrounds are better vehicles for participation in decision making and collective learning than heterogeneous, large scale and more formal organizations (Burns, 1994).

Levels of Community Participation

Rural development agencies distinguish different dimensions, spaces, degrees and levels of community participation. The levels of community participation, which positions participation on a seven step ladder are useful in analyzing these degrees (Arnstein, 1969). The first four levels (passive participation; participation on information giving; participation by consultations and participation by material incentives) on the ladder can be interpreted as community participation as means' while the last three levels (functional participation; interactive participation and self mobilization) fall under participation as an end'. Burton (2003) suggests that the manipulation which is often central to types one to four implies that they should be seen as types of non participation (Atkinson and Cope, 1997).

Macfarlane (1993) conceptualizes these levels in terms of 'weak and strong participation'. According to his views, weak participation involves "informing and consulting" while strong participation means "partnership and control". They argue that, in practice agencies managing

complex projects find it hard to move from the 'weak end' of the continuum and tend to assume that, intended beneficiaries will be consulted during the project design to take into account their felt needs and aspirations. Skinner (1995) cautions that, information giving and consultation are often presented as participation leading to disillusionment among community interests.

Nevertheless, the problem with levels of participation is that they imply coherence, when most rural development organizations operate simultaneously in a wide range of participatory modes (Civil Renewal Unit, 2003). One level on the continuum is not necessarily better than any other as different levels are appropriate at different times and contexts to meet the expectations and interests of different stakeholders. Skinner (1995) cites an analysis of a Danish funded rural water and sanitation project in Uganda, where he observes that participation had ranged from non-participation and manipulation over information and consultation to some degree of partnership and delegation of power. In another study in Kenya, Arnstein (1969) concluded that, the level of community participation was limited to being informed what had already been decided by other key players which implied passive participation by consultation.

From the discussion above, it is clear that there is a myriad of aspects of participation. This means that great care must be taken when using and interpreting the term. It should always be qualified by reference to the type of participation. In addition, observers seem to agree that the application of participatory approaches further calls for an appreciation of the social dynamics and diversities such as gender, age, social

status, ethnicity, disability and power amongst others (MacArthur, 1996).

Materials and Methods

The data used in this study were obtained through both qualitative and quantitative research designs. The research was conducted between August and October 2011 in Buhera District. Field research involved interviewing participants and members of community projects involved using a structured questionnaire. An exploratory survey was conducted to determine the research variables involved in the research. A multi-stage random sampling was used to pick eight locations required as research focus areas. This was immediately followed by identifying and listing the names of all community projects whose nature demanded the local people's participation (either physically or materially) in the locations identified. By focusing only on those projects that solicited community participation and were established with a view of improving the local people's welfare regardless of their project type, a shortlist in all eight areas was drawn up. The involvement and participation of local people was measured by their role in the projects starting with participation on project identification, planning process, implementation and monitoring and evaluation. A simple random sampling technique was then used to determine eight sample projects for study out of a total of 23 which met the criteria mentioned above, due to constraints of time and personnel.

The sampling frame was based on a set of 25 lists, with a total of 3 208 possible respondents in the district. From the lists made 254 respondents who were members of the respective projects were randomly picked for the study, with chairperson or

leader of the project being purposefully picked to act as key informant. The respondents also comprised 25 members who were drawn from non – governmental organizations and government officials. The data set comprised a collection of information on projects, the current level of participation, and the respondent's labor input and the output, among other relevant issues including respondent's background. Statements for the level of participation were tested for their validity using the Cronbach's Alpha.

Result and Discussion

Age-Sex

The research gathered information from both sexes but females constituted the majority compared to their male counterparts (67 % as compared to 33%). Their ages ranged from slightly below 30 years to 60 years. This showed the ages of respondents were still economically active and no respondent was in the retirement age or minor. The 31 – 40 years age group was the largest that constituted 29.5% and the 41-45 years age group was the second largest constituting 27%. The 51-60 years age group and 30 years and below constituted 25% and 15.5% respectively. Those whose ages were below 30 years had ages ranging from 26-29 years. Table 1 shows the age-sex profile of respondents.

Academic Qualification of Respondents

Respondents were of varying background. It included those who had no formal education, those with elementary education, to holders of tertiary education. The respondents showed that a number of them had acquired meaningful education, as 86% of them had at least Zimbabwe junior certificate level of education; of this 49%

had at least attained ordinary level. Only a few had no formal education (14%) which shows that the majority of respondents were literate and therefore could read and write. These people can be trained to run projects effectively if the program is planned well. Some of them who had tertiary education could be trained to take positions of responsibility so that they can lead projects in their areas. Outsiders' initiatives should appreciate that communities are better placed to manage projects in their communities and they can cooperate where they realize benefits accruing to them.

Marital Status of Respondents

Respondents were drawn from varied marital status, which ranged from married, widowed, divorced and singles. The majority of them were married (48%) and the singled constituted a significant percentage (27%), of which males were the majority (20%). The widowed and divorcees constituted a combined 25% (13% and 12% respectively). Marital status of respondents is another factor which determines participation in rural development initiatives. In most cases levels of participation are relatively low among women who are married. Instead, they are represented by their husbands.

Respondent's Distribution by Actual Involvement and Participation

The research revealed that community garden project recorded the highest number of participants, with participation rate above 50 percent. Land rehabilitation and reclamation recorded the lowest participation rates, which was 18.5 percent. The actual average participation rate was 40.4 percent, 59.8 for the average actual participation rate and the average expected

participation was 139.8. The actual participation ratio of all people in the development activities amounted to only a third of the population residing in Buhera. The study revealed that participation rose in projects such as grain loan schemes and community gardens because these projects directly benefit community members. Projects that benefit the community as a collectivity, that is indirectly, recorded the lowest participation rates. Table 2 below shows respondents' distribution by actual involvement and participation.

Forms of community participation in rural project cycle in buhera

The study revealed that there are different forms of stakeholders' involvement in the project cycle. Because of the varied nature and scope of development activities being undertaken in by government and donor agencies, results show that different stakeholders participate in different ways in different stages of the project cycles.

Community Participation in Problem Identification

Most projects in the study area revealed that, one of the crucial design principles in programmes and projects is that local communities must play a key role in the identification of rural development activities. Community respondents revealed that, people participate in the problem identification mostly through community meetings. These meetings are often organized by chiefs, village leaders and councilors. Whether local communities' voices are heard and taken into consideration depends upon the approach used to facilitate the meetings. Some community respondents noted that, village meetings tend to exclude and marginalize the ideas of other community members

such as HIV/AIDS infected and affected, children, the elderly, people with disabilities and women) who because of some reasons do not attend such meetings. Consequently it seems that top down approaches are being used and that participation as 'contribution' and not 'empowerment' were the outcomes of such meetings.

Community respondents identified other participation avenues available for them in the problem identification stage such as involvement in participatory rural appraisal exercises and baseline surveys either as questionnaire respondents, key informants or focus group discussion participants during project inception or evaluations. Although most respondents acknowledged that they often participate in the identification and prioritization of needs upon which rural development activities are based, some argued that this was a one-off activity at the time of baseline survey or annual budgeting process. From this point of view, the respondents felt that on-going involvement in decision making about activities is currently limited as they do not play a 'key role' in such processes. (Chambers, 1984). This suggests that participation in the problem identification stage ranges from 'passive' to 'participation by consultation.' This limited nature of community involvement in problem identification could also be viewed as 'weak participation' as it does not lead to people's empowerment

Community Participation in the Planning Process

The second phase at which local communities in Buhera are supposed to take a direct and active part is during project planning. Community respondents revealed that communities generally

Table.1 Age-Sex Profile of Respondents

Age Group	Males	Females
Below 30 years	10	21
31-40	16	43
41-45	15	39
51-60	19	31
Total	66	134

Source: Survey, 2012

Table.2 Respondent’s distribution by actual involvement and participation rate in selected rural development projects in Buhera

Name of Project	Expected number of participants	Actual number of participants	Participation Rate
Community gardens	144	100	69.4
Water conservation	200	71	35.5
Land rehabilitation and reclamation	130	50	38.4
Piggery projects	125	51	40.8
Poultry	130	42	32.3
Bee keeping	70	13	18.5
Grain loan scheme	180	92	48.4
Average participation	139.8	59.8	40.4

Source: Survey, 2012

Table.3 Issues perceived as promoting stakeholders’ participation

Factors	Respondents
Government and Donor agencies’ long term commitment to working with communities in the rural areas.	Donor agencies staff, Community members
Most donor agencies staff has knowledge and skills on participatory approaches.	Donor agencies staff, Community members
Community perception that rural development interventions address their needs.	Local government staff, Donor agencies staff
Appreciated benefits from project undertakings are shared within the community	Community members, Donor agencies staff
Direct benefits accrued from such rural development interventions	Community members
Support from community and local government leaders	Local government staff, Donor agencies staff
The community see the changes taking place as a result of rural development initiatives being implemented	Local government staff, Donor agencies staff, Community members

Source: Survey, 2012

Table.4 Factors Hindering Community Participation

Factors Hindering Community Participation	Respondents
Poor community leadership in some villages that does not give feedback to community members	Government staff, Donor agencies staff, Community members
Lack of transparency and accountability among community leaders especially on funds contributed for rural development projects.	Government staff, Donor agencies staff, Community members
Poor road and transportation infrastructures in Buhera limiting community movement to and from the district offices	Donor agencies staff, Community members
Strict and non flexible donor agencies policies especially on budgeting and funding procedures	Community members
Ignorance or lack of information	Government staff, Donor agencies staff
Frequent and prolonged droughts in the area causing household food insecurity.	Government staff, Donor agencies staff, Community members
High levels of poverty for most community members	Government staff, Donor agencies staff, Community members

Source: Survey, 2012

consider project planning and decision making to be the responsibility of the village councils, ward development committees (WDCs), representatives of donor agencies and government staff. Thus, most community members seek no direct or active involvement for themselves at this stage. The chairman of Buhera Rural District Committee, for example commented that: “community members are represented in the district planning committee by two representatives (male and female) from each village. It is this committee that makes decisions on their behalf and gives feedback to villagers on all decisions reached in the committee”. Respondents revealed that community members have no capacity to hold representatives accountable of their actions as long as they have the support of the donor agencies and district committee. Similar responses were also obtained from

staff respondents who conceded that participation in planning and decision making is mainly through district planning committee meetings.

Therefore, that participation in the planning and decision making processes in Buhera could be described as ‘representational participation’ through the district committees and community leaders. The study noted that much of what is considered participatory in development projects and agencies is a process whereby large numbers of people are represented by a relatively small group of participants, who sometimes misrepresent the interests of poor and vulnerable groups. Participants revealed that, electoral representation offers a particularly limited form of participation, as representational systems and procedures often exclude the vulnerable groups and therefore lacks the substance of a broader

set of participatory engagements. While Hart (1997) supports this view, he also cautions that, although local representation may be set up, the real power often remains in the hands of the outsiders such as government and donor agencies staff. Feedback mechanisms from the district committees to communities and vice versa also present another problem. Some project activities approved for implementation reflected the interests and priorities of the minority community leaders and not the entire local communities they represent.

Community Participation in Project Implementation

The study revealed that this is perhaps the part of the project cycles that majority of community members participate. Community participation in project implementation was said to be through provision of unskilled labor during various construction works, land reclamation, contribution of cash to pay local masons, participation in various training programmes, and actual implementation of programme activities as recipients of government and donor assistance. The district committee focus group participants in the study area, for example, explained that a recent programme audit established that total community contribution (labor, materials and cash) was estimated at 35% of the annual budget spent on construction activities, rehabilitation and maintenance work. This gives an impression that participation at this stage is mainly used as 'a means' to achieve project goals effectively and economically; which in the view of Burns (1994), such kind of participation is a prototype of 'participation as contribution'. In some cases, this form of participation has exhibited some traits of 'coercion' as community leaders impose some sanctions and penalties to community members who do not contribute voluntarily.

Some aspects of what Hillery (1955) calls 'functional participation' can also be seen at this stage especially where project implementation has involved formation of small interest groups such as women income generation groups. Women respondents explained that programmes have helped to mobilize them to form small self-run groups of 5 - 10 members and through these groups they have been trained on various issues. This response gives an impression that participation in small groups is more effective as all members have equal opportunities to play a direct, active and influential role in the group processes. Despite the fact that most projects are at an infant stage implementation, Buhera Rural District staff have started sensitizing and mobilizing formation of small groups as was revealed by women respondents some of whom identified themselves as members of vegetables community gardens. These initiatives provide some examples where participation can be seen as 'an end' or as an 'empowering processes, or even evolving to higher levels on the participation ladder like 'interactive participation' and 'self mobilization'. Stewart and Taylor (1995) argue that, participation of the poor in small groups lead to their empowerment. Through their groups and organizations they obtain not only access to resources, but also decision making and bargaining power as well as base for sustained self development efforts.

Community Participation in Monitoring and Evaluation

Government, donor agencies and community respondents explained that monitoring of project activities is mainly done by project staff, community leaders and rural district committees who report back to the local communities and the

central government. As is the case with baseline surveys, local communities participate mainly as respondents in providing information during monitoring and evaluation processes. This is another stage in the project cycles where participation of community members can generally be seen to be limited to the lower rungs of the participation ladder amounting to passive participation, information giving or consultation as local communities do not play an active role in these stages. This implies that the current monitoring and evaluation set up in Buhera does not give enough space for local communities to play an active role in these stages.

Factors promoting community participation in buhera

Information obtained from the interviewed community members revealed that government and non - governmental organizations' long term commitment to working with the poor and respect for people is one of the key factors promoting participation of various community groups in Buhera District. Respondents commended government and donor agencies and their staff for their commitment to ensuring that communities are empowered to manage their own development process. Because of the organizational set up that requires donor agencies and government offices to be based in the villages where they operate, it was argued that, this community 'rootedness' provides opportunities for staff to live within the beneficiary communities which allows for meaningful and on - going rapport building, consultations and interactions with local communities. Government and non – governmental organization presence at the grassroots, close to the poorest of poor is important in promoting participation (Chambers, 1984)

The study revealed that consequential participatory development process requires development facilitators or change agents to “go to the people, live with them, learn from them, work with them, start with what they know, and build on what they know”. Continuous community sensitization, mobilization and general awareness creation initiatives done by government and non – governmental organizations staff in collaboration with community leaders on various development issues were also said to have helped in motivating and increasing the level of community involvement in rural development. In addition, most donor agencies staff have working knowledge and experience in using some participatory approaches, facilitation skills and community mobilization, which puts them in a better position to promote and facilitate participatory processes. The research further revealed that community members participate effectively when they perceive that interventions being undertaken by the government and donor agencies address their immediate strategic needs as identified in community consultation processes. Despite the hard work involved, women respondents for instance, were grateful that their participation in construction of boreholes in their villages has helped bring closer water as they now do not walk long distances to get it. Similarly, they were proud of their involvement in construction of school classrooms commenting that they are happy to see their children studying in good school environments. Thus, more community members are now coming up to seek advice and guidance on how they can organize themselves into small self-run groups having learnt from others who have been successful in the already established groups.

Factors hindering community participation in rural development initiatives

A number of issues limiting active participation of community members in rural development initiatives were also identified. A major obstacle to people's participation in Buhera according to the views of many respondents is poverty. Most community respondents were concerned that their involvement in rural development interventions entails some costs in terms of their time, labor and resources. Because of high levels of poverty among community members, most they fail to participate in rural development initiatives especially when such involvement requires cash contributions. Thus the research noted that construction activities for example, delayed to be accomplished because mobilization of community resources which were required as part of their contribution in such structures took long time.

The research further revealed that at times village leaders have to institute penalties to community members who fail to meet their obligations. Despite these challenges, project staffs were of the opinion that most community members are now generally aware of their roles in their own development process, and felt that their involvement in such activities will help communities to own and sustain these projects after government and donor communities phase out.

Furthermore, another constraint to community participation in rural development initiatives was said to be the contradicting approaches used by different rural development agencies working in Buhera District. Respondents explained that while most government and donor agencies do not pay community members for attending meetings, workshops or

provision of unskilled labor, some rural development agencies provide some incentives such as food for work or money to community members for their involvement in rural development activities. This contradiction in policies in turn creates confusion and tensions among community members as others feel being exploited in participating in rural development projects without such incentives.

Donor agencies and government policies were also mentioned as another factor that may be contributing to low community participation in the study area. Respondents raised issues of financial and budgeting procedures which were said to be strict and not flexible to accommodate community proposals. Community representatives in ward committees explained that although they are supposed to be the main decision making structures at the ward level, some decisions are often done for them by district committees and they are just informed in meetings. According to the views of some ward committee members, their presence in the district planning consultative processes does not represent effective participation but more of information dissemination procedures by Buhera District Council.).

The study revealed that lack of resources is limiting community participation in rural development initiatives. In order for rural communities to play an active role in rural development initiatives, it is necessary for their members to have access to resources. These resources include adequate funding, government training programs, education, leaders, and volunteers to support rural causes and initiatives. Buhera community lacks one or more of these resources, a situation which interferes with their ability to effectively impact on rural development

process. Having inadequate resources negatively impacts the community's ability to effectively influence the direction of rural development process. Furthermore, lack of access to financial resources necessary to address problems and concerns of rural communities' leads to organizations relying on volunteers to carry challenges and barriers to community participation in rural development initiatives.

Respondents indicated that they feel there is lack of access to information about government and non – governmental organization programs and services. Most respondents revealed that information that is available on rural development programs and services is difficult to obtain and interpret. There is a desire to learn about and access information about government programs and services that is understandable, concise and timely. Another information challenge is the fact that little research has been conducted in Buhera District concerning rural communities and rural development process.

The study also noted that the relationship between communities in Buhera and government is strained by the community perception that governments do not understand rural issues and impose policies and programs that negatively affect rural development. Even worse, there is sometimes not even agreement among key policy makers in government that circumstances in rural communities are problematic and deserving of government action (Arnstein, 1969). Government is also seen as sometimes downloading responsibilities on rural communities without providing the necessary resources (e.g., financial support, educational

programs) for communities to assume these responsibilities. Furthermore, rural community members get frustrated and discouraged by rejections of rural development proposals by government and ever-changing program criteria.

Recommendations for overcoming challenges and barriers to rural development in buhera

Some rural development projects in Buhera have stalled because of poor co-ordination, poor management, a diminishing teamwork spirit and a decline in commitment to community projects and activities. If the declining rural economy is to be revived, all officials at all levels must begin by informing the rural population of what is happening and by guiding them towards full participation in projects meant for their own welfare. Such policies may be diffused successful by the managers of rural development (namely, ward action committees, and the district development committee). This should go beyond the rural household to grassroots levels. In order to guarantee sustainability and motivate the rural people, local government authority and planners need to devise ways of invoking more participation and ensuring that that participation is sustained and continues to rise.

Training and capacity building programmes are needed in Buhera, in which facilitators who are identified and trained by the Department of Rural development and Mechanization can interact with and exchange ideas with local communities and, at the same time, instill new ideas. The training should be broad and touch on all areas relating to rural development, not narrowly on project identification and implementation. Once rural communities have been sensitized and encouraged to

take the initiative in this direction, external support could be sought for more capacity building. The low-to-average project productivity in Buhera is due to poor community involvement and participation in project conception, implementation and operation. Policymakers and planners need to ensure that people in this community are not only involved in the development process, but are also encouraged by development committees at divisional and location level (community-based development agencies) to alter their current conceptualization of participation which inhibits rural development.

Government and rural development agencies face barriers and challenges in promoting participation of local communities in rural development projects. Successful rural development requires reducing these barriers to participation in rural development initiatives and addressing the challenges. Government, communities and donor agencies have recognized the need for creating ways to facilitate community participation in rural development initiatives and have taken initial steps toward removing obstacles that hinder community participation. It is imperative that rural government and other rural development agencies should appreciate that rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor. Without achieving this fundamental goal it will be difficult to attain sustainable rural development.

The research noted that, communities in Buhera often feel frustrated when trying to have their policy and voice concerns heard by government and other rural development agencies. This frustration may be due in part to a structure that seems to limit

opportunities for community members to communicate with government and nongovernmental organizations. Changing this structure requires the development of mechanisms that provides both communities with a voice and rural development agencies with a means to hear community concerns. One way communities can speak with a louder voice is through the use of network type organizations that have as their mandate mechanisms to provide a forum to encourage dialogue, share information, and create strategies and actions that promote rural development in Buhera. Furthermore, horizontal initiatives can be used to provide a means to link rural communities and create partnerships with government departments, organizations, and agencies. Horizontal initiatives need to be developed keeping in mind the needs, concerns, and resources of the specific communities involved.

Rural development is a complex process with many challenges and barriers faced by non – governmental organizations, communities and government. Further, there seems to be much overlap between the challenges and barriers faced by communities and those faced by government. This implies that ways to tackle these barriers and challenges may be most successful when communities and government work together in partnership. Recent efforts to reduce the barriers and challenges rural development at the community levels has likely increased non – governmental organizations, and government's understanding of rural community needs as well as increased rural communities' understanding of how they can work effectively donor agencies. The study revealed that lack of capable local organizations, lack of resources, and lack of information are some of the factors

contributing to limited community participation in rural development initiatives.

References

- Arnstein, S. R. 1969. A Ladder of Citizen Participation, *J. American .Plann. Asso.* 35 (4): 216-224
- Atkinson, R., and Cope, S. 1997. 'Community Participation and Urban Regeneration In Britain' In Hoggett, P. (Ed) *Contested Communities*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Brownill, S., and Darke, J. 1998. *Rich Mix! Inclusive Strategies for Urban Regeneration*, Bristol: Policy Press and Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Burns, D.,and Taylor, M. 2000. *Auditing Community Participation – An Assessment Handbook*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Burns, D., 1994. *The Politics of Decentralization*, London: Macmillan.
- Burton, P., 2003. *Community Involvement in Neighborhood Regeneration: Stairway to Heaven or Road to Nowhere?* Bristol: ESRC Centre for Neighborhood Research.
- Civil Renewal Unit, 2003. *Building Civil Renewal*, London: Civil Renewal Unit.
- Hart, C.,1997. 'Do the People Want Power? The Social Responsibilities of Empowering Communities' In Hoggett, P (Ed) *Contested Communities*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Harvey, D., 1989. 'From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: Geografiska Annaler.. 7 (1B): 3-17.
- Hillery, G. A., 1955. *Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement*, *Rural Sociol.* 20: 111-123.
- Macfarlane, R., 1993. *Community Involvement In City Challenge: A Policy Report*, London: NCVO
- McArthur. D., 1996. *Less than Equal? Community Organizations and Estate Regeneration Partnerships*, Bristol: The Policy Press Parry,
- Patel, R.,1998. *Making Difference Matter: Ethnic Minority Cultures And City Vitality*, London: Comedia In Association With Demos.
- Skelcher, C., 1993. *Involvement and Empowerment in Local Services*, *Public. Mon. Manage.* 13(1): 13-20
- Skinner, S., 1995. *Building Community Strengths*, London: Community Development Foundation.
- Stewart, M., and Taylor, M. 1995. *Empowerment and Estate Regeneration*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Stoker, G (1997). *Local Political Participation*. New York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Winstanley, D.,1995. 'When the Pieces Don't Fit: A Stakeholder Power Matrix To Analyze Public Sector Restructuring. *Public. Mon.Manage.* 13 (1): 19-26