

Introspecting Civil Society Organisations and Participatory Rural Appraisal in Development Programming in Zimbabwe. The Case of Care International

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Abstract: Despite the increasing presence of NGOs in development aid, it is quite worry some that the contributions of the intended beneficiaries tend to be neglected. This in turn affects negatively the sustainability of development projects or initiatives that are aimed at meeting community needs. The communities instead of being regarded as active participants they are usually regarded as passive recipients of charity efforts. This study therefore sought to establish the effectiveness of community participation using Participatory Rural Approach in development programming. Qualitative methodology was employed to design, amass and make an analysis of the data. Formative and summative evaluation designs were employed in this study. Key findings from the study were that despite a deep theoretical understanding by the respondents, comprehensive community participation was a necessity that is still far-fetched. It also revealed that participation was mainly hindered by donor bias of NGOs, funding issues and geographical factors. Lack of participation thereof was found to be the main reason behind the failure of projects after funding phase. Considering the findings of this study, it is justifiable to reason that community members holds the expectation that NGO funding and support should be endless. However, considering that NGOs have lifespan outside which the community is envisaged as capable to self-guarantee, this is not an attainable expectation.

Keywords: Community Participation, Development, Empowerment, Sustainable Development.

INTRODUCTION

There are many studies that have researched on the issue of community participation in development and have contributed immensely in providing literature in this regard. Taking for instance the study made by Mago, *et al.*, (2015) in Binga district in Zimbabwe, NGOs approaches were blamed for extending poverty by participants since they were of the view that these projects were entirely being controlled and determined by donors who have some after thoughts. In this study, the officers specified the problem of not engaging with the beneficiaries in most circumstances before project implementation as a contributor to the problem of poverty in Binga. Guzha (in Austin, *et al.*, 2005) postulate that community mobilisation, empowerment and participation are crucial prerequisites in implementing successful community projects. For him, the main challenge is the need to engage the beneficiaries throughout the process in order to ensure sustainability of the project (Austin, *et al.*, 2005).

However, these studies have mainly focused on community participation in general and its importance. Only a relatively handful of studies have specifically examined the approaches that are being used to enhance community participation in development programming. Whether these approaches are proving to be effective in ensuring comprehensive community participation and also their capability to ensure community empowerment remains an open question. The inadequacy of available literature on the effectiveness of Participatory Rural Appraisal

(PRA) as an approach to development programming is regrettable since it is an important requirement to development practitioners. Keeping in sight the present scantiness of the available literature on development programming, more research should be done and also certain actions must be embraced in order to make development inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable.

This study therefore, aimed at assessing the effectiveness of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in development programming, focusing mainly on CARE international. The researcher was keen to find out whether it is because the people don't really understand what community participation and find out the real reasons behind poor community engagement and the effectiveness of PRA as an approach to development programming. It was concealed in this study that the participants have a theoretical understanding of what community participation entails. Although PRA was not being applied holistically, some borrowed PRA tools such as Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) were cited to be useful. The study revealed that comprehensive community participation was still lacking. Establishment of Self Help Groups and income generating activities were cited as the basis for sustainability, however sustainability beyond funding phase were questioned on the basis of operational factors and over reliance on external technical support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Alternative Development Paradigm

More recent thinking on humanitarian engagement and development seem to have pressed the intervention discourse further to consider the issues of building the capacity of people in a bid to alleviate poverty, welfare of people and also development with more community participation. In the 1970s the dissatisfactions with mainstream development crystallized into an alternative, people-centred approach to development geared to the satisfaction of needs, endogenous and self-reliant and in harmony with the environment (Pieterse, 2001). Continued neglect of the poor can

pose a grave threat to orderly development of the society as a whole (Rao, 2007). Alternative Development paradigm presented new perceptions grounded on new conceptions, discourses, and practices that professed a paradigm alteration away from the economic prominence of development. Guided by this paradigm therefore this study ranged from the world order issues to national patterns of development programming in which some normative concepts such as participation, empowerment, self-reliance, basic needs and capacity building were prominent.

Proposed Model for Community Engagement

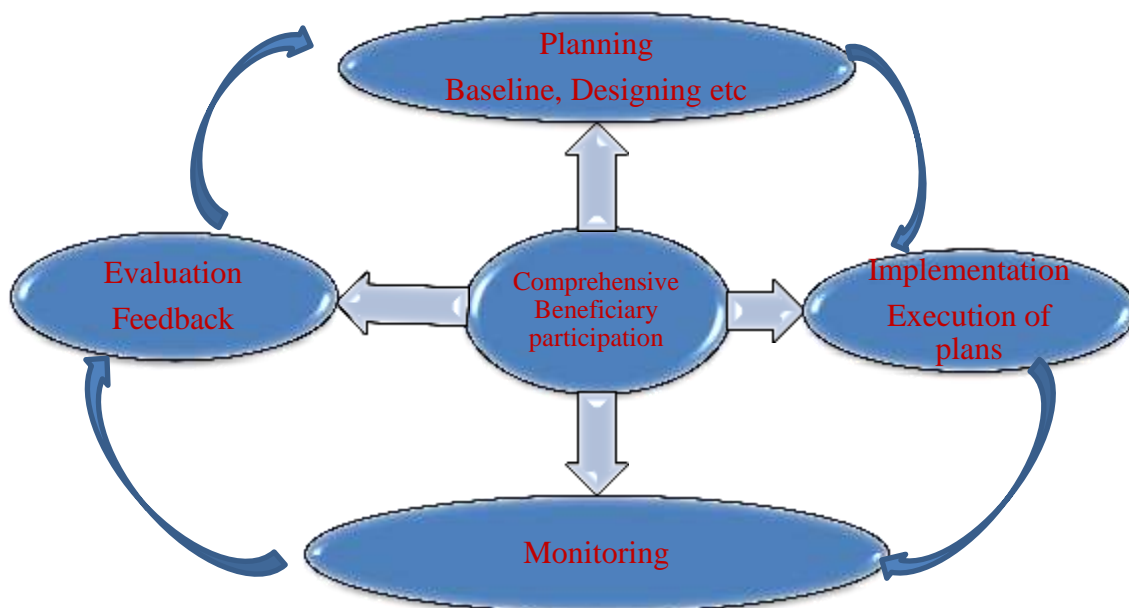


Figure 1: Proposed model for development programming

Planning

This study has proposed the above model for development programming to ensure that the beneficiaries have full control of the project. Development Practitioners should engage the intended beneficiaries and hear from them what they are in need of during the planning phase. Beneficiaries should be the ones who lead the problem identification process and outline how they intend to be helped out of it.

Implementation

During implementation the beneficiaries should take a leading role in all the aspects of that project or program. Owing to their participation in the planning process, they are likely to put their best efforts in the project as they will feel that the project is theirs and it is meant for their own benefit.

Monitoring

On monitoring, since it is an internal process, the beneficiaries should play a critical role. This can be done through the use of traditional monitoring mechanisms. These include self-monitoring. Engaging the intended beneficiaries in the monitoring of the project ensures its effectiveness as they will be able to identify where attention is much needed.

Evaluation

The evaluation process albeit an external process, has to involve the engagement of the beneficiaries. Most importantly feedback should be provided on the progress that has been made in the project. This will help the beneficiaries to be fully aware of what they have successfully accomplished and the loopholes that are supposed to be filled. Usually evaluation reports can serve this purpose.

Participation

There is an anxiety that when the intended recipients do not sense that they have ownership of a development intervention, their subsequent lack of participation may weaken the effectiveness of development aid projects or programmes. According to Hickey, *et al.*, (2004, p.5) participation has a longer and more varied genealogy in development thinking and practice than what is usually acknowledged, and has been periodically regenerated around new schools of thought, institutional agendas and changing political circumstances. The implicit assumption (in both development practice and in much of the academic literature) has been that if communities have ownership of a development activity, they will voluntarily and actively participate in its design and implementation (NORAD, 2013). Swindler and Watkins, (2009, p.5) further emphasized this when they argue that participation will improve the activity's sustainability, particularly beyond the ending of the provision of external financing. It is therefore clear from the above that participation ensures that there is ownership of the project or initiative and this results in sustainability of a development project.

More so, it is equally necessary to ensure participation in development programming so as to understand the situation from the stakeholder's viewpoint. Hawkins, (n.d., p.5) argued that in a participatory development project, stakeholders should be identified and brought in as partners to explore more widely the anticipated development challenge as perceived by different stakeholders. This provides a platform to articulate the relationship model required in the decision-making mechanism to achieve the stated goals (Freeman, *et al.*, 2004). Similarly, Mefalopoulos and Tufte, (2009, p. 24) concurred to this by arguing that the identification of the stakeholders is done early in a project to understand key stakeholder's positions and perceptions about the proposed change. Above all, it is through the involvement of stakeholders that their views are sought and it also allows identification of stakeholders and how they can contribute in addressing the challenges that are identified (Usadolo & Caldwell, 2016, p.3). Taking the above into cognisance, it is prudent for one to note that, participation is a very key component in understanding stakeholder's perceptions.

Empowerment

The two main alternative roots of influence to the empowerment 'philosophy' today appear to be the work of Paolo Freire and the feminist movement

which was developed in the 1960s and became influential in development in Latin America in the 1970s, associated particularly with literacy projects (Luttrell, *et al.*, 2009). SDC, (2004) conceptualises empowerment as an emancipation process in which the disadvantaged are empowered to exercise their rights, obtain access to resources and participate actively in the process of shaping society and making decisions. The subject of empowerment has come to be central to the work of several development organisations. The recent popularity of the concept of empowerment has brought wide concern that the focus has not brought about any fundamental changes in development practice, some critiques go further, suggesting that the use of the term allows organisations to say they are tackling injustice without having to back any political or structural change, or the redistribution of resources (Fiedrich, *et al.*, 2003).

Empowerment also entails building the capacities of the targeted beneficiaries. As Sen, (2000) writes, human competency expansion plays imperative role in bringing about social transformation indeed, the role of human beings even as tools of change can go much beyond economic products on and include social and political development. The human capital has the direct relevance to the well-being and freedom of people; indirect role through influencing social change; and indirect role through influencing economic production (Sen, 2000, p. 293). Moreover, as highlighted by Cornwall and Brock, (2005), many claim that the emphasis on personal and collective struggle has been diluted 'the discordant features fell away as it came to join words like 'social capital' as part of a chain of correspondence that stripped it of any political potency. Many view empowerment as both a process and an outcome, however, other take only an instrumentalist view of empowerment, focusing more narrowly on the importance of process (Luttrell, *et al.*, 2009, p. 5). These discrepancies have obvious operational repercussions. Considering the above, it is therefore important for development agencies to enhance the capacities of the local poor. This will ensure that the beneficiaries actively participate in development programming to help shape the projects that are meant to benefit them.

A review of Development Interventions used by NGOs

Kang, (2011) reviewed NGOs' strengths and limitations in community development. NGOs'

participatory development, bottom-up approach, people-centeredness, capacity building, sustainable development and empowerment were found to have significant strengths (Islam, 2017:480). In another study by Islam, (2014) it was revealed that NGOs have an imperative role in improving development possession among the susceptible communities. That study stated a number of restrictions and challenges including, lack of clearness of local peoples' demands, local appropriate complexities, donor dependency and their tight and time-bounded terms and conditions, NGOs' political attachment and the lack of real involvement in problem assessment and choice making process (Islam, 2014). From the aforementioned studies it is noble to note that it is of utmost importance for NGOs to choose their intervention strategies wisely as this determines their successes and failures.

Moreover, Cooke and Kothari, (2001) argued that, the changing makeup of NGOs have been under criticism from critical theorists that, the role played by NGOs is increasingly that of donor agent. Kaur and Sithou in the article '*Governance of Development Assistance: Issues and Challenges*', advocated for a beneficiary led approach. They went on to argue that the value of beneficiary led approach lies in its ability to force donors to confront a somewhat paternalistic view of development based on experts deciding on behalf of beneficiaries (expert led development) what is 'good for them' and 'what really works' (Kaur & Sithou, 2017, p. 256). However, what they failed to consider in their approach is the issue of capacity building which is a very necessary element for the sustainability of development projects and initiatives. They failed to acknowledge the necessity of the empowerment of beneficiaries of which without this empowerment it is very difficult for them to play a leading role in development programming.

Participatory rural appraisal owes its being to the coming together of a number of research programs, including participatory action research, agroecosystem analysis, applied anthropology, and field research on farming systems (Tapscott & Thompson, 2013). In particular, the current form and use of participatory techniques arose in the 1970s at a time when the expanding aid industry required quick access to socioeconomic data (Steiner & Farmer, 2018, p.123). According to Cooke, (2003), the researchers understood that rapid rural appraisal (RRA) as a strategy was intended to make the best use of limited time for

fieldwork that offered little scope for the rural poor to set the research agenda. However, this appreciation appears to have been at odds with the work of others who sought to devise and promote a field methodology capable of maximizing local participation in development such that proposed projects would better fit the needs of local people and vice versa (Cooperation, 2013).

According to Roka, (2009, p. 957) PRA has been largely embraced by Development Practitioners and Academic Researchers. Robert Chambers' *Rural Development: Putting the Last First*, and Michael Cernea's *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Development* were milestones in underlining the values of participatory approach. Lay-people's participation is assumed to improve research (Chambers, 2015), in a return to positivist epistemology in which indigenous knowledge is constituted (as scientific knowledge normally is) as fact (the legitimate representation of reality). According to Campbell, (2001) the development of participatory methods has been informed primarily by empirical experiences of non-colonised (White) scientists, and their perceptions about how the methods 'worked' to encourage Indigenous lay-people's participation (rather than for example, if and how they worked to decolonise knowledge) (Campbell, 2001). Their accounts elevated PRA as an overriding paradigm in global development.

Adamson, (2010, p. 2) identified main obstacles to the attainment of community empowerment and these includes lack of capacity of local authorities to work in communal sensitive ways, entrenched resistance in relation to community empowerment, insight gap between community participants and statutory service providers in the corporation context. Petriwskyj, *et al.*, (2012) added more obstacles such as lack of understanding and cultural differences in the communities pertaining to the prospects to participate, which was regularly ascribed to the agency's insufficient provision of information. Khalifa, (2011) after studying the planning procedures in some West Bank municipalities, noted some challenges to participation in the programming such as lack of means and efforts, political partisanship, tribalism and community's lack of understanding of the programming process. Pinnington, *et al.*, (2009, p. 458) further highlighted some challenges to participation and these include lack of appropriate funding, diversity in the community and the traditional hierarchical making of decisions. In light of the above, it is clear that participatory

approaches, just like any other approaches may also face challenges. Nevertheless, proper allocation of resources and time for the sustenance of communication channels may be used to counter this.

Donor Aid in the Zimbabwean Context

Many argued that most donor aid allocation was motivated by self-interests especially those from US (Amusa, 2016, p. 8). However, others are of the view that the US donor aid policy is geared towards rewarding developing nations, those that exhibited a good human rights record or those that maintained good governance (Pegg & Moskowitz, 2009). However, in his opinions concerning donor aid, Moyo, (2009) perceives the aim of poverty alleviation as a myth considering unmitigated political and economic conditions in most developing countries. Closely looking at all forms of donor aid provided to poor countries such as Zimbabwe, one is compelled to claim that behind this aid lie harsh conditionality and or strings attached that obscures a disguised plan to benefit the foreign countries just like the IMF and World Bank have done in the past with their aid packages (Gukurume, 2012, p.5). In her book titled '*Dead Aid*', Dambisa Moyo clearly utters what needs to be changed in foreign aid as she was against the claim that development based on aid generates economic growth in developing countries. This therefore implies that the debate on its effectiveness is still unsettled both locally and globally.

The relationship between the majority aid agencies in Zimbabwe and the government has been very capricious, with NGOs being criticized for interfering in local political affairs and being agents of the regime change agenda. This corresponds with Bird and Busse, (2007) who maintained that in Zimbabwe humanitarian aid from the international community is interpreted as politically interested support to the opposition. It has been alleged that ZANU PF has condemned most donor organisations for using their economic weight to champion the regime change in Zimbabwe, therefore their relationship has been characterised by perpetual conflicts and hullabaloo (Gukurume, 2012, p. 13). Moreover, for those agencies that are operational, the problem remains whether this donor aid that is being received in Zimbabwe is able to meet its prospects (Chigora & Dewa, 2009, p. 2). However, taking for instance, the recent catastrophic cyclone Idai, more and more people could have died from the floods had it not been for the foreign humanitarian aid

intervention from several donor agencies and organisations, and this, therefore gives a clear indication that in some cases it has responded well to emergencies.

Community Participation in Zimbabwe

Since the twentieth century efforts to implement participatory approaches has been increasing in a bid to ensure people driven and centred development. From mid-1970s there has been a hastening advancement of participatory methodologies, themes and theories which have been adopted by most development practitioners and NGOs to engage local people in development projects (Chambers, 2008). Not only NGOs have adopted this approach to empower and involve communities in development projects but also governments. However, according to Moyo, (2012) in her study that was carried out in Matabeleland South, the regime has failed to fund most projects and it has created an opening for NGOs to deliver most, if not all services to rural populations. The concept of community participation in development programming influences decisions that affect people's lives and is an avenue for empowering people (Lentfer, 2011). Drawing from this background, it is justifiable for one to argue that NGOs have been perceived as better institutes to expedite development projects and to involve local communities to participate actively in development issues.

Furthermore, various international, regional and local development agencies have been enthusiastically tangled in community development projects or initiatives. Participatory development emanated as a new enterprise from international aid agencies as a means to rejuvenate the approach of development that was top down and non-inclusive of the beneficiary, to a bottom-up and all-inclusive methodology (Munsaka, 2015). With regards to Zimbabwe, the colonial government did not allow participation by the Africans in any development projects or initiatives during the colonial era, thus, decentralization emanated as a means to address historical inequalities of the colonial government that was centralized and top-down (Shembe, 2015, p. 46). The government and NGOs have embraced participatory methodologies to social change and development, much of which lies under the PRA approach (Zimstats, 2013). However, the implementation phase is where participation of the beneficiaries is usually evident in most NGO development projects and in the initial phases

participation of the local people is often downplayed (Dutta, 2011). It is clear therefore from the above that in Zimbabwe, participation is not a new concept in the development discourse however, there are still some questions pertaining to its full practical application.

Taking the above into cognisance, it is clear that the impact of development aid in global society is undisputed, participatory rural appraisal however remains largely underexplored area in both practice and research (Karim & Lacroix, 2017, p.625). Despite it being the buzz approach in coming, there is very few literature so far that has focused on participatory rural appraisal in development aid especially in the context of Zimbabwe. Most of the researches in this field were focusing much on the roles that are being played by NGOs in development efforts. This therefore implies that this field is worthy researching as it provides not only new knowledge on civil society's intervention in development programming but also to create an understanding about the practical community issues. The results of this research will therefore be beneficial to the civil society sector in modifying and strengthening their implementation strategies by reaching the grassroots level since these are the mostly affected population (Aubel, 1999).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Since this study required a thorough understanding on the effectiveness of participatory rural appraisal, qualitative approach was employed. Two types of evaluative design were employed in this study and these are formative and summative. Summative evaluation attempted to answer questions pertaining to how the community is participating in development projects and the degree to which the beneficiaries are empowered by the project. Formative evaluation also concentrated on the process to improve beneficiary participation for sustainable projects. The eventual intention for the interventions by NGOs in rural communities were envisioned in terms of improvements in the community's livelihood circumstances and enhancing the capacity of the community to sustain such change beyond donor support. A pilot study was conducted so as to minimise the likelihood of respondents having problems in answering the questions and data recording problems.

This research was mainly targeting project officers, field officers, intended beneficiaries in the communities and also some indirect beneficiaries

so as to get the perceptions of community people on the organisation's interventions. Due to the size of the population, the researcher narrowed down to ward level (25), then village level (Musadamba) to further narrow down the size of the sample. Purposive sampling method was used to select and interview the key informants with depth knowledge in relation to the study. Moreover, stratified random sampling was employed to collect data from the respondents. In order to build this study constructively both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was obtained through two focus group discussions, ten key informant interviews and five in-depth interviews reaching out to a total of thirty-five (35) participants. The information that was obtained from interview surveys and focus group discussions was in both Shona and English and was then transcribed into English to enhance effective data presentation and analysis. Secondary data sources such as project proposals, reports and work plans were also used especially in building background data.

RESULTS

People's Understanding of Community Participation

Community members had different perceptions on the definition of community participation. Despite the fact that they share different meanings, most definitions that were given by participants revolves around 'contribution', 'consultation' and 'involvement' as the components of participation. As highlighted above, this perception of viewing participation as 'involvement' correspond with Usadolo and Caldwell, (2016) who further emphasised that when the stakeholders are involved, their views are easily sought and also the contributions that they can make address the identified challenges.

Some participants viewed participation as just being part of the project. However, it is important to highlight that being part of a project alone is not enough in community development projects. What matters most therefore is the influence that involvement pose to development programming hence lack of it thereof reduces the effectiveness of the project. With regards to this, however, some of the participants pointed out that they usually commit their time and effort in projects where their opinions are being valued. Wondolleck and Yaffee, (2000) concurs that in poor stakeholder participatory processes, stakeholders may easily conclude that their involvement has no impact

when it becomes clear to them they cannot influence decisions that affect them, because the participatory process resembles a ‘talking shop’ without concrete action (Vedwan, *et al.*, 2008).

The Official’s response on the understanding of community participation in the context of development projects and initiatives were as follows: -

- The engagement of local community members in decision making of projects that are operated in their areas.
- The employment of a bottom-up approach so as to allow the community to play a leading role.
- Allowing the community to take part in all the activities and phases of the projects in their locality.

The encouragement of community centred development and giving the community members a chance to play an active role in projects.

- It was pointed out by participants that community members can participate through different channels and some of them are as follows:
- Participation through sensitization
- Through community structures
- Through execution

It was therefore noted from these responses that the participants have an appreciation of the fact that community participation should be employed at every stage from baseline up to the end of the project. It was also highlighted that the direction of the project should be determined by the beneficiaries themselves. However, it was noted by the researchers that this understanding was not being fully put into practice as the local members had less say in their projects.

Community’s Participation in Identifying and Prioritizing of Projects

Despite the few who indicated that they were consulted, the responses of the majority participants indicated that they were not involved in the identification and prioritization. The general aim of community participation in development programming is to let the people identify their problems, articulating plans and executing decisions over their projects (DFID, 2002). In Musadamba village it was noted that mostly this was not the case as some participants were not given that chance. It was later observed by the researchers that almost all the participants who indicated that they were fully involved were either

Community Facilitators or Community Leaders. It is clear therefore that although sometimes there was participation, not all the targeted beneficiaries were involved, and it was open to only a few. This therefore creates a foundation for project failure. As Phologane, (2014) pointed out, when the targeted beneficiaries are not fully involved in the identification and prioritization of efforts, that project is likely to fail.

However, there were some few participants, who testified that they were involved in the identification of the project. They highlighted that organisation A comes to them without any specific prescribed project in mind. It was indicated by these participants that they are the ones who come up with the ideas and they use the voting system as community members on prioritization so that they come up with one solid area of significance. One such project that they confirmed that it was as a result of their prioritization was the garden project.

Impact of Community Participation on Project Performance

Some few participants indicated that their participation has been invaluable to the projects that they are in. It was also highlighted by some of those participants that their participation in the project made them to get committed as they felt that they are important stakeholders in the project. They also indicated that their participation helped them to create strong relations with people from various backgrounds especially along religious lines under their project. This created a team work spirit which is very important for project success. This goes in line with the argument that, at all levels, community members should be provided with support and should participate to ensure their commitment in the project (Phologane, 2014). Moreover, it was highlighted that the through their participation they are able to air out their needs and interests.

However, the majority of the participants indicated that they were concerned about their contributions not being taken seriously. They pointed out that sometimes they are consulted on issues that have already concluded by the Officers. It was noted from these participants’ response that they believe that they know the community better than what the locals can do in terms of development programming. Hence their contributions are only taken on paper but they won’t be put into practice. As highlighted by Badal, (2016), such involvement only renders haphazard impact to building the local people’s capabilities to respond to their

necessities beyond external support. This therefore implies that project failure or lack of sustainability beyond donor support is grounded on such methods of participation.

The participants mentioned that participatory monitoring and evaluation is important in increasing accountability and community ownership by the beneficiaries. This was used to track if the objectives of the project are being met and whether the project is appropriate in the area. The participants from the community testified that they felt empowered through the use of this strategy as they were supposed to monitor and evaluate their projects rather than waiting for outsiders to come and monitor for them. The participants also outlined that they allow the beneficiaries to design project indicators on their own so that they can be able to monitor and evaluate their projects. Some of the indicators mentioned were improved nutrition, number of children assisted with educational support, reduced mortality rate due to HIV and AIDS related illness.

Decision Making in the Projects

As highlighted above, Kauri and Sithou, (2017) argue that the value of beneficiary led approach lies in its ability to force donors to confront a somewhat paternalistic view of development based on experts deciding on behalf of beneficiaries (expert led development) what is 'good for them' and 'what really works'. It was noted that in some projects the beneficiaries are the ones who makes decisions around development ventures. The participants indicated that local church and community leaders are met during dialogues and group discussions in different parts of the community. Through these meetings, feedback is obtained on deep rooted traditions that compel families to practise early marriage despite its psychological and physiological consequences, wife battering, drug and alcohol abuse as well as child neglect. Marriage enrichment and youth life skills seminars were used to address such social and cultural ills. It was learnt by the researcher however that despite these responses from participants, they were not so concerned about decision making in the projects. This was partly due to economic hardships that are being faced in Zimbabwe as it was noted that they felt privileged by just being enrolled in the project.

It was however noted from the interviewees' responses that the Project Officers are the ones who makes decisions for the beneficiaries at project level in some of the projects. Then at

community level, the Community Facilitators were pointed out to be the ones who makes decisions in consultation with the local leadership whenever necessary. This therefore entails a top-down approach where the beneficiaries are considered as mere recipients of aid. As pointed out in this study, Participatory development emanated as a new enterprise from international aid agencies as a means to rejuvenate the approach of development that was top down and non-inclusive of the beneficiary, to a bottom-up and all-inclusive methodology (Munsaka, 2015). In this case therefore participatory development was not being followed religiously. Incapacitation was cited as the main challenge that hinders complete engagement of the community members throughout. It was highlighted that this was usually caused by the late disbursement of funds by the donors of funding partners.

Assessment of Community Empowerment

Maphunye, Theron and Davids, (2005, 24), defined development as a process of empowerment which enables the participants to take on greater control and responsibility over their lives not only at individual level but also at community level. It was revealed by most of the participants that they feel that CARE International has empowered them especially under the Community empowerment project. The participants testified that through the Community empowerment project their financial capacity has been growing. Rather than relying on one source of income, they highlighted that they are now involved in several income generating projects not only at project level but also at individual level. Some of these projects include livestock rearing, cross border trading and also the garden project itself. They testified that they have acquired the skills to run these projects from CARE International staff through trainings and workshops.

Through the community empowerment project, it was highlighted that gender equality was instilled in the beneficiaries. The participants pointed out that during meetings, the beneficiaries would sit in circles to show equality. It was used as a way to address undesirable gender norms. Also through this approach, each and every participant has an equal chance to participate in the discussion. In order to strengthen their leadership capacity, everyone had an opportunity to chair as it rotates from one person to the next. Moreover, it was raised that their discussions during these meetings usually revolves around gender, livelihoods and

rights. This has therefore empowered them to know and claim their rights.

Problems Linked to Community Participation

Among the challenges to participation that were pointed out by the participants was the issue of distance. They highlighted that sometimes they were not able to attend meetings due to long distances from the site. This was noted to be found at different stages from initiation up to the end of the funding phase. It will then be so difficult for them to participate effectively without actually knowing what the project is all about. Against this background the project is likely to face several drawbacks.

It was highlighted by some participants that sometimes the project staff members make decisions on their behalf without any consultation. This therefore makes it difficult for them to participate and implement the project since they were not involved in the planning process. It will then take time for them to catch up and embrace all the aspects of the project. In relation to this again the participants raised the fact that some staff members do not respect their cultural values and norms through their dressing and the way they talk to us during workshops, so they end up losing their commitment.

The respondents from the officials' side pointed out that it is very expensive to engage the community members in the whole process of development programming. It was highlighted that participation requires a lot of resources that are dedicated for the project. According to Dube, (2004) most of the projects or initiatives tend to operate in remoteness due to the lack of resources and networking. More so, due to incapacitation or lack of funds they are then forced to do some of the things and make decisions from the office without going to the communities. They mentioned that this is sometimes caused by late disbursement of funds from their donors. However, this poses some challenges to the project as there is lack of appraisal to the community members hence less commitment

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study concealed that the participants have a theoretical understanding of what community participation entails however, comprehensive community participation is a reality that is still far-fetched. This is confirmed by how they defined community participation and how they believe that it is an important component

in developing programming. Their participation is mainly limited to execution and it was overlooked especially in problem identification and prioritization. As can be noted from the findings, although PRA was not being applied holistically, it is clear that some borrowed PRA tools such as PME were proving to be useful. The study also revealed that community members only had the capacity to make decisions at community level and the projects are controlled by the Officers at project level. Establishment of Self Help Groups and income generating activities can be seen as a sign of empowerment. These were cited as the basis for sustainability, however sustainability beyond funding phase were questioned due to over reliance on external assistance.

It is from this background therefore that the sense of empowerment of the community remains a necessity that is far-fetched in development. According to Nunan, (2006), community empowerment can be resolutely established as an important means to enable side-lined groups to claim rights for the control of the projects through existing associations. However, in this case the rural people indicated that they were neglected. It implies therefore that they were just being considered as mere recipients of aid as they could not make any valuable contribution in shaping the project that is meant to benefit them. What can also be noted from the findings is the fact that they rely solely on CARE International for technical support, this therefore may lead to the end of the project after its withdrawal. Inadequate funding was found to be one of the challenges to participation. Taking all these into cognisance therefore it is justifiable to attribute project sustainability issues to lack of comprehensive participation.

One explanation for poor community participation is that NGOs are often more biased towards their funders than they are to targeted communities. From the study made by Mago, *et al.*, (2015, p. 67) it was highlighted that whenever NGOs get funding the donor specifies what the NGO should do with the funding. Cooke and Kothari, (2001) has also argued that the changing makeup of NGOs has some criticism from critical theorists that the role played by NGOs is increasingly that of donor agent. This implies therefore that NGOs are now focusing mainly on vertical accountability at the expense of horizontal accountability. Another explanation is that some participants were not able to attend some activities due to distance barriers. Hawkins, (2017) argues that, it is

important to identify and bring stakeholders as partners so as to discover more broadly the projected development task as professed by different stakeholders. In this regard therefore, it will then be so difficult for them to participate effectively without being part of all project activities.

The study was limited by inadequate funding since it was self-funded and this has led the researcher to conduct two Focus group discussions instead of three as planned. However, sufficient data was obtained from those two. Also some of the Senior Officials had very busy schedules so they kept on postponing the appointments, however the researchers were very patient hence they waited to hear from them. In light of the above, it was recommended by the researchers that there is need to meet or interact with beneficiaries more frequently for reviewing of the implemented strategy and ultimately the actual output versus the set objectives. The beneficiaries should be recognised as the primary stakeholders in projects and should shape the direction of the projects that are meant to benefit them. In this regard therefore, community members should be engaged from the identification and prioritization of the project up to the end of the project. Furthermore, downward accountability should be ensured in order to promote full commitment in the projects by the community members.

CONCLUSION

After all being said and done, great strides towards community participation have been made by CARE International in Musademba village. The Officials had a deeper understanding of community participation and they are aware of its importance. However, in practical terms all-inclusive community participation remains a necessity that is far-fetched. Moreover, although many efforts have been made towards community empowerment, the community still relies heavily on external technical support. This therefore compromises the sustainability of their projects beyond donor funding phase. This corresponds with the findings of Moyo and Mafuso, (2017, p. 181) where they argue that development aid causes a dependency syndrome as it prompts a lazy mentality and beliefs across societies spanning from governments to villagers. The community members hold the expectation that NGO funding and support should be endless to guarantee continuous provision for their needs. However, considering that NGOs have lifespan outside

which the community is envisaged as capable to self-guarantee, this is not an attainable expectation hence a dilemma. It is clear from the above that plans organized by external experts, regardless of their technical soundness, cannot motivate individuals to participate in their enactment hence compromising the sustainability of the protect.

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