

Local Participation in Community-Based Development Projects in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The study critically analyses how the local people in Ga West municipality perceive local participation and socio-cultural factors that influence local participation. The study used the mixed method design. The lottery method of the simple random sampling technique coupled with Neuman and Neuman's recommendation on random convenience sampling were used to sample and collect data from 187 respondents. The study revealed that local participation provides the local people employment avenues. It was revealed that developmental projects brought to their communities do not allow the local people to be involved at the planning and implementation phases. The study further revealed that women were of the opinion that projects brought to them were not feminine enough and did not build their capacity. Education, social cohesion, peace, and stability were among some of the sociocultural factors that influence participation. The study again recommended that every community member should participate, regardless of their gender, ethnic group, or socio-cultural differences.

KEYWORDS

Community, Community-Based Development Projects, Local Participation, Stakeholder

INTRODUCTION

Local participation is not only believed to be the “panacea” to ensuring improvement, especially in the context of poverty alleviation (Boakye-Agyei, 2009) but also justified as a prerequisite to, and a catalyst for sustainable socio-economic development and general societal well-being (Work, 2002). A number of authors have categorized participation in development projects into typologies with lower and higher levels (Chambers, 2005; Ahwoi, 2007; Ayee, 2000a; Ayoade, 2000). In lower levels of participation, the local people contribute labour, time, and resources, whereas decisions are controlled by the development organization. In contrast, higher levels of participation have the local people taking command of the project, undertaking their own analysis and making key decisions. Chambers (2005) analysed that, scholars have different opinions regarding higher and lower levels of participation, while some think higher level give more power to local people, others have the opinion that participating in lower levels may also be an empowering process.

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Local participation, particularly by the poor and marginalized, in development initiatives intended to benefit them have been acknowledged as important in achieving sustainable development (Blackburn & Holland, 2007; Dadzie, 2000; Korkor, 2014). The assumption is that the local people themselves better understand their economic and social milieu and probably have insights that can help shape initiatives intended to benefit them. Ideally, a good local participation program will enable those who are interested in or affected by a decision to have an opportunity to influence the outcome. However, Chambers (2005) points out that rural or community development projects have had a high failure rate because most program officers are external experts and outsiders, who are neither poor nor rural, and thus do not have a true understanding of the issues at stake. Community members must therefore be recognized to foster participation for development.

In Ghana for instance, many government projects that have been successfully delivered have suffered a backlash because of the lack of involvement of local people and neglect of the cultural, historical and social perspectives of the local people. Some typical examples of Government project that has suffered this fate are the Ayensu Starch Factory and the Komenda Tomatoes Factory in the Central Region (Boateng, 2012). To Boateng, this as a major concern, has led many stakeholders, particularly benefactors, to consider better ways of devising structures and/or measures that will ensure a social content as well as promote a social context within which participation in all community-based development projects can be enhanced.

Over the years, most studies conducted on the subject matter have largely focused on conceptualizing theories associated with local participation in community development (Boakye-Adjei, 2009; Amon, 2014; Fundi, 2005) with seldom any recourse to the dynamics and complexities of environmental context of participation (IJHSS, 2016). The problem, therefore, is “What socio-cultural factors influence community’s participation in community development projects?” This study takes the discussion to the local people in Ga West Municipality and presents an argument that substantiates a socially constructed position on local participation in development interventions.

The study critically analyses the Ga West communities’ perception about local participation and examines the socio-cultural factors that influence local participation in these communities.

The study seeks to:

1. Analyse how local people in the Ga West Municipality perceive local participation.
2. Identify and examine the socio-cultural factors that influence community participation.

Concept of Participation

The term participation is generally operationalized differently depending on the context and field in which it is studied which makes it uneasy to be conceptualized (Samad, 2002). In ancient Greece, participation was viewed as a matter of voting, holding offices, attending public meetings, paying taxes and defending the state (Pateman, 1999). But in modern times, participation became synonymous with “sharing” (Kaler, 1999). Oakley and Marsden (1984), and Wolfe (1994) put forward that participation is closely linked with the concept of empowerment. Without empowerment, participation may be meaningless. People’s participation is the process of empowering the deprived, marginalized and the excluded (Samad, 2002). Cohen and Uphoff (1980) view participation with regard to development projects as “people’s involvement in decision making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes” and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programme. Mohammed (2010) defines participation as the active involvement of the local people in the planning and implementation of development projects. Mohammed argues that for effective plan formulation, control of projects and sharing of benefits of development to be realized, participation is necessary.

Social scientists, development practitioners and development agencies have conceptualized the term “participation” in their own view and its scope and meaning are still open to debate (Sill, 2016).

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