

## **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DONOR FUNDED PROJECTS IN THE PASTORAL COMMUNITIES**

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### **Abstract**

*Donor funded projects are considered valuable given their socio-economic complementary role to the government in the provision of public goods. There is however, close relationship between donor funded projects and the community participation initiatives in the achievement of the project goals. This, paper sought to examine community participation in donor projects among pastoral communities of Northern Kenya while suggesting areas that require the attention of potential stakeholders. Using survey design, respondents were selected using multi-stage sampling before applying simple random sampling to select five hundred respondents. Data was primarily collected using questionnaires although additional data was collected through in-depth interviews and focused group discussions with key informants. The study reveals that the region has continued to suffer from various challenges over the years including perennial drought which affects agriculture and livestock farming; inadequate access to social services, poor infrastructure, insecurity, conflict, cultural issues, to mention a few. Key projects implemented in the region were in education, water, health, livestock production and veterinary services, environmental conservation, conflict management, food security and emergency programs, and economic empowerment among others. Other findings were insignificant community involvement in the planning and implementation of the projects, capacity gaps in managing projects; insignificant community support in terms of resources and effective participation in donor projects. It is recommended that donor projects should embrace*

*community participation at all levels of project implementation; capacity development at community level as well as enhanced resource mobilization and awareness strategies for purposes of community ownership of the projects, commitment resources by the local communities through sensitization forums.*

*Keywords: Community participation, Conflict management, Resource mobilization, Sustainability*

## INTRODUCTION

Donor Funded Projects (DFPs) are conceived as developmental projects meant to complement government developmental initiatives to its populace. The projects may be funded by a small budget and sometimes set up in a much disorganized structure especially in emergency cases and relief needs (Coppola, 2011). These projects reach the communities through various means which include International Financial Institutions (IFIs), United Nations (UN) Agencies that provides grants through government, UN institutions, Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to initiate programs in the society. Others are initiated through Consultative Groups to Assist the Poorest (CGAP) where funds flow from global headquarters to individual grassroots institutions as grants and finally public philanthropic foundations (Delmon, 2011). In any donor funded project there is a strategy on financial and economic analyses of the project meant to determine the viability and contributions to development (Ribeiro, 2011). Most donors consider community participation in projects as an essential ingredient of development and eventually their sustainability after the project cycle from the donor perspective (Ribeiro, 2011). Similar, the tension between accountability to donors and accountability to beneficiaries can be satisfied through community ownership and empowerment (Igweonu, 2011).

Over the years, community participation in project implementation and development has become prominence and its variants have taken on particular prominence in the policies of bilateral and multilateral development agencies. For instance, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that for sustainable development, projects must be locally owned and that development co-operation have to be shifted to a partnership model, where donor programs and activities operate within locally-owned development strategies (as quoted by Saxby 2003). In the policy document, donors were urged to respect and encourage strong local commitment, participation, capacity development and ownership of the project activities. Like the OECD/DAC, Wolfensohn (1999) emphasized that donors should provide a supportive role, while working closely with

governments, business and civil society. Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) echoed similar sentiments in 2002 by reiterating the importance of local ownership as core principles of effective developmental initiative at community level (CIDA, 2002).

For sustainability purposes, CIDA noted that development strategies must be developed by recipient countries (including governments and people) and they must reflect the priorities of the recipients rather than those of donors (CIDA, 2002). Studies also show that participatory approaches to project development and implementation where those affected by the project take part throughout the entire process of the project cycle is important. This was in contrast to a conventional approach, where people who are not part of the community such as donor representatives or external consultants are primarily responsible for identifying needs, developing a general project concept, providing money and other resources, then monitoring and evaluating project activities (Oakley, 1991; UNFPA, 2000).

In Mitchell & Ashley (2010), it was contended that although DFPs in any community play a big role by initiating and implementing development projects that would otherwise take the government directly or through its agencies some time to implement, the projects are short-lived therefore the question that arises is how the community can ensure sustainability and ownership of these projects when the donors eventually leave. In this regard, community involvement was singled out as being critical. DeFilippis et al (2010) notes that community ownership need to be considered since the community itself is a very important asset. This however according to DeFilippis et al (2010) requires giving the community energy to take action like teaching them project management skills.

In the Arnstein's ladder, community involvement was pointed out as an important ingredient likely to provide better results of any donor funded project in terms of sustainability (Bell, 2010). Bell identified three key ingredients necessary for community involvement in donor funded projects. These include empowerment of local communities to take command of the projects, the practice of co-opting community members to take part in existing programs, and finally as a masquerading public relations exercise, justifying a predetermined donor project. This is a pointer that community mobilization and empowerment are important in donor funded projects. According to the Society of Public Health Education (2010), community mobilization is a process through which the communities, individuals or groups implement and evaluate donor funded projects influences ownership in that actions regarding the project are organized around specific community issues of concern. Community empowerment on the other hand involves a goal in itself since the community takes responsibility of the actions related to any project and that empowerment gives the community opportunity to demand transparency and accountability of all the parties involved in the donor funded project (Henderson & Vercseg, 2010).

Other studies also show that fully engagement of the community serves to expand the feeling of community ownership of any given project which may contribute towards positive project outcomes (Sirgy et al., 2011). In the process, this motivates the participants to put in extra effort and in the end there is likelihood of continuity. To realize this, active community participation was reiterated. Full participation according to Anderson &McFarlane (2010) can only be attained when the community is incorporated in decisions making process in the planning and implementation of the project activities. Similarly, community participation plays a role in the societies which contributes towards increasing democracy, combating exclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged population, empowering and mobilizing people plus resources and developing holistic and integrated approaches towards problems which all point to ensuring ownership (Bartholomew et al., 2011).

Community participation is also important for validity of any donor funded project which brings in the ownership aspect (Phillips & Pittman (2009). Similarly, for any donor funded project to succeed, it must link not only planning with action but also the aspect that community stakeholders must demonstrate their ownership in the in the plan (Sirgy et al., 2011).According to DeFilippiset al (2010), the fundamental goal of any community ownership program should be to foster community confidence and self-reliance achieved through the development of self-sustaining projects, effective mechanisms for community decision making and leadership renewal (see also Falk et al.,2011).According to Gofin & Gofin (2010) the major factor that influence community ownership of donor funded projects is participation which varies depending on the context of the projects. Community involvement is a key factor which is the art of getting people involved in the active roles of the projects; the community should be seen as a unit of identity through building of strengths and resources within the community (Morrow et al., 2011). Community involvement unveils a sense of responsibility and ownership among the members which improves the vitality of the community through uniting people thus promoting multigenerational and multi-ethnic community involvement (Cohen, 2010).

### **The Problem and Research Objective**

World-wide, donor funded projects continue to complement the government's role in the provision of societal developmental needs such as access to social economic services such as education, health, water, agriculture, environmental among others (Ramisch & Verma, 2010. Similarly, individuals who benefit from donor funded projects enjoy material and professional privileges not found in institutions owned and managed by the government. There is however, close and intimate relationship between donor funded projects and the community ownership

initiative taken to ensure sustainability and objective achievement of the projects (Minkler, 2011). Since the success of any donor funded project depends on the ownership initiative taken by the community for sustainability purposes, factors influencing community participation and ownership of the projects is of vital significance (Ife, 2009). Community participation comes with putting certain wheels in motion an initiative of both the benefactor and the beneficiaries of the project (Doll, 2010).

Studies show that there are a number of factors that influence community participation in donor funded projects. For instance, they show that the success of any project depends on two things; achieving objectives of the project and sustainability brought about by community participation and ownership (Block, 2009). Considerable research in the field of sustainability of the projects, community participation in development projects have been undertaken, however, not much has been done in relation to the participation of pastoral communities in donor funded projects in Northern Kenya. This in the process impacts negatively on their sustainability, after the initial project cycle as envisaged by the financing authority. In the end, this levels a vacuum in the society thereby exposing the existing beneficiaries and potential ones more vulnerable. This is in recognition of the fact that donor funded project is a temporary activity with a starting date and end date, goals and objectives and conditions, clearly defined responsibilities, fixed budget. Against this, the paper sought to examine community participation in donor funded projects among the pastoral communities and suggest various strategies that need to be considered to mitigate the same.

## METHODOLOGY

In the study, survey research design was adopted. This was considered as the best given its characteristics of facilitating the collection of data from members of a population in order to determine the current status of that population with respect to one or more variables under consideration. As observed by Mugenda & Mugenda (2003), this was considered appropriate in collecting original data for the purpose of describing a population which is too large to observe directly. The target population constituted beneficiaries of various donor projects in the pastoral communities of Northern Kenya selected using multi-stage sampling followed by simple random sampling to select five hundred respondents. Primary data collection was collected using questionnaire as the main instrument complemented by focus group discussion and in-depth interviews with key informants. The tools were developed in consultation with various stakeholders involved in donor funded projects for the purpose of getting detailed information. The questionnaire contained close ended questions which were considered easier to analyze given the number of respondents targeted. After administering the research tools, data collected

was coded and converted was numerical codes for statistical analysis. Analysis of data employed descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions and percentages.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this section, the findings are reported starting with the problems experienced by the local communities followed by key program activities that donors are implementing in the region. Others include community perception about donor projects, areas in which the community is involved in the donor projects including the workload, strategies that communities have devised for takeover for purposes of sustainability, among others.

The study reveals that the region has continued to suffer from various problems over a period of time. These include perennial drought which has affected access to water for both domestic and livestock use, and access to social services especially education and health services. Other challenges identified by the respondents were infrastructure, security, cultural issues, among others. Majority of respondents acknowledged the presence of donor funded projects, with more than seventy percent acknowledging existence of donor projects in the region in addressing their concerns, while less than thirty percent observed otherwise. Existence of donor funded projects in the community in providing necessary support to the populace in the region further affirms findings by 3-D Dimensions (2014) where it was reported that the Northern region has lacked government support for a long time despite the various problems which the region has been exposed to which would however, be turned into opportunities. The study reveals existence of donor projects in the region ranging from education, water, health, sanitation and hygiene, capacity building, environment conservation, conflict resolution, livestock production and veterinary services, food security and emergency programs, and economic empowerment.

The existence of donor projects in the region is an indication of the need for various public goods in the region. This however may necessitate prioritization of the projects by involving the local communities as a sustainability strategy, while ensuring that key community needs are adequately addressed. As reiterated by CIDA (2002), for sustainability purposes, development strategies must be developed by recipient who in this case would be the community members, in order reflect the priorities of the recipients rather than those of donors. This calls for a participatory process where the community in general and the beneficiaries in particular are continuously engaged. This approach as noted by Oakley (1991) positively affect project development and implementation and hence sustainability during and after the project cycle.



Similarly the inability to involve the community may contribute towards under-utilization by the community as well as resistance in the implementation of the projects activities or timely completion of the activities as may have been conceived in the project document by the financiers and implementers. This may also affect negatively the ability of the community to contribute resources in whatever form towards the project. This is because citizen's participation in project activities has been known to contribute towards effective and sustainable activities beyond the funding cycle. As reported in various studies (World Bank, 1990; USAID, 1993; and Chege, 1996), stakeholder or beneficiary participation in development need to be recognized by development actors and donor agencies alike. Cases where these actors work closely with the intended beneficiaries and actors are more effective, and that their work can have more positive results, if they work alongside communities in helping the latter to empower themselves both socially and economically (Pretty 1994; Narayan, 1995; Jackson 2000; World Bank, 1996). As demonstrated by Narayan (1995), beneficiary participation has weaker effects on project performance and outcome when measured separately at any one particular stage of the project but stronger in projects where participation was treated as a continuous process (participation at all levels).

Donor funded projects vary greatly in the extent to which they ensure beneficiary participation in their own activities. Beneficiary participation may range from passive listening (the project planners do the planning, the local population does what the project planners decide) to communities defining their own objectives and implementing and monitoring the project themselves. In the study, various aspects of community participation in the donor funded projects were analyzed. These were in terms of time devoted, time allocated to project activities, participation in the decision committee, commitment of resources, and what resources committed to the donor projects. Community strategy for takeover and willingness to contribute resources after the project cycle were also considered. Regarding time devoted, the study reveals that local communities put in insignificant time at any given project phase in supporting the donor funded projects. The time devoted towards the project could be an indication of either lack of capacity in key project areas or that the community is not actively involved.

As pointed out earlier, the inability to involve the local community may have negative implication on the future of the project as well as marginalization of the intended beneficiaries. This is in recognition of the fact that donor funded project is a temporary activity with a starting date and end date, goals and objectives and conditions, clearly defined responsibilities and with fixed budget. Community participation plays a key in contributing towards increasing democracy, combating exclusion of marginalized and disadvantaged population, empowering and mobilizing people plus resources and developing holistic and integrated approaches

towards problems which all point to ensuring ownership (Bartholomew et al., 2011). The dismal participation of the community could also be a pointer of lack of requisite skills by the community to provide necessary support in the implementation of the project activities. This in the process may have negative implication at the end of the project cycle for purposes of continuity. It is worth noting that in most of these projects, majority of the personnel are either expatriates based in Nairobi with few local staff who most of the time are operate from Nairobi or major urban centers of Maralal (Samburu), Marsabit (Marsabit) or Lodwar (Turkana). With this kind of operation given the geographical areas covered, participation of the local communities in the implementation of the activities would be very important.

In seeking the reasons for allocating time to the projects, it was revealed that majority allocated time to the projects activities based on the benefits obtained from the project, however less than a third allocated time with regard to resources donated to project and responsibility held in project management. Of concern is the more than three-quarters of the respondents whose contribution was dismal in these projects in the various project activities including resources, planning, and the implementation of the activities. This finding compares with Narayan (1995) where it was reported that that when beneficiaries are involved in decision making during all stages of the project, from design to maintenance, the best results are realized. On the other hand, when they were just involved in information sharing and consultations, the results were not satisfactory. As earlier noted, non-involvement of the local community could also be an indication that locals may lack requisite skills in project planning and implementation. As reported in Oakley (2012) participation empowers the marginalized by helping break the mentality of dependence, promoting self-awareness and confidence, by leading the poor to examine their problems and to think positively about solutions which in the process has positive bearing on sustainability. Participation also empowers the primary stakeholders by helping the poor to acquire new skills and abilities which could enable them to better defend and promote their livelihoods beyond the project. Similarly if the communities are involved, this would help build up the capacity of people to generate and influence development at various levels, increasing their access to and influence over resources and institutions which further enhances the continuity of the projects.

In terms of take over strategy after the project cycle, majority were non-committal, while only a few indicated assuming management responsibility. This is an indication of lack of community involvement or awareness regarding the issue. Majority perceived the projects as purely donor driven in the region and that they had very little to do with the projects. Also, the issue of capacity among the local community is of great concern for purposes of their involvement not forgetting the nomadic behavior. Community mobilization and awareness alone



does not influence community ownership of donor funded projects as the findings of this study revealed that the majority of the respondents indicated that there was mobilization and awareness for the projects yet the level of ownership was found to be low. When there is community mobilization strategy that ensures inclusiveness in the form of participation, there will be a high level of community ownership of the donor funded projects. This is emphasized by Participatory theory of development which is of the meaning that any community or society has solutions to the problems undermining socioeconomic transformation on one hand hence it places emphasis on creating partnerships and using participatory and people centered approaches to solve problems (Syokau et al., 2010).

## CONCLUSION

Donor projects continue to play a major role in enhancing socio-economic development at community level in their diverse role of complementing role of complementing government initiatives towards the improvement of the living standard of the people. In their diverse roles with sustainable development as their shared common goal, they have many mechanisms at their disposal to achieve this, such as wider impact, capacity building and direct provision of socio-economic goods to the local populace. The approach explored by the institutions should be participatory where the local community is actively involved. Although some of these institutions have had a bad reputation in the past, and to some extent even today they continue to fill the void in communities where there is minimal government support like experienced in the Northern Kenya. To ensure long run provision of these services, local community participation is important to mitigate upon donor dependency syndrome. This could be in terms of involvement in the various aspects of project planning and implementation such as identification of the projects to be implemented, resource provision by the community, time invested by the local community to mention a few. Citizen's participation in project activities has been known to result in effective and sustainable activities after the project cycle is completed (Narayan, 1995; Pretty, 1995). This belief has played a major role in the shift in these institutions' strategies from supply driven to demand driven approaches, which impacts needs and aspirations of the intended beneficiaries. Thus stakeholder or beneficiary participation in development should be recognized and embraced by development actors and donor agencies alike. In the end, donor programs are likely to be more effective, and that their work expected to generate positive results, if they work alongside communities in helping the latter to empower themselves both socially and economically. Recent studies indicate that participation is widely endorsed in many development related projects. However, it is also a fact that donor funded projects vary greatly

in the extent to which they ensure beneficiary participation in their own activities as reported in the study findings.

Ownership of donor funded projects is influenced by the benefits that accrue to the community from such projects. As also pointed out by Wignaraja (1991) benefits from a project that play a critical role in the level of involvement and subsequent ownership of most donor funded projects in Africa. Ownership of donor funded developmental projects means a situation whereby the community will be committed and take responsibility of their own development, put in resources, labour, and time to their developmental projects to ensure sustainability of the same (John Saxby 2003). In the study, the low participation of the community in decision committees, the low commitment of resources to projects and the fact that an insignificant percentage committed physical resources to projects may mean that the level of community ownership of projects is low as most of the intervention is decided for them and may not necessarily address their immediate need. To achieve any desired outcome, research has suggested that the community must be actively involved; stepping in to the community requires an attitude of 'do it with the people' which entails doing things with them not doing things for them or to them (Anderson &McFarlane, 2010).The involvement of people in decisions concerning the environment where they live is critical. The concept partly reflects the observation that people who inhabit an environment over time are often the ones most able to make decisions about its sustainable use (Wignaraja, 1991).

## IMPLICATIONS

There are numerous donor funded projects currently implemented in Northern Kenya in various sectors including education, water, health, sanitation and hygiene, capacity building, environment conservation, conflict resolution, livestock production and veterinary services, food security and emergency programs, and economic empowerment among others. There is however, low level of community participation and ownership of the projects. This is likely to affect sustainability of the project when the donors exit after the initial project cycle leaving a huge void in the community. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that donor funded projects should embrace high community participation at all levels of project planning and implementation; skills development of the local community through appropriate capacity development projects; improved mobilization of resources and awareness strategies for better community participation and ownership of such projects key inputs in the sustainability of the projects beyond the project cycle. Further, the community should be encouraged to commit resources in whatever form to mitigate on the negative impact of donor exit. This would require

continuous sensitization of the local community so that they see the project as theirs and hence ownership.

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