



Sustainable Public Sector Construction Project Benefits Through Learning and Beneficiary Empowerment Strategies

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Abstract

Conflicts of interest and opinion continually rise in the frantic search for a unique approach to solving issues of sustainable development, towards achieving globally established targets on improving well-being. With the recognition that it is needful for people to be involved actively in their own development, this study establishes that in considerations of participation and sustainable development, primary attention must be given to learning and empowerment of beneficiaries within the process. Major focus is placed on construction and infrastructural projects as they are the most common forms of development assistance. Popular perspectives on issues of sustainability in development projects are reviewed and substantiated with case studies from well-recognized development practitioners. The discussion follows a qualitative pattern as it is concerned with investigating not how much, but how well participation can be put to proper use.

Keywords: Learning, Beneficiary Empowerment, Projects, Sustainable Development

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I. INTRODUCTION

The sustainability of project benefits or programmes aimed at achieving development objectives and the continued improvement of well-being of beneficiaries has remained a major issue in development sectors for many years. On a regular basis, a great deal of financial resources are invested in the conception and implementation of construction and development projects by international donor agencies, government institutions, as well as non-governmental organisations but most times the outcomes of these projects end up short-lived. Analytical studies by the GTZ, USAID Impact evaluations, the World Bank and development researchers globally, continually emphasize serious weaknesses in the long term sustainability of development investments (Wunsch, 1991; Hill, 2002). This is also, with the established milestones of the millennium development goals including the unrealistic achievement of a 14.4 percent reduction of poverty by 2015 globally (WBR, 2011) and the revelation at the Accra Agenda for Action 2008 that globally an estimate of 1.4 billion people still live in extreme poverty. Despite the growing increase in the number of development aids (OECD, 2011), there is increasingly grave concern in the implementation of development strategies.

Resultantly, the need for alternative solutions to this growing development concern has prompted research into development project processes, with a view to finding more effective ways of ensuring the sustainability of benefits. Desperate measures are now being taken to understand the links between development projects and sustainability, more especially, with the recent global adoption of the concept of sustainable development. Consequently, in considering development through projects, sustainable development has brought about the comprehension of project success in a different light, moving greater concentration from immediate outcomes to the longer term expectations.

Kumar (2002) suggested that the fragility and apparent possibility of failure of development initiatives becomes particularly clear shortly after the completion of active donor assistance. These conceptions have highlighted the need for a maintenance framework after initial project processes. But little consideration for post project implementation or execution phase has been reflected in existing research, neither has post project monitoring and evaluation been given concrete attention which makes it rather difficult to identify when sustainability is achieved.

However, there exists the notion that continued development is dependent on certain parameters, of which learning has been distinctively identified. Core theories of learning (constructivism and social/ humanistic

more especially) hint that action based learning is the bedrock of development just as Blewitt (2008) argues that sustainable development must reflect a recognition for change, as growth can only be sustainable if there is a continued improvement of knowledge. The sense of ownership and control over decision making processes has also been made popular as a necessity for achieving sustainability (WCED, 1987; WDR, 2001; OECD, 2011; UNDP, 2011). Besides this, the issue of beneficiary or popular participation has been mentioned repeatedly as prominent. In most cases, the discourse on participation in projects is expressed as a general idea. But criticisms exist that a major portion of the emerging literature focuses on debating whether beneficiary participation ensures successful project outcomes, but neglects to explore how proper participation can be employed within the project process for realizing benefits (Oakley, 1991; Cleaver, 1999) and even lesser, the sustaining of these benefits. Finsterbusch and Van Wicklin (1987), and Narayan (1995) assert that this is as a result of most evidence which has been uncovered through research being qualitative in approach such that there still remains room for scepticism and the offer of little guidance on its promotion.

On this basis, having adopted the perspective that participation is of great importance for achieving and sustaining project outcomes, this study established that learning and empowerment through beneficiary participation increases the possibility of achieving development which is sustainable from a project-based approach when applied in a flexible and purposeful manner across development initiatives.

RESEARCH QUESTION

The study attempted to answer one distinct question; How can the participation of beneficiaries in construction development project initiatives be effective in the achievement of sustainable outcomes?

RESEARCH AIM

The objective of this research is to establish to a reasonable extent that participation, when employed with a stern focus on educating and empowering beneficiaries of development interventions during project processes, increases the assurance of accomplishing project targets and also improves beneficiary capabilities necessary for the sustainability of these project benefits in a sustainable development perspective. Overall, this study should add significantly to already existing knowledge in this area of study, while also provoking further research thought along these lines.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning for Development

In popular opinion learning is considered as the acquisition of skill or transferring of knowledge, in simplest terms. But relative research seeking to uncover greater usefulness to the term explored deeper dimensions. In contrast to this one-dimensional perception, there exists revelations of the concept of learning to be more complex and dependent on certain specific elements inclusive of the context in which it is employed, as well as what it aims to achieve (Knowles, 1978; Laird, 1985; McGill & Beaty, 1995; Oxford Dictionary, 2011).

Also, the consideration of whether learning should be seen as an end product or a process has been controversial thus culminating in the existence of various theories of learning suited to different configurations. These theories have included the sensory stimulation theory which according to Laird (1985) is based on the premise that actual learning takes place when the senses are stimulated; and the reinforcement theory generated from the psychology of behaviour that examines that in learning, a desired behaviour will be repeated if positive reinforcement follows it but punishment or negative consequences eliminate the re-occurrence of an undesirable one (Burns, 1995).

Nonetheless, for recent development practices, the concept of action learning which involves learning as a reflective process has come to be more favoured. This is with the adoption of the Carl Rogers humanistic approach and the Reg Revans action learning perspectives which lay more profound emphasis on learning through action and experience, where there is the involvement of adults and the guidance of a facilitating educator who does not pose a threat to the consideration of new ideas (Burns, 1995; McDermott et al, 2002; Dunn, 2002; Johnson and Wilson, 2009). This perspective to learning is now related easily to the new opinions on beneficiary participation in development projects even as evolving development paradigms have most recently been concerned with social and human related elements. In analysis of some of these theories, Burns (1995) considered learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour where behaviour is constituent of observable physical activity and internal processes such as thinking, reflection, attitude and reactions.

The concept of development remains one surrounded by a multitude of views and opinions, offered by different schools of thought, which consider it from varied dimensions (Lafferty, 1995; Jacobs, 1995). However, in long-standing, development had more popularly been viewed from an economic perspective with beliefs that if sufficiently sustained, economic growth ensures development (Dale, 2000; Brennan et al, 2009). Thompson (2002) educates that the major paradigms of 'structuralism' and 'neo-liberalism' were most dominant in development processes over the preceding fifty years, but the 1970s brought a different consideration in

development theories that recipients of development interventions needed to be involved for any such development to be successful. Ideologies like that of Gamer (1976) which argued that a healthy development system can only emanate from the local people as any development from external without knowledge of the immanent is counter-productive, set the foundation for change.

However, little consideration for the definition of roles of these recipients in the process reflected the lack of improvement in subsequent practice. This gave rise to the current widespread theory in recent practice which considers that recipients need not only be involved but must be identifiably active and well aware of their roles in the survival of development undertakings (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Development has thence become a humanistic concern as more recent definitions reflect.

Dale (2000) proffers that development as a process of growth, goes beyond the direct profits from increase in production of commodities and services, to improving the quality of living for a certain group of people. Potts (2002) considers that in the widest of terms, development can be interpreted to be “the process of improving human welfare”. But being more holistic in its own view, the UN General Assembly recognizes the process of development as “*a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom*” (UN Declaration on Right to development, 1986). This opinion has remained the most widely recognized in more recent development issues.

Empowerment, Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Thomas (2000) describes empowerment as a process where individuals are encouraged to take direct control of their lives and subsequently be responsible for their own development. Alternatively, empowerment is considered as the enhancement of capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (WB, 2011). Hoare et al (1993) defines empowerment as a social action process promoting the participation of individuals and organisations with the objectives of increasing their control, political efficacy, improving quality of life, and enforcing social justice.

These perceptions of empowerment portray the need for building of capacities of which learning is primary to be rudimentary for control. Hence there is an inherent nature of learning in empowerment. The WDR (2001) also identifies that certain elements which include access to information, participation and inclusion of the deprived and local capacity have been vital to the achievement of any successful empowerment efforts. Johnson and Wilson (2009) further mention that there has been a long existing concern for providing a voice for the underprivileged in participation within the confines of development.

According to Baker (2006), issues of sustainability had provoked concern as early as the 1700s, but the term ‘sustainable development’ only emerged in public light in 1980, in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN 1980), but rather with limited focus to issues on the environment. A traditional understanding of sustainability explains it to be the ability to maintain productivity (Conway and Babier, 1990), or alternatively, “*it is the maintenance or augmentation of positive changes induced by a programme or project after it has been terminated*”, (Dale, 2000, p. 214). All the same, Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1990) established that the ultimate objective of sustainability is the discovery of approaches to make more efficient and effective use of resources to achieve lasting impacts among a wide range of people. They further express it to be the process of building organizational capacity for performance through a protracted period while assuring continued benefits and appreciated outcomes for benefitting groups, from an organizational stand point.

Similarly, there exists relatively no profound definition to sustainable development as there is continued variance in proffered meanings, its implementation, and even more intensely, in the identification of its requirements (Redclift and Woodgate, 1997; Baker 2006; Atkinson et al, 2007). This suggests that in the discussion of sustainable development, certain considerations need to be clearly defined, for the discourse to take any identifiable direction.

The concepts of sustainability and sustainable development have often been considered in one same context similarly put forward by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). But Reboratti (1999) interprets that sustainable development differs significantly from sustainability which is primarily concerned with ecology, and the possibility of its continued existence over time. Baker (2006) confers that the addition of the idea of development to the notion of sustainability prompted a change in its focus, from particularly ecological or environmental issues, to a wider scope of societal issues, taking a transition from conservation to development. Thus, the main focus of sustainable development is now on society and human well-being, with a view to incorporating environmental conditions in subjects of economic and societal change.

However, the considerations of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report, Our Common Future, proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development where, the Commission defines sustainable development as; “*That development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (WCED, 1987, p.43); has come to earn greater popularity

as being the most precise interpretation of sustainable development as it stretches its perspective across economic, environmental and social extents of development.

Elkins (2000) further considers these, as the three major pillars on which sustainable development exists. This perception is now widely adopted in subsequent discussions and effecting of sustainable development by donor-aid agencies and government institutions as well as researchers alike.

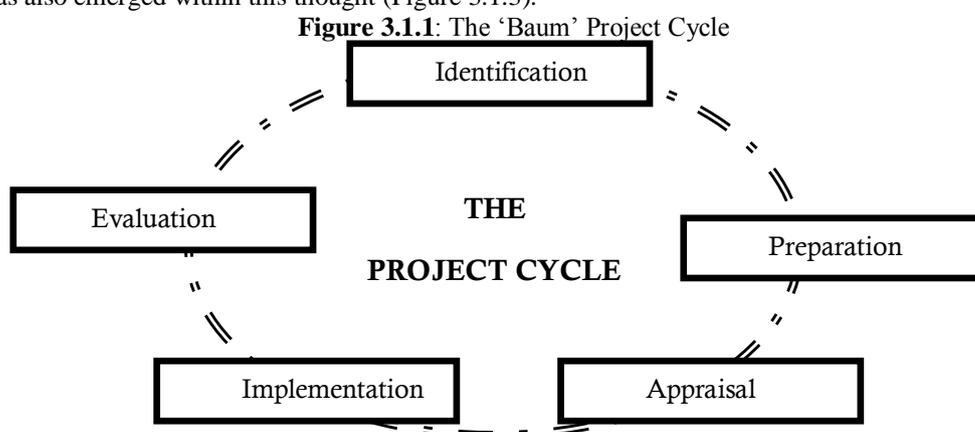
All the same, development professionals across these extents still drive alternative interpretations unique to their practice despite acknowledging the contributing importance of other sectors (Serageldin, 1994; Baker, 2006; Atkinson et al, 2007). These authors record that in the varied development focuses, economists attempt to enhance the welfare of economic activities within the confines of existing capital stock towards the reduction of poverty through monetary concerns, while the ecologists consider the importance of preserving the original structure of ecosystems and enlightening on the impacts of unlimited growth in the environment.

In contrast, sociologists focus rather on illuminating on a human or society centred approach, highlighting the crucial role of social institutions in sustainable development processes. Elkins (2000) recognises this perspective as social sustainability, involving a society's ability to preserve the essential means of wealth creation while also possessing a shared sense of responsibility for fostering social integration and unity of concerned parties. Serageldin (1994) further enlists that there is mounting evidence that the profound ineffectiveness of development projects is largely resulting from undermining these social concerns, against the ecological and economic. Similarly, Dobson (1998) confers that the driving force behind any of these sustainable development concepts must be the interest of humans in human welfare as every development is a human activity. Cernea (1994) examines that the sustenance of social and economic arrangements cannot be achieved purposefully except sustainability is socially constructed. These illustrations highlight the importance of social elements in sustainability.

The distinct difference between 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' therefore lies in the context that while sustainability takes a general outlook of maintaining the environment, sustainable development considers multiple dimensions and is particular in its nature and direction of use as it seeks to define the purpose and the human parties involved in the maintaining process. It also ensures that the necessary skills for sustaining are existent. Subsequently this discussion follows the sociologist trajectory as its interest lie in the people-related considerations of sustainable development.

Participation as Empowering: Analysis of Issues through the Project Process in the Project Context

According to Johnson and Wilson (2009), the common dimensions of development actions require the existence of an instinctive pragmatism which should be socially aware hence such development actions should make provision for reflexive learning, negotiation and accommodation to achieve any longer-term positive impact. Being that most development assistance is implemented through projects, this highlights that there has to be a basic understanding of development project nature and process for it to be fluently moulded to react in specific directions. The role of participation as empowering within project processes, across project typologies and its association with most commonly used tools involved in development projects. The typical project cycle as established by Warren Baum and popularized by the World Bank (Landoni and Corti, 2011) identifies that projects are characterized by stages (Figure 3.1.1). These stages popularly include the identification, preparation, appraisal, implementation and evaluation though a variety of development project practitioners make alterations to this common cycle, which are more suitable to their development objectives. These institutions have included the World Bank, which has attempted to capture further related issues in the development project setting within the cycle as seen in figure 3.1.2, and the DFID project and programme cycle which has also emerged within this thought (Figure 3.1.3).



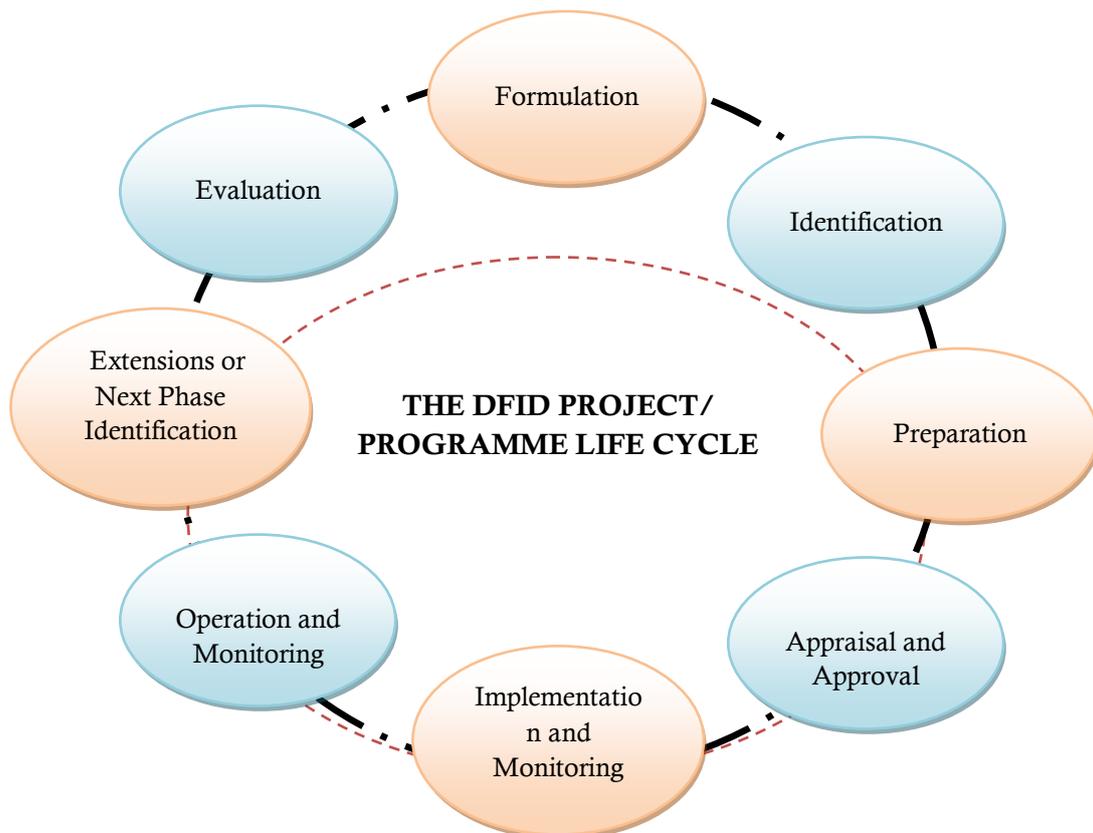
Source: Adapted from Potts, D. (2002), Project Planning and Analysis for Development

Figure 3.1.2: The World Bank Project Cycle



Source: Adapted from <http://www.web.worldbank.org>

Figure 3.1.3: The DFID Project/ Programme Cycle



As a process, the management of projects basically involves the guiding and controlling of these stages of the cycle towards the full achievement of the project output, and the process has been found to involve the unique activities of initiating, planning, monitoring and control, and closing through the project life span (PMBOK, 4ed.). The management of projects over time has been largely based on the application of knowledge and the use of tools and techniques (Burke, 2010), and the many opinions proffered as to what a project is have

also consistently highlighted the temporary nature of projects and the need for them to be well managed as they are a one-time occurrence, involving a considerable amount of resources. This has remained a motivating factor for improvements in the discovery of tools which can effectively manage the process to its completion. Collective opinion also argues that the management of projects dates back as old as the existence of man, but the introduction of tools in the management of projects began with Joseph Priestley who originated the 'bar chart' in 1765 (Weaver, 2007). Nonetheless, greater recognition is given to Henry Gantt who redefined and popularized the concept years later and had it named after him, with the concept dominating management practice up until the early 1950s (Burke, 2010).

However, subsequent revolutions in the perception and practice of development have seen the emergence of supposedly 'better' project management tools or approaches among which the 'logical framework', first introduced into development circles by the USAID in 1971 (Pitt, 1998; AusAID Guidelines, 2003), and the participatory learning and action/ participatory rural appraisal in the late eighties (FAO, 2011) have become most popular. Relative to this popularity, there exists equally abundant debate in opinions towards these management approaches (MacArthur, 1994; Gasper, 2000) in the light of the renewed discourse on issues of beneficiary participation, empowerment and learning, with the resultant categorization of these approaches into blueprint and process.

Project Management Tools and the Nature of Participation

Though initially a widely recognized requirement of major development organizations (UN, ADB, USAID, DFID, WB, WHO) for project management processes, the Logical framework approach has more recently been often criticized as being highly blueprint and top down in its approach, without adequate consideration for the aforementioned development issues. Where cases have been made in favour of the logical framework with regard to participation, the concept of participation as contribution has been more associated with it, as it is typically consultation-based, with little or no learning on the part of beneficiaries (Dale, 2000). According to Dale, participation as contribution may occur in project planning stage with the casual sourcing of opinions of beneficiaries during feasibility studies but more primarily at the implementation stage of development project or programmes where beneficiary resources and capabilities are exploited, or in the operation of created services.

More credits have been given to the participatory learning/ rural approaches that they portray more flexibility, adaptability toward development issues, and are more beneficiary focused making them better receptive to the conceptions of sustainable development, while embracing the existence of uncertainties (ibid). The participatory learning approaches have been considered to reflect the nature of participation as empowering. Participation as empowering exercises a more thorough reach across the project process as it considers as interactive problem analysis right from the planning stage, with constant interactive re-examination of progress through the implementation and evaluation stages, creating an avenue for learning.

But the power discourse within development project management circles remains a critical one as Long (2001) enlists that the project cycle in itself is a bureaucratic process involving artificial stages established to keep projects within the control of external donors or implementing development institutions. Hence attempting to fuse participatory management approaches with it like the World Bank, GTZ and DFID do, restricts consideration of true beneficiary empowerment, Long records. Rowlands (2003) also identifies that for every development intervention, power is intrinsic in every constituent activity hence no methodology or approach involved in the process can be considered as neutral to power influences. Resultantly the participatory approaches still experience the challenge of the common existence of a 'quick fix' attitude which involves attempts to use these participatory approaches and methods without investing in the learning and experience needed for their effectiveness, despite the immense investment of time and resources in the promotion of participation. Rowlands records that this constitutes a major challenge to empowerment. This raises particular concern that beneficiary opinions are also crucial in the development and selection of project tools and the definition of the process in which these tools will be employed, for a true reflection of the flexible nature of participatory approaches towards sustainable development.

Further complexities also exist with regard to project typology as in opposition to process projects which involve high flexibility, doubts lurk as to whether the participatory learning approaches credited to be more empowering in nature are suitable to the management of the different project typologies as other projects which are classified as blueprint projects are more technical in nature and demand the application of expert skills which beneficiary parties will not normally possess. Considerations for effective tailoring of participatory approaches are also necessary in this context.

Empowerment, Management Approaches and the Concept Of Sustainability

Evidently, as these project tools can only identify with the planning, implementation, monitoring and immediate evaluation of projects, it raises questions as to the suitability of these tools which have been crafted

to align with the temporary nature of projects, to the more recent discourse of sustainable development. Dale's literature (Dale, 2000) as similar to many others, fails to consider the maintenance of outcomes as crucial to any immediate project activities, rather proffering that the generation and subsequent maintenance of benefits requires a separate set of participatory tools and methodologies specific to the concepts of sustenance. But Pretty (1995) argues that it is of great necessity to establish knowledge of what is to be sustained and why, for how long it should be sustained, who benefits from the sustenance and at whose cost, and the defining criteria that will be used to measure, from the project onset in discussing sustainable development. In the same light, another view asserts that beyond the immediate achievement of aid initiatives, the continued effectiveness of these aids should remain the core agenda from the planning, through the managing, down to the impacting of all development assistance (WB, 2011).

Although there is a now an extensive acceptance of the sustainability and sustainable development concepts in project circles, and an increasing request for it in practice, popular knowledge of how to assess its achievement remains limited. The challenge that some development projects do not yield any tangible benefits, also exist to the measurement of sustainable development. This has created the basis for the many criticisms and questions to the reality of sustainable development. This implies the requirement for impact evaluation and competent monitoring which would require the use of tools, systems or approaches.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

The research employed a qualitative approach as it was concerned with the social issues of project development which involve human attitudes and behaviours better understood through observational and experiential investigation and not easily measurable through statistical analysis. The discussion of participation and empowerment involves varied perceptions and qualitative methods allow for a thorough review of the theories surrounding the issues in focus while also allowing for a proper analysis of the case studies. Data from previous similar research studies which considered participation in development projects from varying perspectives are adopted as secondary data.

This research creatively considered the major theories of participation currently employed in the consideration of development issues. The perspectives of aid agencies, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations like the World Bank, OECD, FAO and UN amongst others, popularly concerned with the conception and implementation of large construction and development projects have been reviewed. An assessment of project management methodologies, tools and techniques like the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), commonly in use especially on development projects was done from a participation angle. An overview of the project cycle and the various features of project and how it interacts with beneficiary input was also undertaken.

However, the short-comings of this methodology to this research might be the greater reliance on these agency perspectives without a first-hand interaction with the project setting and the beneficiaries. Maximal effort was made to ensure that only relevant information required was used and that resultant findings were based solely on academic facts, in an ethically acceptable manner.

ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES ON BENEFICIARY EMPOWERMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is logical to incite that being actively involved in the practice of projects and development, Non-Governmental Organizations and International Funding Institutions perspectives can be considered some of the most reliable sources of data in the discourse of development projects. A cross-section of these development practitioners who proffer that capacity building and community empowerment are critical to the sustainability of development through projects have taken steps towards the innovation of collaborative mechanisms geared at making empowerment core to development. The study reviewed case studies on sustaining development through empowerment and action learning from development data from such practising development institutions.

CASE ONE: COMMUNITY BASED MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROJECT STRATEGY IN AFRICA - A World Bank Project

An Overview of the region

The Africa region has been recognized to be amongst the most underdeveloped in the world with a high incidence of 39% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa living in abject poverty, which represents one-third of the world's poor. This is despite the existence of a variety of natural resources across the region. With an estimated population of 839.6 million people and an annual population increase rate of 2.5%, the World Bank (2011) records life expectancy at 52 years. In more recent times, the region has been plagued by issues emanating from poor governance and the absence of true development interests. This has created an increased reliance on external support from development organisations, mainly through projects. The World Bank

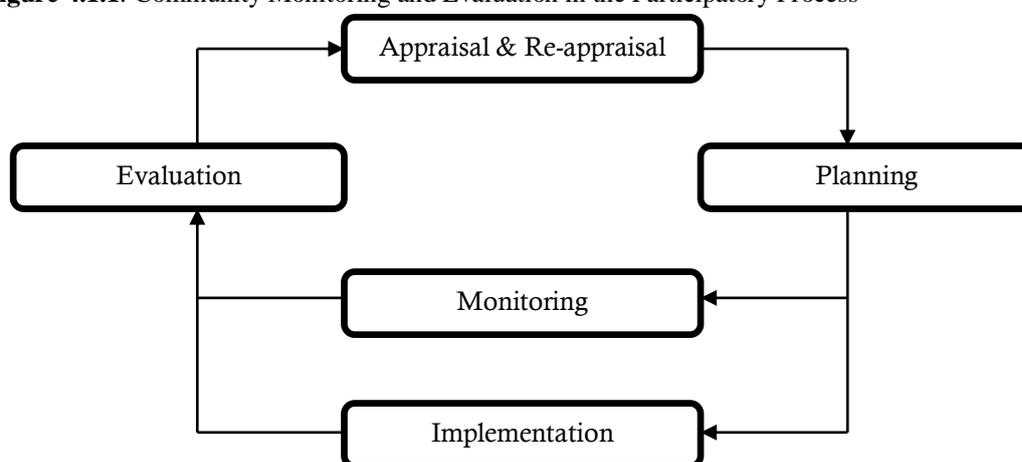
considers 47 countries from the region in its membership, across which it is currently undertaking 506 development projects.

With increased concern based on the findings of its Internal Evaluation Unit (WB, 2000) that only one in five community-based development projects in the Africa region had a sustainable likelihood the World Bank embarked on an action research program aimed at developing monitoring and evaluation systems suited to beneficiary management capabilities. This was to improve the sustainability of project outcomes in order to justify the copious amounts of financial resources invested in development initiatives. Furthermore, there was an expressed focus on empowerment based on the recognition that “communities cannot be independent without their own tools” (WB, 2002 p.1) in the consideration of this sustainability.

The Project

The community-based monitoring and evaluation project is a project developed by the World Bank, aimed at developing a project methodology which would manage projects more effectively. Primarily undertaken in the Africa region due to the existing criticality of sustainability issues compared to other regions, the World Bank sought to develop a relatively reliable management approach which could address immediate project processes with full consideration of managing outputs beyond the process, a system suitable to the understanding of, and operating by both developing organizations and recipient parties. Figure 4.1.1 displays the basic concept behind the project, the issues of effective community monitoring and evaluation.

Figure 4.1.1: Community Monitoring and Evaluation in the Participatory Process



Source: The World Bank; Rural Development Report, 2002

The Project Methodology

To develop and test this methodology, the World Bank development team undertook participatory action-research in eighteen villages across the three countries of Cameroon, Benin and Niger in the region over a one year period as shown in Table 1.

Table 4.1.1: Project Villages

Country	Villages						
Niger	Tchoulan	Kibba Tombo	Kibba Adamou	Kossey	Souloulou	Falki Karama	Gangara Boulama
Benin	Kori	Wore	Sontou	Sonon et Guinagourou			
Cameroon	Kouffen	Manfu	Foyet	Et Njimon	Sorawel Djougui	et Foumban	Mayo Louti

Source: The World Bank; Rural Development Report, 2002

The choice of countries or project population involved communities already employing participatory approaches in their development strategies, but still with recorded issues of sustainable development. The project thence was centred on aiding communities in managing their own development by collaboratively reviewing the existing participatory approaches in use and adding values for communities to re-assess their own development, instead of introducing a new set of techniques or methodology strange to the community or tedious to understanding. This offered for easy acceptance and implementation of this development initiative.

The ideology of ‘action-research’ which the evaluation and monitoring team used in the course of the project was based on the premise that doing and searching are central in the community yearning for long lasting well-being. This involved back and forth, semi-structured discussions with the entire village population, where the local community history was first discussed, the community varied interests were identified, and peoples individual abilities in the reasoning of cause and consequence was assessed.

Communities were given the initiative of defining whether community-based monitoring systems were necessary to their own development immediately after introductory sessions and then further encouraged to monitor the exercise by drawing up a calendar for planning meetings for discussion of implementation plans and the supervision of implementation. The local people were then encouraged to appoint individuals to monitor and evaluate the developments without special reference or consideration for the local elite to avoid power influences from deterring the effectiveness of the project. Initial resistance was recorded in several villages in Niger where culture dictated that positions of such nature were automatically supposed to be occupied by village headship and their families resulting in 80% of the selected, being from the elite. This situation had to be managed in line with beneficiary community preferences so as not to disrupt the primary intention of community empowerment.

Existing participatory management approaches were then introduced to the local community monitoring and evaluation teams after breaking them into smaller manageable work groups, where they reviewed these tools intensively establishing the conveniences and necessary changes required, and further developed additional tools which they could easily identify with for sustaining benefits.

Findings of the Community-based monitoring and evaluation project

The immediate findings of the evaluation team during the course of the project records that communities were highly eager to assess their development, but the absence of necessary skills and tools towards such processes limited their extent of control over self development. This established that if there is no firm focus on building capacities or skills which empower communities to manage their own development, sustaining it remains impossible. The need for supporting capacity building with literacy education classes on the path of beneficiaries was also prominent for achieving sustainable development. On the other hand, the necessity for developing organisations to identify with the existent language of the local community for achieving development collaboratively was identified. This case study was sourced from the World Bank Rural Development Report, Africa Region (2002).

Case Two: The Gemidiriya Community Development and Livelihood Improvement Project (GCDLIP) An Overview of Sri Lanka

The post-war situation in Sri Lanka makes it difficult to establish the current population, but a 2005 survey by the CIA world fact book places it at 20.2 million people, while life expectancy is placed at 68.2years for males and 75.8years for females (Gunasekera, 2002). Situated in the South Asian region where there resides the world’s greatest concentration of the poor with over one billion people living on less than US\$2 despite the region’s economic growth, Sri Lanka draws immensely on external support and development aids from multiple development organizations. Rather high, 41.6 percent of the Sri Lankan national population survives below this mark. Currently, there exist 22 active major development projects funded by the World Bank in the country (WB, 2011), most of which are targeted at the rebuilding of the nation as a result of recently ended armed conflicts, as well as the need for encouragement of participation and civil engagement of the general populace in development issues. More especially the concept of empowering the local communities has become primary to the World Bank in its reach for sustainable development in Sri Lanka.

The Project

Aimed at the reduction of rural poverty, through empowerment, the Gemidiriya is a participatory programme jointly funded and implemented by the World Bank, the Sri Lankan government and local communities. The origin of the programme stems from the historical efforts of the country at poverty alleviation and therefore contains relatively small content from external development organizations. Its adoption was a result of collaborative efforts between Sri Lanka, the World Bank and Japan Social Development towards the discovery of community driven development approaches. The project sought to address the absence of determination towards self-help which was a result impact of previous colonialism and the mentality of extreme dependence. Resolving issues of inadequate investment and re-investment within the small economies and the non-inclusion of half the population constituting mainly of youth and women in development were also target objectives.

IV. The Project Methodology

The methodology employed involved firstly, selecting the poor communities, educating these communities on the approach to be used, organizing the institutional structure, and training the constituting members on the management practices. For the selection of the target population, existing data obtained from the national Department of Census and Statistics which recorded poverty distribution was used, with priority given to the poorest. However, willingness on the path of the local community towards accepting the project had to be established to ensure that the initiative was properly directed.

The Gemidiriya Foundation, set up to implement the project, provided loans to youths for the development of skill, and one-off grants to the poorest for undertaking livelihood ventures. In implementation, within the first two years, the Gemidiriya employed the use of NGOs to empower communities at village level through social mobilization, where they educated and motivated the populace toward participating in establishing institutional structure and creating their own development plans. With infrastructural projects, the notion of establishing collective responsibility while building capacity defined that priorities had to be determined through a participatory process and this helped facilitate participation and commitment from the community through 20% contribution of labour and materials and 10% financial cost. Community capacity in budgeting, accounting, and organizational management was also built within this period hence there was a major transfer of technical and managerial skill.

V. Findings of the Gemidiriya Community Development Programme

By December 2008, a record 2,416 projects had been started with 11% focused on improving water supply, and 55% and 16% on roads and multi-purpose buildings respectively. The foundation in an empowering move, then revised the implementation system in 2007 when it begun using community representatives for social mobilization, education and empowerment processes for newly joining communities instead of NGOs. In sustaining and consolidating this development, the People's Company was formed with a compulsory requirement of at least 80% of the village families becoming shareholders, but with restrictions on acquisition of 10% or less on issued share capital, to prevent excessive control from rural elites or political influences.

The success or effectiveness of the Gemidiriya programme is evident in the World Bank decision to fund a second phase of the project, based on their mid-term review. With a target of 1,000 villages over a four-year period at the inception of the programme, 1,036 villages were covered at the close of the phase indicating achievement of the target. The mid-term review of 2007 also records a survey result of 14% of all households in project areas reporting increase in income as well as living standard. This case study was sourced from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP, 2009).

VI. Summary

The subsequent analysis and findings of these case studies present that when development is hinged on the transference of knowledge, skill or ability, it presents greater opportunity for sustainability. The considerations that educating beneficiaries in a participatory way before embarking on development project processes as evident in the Gemidiriya Programme, will be time and cost intensive, can be countered as the Community monitoring and evaluation project which built on already existing participatory approaches which were not previously empowerment grounded showed that less effort was needed in implementing subsequent development initiatives. As both projects present, where beneficiaries are allowed to draft their own development plans as well as develop or identify necessary tools and mechanisms required for its achievement, there is a certain confidence exhibited towards the subsequent management and maintenance. These cases further demonstrate that there is a willingness to learn, when beneficiaries are well convinced that such learning will have a long-standing impact in the transforming a dire situation and will make extra effort to ensure the sustainability of such positive change.

VII. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been on exercising that learning and empowerment of beneficiaries should form the core objective of sustainable development projects or programmes. The recognition by the World Bank that there is an importance of learning for initiating development in any form which led to the forming of the World Bank Learning Group amongst other development bodies, to sustain the existence of knowledge acquired in development processes is exemplary. Such considerations that learning provides a sturdy base for the subsequent institution or implementation of development projects should also inspire that simultaneously, the management and long survival of such projects will be dependent on learning. Also, the study has discussed the perspectives that when learning occurs on the part of beneficiaries during participation, it empowers and thus enhances sustainability possibilities.

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