

INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION ON PROJECT PERFORMANCE OF RUIRI WATER PROJECTS, MERU COUNTY, KENYA

Mbui Josphat Njogu

Master of Arts in Project Planning and Management, University of Nairobi, Kenya

Dr. Wanjohi John M.

Senior Lecturer, School of Physical Sciences, University of Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Nearly 16% of the global population has no access to adequate, clean and safe water. Kenya, like numerous other Sub-Saharan African countries, is water scarce. Community water projects exist to supplement or complement government efforts to avail water to rural citizens. The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of community participation in the performance of community water projects in Ruiru Area, Meru County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to establish the influence of community participation in financial management, project governance, operations and maintenance and monitoring and evaluation on performance of Ruiru-Thau Water Project. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population was 413 respondents comprising 400 heads of household that were benefitting from Ruiru-Thau Water Project, 11 project committee members and two project donors (Catholic Diocese of Meru and Meru County Government). Proportionate stratified sampling was used to derive a sample of 211 respondents – 196 household leaders, 11 project committee members and two donors. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire (for household heads and project committee members) and an interview schedule (for project donors). Data analysis and presentation was conducted using descriptive statistics with the help of IBM Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS), Version 20. The study established that community participation in financial planning had a moderate positive influence on project

performance; community participation in project governance had a moderate positive influence on project performance; community participation in project operations and management had a weak positive influence on project performance, and community participation in monitoring and evaluation had a moderate positive influence on project performance. The study concluded that Ruiru-Thau Water Project community members were not participating actively in scrutinizing and approving financial transactions. Moreover, elections were mere formalities to maintain the status quo; community members rarely attended project governance meetings and were not involved in decision-making for the project. In addition, the community and project donors were contributing materials, labour, finances and security to the project towards enhancement of project performance. The study also concluded that community members were indifferent to the project by not visiting project sites, failing to attend meetings to discuss overall performance of the project and not requesting to scrutinize performance and progress reports. The study recommended that the project team and donors should create a clear system of accounting for project finances. Further, a new governance structure should be established with emphasis on new elections. Moreover, a new system for receiving project materials and fees and reporting water distribution problems should be put in place. In addition, meetings and site visits should be organized regularly to inculcate accountability and transparency in project management.

Key Words: *community participation, management, monitoring and evaluation, financial management, operations and governance, project*

INTRODUCTION

According to Griffin (2000), participatory development has its roots in economic development practices of the post-World War II period (1945 to Mid-1950s), when most of Europe needed reconstruction. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, (popularly known as the World Bank), was established to facilitate the process of economic recovery. The late 1950s and 1960s witnessed another significant process that necessitated economic development. Colonialism was in decline as many African and Asian countries attained independence. It became critical to develop and modernize of these countries. As Europe underwent reconstruction and economic development, global inequalities between rich nations and poor ones became evident and spawned the development aid era, pitting competing global war rivals, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America (USA). Development was equated to economic progress dominated by the elite, with poor people offering cheap labour. This approach to development (also called modernization or top-down development), however, widened the gap between the rich and the poor and entrenched poverty, especially in developing nations (Cooke & Kothari, 2001).

Thomas (2013) opines that participatory development emerged to curb the drawbacks of top-down development, which entails conception, planning and implementation of projects by the elite without involvement or consultation with the masses, the latter being considered too uninformed and unsophisticated to engage in development work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) developed the Basic Needs Approach in 1976, defining the minimum resources a person required to live, hence the need to offer workers incomes that would satisfy basic needs. Participatory development gained momentum in the 1970s. The World Bank also advocated for Basic Needs Approach in development and labour issues.

Paulo Freire and Robert Chambers supported participatory development, asserting that people required opportunities to participate in development projects designed for their benefit as this entrenches a sense of responsibility and ensures project sustainability. Mohan and Stokke (2000) assert that participatory development is a grassroots movement that rejects 'top-downism' and 'statism' as the recognized channels of development. A plurality of development goals can be achieved outside conventional reliance on the state to initiate, fund and implement development projects (Stein & Harper, 2000).

Mohan and Stokke (2000) assert that since its introduction, various organizations have adopted participatory development and utilized it in development work. The World Bank was among the first financial aid agencies to popularize this approach. Other organizations that have embraced this approach include International Monetary Fund, UN agencies such as

UNDP and FAO, individual governments, especially in the developing world, and civil society organizations working with local communities all over the world. However, for participatory development to work, it must embrace practical community participation in all phases of the project cycle. WHO (2002) asserts that community participation is not mere involvement of members of the beneficiary community in development, but also empowering people and helping them make decisions on desired developmental outcomes. WHO advocates for community participation in health issues globally, since is the best strategy of ensuring improved health and better livelihoods for global citizens.

Bamberger and the World Bank (1998) observe that local people must be active from the onset of a project to the time it is completed. The community cannot be a passive participant since it understands its needs, the dynamics of implementing projects in the locality and the accruing benefits, better than external donors. Social acceptability of the project, reasonable sharing of benefits, mobilization of local resources and project sustainability are some of the reasons advanced for active community participation in project management. Water projects in particular call for participation of local communities in development initiatives since water is a basic but scarce commodity, often at the centre of conflicts between various types of users. The scarcity of water sources demands prudent conservation, extraction, distribution and management, all of which depend, largely, on the understanding and cooperation of local people who are also the beneficiaries.

According to WHO (2010), over one billion (nearly 16%) global citizens lack clean and safe water for drinking. About 120 million Europeans lack clean and safe water. Developing nations are most affected, particularly people living in rural areas. Of the 49 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, 37 are water insecure. Nearly three quarters of these countries are likely to face water crises at any time. Piped water is not available for about 60% of the population. According to UNEP (2010), Africa is the second driest continent, with water availability being critical for survival. Most people still live in rural areas, relying on rain-fed agriculture for livelihood. Only 40% of Sub-Saharan Africa population access clean, safe water.

USAID (2008) observes that Kenya is a water-scarce nation. It contains renewable fresh water resources of 647m³ per capita, yet UN standards require the nation to have not less than 1,000m³. Almost 80% of the country consists of arid and semi-arid land and rainfall is often unreliable. By 2006, 57% of Kenyans had access to clean drinking water as the country strived to attain the then Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Water Act of 2016 guarantees every citizen the right to access water resources. In the Fourth Schedule of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, Kenyans have the right to adequate, safe and clean water. Further, Strategic Development Goal (SDG) Number 6 advocates for provision of clean water and sanitation for all global citizens by the year 2030. For Kenyan especially in rural areas to enjoy the right to water and to cater for their ever-increasing need for the commodity, local water management projects must be encouraged and supported.

Despite this, as K'Akumu (2006) asserts, Kenya's history of water management reveals a bias towards commercial extraction and favouritism in relation to urban users as opposed to those in rural areas. During colonial times, provision of water to government facilities, the settler community and commercial agriculture was the norm. Independent African states perpetuated the same in relation to elites and large commercial farms. Top-down approach to management of water and water resources has resulted in acute water shortages and conflicts. Droughts and deforestation have aggravated the situation. In recent times, the government has embarked on construction of various water dams and tunnels to channel water to urban centres to deal with increasing demand from domestic, farming and commercial consumers. Incidentally, local communities, from whose areas water is extracted are not consulted, and do not benefit from mega water projects, a case in point being people in the Aberdare Region, whose rivers contribute to the water needs of Nairobi City.

The government enacts laws to govern the management of water resources. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation has the responsibility of formulating policy and coordinating water management and resource issues in the country. The practical work of regulating the use of water resources lies with the Water Resource Authority (WRA). The Water Service Regulatory Board issues licenses for various forms of water extraction. Water Service Providers (WPS) work within this arrangement to provide services to the community. However, weak laws and poor implementation and enforcement have resulted in acute water shortage both in rural and urban areas.

Ruiri-Thau Water Association is a community water project that established in 1992 by the Catholic Diocese of Meru in Ruiri Area, Meru County, to serve the water needs of people of Buuri and Tigania West Constituency. The Tana Water Services Board, under the Water Act 2016, contracted Ruiri-Thau Water Association to provide water in the project area. The association was incorporated in 2003 under Section 10 of the Societies Act. Presently, the Meru County Government and Diocese of Meru nominally own the association. The objectives of the association are to improve health and living standards of the community in accordance with self-help groups' principles, through provision of gravity piped water in the project area. The mandate of the association is to provide clean, safe, affordable water and sanitation services to Ruiri Area residents. The association operates a meter-based water management system.

Ruiri-Thau Water Association is a small-scale water service provider located in Buuri and Tigania West Constituencies. It covers an area of 47km² with a population of 30,000 people. The association serves a population of approximately 15,000 people. Water is rationed through 800 connections. These include community water points (kiosks) and individual connections. Kathita-Ruiri Community Water Project also operates in the same locality. Some residents also have individual and community boreholes. The highest decision-making organ of the association is the Annual General Meeting (AGM) during which available members participate in electing committee members. The Association has 7 working staff

and 11 committee members, elected during the AGM. Committee members formulate the Daily Operational Policy of the association.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Kenya lacks adequate water, yet water is a critical commodity for human life and sustenance. According to Water.org (2018), 41% of Kenya's 46 million people depend on water sources that are unimproved like rivers, shallow wells and ponds, for their water needs. Moreover, only about 16% of the designated water suppliers in the country provide water on a continuous basis. Wateraid.org. (2018) further asserts that more than 30% of Kenyans do not have access to clean water. Consequently, majority of Kenyans have to devise their own solutions to the water crisis facing the country. Community water projects are critical components in the water provision matrix especially in rural areas where government-owned and run water companies do not offer services (Macharia, 2015). However, while many rural citizens depend on community water projects, the latter often fail to provide clean, safe and reliable water to targeted beneficiaries. Donors initiate most of these projects, with the community assuming management roles after the donor has exited. Participatory development experts opine that projects implemented with the active participation of the community and beneficiaries are likely to perform efficiently and sustainably (Batchelor, 2000). The Catholic Diocese of Meru (D.O.M.) initiated Ruiru-Thau Water Projects in 1992. The project purposes to meet the water needs of people living in Ruiru Area, spanning Buuri and Tigania West Constituencies. However, despite more than two and a half decades of existence, the community-run project has failed to expand significantly beyond the original area of operation, and targeted beneficiaries still experience prolonged water shortages and maintenance issues. Considering many residents of Ruiru and its environs depend on this project for their water needs, it was important to carry out a study on the role of community participation in the performance of Ruiru-Thau Water Project with focus on financial management, governance, operations and maintenance and monitoring and evaluation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the influence of community participation in financial management on performance of Ruiru Water Projects, Meru County.
2. To determine the influence of community participation in project governance on performance of Ruiru Water Projects, Meru County.
3. To assess the influence of community participation in operations and maintenance on performance of Ruiru Water Projects, Meru County.
4. To evaluate the influence of community participation in monitoring and evaluation on performance of Ruiru Water Projects, Meru County.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the Ladder Theory of Participation, which was introduced by Sherry Arnstein in 1969. The rationale behind the ladder was to conceptualize how participation works in development. According to Tritter and McCallum (2006), Arnstein identified a number of rungs in the participation ladder, indicating that either people are manipulated or they participate actively in a project. The ladder of participation is applicable to community participation in various stages of the project cycle. Figure 1 illustrates the different levels of the Ladder of Participation.

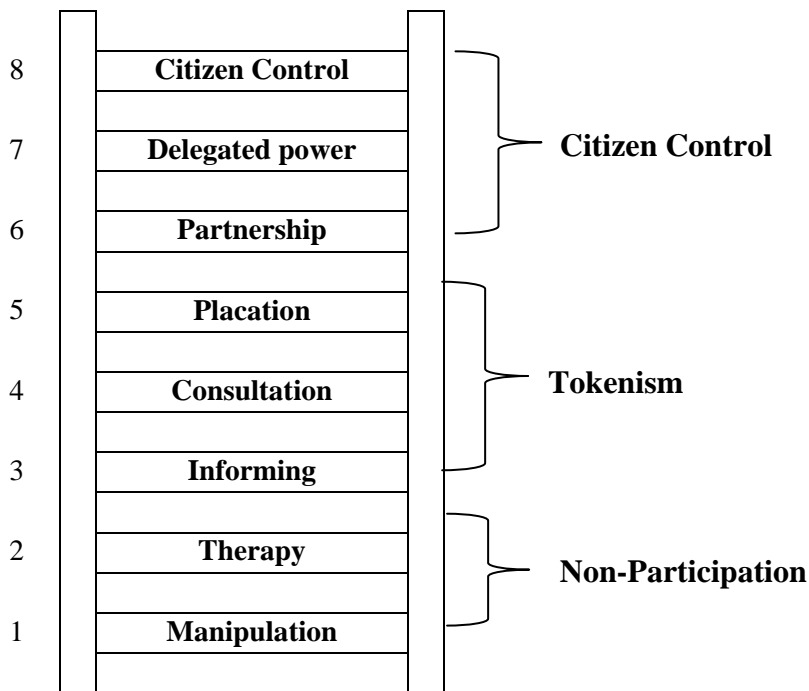


Figure 1: Ladder of Participation

Source: Sherry (1969)

The first two rungs represent non-participation at a technical level, though, superficially, community members are said to participate. ‘Manipulation’ may involve project beneficiaries being invited to meetings where they rubber-stamp decisions of the donor(s) or project committees, despite not participating in decision-making. For example, the community may be asked to sign a petition or document seeking for more donor funding with the promise of improved services. The second rung represents ‘Therapy’, whereby project committee leaders and donors do not give practical solutions to the problems faced by project beneficiaries. Instead, leaders blame community members and direct the latter to seek alternative solutions to their problems, for example attributing water shortage to climate

change and asking the community to plant more trees instead of dealing with operations and maintenance problems.

The third to fifth rungs entail 'Tokenism' as a form of participation. The third rung involves informing people about projects and issues that concern them. While sensitization and dissemination of information to community members is critical for projects to attain their objectives, communication should be two-way and intended beneficiaries should be given opportunities to air their views. In the context of water projects, it is not enough to inform the community that a certain amount of money was collected during a specified period, without allowing for scrutiny of the information. 'Consultation' goes a notch higher but fails to meet the threshold of active participation. Seeking the opinions of the community on water project problems and solutions is inadequate if those solutions will not be implemented and feedback provided. Under 'Placation', community members may be invited to participate in planning meetings to feel part of the project but the final decision on what is to be implemented lies with the donor(s) and / or project committee members, making this a superficial process, though an improvement on participation in lower levels.

The final three rungs of the Participation Ladder represent more active community participation, hence the moniker 'Citizen Control'. 'Partnership' entails sharing power and responsibilities between the community and project leaders / donors. A mutual agreement exists and community members feel they have a stake in water projects as equal partners with project managers. This is the ideal situation for most rural water projects since leaders of various committees are elected to serve the needs of the community and can be removed from their positions if their actions and decisions are not in tandem with community needs. Under 'Delegated Power', the community holds greater sway over the project and delegates it to project committee members. While this is an ideal situation, it requires superior conceptual and implementation skills on the part of the community. This is rarely the case in most water projects. The highest and final rung entails absolute control by citizens. This situation exists when the community stops depending on external support to run the project. Members of the community also actively run the day-to-day affairs of the project. While this is an model situation, it is impracticable in local water management projects since the community does not own the water in real sense and has to depend on donor and government support in perpetuity.

In essence, community participation in water projects demands reasonable practical participation by community members. This entails not just being informed but attending meetings, giving opinion, scrutinizing documents, contributing financial and materials resources, offering labour, demanding for accountability for funds, electing officials and making decisions on all aspects of the project. Despite this, owing to varying levels of understanding and literacy of different members of the community, and the fact that they also have jobs and other commitments to attend to, a water project may not attain the highest rung of the Ladder of Participation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Denscombe (2007) asserts that a research design is the overarching strategy a researcher adopts to assemble various components of a study in a manner that is rational and intelligible with the intention of dealing exhaustively with the research problem. A research design is likened to a map that explains the path to be taken in collecting data, and the measurement and analysis of the data, to the point where the study is concluded. The research problem is the key determinant of the type of research design to be adopted in a study. This study adopted the descriptive survey design. Mertler (2006) opines that descriptive studies are meant to portray the subject of the study accurately at a given point in time. Surveys entail interacting with people and eliciting information from them using methods such as interviews and questionnaires. The study sought to investigate the role of community participation in the performance of community water projects in Ruiru Area, Meru County. The survey research design was appropriate for the study because data was collected from the implementers and beneficiaries of the projects by use of a questionnaire. Data was collated, analysed and presented, as collected from respondents, without any manipulation.

Target Population

All the items or individuals that possess the characteristics the study is looking for comprise the population (McBurney and White, 2009). The population of this study consisted of 400 households (benefiting directly from Ruiru-Thau Water Project, and spread across nine sub-locations), 11 management committee members and two project sponsors.

Sample Size

The “Table for Determining Sample Size for a Given Population” that was developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), was used to derive a sample from the population. Krejcie & Morgan used the following formula to develop a table that explains how to derive a sample from a specified population (Sahu, 2013):

$$S = X^2NP(1-P) / d^2(N-1) + X^2P(1-P)$$

Where: S = the required sample size; X^2 = the table value of chi-square for one degree of freedom at the desired confidence level; N = the population size; P = the population (assumed to be 50 since this would provide the maximum sample size); d= the degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (.05)

According to the “Table for Determining Sample Size for a Given Population”, a population of 400 requires a sample of 196 individuals, hence 196 households. Proportionate stratified sampling method was used to distribute the population of 400 households across 11 different sub-locations, from which a sample of 196 households was derived proportionately across

the stratum (sub-locations). Moreover, the study applied census sampling to select all the 11 water management committees and the two donors / sponsors as sample populations respectively. Census sampling is appropriate when the population is minimal and sampling is unnecessary (Kumar, 2008). In essence, the sample population of the study comprised 196 households, 11 sub-location water management committees and two donors.

Sampling Procedure

Simple random sampling was used to select 196 households from which to collect data. Further, purposive sampling was used to select the head of the household as the primary respondent. For water management committees, census sampling was used to select respective project leaders. For project donors, purposive sampling was used to select the person the donor organization had assigned to the project as the respondent on behalf of the donor. Therefore, data was gathered from 209 individuals.

Data Collection Instruments

Two types of tools were used to collect data from respondents. A questionnaire was used to collect data from household heads and sub-location committee members. Structured questionnaires are appropriate for collecting data from large populations because the instrument yields uniform responses. Moreover, this tool enables the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire was structured based on the four objectives of the study. It had six sections: one for personal information, four sections for the four independent variables and one section for the dependent variable. Further, donors volunteered information for the study through an interview schedule. Interview schedules are appropriate for smaller population and allow the interviewer to probe for information from the respondents. The interview schedule was also designed to collect information on each of the objectives.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher liaised with project committees and donors to acquire information on meeting days of various committees. With the help of trained graduate assistants from the locality, the researcher administered questionnaires during respective meeting days of locational sub-location committees. Questionnaires were filled and collected in one session to minimize losses and increase the return rate. The researcher also interviewed representatives of the two project donors on different dates. Out of the 196 questionnaires issued to household heads and project committee members, 189 were filled and returned. Moreover, both donors participated in respective interviews.

Data Analysis Technique

De Vaus, Fouche and Delport (2005) assert that data collection targets reduction of information collected from respondents into smaller units amenable to logical and scientific interpretation, hence aiding in drawing concomitant conclusions. Data from questionnaires was coded, edited, categorized and entered into SPSS Version 20. The researcher generated frequency tables, graphs, charts and other descriptive means of presenting and analysing data. Findings were presented in frequency tables and analysed based on respective objectives.

RESEARCH RESULTS

To establish the relationship between community participation and the performance of Ruirithau Water Project, Pearson-Product-Moment Correlation was computed. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1: Pearson Product-Moment Correlation on Community Participation and Project Performance

		Community Participation	Project Performance
Pearson	Financial Management	1.000	0.49
	Project Governance	1.000	0.38
	Operations and Management	1.000	0.26
	Monitoring and Evaluation	1.000	0.31
Si 2 - tailed	Project Performance		1.000
N	189	189	

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It is evident from Table 1 that community participation in project financial management had a moderate positive influence (0.49) on performance of Ruirithau Water Project. This implies that the greater and more active the participation of community members in project financial management, the more improved the performance of the project. Further, community participation in project governance had a moderate positive influence (0.38) on performance of Ruirithau Water Project. In essence, the project would have experienced improved performance if community members had participated more actively in making critical decisions on the project and its leadership. In addition, there was a moderate positive correlation (0.31) between community participation in monitoring and evaluation and performance of Ruirithau Water Project. This implied that if the community had been involved more actively in project monitoring and evaluation, the project would improve in performance. Moreover, community participation in project operations and management had a weak positive influence (0.26) on the performance of Ruirithau Water Project. The implication is that the greater the participation of the community in operations and

management, the more improved the performance of Ruiiri-Thau Water Project would have been and vice versa.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that the more active the Ruiiri-Thau Community Water Project members were in scrutinizing and approving financial transactions and pertinent reports, the more efficient and effective the project was and vice versa. At a practical level, though, Ruiiri-Thau community members were not active participants in project financial management, partly due to deliberate marginalization by leaders and partly owing to indifference to most project issues, except access to water.

In addition, the study established that active involvement of community members in electing project leaders, attending meetings to discuss accountability and transparency and participating in decision-making should have resulted in enhance performance of the project. The reality, though, is that elections were mere formalities to maintain the status quo; members rarely attended project governance meetings, and were not involved in decision-making for the project.

Further, the study established that project beneficiaries were active in contributing labour, relevant fees and materials for the project. Project donors were also active contributors of material and technical support, advocacy for the project and security for project staff and material. However, the operations and management aspect of the project required the input of technical experts.

Moreover, findings established community members were indifferent to the project by not visiting project sites, failing to attend meetings to discuss overall performance of the project and not requesting to scrutinize performance and progress reports. Project leaders were not willing to accept criticism and implement the recommendations of water users and this contributed to apathy in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations emanate from the findings of the study. It would be prudent for the Ruiiri-Thau Water Project management committee, the beneficiary community and donors to implement the suggestions because this would enhance community participation in project financial management, project governance, project operations and management and project monitoring and evaluation to ensure Ruiiri-Thau Water Project consistently produces clean and adequate water.

1. The Ruiiri-Thau Water Project management team, with the active participation of community members and donors should establish a clear system of receiving and accounting for project money; develop a procurement plan; establish clear auditing

- procedures and organize regular meetings for the community to scrutinize the project's financial records.
2. Project donors and the government should mediate and help the Ruiru-Thau Water Project community and leaders to develop a new constitution and elections' guidelines, supervise the election of a new project team and subsequent elections of committee members, and entrench a culture of holding regular accountability meetings where the views of community members are collected, respected and implemented.
 3. The community and donors must together create a framework for identifying Ruiru-Thau Water Project's material needs, reporting any anomalies in the water distribution infrastructure, accounting for all monies paid by community members, paying allowances to project teams, holding regular meetings to receive O&M reports and hiring technical experts to enhance water production and distribution.
 4. All project stakeholders, under the guidance of the Ruiru-Thau Water Project's committee should organize regular meetings to discuss the progress of the project, conduct customer satisfaction surveys among project beneficiaries, benchmark with more successful community water projects in the area and entrench the notion of accountability among project leaders and community ownership of the project.

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