**Role of Community Participation on Sustainability of Donor Funded Food Security Projects in Tharaka South Sub County, Kenya**

**ABSTRACT**

Participatory approach has been embraced globally for most development projects such that most current food security projects have been implemented in many communities using the participatory approach. However, there is evidence that many food security projects lack sustainability that is the projects collapse with the exit of the donor funding the projects. Therefore, his study sought to examine the role of community participation on Sustainability of Donor Funded Food Security Projects in Tharaka South Sub County in Kenya. The study used descriptive survey research design on a sample size of 227 respondents selected using purposive and simple random sampling methods. The instruments for data collection were questionnaires and interview schedules. The data were analyzed using correlation analysis, frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation. The findings indicated that community participation and sustainability of donor funded food security projects correlated positively. The community involvement, institutional capacity and role of donors enhanced sustainability of donor funded food security projects in Tharaka South Sub County in Kenya. Based on the findings, the study recommended that community members be involved in generating project ideas as well as considered in monetary contribution and technical support for the donor funded food security projects. It was also deemed paramount to train and empower project implementers for the sustainability of the projects. The donors would also consider continuing to play their role in the operation and maintenance of the donor funded food security projects.

**Key words:** Community Participation, Donor funded projects, Food security, Sustainability.

**1.** **INTRODUCTION**

Globally, the participatory approach has been used to enhance sustainability of most food funded projects (FAO, 2002; Maina, 2024). Therefore, reception of innovations and new cultivating techniques in conjunction with participatory approach has been instrumental in enhancement of development projects. Food security in developed nations like the United States of America has been to a great extent through innovation and participatory strategies (Boratyńska & Huseynov, 2017). Anderson and McFarlane (2010) showed that to accomplish any ideal result, the community must be actively included and venturing into the community requires a frame of mind of 'do it with the individuals' which involves getting things done with them not getting things done for them or to them. At the point when things are accomplished for individuals or to individuals the enthusiastic duty is restricted therefore the hugeness of participatory advancement. Community involvement positively affects the results of an undertaking and this linkage gets established through better aggregation of preferences, better design through use of local knowledge, pressure by community on bureaucracies to perform and better implementation through ownership (Boratyńska & Huseynov, 2017). When the community appreciates the importance of not only participation but also ownership of the project due to the accrued benefits then there is likelihood of sustainability of the project beyond the exit of the donor.

Project sustainability is a major challenge that affects nearly all the developing nations (Imasiku, 2021). The increasing recognition of the importance of sustainability in project management is a positive development, signaling a shift towards more responsible and sustainable practices (Orieno *et al.,* 2024) as the sustainability discourse in projects focus on the development of sustainable deliverables (Soares *et al.,* 2024). The connection between sustainability and project management is firmly grounded in the shared goal of achieving positive change (Shokouhi & Bachari, 2025). Donors and other advancement accomplices or Agencies such as the World Bank, DFID, USAID and other reciprocal guide offices have been communicating concerns about project sustainability on the grounds that while the pattern with execution of activities is indicating noteworthy improvement, post-usage supportability is very deficient with not very many tasks being continued (Kanyanya *et al.,*2014) demonstrated that active community involvement improves the match between community needs and what the community acquires from a venture. Active involvement is the most key of all the empowerment fundamentals mainly because of ensuring proper resource mobilization and utilization, higher degree of volunteerism and a brighter community spirit thus yielding better results. Muchelule (2018), adds that community involvement upgrades expertise advancement and feeling of proprietorship that stimulates powerful execution and sustainability of projects. Through community involvement individuals gain aptitudes for an aggregate activity that upgrades sustainability of ventures (Olukotun, 2008). This is because active community inclusion tends to improve realization, support and manageability of project tasks.

In spite of gigantic measures of cash having been spent on execution of advancement extends in Kenya, poor activities supportability limits the profits expected of these ventures. Different components in charge of poor task manageability are straightforward while others not so direct but are all embedded in the weaknesses within the project and threats from the environment or outside of the project (Lemba, 2009). Low community involvement is said to prompt decreased undertaking adequacy and in this way low project impact (Mwangi, 2014). Community participation is considered a significant strategy for making local-level development projects more accountable, citizen-centric, and sustainable (Costumado & Chemane, 2024). Community contribution realizes various encounters and emotions from various individuals in various conditions and even in comparable circumstances on the grounds that the advantages that accumulate from it may not be the equivalent for all. Community involvement in activities such as collection and analysis of information; prioritization, ranking, stocking taking of resources owned, fund raising, agreeing and developing plans, allocating roles to members, report writing, communication and impact involve high level of community involvement (Kanyanya, *et al.,* 2014). Active involvement of the community in needs assessment facilitates proper problem or need diagnosis hence clear definition of the problem in many ways. For example, Community Based Planning enables communities to design within their own assets, around their very own needs and inside their own conditions (Olukotun, 2008). Community engagement in local development programs is an indispensable tool for ensuring that projects are not just only successfully implemented but also meaningful, providing the host community with a platform for sustainable growth (Ara *et al.,* 2024). This approach may improve service delivery and democratic engagement which enhances collective action in management of development projects and empowering communities.

Tharaka South Sub-County is in the Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL) regions in Upper Eastern locale of Kenya which experience across the board and ceaseless food insecurity. The Sub County receives insufficient rainfall and encounters dry spells prompting crop disappointments and starvation to the community (Gioto, 2018). Because of regular harvest disappointments, the community depends for the most part on help sustenance supplies from the Government, different contributors and religious associations. Notwithstanding help nourishment supplies, the Government and other improvement offices have been actualizing sustenance security extends in the Sub-County to address the nourishment frailty. NGOs have been into these ASAL zones in Kenya including Tharaka South Sub County implementing various food security projects that keep running into a huge number of dollars. Some of these projects include: Njaa Marufuku Kenya, Traditional high value food crops promotion project, Promotion of private sector development in agriculture, Kenya Agricultural Productivity and Agribusiness Project, East African Agricultural Productivity Project among others Lokuruka (2021). In spite of these ventures having been actualized in the Tharaka South Sub County, 64% of the community is as yet poor and dependent on relief food distribution every year (Kawira, 2022). Food security projects have not been fruitful in light of the fact that the recipients have remained food insecure for a long period. Along these lines these food security projects have not conveyed what they were planned to, according to the stakeholder desires. This study examined the Role of Community Participation on Sustainability of Donor Funded Food Security Projects in Tharaka South Sub County in Kenya.

**2. METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in Tharaka South Sub County which is situated in the lower parts of Tharaka Nithi County in Kenya. This study applied descriptive research design and targeted 227 respondents who included community project beneficiaries, social development officers, project officers and opinion leaders in the Sub County. The determination of the sample size was guided by a sample estimation table by the Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Simple random sampling method was used to select the project beneficiaries while the project officers and other opinion leaders were purposively sampled since they were technocrats in food security projects. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used as the research instruments. Questionnaires were used to solicit information from the Donors, Project Officers, and opinion leaders while the interview schedule was used to collect in depth data from the Community members. Data collected was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics, correlation and regression analysis and reported as frequencies and percentages.

**3.** **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**3.1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

The respondents were required to indicate their gender. The findings showed there was gender disparity among the respondents, where more males (66.1%) than females (33.9%) engaged in these food security projects. Regarding the age of the respondents, the highest percentage (42%) were aged between 41-50 years while the least percentage (10%) were in the age group of 20- 30 years. This indicated lower participation of the youth in donor funded food security projects. It is important to note that Young people’s participation in the design and implementation of community-based projects is key to ensuring that such interventions are relevant to them (Ferreira *et al.,* 2024). Youth Participation is considered an overarching dimension that helps to improve young people’s quality of life and promote their social inclusion (Ferreira *et al.,* 2023). The findings also indicated that majority (70.5%) of the respondents were members of various food security projects meaning that only 29.5% of the community members were enrolled in the food security donor projects. Regarding groups targeted for donor funded food security projects, majority (51.1%) were poor household farmers while 39.2% were in projects that involved all farmers in the project area (Table 1). This indicated that most of the donor funded food security projects targeted poor household farmers since they are mostly affected and lacked basic needs such food and appropriate shelter. As such, with adequate planning, the donor funded food security projects can easily be supported by the community because the projects support basic requirement of the community members. The respondents were asked to indicate the donor funded projects they were involved in and the findings showed that majority of donor funded project (60.8%) focused on food crop production because there is food insecurity in the region (Table 2).

Table 1: Respondents’ gender, age, project membership, and people addressed by the project

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristic | Response area | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Gender of the respondents | Male | 150 | 66.1 | 66.1 |
| Female | 77 | 33.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |  |
| Age of the respondents | 20-30 | 22 | 9.7 | 9.7 |
| 31-40 | 66 | 29.1 | 38.8 |
| 41-50 | 96 | 42.3 | 81.1 |
| 51 Years and above | 43 | 18.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |  |
| Project Membership | Yes | 160 | 70.5 | 70.5 |
| No | 67 | 29.5 | 100.0 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |  |
| Group of people addressed by the projects | Poor household farmers | 116 | 51.1 | 51.1 |
| All farmers in project area | 89 | 39.2 | 90.3 |
| Both categories | 22 | 9.7 | 100.0 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |  |

Table 2: Projects in which Community Members had Participated

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Projects participating in | Frequency | Percent |
| Food Crop Production | 138 | 60.8 |
| Farm Input Provision | 33 | 14.5 |
| Extension Service Provision | 11 | 4.8 |
| Technology Promotion | 11 | 4.8 |
| Agribusiness Promotion | 34 | 15.0 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |

Therefore, based on these findings it is necessary to come up with strategies that improve on the sustainability of the food security projects which affects most of the community members.

**3.2.** **Correlation Analysis Between the Study Variables**

The inferential statistics were employed to determine the correlation analysis among the study variables. The findings indicated that community involvement and Sustainability of Donor funded food security projects correlated positively and significantly (r=0.548, p=0.000). It was further observed that institutional capacity and sustainability of donor funded food security projects correlated positively and significantly (r=0.521, p=0.000). Further it was established that, the roles of donors and sustainability of donor funded food security projects correlated positively (r=0.534, p=0.000) [Table 3].

Table 3: Results of Correlation Analysis among Study Variables

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Sustainability of Donor funded food security projects | Community involvement | Institution capacity | Roles of Donors |
| Sustainability of Donor funded food security projects | Pearson Correlation | 1 |  |  |  |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 |  |  |  |
| Community involvement | Pearson Correlation | 0.548 | 1 |  |  |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 |  |  |
| Institution capacity | Pearson Correlation | 0.521 | 0.475 | 1 |  |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.000 | 0.000 |  |
| Roles of Donors | Pearson Correlation | 0.534 | 0.363 | 0.226 | 1 |
| Sig. (2-tailed) | 0.000 | 0.002 | 0.071 | **.** |

**3.3. Stages of Community Involvement in Project Implementation**

The study sought to determine the stages at which the stakeholders were involved in the implementation of donor funded food security projects. The findings of the study showed that community members were more involved at project implementation stage (Mean= 3.1) and at monitoring stage (Mean = 3.0). The community members were however less involved at project identification stage (Mean= 2.1) and at project preparation stage (mean = 2.4). This means the community was involvement in donor funded projects (Table 4).

Table 4: Stages of involvement of community in projects

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Community involvement | N | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Deviation |
| Project identification | 227 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 2.0485 | 0.66007 |
| Project preparation | 227 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 2.4361 | 0.73420 |
| Project implementation | 227 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 3.0705 | 1.13057 |
| Project monitoring | 227 | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.9736 | 1.08864 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 227 |  |  |  |  |

The findings of this study are in line with Anderson and McFarlane (2010) who suggested that to achieve any desired outcome of a project, community must be actively involved and 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. When things are done for people or to people the emotional commitment is limited thus the significance of participatory development. Manikutty (2010) stated that Community involvement has a favorable impact on the outcomes of a project and this linkage gets established through better aggregation of preferences, better design through use of local knowledge, pressure by community on bureaucracies to perform and better implementation through ownership. This also goes in line with Shore (2005) who stated that the success of a project may depend more on human factors such as community involvement, rather than other technical factors such as project leadership, top management support, and project team.

**3.4. Community Involvement in Sustainability of Donor Funded Food Security Projects**

The community involvement in sustainability of donor funded food security projects was determined by finding out community involvement in generation of the project ideas and forms of contribution by community members during project implementation in the context of sustainability of donor funded food security projects.

**3.4.1. Community Involvement in Generation of the Project Ideas**

The study sought to examine who generated the project ideas whether the community members themselves, the government officials or the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The findings showed that most respondents (66.1%) were of the opinion that ideas about donor funded food security projects in Tharaka South Sub County in Kenya were generated by NGOs. The involvement of community members in generation of project ideas was ascertained by 9.7% of the respondents (Table 5). This was an indication that community members were rarely involved in generating projects ideas.

Table 5: Response on Community Involvement in Generation of the Project Ideas

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Project Ideas | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative Percent |
| Community Members | 22 | 9.7 | 9.7 |
| The government Officials | 55 | 24.2 | 33.9 |
| NGOs | 150 | 66.1 | 100.0 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |  |

In agreement with this findings, Delmon (2011) reported that donor funded food security projects reached the communities through various means which included International Financial Institutions (IFIs), United Nations (U.N) Agencies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) which provide grants through the government and UNDP offices to start up programs, Consultative Groups to Assist the Poorest (CGAP) where funds flow form global headquarters to individual grassroots institutions as grants and finally public philanthropic foundations. It is possible that lack of community involvement in generating projects ideas negatively influences project sustainability since Okafor (2005) indicated that when communities participate in their own projects include empowering communities improve efficiency, local involvement yields better projects, better outcomes as well as greater transparency and accountability enhances service delivery. Communities who were the beneficiaries of the projects should not be seen as targets of poverty reduction efforts but should be seen as assets and partners in the development process.

**3.4.2. Forms of Contribution by Community Members during Project Implementation**

Regarding the forms of contribution given during project implementation by community members there were three categories realized from the findings. The findings showed that majority of the respondents (85%) were contributed to the donor funded food security projects in form of manual labour while 9.7% and 5.3% contributed in form of monetary and technical support, respectively (Table 6).

Table 6: Forms of Contribution given by Community Members during Project Implementation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Community contribution | Frequency | Percent |
| Monetary contribution | 22 | 9.7 |
| Manual labour | 193 | 85.0 |
| Technical support | 12 | 5.3 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |

Institutions and individuals partaking in projects that have an impact on the wider community cannot overlook the power of public participation as key benefits of public participation include the inclusion of diverse perspectives in decision-making and a better understanding of the community’s needs and hence has a significant association with project implementation (Mburu *et al.,* 2025).  Chappel, (2011) indicated that community support increases project efficiency and therefore there should be consultation with the community during project planning or beneficiary involvement in the management of project implementation or operation to ensure project sustainability. To increase sustainability of donor funded food security projects in Tharaka South Sub County in Kenya it is fundamental for the community to increasingly participate in monitory contribution and technical support.

**3.5 Institutional Capacity in Sustainability of Donor Funded Food Security Projects**

The study required that the respondents determine the role of institutional capacity in sustainability of donor funded food security projects. This was achieved by finding out the capacity of involvement of community members in project implementation and the effect of the organization on sustainability of donor funded food security projects. The respondents were requested to indicate in what capacity they have participated in project implementation. The findings indicated that customers (41.4%) were essential when it came to project implementation since these were the main beneficiaries of sustainability of donor funded food security projects. The team members (33.9%) also contributed immensely to achievement of successful results during implementation of donor funded food security projects. The least involved were the project coordinators (5.3%) who may have been busy coordinating the project behind the scenes (Table 7).

Table 7: Capacity of Involvement of Community Members in Project Implementation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Capacity of involvement | Frequency | Percent |
| Project Coordinator | 12 | 5.3 |
| Team Member | 77 | 33.9 |
| Customer | 94 | 41.4 |
| Administrative Support | 33 | 14.5 |
| Others | 11 | 4.8 |
| Total | 227 | 100.0 |

It is important for project coordinators to lead by example as being hands on during project implementation. Shore (2005) stated that failure of community projects was linked with the external environments such as competitors, suppliers, customers, vendors, Government, education and technological framework including the hardware, software and telecommunications or a combination of the three domains. In addition, this failure was primarily linked to the organizational context and could be attributed to the lack of leadership, organizational culture, integration and commitment by senior management. The importance of sustainability in project management is underscored by its potential to enhance project outcomes, foster stakeholder engagement, and contribute to the broader goals of sustainable development (Orieno *et al.,* 2024). A sustainable approach promotes the efficient use of resources, reduces waste, and minimizes the environmental footprint of projects, while also taking into account social and economic factors (Shokouhi & Bachari, 2025).

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of this study, it was observed that most of the community members were involved in the implementation of the community projects in all the phases despite them not being given a chance to generate ideas and there was a strong positive correlation between Community involvement and sustainability of donor funded community projects. This shows that the customers are very important when it comes to project implementation since they are the main beneficiaries. The study also observed that majority of donor funded project focused on food crop production because there was food insecurity in the region and therefore the Institution capacity and sustainability of donor funded food security projects correlated positively.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the finding of this study the community members may consider being involved by the donors in generating project ideas since engaging the community in its own development ensures that the proposed development will better target people’s needs, incorporate local knowledge, create grass root or capacity to undertake other projects and maintain facilities, distribute benefits equitably and help lower costs. The community members need to be involved more as monetary contributors and technical support team domains that were found to have low involvement. Further, the project officers and donors may consider training and empowering the community leaders on the management of donor funded community food security projects to ensure sustainability because Internal factors such as lack of community cohesion, lack of management skills may affect negatively the project. The donors may need to continue playing their role in operation and maintenance of donor projects.

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