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SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION ON SUSTAINABILITY OF DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability of development became a more substantial concern among developing countries. The participatory approach to adapt and exercise community participation in the development projects enriches the sustainability of the development plans. This study has been undertaken to explore the participatory approach and to discuss the significance of community involvement as a key tool for sustainable progress of development projects. As it is a conceptual paper, the discussions and arguments were presented based on secondary sources that were already published. The discussion revealed that participatory approach, especially the 'bottom-up approach' is a useful strategy to ensure greater degree of community participation in all stages such as preparation, designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development initiatives. Also this paper determined that the mechanism of participatory model (community participation – bottom-up approach) is a key component to reach the goals, and ensure the success and sustainability of the development projects.

Keywords: Bottom-up Approach; Community Participation; Participatory Development; Participatory Approach; Sustainability of Development; SDGs

INTRODUCTION

During 1970s, public participation was seen as a solution mechanism for the sustainability of

the project. Thus, a participatory approach was introduced and adopted not for ensuring success, but for supporting more effective and

efficient projects (McGee, 2002). Participation of local communities is leading the way for sustainability of community development projects, often realized through evidence of many case studies (Briscoe & Ferranti, 1988). In the 1990s, international organizations like the World Bank insisted on an important weight on participation of shareholders such as public, donors and organizations in the development practice, as a path for ensuring sustainability of the development projects (Gonzales, 1998). However, it is a very crucial element to promote all development programs to ensure sustainability through community empowerment and capacity building (Brett, 2003; Korten, 1984; Botchway, 2001).

The empowerment and capacity building are more important to the people who are vulnerable, socially excluded and marginalized from all development sorts (Lyons, Smuts & Stephens, 2001). Through this process, people or communities will be self-reliant, then they will be able to contribute to the sustainability of development projects. Chambers (1983) outlines that inclusion of community participation is an essential component to permit the poor to control over decision making. The national development in a country does not indicating the growth of country's revenue, nevertheless it is a process for reaching development and human requirements. Sen

(1999& 1985) studies the transition of development from material well-being to capability approach. This method of capability approach clearly denotes the capacity building in terms of empowerment of the poor, this model recognized by the World Bank and other donor agencies in aligning with the answer to the critiques of 'top down approach' in all kinds of development programs.

Most number of development projects have been implemented in developing countries with the support of donor countries or donor agencies (Noori, 2017). These developing nations need to utilize these financial assistance for improving livelihood and social standard of the communities, otherwise these funds can be considered as a waste source. Therefore, it is expected to ensure long term sustainability when financial resources are allocated and projects are implemented. The donors also consider the outcomes and sustainability of development projects, and those projects need to be maintained after handing over to the stakeholders.

Many development projects failed to achieve the intended goals and failed to succeed (Bishop, Etherton&Majumdar, 2001). The major reason for this failure was lack of community participation. Therefore, the World Bank and Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) applied community

participation as a useful approach to overwhelm this failure of development projects (Noori, 2017). There was a huge gap observed between development projects and real beneficiaries' involvement. Most of the projects were planned centrally (by the government or outsiders – using top-down approach) without participation of local communities, but certain groups are only engaged in some extent of the development programs. It is found that development programs were not linked with a sense of ownership, and did not need to maintain or continue proposed project's activities. It resulted in no essential long-term outcome or involvement of local people who are actual beneficiaries of the entire development initiatives. Subsequently, this paper aimed to conceptualize *community participation* as an important plea for *sustainable development* funded or executed by the government, non-governmental organizations, donor countries, and or donor agencies.

Objective and Methodology

This conceptual paper primarily aims to define the notion of community participation and sustainable development, and a specific objective is to underline the significant role of community participation in terms of using 'participatory approach' in the success and sustainability of development initiatives. This

paper is constructed purely based on concepts in nature. Most of the information has been gathered from previously published articles, reports and electronic sources. The field survey is not employed in this paper as it is developed conceptually. The discussions and arguments were presented in an interpretative manner. The conceptual model established by the scholars, and their approaches and argument, as well as the research report were mainly employed in this paper for validating the discussion and outcome of this study.

Discussions

Defining and Conceptualizing Community Participation

Participation is not a slight concept, it is clearly a rich and a noteworthy concept, thus participation has not been described with few interpretations (Oakley 1991). Brager, Specht and Torczyner (1987) denote participation is a wealth that educates the people to upsurge their skills and capacities. It is a unique approach to motivate the people to take decisions that affect their lives and an opportunity to gain power to be involved with any development projects. Besides, Armitage (1988) indicates community participation is a method in which people can react to common concerns, raise their voice to fix their view on decision making, and take action to make changes for their community. Westergaard (1986) describes participation as a

collective activity that can increase and practice control over institutions and resources. This description connects toward the strategy to ensure community participation. In the matter of development, CP specifies an active process in which people influence the plan and implementation of the development programs rather than getting benefits from the projects (Bamberger, 1987).

De Beer (1998) defines community participation as an approach to make people understand their values, needs and act with their own decisions. Kotze (1997) states that a people-centered approach is promoted for development activities. The involvement of outsiders (funding and decision making etc.) resulted in unsustainability in the development plans, but community based (people-centered) development mechanisms will improve self-reliance in communities (Kotze, 1997) and ensure sustainable outcome of the projects. Communities must play a comprehensive role to realize sustainable development (Pearce, 2003). Sustainable development must be determined by the local community themselves rather than outsiders. People should represent their participation through empowerment, capacity building and self-reliance. The community is the core element that is hypothetically associated through participation. Sustainability of the development projects may

not be achieved without effective participation of the community themselves (Redclift, 1993).

Community engagement can be distinct as a constant practice, because people are responsible to develop their communities based on their norms, beliefs and moralities. Community participation needs an active involvement which is associated with people's knowledge, capabilities, attitudes and activities for working to create better and skilled society. The active participation of people will create a safe, strong and sustainable society. Young people can engage in community participation as they too have better knowledge and talents to create their society better (SRHR, 2021). So, people's involvement is a powerful notion that applies in diverse levels in various contexts.

Community Participation is a necessary matter, because it guides the people to understand how to work and live together, accepting others' opinion, thought, beliefs with tolerance. Community Participation promotes people to be aware of the value of civil engagement to make changes in the society and upgrade communities to a better standard. Likewise, community participation is denoted as a key concept which is directly connected with social capital, and establishing bond, relationships, interaction, trust, and sense of ownership within community groups or among community

members (Setokoe&Ramukumba, 2020).

Community involvement is a serious and more essential element to ensure the sustainability of any development projects beyond the assistance of donors, and it performs pivotal actions in the management and sustainability of development plans that provide more benefits to all community members. Moreover, this participatory approach has close association with sustainability, and it has prime duty for funding and project implementing agencies including governments (Musaana, 2018). As a matter of development, community participation designates to an enthusiastic practice in which local people (beneficiaries) engage with the design, moderation, implementation, monitoring and management of development projects rather than that of sharing only benefits from the project (Wasilwa, 2015).

Sustainable Development & SDGs

Many definitions are put forward to describe the notion of sustainable development. The landmark of definition which was firstly recognized in 1987 by Bruntland Commission. ‘Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Bruntland, 1987). The capability of an organization to upgrade an approach of growth and development that continues to function

indefinitely (World Bank, 2002). In many ways, the concept of sustainability has been defined in relation to community development projects, which are determined by different outlooks of the stakeholders. Sustainability can be defined as the ability of a system of any kind to endure and be healthy over the long term. A “sustainable society” is one that is healthy, vital, resilient, and able to creatively adapt to changing conditions over time. Sustainability can also be defined as the continuing of project benefits beyond the project period, and the continuation of local action stimulated by the project, and the generation of successor services and initiatives as a result of Project-built local capacity (Honadle&VanSant, and Kamarah as cited in: Wasilwa, 2015). Every project is measured to be successful and sustainable in the short term when *‘the project actions and outcomes continue at least 3-5 year after the life of the project’*. This is the most suitable definition which can be considered for this study (Wasilwa, 2015).

The sustainable development goals (SDGs), known as universal goals, have been adapted and implemented in the year 2015 by the United Nations as a worldwide demand for taking actions to eradicate poverty, safeguard the earth, provide space for all people to enjoy peace and prosperity, and ensure that by 2030. Almost 17 SDGs are incorporated, these goals

allow the action of one aspect to affect results in other elements, and these goals will consider equilibrium with multiple dimensions of social, economic and environmental sustainability (UNDP, 2021). The technology, creativity, financial capabilities from all nations is essential for achieving the SDGs in each component. However, these goals also plead for community participation in terms of capacity building, empowerment, and gender equality and so on in the implementation of any development sorts. There has been increasing stress on community participation to achieve sustainability goals, for the last twenty years. *For instant*; the SDG 6 - 'ensure accessibility and management of water and sanitation for all' which is associated with focusing on the significance of community participation for long-term success and impact of safe water, sanitation and hygiene (Hes, 2017). Subsequently, these SDGs framework also recognizes participatory approach (bottom-up model) in the development targets.

Participatory Approach (bottom-up) and Development

Community participation is known to be a more expensive, intensive process, demanding and time consuming efforts. Though it is very important to comprehend the impact of participatory approach on the sustainability of community development projects. Conversely,

Mansuri& Rao (2003) conclude that little is known on the impacts of community participation in community based development projects. This present study also aimed to examine the significance of community participation on the sustainability of development projects by reviewing the studies undertaken in many developing and developed countries where participatory approach has been adopted in the development initiatives. Numerous studies were reviewed and used into account in order to validate the discussion and results of this study.

Primarily, the participation was categorized into active and passive or interactive participation (Mikkelsen, 2005). ***Active participation*** is defined as people can take part actively in an open way in all phases of development projects. The operation, management, monitoring, evaluation and decision making are done by the local community. On the contrary, ***passive participation*** denotes the non-intervention of people and disparity from the activities of development projects. But the ***interactive participation*** often promotes community members to engage with the planning and implementation process in order to enhance their development programs (Roodt, 2001). Community participation educates the people to mitigate their own problems and conflicts. It allows people to promote and help themselves.

Communities can form a powerful group to manage their situation, take decisions, and work efficiently toward community development. This participation can help the local community to mobilize and assist themselves, and lead the community, minimize state's dependence and promote bottom-up approach in the development process (Nampila, 2005; cited in: Wasilwa, 2015).

Many development activities promote participatory approach from grass-root level. Thus, top-bottom and bottom-up approaches argued in different stages and on various platforms, and gained support from government, NGOs and donor countries or agencies for providing better outcomes for development projects. Specifically, the bottom-up approach is highly appreciated and adapted by many countries, NGOs and donor agencies (Panda, 2007). This model assists to identify the challenges, discuss innovative plans or strategies and mitigate the issues faced by the society. This approach invests through indigenous knowledge and local expertise that can be schematized and disseminated from grassroots for achieving the goals of the projects.

Panda (2007) presents that bottom-up method denoted and emphasized with numerous indicators namely, community awareness, capacity building, encouraging community

participation in development projects and creating people-centered institutions for handling and monitoring the projects successfully. Similarly, many experts denotes that the bottom-up approach contains several indicators such as, awareness, capacity building, participation of people, community network, and so on. This concept has also been widely accepted and adapted in most developed and developing nations when planning and implementing development initiatives. The concept of community participation has been adapted mostly in the developed and developing countries, from Asia to Latin America and to Sub-Saharan Africa (Lowe et.al. 1998; cited in Pimoljinda&Siriprasertchok, 2017). The traditional *top-down method* is not an appropriate model for the development process, but the *bottom-up approach* with the multiple group (multi-stakeholders) participation for decision making practice on the development projects has been recognized by many countries and international organizations as well as donor agencies.

Significance of Community Participation for Sustainable Development

Many governments and NGOs are closely working with poverty reduction and rural development programs especially in the developing countries. The key tool for these

developments aim sustainable development in aligning with the philosophy of community-driven development. These efforts aim to promote participation among local people (beneficiaries) to run their program with self-reliance and manage their own program to upgrade their livelihood (Suthinarakorn&Traimongkolkul, 2002). Community involvement is a major requirement for the process of sustainable development and it is a key establishment for community-based organizations to improve development plans for the local community (Pimoljinda&Siriprasertchok, 2017).

Community Participation has been recognized as a prime tool for social development, and it can be applied in practice when implementing any development initiatives for achieving the targets of sustainable development (Ramsey, Abrams, Clark & Evans, 2013). International organizations, funding agencies and countries recognize 'community participation' as an important tool to achieve success and sustainability of the development initiatives. Similarly, Korten (1990) denotes that active community participation improves the sustainability of community development projects. Sustainable development can be attained with an effective participation of people. It will enhance people's ability and empower communities toward social and

economic developments and political changes (Kaufman & Alfonso, 1997).

Many researches on community participation scrutinizes that development projects directed by local communities will be more responsive for needs of poor, more responsive for governance, good service delivery, maintain community resources, and more informed and citizen-centric (Mansuri& Rao, 2003). The participation of local people lead to having responsibility for demanding power and influencing decision making (Hart & Moore, 1990). The community participation often helps citizens and government to manage public assets and maintain efficient systems, and remove corruption (Toulmin, 1995, cited in: Bass, Dalal-Clayton & Pretty, 1995) to make development projects to be successful and sustained.

The development plans were coupled with sustainability concerns from the 1980s (Scoones, 2007). The notion of sustainable development interlinked with five important parameters such as social, financial, environmental, technical and institutional sustainability. But most of the projects implemented in Third World countries have failed to achieve their real goal. For instance, the World Bank and USAID's evaluation reports indicate that numerous development projects have low level or very poor level

stability after end up the projects (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 1992). This pressure has claimed demand among governments and donor agencies to provide funds that assist people developed independent at some level in future, rather than giving them charity which is unsustainable, which leads to dependence again with the government and donor agencies (Bossert, 1990). The long term success and sustainability in the project can be possible when improving the capacity of people and empowering the communities to engage with the projects.

To realize this fact, many scholars stressed that community participation is an essential requirement (Leeuwis, 2000; Carlsson&Berkes, 2005 as cited in: Pimoljinda&Siriprasertchok, 2017) for the successful development projects. This is because participation of the local community should be integrated with development projects which more or less meet their absolute needs. The development project associated with community participation will meet the success and possibly be sustained. Before 1990, numerous development schemes were not maintained and managed by the native people or beneficiaries. But in the recent past, participatory approach has been accepted and amended with development programs for making projects more effective, more successful and sustainable (Noori, 2017). In

nutshell, it can be stated that ‘a people-centered approach improves self-sufficiency among local communities (Kotze, 1997).

The development projects would not succeed or continue without community engagement. The local people can participate in the development projects or are willing to participate in such activities if they have access (Shigetomi, 2006). Sustainable development is not an easy target, but a challengeable socio-economic and environmental process. These challenges claim alternative or new approaches for making decisions and taking actions. Sustainable development closely involved with multiple concerns, such as;

- Greater understanding of sustainable development challenges.
- Improved communication among interest groups.
- Consensus on the key challenges.
- Network with relevant groups and organizations, and
- Larger commitment to take action for ensuring development activities to be sustained (Bass, Dalal-Clayton & Pretty, 1995).

Community-based development projects help the people to gain what they want from the project. The World Bank also stated that those developments associated with *bottom-up approach* have satisfied, succeeded and are sustainable (Olukotun, 2017; Stanley, 2003).

The local community should be mobilized to engage with development projects rather than imposing projects on the local community and leading the project from outside or at the top-level of the political and administrative system. Because, people will improve their capacity and self-confidence to handle and manage the projects. However, it is an easy task to achieve, but it takes time to train the people and build the capacity toward the success of development projects.

Besides, Community participation is an essential element when it associates with development projects (Dannyet *et al.* 2004; cited in: Kinyata, & Abiodun, 2020). Similarly, Arthur & Michelle (2002) insists that development initiatives contain participatory approach in the project preparation, and gain sustainable outcomes particularly those that consider community engagement truly and practice it effectively. Numerous projects practice bottom-up approach with greater sense of community ownership to achieve real needs for the community with sustainable nature. A development project can reach its success and sustainability when beneficiaries or local community actively engage in preparation, planning, implementation and operation of such projects or programs. So, the participatory model recognizes all people who have responsibility, accountability and ownership on

the project (Sirker&Cosic, 2007; Kumar, 2002).

Conversely, local communities have power and strength to handle their own issues and move forward to curb their communal problems (Musaana, 2018). Therefore, it can be said participatory approach is a crucial slant for permitting people to help themselves and tolerate many efforts through several development stakeholders or agencies. Another argument made is that the community involvement (beneficiaries' participation) in the initial stage of the development project make this program more successful and sustainable (Chambers, 2012). Further, Panda (2007) also presents that community participation for finding and reacting communal problems and difficulties in development schemes should be an important element to ensure the developments remain successful and to be sustained.

On the other hand, the performance of rural water supply systems in many countries has been observed as a better service due to higher degree of community participation with democratic and inclusive manner, thus decision making and requirement for needs are normally done by the local community. Conversely, Sara & Katz (1997) argues that the construction of some projects were failed and unstable due to poor community involvement and poor

accountability and monitoring of local people. Another study analyses about 121 rural drinking water schemes in 49 countries from Asia, Africa, and Latin American regions, and stated that community participation was found as an important factor to determine effective, successful and benefitted water supply services. The study found that projects can provide best outcomes in a successful manner, when communities take part in all levels of the plan, such as, design, operation and maintenance, monitoring and evaluation, and also in the knowledge sharing and consultation stage of the projects (Narayan, 1993).

In the last three decades, numerous projects have failed due to poor attention on beneficiaries' needs and their priorities, local or indigenous knowledge and abilities. Another assessment of 25 different development projects funded by the World Bank specified that 13 out of them have been abundant within a very short period of time after implementation and financing. The major factor for this problem found that there was poor attention on community participation during preparation and implementation of such projects (Zazueta, 1994, cited in: Bass, Dalal-Clayton & Pretty, 1995). So, the participatory approach in terms of community involvement has been introduced and approved as a widened concept or mechanism to ensure success and sustainability

of development projects, therefore, this model should be considered by the practitioners to adhere with all stages of development plans and programs. The participatory model will help to discuss and find out social problems, outline the requirements and priorities of the local people and to provide strategies to overcome the issues. Participatory approach taps local knowledge and experience of local people, and it amalgamates and regulates previous lessons and can disseminate new knowledge to deal with existing problems.

Community participation is an old thought that has been used in various means for many years within social practices and development. Though, many associations related to development have been effective in putting people (participation of community) high in the development agenda of the governments and non-governmental authorities (WHO, 2002). The community participation has been connected with different activities such as, consultation, decision making, involvement, community action, empowerment, community capacity building, networking, community development, and community ownership and rights (WHO, 2002; Davids, Theron & Maphunye, 2005). These all strategies recognize the effective community involvement in the development activities to ensure success and sustainability of the programs or

development plans.

CONCLUSION

The concept of community participation in development initiatives has developed as a crucial component in the preparation or design and implementation of development programs. Contribution of local people in the form of Community Based development (CBD) is a rapidly increasing tool for evaluating development support. The purpose of CP in CBD programs is not just providing power to poor or marginalized, but permit them to have more control over the funds allocated for development, that is more accountable and responsible for them to get their needs, target poverty alleviation plans, maintain assets of the government, strengthen their capacity to handle the projects with self-reliant (Mansuri & Rao, 2003). Development is not a process of giving benefits to the people, but it is an active engagement of people and empowerment of local communities. And community participation improves capacity building and empowerment among people to realize their situation and understand the social reality (Callaghan, 1997 & Davids *et al* 2009, cited in: Wasilwa, 2015). The concept of sustainability formulates the root for any development projects, otherwise all efforts invested for the projects become waste of time, money and other resources. So, community participation

adapted with the development activities to reach the goals and long-term sustainability. Hence, this paper also presented that community participation is an asset and useful model to achieve the objectives of the projects, and to obtain success and sustainability. Further, the bottom-up approach is so decisive to achieve maximum benefits to the community with satisfactory level, and involvement of people in all phases of development initiatives is much more crucial for ensuring success and sustainability of any types of development schemes.

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever does.” –

Margaret Mead

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