

The Roles of Community Participation on Sustainability of Donor Funded Community-Based Education Projects in Meru District Council, Tanzania

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the roles of community participation on sustainability of donor funded community-based education projects in Meru district council, Tanzania. Simple random and purposive sampling techniques will be used to sample the respondents. This study explores the roles of the community in ensuring the sustainability of donor-funded community-based education projects in Meru District Council, Tanzania. With the increasing reliance on donor funding for education initiatives in developing countries, understanding the dynamics of community involvement is crucial for ensuring the long-term success and impact of such projects. Through a mixed-methods approach combining surveys, interviews, and document analysis, data were collected from various stakeholders involved in community-based education projects in Meru District Council. .

The findings reveal that community involvement plays a significant role in the sustainability of donor-funded projects, including mobilizing resources, providing local knowledge and expertise, fostering ownership and commitment, and facilitating project monitoring and evaluation. However, challenges such as limited capacity, inadequate funding, and coordination issues hinder effective community participation. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts among donors, government agencies, NGOs, and local

communities to build capacity, enhance transparency, and promote meaningful community engagement.

The findings recommended that, community participation should be improved through provision of education, and effective communication to the people or community members. Provision of education and effective communication will rise up awareness for the community members about their participation roles in the sustainability of donor-funded community-based education projects in Tanzania. Also, project implementers should focus on building the capacity of the local community to ensure the project's sustainability. This includes training community members in project management, leadership, and technical skills. The study contributes to the existing literature on community participation in development projects and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, and donor agencies to improve the sustainability and impact of donor-funded education initiatives in Tanzania and beyond

Keywords: Community, Participation, Education Project, Donor Funded

Introduction

A donor funded community-based education project involves financial support from external sources to implement \educational initiatives within a specific community. These projects are designed to address local educational needs and improve access to quality education. Community-based education projects are initiatives that engage and involve local communities in the design, implementation and evaluation of educational programs. These projects aim to address specific educational challenges within a community while taking into account its unique cultural, social and economic contexts. By involving community members, these projects can lead to more relevant and sustainable education solution. Community Based Projects (CBPs) are core initiatives for intervention of common problems while enhancing development in most communities (Hunger, 2018). Different projects are formulated and carried every year with different purposes of improving community-based education projects. These projects work to provide solutions and hope to communities in need such as rural areas

where majority of population in developing countries have no access to quality education (Jackson, 2019).

An examination of the available literature reveals lack of commonly accepted definition of the concept of policy. There is agreement on the domain, function and processes of policy (Quiggin, 2019); define a policy in terms of action to reduce inequality through redistribution and access to resources, rights and social opportunities. These, the people do without force or coercion but through collective agreement and individual's willingness. This is the view of Jaramillo (2020) who sees community development as a method of helping local communities to become aware of their needs, to assess their resources more realistically, to organize themselves and their resources in such a way as to satisfy their needs and in so doing, acquire the attitude, experiences and cooperative skills for repeating this process again and again on their own initiative.

Shayo (2015) observed on community participation and sustainability on national water projects in Chalinze. The study was conducted in Chalinze whereby 130 respondents were selected to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. Structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, observation, interview of key informants and documentary reviews were used to obtain relevant information. Checklists and observation kits were used for interviews and focus group discussion and observation. The findings show that, the community participation in planning and implementation of project was very poor; as well as monitoring mechanism of operation and management and community participation on decision making was not satisfactory. Wema (2017) based on an examination of factors affecting women participation in project planning and implementation; the case of the TASAF program in the Rufiji district Tanzania. The findings have revealed that women participation in development projects and TASAF in particular, was affected by social, political and economic factors embedded at community, national and global levels. The study used qualitative research method to obtain information.

Mishra (2015) conducted a study on determinants of community ownership of projects in Kenya. The study revealed that community involvement influences community ownership of education projects. Lachapelle (2018), revealed that applying the concept of ownership makes

it easier in determining how the interests and actions of individuals or organizations contribute to community development work. The level of dedication to the process and outcome is enhanced; that is, if individuals are engaged authentically and intimately, engaging individual lead to greater chances of support in implementation and realization of community development goals. This study examined the extent which individual are engaged on community-based projects.

Internationally, resources for social welfare services are shrinking. Population pressures, changing priorities, economic competition, and demands for greater effectiveness are all affecting the course of social welfare (Freeman, 2022). The utilization of nonprofessionals through citizen involvement mechanisms to address social problems has become more commonplace (Elham, 2018). Eriksen (2019) says that authentic community participation enhances the sustainability of the community development projects and this can only be achieved through a people centered development. Effective community participation may lead to social and personal empowerment, economic development, and socio-political transformation. The issue of sustainability relating to development activities started to become important to government, donors and development theorists from the 2000s (Freire, 2013). The importance of the notion of sustainability can be seen from the way sustainability is used as one of five yardsticks in evaluating development interventions (Brown, 1998).

Despite recognition of the importance of community involvement in development projects, there is a lack of in-depth understanding of the specific roles that communities play in ensuring the sustainability of donor-funded education initiatives. More research is needed to explore the dynamics of community engagement, including the extent of community participation, factors influencing community involvement, and the impact of community-led initiatives on project sustainability (Grootaert & Bastelaer 2002)

Material and Method

The study was conducted in Arumeru district council in Arusha region Tanzania. Arumeru district is one among the districts in Arusha region implementing various donor projects

especially education projects for example at African Amini Alama organization has different education projects such as Nariva Academy, Pamoja secondary school, Maasai Vision Medium Academy, and Simba Vision as well as Naurey Golden Soils secondary school (NGSSS), Precious English Medium school, Precious Leaders secondary school and Amani English Medium school.

To achieve the research objectives, a mixed-methods approach were used. The research design used was convergent parallel design where by quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously but analyzed separately, and the results merged or integrated. In this study, the targeted population was project implementers because are the one who design and implement donor funded community-based education projects and community members because are the one who benefits from the projects. In statistics, a sampling frame is the source material or device from which a sample is drawn.

The purposive sampling technique was used among the community members in the study area. The community members and project implementers were selected purposively because they have key information that can be used by the researcher to make conclusion about the studied problem. The study used a total sample of 102 participants including 85 community members these includes five (5) members in a group from one community education project and 17 project implementers from seventeen schools seven (7) schools was secondary schools and ten (10) schools was primary schools. The data were collected through interview, focus group discussion and documentary review.

In this study the data were analyzed through qualitative and quantitative techniques depending on the specific objectives of the study. Qualitative data from Key Informant Interviews and focused group discussion was analyzed using Content Analysis method. First interviews transcribed into word document. Then from these transcriptions' key themes and concepts was identified.

Results and Discussions

Data collected from community members via focus group discussion and the data from project implementers collected through interview method. The verification of the collected data was done via documentary methods which lead to the final judgment to the findings.

Participation of Community

The respondents were asked if community member participates in donor funded community-based education projects. The answers from the respondents are presented below. The data from the research findings shows that, 98% of the respondents participated in the provision of data out of 100%. Whereby 78% agreed that, community members participate fully in donor funded community-based education projects, 20% disagreed. The higher responses of agreed means that, there is participation of community members in donor funded community-based education projects in Meru district council. This evident by one of the project implementers who said;

“By actively engaging with the project, community members can provide valuable insights, feedback, and suggestions. Their involvement ensures that the project aligns with the specific needs and aspirations of the community. This engagement takes various forms, including participating in planning meetings, serving on project committees, or volunteering as mentors or tutors”. (Interview, 24.9.2023).

This study was supported by the evidence from Shayo (2015) who observed the community participation in planning and implementation of projects, as well as monitoring mechanism of operation and management and community participation on decision making was not satisfactory.

The Extent of Participation

The participants were asked the extent community members participate in donor funded community-based education projects to make the project sustainable. The responses are presented below.

Findings shows that, 98% of the respondent participated in the provision of data out of 100%, whereby 50% reported moderate extent, 20% large extent and 30% small extent. This means that, community members have moderate participation in donor funded community-based education projects. One of the community members from Precious Leader was quoted as follow,

“Community members have moderate extent of participation in donor funded community-based education projects for example; they are involved in identifying the specific education needs of the community. They provide insights into what education resources or programs would be most beneficial”. (FGD, 23.9.2023).

Also, other community member from Londoiya community observed;

“Community members are moderately participating in donor funded community- based education projects for example; they are participating in planning phase, community members help to set project goals, objectives and strategies. Their input ensure that the project aligns with the community’s priorities” (FGD, 23.9.2023)

This study was supported by the evidence from Mishra (2015) community members involvement influences community ownership of education projects. This means that, participation of community members in donor funded community-based education projects contributes to the mutual successful of the educational projects. From the interview, one of the project implementers said;

“Though community members are not fully participating in donor funded community-based education projects, their participation can assist in securing additional resources or funding for the project, beyond what donors provide. This may involve fundraising efforts or seeking support from local businesses or government agencies” (Interview, 24.9.2023)

According to the findings show that, community members are moderately participating in donor funded community-based education projects but still play crucial contribution in the successful sustainability of donor funded community-based education projects. Also, roles of the community in sustaining donor-funded community-based education projects are multifaceted. Ownership, engagement, capacity building, resource mobilization, monitoring

and evaluation, advocacy, and networking all contribute to the long-term success and sustainability of these initiatives.

The Roles of Community Participation

Participants was interviewed on sustainability of donor funded community-based education projects. The data from the research findings shows that, 98% of the respondents participated in the provision of data out of 100%. The responses are presented in the Table 3.1 below.

Table: The Roles of Community Participation

Responses	Percentages (%)
Ownership and commitment	88
Local contextualization	76
Resource mobilization	78
Monitoring and evaluation	67

Ownership and Commitment

Table 4.3 shows that, 88% of the respondents reported that, ownership and commitment is one of the roles of community participation in the sustainability of donor funded community-based education projects. From the interview, one of the project implementers said;

“When community members actively participate in the project from its inception, they develop a sense of ownership and commitment. This makes them more likely to support and sustain the project over the long term”. (Interview.05.10.2023)

This study was supported by the evidence from Brinkerhoff (2015) active community participation fosters a sense of commitment among the project beneficiaries. They feel responsible for the project’s success and are more likely to contribute their time, resources and

effort to ensure its sustainability. Communities possess valuable local knowledge and expertise, which can enhance the project's relevance and sustainability. Involving community members in project design and implementation ensures that the project align with their needs and priorities

Local Contextualization

Also, table 4.3 show that, 76% reported local contextualization. Community participation is essential for the sustainability of donor-funded community-based education projects. When local communities actively engage in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of these projects, it leads to greater contextualization and sustainability. Through interview one of the project implementers said;

“When community members actively participate, they can infuse local cultural elements into the education projects, making the more relevant to the community's needs” (Interview, 25.9.2023).

Also, through focus group discussion one of the community members said;

“Involving community members in the design of the project allows for tailoring the content to the specific needs and preferences of the local community” (FGD. 26.9.2023)

Resource Mobilization

Likewise, Table 4.3 shows that, 78% of the respondents reported resource mobilization. When communities actively participate in project planning and implementation, they feel a sense of ownership and commitment to its success. This can lead to increased voluntary contributions of time, labor and even financial resources. Through focus group discussion one of the community members quoted;

“Community participation often involves capacity buildings and training of local residents. These newly acquired skills can be leveraged for resources mobilization through income-generating activities, thereby contributing to project sustainability” (FGD. 28.9.2023)

This study was supported by the evidence from Smith (2018) active community involvement fosters relationships and partnerships with other organizations and stakeholders, which can lead to additional resources and support in which communities can tap into a broader network of donors and supports.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Also, Table 4.3 shows that, 67% reported monitoring and evaluation. Community participation plays a crucial role in monitoring and evaluation (M &E) for the sustainability of donor-funded community-based education projects. Through interview, one of the project implementers said;

“Community members possess valuable local knowledge and contextual insights that external evaluators may lack. Their participation ensures that M&E processes are better informed and tailored to the specific needs of the community” (Interview. 28.9.2023)

This study was supported by the evidence from UNESCO (2018), community participation can lead to continuous feedback and quality insurance. Regular input from community stakeholders helps identify and address issues in real time, improving the project’s overall quality. Therefore, community participation plays huge contribution towards sustainability of donor-funded community-based education projects as illustrated above.

Through focus group discussion, one of the community members explain;

“Community members have a deep understanding of the local context, including cultural, social, and economic factors that can affect the project’s success. Their participation in M&E helps to identify potential challenges and opportunities that may not be apparent to external evaluators”. (FGD. 04.10.2023).

The results above underscore the critical role of community participation in sustaining donor-funded community-based education projects in Meru District Council, Tanzania. Effective engagement of communities enhances project ownership, relevance, and impact, ultimately contributing to the achievement of sustainable development goals in the education sector.

Conclusion

In regard, to the findings, it was found that, community participation plays a crucial role in the sustainability of donor-funded community-based education projects in Meru district by influencing ownership and commitment, local contextualization, resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation and long-term vision. Also, it was reported that, project implementers play a crucial role in the sustainability of donor-funded community-based education project through ensuring effective planning and implementation, community engagement, monitoring and evaluation, documentation and reporting, resource mobilization. It is recommended that community participation should be improved through provision of education, and effective communication to the people or community members. Provision of education and effective communication will rise up awareness for the community members about their participation roles in the sustainability of donor-funded community-based education projects in Tanzania. Also, project implementers should focus on building the capacity of the local community to ensure the project's sustainability. This includes training community members in project management, leadership, and technical skills

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