Assessment of Community Engagement and Success of Education Projects in Tanzania: A Case of Changarawe Village, Morogoro

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Abstract: Education has been a global agenda that has been promoted by countries and different international agencies. Various countries including Tanzania have been implementing various programmes and projects to promote the education sector. Community engagement has been claimed to be vital in success of these projects. However, factors promoting community engagement and methods used to engage community members in education projects in Tanzania have not been well captured in the literature. Social capital theory was used to guide the study. Data was collected from Changarawe village in Morogoro. The study used a descriptive research design. Qualitative approach was used to collect data from 14 respondents by using interviews and focus group discussion as tools of data collection. Purposive sampling technique was used to obtain a sample of 14 participants for interviews and 9 participants for focus group discussions which made a sample size of 23 for the study. Thematic analysis was used to analyze collected data. The study found community engagement is enhanced to the large extent by leaders in the study area. Moreover, significance of the projects was found to play an important role in enhancing community engagement. Various methods of engaging community members were found through five major themes which are village meetings, sports and games, social media networks, phone calls and door-to-door. The study recommends community members to be engaged throughout the project cycle and multiple methods of engaging the community has to be used to increase level of community engagement in education and other related development projects.

Keywords: *community engagement, community participation, education projects, bottom-up approach*

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INTRODUCTION

Education has been one of the most important tools for human development and civilization of societies (Mwita, 2018). It has been a global agenda that has been promoted by countries and different international agencies including the United Nations (UN). Currently, the world is focusing on enhancing inclusive education to enable upward social mobility and end poverty; a goal agreed by world leaders as one of global sustainable goals in 2015 in the UN Summit which states that ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2019).Tanzania as part of the global community has been engaging herself in making sure that quality education is provided to her citizens (Mashala, 2019). One of the means used to achieve this is through implementation of various projects in education (Athuman, 2018). The projects have ranging from developing human capital working in the sector, building infrastructure, enhancing availability of facilities in schools, among others. Success of these projects depends on how the community members are engaged in all the stages of the said projects (Weger, et al, 2018).

Community engagement in projects have been proven to be one of the important factors that may lead to success or failure of projects especially when the projects seek to bring about social, political or economic changes to community members (Kinyatta & Abiodun, 2020). Community members' engagement in education projects is essential because it may help to motivate members to accept the projects and being ready to support by supplying various inputs to the said project (Lauwo & Mkulu, 2021). It should be noted that projects that intends to increase access to social services focus on changing the lives of community members themselves hence engaging them is a paramount to their success.

In Tanzania, community engagement is given more emphasis when initiating and implementing economic development projects particularly in Local Government Authorities. Engagement is manifested by the citizen's active role in governance structure (village assembly meetings), active involvement in public service committees such as water management committees and school involvement committees, as well as active involvement in preparing village and ward plans (Rochira & Mannarini, 2019). Extent and means of engagement vary from place to place and project to project. This means there are places (or some projects) where engagement of community members is higher than in others due to varied factors. Studies show that, the level of engagement is a function of many factors but mainly being willingness and ability of community leaders to engage their people (Sandmann & Liang,

2015). This makes leadership one of the important aspects in engaging citizens in projects.

Despite the importance of education projects in Tanzania, community engagement in education projects have not been well explored in Tanzania literature to understand what influence community engagement, methods used and how they affect the success of the projects (Ngwirizi, 2021). To address the empirical gap, this study aimed at assessing factors promoting community engagement, methods used and how they affect success of education projects at grassroots' level in Tanzania.

Theoretical review

This study is underpinned by the social capital theory which was founded by French sociologist and Public intellectual Pierre Bourdieu who was primarily concerned with the dynamics of power in the society of 1930 to 2002 (Stallone, 2018). The theory is concerned with social interaction in different aspects including social and economic aspects by recognizing the values of individuals in the society. Every member in certain society has his or her contributions either financially or non-financially by providing any kind of resources which could at one way or another bring about social development (Claridge, 2018). The theory assumes that civic community is a major factor behind economic and governmental effectiveness (McKeever et al., 2014). Social capital theory is relevant to this study simply because, it emphasizes the importance of providing a chance for community citizens to contribute their resources and ideas in social development projects through engaging them in all project stages. This has emphasized by Umeodum, et al (2020). Although the theory is relevant to this study yet it has some flaws. The direct causal relationship between community engagement (social capital) and its significant to social and economic development cannot easily detected (Claridge, 2018). Moreover,

the theory has been found to be vague and inconsistency because of lack of fixed indicators of what is called social capital. This gives a room for researchers to use the theory in different ways and in some cases leading to misconception of the theory. Further, Aksiuto (2019) argues that the concept of social capital cannot be well defined and therefore attracting various contradicting meanings. Despite its weaknesses, the theory seems to explain better community engagement in projects as it shows the link between community ideas and efforts on one side and success of the projects on the other (McManaman, 2019).

Empirical Review

Studies of Yin (2021); Kenton (2021) and Morris (2019) proves that community engagement in the western countries such as Netherlands, Canada, and England is relatively high. Community members are engaged in all stages of projects and their needs and expectations are taken into account. The process makes these projects owned by community members and as the result increase their effectives and efficiency. The study of Lee (2018) which was done in China revealed similar findings. Further, the study showed that level of education of community members is one of important determinants of whether they will be engaged or not. The study concluded that community engagement in education projects among Chinese was high. Inconsistent findings were found in the study of Rashied & Begum (2016) which was conducted in Bangladesh assessed the level of engagement of local people in development projects. The study revealed that there was a minimal engagement of local people in development projects from mobilizing stage although later in the implementation stage were started being engaged.

The study of Moseif (2020) which was done in India using a qualitative approach identified various reasons why community members are in some cases not engaged or engagement is at

low level. The study identified implementation of irrelevant projects as one of barriers to effective engagement of community members because members' interest in projects is very important. This implies that bottom-up approach is important in community development projects to ensure that projects identified are those that community members need. Another barrier was level of willingness of leaders to engage community members; the lower the willingness the lower the engagement. The qualitative study of Dyer, Dougill et al (2014) which was done in Zambia and Congo revealed that the extent of community engagement was high through which citizens were engaged in various development projects. Studies in conducted in Tanzania on community engagement in various projects have contradicting findings on the extent of engagement. The study of Mzitu (2020) which was done in Pemba on community engagement in health projects shows the engagement to be high while the study of Mustapha (2019) which was done in Rufiji found the engagement to be unsatisfactory. These variations justify the need for more empirical studies. The current study therefore is important to fill the existing empirical gap.

Information sharing is important in motivating people to take part in group activities (Mwita, 2019; Liang & Sandmann, 2015). Studies show that public gatherings such as village meetings are one of important means of engaging community members in various projects. The study of Hamza (2021) which was done in India, shows that public gatherings (meetings) play a significant role in engaging community members. However, the study of Kenton (2021) which was done in Canada found a different observation. Public meetings were found to be less preferred by community members. Similar findings were reported in the study of Rashied and Begum (2016) which was done in Bangladesh. Although the study found public meetings as one of ways used in engaging the community members, surprisingly, attendance in these

meetings was found to be too low. This gives an impression that different societies may have different preferences when it comes to what method should be used as a tool to engage them.The study which was conducted by Evans-Cowley and Griffin (2012) in the USA proved that social networks are powerful tool to engage community members in various programmes. The study used a mixed method approach to examine more than 49,000 posts on Twitter and other social networking sites to determine sentiment, extent of engagement, and impact on the decision-making process.

With regard to technological means of engaging community members as the previous findings show the study of Adib (2021) had similar observation. They found that the use of digital means specifically web-based technology such as online mapping, online interview as well as information and training session was found to be effective in engaging the community members. Moreover, the use of this technology was found to be affected by various factors such as logistics, perceptual and political factors. It should be noted that technology is not evenly distributed across the globe hence the level of technology presence in a particular community may affect the appropriateness of a particular technology (White, 2017).

The study of Fombad and Jiyane (2016) which was done in South Africa at KwaZulu-Natal province using a case study design found that the use of community radio stations plays a significant role in enhancing community participation in projects. This method was found to be very appropriate especially in rural areas where radios are preferred to be one of the major sources of information. Although the method was found to be relevant it may not work out in places where community radio stations are not available because other radio stations tend to disseminate general information that is not specific on development projects and the costs of airing information is normally too high. Technological development has made

community engagement much easier because community members can be engaged through the use of social media.

The Study of Mwoga (2020) which was done at Iyanya, Mbeya in Tanzania offers evidence that the use of village meetings in among appropriate ways of engaging community members in development projects. Bigger number community members turned up in public meetings than in any other methods used in community engagement.

METHODS

The study used descriptive research design. Descriptive design is used in describing population or situation which have not yet known before and it's appropriate when research aim at identifying characteristics, trends, and categories (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This makes the design appropriate for the study since the study focused on describing how the community is engaged in education projects. The study adopted the qualitative approach which refers to a process concerned with providing explanations and understanding reasons for human behavior from the informant's perspective by using interview, focus group discussion and observation as tools for data collection (Trainor & Graue, 2013). The approach was used to gain in-depth information to offer an understanding of the research phenomenon (Mwita, 2022). The study used Changarawe village as a case study. The village was chosen due to the fact that there have been numerous education projects that have been taking place for the past 10 years (F. Matangalu (Village Chairman), personal communication, July, 2021). The study used purposive sampling technique to acquire sufficient sample size for the study of 23 participants. The technique was used so as to get the relevant, specific and required information from sample, the method was used to select sample from population of the study such as village leaders who are direct responsible for leading and engaging citizens in social development

projects and other community stakeholders who were considered to have relevant information for the study. The sample size of 14 participants for interviews was determined based on data saturation principle. The principle requires a researcher to keep on sampling more participants while collecting data until a point where no more relevant data can be collected (Mwita, 2022). Data was collected by the use of semi structured interview and focus group discussion. The focus group had a total of 9 community members. The use of multiple methods helped in triangulating data collected from different methods which tend to increase validity of collected data. Thematic analysis was used to analyze collected data. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns of data across the study's participants which are relevant in answering research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factors promoting community engagement in education projects
In identifying factors that promote community engagement, two major themes emerged. These themes are role of leaders and significance of projects.

The role of leaders

From the interviews conducted it was revealed that community members seriously take part in education projects as the result of leadership role played by their respective leaders. The respondents revealed they were willing to be engaged and participate in education projects because of the trust they have in their leaders. One of the participants responded that;

"*Citizen commitment to be part of education projects and any project implemented in our village is very high because citizens believe that leaders are part and parcel of our community. Our leaders are transparent and treat us as one of important stakeholders in implementation of these projects. This makes us feel like we are obliged to support these*

projects. It is fair to say that we are not only engaged by our leaders but also engage ourselves due to the level of support and receive. In short, the level of engagement is very high"

The study found that leaders play a big role in making engagement more meaningful and effective. It was revealed that leaders had to make sure information reached as many community members as possible on any matter related to projects. One of the participants (leader) had this to say;

> *"Since we expect that education projects are for our people [community members] we normally involve them since inception of these projects. In fact, some of the projects are initiated by community members themselves. We know that we can empower them through giving them a room to give ideas and become major actors of these projects."*

Various studies such as Rami, Abdullah and Simini (2017) which was done in Malaysia; Emmuel (2018) which was done in Rwanda; and Chambila (2020) which was done in Tanzania provide empirical evidences of how leaders can increase participation of community members in development projects.

Significance of projects

The study found that one of the factors enhancing community engagement in projects is the significance of the projects implemented. With reference to education projects, it was found that citizens feel the need to easily respond to engagement interventions because of how important education is and the expected results of the projects. In the focus group discussion, one of the participants narrated that,

> *"We do not only contribute money to build these classes but we do that knowing this infrastructure will help*

our children and other generations to come to obtain quality education. Being informed on why it is important to build these classes change minds even of those who were not ready to support this project."

This gives an impression that it is important for community members to know how important the projects are to increase their participation. The Study by Mwoga (2020) which was done at Iyanya, Mbeya revealed that one of the factors that increase participation in village meetings is prior information that villagers have concerning the relevance of a particular projects to them

The same observation was noted in focus group discussions by participants revealed that the community members are highly motivated to take part in education projects because learning conditions of their children are not pleasant. The participants explained that during data collection, there was an ongoing project of building classes at Changarawe Secondary School and the community members were highly engaged and feel the need to take part in the project because available classes were not enough to accommodate all students something that caused congestions in the classes. One of the participants explained that,

> *"We personally, saw how uncomfortable our children are with available small class sizes. This made us realizing that something has to be done and that is one of the reasons we are looking for all possible ways to build these classes"*

Community members expressed that they were satisfied with how they were engaged by their leaders in education projects. All 14 participants included in the study expressed satisfaction with how they are engaged. It was found that the community was made part of education projects from planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation

stage. One of the participants commented that;

> "Before the idea of building more classes at Changarawe Secondary School we were called by our leaders and they explained to us why this project is important. Now you can see how well we know the project and ready to support it fully. Additionally, we always receive information on how the project is going including how much fund has been collected for the project and how the same is spent"

This study found that engaging community members makes education projects more meaningful because people who are directly benefited by the projects are the community and success of these projects largely depends on their interventions. From the interviews it was revealed that enrollment of students in primary and secondary schools tend to increase when the community members are engaged in all stages of these projects. People whose efforts are directed in building classes are not ready to see their efforts are wasted by not utilizing the end results of the projects. This motivates them to take their children to schools so their ideas, commitment and efforts can be well utilized. These findings are consistent with the social capital theory that underpinned this study which shows how contribution of various resources from community members is vital to the development of a particular community. Further, these findings are consistent with those of Sanfo (2020) in his study which was done in Burkina Faso which emphasized that people who directly take part in a particular project tend to value its existence and therefore find means of protecting it. The role of leadership in making engagement a success cannot be underestimated. Leadership is believed to be one of the important aspects of any group activity, Mwita, Mwakasangula & Tefurukwa, (2018). People to assess commitment of their leaders to achieving group objectives before exerting their efforts

towards achieving the same (Mwakasangula & Mwita, 2021).

Methods in Engaging Community Members in Education Projects

In identifying methods used, in engaging community members, numerous themes emerged. These themes include village meetings, games and sports, notice boards, cell-phones, door-to-door, and official letters. These can generally be categorized to verbal and non-verbal communication.

The study intended to describe ways through which community members are engaged in education projects. In this context these ways that are used for disseminating information about proposed, on-going or finished projects were fully explained as follows:

Village Meetings

Village meetings were found to be the most effective way of engaging community members. For the purpose of communicating about projects leaders call for ad hoc or scheduled meetings to persuade community members to engage in education projects. This way was found to be effective because of the response to these meetings experienced. One of the leaders interviewed commented that,

> "In rural areas like ours, people meet and discuss issues through meetings regularly. Here is where you can easily speak about matters that affect welfare of the villagers and they take them seriously. We tend to use meetings to communicate about projects at any phase whether as an idea, at planning, implementation or monitoring and evaluation phase. To use this is the most effective way of engaging our people [villagers]"

Findings from the focus group discussion show that the villagers find meetings to be the most convenient way of receiving information concerning education projects. Group

discussants in FGD were in agreement that meetings show how serious the information is whenever communicated through that means since it involves all the villagers directly or indirectly. It was observed that the village council is the most powerful organ at the village level therefore once issues related to projects are conveyed through this organ in the village assembly portrays how committed the leaders are in the projects and therefore helps to engage the villagers easily. Similar findings were reported in studies of Njobe (2021) and Chacha (2019). These studies elaborated how village meetings were important tools used to engage community members in projects. However, the study of Hamza (2021) which was done Bangalore, India showed how meetings can be less effective in some cases. The study showed that community members were not able to meet physically due to restrictions imposed to discourage gatherings to avoid the spread of COVID19. Alternatively, community members were asked to interact virtually. Virtual meetings were also found to be less engaging due to the fact that not all community members had digital devices to facilitate that.

Sports and games

The study found that, another means that is used to engage the community members are sports and games. The study found that people in the studied like to participate in sports and games especially soccer as players and spectators. The fact that sports attract many people, leaders use this as an appropriate means to meet and speak to the villagers about education projects. The study observed that village leaders tend to organize soccer leagues and matches to attract people and before commencement of the matches they speak about planned or ongoing projects. This technique was found to be more effective in persuading young people to be part of the projects because in most cases they are not interested in attending regular meetings. One of the interviewed leaders commented that,

"Young people tend to avoid village meetings; they consider them to be for old people to make decisions. We realized that the only places were young people attend willingly is on sporting activities therefore we decided to make the use of them to let them know on what the village is doing through our projects. The method has been proven to be very effective."

The study found that young people tend to participate in education projects through offering their physical efforts in building school infrastructure unlike their older counterparts who tend to offer financial resources to the projects. The study revealed that, physical efforts in building classes and other school infrastructure is very significant to village projects and therefore make sports and games interventions one very meaningful ways of engaging community members. Few studies in the literature such as Ginazu (2019) and Mzitu, S. (2020). reported how sports and games can be used as one of methods to engage community members. Ginazu (2019) insisted that sports and games can only be effective in communities that prefer or love them.

Notice boards

Another methods that was found to be used for community engagement is the use of notice boards particularly those boards found in village offices. Village leaders tend to use this method particularly as a means of disseminating information about progress of the project. It was observed that information concerning revenue and expenditure of the project are regularly disseminated through notices boards. Since village meetings are scheduled events in most cases with regard to financial information dissemination notice boards were found to be used to supplement village meetings. The study observed number of printed announcements on revenue and expenditure in the village office's notice boards.

Although notice boards were found to be effective yet it was found that there is little number of people who prefer this method. In probing the reason behind this one of the respondents explained that reading culture is popular in rural areas and notice boards are considered to be having a one-way communication pattern hence less preferred because people wish to ask questions and seek for clarifications something that notice boards cannot satisfy. Although the respondents find this as a less preferred method comparing to village meetings still, they agreed that publishing information on notice boards especially when there is inclusion of financial information of education projects demonstrates high level of accountability and honestly from leaders. One of the respondents narrated that;

> "We normally don't use notice boards; I think meetings are more effective. In most cases notice boards contain information that have been discussed in meetings. Few people tend to visit notice boards to verify certain information. Some visit notice boards when it happens, they didn't attend meetings."

Ginazu (2019) narrated that reading culture in rural areas has not been well instilled among community members and some are illiterate something that make them prefer meetings to notice boards. This might be one of the reasons why notice boards are preferred by so many community members.

Other methods

The study found that there are other methods that are used to supplement the above methods that were being used in engaging community members. These methods include the use of cell phones through calls and short messages. Further, cell phone technology was found to instant when information is shared through *WhatsApp* messenger which facilitates formation of virtual social groups.

The study found that the problem with cell phone use especially *WhatsApp* is inaccessibility to some villagers whose cell phones do not support the service and those who do not have cell phones at all. The study of Evans-Cowley and Griffin (2012) offers evidence that social media may be an important tool in promoting community engagement.

The use of door-to-door method was also found to be useful. This involves officers from the village office who pass from one house to another for sensitizing about the project and seek for financial, material and physical efforts to support education projects. The use of official letters was also found to be used in engaging community members in education projects. This method was found to be useful to send and receive information from institutions located in the village. In the group discussion it was noted that these methods tend to complement the main methods (meetings, sports and games, and notice boards). One of the discussants explained that;

> "Cellphones, door-to-door, official letters and other methods may seem less preferred but they are important and there are certain people who prefer them. Although majority attend meetings there are others for some reasons fail to end these gatherings hence the use of other methods help them to be informed and get engaged. Their contributions towards success of educational projects cannot be underscored"

The above quotation gives an impression that the use of multiple methods may help to reach more community members and increase extent of engagement and consequently reaching intended goals of education projects. Stallone (2018) observed that community members have different preferences when it comes to how they wished to be engaged and therefore the more the methods the higher the

chance of engaging more community members.

CONCLUSION

The role of leadership is very vital in ensuring that community members are offered with sufficient and effective avenues for being engaged. Different people in the community have to be engaged differently based on their preferred means of engagement. Village meetings were found to be the most effective method of engaging community members since they attract many people and allow interactions between leaders and community members. Other methods such as notice boards, games and sports, cell phone communication, door-to-door and letters are important in supplementing village meetings. The study confirms the social capital theory that posits contribution of community members is important in the development of a particular society. This study offers insights on the relevance of using different methods of engaging community members concurrently. Further, the use of sports activities which was among methods used presents a new method which have not been adequately covered in the literature like the rest of the methods.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following;

In order to improve and increase community engagement in education projects, leaders have to play a significant role by creating an environment that allows and welcomes community members to be part of the project in all stages.

Engaging community members have to be throughout the project cycle and not during implementation alone. This can increase trust of community members towards those directly involved in the project.

To make community engagement effective it has to consider different needs and preferences of various community groups on methods to be used in engaging them. Further, the use of various methods or methods in engaging community members is highly recommended to increase level of community participation.

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