

Improving People's Participation In Local Development

Project: A Case of Urban Local Government in Oromia-Ethiopia

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Abstract

Despite the prominence given to participatory development in National Urban Development Policy 2005, a people-centered development culture akin to participation is yet to take root in urban Oromia. This study takes a fresh look at local governance and the level of people participation in the development process. The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent and status of people participation in the local development project cycle in Oromia Regional State relying on the knowledge from the closing of the ULGDP¹ as a case study. To achieve this, primary data were collected using a survey from the selected urban households and secondary data were collected from reports and books. Appropriate descriptive and analytical tools were employed to process the data obtained. The results of the study show that the extent and status of people's participation in identifying problems, implementation and evaluation of the activity and its outcomes were still negligible and not institutionalized. The study found that administrative obstacles such as bureaucracy and lack of regard for local people greatly hindered community participation in development efforts and that it is equally as important for a meaningful participation, for people to know about the project as it is for them to be recognized and acknowledged. The study concludes with a recommendation for a massive awareness program to be conducted by government in partnership with local Community Based Organizations (CBOs) working closely with the poor and the disadvantaged. Enactment of participation friendly guidelines can also promote and encourage participation.

Keywords - development project, people participation, and urban local government

1. Introduction

1.1. Study Background

People's participation is an indispensable and essential for development. The cornerstone of local development is people participation, a historically- and universally-accepted concept of human empowerment for settlement development. Scholars of human settlement development studies have long believed in, and advocated for the involvement of citizens in the planning and implementation of development projects in order for the objectives of these project to be fully and meaningfully realized. Stone (1989) argues that people's participation in development projects may help bring effective social change rather than impose an external culture on a society. Similarly, Shrimpton (1989) states that community participation in the design and management of a project greatly enhances the likelihood of project success due to improved goodness of fit and increased sustainability.

The most widely accepted and adopted strategy for ensuring people's participation in local development is decentralization and there is, perhaps, no other institution close enough like local government to provide the scope and platform for people's participation in their own development. Ethiopia, in the last two decades, has implemented comprehensive and cross-cutting political and administrative programs intended not only to institute but more so to spread and deepen the culture of decentralization. The main reason for this has been to ensure grassroots participation in decisions that affect their physical well-being and socio-economic

¹ Urban Local Government Development Project launched in 2008.

development. In this respect, one would be forgiven for expecting local community members fully involved and actively engaged in development project planning and implementation by now. However, the real situation is far from desired and local people have increasingly become mere observers having no clue as to the origin, the funding and, strange enough, the purpose regarding projects being implemented.

The study conducted by GTZ (2010) found that citizen participation and vision towards enhancing the future participation in different development activities of the municipality have been changing from time to time. But, That there were significant numbers of citizens who did not even know the future development plans of their cities and, still many, who had not participated in any local consultation meetings. The study also noted citizens' complaints concerning the non-implementation of decisions of consultative meetings by the authorities (GTZ, 2011). The study did not, though, explain the reasons for the minimal participation of people in the development process. Another study found that people's participation in local infrastructure development projects was still below expectation and that this was due to apathy and lack of feeling of community ownership in recognizing, protecting and maintaining development outcomes as part of their commonwealth (AfDB, 2011).

Generally, projects are considered as the backbone of local development. Related literature shows that the extent and status of local people's participation in development project problem identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is very low/ minimal. Since urban reform in Ethiopia, many projects have been implemented to improve the capacity of governments. From those development projects, The ULGDP is a 5-year, 416 million dollar urban development project co-financed by regional and selected local governments (28%) and the World Bank (IDA credit, 72%) that commenced in 2008 (WB, 2008 & 2011). It was conceived to support the Ministry of Urban Development and Construction's urban program which was, at the time, an integral part of the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (2005/06-2009/10). Subsequently, it was adapted to support the Growth and Transformation Plan (2010/11-2014/15). The objective of the ULGDP is to improve ULG² performance capacity to plan, deliver and sustain municipal infrastructure services through effective people's participation (MWUD, 2012). The practice of people's participation has not been cultured and institutionalized. Moreover, local governments were not aware of how the resources used to execute the ULGDP and, by extension, other infrastructure project was mobilized. They were not disseminated plan and performances of activities as required.

1.2. Objective of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the extent and status to which people participate in development project in Major Oromia Cities, using ULGDP as a case study. The specific objectives include to:

1. Evaluate the level of people participation in development project cycle.
2. Identify factors that affect the level of people participation in development projects.

1.3. Research Questions

1. To what extent do beneficiary communities participate throughout the development project cycle?
2. What are the factors responsible for low level of community participation in development project implementation?
3. What mechanism should be put in place to ensure desirable levels of participation of the beneficiaries throughout the development project cycle?

1.4. Significance

This article examines the extent and status of people's participation in local development process and identifies the major causes of ineffective engagement in the cycle. Essentially, it restates the urgent call for governments and development authorities to strengthen their mobilization drive to raise the interest of local people in the development of their locality. The research findings made will assist policy makers and local government leaders to improve the environment and conditions for people participation and, thereby, maximize the benefits of development efforts.

1.5. Structure of Article

There are five parts: the introduction, the literature review, the methodology, the results and ensuing discussions, finally, the conclusion and recommendation.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual and Theoretical Terrains

² Urban Local Government

2.1.1. Local Governments

Most of the time, the local government nearest to local people is local government. It is also, the government tier followed from federal and regional governments established to meet the needs and aspiration of local people. Ola and Tonwe (2005) define local government as the administration of locality, a village, or town/city, a body representing the local inhabitants, have autonomy, collect revenue, and provide services to its inhabitants.

The proclamation 65/2003 of the Oromia National Regional State defined urban local government as: the administration of self-rule by the cities in the Region after acquiring legal personality. Local government is the adjacent and immediate government for the residents.

2.1.2. Development Project

The Project Management Institute (PMI) has defined project as a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service. Projects are supportive of programs whereas programs are supportive of plans (Project Management Institute, 2004:5). Little & Mirrless (1986) have described the relationship between plans and projects as twin-like; "plans require projects" and "projects require plans". Chadha (2005) defines this relationship as "projects are the pivot of a sectorial program and the sectorial programs in turn constitute a well-conceived national plan. But the project formulation needs national plans and vice versa thus raising the fundamental issue of the hen and the egg dilemma".

Development projects constitute an integral part of economic growth and development. The European Commission (1997) defined a development project as "a multi-dimensional interventions which is intended to develop human, physical and economical potentials of a country to bring about the change leading to the improvement of economy, environment, communities and institutions". Gittinger (1982) sees a development project as a model which aims primarily to add value through internal inputs/resources that are organized and operated by projects.

Thus, development project consist of an optimum set of investment-oriented actions based on comprehensive and coherent sector planning by means of which a defined combination of human and material resources is expected to cause a determined amount of economic and social development. The component of a project needs to be precisely defined as to character, location and time. Both the resources required in the form of finance, materials and institutional development are estimated in advance. Cost and benefits are calculated in financial and economic terms or defined with sufficient precision to permit a reasoned judgment to be made as to optimum set of actions (Ibid). Project, in this study, refer to the development project undertaken and implemented through local government, at city level. A development project, in content and coverage, is flourished through several stages which are known as **the project cycle**.

2.2. People's Participation in Development

Researchers and developmental organizations have defined the term 'people's participation' from various points of view, depending on experience and priority. Some of these definitions are: "Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and partly control the development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them" (World Bank 1996); "Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives" (UNDP 1997a); Participation is a process whereby individuals and community are actively involved in all phases of development (USAID, 1999).

Other definitions given by researchers are: "Empowering people to mobilize their own capacities, be social actors rather than passive subjects, manage the resources, make decisions, and control the activities that affect their lives" (Cernea, 1985). "A complex social, technical and institutional process through which communities may become more fully involved in their own development, more particularly taking an active part in the design, implementation and evaluation of specific development initiatives" (Bonfiglioli, 1997). According to Pretty there are two overlapping thoughts; (a) participation as a means to increase the efficiency, and (b) participation as a fundamental right in which the main aim is to initiate and mobilize for collective action, empowerment and institution building (Pretty, 1995).

For the purposes of this article a broader and an all-encompassing definition appears to be that given by Ali "The active involvement of local people/community or their representatives, local organizations, ideas, skills, knowledge and priorities in all the phases of any local project/ programs, developmental activities and developmental policies, in order to increase the efficiency or to ensure sustainability and equitability, as it is the fundamental right of poor /local beneficiaries or because the local people know more than the government and external professional experts what problems they face and how best to resolve them" (Ali, 2012). The definition includes political economic, socio-cultural aspect of human life. It relates the involvement of people in development process to ensuring sustainability, to achieving equitability, and to protecting social justice in

society. The Ethiopian Urban Development Policy defines people participation as “development strategy in which the urban residents are active participants at all stages of the development and execution of a project from identification of a projects, selection of a site, supervision of work and provision of labor to appropriate utilization, management, and maintenance of the final product” (MWUD, 2005).

2.2.1. Need for People’s Participation in Development

Saxena (1998) points out that the need for people to participate in development can have the following objectives: efficiency; effectiveness; empowerment; and equity (Saxena, 1998). Experience of UNDP³ has shown that people participation in development efforts can improve the quality, efficacy and sustainability of development actions. By placing people at the center of such actions, development efforts have a much greater potential to empower and to lead to ownership of the results (UNDP, 1997a). “Development is a complex process. It cannot be left in the hands of centralized power. Even latter-day communists such as Mikhail Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping have come to realize this and tried to open up their societies, to provide more room and more opportunities to the people to be more participative, creative and productive” (Cleveland and Lubic, 1992). The ineffectiveness of the top-down approach in many developing countries has redirected strategy to adopt the foundation of people participation/bottom-up approach which holds the characteristics of sustainability, empowerment, independence, and justice. In fact, the need for a bottom-up approach has not only been felt by governments but also by development organizations, NGOs, & CBOs all of whom have begun incorporating the technique in their programs and activities for successful implementation. There are three reasons which justify people’s participation:

1. When people participate in the identification of problems and come up with their own solutions, the results can be both spectacular and sustainable
2. Participation allows communities to discover their own wealth of knowledge and capacity for problem identification and problem solving
3. The solutions that are identified by communities are more likely to be feasible and implementable than those formulated by outsiders (Ibid)

Linking institutions and communities poses problems. For the institution, it is very difficult to involve the isolated and uneducated people in the main stream of development. It is a problem of how to access them to increase their productivity and income and to make development activities more sustainable. The same is also faced by the poor population as they are neither connected with the political system nor with the general economy. They are often isolated and with limited access to newspapers and other forms of communication. They don’t know how to approach the government and other institutions for their rights and own development. Though they know their own problems and the solutions better, the difficulty is to organize and make their knowledge of the locality effective. So, there is a need for a two ways communication between the two groups, i.e. the development agent and the local people and linking the two is now mostly accomplished by local NGOs.

2.2.2. Classification of Participation

To get best result in the development process participation in all stages of project cycle, from problem identification to monitoring and evaluation is essential. If people are participating through information sharing and consultation then the result will be poor (Pretty, 1995). The UNDP (1997) has classified participation on the basis of levels or degrees. Level one contains manipulation, information, consultation and consensus building. This level is a very weak level of participation because at this stage all the beneficiaries are just manipulated, informed and consulted. However, this is a basic level and necessary for future participatory development of a project. The second stage of participation consists of decision-making, risk-sharing, partnership and self-management. This is the actual level where the beneficiaries are responsible to control, manage and share the decisions, risk, partnership and self-management of a development project (UNDP, 1997). Pretty (1994) and UNDP classify participation similarly but with differences in the nature of the typology. The typology of UNDP provides various stages of participation whereas Pretty’s typology indicates various forms/ kinds of participation.

Other authors present participatory ranging from **pseudo participation** (manipulation of beneficiaries) to **genuine participation** in which participation is empowered by having control over program policy and management. At the pseudo participatory level, the beneficiaries are just invited, informed, consulted and manipulated with regard to project activities – a one-way communication. All project activities are controlled and managed by the project staff. The beneficiaries’ suggestions and advice with regard to project activities are

³ United Nations Development Program

heard and may or may not be respected. Pseudo participation may appear weak and less effective but, in fact, it does provide a basis for future genuine participation. At the genuine participatory level, the community is empowered and gains control over project planning, decisions and resources. Community partnership is strengthened with the external agents of development projects. Thus, it is a very strong level of participation where people, community and project implementers have strong cooperation and share all project activities. At this level, communities are delegated more powers to become the owners of the development projects (Deshler and Sock, 1985).

White (1996) classified participation on the basis of interest of stakeholders (planners and beneficiaries). At each of the first three levels (Nominal, Instrumental and Representative), planners and beneficiaries have different interest. However, at the ultimate level (transformative) both groups are interested in the empowerment of beneficiaries (White, 1996). White describes four types of stakeholders' participation. According to him each type is characterized by the divergent interests of different stakeholders. Planners are identified as having top-down interests versus the bottom-up interests of project beneficiaries. Participation ranges from nominal to transformative. White's classification is important because it demonstrates that stakeholders do not share the same expectations of participation in development projects. At each of the first three levels, planners and beneficiaries employ concurrently conflicting definitions of participation. Only at the ultimate level (transformative), both groups of stakeholders are interested in the empowerment of beneficiaries (Michener, 1998).

Cohen and Uphoff (1980) presented a more comprehensive typology by examining the various dimensions of participation. Their typology not only includes different type/kinds of participation but also who participates and how. The type/kind of participation has been classified with regard to the project cycle and "who" dimension divides the actors or stakeholders involved. Similarly, the "how" dimension describes the mechanisms by which participation takes place. Cohen and Uphoff's typology of participation is more comprehensive. It has an applied focus with less attention to theoretical divisions. This classification provides a complete framework for the analysis of participatory component of any rural development project. The Cohen and Uphoff dimensions of participation concerns the kind of participation which is taking place, the sets of individuals who are involved in the participatory process and the various features of how that process is occurring. Basically these dimensions provide answer to the questions: what kinds of participation take place; who participates in them; and how the process of participation takes place.

Pretty (1995) presented a participatory continuum laying out different forms of participation, from the least participatory to the most participatory. Pretty's participatory continuum is different from the all other aforementioned typologies. This typology lays down different forms of participation, from the least participatory to the most participatory. It indicates how people are involved in the project activities and how they are mobilized to carry out their own developmental activities in the absence of external initiators and facilitators. This article adopts the participation process described by Pretty (1995).

2.2.3. Obstacles to People's Participation

A host of factors have been identified as obstacles to effective participation in development programs and projects. Oakley (1991) discusses three major obstacles to people's participation which are structural, administrative and social. Structural obstacles form part of the complex and centralized organizational systems that control decision-making, resource allocation and information, and are not oriented towards people's participation. This situation is usually typified by a 'top-down' development approach. Administrative obstacles relate to bureaucratic procedures, operated by a set of guidelines and adopt a blue print approach, providing little space for people to make their own decisions or control their development process. The social impediments include mentality of dependence, culture of silence, domination of the local elite, gender inequality, and low levels of education and of exposure to non-local information.

Another obstacle is "standardization of approaches" (Guijt and Shah, 1998, p.5) which contradicts the original aims of participation, to move away from the limitations of blue print planning and implementation towards more flexible and context-specific methodologies. According to Cooke and Kothari (2001, p.53), participation has been translated into managerial "toolboxes" of procedures and techniques. This limited approach gives rise to a number of critical paradoxes: project approaches remain largely concerned with efficiency, and focus attention only on the highly visible, formal, local organizations, overlooking the numerous communal activities that occur through daily interactions and socially embedded arrangements. Dale (2004) identifies other barriers such as power structures within local communities, rigid professional attitudes among program and project staff, little awareness among people of rights they may have or opportunities they may exploit, and little emphasis on qualitative achievements of participation. These barriers are situation-specific, and need to be carefully analyzed in particular contexts.

3. Research Methodology

This article derives from a larger ongoing study⁴ looking into the broad performance of local government in the handling of development projects. Specific, related and analyzed results from that study provide the source material for the article and, just to situate and place the discussion in proper context, the following description of the larger study should give meaning and clarity to information basis of the article. The said study was conducted in 2013⁵ and it involved a mass survey of local people by questionnaire covering 400 randomly selected household-heads⁶ from four urban local governments namely, Adama, Bishoftu, Jimma and Shashemene; all deliberately included for their size and status in the Region. There were focus group discussions with local people representatives all levels of government. The basic methodology adopted here is by critically looking at particular survey questions related to the theme of this article to, relying on the simple response strength by percentages, ascertain the general condition regarding the status of people participation in local government activity. The table below gives the characteristics of the four towns.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Four Cities

Feature	Adama	Bishoftu	Jimma	Shashemene
Establishment	1915	1917	1990	1936
Area	133.6 KM ²	14,000 Hectares	9106.42 Hectares	1,320 Hectares
Number of Kebele	14	9	14	8
Population in July 2012	282,974	128,408	155,434	129,084

Source: Respective town's archives.

4. Results

The survey findings revealed that 57.1 percent of respondents were male and 42.9 percent were female. Most of the respondents belonged to the age group 31-40 years, 136 belonged to the age group 21-30 years, 25 from the age group 51-60 years, 60 from the age group 41-50 years, and 16 from the age group of above 60 years. A respectable number of respondents, 76.5 percent, admitted to knowing about projects in their local government areas while 10.3 percent denied any knowledge whatsoever. This shows that projects are given adequate publicity and that citizen's generally are not left in the dark as is often the complaint. On the specific issue of the ULGDP an overwhelming majority of 71.5 percent answered that they knew of the project as well as its purposes and objectives [see Table 2 below].

Table 2: Awareness about ULGDP Projects at Household Level

Have you ever heard of ULGDP in your kebele? n=400					
		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Yes	306	76.5	76.5	76.5
	No	41	10.3	10.3	86.8
	No Opinion	53	13.3	13.3	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

When questioned further only 34 percent of total respondents mentioned that they knew of how the resources used to set up the ULGDP infrastructure services project were mobilized. The larger group of respondents of 66 percent indicated that they were not aware of how the resources used to execute the ULGDP and, by extension; other infrastructure project was mobilized [see Table 3 below].

⁴ Titled 'Urban Development Management in Oromia Regional State of Ethiopia'

⁵ August to December, 2013

⁶ Fathers or, in their absence, mothers or representatives

Table 3: Awareness about Source of Budget to Finance Development Projects

Are you aware of how the resources used to set up these infrastructure services project is mobilized? N=286				
		Frequency	%	Valid %
Valid	Yes	98	34	34
	No	188	66	64
	Total	286	100	100

Community, rather than individual, awareness of development projects in the locality was evaluated through focus group discussion. Findings showed that the level of awareness about ULGDP was the same as was with household-heads level. Naturally, most of the participants indicated that they had no knowledge about the source of budget or its appropriation. During the focus group discussion majority of participants in showed general awareness of the World Bank and its numerous financial interventions in their communities. Again, there was absolute ignorance of project economics, particularly cost, returns, source structure, and allocation details.

An important finding was that local people were invited to early or pre-project planning to enable them assist in ranking and making choices. In the study 79.8 percent of respondents acknowledged that they were invited to participate in local consultations on the future development of their city, and of the ULGDP in particular during the identification phase meetings [see Table 4 below].

Table 4: Household Invitations to Participate in Problem Identification and Decision Making Process

Did you or your family ever receive an invitation from your Kebele or city administration to participate in local consultations? n=400					
		Frequency	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Yes	319	79.8	79.8	79.8
	No	61	15.3	15.3	95.0
	No Opinion	20	5.0	5.0	100.0
	Total	400	100.0	100.0	

It was further found that 58.8 percent of those confirming invitation to early project planning did not actively participate in the process, hence, the actual number of people participating in project planning was 32.6 percent. Unfortunately, the level drops even further to 29.5 percent during implementation and again to 26.5 percent at completion evaluation. Focus group discussions, outside the survey, revealed very important reasons explaining for the general lack of interest on the part of citizens in participating in government –related projects. For instance, communities considered project planning and decision-making to be the responsibility of village & city councils, ward committees, and project management staff. As a result, community members tended not to seek direct or active involvement citing, in support, that community members are represented in the city council by five representatives from each village/kebele. It is this council that makes decisions on their behalf and gives feedback to them on all decisions reached thereby suggesting that participation in the planning and decision making processes could be described as ‘representational participation’ through the councils. Hickey and Mohan (2004) argue that much of what is considered participatory in development projects and agencies is a process whereby large numbers of people are represented by a relatively small group of participants. According to their views, electoral representation offers a particularly limited form of participation, as representational systems and procedures often exclude the poor and therefore lacks the substance of a broader set of participatory engagements. While Bunch (1995) supports this view, he cautions that although local representation may be set up, the real ‘power behind the throne’ often remains in the hands of outsiders.

Feedback mechanisms from council members to communities and vice versa may also present another problem, and as such some project activities approved for implementation may only reflect the interests and priorities of the minority community leaders and not the entire local communities they represent. It was also clear that the extent of participation had something to do with the strength of individual or community contribution. For example, the report showed that in 2012, the total community contribution (i.e. labor, materials and cash) in Adama was estimated at 650,000 dollars on construction activities, buttressing the fact that people participation at the implementation stage is often only meant to achieve development project goals with no indication of overall people’s participation towards empowerment. Oakley (1991) and Dale (2004) refer to this type of participation is an example of participation as contribution.

Moreover, it was found that out of the 319 respondents who had actively participated in consultative meetings 65 percent indicated that the investments by the city administration did not correspond to the priorities they had identified and voted for. In other words, the responsible bodies from the local government ignored their

ideas and provided little room for them to make their own decision. Even where citizens had been sufficiently briefed and carried along throughout the planning process and decision-making, the study still found that implementation and final outcome deviated sharply from what had been mutually consented to [see Table 5 below].

Table 5: Correspondences of Investments with the Priority of People's

Do the investments by the city administration correspond to the priorities you have identified? n=319				
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	111	35	35
	No	208	65	65
	Total	319	100	100

The survey data showed that 61 percent of the respondents had had no periodic discussions with Kebele /city representatives/development committees on different aspects of either the ULGDP or other development activities implemented in their localities. Focus group discussions confirmed this finding and further complained of the absence of any functional structure to facilitate communication between project implementers and the local population.

Again, 65.8 percent of respondents indicated that they had had no participation of any sort or form in project progress monitoring and evaluation. Focus group discussions clarified that monitoring of project activities was mainly done by project staff and community leaders who reported back to them. Their report, often, hardly met the expectations of the community-at-large. Clearly, the absence of effective and efficient community-involved monitoring and evaluation system may be responsible for much of the low quality construction of roads, drainage channels, and bridges.

Discussions also brought out serious issues of transparency and accountability, both of which can be assured through a community-participation audit system. Currently, there is very little or no transparency in project management and managers are never called to account for their stewardship. This irregularity encourages local government elected representatives to gain undue or personal benefit in the dark.

4. Conclusion

The extent and status of People's participation in development project cycle and factors that affect people participation were reviewed in four urban local governments. All ULGs included in this article have started practicing participatory budgeting of its own accord. In some ULGs open meetings are held for identification of local priorities. But the initiatives are very few and do not have significant impact on the overall development process. This article exposes the ignorance and/or lack of information on the part of the people and community leaders, stressing that effective participation will give people a sense of ownership of public projects and assist in guaranteeing that standards are maintained. It is clear that knowledge about development projects is much higher among local people than the awareness, implementation, and utilization of resources.

Poor community leaders in giving feedback, lack of transparency and accountability, mentality of dependence, provision of little space for people to make their own decision, and administrative obstacles related to bureaucratic procedures were identified as causes for minimal participation in local government. Local governments and local Community Based Organizations (CBOs) which work closely with the poor and the disadvantaged should conduct awareness building campaigns. The openly advertised project problem identification, implementation and evaluation system should be activated to bring transparency and to ensure accountability from elected representatives. Enactment of participation-friendly guidelines can also promote and encourage participation. Local governments must institutionalize the participatory function and reduce bureaucratic obstacles that hamper people's interest in local matters.

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