

Examining the Psychosocial Hurdles on Effective Public Participation. A Keynote Towards Enhancing Participation in the Political Milieu

Derrick Opoku Danquah^{1*} Belinda Bonney² Raphael Mmieh Kwakye³

Institution of Affiliation: University of Electronic Science and Technology of China, School of Public Affairs and Administration. Centre for West African Studies. Qingshuihe Campus No. 2006, Xiyuan Ave, West Hi Tech Zone, 611731

Abstract

Public participation may be referred to as a pathway to express the personal interest of individuals and the general society in reference to the development plans, based on the premise that the planning activities would have an effect on the public generally and certain groups specifically. The current study explored public participation narrowing the scope on public and political decision-making processes, significance and the dynamism of participation. Certain factors have a tendency to hamper effective political participation and efforts are made to further review some of these factors from the psychosocial perspective. The study specifically reviewed the psychosocial factors limiting the review on the concepts of social loafing, social conformity and in-group out-group phenomenon. It is suggested that mechanisms and designs that would highly foster collaboration among political and social divides in the political arena should be prioritized to mitigate these psychosocial effects that hinders effective participation.

Keywords: Public Participation, Social loafing, Social Conformity, In-group, Out-group, Psychosocial, Decision-making.

1. Introduction

Public participation as a concept has faced definitional issues from scholars and literatures. Despite the concept lacking a universally accepted definition the varied definitions reflect and capture the broad scope of the subject matter. Rowe & Frewer (2005) disclosed that the scope of activities implicitly or explicitly included within the concept by others is often subject to debates and disagreements. That notwithstanding, Slocum & Thomas-Slayter (1995) referred to public participation as a pathway to express the personal interest of individuals and the general society in reference to the development plans, based on the premise that the planning activities would as a result have an effect on the public generally and certain groups specifically. Participation may be broadly or generally classified as the process of involvement in governance although its scope is limitedly referred to discrete acts such as town hall meeting or citizen survey or defined by a set of practices example, convening public hearings or other types of consultation processes (Quick & Bryson, 2018). Lukensmeyer, Goldman & Stern (2011) opined that the essence of public participation may be associated with creating awareness among citizens concerning government plans and activities. Awareness and understanding among citizens who assume stakeholders' role or position enables them to meaningfully participate in government decision machinery which leads to an effective resource planning and management through preparation of efficient planning framework. In essence, public participation is viewed as a tool, intended to inform planning, organizing or funding of activities. The public engagement in structuring the development plans and policies lessens political and administrative problems while fostering transparency within the professional environment. Public participation may also be used to measure attainable objectives, evaluate impact, and identify lessons for future practice (OCED, 2005).

Virtually every study of political participation begins with the allegation that political participation and democracy are inseparable (Deth, 2001). Public participation in governance involves the direct or indirect involvement of stakeholders in decision-making on policies, plans or programs in which they have an interest or stake (Quick & Bryson, 2016). Citizens participation on political discourse may take many forms including commenting on draft policies, raising concerns at a public hearing, or serving on advisory committees. (World Bank Group). It may be regarded as a way of empowerment and as vital part of democratic governance. Governments involving the public in decisions can enhance the quality and legitimacy of decisions. Also, it can ensure fairness in decisions, and give voice to underrepresented groups (World Bank Group). The mission and decision by the government to provide the needed services and infrastructures to the public must be complemented by the public who are the end users of these services. The status, perceptions, information, knowledge and resources of citizens and governments are irreducibly different, even when they are dealing with the same issues. That is why cooperation is worthwhile not because it is politically correct but also and above it because is effective (OCED, 2015).

Public participation must be regarded as an essential tool to carry out programs and policies in order to ensure high sustainability. The limited extent of participation by the public in government programs, policies,

and intervention initiatives often results in most programs becoming less relevant, unappreciated and the end result being the abrogation of these programs. According to Brady, Verba & Schlozman (1995) the question on why individual engage in political life can be reexamined as why people don't take part in politics. Three suggestive answers come up, 1. because they want to 2. because they can't, and 3. because nobody asked. However, most studies focus on the resource needs of the individual in terms of time, money and civic skills to meaningfully participate. These factors help to explain and analyze political participation but it is relevant to focus on the non-physical or psychological dimension to help analyze political participation (Brady, Verba & Schlozman, 1995).

Often at times, policies and government decision-making processes are often centralized to the few regarded expertise, government agencies and administration, legislators, judiciary bodies, government advocate (interest groups) and political elites. However, Rowe & Frewer (2000) assertion that public policy making remains incomplete when there is no public participation seems highly relevant subject matter in contemporary times. A good public participation needs to involve the public at every stage of decision-making and development (Litchfield, 1996). However, related studies have revealed how problematic it is to accomplish what Litchfield (1996) proposed. These problematic factors may range from social, technical know-how, economic, psychological, resource needs, political among others. A study by Timothy (1999) revealed that an entire local community under study was completely neglected from the public decision-making process for these reasons; [1] the local community's lack of knowledge and understanding in public participation generally and in the decision-making process specifically, [2] insufficient resources in terms of managing staff and information and [3] limited budget allocations.

There are numerous factors that may leads to under-representation of the general public and individuals in political participation. These factors tend to hamper individual or group motivation to participate adequately in political or policy decision processes. In most democratic jurisdiction, the existence of multiparty, numerous civil and interest groups often creates political and social divides which foster labeling of in-group out-groups. Whereas some sect may assume advocating role for government policies and decisions becoming a mouthpiece, the other sect may often be considered as undertaking a non-advocate role. In other words, some groups tend to be highly critical of government policies and initiatives playing the check and balance role. On the other end, other groups may advocate in favor to ensure government remaining in power for a perpetual period due to groups and individuals' self-interest. Participation is less fostered when advocate role by some groups are undermined and sideline in the government decision machinery and processes.

The nature of most political decisions, policies and programs demands certain fundamental or basic knowledge, skills, technical-know-how in order to meaningfully participate. These requirements may favorably position individuals to fully participate in public decision-making. However, in certain cases these may be far-fetched from individuals' list of competencies. Individuals in groups in an attempt to conceal their inadequacies may tend to socially conform to decisions by leaders, significant others or experts or majority opinion. Although, that may sound to be the best option in the event of such inadequacies but it may have other repercussions. Government decisions on policies and programs may sometimes not adequately reflect on the demands and needs of the public and resource may be diverted wrongfully. This tendency reflects or unveils on the concept of Social Conformity. Cialdini & Goldstein (2004) refer to social conformity as changing one's behavior to match the responses of others.

Extent of public participation by individuals may dwindle when the task involved are carried out collectively. Numerous studies have established that individuals' overall output in groups tends to diminish when they perceive undertaking task in groups. The factors accounting for the diminished outputs are mostly explored from varying perspectives not limited to personality, leadership and cultural influences. Due to the obvious characteristic of vast size of the general public or political groups, some individuals may be less participating in political or government decision machinery. In other words, the political context may have limited proportion of participants due to tendency for certain fraction to remain aloof in decision-making on policies and other government programs. The implication is that not every voice would be represented and other individuals may end up making such decision on their behalf. Such behavioral tendencies are considered as social loafing manifesting public participation and decision-making processes. Individual view their personal contribution as less important and as such becomes less participating in public matters.

The current study explored public participation with a scope on public and political decision-making processes, significance and the dynamism of participation. Certain factors have a tendency to hamper effective political participation. Hence, efforts are made to further review some aspects or dimensions of these factors from the psychosocial perspective. The study specifically reviewed the psychosocial factors limiting the discussion to the concepts on social loafing, social conformity and in-group out-group phenomenon. It draws on the essence of also giving the needed attention in exploring other factors that may explain the ineffectiveness of public participation other than the normative focus of previous researches on resource need factors. In order to foster high and effective participation from individuals and groups, the study suggests in the concluding chapter

ways of promoting effectiveness and enhancing public participation in the political milieu.

1.1 Theories of Public Participation

There are developed theories and models that analyze political participation including 1. Resource Needs (time, money and civil skills), 2. Rational Choice Model (self-interested individuals), 3. Mobilization Model (individuals' response to opportunities in their political environment), 4. General Incentive Model (broader array of incentives unlimited to individual incentive as depicted in rational choice theory) and 5. Action- Theory Model of Personality. This current study limits the analysis and discussion on political participation from the general incentives model perspective.

1.1.1 General Incentives Model.

This model was developed by Whiteley and Seyd (1994, 2002) which combines social factors and individual factors to explain public participation in governance. This model expands on the individual incentive needs to participate in political decision-making as highlighted by the rational choice model to a broader array of incentives. Individual participates and has positive civic values if they have several types of incentives to do. According to Phang & Kankanhalli (2005) these broad array of incentives can be categorized into five dimensions: (I) Collective incentives (II) Selective incentives (III) Group incentives (IV) Expressive incentives, and (V) Social norms-derived incentives. Collective incentives are outcomes of policy goals and are often 'free ride' in terms of participation because individuals can enjoy such incentives regardless of participation such as a policy to reduce high taxes. Olson's collective action theory accentuates collective incentives where individuals benefit from public goods regardless of participation or contribution of such non-excludable goods. Contrary to selective incentive, individuals who do not participate do not stand the chance to benefit. The concern of 'free riding' tendency leads Olson (1965) to suggest that participation may only occur if some of the benefits are selective incentives, that is, they can be restricted to those who participate. Selective incentive is regarded in two folds i.e. the process and outcome. The process refers to the satisfaction individuals acquire as a result of participation such as fun, meeting like-minded personalities whereas the outcome is attached to individual expected goals for participation such being elected to a political position. The group incentives for participation are based on cost-benefit analysis but extends beyond the level of individual to the level of group. Individual has an incentive to collaborate and actively participate in a group, when the group is assess or perceive as possessing the efficacy to alleviate social problems and meaningfully contribute to policy and political decisions. In other words, the group incentives is dependent on the efficacy of the group to make an impact implying that an individual may not participate or limitedly participate if the group is perceived as less efficacious in political decision-making. The expressive incentive transcends the individual motivation to acquire personal gains. Individuals have incentive to participate in a political group when they identify or affiliate with the group. In other words, it denotes affective attachment of individuals to a group. This captures the in-group out-group phenomenon where individuals tend to be loyal and defensive of group actions. The last class of incentive that is termed social incentives is predominantly based on social norms and reflects the tendency of individuals' behavior to be affected by others. This highlights the environmental influence on individual incentive to participate. Individuals who found themselves in an environment where there is constant agitation for human rights because of dominance of oppression would most likely collaborate in such agenda. Individuals in a parochial political culture environment are most likely to be non-involving in political matters.

1.1.2 Psychosocial Dimensional Effects on Public Participation

Certain factors may hinder groups and individuals from living up to their full potentials in political participation. Extant of research has offered diverse perspectives on factors that hinder public participation. Reviewed literatures indicate that there has been limited attention in exploring the psychosocial factors that influence citizen participation. The psychosocial factors have potentials to hinder effective participation and must never be downplayed since they are central to stimulating behavior of citizens to be involved in the political discourse. Three psychosocial factors i.e. social loafing, in-group out-group phenomenon and social conformity are elaborated from literatures with a research focus on identifying their extent of influence on individuals and groups participation in the political decision-making processes.

1.1.3 Social Loafing Effects on Extent of Public Participation

The concept of social loafing has been a grounded concept that has stood the test of time over a century now. The concept originated from 'Ringlemen effect' study which accentuates the tendency of productivity of individuals to diminish when working in groups (Ringlemen, 1913). However, the term social loafing was coined by Ingham & Peckham through their empirical study demonstrating that individual efforts or participation dwindles in a curvilinear fashion when they engage in group or team work. Social loafing effects as explored by most literatures and studies point out that the phenomenon is inevitable when tasks are being carried out by

individuals working together in a group. Despite the fact that there may be other numerous factors that may necessitate individuals to become less involved in collective decision-making process, social loafing effects cannot be ruled out. From Latane et al (1979) assessment, numerous reasons might result in the social loafing effect.

Studies on social loafing have assumed different trends over the past years after the concept received a full limelight with some recent research shifting investigation focus to social loafing phenomenon in modern technology. Social loafing phenomenon does not only occur in physical activities, as further studies have discovered its occurrence in cognitive task as well. Its effect may be very vast from high efficiency of basic brainstorming activity to a further planned judgment and decisions. Among the earliest works on social loafing in cognitive task includes Harkings, Williams & Latane (1977) whose outcome supported the hypothesis that social loafing also occurs in cognitive task. In the same vein, Robbins (1995) discovered social loafing effect on thought proving tasks. Furthermore, according to Henningsen, Cruz & Miller (2000) individuals who perceived working solely or undertaking intellectual decision type recalled more information than subjects who perceived working in group or making judgmental decision type. The study further disclosed that there is a phenomenon characterizing the inclination of people or individuals to under-contribute when in group which is regarded as among the prime reasons why success are far-fetched from brainstorming group according to the study. Social loafing tendencies may also permeate in the policy and political function due to several factors. In relation to public participation functions and activities, it is crystal clear that it is unlimited to physical activity or presence of participants in the political or policy arena. Another relevant scope in the participation framework entails the decision making machinery which is centered on cognitive functions where citizens partake in policies and government programs through deliberations.

Determinants of social loafing tendencies have also been explored from many other angles including extent of task visibility and intrinsic task involvement (George, 1992), individual self-evaluation ((Szymanski & Harkins, 1987), task difficulty level or whether task is more or less interesting (Harkins & Petty, 1982), task attractiveness (Zaccaro, 1984), fatigue experience (Hoeksema-van Orden, 1998), as well as cultural influences (Charbonnier, Huguet, Brauer, & Monteil 1998, Clark & Baker, 2011) and many others.

Some further supporting studies that are of relevance to provide extra insights includes related study from Ferrante, Green & Forster (2006) which established that there is tendency for less loafing for groups or teams who has formal, incentivized leader than those without formal leaders. Again, individual perception of uniqueness of contributions has a tendency to positively affect their outcome (Harkins & Petty, 1982). Additionally, evidence attests that loafing highly transpires when individuals perceive that their personal efforts are difficult to separate from those of others. Williams, Harkins & Latane (1981) affirmed through their study that individual perceptions of their sole efforts being measured or not evaluated tend to determine their level of output or performance. Donelson (2009) pointed out that social loafing is responsible for diminished group performance on all sorts of physical and mental tasks, including brainstorming, evaluating employees, or making causal judgments. In cultural perspective study, Klehe & Anderson (2007) also discovered that people from individualistic culture have tendency to loaf whereas there is high tendency for individuals to loaf in collectivist culture when working in group.

The dominant theory that has provided insights on the occurrence of this phenomenon is equity approach which describes individual tendency to exhibit loafing behavior due to expectation of their co-performers likeliness to loaf. The theory posits further that individual seeks to ensure the equitable distribution of labor between themselves and their co-performers. The concept is reechoed in Olson's theory of collective action relating to public goods which provided the insight that the policy goals and programs which are the "products" of a political party, are public goods, and as a result rational actors have a motivation to free ride on the efforts of others and to let them do the work to provide such goods (Whiteley & Seyd, 2002). Array of evidence attests that it highly transpires when individuals perceives that their personal efforts are difficult to separate from those of others. This reiterates that rational actors when engaged in collective policy and program deliberations as well other forms of participation would have limited incentive to contribute in their full capacity. This limited incentive may not be entirely different from Whiteley & Seyd (2002) who opined that "equally, there is few, if any, incentive for individuals to avoid myopia in politics, since their own involvement makes no material difference to the outcome of an election or to the changing of the policy goals of their preferred party". There is a propensity for decision makers or participants to stay aloof and presume of others to make decisions on their behalf. However, decision-making in group is highly recommendable due to the fact that individuals are limited in their extent of exercising their rationality or reasoning which is conceptually termed as 'bounded rationality'. Janis (1982) has emphasized that decision-making in groups is complex and can go wrong. Groups may stand to gain by their larger size when members possess great level of ability (Yetton & Bottger, 1983), and groups with positive social labeling and high extent of dedication are less prone to demotivation (Hardy & Latane, 1988). There are tendencies for individuals to presume and feel they can 'hide in the crowd' when they work together in group. According to Davis (1969), individuals presumably hide behind the group and escape the blame for not

living up to expectations and or experience the feeling of being “lost in the crowd” and others incapable of detecting and acknowledging their fair proportion of the credit.

1.1.4 In-group Out-group Phenomenon in Public Participation

Individuals tend to define themselves in relation to the social groups they belong or identify with. Such definitions mainly reflect on the social group norms, values, ideologies and status of the group. The basis for identifying with a group may stem from factors inherent to individuals (age, sex, race, and ethnicity) as well as other external or environmental factors (group status, norms). Hutter & Diehl (2011) opined that team diversity may lead to a categorization of team mates as in-group versus out-group members. On the premise of this identification basis, individuals may as a result tend to denigrate others who do not fit into the groups. Studies have revealed that based on the power asymmetry more powerful groups are not adamant to discriminate against the less power groups (Ng, 1982; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991). Consequentially, among other effects, it generates the phenomenon of ideological differences, different preferences and perspectives on same matters as well breed stereotypes and prejudice among people resulting in different treatments. Past experimental work on inter-group relations has apparently indicated that social identity has consequences for attitudes toward out-group members (Brown, 1986). According to Allport (1954) in an attempt to answer the question of how members of disadvantaged groups react to their unfavorable conditions, in psychology, it was once assumed that they internalize society’s biases against them and adopt certain preferences for advantaged groups. Erik Erikson (1968) draws attention to behavioral tendencies of ‘inferiority’ feelings and self-hate in minority groups.

A group features which often set it apart from the others entails possessing resources that determine the level of its influence. Scholars have indicated that certain demographic features such as size, heterogeneity and density affect participation and political action due to the fact that they offer stimulating resources (Hunter & Staggenborg, 1986). Indeed, in-group identification is well studied as the most robust predictor of collective action (Gurin & Townsend, 1986; Kawakami & Dion, 1993; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1995; Lalonde & Cameron, 1993; Tougas & Veilleux, 1987; Tropp & Wright, 1999; Veenstra & Haslam, 2000; Wright & Tropp, 2002) cited in Baysu (2007).

Notwithstanding, individuals identifying with social groups have manifested in diverse environments not limited to institutions, political sphere, cultures, races, ethnic groups, geographic locations. As indicated earlier, social identification or labeling may often connote negative consequences as people identifying with same group often differs in opinion and ideologies. Concerns by Simon & Klandermans (2001) raised question under what conditions ethnic identity becomes politicized to the extent that the social group becomes “a group of and for itself in the political arena”. Wong and Cho (2005) questioned the conditions under which racial identity became politicized and maintained that Black identification was related to support for government policies for the interests of African Americans. Similarly, Huo, Smith, Tyler, & Lind (1996) in their study of different ethnic groups in the US found out that when identification with the subgroup became the primary self-categorization, instrumental concerns dominated other concerns in terms of the expectations from the authorities

In the political milieu, in -out group orientation serves as a major drive in policy decision and often predicts political behavior. Democratic governance system creates an atmosphere that stimulates and encourages citizen participation in the sphere of political matters. Political systems and structures often create divides where political parties and other civil and non- civil groups aim to dominate discussion in order to represent their subjective opinion on matters of majority concern. However, political participation may be undermined and not encouraged when the governance system sideline and marginalize the out-group. Typically, in U.S, the government machinery tasks on policies and decision-making has an ideological foundation of Democrat or Republicans depending on the current political organization in power. A synopsis of government structure in West Africa nations are majorly democratic nations. Ghana is geographically positioned in West Africa with a political system revolving around two major political organizations. At any point in time, the incumbent political organization becomes almost the whole machinery running the government. Policy decisions are often sidelined from the non- incumbent political groups or organization which depicts a political milieu where participation from out-group organizations becomes less endorsed in the government. Oftentimes, major policies that merit participation from all sides are rather parochially sidelined and thereby raise skepticism about outcome of certain policy. At both the micro and macro level, organization and individuals regarded as out-group becomes aloof in participation in public affairs which pose a dire consequence on success of most policies. In-group and out-group forms occupy a broader space in the political design in the democratic state. In-group and out group identification affects political behavior which influences political participation in indisputable ways. Oftentimes, it breeds out-group hostility and in-group favoritism and as a result they are often limited or no consultation irrespective of the out-group resources it possess in political decision-making.

1.1.5 Social Conformity in Political Decision-making

The concept describes a social situation where individuals amend their belief or behavior in order to be accepted

or to fit in a social group. There is tendency for individuals to conform for the benefit of social acceptance as experimental study has suggested (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Psychologically, individuals may also maintain positive self-assessment by identifying with and conforming to relevant or treasured groups (Brewer & Roccas, 2001). Crutchfield (1955) simply define conformity as “yielding to group pressure”. Cialdini & Goldstein (2004) also referred to the concept as changing one’s behavior to match the responses of others. These alterations in behavior or belief are often in response to the pressure for individuals to align with the social norms and other expectations of the group. Additionally, the presence of others or significant others may also generate likewise behavior. Social conformity phenomenon depicts that there is more of agreement than critical thinking when making decisions in groups in diverse context or situations. In this review, the effect of social conformity is explored from two main perspectives although its influence extends beyond. Social conformity may influence decision-making due its tendency to generate groupthink fostering less innovativeness in decision-making. Janis (1972) who coined the term groupthink posits that it occurs when “pursuit of agreement among team members becomes so dominant that it overrides any realistic appraisal of alternative courses of action”. Group-think induce an environment where wrong decisions triumph amidst other rational decisions and available choices which may result in ineffective policies or decisions hampering achievement of policy objectives. Individuals compare their actions to others choices because they either believe that it gives an indication as to the correct course of action as in the case of (Banerjee, 1992; Bikhchandani et al., 1992) or the desire to avoid the discomfort of being different from others (Asch, 1956). The negative effect of social conformity has further been examined towards its influence on opinion change. Mallinson & Hatemi (2018) discovered through their live interaction methodological study that some subjects changed their opinion in order to gain social acceptance. However, it can be asserted that this tendency often results in breeding alienated or opposing sides during decision-making. In effect, citizens may disengage or become less motivated to participate in deliberations when their opinions are opposed or challenged as evidenced in a focus group discussion by Hibbing & Thesis- Morse, 2002. It is essential to establish that opinion change and group-think are inevitable in decision-making. These two effects exist or reflect in policy deliberations when groups in pursuance of its objectives are affected by groupthink and opinion change tendencies on the masses or majority affecting policy adoption. On the positive side, it may facilitate decision-making for the reason that it will save time due to limited or no objection or opposition concerning decision-making. Groupthink and opinion change in decision-making process establish homogeneity in direction of thoughts among decision-makers that can conceal individual inadequacies. Social conformity studies on political behavior regarding voting decisions point out that conformity stimulates individual to engage in voting exercise as well influence their choice of party to vote for (Coleman, 2004). Cognitively, Klucharev et al (2008) study provides the evidence that social group norms induce conformity through learning mechanism reflected in the activity of the rostral cingulate zone and ventral striatum using functional magnetic resonance imaging device. According to Cialdini (2001), in the event of uncertainty, individuals may consider social norms to enhance understanding of and response to situations aside the influence of authorities. An individual choice may be consistent with that of his reference group on a positive association based on the premise that the choice may be influenced by the experience of others through learning. Stressing on further, individual makes similar choice opted for by the reference group and due to image related issues conforms to the perceived norms of the group (Abbinck, Irelenbusch, & Renner, 2006). Basit (2009) study also gives credence that conformity of actions emanates either through individuals learning and associating with the norms (social learning) and adherence to norm due to image related concerns (social influence). It is essential to establish that conformity arises from image-related concerns only if the individual’s actions are observable to other people.

1.1.6 Discussion and Conclusions

Public participation discussions and studies have featured on many literatures since it serves as a major tenet in enhancing democratic principles and values. Participation willingness by individuals or groups may be connected to their incentives needs which often serves as motivating factor. Taking a cue from reinforcement theory, individuals or groups are much more likely to participate in policies and programs decision-making processes if such behavior results in positive reinforcement. Contrary, the behavior tends to be eliminated or discontinued if there are negative consequences. The necessity and essence of public participation in the political, government and institutional levels must never be downplayed or underestimated. Neshkova et al (2012) quest to understand whether possibly citizen engagement can enhance performance of public programs discovered that enhanced organizational performance can be linked to public participation. Public participation may also be used to measure attainable objectives, evaluate impact, and identify lessons for future practices. It may also have a great role to play because it may reduce tension and resolve conflicts among groups and individuals. Through participation information inputs into administrative decisions can be promoted which is highly regarded since government is structured to serve the people. It therefore necessitate that their views and opinions must be a greater resource in decision-making processes. In other words, the public are the ultimate users and beneficiaries

of government programs and policies and it is highly imperative that policy deliberations are complemented by them. Engaging citizens may be regarded as a prudent pathway since public participation is a key towards sustainable development given that the proposed development will be structured based on the stakeholders' demands and needs, which include the benefits for future generations.

Public participation has been well embraced in certain countries. According to Wengert (1976), although public participation phenomenon may be worldwide, its role and importance may vary from one political jurisdiction to another due to differences in political and government systems or structures. In the USA, evidence of public participation can be found in administrative rule-making where rules proposed are subject to public scrutiny and comments for a specified period of time. Public participation is also considered compulsory for rules drafted by the executive bodies in the US government. In the UK, citizen engagement has been observed in mannerism where all levels of government has started incorporating citizens and stakeholders' involvement in the policy making processes. This may take the form of large scale consultation, focus group research, online discussion forums or deliberative citizens' juries. Such political structures or systems create an enabling environment where individual enthusiastically partakes and shares their opinions on matters that is catalytic for enhancing public understanding and building of tolerance. The process of engagement also weakens a tendency toward inflexible assertions or decisions and reduces individuals' biases and mistrust of the government and the political system.

Despite the benefits and positive attributes of political participation phenomenon, it is not entirely devoid of limitations and impeding factors that constraints individuals and group participation. Certain psychosocial factors may often hamper effective public participation as studies has limitedly explored. Diversity of groups and individuals is centrally regarded a stronger factor that often mediate effective participation and often breeds in-out group phenomenon and tendencies among various actors. Democratic milieu often generate several groups such as civil and non-civil, ethnic, political which can account for development of social divides. The existence of these social groups notwithstanding their positive impacts may as well hinder effective participation through development of alienated and non-alienated groups. In-group and out-group ensue mainly due to diversity contents and thereby becomes a serious barrier in effective political participation which may accounts for limited local community support of government policies and programs. The phenomenon may often result in unequal public participation due to some groups being marginalized in the deliberations or input process. This may possibly not be as a result of inadequacies in terms of skills and knowledge or technicalities of certain programs but due to social labeling that may be attached to groups as being an out-group and in-group. The probable implication is that, it may hinder participation since individuals and groups may develop and harbor the impression of their inputs as less relevant in policy deliberation and decision-making processes.

From the understanding of social loafing, individuals may have a tendency to 'free ride' on others efforts during policy deliberations or public decision processes. This tendency can be conceptually linked to Osmon theory of collective action where individuals 'free ride' on others to enjoy public goods provision. Individuals for many reasons may limitedly participate or exempt in public decision-making processes. In some political milieu, certain individuals may stay aloof or disengage from policy and decision-making processes. Thereby, individuals become susceptible to any potential consensus representing an outcome from the decision-making processes. Despite outcome of political deliberations and decision-making processes having a general impact on individuals regardless of their status of participation, a proportion may still disengage in the processes. When policy deliberations and decision-making processes are viewed by individuals as entirely group or team or public task that must be undertaken collectively, there are tendencies of a number of individuals developing the mindset that their individual efforts may be less relevant, unnoticed and so may 'hide in the crowd'. Usually, the size of the participating group may often make it impossible to identify personal contributions or efforts but rather the overall decision outcome based on the majority position. Furthermore, since minority position does not win out on issues, individuals may stay aloof or may be less intrigued to pursue on political deliberations. In the same vein, majority number may also heighten individuals' tendency to free ride because of the possible large size of group.

The expectation and desire to be accepted by a social group also determine the extent of participation by individuals. Generally, public participation seeks and facilitates the engagement of those potentially affected by or interested in a policy matter. However, individuals act or participate in decision-making in manner which does not contravene the code of social group one affiliates or attaches to. This phenomenon of individuals conforming with group social norms mostly generates the concern of groupthink and opinion change in decision-making. Thus, some individuals seek social acceptance and would mostly move along with the position of the group (groupthink) or amend behavior or opinion when it deems contrary to that of the group which gives credence to social norms-derived incentives of participation. This has greater implication on decision-making processes since individuals may tend to be less critical and judgmental but conform to group position. As a result, meaningful and effective participation can be compromised because individual capacity or competencies may not feature exhaustively in decision-making.

Instituting mechanisms and policies geared toward positively influencing participation is not as easier as it may be speculated. In the opinion of Hibbing & Theiss-Morse (2002), securing appreciable and meaningful deliberations on debatable issues from ordinary citizen, majority of who have little incentives to engage in policy discussion is not easier as one may think no matter how creative the forum may assume.

What are the possible mechanisms and designs that can be designed to moderate or alleviate these psychosocial factors that hinder effective participation? Government decision-making machinery and institutions must be designed to assume position or responsibility of promoting a collaborating role among various actors in the political environment in functions such as government development plan, policy agenda settings, policies deliberations etc. Although, it may appear to be challenging measure to adopt since some studies have disclosed that the major challenge in participation is guarantying an appropriate range of interests are involved in the process, including those normally excluded from decision-making by institutionalized inequities (Abers 2000; Young 2000; Parekh 2002; Schlozman and Brady 2012). Creating such collaborative functions may have a tendency to reduce the influence of in-group and out-group phenomenon resulting in expunging political divides. Success is unlikely to be far-fetched when various sects cooperate in policy deliberations. Thus, government development plan and projects would attain the total support of both local community and the general public. Effective participation can be significantly enhanced when individuals and groups collaborate in a political environment devoid of political divisions. When collaborative tendency becomes a pillar and hallmark in political decision-making processes among the various political divides, leaning to group ideologies or conforming to group social norms by individuals in decision-making would be less promoted. Thereby, overall interest of the state becomes the ultimate goal than group or personal goals.

Identifying individual efforts in decision-making processes generally or in groups is not normative due to the vast number of participants in the political arena. However, promoting a political culture where individuals can engage in political decision is essential since that can relatively reduce social loafing behavior or 'free rider' tendencies in decision-making processes. Participation in this sense can be enhanced at the various levels of social stratification (household, community, regional,) as depicted in referendum processes where individuals are relatively highly motivated to participate in state or national decision-making. On the same line, government should design mechanisms that would enable it achieve the highest extent of participation. Establishing these mechanisms would engage the public maximally and as a result individuals would develop limited tendencies to 'free ride' on others in political and government decision-making processes. Introducing such mechanism would also promote greater engagement in decision-making since individuals may realize their individuals' effort counts and form part of the eventual policy or government decision.

Technicalities and scope of government project and decision-making demands a level of intelligence to enable individual to meaningfully engage or participate. According to Jenkins (1993) the challenges encountered by the public due to their limitation in comprehending technical reports and the complex planning may generate a compromising effect on effectiveness and efficiency of participation. The implications are that only individuals with such level of intelligence can adequately participate. Quick and Bryson (2016) asserted that the participatory process ends up engaging the "usual suspects," who are considered as well-vested in the language and logics employed in such decisions and reasonably comfortable in the public space. In order to enhance participation, appropriate measures need to be employed to bridge the gap of ambiguity and technicalities associated with certain government policies and programs to attain adequate public participation

1.1.7 Recommendations for future studies

Future studies should also consider conducting empirical studies to investigate how collaborative and corporation functions can be fostered among political divides in the political arena.

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