

Do Actors Interest Count in Planning Community Based Projects? Evidence from Community Based Water Projects in Central Tanzania

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Abstract

Community based projects are necessary tools of channeling development to communities. The aim of using community development projects as a development vehicle rests in the assumption of bringing power back to the community and enhancing sustainability. In designing, planning and implementing projects, various actors are involved. Presumably different actors have varied interests in projects. Nevertheless, empirical evidence of actors' interests in planning and managing community based projects is missing. This study uses cases of water projects to expound actors' interests in community based water projects. The study was conducted in Central Tanzania singling out two regions namely Dodoma and Singida. A cross sectional design was adopted for the study purposes. A total of 30 Community based water projects were surveyed and 390 water users were randomly sampled for household survey. Multiple methods of data collection were used ranging from household survey, Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews. The study found that three categories of actors exists in the study area, these actors do participate in projects cycle with varied interests. Evidence suggests interest the influence of interest in project sustainability. The study recommends a holistic approach of planning incorporating actors' interest at different stages of project life cycle.

Keywords: Actors, community based water projects, interests and planning, project cycle

INTRODUCTION

Community based projects¹ are becoming necessary tools of development policy implementations. These projects are now adopting the bottom-up approach in its design and implementation. The aim of using community development projects as a development vehicle rests in the assumption of bringing power back to the community and enhancing sustainability. Other approaches that were used earlier in implementing development projects seem to prove failure. The most dominant of these approaches were the top down approach. In this case governments assumed the position of identifying problems, finding solutions and implementing the interventions. Literature suggests unsatisfactory results or performances of such projects. The community based projects seemed as a panacea to projects failures. However, that has not been the case. To date the question of project failures still persist. Three schools of thought exist on the reasons for failure. One suggests projects failure as a result of poor planning (pre-project) while others suggest failure is a result of poor management (execution). On the other hand factors external to projects (environment) might also contribute to project failure.

On the other-hand project failure has been highly linked with non-participatory approaches used in planning and execution especially with development projects. At this end governments and development partners has opted for participatory planning and community based management approaches. Despite the new approaches in planning and management, yet the community based projects fail. This calls for alternative thinking on the planning and management approaches of the community based projects taking into consideration interests of actors. The interest has been singled out because when planning and managing project, actors have different interest that could influence positively or negatively the success of projects. It could be pointed out clearly that empirical evidence of actors interests in planning and managing community based projects are missing. This study is an attempt to analyse actors' interest in planning and managing community based projects. In doing so the paper uses empirical evidence from 30 community based water projects in central Tanzania.

Community based projects: Community based development projects are regarded as the rapid approach for channeling development assistance (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). The major reason for advocating community management is the acknowledgement that people, who are targeted by a project, should have a major stake during project implementation. Since they are the ones who potentially benefit from the project, they are also interested in maintaining these benefits for a long time. So in order to make community management successful, the community must not only participate at meetings but should also be involved in planning, decision-making processes and even contribute their money and/or labor (Doe and Khan, 2004; Buddeke, 2010). Apart from just contributions, the other advantages of community management include; increased ownership, familiarity with the system, decreased project costs etc.

Water project actors: In understanding well the actors of community based water projects, the paper makes use of the actors' oriented approach as promulgated by Long (1992). Long emphasized the central significance of 'human agency' and self-organizing processes and the mutual determination of so-called 'internal' and 'external' factors and their relationships. Long (1992) brings forward the issues of interests, values, motives and power struggle of the actors, meaning that actors are able to negotiate, accommodate and struggle over definitions and boundaries of meanings (Kamanzi, 2007).

Community based water projects involve several actors who could be categorized under three broad groups:

- Global actors
- National actors
- Local actors

Global actors include all external or international agencies working with the water sector, while national actors include national bodies such as Ministry of Water and other national agencies dealing with water issues. On the other hand, local actors encompass local communities or the end users of the project outputs. While implementing the community based water projects, global actors might come with "full package of interventions" having their own interests and motives assuming they can do it by themselves and forget about the interest and motives of the local actors (Desai, 2003). Kilonzo (2008) argues that when external actors bring some intervention in the name of development, internal actors, that is, local community have their own belief and meaning of development.

External interventions take on different meanings to various individuals and groups. One of the reasons for understanding social meaning, purpose and power of actors in projects is because local community is closer to the project and has knowledge about managing it in sustainable way (Brosius *et al.*, 1998). Due to different background, interests and purpose among project actors in implementing development projects, there is a battlefield of knowledge between internal and external actors.

Actors interests: Interest can be defined as a reason for wanting something done. The reason might be direct/open or hidden. In this study interest has been conceptualized as both open and hidden reasons for wanting the community based projects implemented. Narayan (1995) assert that, when embedded in the existing social organization of a group, commonality of interest provides the basis for trust, loyalty, rules and reciprocity.

Interests of global actors: Global actors have varied interest on the community based water projects. The reason for the global actors wanting community based water projects to be implemented is grouped in two folds, open and hidden reasons. The hidden reasons are always attached behind the open reason. Supporting the fact that actors have open and hidden agenda, Baregu (2011) when discussing conflicts in the Great Lake region commented that:

"Actors may have the most noble stated motives, but in certain cases their actual activities on the ground are not consistent with their stated motives and goals. This arises either from deliberate strategies of deception or from weaknesses in orientation arising from the logic of their interests. It could also be a combination" (Baregu, 2011).

Interests of national actors: The interests of national actors are to realize the Tanzania Development Vision 2025, through effective implementation of NAWAPO 2002. More specifically, the national actors intend to improve health and alleviate poverty of rural population through improved access to adequate and safe water (URT, 2002a).

Interests of local actors: Being the end users of the project, it could be said that their interest is to see project benefits last longer. In the case of community based water projects, the interests of local actors is continuous flow of water that has the following advantages; reducing time searching for water, reducing water borne diseases, improved productivity time and other associated benefits.

METHODOLOGY

Study area: The study was conducted in four districts in two regions located at central part of Tanzania namely Dodoma and Singida. The districts were Kondoa and Kongwa (Dodoma) and Manyoni and Singida Urban (Singida). The regions were purposively selected to form the study area as they are found in the semi-arid zone which is characterized by dry-land and poor rainfall hence facing a critical shortage of water. The demand for water in these regions is most critical as it impacts agricultural and other productive activities, thus, contributing to persistent poverty. Selection of districts based on the functionality rate² of water projects. On that basis on each region one district with high functionality rate and the other with lower was chosen.

Research design and methods of data collection: Cross-sectional research design was used in this research study. This method allows data to be collected at one point in time and establishes relationships between

variables for the purpose of testing the hypotheses (Bailey, 1998). Thirty (30) projects of the CBWP were randomly picked for the purpose of the study. Since there are many CBWP in the study area, stratification of the projects basing on similar attributes were done. Three strata were created basing on common extraction methods in the study area. These included gravity extracted projects, engine pump extracted projects and manual extracted projects. Multiple methods of data collection were used in this study. Primary data were collected through household surveys (A total of 390 households who are project users were randomly sampled), key informant interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Secondary data were collected from various sources to complement the primary data. The application of different methods helps to ensure the quality of the findings by triangulating the findings via comparison of the content of different sources of information (Odell, 2001).

Data analysis: After the actual field survey, the collected data both qualitative and quantitative were processed prior to analysis. Analysing data collected from mixed methods necessitates the use of multiple processing and analysis techniques. The information collected during the FGDs and in-depth interviews were subjected to content analysis. Quantitative data collected were coded, processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Actors' participation in planning: Actors' participation is a critical ingredient for sustainability of development projects (Mansuri and Rao, 2004). However, an important point for analysis is the level of participation of actors. Project cycle have different sequences, therefore actors have to be involved in all sequences of the cycle. Participation have different levels, this study analyses levels of participation of actors in different sequences of the CBWP (Table 1).

The study reveals that, different actors tend to participate in community water based projects through different levels. The global actors control appraisal and evaluation of projects, while national actors control identification and design of projects. On the other hand, local actors tend to participate in projects through providing information, being consulted or through partnership with other actors during project monitoring. The only stage where local actors have control is during implementation of the project.

Table 1: Actors Participation in Project Planning

Global Actors	Inform	Consult	Partnership	Control
Identification		x		
Design	x			
Appraisal Implementation			x	x
Monitoring	x			
Evaluation				x
National Actors				
Identification				x
Design Appraisal			x	x
Implementation			x	
Monitoring			x	x
Evaluation			x	
Local Actors				
Identification		x		
Design Appraisal	x x			
Implementation				x
Monitoring			x	
Evaluation		x		

Local actors participation in project cycle sequences: Further analysis of participation of actors in the sequences of project cycle was done. It was revealed that only 2.8% of local actors have been involved in planning activities, excluding the rest (97.2%). It was noted that 2.2% of the local actors have been involved in designing of the projects. The only stage where local actors seem to be involved much was during implementation. It was found that, about 62% of respondents had participated in project implementation, while 38% denied involvement during such stage. The study also has found out a small proportion of the surveyed respondents (6.7%) had participated in Monitoring and Evaluation of the projects, leaving out the majority 93.3%. Table 2 indicates the percentages of respondents who had participated in different project activities.

Table 2: Local Actors Participation in the Sequences of Project Cycle

Activity		Frequency	Percentages (%)
Planning	Yes	9	2.8
	No	308	97.2
	Total	317	100.0
Design	Yes	7	2.2
	No	309	97.8
	Total	316	100.0
Implementation	Yes	199	62.0
	No	122	38.0
	Total	321	100.0
M&E	Yes	21	6.7
	No	292	93.3
	Total	313	100.0

The meaning attached to this analysis is that local actors are involved at the lower level of participation hierarchy. As a result their participation will be limited (Kamanzi, 2007). Actors will not be in the position to understand better the project (Carson and Gelber, 2001).

Actors interest: Generally, all actors have open and hidden interests in the implementation of the CBWP. These actors seem to have common goals and interests. The common interests include, meeting the MDGs and nation development vision, reducing distance to access safe and clean water. However, these hidden interests of actors vary and in most cases they are conflicting. They include, creating markets for technology, increasing loan opportunities and gaining political influence and power See Table 3.

Table 3: Actors Interests in CBWP

Group of Actors	Open Interest	Hidden interest	Area of Conflict
Global	1. Meeting the MDGs, Halving poverty	1. Creating markets for technology and spare parts 2. Creating and increasing loan opportunities	1. Choice of technology
National	1. Meeting the MDGs, TDV 2025 and NGRPS 2. Access to water <400 meters	1. Gaining political influence	1. Choice of project location
Local	1. Reduce time searching for water 2. Access to clean and safe water 3. Sustainable projects	1. Gaining political influence*	1. Choice of project site

*: Mostly seen in local political leaders who seek for self-prestige and recognition; Field Survey (2011)

The hidden interests of global actors tend to override the open interests thus compromising the sustainability of the community based water projects. For example, in creating more markets for technology, global actors tend to produce inappropriate project facilities, thus increasing project costs. For example, it was observed in the study area that, most of the hand- pump extracted projects were facing a physical break- down on the handles. This is because actors who fund the project install low quality pumps that would require frequent maintenance which are costly to the local communities.

Despite having the open interests in CBWP, national actors have hidden and quite often conflicting hidden interests. A notable case was observed in Singida Urban, where one of the water projects was implemented during election. The aim was to gain support of the electorate. This is how political influence and power has been used with little consideration on sustainability on the project. In particular aspect of gaining political influence neglected technical advice as a result the project has been abandoned because it has been implemented in an area with high level of salinity. Local actors in their part, also have open and hidden interest. However, the hidden interest of these actors are weaker compared to other actors. These interests based mainly on gaining self-prestige and recognition in their local communities. The study observed that, local political leaders were influencing the choice of project sites in favor of their political base. The conflict of interest at local level may not constitute much to un-sustainability of the water projects. Rather they are found at the receiving ends because they were not involved in design and planning of the projects. Thus the hidden interests of global and national actors tend to be strong and override the hidden interest of local actors and

thus influence sustainability of the CBWP.

CONCLUSION: MERGING ACTORS INTERESTS IN PROJECT PLANNING

The discussion above points out actors' interests and their positions in planning for community based water projects in central Tanzania. It has been noted that actors in community based water projects have varied interests in those projects. Moreover, the study acknowledges actors participation in planning for community based projects on different project cycle phases. The central argument lies not only on actors' interests or participation but rather on their outcome which is project sustainability. Evidence suggest varied interest could jeopardize project success, hence its sustainability. This calls for holistic approach that integrates all actors in planning to accommodate their demands, because in most cases actors interests lies in their demands or needs for projects. Pragmatically, it would seem impossible to accommodate interests of all actors in planning in a win-win scenario. Being the receipts of project benefits, the paper emphasize, on local actors interest to be taken on board during planning, design and implementation if sustainability of community based water project is sought.

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End note:

- ¹: Mansuri and Rao (2004) define community based development projects as the endeavour that communities have direct control over key project decisions as well as the management of investment funds.
- ²: According to Water Map Report from Water AID (2006), Kongwa and Singida Urban has high functionality rate while Kondoa and Manyoni had the lowest.