

# Success of Community Participation in Development Planning for Socio-Economic Transformation in Rwanda. Gakenke District

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**Abstract:** The study attempted to assess the success of community participation in development planning process in Gakenke District in Rwanda. The study adopted a cross-sectional design using both quantitative and qualitative research approaches on a sample of 76 respondents. Quantitative data involved the use of descriptive statistics particularly frequencies, percentages and the mean. Findings revealed that the development planning process remains top-down approach, priorities from the community are rarely taken into account and community participation is often used as a word of fantasy wherein the community has no role to play unless and until a comprehensive detailed plan is prepared by the development authority. The needs and priorities from the community are not taken into account as needed into the district development strategy; this situation contributes certainly to the rate of poverty of the district because implemented projects are not responding necessarily to the direct needs of communities. The study recommended to lighten the top-down approach and reinforce the bottom-up approach through the utilization of the community participation tools, empowering people through capacity building for staffs and local leaders at all levels of the district; equipping them with knowledge, skills and confidence to address their own needs and advocate on their own behalf and improve their capacity for collective activity for more socio-economic transformation results.

**Key words:** Community development, development planning & Socio-economic transformation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary planning theories acknowledge the value of community participation in the development processes, the reason why most developing countries have embarked on the administrative decentralization to empower citizens and help them to improve their living standards through participatory approaches. In Rwanda, the participatory planning began effectively in 1999 was followed by an effort to find common ground between the government's vision and the concerns of the population under a model of consultation (Bugingo, 2002).

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### *The importance of community participation*

Across the nation, the desire for communities and development stakeholders to solve local problems and reduce socioeconomic disparities is increasingly recognized by

policymakers, local elected officials and citizens. The idea of participation has long been part of development thinking but today it has become mandatory in planning development projects (Chauya, 2015).

One of the key objectives of participation is to incorporate local knowledge and preferences into the decision-making processes of governments, private providers, civil societies, communities and donor agencies. When potential beneficiaries are able to make key decisions, participation becomes self-initiated action, what is known as the "exercise of voice and choice," or "empowerment." Participation is expected to lead to better-designed policies and development projects, more effective service delivery, and improvements in the targeting of benefits. It also enhances social cohesion because communities recognize the value of working in partnership with each other.

Community participation legitimizes a local authority by making it acceptable to the municipal community. As Reddy puts it (as cited in Ababio, 2004), the dignity of a person is best manifested when he/she determines and controls his/her affairs. Responsibility for governing of one's own conduct develops integrity and the community needs to constantly interact with its councilors and officials to ensure that all actions by the district are beneficial to them. Community participation in municipal matters contributes to the creation of community solidarity, because the community feels involved in matters affecting and relevant to their welfare, thereby creating civic pride.

This Community participation is mostly applied as one of the key ingredients for poverty reduction. Indeed, intention of community participation in development policy and practice is to promote the active engagement of individuals working in collectives to change problematic conditions as well as influence policies and programs that affect the quality of their lives or the lives of others (Mansuri and Rao, 2003). In other words, community participation helps to develop people's capacities or abilities, to recognize and improve their inherent potential, and provides them with opportunities to influence and share power, i.e. power to decide and to gain some control over their lives (Samah and Aref, 2011).

### *Legislative and institutional framework for community participation in Rwanda*

In Rwanda, the concept of community participation is largely linked to the planning and management of development activities at the central and the district levels. According to the Local Development Agency (LODA, 2017), the elaboration of the Planning and Budgeting documents is a participatory planning process. It involves the central and local government entities as well as the citizens and the civil society organizations at different levels and in several steps –from collection of citizens’ needs, stakeholders’ consultation prior the final decision up to the feedback on the final decision taken.

The process began between 1998 and 1999, when a national consultation process took place in Urugwiro Village. From this consultation, there was a broad consensus on the necessity for Rwandans to clearly define the future of the country. The result was Vision 2020 and this bootstrapped the participatory approach in Rwanda with the preparation and the publication of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) in 2000.

In March 2001, the Community Development Policy was adopted by the Cabinet of the Government of Rwanda with the goal of “*ensuring effective and sustainable participation of the community in its own development, in order to achieve poverty reduction and self-reliance based on the sustainable exploitation of available resources*”. The policy was revised in 2008 to envisage “*a community that is organized, self-motivated, hardworking, forward-looking, and the ability to exploit local potential with innovation geared towards sustainable development*”.

On 17<sup>th</sup> July 2007, through the Ministerial Instruction No. 04/07, the Ministry of Local Government institutionalized the Joint Action Development Forum (JADF) at District and Sector levels. JADF is defined as a consultative level of information dissemination, promoting cooperation among people or actors in development and social welfare of the population. JADF aims at coordinating activities of all development actors so as to promote efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts. The forum can be viewed as a multi-stakeholder platform (SNV, 2009).

In accordance with the law No. 12/2013/OL of 12/9/2013 on the State Finances Property in its article 26 related to the Planning and Budgeting Calendar, the annual planning and budgeting call circulars emphasize on the planning participatory approach involving administrative authorities at all administrative levels, specific organs, civil society and community.

At local level, there are different mechanisms for enhancing community participation. Community assemblies (*Intekoz’abatwariye*) at the village level (Umudugudu) initially established in 2010, following Ministerial Instruction N°002/07/01 of 20/05/2011 and community work

(*Umuganda*), among others, are forms of direct community participation. At cell, sector and district levels, community participation is organized through indirect citizen participation mechanism of elected local councils, known as “*Inama Njyanama*” established by Law N° 87/2013 of 11/09/2013 (Never Again Rwanda, 2016), which also determines the organization and functioning of decentralized administrative entities. Through these councils, citizens participate in decision-making and policy-making processes at all local levels.

These policies, laws and call circulars, among others, are a response to issues of inadequate citizen participation in decision-making, they are addressing the challenges related to the concentration of powers in the hands of one leader and they are offering tentative solutions to the passivity and dependency that have characterized Rwandans for long, as a result of strong centralization and the exclusion of citizens from meaningful participation (Never Again Rwanda, 2018).

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study has used both qualitative and quantitative methods through direct and indirect interaction with the respondents during data collection.

It is qualitative (exploratory) because it aims at examining the diversity in the way communities benefit from their participation in development planning process. In addition, the individual interview, questionnaire also contained some questions to solicit individual perceptions on the benefits for community to participate in development planning. It is quantitative (descriptive) due to the fact that there is a need to analyze some common elements of satisfaction that characterized communities or individuals during the development planning process (Kothari, 2004)

The study used also a number of research techniques by employing relevant tools to guide the data collection process. The tools used include; questionnaires, interviews with key informants (KIs) and secondary data review. The different methods of data collection were applied as part of data triangulation to ensure there is validity in the information that has been provided from the target groups pertaining to the research questions.

#### *Sample size determination and sampling method*

For the adequate representation, the mathematical expression as proposed by Naku and Afrane (2013) was utilized as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(\alpha)}$$

Where,

n= Sample size

N = Study population

$\alpha = 0.10$  significance level (margin of error) with a confidence level of 90%.

Calculations were done as follows:

$$n = \frac{321}{1 + 321(0.10)^2} = \frac{321}{4.21} = 76$$

The sampling method for this study consisted in individuals based on specific purposes associated with answering a research study's questions. Respondents were selected on the basis of the objectives of the study and the nature and type of data expected from them. Attention was paid to the role played in the participatory planning at district/sector level and their assumed knowledge of this area depending on their current professional positions. Each member of population had equal probability of being chosen using the probability sampling techniques based on simple random sampling.

#### Data Analysis

In analysis of qualitative data, patterns and connections within and between categories of data collected were established. Data was presented in form of notes, word-for-word transcripts, single words, brief phrases and full paragraphs (Powell & Renner, 2003). Data was interpreted by content analysis composing explanations and substantiating them using the respondents open responses. While analysing qualitative data, conclusions were made on how different variables are related. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 22.0) was used for data analysis.

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Table 1: Gender characteristic of the respondents

Gender of respondents	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	49	64.5	64.5	64.5
Female	27	35.5	35.5	100.0
Total	76	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data 2019

Gender characteristic of respondents shows that males (64.5%) are most represented in the study than females (35.5%). This situation explains clearly that females in Gakenke district are less represented in local staff despite the big number of females considering the population of the entire district. This is a visible gap that local leaders of Gakenke District should take into consideration during their future recruitment process.

*To assess the level of participation by the communities in development planning and their role in this process*

In order to assess the level of participation, respondents were asked the following question:

Do your village/Cell/Sector development priorities considered in the District Development Plan/ the District Development Strategy?

The respondents were asked to answer by yes or not through the table below:

#### Consideration of community priorities in the District Development strategy

Table 2: Community priorities in District Development strategy

Views of respondents	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	28	36.8	36.8	36.8
No	48	63.2	63.2	100.0
Total	76	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data 2019

However, on the question to know if Sector development priorities are included in the District Development Strategy as needed, respondents are not comfortable with what is done during prioritization of development actions. 63.2% of the respondents affirm that needs and priorities from the community are not considered by the district development strategy as suggested by the community. This was explained by the respondents due mainly to short time allocated to the planning process at the citizens' level, budget constraints at district and national levels, district priorities and priorities from the central government. Only 36.8% state that needs and priorities of their sectors were considered. In the same vein, one of interviewed people stated:

*"We are of course requested to participate in planning meeting but it is just to approve what has been prepared by the authorities. The planning process is top-down because priorities are defined at high level, from the central government to the district and from the district to the sector. Contribution from communities is not significant in development planning."*

The statement above shows clearly that people in Gakenke District people are told what to do and to approve during local meeting and yet development process should take into account the primacy of people that is, participatory development must be consciously based on people, their needs, their analysis of issues and decisions. In the same spirit, people should move from being objects to become subjects. To this point of view, Sethi(1987:52) stresses that: *"Conventional modes of rural development, explicitly or implicitly, treat people as objects of change and the relation the development agent and the people often takes the form of a subject acting upon an object (rural) people has been told what to do. The outcome is a delivery approach that is, an attempt to bring development to people through deliveries of knowledge and resources from outside"*

Therefore, with the purpose to know the appreciation of citizen’s participation in the district development planning process by respondents, the question below has been raised:

Are councilors actively involved in the preparation of the development strategy of the district? Their views are reported in the table below:

*Appreciation of participation of citizens in district development planning*

Table 3: Participation of citizens in District development Planning

Views of respondents	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Fairly satisfactory	32	42.1	42.1	42.1
Satisfactory	19	25.0	25.0	67.1
Very satisfactory	25	32.9	32.9	100.0
Total	76	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data 2019

The results from the table above show that 42.1% of the respondents think the process is fairly satisfactory when only 25% think the process is satisfactory and 32.9% esteem it is very satisfactory.

One of KIs states that:

*“Well defined planning tools are there to reinforce the so called participatory planning approach. However, it is definitely a complicated exercise because local planning process has to consider the “top-down approach” guiding principles and in same time consider needs and priorities from the community through a participatory planning approach are not taken into account as it should be”*

Based on the table above and the verbal statement from one of respondents, people in Gakenke District are still relying on top-down approach while the real participatory development is based on bottom-up approach. Thus, local leaders do not have the desire and enough time to transfer this responsibility to people for their involvement in local development planning. This practice may be general to many rural areas as observed by Oakley (1999:12) who stressed that: *“Most rural development planning takes place in ministries in urban areas and there is rarely any genuine desire to devolve this responsibility effectively to the local level, planning information and data are often complex in nature and rarely presented or interpreted in a way intelligible to most rural people.”*

If the district development strategy is approved by incorporating some minor inputs from the community, there is no feeling of ownership of community to the strategy. The overall process thus can practically be referred to as non-participatory in nature, as merely priorities from the community are not incorporated in the district strategy due to budget, time constraints or more visible projects (physical constructions for example) preferred by local governments in

place of needs of citizens which are sometimes not visible. This practice rather can create dissatisfaction in the community; it clearly indicates that more efforts are needed to understand and to consider the aspirations and priorities of the community from their perspective. Therefore, this kind of community participation is often used as a word of fantasy wherein the community has no role to play unless and until a comprehensive detailed plan is prepared by the development authority. This encourages dissatisfaction’ amongst the people and they lack a feeling of responsibility /ownership of the plan during its implementation phase. As it has been showed earlier, community participation is mostly applied as one of the key ingredients for poverty reduction.

*To assess the impact on the socio-economic transformation of local people*

Gakenke district is reported as one of the districts with high poverty rate: 42% of poverty and 16.2% of extreme poverty. (EICV4 (NISR, 2015). For that sake, the study was interested to know whether there is any relationship between the level of poverty and the participation of community in development planning process. The following questions were asked to respondents as follows:

Is the high poverty rate of the district due to low level of Community involvement in development planning process?

Table 4: High poverty rate and low community involvement

Views of respondents	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	3	3.9	3.9	3.9
Agree	44	57.9	57.9	61.8
Disagree	13	17.1	17.1	78.9
Strongly disagree	16	21.1	21.1	100.0
Total	76	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data 2019

The table 4 reveals that 3.9% of the respondents strongly agree with the assertion that “high poverty rate in the district is due to the low participation of the community in development planning process” and 57.9% agree. However, 17.1% of the respondents and 21.9% respectively disagree and strongly disagree with the assertion. Even if in Gakenke district the level of poverty is due to the natural situation of the district, most of respondents do agree that low community participation is an added element to accelerate poverty rate because when more local needs are valued and prioritized more local conditions are improved. People’s engagement in the development planning and implementation of policy can help to generate a heightened sense of public value for what government does. Listen to citizens’ preferences, providing citizens with an opportunity to analyse available option and providing feedback through performance measurement and monitoring and evaluation are likely to help ensure that the public will value more highly the fund services they receive.

In the same line, Boeninger,(1992) stresses that: “ *The involvement of citizens in development planning and implementation enables the formulation of realistic plans that are in line with local circumstances and conditions*” In the same view, Vandama and Poter added “ *People have the right to participate in decision-making which directly affects their living conditions. Social development can be promoted by increasing self-reliance*” In other words without people’s involvement the wellbeing of people is not enhanced, thus poverty persists. If that is the case, let us turn on the other side by asking the question below:

Does strong involvement of community participation in development planning process help in the reduction of poverty of the district?

Table 5: Strong involvement of community in planning process contributes to poverty reduction

Views of respondents	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly agree	38	50.0	50.0	50.0
Agree	32	42.1	42.1	92.1
Undecided	3	3.9	3.9	96.1
Disagree	1	1.3	1.3	97.4
Strongly disagree	2	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total	76	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data 2019

Table 5 reveals the relationship between strong involvement of community in development planning process and poverty reduction, whereby 50% of the respondents strongly agree and 42.1% agree. Only 3.9% are undecided on the question, 1.3% disagrees and 2.6% strongly disagree.

Regarding the relationship between community participation in development planning process and poverty reduction in Gakenkedistrict,a big number of respondents recognize that a strong community involvement in this process could play an important role in poverty reduction. This idea is supported by Okley,P.(1999:162) who stated that: “ *Programme activities must be based on bottom-up approach. Only through this sort of approach can the program attain any meaningful and lasting success. The community awareness of the necessity and effectiveness of their active participation in their own development will ensure that the progress shall continue even after the formalized project ends.*” In the same vein, Kaur (2007) added: “*community participation in development planning is a proven instrument for more sustainable output and multiplies the rate of successful realization of development by people because it is more likely to produce a set of outcomes actually desired by the community.*” As in Gakenke district they still rely on top-down approach, needs and priorities from the community are not taken into account as needed into the district development strategy; this situation contributes certainly to the rate of poverty of the district

because implemented projects are not responding to the direct needs of communities.

### V. CONCLUSION

It was concluded that community participation is a top-down approach whereby community participation is often used as a word of fantasy wherein the community has no role to play unless and until a comprehensive detailed plan is prepared by the development authority . In Gakenke district, needs and priorities from the community are not taken into account as needed into the district development strategy; this situation contributes certainly to the rate of poverty of the district because implemented projects are not responding to the direct needs of communities.

### VI. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended the following:

- (i) The community should be actively involved in development strategies and its knowledge and experience recognized. This will provide citizens as beneficiaries with more sense of ownership and as such contribute to resolving some of the challenges experienced. Communities should be taken as no the target or object of development but an active subject in the planning process.
- (ii) Empowering people through capacity building increases the likelihood of their participation in community activities. At the individual level, equipping people with knowledge, skills and confidence to address their own needs and advocate on their own behalf improves their capacity for collective activity. Community empowerment goes beyond consultation and information sharing and offers the possibility for active involvement in the decision-making process.
- (iii) The community participation should not be so short or merely organized to confirm decisions already made by the authorities and public servants. There is need for district authorities and staff to be proactive and seriously make sure that planning process is done under the participatory approach at village, cell, sector and district levels. The use of participation should have a clear purpose of poverty reduction.
- (iv) It is necessary to reinforce the community participation in planning process through the utilization of the available tools and to accept the approach as the important tool to obtain local knowledge and local ownership.
- (v) It is necessary to lighten the top-down approach and reinforce the bottom-up approach through the utilization of the community participation tools in place.

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