

CHALLENGES OF STAKEHOLDER-PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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Abstract

There is need for active participation of stakeholders in project design, implementation monitoring and evaluation in order to ensure high project implementation success. Rural development projects continue to experience limited productive stakeholder participation yet the underlying causes are not well documented in literature. The purpose of this study was to examine challenges that face stakeholder-participation in rural development projects, as a basis for improving project success. The study was qualitative in nature, taking the form of a desk research that reviewed secondary data from various journal articles that were purposively selected based on the research theme. Document review was the main data collection method while data analysis was done using content analysis and thematic analysis. Environmental, socio-cultural, political, economic and structural challenges were found to be impeding stakeholder-participation in rural development projects; thereby making the projects fail to attain their objectives and leading to wastage of the very scarce resources that rural development projects are meant to prudently manage. This study concluded that challenges that face stakeholder-participation in projects need to not only be comprehensively understood, but also addressed in order to ensure project success.

Key Terms: Stakeholder participation, Rural development projects, Project performance

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1.0 Introduction

Stakeholder participation is a process by which all the interested parties take part in the control of development initiatives and the decisions and resources that influence these initiatives. In this case, stakeholder participation in project management could come in the form of identification of problems, the design and application of solutions, the monitoring of results, or the evaluation of performance (Boon, Bawole & Ahenkan, 2013). On the other hand - and for purposes of this study - project success refers to the extent to which a project achieves its objectives. Thus, we may have a successful project that achieves all the objectives, partially successful project that achieves some of the objectives and a failed project that does not achieve any objective. The objective of this study was to examine challenges of stakeholder-participation in rural development projects and the effect of such challenges on the subject projects.

1.2 Background

Studies across the world indicate that there is a strong consensus among development actors and project managers on the need for active participation of stakeholders in project design and implementation in order to ensure high project implementation success (Boon *et al.*, 2013). Boon *et al.* (2013) assert that participation is inextricably linked to sustainable development and without a multiplicity of actors and approaches, it cannot be realized. Nina, Omoro, Pellikka, and Luukkanen (2009) note that participation is presumed to enable communities to manage their natural resources in an efficient, equitable and sustainable manner; other than increasing democratization processes. Similarly, Bingham, Nabatchi, and O'Leary (2005); Osti (2004), and Woods (2000) underscore the centrality of stakeholder participation in project management asserting that it has been identified as one of the cardinal principles of good project management and good governance in recent times.

Community participation may be thought of as an instrument of empowerment that builds beneficiary capacity in relation to a project, effectiveness in project design and implementation; leads to a better match of project services with beneficiary needs and constraints, and enables cost-sharing and improved project efficiency (Ngowi & Mselle, 1998). The foregoing is underscored by Dadvar-Khani's (2012) study in Tehran (in Iran) which found out that development of tourism in rural areas in the absence of community participation led to conflicts

that undermined the project. Boon *et al.* (2013) have gone ahead to term participation as a basic human right, which has capacity to increase confidence and enhance self-esteem, while the skills learned through participation enable the participants to act more effectively within the wider society. With reference to participating communities, they argue that development should mean the development of local people and their organizations and networks as well as the development of better physical and economic conditions.

It has been argued that if well managed, stakeholder participation can propel project success to higher levels because participation is closely linked to sustainable development, Boon *et al.* (2013). This resonates with Ngowi and Mselle's (1998) views on the roles of stakeholder participation which are also in tandem with those of Reid (2002) who observe that of all the empowerment principles, active citizen participation is perhaps the most important. Reid (2002) asserts that not only does it lead to developing true democratic processes; it also leads to higher rates of resource acquisition and use, better results, higher levels of voluntarism, and a brighter community spirit. For Reid (2002), participation is the soul of an empowered community.

Despite all this potential that stakeholder participation is meant to ride on in order to deliver successful development projects, stakeholder participation has had many challenges. Boon *et al.* (2013) note that although participation may seek in the final analysis to empower community members to take initiative, whether this really happens in practice has been challenged. They go ahead to explain challenges which may make stakeholder participation less beneficial, and just like Brody (2003), they argue that there is a strong perception that stakeholder participation does not necessarily improve project implementation success. With reference to stakeholder-participation challenges, Ruud (2007) observes that many writers on the subject of stakeholder participation have not been comprehensive in addressing it because, while they praise stakeholder participation for its ability as one of the best ways of attracting and sustaining the interest of stakeholders and enhancing project design and implementation; they just mention stakeholder participation challenges and their implications for the project in passing.

Stauss, Boyas and Murphy-Erby (2012) argue that rural communities in particular have unique challenges related to infrastructure, social and economic contexts. This view is shared by St.

Lawerence and Ndiaye (1997) who note that rural communities face challenges such as vast geographical distances, limited service delivery systems, and limited or non-existent public transportation systems. In line with these sentiments, Stauss *et al.* (2012) argue that contextually, conservative political and social views coupled with high poverty levels make the rural setting a challenge when it comes to implementing and evaluating projects. Moreover, research sites in rural communities tend to yield smaller recruiting pools than urban areas (Blinn-Pike, Berger, & Rea-Holloway, 2000), thereby increasing the potential for participants to feel over-burdened by requests to participate in studies. Consequently, because they may feel fatigued, it is possible for them to take part in research just as a formality. Other than that, the scarcity of local resources - especially human resources - often means that program evaluators do not come from these rural areas and “are in many respects, the 'ultimate' outsiders” (St. Lawrence & Ndiaye 1997, P. 552) who are always being viewed with suspicion thereby hampering free interaction.

The aforementioned stakeholder participation challenges diminish the success of development projects. Whereas rural projects have unique stakeholder-participation challenges, few studies have examined this aspect. This study thus focuses on examining challenges of stakeholder-participation in development projects of a rural context and how such challenges affect the success of these projects. As Blinn-Pike (2008); Jordan, Price, and Fitzgerald (2000); and Stauss *et al.* (2012) have observed, studies that relate to challenges of stakeholder-participation in development projects of a rural context continue to be absent in literature. Consequently, there is need to identify such challenges through studies for this will help project sponsors, managers, beneficiaries and development agencies in general to develop ways of addressing these challenges in order to improve project success.

1.3 Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature. It was a desk research that reviewed literature that arose from empirical research. A sample of 9 studies - Nina, *et al.* (2009); Dye *et al.* (2011); Dadvar-Khani (2012); Gbadegesin and Olorunfemi (2012); Stauss *et al.* (2012); Shayo, Mborera and Blystad (2012); Motungu (2012); Tseng and Penning-Rowell (2012); Boon *et al.* (2013) – was purposively selected out of many other studies based on the relevance of the selected studies to the purpose of this research. The purpose was to explore challenges that impede stakeholders

from participating or participating well in rural development projects and the influence of such challenges on performance of the projects. This study employed document review as the method of data collection. Data was collected in the form of text and was analyzed using content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. Themes that emerged from the data were analyzed and then synthesized into specific patterns to form concrete findings that were used to address the research objectives.

1.4 Findings

This study established that all the 9 studies that formed the basis of this study have highlighted challenges to stakeholder participation in various rural development projects that were studied. The findings are as discussed below.

1.4.1 Flood risk management (FRM) project in Shuanghsi River basin in Taiwan

Tseng and Penning-Rowsell (2012) studied micro-political and related barriers to stakeholder engagement in flood risk management (FRM) in Shuanghsi River basin in Taiwan. The purpose of their study was to examine and describe the barriers to stakeholder engagement in flood risk management with a focus on Shuanghsi River Basin in Taiwan. The research objective was to determine the extent to which conventional stakeholder engagement ideas influence the outputs of the FRM in the Shuanghsi River Basin given its geographical and cultural particularities.

Tseng and Penning-Rowsell (2012) explain that modern FRM envisions active engagement of citizens in the appraisal of risk and the development of risk-reducing options, as a hallmark of sustainable risk management. However, they note that stakeholder engagement is not easy because as they report, "...many FRM schemes continue to be strongly opposed or at least disputed by the very people they are intended to protect, causing bewilderment for their promoters" (p. 253). This is as a result of the challenges which the stakeholders encounter in trying to meaningfully engage in the FRM projects. Tseng and Penning-Rowsell (2012) found that impediments to stakeholder engagement in FRM and its decision making processes were threefold: Stakeholder-based barriers; time-related barriers; and barriers caused by power inequalities.

For the stakeholder-related barriers, the study found out that Shuanghsi River Basin government officials lacked institutional support; and that institutional constraints formed the major stakeholder-based barriers. In this respect, there was no appropriately tailored law or policy to support senior government leaders in their promotion of stakeholder engagement in this project. Together with that, the rigid institutional regulations and a lack of flexibility due to fears over accountability (example, being blamed) were real concerns during the stakeholder engagement process. For instance, the residents and NGOs were said to have often asked for more integrated policy solutions than were within the responsibilities and legitimacy of the Water Resources Agency (WRA), meaning that the agency lacked capacity and flexibility to meaningfully engage the local stakeholders in FRM projects. This implies that the project team was not prepared in terms of stakeholder management.

Furthermore, it is reported that floodplain dwellers mentioned lack of resources and their low degree of influence (over the entire process) as impediments to participation in FRM. In rural areas, residents' willingness to participate was also bound by a number of inherent limitations, such as their relatively poorer educational and financial resources, the geographical distances between potential participants, and their having to take time away from employment – and hence lose income – for FRM project activities. There was also 'mental fatigue' due to government officials answering their requests in what the project stakeholders termed as a perfunctory manner; and also because the local stakeholders did not know how their input influenced decision making in the FRM project.

The study also found that there was a shortage of FRM operations staff and finance for effectively mitigating flood risk. Other than that, as the project was ongoing, it is reported that the appropriate administrative system for integrated flood management had not yet been established, which led to difficulties in coordination among governmental institutions. Moreover, according to Tseng and Penning-Rowsell (2012), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Taiwan, particularly the environmental NGOs (ENGOS), are relatively weak in comparison with those in western countries. Thus often, ENGOS in this country lack adequate financial and human resources; their roles in FRM have not been widely approved; and sometimes they are considered 'troublemakers' by the government. Consequently, the NGOs played a limited role in

the FRM project thereby denying many stakeholders an opportunity to effectively contribute to the project.

The time-related barriers included the late involvement of stakeholders which delayed the project, and caused FRM implementers significant problems. The FRM project in the Shuanghsi River Basin was delayed for 1 year, thereby greatly interfering with the schedule of activities and leading to cost escalation (Tseng and Penning-Rowse, 2012). They report that, some interviewees indicated that the information on public meetings was hardly known to them at all, or in good time. It is further reported that government officials would not notify residents unless such residents had a particular or special role or title related to flood management. Sometimes, the officials deferred the meeting notice intentionally with the result that particular individuals missed the opportunity to participate. This greatly disadvantaged some of the stakeholders especially those from the rural areas since communication infrastructure is poorer there. On the other hand, government officials manipulated when and how to provide information. For example, it is reported that the Taipei County Government (TCG) did not inform the residents of a decisive meeting for reviewing the final FRM project. The aforementioned time-related barriers made many stakeholders to fail to participate in FRM activities and this negatively affected the project (Tseng & Penning-Rowse, 2012).

About power inequality barriers, the study found that power inequalities among stakeholders had been cited as an obstacle to meaningful stakeholder engagement. The FRM planner for instance indicated that at the beginning of the process, flood victims were questioned about their flood experiences and all information was one-way; always flowing from the planners/officials to other stakeholders in a top-down manner. Little chance was given to other stakeholders to meaningfully contribute. Similarly, the briefing materials for the meetings were usually not available in advance and, without preparation, it was difficult for residents to fully understand what was being proposed so as to raise pertinent issues.

Power inequalities also manifested themselves in the language that was used and the socioeconomic status of the stakeholders. It is reported that during briefing on FRM plans at the meetings or field sites, the consultancy company sometimes used technical language which was

difficult for residents and NGOs to understand, as well as using standard Mandarin (the official language in Taiwan) rather than Taiwanese which is habitually used in the Shuanghsi and Gongliao Townships. It is noted that residents here are relatively poor and appear to adapt to new technologies and knowledge more slowly and may need more time, with the aid of appropriate methods, to digest new FRM information (Tseng and Penning-Rowse, 2012). Another barrier was that public opinions were ideally reflected and conveyed through layers of elected representatives, according to the design of the political system in Taiwan. As a result, residents' direct negotiation with the central government, rather than through the local political system, were seen to undermine the role and influence of the township chief and elected representatives, and this was punished by being blacklisted, withdrawal of business opportunities among other penalties. This often led to intimidation of project stakeholders who feared to directly contact the central government over project matters. Ultimately, the further away one was from the central government, the more difficult it became to participate in the FRM projects; and this alienated many stakeholders from the project.

Tseng and Penning-Rowse (2012) also report that stakeholder engagement in projects in Taiwan - especially in smaller towns - is not as straightforward as the conventional stakeholder engagement models suggest because individuals and their interests always dominate, rather than progress being made through some form of broad consensus. As such, some residents were unwilling to become involved in the engagement process due to the feeling of powerlessness to change the status quo. Tseng and Penning-Rowse (2012) thus concluded on this aspect that failure to acknowledge and address the micro-politics in the engagement process by the project team brought about new impediments to participation, where unequal power sharing unexpectedly created new barriers to some of the stakeholders.

The study by Tseng and Penning-Rowse (2012) has managed to examine barriers that faced stakeholder participation in the FRM project in the Shuanghsi River Basin. However, the study does not address the extent to which such barriers influenced the outputs of the FRM project. This way, the study missed out a critical part, which relates to the influence of the identified barriers to stakeholder engagement in flood risk management (FRM) on project outputs. This would have given the study a much more comprehensive perspective.

1.4.2 The community-based abstinence project in Polk County rural community in Arkansas

(USA)

Having explored the practical strategies and challenges that characterized the implementation of an evaluation of a community-based abstinence project in Polk County rural community in Arkansas (USA), Stauss *et al.* (2012) found out – like Dye *et al.* (2011) and Tseng and Penning-Rowse (2012) - that the geographical dispersion (of settlements) in the community posed challenges to communication, specifically the exchange and management that must happen between the project staff and the other rural-based stakeholders. Stauss *et al.* (2012) also report lack of trust by stakeholders in the project staff owing to the fact that many of the project staff were strangers to the rural stakeholders; as well as challenges related to high levels of poverty, conservative political and social views, and lack of critical information at the grassroots level. Other than that, language barrier was found to be a big challenge as some of the stakeholders spoke only Spanish, yet the common medium was English. There is therefore a similarity in findings by various findings because language barrier and poverty are also echoed in Dye *et al.* (2011), and Tseng and Penning-Rowse (2012) as challenges to stakeholder participation. Gbadegesin and Olorunfemi (2011) have also cited poverty as an impediment to stakeholder participation in rural development projects; where the poor are unable to find the material resources that are necessary for them to participate in development projects like money for modern water storage facilities. Generally, Stauss *et al.* (2012) conclude that impediments to stakeholder participation made the community-based abstinence project fail to achieve all its objectives.

1.4.3 The rural tourism promotion project in the Kan area of Iran

In 2012, Dadvar-Khani who studied rural stakeholders' participation in a rural tourism promotion project in the Kan area of Iran established that there was lack of meaningful community participation in the development of tourism in their villages and that Iran government's top-down planning of rural tourism had alienated the rural communities. These findings find expression in Nina *et al.* (2009) who established that the Kenya Government had the tendency to limit the local community's participation in the management of forest resources. Dadvar-Khani (2012) also

highlights that the need to preserve cultural heritage in Kan was a source of resistance to the promotion of rural tourism that was seen by the residents to be a threat to their cultural heritage. The researcher also reports that environmental degradation by tourists in the study area of Kan was increasingly making it difficult for the local people to participate in the project as the negative effects made them to oppose it. This resonates with Nina *et al.* (2009) study which established that local peoples did not fully participate in the management of the Taita Hills forest resources because the Kenya government restricted their participation owing to their destructive tendencies. In both cases therefore, local stakeholders' participation was limited as a result of environmental degradation. In summary, Dadvar-Khani (2012) found that tourism in the Kan area had not been successful enough to achieve economic prosperity, and, “... in the view of local people, tourism has had no positive effect on the quality of their life and welfare of the host community” (p. 274).

1.4.4 Rural water supply management projects in Oyo State, Nigeria

In another study, Gbadegesin and Olorunfemi (2011) set out to explore the extent to which stakeholders are willing and able to adopt and implement sustainable, cost-effective and environment friendly management options for water resources in selected rural areas of Oyo state, Nigeria. They established that local people still used indigenous technical knowledge of water management which were cumbersome, time consuming and prone to health risks. Moreover, they found that many people were poor and could not afford modern technology in water management like underground tanks; there was lack of regular electricity supply to power the machines besides lack of enough technicians to service them. Another challenge to participation they noted, was that the knowledge base of the different stakeholder groups about the technological, socio-economic and ecological dimensions of water resources management was very low. These factors impeded the stakeholders from fully participating in modern water management projects in the Oyo state. In a nutshell, these findings are reflective of the objective of Gbadegesin and Olorunfemi's (2011) study and are also comprehensive, for the researchers recommend solutions to some of the challenges. For example, they recommend that local engineers and technicians should develop simple machines and tools that will be affordable to households in rural communities like the simple sand filters; or to the community at large, through solar disinfection of water. This way, many households will find capacity to participate

in modern water management projects that the Government of Nigeria has rolled out to address water shortage in Oyo State.

1.4.5 The management of community development projects in Ghana

Boon *et al.* (2013) undertook a study whose objective was to analyze the quadripartite project participation model (QPPM) and its implication for management of community development projects in Ghana. The QPPM was applied by the International Center for Enterprise and Sustainable Development (ICED) which is a national non-governmental organization that is engaged in the design and implementation of community development projects in Ghana. According to Boon, *et al.* (2013), the QPPM consists of a three-tier management structure comprising local project management teams (LPMTs), national project management teams (NPMTs), and international project management teams (IPMTs) with a transversal advisory quality assurance team (QAT). The roles, responsibilities, obligations, and rights of these management levels are clearly spelt out in this model.

The researchers studied rural communities and found out that some of them had sharply divided sectional interests caused by such institutions like the chieftaincy that impeded participation even with the QPPM in use. In most rural communities too, the researchers found that members were always so eager for development interventions to the point that, once a project idea was discussed, pressure was brought to bear on the organizers to commence implementation leading to some stakeholders to make rushed decisions. Incidentally, the QPPM that was introduced in order to improve stakeholder management of projects was not able to address a challenge such as this. There were other challenges as well for example; just like Dye, *et al.* (2011) and Stauss *et al.* (2012); Boon *et al.*, (2013) have pointed out the geographical dispersion of settlements in project areas as a serious challenge to stakeholder-participation in rural community projects in Ghana. Boon *et al.* (2013) also warn that the application of the QPPM has the potential to increase the magnitude of inter-personal and inter-stakeholder conflicts; as it encourages the bringing together of an array of stakeholders with diverse interests which can easily compete and lead to conflicts. This then means that the QPPM model of stakeholder participation in projects may in itself be a challenge to stakeholder participation in projects. The aforementioned challenges diminished the anticipated project outputs and in most cases left communities divided

as a result of conflicts over resources.

1.4.6 The mass medical intervention in Lurambi Division of Kakamega County of Kenya.

In their study of this project, Dye, *et al.* (2011) aimed at evaluating participant experience in a mass medical intervention that addressed common and significant infectious diseases in Lurambi Division of the present day Kakamega County of Kenya. Their findings on language barrier, geographical dispersion and poverty as barriers to stakeholder-participation are similar to those reported by Stauss *et al.* (2012). Dye, *et al.* (2011) explain that language barrier was a challenge to local community participation because many of the rural people spoke in vernacular or Kiswahili, which could not be understood by some of the project staff; while long distances and poverty made some people not be able to make it to the health facilities where the campaign was going on. Away from that, there was also the finding that the stigma that is always associated with some diseases like Acquired Immuno-deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) prevented many people from participating in health related campaigns for fear of being isolated. Other than that, some participants lacked independent decision-making authority due to familial-cultural restrictions. The researchers cited a case in which a married woman was unable to attend voluntary testing and counseling because she had not sought her husband's opinion and permission on this. As a result, many of the would-be beneficiaries of the project ended up missing an opportunity to have their medical conditions addressed.

1.4.7 The transformation of forest management of the Taita Hills Forest in Kenya

There are profound findings by Nina, *et al.* (2009) who sought to examine local people's perceptions about benefits and challenges of participating in forest management of the Taita Hills Forest of Kenya; during the transformation of the forest policy that was going on at that time. In this project the Government of Kenya sought – among other issues – to include community participation in the management of forest resources. Some of their findings bear similarities with those of Dadvar-Khani (2012) on environmental impediments and government dominance that curtail rural stakeholder-participation in development projects. Nina, *et al.* (2009) found that there were environmental problems, like decreased endemic animal populations and herbal plants, illegal logging and hunting, deliberately started forest fires and inadequate planting of indigenous trees due to difficulties of getting particular seeds and seedlings; and all these

hindered stakeholder engagement in the forest management project. Similarly, the government did not allow full community participation in the conservation and use of forest resources. Other findings by Nina, *et al.* (2009) included limited access to forest resources; lack of access by the community to revenue from the forest; unreliable market for bee, butterfly farming and silk-moth rearing products which made some of the residents to abandon the activities. There was also human-wildlife conflict and lack of education on modern forest management and conservation approaches. This implies that for as long as these challenges continued to exist, it would be difficult to have stakeholders meaningfully participate in this noble initiative.

1.4.8 The stakeholders' participation in planning and priority setting in the context of a decentralized health care system

In Tanzania, Shayo, Mborera and Blystad (2012) studied stakeholders' participation in planning and priority setting in the context of a decentralized health care system with a focus on the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). They note that in Tanzania at that time, one of the major components of the health sector reforms was decentralization through devolution and integration of the district health care services. This reform included devolving political, administrative, financial, and personnel control from the center to the lower levels. By devolving decision-making to local authorities, decentralization aimed at improving planning and accountability and ensuring that priority setting and decision-making processes were located close to the beneficiaries in the health sector. The main expected benefits of decentralization were local participation in the planning of the services, increased responsiveness to locally-experienced problems, and ultimately increased efficiency and quality.

The objective of the study was to explore the extent to which the needs and challenges identified and brought forward by key stakeholders at the health facility, district and regional levels pertaining to the PMTCT programme were incorporated into the health plans. The study found that the prime planning and priority setting processes related to the PMTCT programme were, according to the regional and district informants (Shayo, Mborera and Blystad, 2012), carried out at the regional level since international donors were the main funders of the programme and their offices were established at the regional level. This made it difficult for grassroots stakeholder-involvement to take place; posing a barrier to stakeholder participation.

The study reports that despite the decentralized management of the PMTCT programme, the informants at the health facility, district and regional levels were frustrated as they reported that their PMTCT-related priorities were rarely taken into account in the final plans that were meant for actual implementation. Moreover, the involvement of the region in the review of the prioritized activities in the Comprehensive Council Health Plan

(CCHP) was perceived by all the district informants to have been a serious barrier to the accommodation of their own prioritized PMTCT - related activities. This was because the donors' primary aim was to increase coverage in terms of the number of health facilities providing PMTCT services and trained health care providers, in order to expand care and treatment services. Thus, whatever other plans that the other stakeholders at the lower levels initially had hardly found chance to be included in the budget. The study further reports that district informants also complained that whatever activity they proposed with a view to enhance the PMTCT programme would be cancelled by the regional secretariat as the aims and the priorities of the intervention had already been provided by the donors. The district informants thus complained that they experienced loss of influence over the planning process that they were otherwise supposed to own, meaning that the overriding interests at the grassroots level were overlooked. This appeared to negate the whole concept of stakeholder participation in the programme. This was so because key stakeholders at the health facility level found that, although they were the ones with hands-on experience in the programme, their experiences and views were not taken into account by the district planning team, and they rarely appeared in local discussions, planning or in budgeting relating to the PMTCT programme.

What the above findings point to is that there existed structures and also clear ideals of decentralization in the health sector in Tanzania. However, for the PMTCT programme, there was no policy to ensure that the envisaged decentralization was accompanied by meaningful grassroots stakeholder participation. Consequently, very little of needs and challenges that were identified and brought forward by key stakeholders at the regional, district and health facility levels pertaining to the PMTCT programme were incorporated into the health plans. With regard to this, Shayo *et al.* (2012) state that the findings "...indicate that the decentralization policy

seem to work to reinforce the established power structures rather than integrating priorities of lower level stakeholders which was aimed at with the reform...” (p.10). This is an example of decentralization that comes with negative results of weakening stakeholder-participation.

The study by Shayo et al. (2012) is apt in concluding that the strong donor influence coupled with the ministry of health and social services (MoHSW) high profile role in the country’s priority setting facilitate the continuity of the top-down approaches that were supposed to have been reduced through the promotion decentralization and grassroots-based bottom-up approaches. In spite of the shortcomings of this project, it is significant to note that its findings are an invaluable contribution to the pool of knowledge about stakeholder participation in development projects and the attendant challenges. For instance, this study demonstrates the reality and lesson that dis-empowerment of grassroots stakeholders can exist side by side with poorly designed decentralization and bottom-up approaches. This state of affairs needs to be addressed.

1.4.9 Women's participation in community-based organizations' development projects in Kenya

In this study, Motungu (2012) explored women's participation in community-based organizations' (CBOs) development as a strategy for poverty reduction in Kenya. He focused on the factors that hinder women's participation in CBOs development projects. Some of the findings of this study were that illiteracy, low level of education, socio-cultural influences, domestic and family responsibilities hindered women from participating in CBO related projects. He notes that in most African societies, outdated cultural practices require that women do not speak to address men in a gathering, an expectation that has kept many women's potential untapped or even unrealized. Moreover, women are also not expected to own property or even share in the inheritance of their parents (Motungu, 2012). This always tends to limit them from contributing to socio-economic activities and projects that are meant to bring about development of the whole society. Motungu (2012) also found out that domestic and family responsibilities played a big role in hindering women from participating in CBO development projects; noting that women are still largely responsible for care of the family, and this deeply held value largely limits women's participation in community projects mainly because they are already tied up in

family-care engagements.

1.5 Discussion of findings

All the nine studies - Nina, *et al.* (2009); Dye *et al.* (2011); Dadvar-Khani (2012); Gbadegesin and Olorunfemi (2012); Stauss *et al.* (2012); Shayo, Mborera and Blystad (2012); Motungu (2012); Tseng and Penning-Rowcell (2012) and Boon *et al.* (2013) have addressed various challenges that impede stakeholder-participation in rural community development projects.

Dadvar-Khani (2012) and Nina, *et al.* (2009) have similar findings to the effect that environment related issues hinder stakeholder participation in rural projects. However, a major point of divergence on this environmental challenge exists between the two studies. While Dadvar-Khani (2012) found that environmental degradation of the rural areas by rural tourists made most of the residents to oppose and shun the rural tourism project in Kan area (Iran); Nina *et al.* (2009) found out that the communities around the Taita Hills Forests in Kenya were restricted by the government from accessing the forests because their own activities led to environmental degradation. Thus, in Dadvar-Khani (2012), environmental degradation was caused by agents emanating outside the community while in Nina *et al.*(2009), environmental degradation was a consequence of the activities of community members themselves. Nonetheless, the effect was the same in the two projects for stakeholder participation was limited.

Other similarities manifest in Dye *et al.* (2011), Tseng and Penning-Rowcell (2012) and Stauss *et al.* (2012) who point out geographical dispersion of the rural settlers, language barrier and poverty as a hindrance to stakeholder participation in rural projects. The poverty challenge is also highlighted by Gbadegesin and Olorunfemi (2012); while Boon *et al.* (2013) acknowledge that the geographical dispersion between the project office and the respondents' homes was a big challenge to their participation in the subject project.

Some of the reviewed studies - Dadvar-Khani (2012), Boon *et al.* (2013), Tseng and Penning-Rowcell (2012) - explored the application of stakeholder participation models in project management. Boon *et al.* (2013) found out that applying the QPPM can indeed solve some of the challenges of stakeholder participation in projects; as evidenced by IECDs projects in Ghana.

However, they also established and warn that although the QPPM affords an opportunity for the harmonization of the synergies of all partners and stakeholders (by enhancing effective intra and inter-stakeholder communication) and contributes to reducing the cacophony of stakeholders; it may as well lead to stakeholder conflicts that can easily derail projects. The other 8 projects largely applied the top-down stakeholder-participation model which had its drawbacks as well. This therefore implies that project managers ought to critically apply whichever stakeholder-participation model(s) of choice in their projects in order to avoid pitfalls such as ones highlighted by Boon *et al* (2013). On their part, Tseng and Penning-Rowell (2012), and Dadvar-Khani (2012) have attributed some of the challenges that faced stakeholder-participation in the projects that they studied to the top-down participation model that the subject project applied. This requires project managers to find ways of mitigating the demerits that come as a result of using the top-down stakeholder-participation model if they hope to attain project objectives.

A methodological departure from the rest of the studies is by Stauss *et al.* (2012); who examined the process of engaging the stakeholders and carefully documenting the process as well. They found out that in any study, a pilot study is critical as well as a clear process of establishing confidence and good relationships with the local communities. They explain that this helps to address many challenges including those relating to recruitment and retention of staff which if not addressed, can easily derail a project.

Generally, all the studies found out that challenges that impeded stakeholders from participating in projects were responsible for making the studied projects fail to achieve their stated objectives; thereby leading to a waste of scarce resources (time, money, skills, effort) and missed opportunities to improve peoples' standards of living. Boon *et al.* (2013, p. 41) for instance found that in Ghana, a number of community projects that had been initiated by the government had either been opposed by community members or had never been used after completion. For instance they note that "... toilet facilities, market structures, and boreholes, among others, have been abandoned due to little or no stakeholder participation..." In Arkansas, Stauss *et al.* (2012) found that stakeholders in the teenage abstinence project lacked trust in project staff and withheld vital information. In Iran, Dadvar-Khani (2012) found that development of tourism in rural areas in absence of community participation led to conflict between host community and

tourists and this made the local people to be opposed to the entire rural tourism project which failed to achieve the intended objectives. In Tanzania, decentralization only served to reinforce the existing inequalities between program stakeholders. Such challenges of stakeholder-participation are not unique to Ghana, USA, Iran and Tanzania. In Kenya for instance, many market stalls meant for fresh farm produce have suffered a similar fate for they have never been used since completion yet they cost billions of Kenya shillings as a result of limited participation by some of the key stakeholders. Many people in rural Kenya also – just like in rural Iran - dislike foreign rural tourists whom they blame for cultural erosion and moral decadence. There is therefore need to empower stakeholders as well as increasing their role in project management as a way of improving project performance.

Tseng and Penning-Rowsell (2012) point out that the issue of stakeholder engagement is controversial noting that some in the field of development dismiss it outrightly. They observe that the criticism is attributed to stakeholder engagement's acknowledged limitations and flaws that have tended to diminish its potential. According to Tseng and Penning-Rowsell (2012) the critics claim that stakeholder engagement is 'tyrannical' because it reinforces the positions of those who are already powerful, thus keeping the weak in their disadvantaged positions. Moreover, the critics say that there is doubt that laypersons are competent to deal with – or are comfortable with – complex project decisions involving detailed scientific knowledge, technical tools, and risk management issues. According to these researchers, critics also point out that in some cases, stakeholder involvement can change the existing power structure leading to unexpected conflicts, rather than a hoped-for consensus or can reinforce privileged interests and marginalize minority perspectives. They add that participatory processes are seen to be unproductive in finding solutions and are also too time consuming; a situation that delays decision making. They also note that this has consequently led to the call by the critics for the development of a more influential stakeholder – participation models for use in development projects. However, these models are yet to be developed.

1.6 Conclusion

Stakeholder-participation has been identified as one of the cardinal principles of good project management and good governance for it enhances project outputs and sustainability. However,

its application in project management has to be done cautiously because it is susceptible to many challenges. This study found out that rural development projects have unique challenges that generally include but are not limited to lack of capacity by stakeholders to engage in development projects, natural challenges like geographical dispersion of the project area, socio-cultural challenges, economic challenges like lack of finances, poor stakeholder management, and weak stakeholder-participation models. As discussed in this paper, these challenges were responsible for the limited local stakeholder participation that negatively affected attainment of project objectives thereby leading to wastage of resources. Unless these challenges are exhaustively understood and addressed, stakeholder-participation in many rural projects may not yield the desired results now and in the future.

1.7 Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, several recommendations can be made to help improve stakeholder participation in development projects especially those of a rural nature. Since limited local stakeholder participation has been found to be a major drawback as evidenced by the reviewed projects, this study recommends that governments should enact strong policy aimed at empowering and encouraging local communities to fully participate in rural projects through effective stakeholder-participation models. Limited local participation has been highlighted by many researchers including Chowdhury and Amin (2006); and Okello, Beevers, Douven and Leentvaar (2009) who have reported lack of local participation as being a major deficiency of policy and practice in developing countries, including many in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Another avenue is for project sponsors and managers to invest enough resources to establish and maintain good relationships with the local community partners and between the program and evaluation teams as it is essential in addressing challenges related to aspects such as project/program recruitment and retention that can derail a project. Project managers should also adopt stakeholder participation models that guarantee meaningful local stakeholder participation. Effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting the implementation of project activities are critical to effective participation, and since stakeholders' interest change over time; they must be managed through an effective monitoring, evaluation, and reporting system, Boon *et al.* (2013). Moreover, capacity building and training must be offered to stakeholders to equip

them with the dynamics of engaging other stakeholders in mutual partnership; and a decision has to be made about who to involve, how to involve them, and what to involve them in while undertaking a project.

1.8 Areas of further research

It emerges from the review of literature for this study that studies that relate to challenges of stakeholder participation of a rural context are not adequate. Stauss *et al.* (2012) for instance observe that such studies, “...continue to be absent in literature” (pp. 49-50). The lack of literature on this aspect forms a potential area of study for development scholars, experts and agencies in general.

Besides, in summing up the shortfalls that are related to the conventional stakeholder-participation models, Kapoor (2005) notes that far from being inclusive and bottom-up, many conventional participatory processes actually function to reconfigure power and value systems in a way that may end up being exclusionary. Thus, researchers in the field of development need to develop alternative stakeholder-participation models that can address the limitations of the conventional models. This is because the stakeholder-participation ideals espoused by the conventional models are inextricably interwoven with limitations which tend to depict the models as lacking capacity to address the various challenges that impede stakeholders from participating or participating well in projects Kapoor (2005). The call for alternative stakeholder-participation models has been on for quite some time and researchers acknowledge that growing attention has now turned to the emerging ‘post-participation’ consensus (Tseng & Penning-Rowell, 2012 p. 254) that is focusing on among other issues, the need to design and shift to more efficient stakeholder participation models (Bierele, 2002; Stanghellini, 2010). This forms another area of further research.

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