

The Evolving Nature of Community Participation in Public Development Projects in Kenya: A Literature Review

Benard Muronga Kadurenge

The Catholic University of Eastern Africa
Nairobi, Kenya

Raphael Ondeko Nyonje

University of Nairobi
Nairobi, Kenya

Brown Bully Onguko

Tujifunzeni Consultancy
Eldoret, Kenya

Dorothy Kyalo Ndunge

University of Nairobi
Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract

Community participation in public development projects was quite limited during the colonial period in Kenya. Today, the constitution of Kenya guarantees community participation in public development projects. This paper purposes to examine the evolving nature of community participation in public development projects in Kenya. The scope of this paper covers public projects done in Kenya from the colonial period to date. Data collection was done by document review, whereas content analysis technique was used to analyze the data. The main finding is that there is enhanced community participation in public development projects. This paper concludes that community participation in public development projects in Kenya has undergone tremendous transformation by way of approaches and resources by which communities are now engaging in and contributing to public development projects. Thus governments, development agencies and sponsors should accord local communities more space to participate and contribute to public development projects in order to foster sustainable development.

Key Words: Community participation, Public project, Participation approach.

1.0 Introduction

Community participation can be defined as a process by which citizens and other interested parties take part in the control of development initiatives and the decisions and resources that influence these initiatives. Community participation in the management of public projects can come in the form of involvement in identification of problems, design and application of solutions, monitoring of results, or evaluation of performance (Boon, Bawole & Ahenkan, 2013). Communities can also participate in public projects by providing resources. A public project is one that is funded using public resources or meant for public utility; while participation approach refers to a particular way by which stakeholders participate in projects which can be top-down, bottom-up, consultative etc. Literature reveals that community participation in public projects in Kenya today is more diversified than what it was during the colonial period that ended with Kenya's independence in 1963. This paper presents the evolving nature of community participation in public development projects, highlighting the diversified approaches and resources by which communities in Kenya are participating in such projects.

2.0 Background

During the colonial period in Kenya, community participation in public development projects was quite limited as was the case in many other colonized areas of the world then, because it was characteristic of colonial governments to limit the rights and freedoms of those whom they had colonized (Rodney, 1981). In most cases, community participation would mainly manifest in the form of provision of manual labor and other material resources - particularly land - by the local communities to projects via a top-down approach because this kind of local community participation was greatly beneficial to the colonial administrators (Rodney, 1981). Up to the mid of the twentieth century, the top-down approach to community participation in projects was the preferred way of undertaking development projects (Smith, 2008). This was partly because many scientists and academics led people to believe in the top-down based perception that professional scientists were the ones who knew how to undertake projects (Carr 2002). However, from mid twentieth century, there was increased criticism of the top-down approach (Smith, 2008).

Top-down participation in projects is structured around the use of professional leadership that is provided by external resources to plan, implement, and evaluate development projects or programs (Macdonald, 1995). The advantages of this approach include better professional skills, better services and a variety of material resources which may not be available within the local communities. Nonetheless, according to Smith (2008), there has been a growing backlash against the top-down approach especially in the area of environmental management throughout the world. This backlash is because the top-down approach tends to prioritize and solely appreciate professional and scientific 'expert' knowledge while ignoring local and cultural knowledge.

This gives the approach a potentially exclusive and paternalistic nature, which can be alienating to local people and their internal resource management schemes (Smith, 2008). The implication of using the top-down approach is that local communities get very little space within which they can contribute to development projects. Disenchantment with the top-down participation is partly what led to the rise in the use of alternative participation approaches that characterize the undertaking of public development projects in Kenya today.

3.0 Methodology

This paper relied on qualitative data. The study was a desk-based review of literature. Document review was used to collect data that was used to arrive at the findings as outlined in this paper. The documentary sources of data as reported in this paper included books, journal articles, the constitution of Kenya, reports, and Acts of Parliament of Kenya. Sampling was purposively done to get the various documents that were reviewed and these were journal articles, books, the constitution of Kenya, reports, and Acts of Parliament of Kenya. Data was collected by the authors by collating relevant pre-identified themes through desk document review. Data was analyzed using content analysis technique. In content analysis, two strategies were used namely thematic networks analysis and discovering patterns. The technique of thematic networks analysis was used to identify various themes that address the study objective. Themes that emerged from the data were then synthesized to discover patterns that constituted the findings of this paper.

4.0 Findings

From theoretical as well as empirical literature, this paper finds that the top-down participatory approach (which was dominant during the colonial period in Kenya) is replete with many shortfalls which opened it up to heavy criticism especially in the period preceding the mid twentieth century (Smith, 2008). This helped to usher in other stakeholder participation approaches including bottom-up participation. The paper also finds that local communities in Kenya have managed to diversify resources by which they now participating in, and contributing to public development projects.

4.1 The shift from top-down to other participatory approaches

The shift from top-down to other participatory approaches was precipitated by the many challenges that characterize the application of this approach in projects. One of the challenges of top-down participation is its tendency to ignore the potential of grassroots stakeholders to immensely contribute to a project. This view is supported by Marshall (2005) and Smith (2008, p. 354) who in their study of environmental management note that the top-down approach erroneously presumes that natural resource management should be performed solely by outside “experts” who are “objective and rational”, rather than the “subjective and irrational” local people and communities. Indeed, as Agrawal and Gibson (2001, p. 4) put it, early environmental policy and scholarly literature often described local people as “an obstacle to efficient and ‘rational’ organization of resource use”. Moreover, Carr (2002), Dryzek (2005), Hickey and Mohan (2004), and Smith (2008, p. 354) note that normally, top-down “experts” tend to feel that local actors, who do not have a degree in environmental management or earth sciences - including hydrology, forestry, ecology, geology and biochemistry - would not have the capacity to effectively and intellectually participate in projects. They observe that this approach is thus exclusive in nature.

Smith (2008) is in agreement with Carr (2002), Hickey and Mohan (2004), and Dryzek (2005) that because the top-down approach typically values and appreciates 'expert' scientific knowledge and analysis concerning environmental issues and management options, it is usually paternalistic and alienating to local people and their local environmental knowledge and experience. Given the foregoing, this paper notes that it is possible that the top-down stakeholder-participation model can cause projects to miss out on the critical contribution of the local community and the local environment to the projects. Whereas it is true that local communities - especially rural communities - may lack the sophistication of language and technology with which to present their knowledge and experiences, this does not make their knowledge and experiences less useful to projects that are being implemented in their localities.

This paper also finds that the biggest demerit of the top-down approach to participation is that by largely excluding local people from participating in management discussions and decision-making that concerns their local environment, top-down approaches and their management initiatives can be lacking in crucially relevant local realities, perspectives and input (Smith, 2008). Consequently, top-down 'experts' can develop management policies, programs or projects that are locally unsuitable, unsustainable and unaccepted (Carr 2002). As a result, Carr (2002) notes that the top-down stakeholder-participation approach has lost appeal because decisions made regarding the environment have tended to be entirely scientific or technical yet this should not be the case because; contributing factors leading to the need for environmental management policies or program are never exclusively scientific or technical in nature. Other than that, top-down participation has been seen to be lacking the “social element”, and the local input into technical and governmental administration of the environment (Caldwell, 1970 p. 183). Caldwell (1970) contends that external technicians and bureaucrats cannot in any way “embrace all aspects of activities that shape or influence the environment”; noting that not enough attention is paid by these top-down actors and “scientific experts” to the point at which action occurs; which is the grassroots level of society (p. 183).

In spite of these shortcomings, the top-down approach to community participation in development projects is still widely applied especially by government agencies. This is because governments tend to be the dominant stakeholders in all projects that they fund and always determine what approach of community participation takes place. This study explores examples of public development projects that illustrate that the top-down approach is still preferred by the Kenya Government in the undertaking of its projects. In an empirical study, Nina *et al.* (2009) examined local people’s perceptions about benefits and challenges of participating in forest management in Taita Hills (Kenya), during the transformation of the forest policy project that was going on at that time.

In 2005, the Kenya Government introduced the Forest Act which sought to transform and improve the management of forest resources and for the first time in Kenya's history, the act introduced community participation in the conservation management of forests; in what was a top-down measure since the Government of Kenya was initiator of the new strategy, with local communities only being brought on board to help in its implementation (Nina *et al.*, 2009). Although the top-down approach has been heavily criticized as a result of its shortcomings, it has its merits which should not be ignored. In this forest conservation management project, the top-down model of stakeholder participation can be considered as having had some positive contribution to the success of the project. To begin with, the Government of Kenya generated the much needed new policy which had the potential to improve forest conservation management, and this provided leadership without which it would have been difficult to rally the support and resources from the other stakeholders in the forest conservation effort (Nina *et al.*, 2009). Generally, Nina *et al.* (2009) have discussed the benefits and challenges of the top-down approach in this project thereby focusing their study on how the model influenced either positive or negative outputs that were realized in the project. This paper established that the top-down stakeholder-participation approach negatively influenced the Taita Hills forest management project.

In Kenya as well, the economic stimulus program (ESP) that was implemented in the year 2010 was one of the ways by which the Government of Kenya sought to spur rural development (GoK, 2009). Indeed, one of the objectives of the ESP was to expand economic opportunities in rural areas for employment creation by mounting various development projects across the country. One of the flagship projects that were designed to attain this objective was the construction of market stalls in all the 210 constituencies in Kenya then. The ESP was a top-down program since all the projects in the program were designed at the national level and subsequently passed down to the grassroots for implementation. The ESP in Kenya envisaged that successful market stalls would be established in 210 constituencies of Kenya with the help of relevant stakeholders at national and local levels. The ESP secretariat at the national level planned that stakeholders at the national level were to be the Deputy Prime Minister & Minister for Finance then, the technical working group, the ESP secretariat, and the project implementation unit. At the local (constituency) level, the stimulus project management committee and the constituency projects tender committee were constituted to help in the management of the projects. In effect, the local stakeholders did not have any input at the project planning stage.

Generally, most of the Kenya Government sponsored projects are top-down in nature, mainly planned by the national government and passed down for implementation by the local stakeholders. This is true even for the Government of Kenya sponsored tablet provision project for public primary school pupils which officially started in May of 2016. This project had no input from the grassroots stakeholders especially in its identification and planning. It would appear that although the top-down participation approach has many demerits, the Kenya Government has been keen on using it in most of its projects to guarantee it of total control on all project phases and activities. Unlike the Government of Kenya, the national and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been consistently critical of the top-down approach and have been on the forefront of the effort to adopt bottom-up and other stakeholder-participation approaches.

4.1.1 The rise of bottom-up participation

Bottom-up participation in development is an approach that lays emphasis on decisions that originate from the lowest level of stakeholders, and all the other stakeholders come in to provide the support that is required to accomplish these decisions. Arising from the inability of the top-down participation approach to overcome its exclusionary and unrepresentative nature, criticism against it continued to mount and peaked around the mid-twentieth century (Smith, 2008). This had the effect of giving rise to the concept of bottom-up participation which started shaping up in the 1950s and into the 1960s and 1970s (Agrawal & Gibson, 2001; Volger & Jordan, 2003; UNICEF, 1999).

By the mid-1980s and early 1990s, the bottom-up approach had gained sufficient momentum and support making it to become a priority issue and a focal agenda of discussion in environmental governance (UNICEF, 1999). At this time, there was a growing feeling that "in the end it is what occurs at the 'grass roots' level that makes or breaks policies" (Buhrs & Bartlett, 1993, p. 2); and as a result, development experts and agencies were prepared to push this agenda to the top. The growing popularity of the bottom-up approach got a boost through the Brundtland Report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development as well as Agenda 21 of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The two reports played a critical role in cementing the concept of involving local communities in environmental management for sustainable outcomes (Buchdahl, 2004; Connelly & Smith, 1999).

Between the mid and late twentieth century as well, democratic political structures around the world grew (Paehlke, 2005) and this helped to bolster calls to place more emphasis on peoples' participation in development initiatives that are meant to uplift their own standards of living. The environment within which the strong need for grassroots participation in projects was evolving was also conducive given that it came following the collapse of colonialism, and the rise of new independent states - like Kenya - (Agrawal & Gibson 2001; Dryzek, 2005). The foregoing factors helped to firmly usher in the bottom-up approach to citizen participation in development projects; and Kenya was not left behind.

In his contribution to the bottom-up approach debate, Blanchard (1988) proposed seven basic strategies of the bottom-up approach that can be used to realize community development. These strategies are: Comprehensive community participation, motivating local communities, expanding learning opportunities, improving local resource management, replicating human development, increasing communication and interchange, and localizing financial access. He opined that this would firmly place development projects on the road to success. These strategies helped to shape the theory and practice of bottom-up participation as applied today.

By the time the twentieth century was ending, the bottom-up approach had gathered enough support and there was the general belief that with good planning, local people can take care of their own problems, using their own resources (Smith, 2008). According to Agrawal and Gibson (2001), and Carr (2002); the emergent bottom-up approach - unlike the top-down approach - encouraged local people, groups and communities to organize themselves to work together on locally based environmental problems or issues thereby promoting project ownership by the local communities. This self-organization and action by local communities is a missing feature in the top-down participation model, and this has boosted the perception that the bottom-up approach is better than the top-down approach.

Moreover, this paper finds that the bottom-up approach encourages projects to seek for, appreciate and apply local knowledge, and to consider local people themselves as the appropriate experts about their local environments (Chambers, 1997). Thus, unlike in the traditional top-down approach, local knowledge can no longer be dismissed as being “irrational, amateurish, unsophisticated and irrelevant” (Smith, 2008 p. 355). Instead, in the bottom-up approach, local skills, experiences and perspectives are acknowledged and appreciated (Tsing, Brosius & Zerener, 2005; Vanclay & Lawrence, 1995). According to Carr (2002), Schouten and Moriarty (2003) and Smith (2008); this kind of re-valuing of local capacities, knowledge and skills can be extremely empowering for local communities participating in local environmental management projects and programs. It can thus be concluded that the objective of the bottom-up model is to invite all development actors to adopt the bottom-up approach in the management of projects owing to the afore-stated advantages.

Nevertheless, caution should be observed and a critical evaluation of the bottom-up model should be done before adopting it to projects because the model – just as with the other models reviewed for this study– has its demerits. This paper has established several demerits of this approach. The bottom-up approach for instance, has been beset by the problem of tokenism. This is documented in literature whereby for instance, Heyd and Neef (2004, p. 1) assert that there largely remains a “sharp contrast between official rhetoric and the reality on the ground” about stakeholder-participation. They observe that as a result, participatory espousals in projects and policy briefs do not necessarily translate into a real and locally meaningful participatory process on the ground. Instead, communities may become mere information providers and at best involved in consultation, but not in more important and effectual positions with decision-making power. This paper thus finds it quite logical for Heyd and Neef (2004) to have concluded that participation in this manner then becomes passive and tokenistic rather than rigorous and beneficial. The implication of this is that project sponsors, owners and managers ought to know that adoption of the bottom-up approach in projects is not enough. They need to build structures in projects that ensure that stakeholders gainfully engage in such projects for this is the only way of fostering sustainable development.

Other than that, this paper finds that the assumption by the bottom-up model that communities are cohesive and can easily agree on what to do is not always the case, often leading to project implementation difficulties (Smith 2008). Consequently, this paper is in agreement with Dreyer (2000), as well as Godfrey and Obika (2004) who caution against communities being problematically simplified as idyllic, cohesive, organic, harmonious and homogeneous entities united in their interests, aims and goals, rather than as complex organizations of people with differential interests and power relations. Similarly, this paper finds Smith (2008) quite apt in asserting that the rosy picture about the bottom-up approach that is always portrayed in most of the literature has to be challenged in order for more realistic descriptions to be accepted and adopted in the participatory literature and subsequently in project management. Up-coming research needs to explore this shortcoming as well.

Another problematic element inherent in the bottom-up approach is the critical lack of facilitator knowledge about community participation by those charged with the responsibility for its facilitation; especially where management processes and projects are externally inspired, but seek local input (Dreyer, 2000). This challenge can however as Chambers (1997) suggests, be easily addressed by providing appropriate training and preparation for those expected or required in new job responsibilities and volunteer positions so as to know how to effectively engage with communities and to properly facilitate a participatory process.

In Kenya, there are government funded projects which are bottom-up in nature mainly because of citizen agitation which has ensured that there is legislation that guarantees that the projects should be undertaken using a bottom-up participation approach. The former Constituency Development Fund (CDF) projects; now called the National Constituency Development Fund (NCDF) are an example of government funded projects in Kenya in which citizens have managed to have them done in a bottom-up approach. This has been the case since early last decade when the CDF act was implemented. Many other public projects in Kenya besides NCDF are increasingly assuming a bottom-up approach.

4.1.2 Collaborative participation

This paper finds collaborative participation as another model by which Kenyan citizens have found an avenue to participate in the undertaking of public development projects. In this model, the collaborative approach ensures the sharing of decision-making power among different stakeholders in a project; and all stakeholders are deemed equally important and are linked through knowledge sharing (Probst & Hagmann, 2003). Thus, the basic feature in this model is that it engenders a collective approach to decision-making which comes along with attendant merits. For instance, collaboration in project management has been shown to not only enhance cooperation and foster belief change among stakeholders; it is also credited for generating funds and support for alternative policy measures when problems are too diffuse or difficult to address through regulation and it increases the implementation success of policies and programs as well (Scott, 2015). In Kenya, the wildlife conservation and management program has been undertaken for many years involving the government and the private land owners, because sometimes state owned wild animals roam private land; and tourists also use privately owned resources. Thus, there is always a collaborative decision making process on how to manage state owned wild animals and state sponsored tourists on privately owned ranches.

Nonetheless, the foregoing advantages of the collaborative stakeholder participation model do not mean that it is problem-free. The biggest pitfall in this model is that the constellation of stakeholders in one project often leads to conflicts which may be quite debilitating to the project (Boon *et al.*, 2013; Sultana *et al.*, 2008); implying that realization of the project life cycle that adopts this model will partly depend on the skills by which this model is applied. The application of this model does not therefore guarantee project success.

4.1.3 Consultative participation

In this approach, most of the key decisions are made by one actor who wields influence in the project (Probst, Hagmann, Fernandez & Ashby, 2003). However, emphasis is laid on consultation and gathering of information from other stakeholders, especially for identifying challenges and opportunities, priority setting, and even risk factors; which information is then applied in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project. In Kenya, this approach has been used in cases where the Kenya Government has purchased resources from individuals or communities; or cases where it has undertaken projects using community resources. The acquisitions of private land for construction of road and railway line projects in Kenya are examples of projects in which consultative participation has been prominent. In particular, the implementation of the standard gauge railway line project from Mombasa to Nairobi is an example in which this stakeholder participation approach has been widely used. The recent resettlement of squatters on Waitiki Farm in Likoni in Mombasa in 2015 (Kenya) is a recent example as well.

4.1.4 Collegiate participation

This is an approach to participation in which various stakeholders work together as colleagues or partners. Project ownership and responsibility are equally distributed among the partners, and decisions are made by agreement or consensus among all the stakeholders (Probst *et al.*, 2003). In Kenya, most of the public-private partnership (PPP) projects are undertaken under collegiate stakeholder participation model. In such projects, the government of Kenya and the private entity relate as partners in the subject project. A recent example is the planned Lake Turkana Wind Farm which the Cambridge Economic Policy Associates (CEPA) Ltd observes that "... the project will be the largest wind farm constructed in Africa to date and will also be the largest single private investment in the country..." (CEPA, 2015, p. 26). It is estimated to cost 830 million US dollars. In this project, the Government of Kenya (acting on behalf of the general public) on one hand and the DFID and European Union-Africa infrastructure Fund on the other; took part in this project as partners (CEPA, 2015).

4.1.5 Contractual participation

This is a stakeholder-participation model in which an influential stakeholder who is regarded as the project or initiative owner has sole decision-making power. Other stakeholders participate in activities defined by this main stakeholder in the sense of being formally or informally contracted to provide goods, services and other kinds of support. There is literature on the application of this model in projects. While studying flood risk management projects in England and Wales, Geaves and Penning-Rowsell (2014) found that stakeholders were engaged in contractual participation while undertaking these projects. This paper has established that in many public projects in Kenya today, the government procures human as well as material resources from the community mainly via contractual participation as opposed to what used to happen during the colonial period where community resources were in most cases forcibly acquired by the state; or were paid for at rates that were determined by government officials. At the moment in Kenya, several thousands of Kenyans have been contracted to provide labor on the standard gauge railway construction project where the workers have had the opportunity to bargain for their fair share of remuneration.

4.2 Community resources for development projects

Today, there are a variety of resources which communities can contribute to projects. Resource mobilization theory (RMT) analysts have made considerable progress in specifying and differentiating between five distinct types of resources: Moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004).

4.2.1 Moral resources: They include legitimacy, integrity, solidarity support, sympathetic support, and celebrity. These resources are important because some projects cannot succeed without the support of moral resources from the project host community.

4.2.2 Cultural resources: These include tacit knowledge about how to accomplish specific tasks like enacting a protest event, holding a news conference, running a meeting, forming an organization, initiating a festival, or utilizing new social media, music, literature, magazine/newspapers, or film/videos. Specific cultural resources are widely available in a given society, but neither evenly distributed, nor universally available (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Cultural resources, moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources have been used widely to promote development projects in Kenya.

4.2.3 Human resources: This category includes resources like labor, experience, skills, expertise, and leadership. Individuals typically have control over the use of their labor and other human resources and make them accessible to public projects.

4.2.4 Material resources: This category combines the financial and physical capital includes but not limited to monetary resources, property, office space, equipment, and supplies. Monetary resources are very vital because money can be converted into other types of resources (e.g., rent for office space, hiring of picketers, purchase of opinion ads) while the opposite is less often the case (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004).

4.2.5 Social-organizational resources: There are three general forms of social-organizational resources and these are infrastructures, social networks and organizations; each varying in their degree of organizational formality (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). Normally, infrastructures are publicly owned while social networks belong to groups and may not be readily available to anyone in need. Socio-organizational resources have been used by communities to help in the undertaking of public development projects in Kenya.

For instance, many people have always used their 'whats up' social media groups to publicize and promote the mass vaccination projects that have always been done in Kenya by the government. During the colonial period in Kenya, local communities would mainly participate in public development projects by offering human and material resources. Many Kenyans had not got formal education and may not have been aware of the wide range of resources available to them which they could gainfully offer to public projects. Today all the aforementioned resources are being utilized by communities to help undertake public projects. In the health sector, the Government of Kenya has for example relied on religious organizations (which have strong networks) to implement health projects like mass immunization.

Based on the foregoing, in Kenya, the space for community participation in development projects has been gradually expanding. In the year 2010, Kenya adopted a new constitution which ushered in a new dawn with regard to citizen participation in development projects (GoK, 2010); for it has expanded the space within which communities can engage in public development projects. This has been possible due to the gradual expansion of democratic space in Kenya over the decades that enabled the enactment of the new constitution in 2010. Consequently, under the NCDF, it is possible for citizens to decide projects that are of priority significance to them, where and how to implement them, and even who deserve or do not deserve to benefit from them. It has been established that the democratization process has had the effect of enhancing community participation in development projects (Handley & Howell-Moroney, 2010); just as it is happening in Kenya today. In their study, Handley and Howell-Moroney (2010) have concluded that communities in which grant administrators feel most accountable to citizens for grant performance have higher degrees of citizen participation.

This paper notes that in Kenya generally, there has been a gradual expansion in the opportunity for community participation in development projects over the decades and this is informed by the importance of community participation on project outputs (Sherman & Ford, 2014). Sherman & Ford (2014) studied 18 projects and having compared top-down and bottom-up approaches, they concluded that community stakeholder engagement in project design and implementation led to higher effectiveness, efficiency, equity, flexibility, legitimacy, sustainability, and replicability. However, they warn that if the right strategies are not used to engage the community in projects; neither the top-down nor the bottom-up approach can yield the desired results.

5.0 Discussion of findings

This paper has established that the top-down stakeholder-participation approach was dominant during the colonial period but criticism about its demerits peaked around the mid-twentieth century. From this time on, the bottom-up stakeholder-participation approach started to take root and today, it is seen in Kenya as the ideal approach to development. Other stakeholder-participation approaches are also being increasingly applied in public development projects in Kenya today including collaborative, consultative, collegiate and contractual approaches. This means that unlike during the colonial period when the local community could only help to implement already decided public projects, today the communities have the right to take decisions about many of the public projects that are being implemented in their localities through various approaches. However, the availability of many participatory approaches does not guarantee project success. Stakeholders should understand the merits and demerits of each approach and apply it only when they have the capacity to leverage on its demerits. Only this way, can any of the available stakeholder-participation approaches help in undertaking sustainable projects. Even the much criticized top-down approach can result into very successful public projects as long as all the stakeholders are gainfully engaged at the right time.

As for resources, this paper has established that in Kenya today, there are far more resources by which communities are participating in public development projects than it was during the colonial period; including but not limited to moral, cultural, social-organizational, intellectual, labor and material resources. This is a big departure from what used to happen during the colonial period in Kenya when the local people were forced to render their labor at extremely meager wages. Alternatively, they were forced to give up their ancestral land free of charge to pave way for public projects. The many resources by which stakeholders can now engage in public development projects have enabled local people to gainfully engage in public development projects and tremendously improve their lives. As observed, there are several thousands of Kenyans offering human resources to the standard gauge railway project that is being constructed from Mombasa to Nairobi at the moment at competitive rates. Those who have benefited most are those households who have sold land to the project reaping several millions of Kenya shillings as a result. This is replicated in many other major public development projects. Many other Kenyans have contracts of leasing their land and other property to the Kenya Government and other agencies. Thus, the expanded nature of stakeholder-participation in public development projects in Kenya today is much more beneficial to the local citizens and much more sustainable than it used to be during the colonial period.

6.0 Conclusion

There has been a tremendous transformation in the way citizens are engaged in public development projects in Kenya. From the widespread top-down community participation approach that was preferred during the colonial period, the community participation landscape is today characterized by a multiplicity of approaches including the bottom-up, top-down, collaborative, consultative, contractual and collegiate approaches. The net value of any approach however, lies not in the approach itself, but rather in how it is applied. For instance, when well applied, the top-down participation can yield the desired results. It is also not a guarantee that the bottom-up approach will always deliver good results for it depends on how it has been applied in a project. There has also been an increase in the variety of resources by which communities in Kenya have been participating in public projects including but not limited to moral, cultural, social-organizational, human, and material resources.

Thus in Kenya, in many of the projects that are being implemented today (example those by the NCDF), communities have the capacity to choose which projects are of priority significance to them, where and how to implement them, and even who deserve or do not deserve to benefit from them. This paper recommends that the Government of Kenya and all other governments across the globe should accord enough space for community participation in public development projects for this enhances sustainable development.

This paper also recommends further studies to establish how the many approaches and resources by which communities are engaging in public development projects in Kenya have influenced project results.

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