

Public Participation and Sustainable Development in Devolved Government

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Abstract

Sustainable development will not be attained in devolved government without public participation. The new constitution brought new socio-economic and political opportunities and requires public participation to sustain development in most counties. The community elites through county systems of governance should develop strategies to see how the public participation in local, national and globally in exploiting the resources to benefit them. It's against this background that sustainability of development can be maintained in socio-economic, structural, and environmental through public participation. The paper will examine how public participation leads to sustainable development in devolved government in Kenya. According Bhatnagar and Williams[1992], participation is; "a process by which people, especially disadvantaged people, influence decisions that affect them...participation means influence on development decisions, not simply involvement in implementation or [in sharing]benefits of a development activity, although those types of involvement are important and are often encouraged by opportunities for influence". The objective, what is the role of public participation in supporting and enhancing the process of economic and social sustainable development in the counties? The research will adopt analytical method of the empirical data. The findings will be vital for community sustainable development and realized public participation makes people become competent to live with and gain some control over local conditions and the changing world. According to Ajayi and Otuya [2006], "sustained community development cannot take place through force or order, but is mostly likely bound to happen if, all actors participate and share ideas, visions and responsibilities equally and democratically in steering and implementing their community or village development". So in creating sustainable rural development, it is through giving the main actors [public or villagers living in the community] an equal opportunity to think and plan their own future.

Keywords: *Public; Participation; Sustainable; Development; Devolved*

Introduction

Sustainable development will not be attained in devolved government without public participation. The new constitution brought new socio-economic and political opportunities and requires public participation to sustain development in most counties. The community elites through county systems of governance should develop strategies to see how the public participation in local, national and globally in exploiting the resources to benefit them. It's against this background that sustainability of development can be maintained in socio-economic, structural, and environmental through public participation.

Public participation is the thread that runs through all objects of devolution, connects all institutions in the devolved government. In the new constitution, devolution laws provide for avenues and modalities for public participation. Public is the general body of a nation, state or community, a specific part of people and those considered together because of common interest of purpose[Webster's dictionary]. Public participation is an action or a series of actions a citizen takes to participate in the affairs of his or her own government or community. This means that participation will include; participation in electoral process-through electing good and visionary leaders at the devolved government and leaders elected will manage and offer oversight the use of county resources for sustained development. This can be practically seen from Honorable governor Dr. Alfred Mutua of Machakos county; secondly, participation in legislative process and provide necessary input and ensure the laws are enacted to benefit them as citizens of the particular county and future generations for sustainable development; thirdly, participation in planning and budgetary, where counties must develop county integrated development plans through a participatory process and consultation. fourth, participation in public finance management and this leads to openness to some extent ensuring that resources are used for the intended purposes. It is a clear indication that; According Bhatnagar and Williams[1992], participation is "a process by which people, especially disadvantaged people, influence decisions that affect them...participation means influence on development decisions, not simply involvement in implementation or [in sharing]benefits of a development activity, although those types of involvement are important and are often encouraged by opportunities for influence".

Sustainable development will not be attained in devolved government without public participation and also public participation will not be exercised if the citizens do not know their rights properly. It is therefore, important for community elites through county systems of governance come up with

strategies to see how the public participation in local, national and globally in exploiting resources to benefit them, as in the case study of Machakos county. It is against this background that sustainability of development can be maintained in social, economic structural and environmental through public participation.

To comprehend sustainable development, it is important to adopt a phrase to Smith, whereby it is observed that it is still "in an Alice in wonderland world where words still mean what you want them to mean"[Smith,1979,58].in this sense it is intelligently to conclusively note that there is no universally acceptable definition of what sustainable development entails[Sharachchandra,1991, 607].Therefore,the realization of sustainable cut across the borders to include public participation to embrace the sustenance of natural resource systems, institutional development, appropriate management skills,economic,ethical and socio-cultural and psycho-political concerns of any county in Kenya.

The problem of the study

The paper will examine how public participation leads to sustainable development in devolved government in Kenya. According Bhatnagar and Williams[1992],participation is "a process by which people, especially disadvantaged people, influence decisions that affect them...participation means influence on development decisions, not simply involvement in implementation or [in sharing]benefits of a development activity, although those types of involvement are important and are often encouraged by opportunities for influence".

The objective of the study

The objective, what is the role of public participation in supporting and enhancing the process of economic and social sustainable development in the counties?

Methodology

The research will adopt analytical method of the empirical data.

Discussion and Findings

The community sustainable development and realized public participation makes people become competent to live with and gain some control over local conditions and the changing world. According to Ajayi and Otuya [2006], "sustained community development cannot take place through force or order, but is mostly likely bound to happen if, all actors participate and share ideas, visions and responsibilities equally and democratically in steering and implementing their community or village development". So in creating sustainable rural development, it is through giving the main actors [public or villagers living in the community] an equal opportunity to think and plan their own future.

Public Participation as two-way process-where the government provides opportunities for citizens involvement and citizens to choose whether to utilize those opportunities based on their level of concern, interest and desired outcome. It is therefore, the interest of county governments to encourage active participation from citizens and to ensure that citizens are educated on public issues so that to make valuable contributions to their decision-making process [URAIA, 2012].

Stages of public participation: it important to separate public participation into stages, to visualize which needs of its stand in terms of level of participation in relation to the governance process. There are eight different

stages of public [participation in both county and national government, which are classified into three specific categories as follows:

Public Non-participation stages [level 1 and 2]: The lowest stages of public participation are [1] manipulation and [2] therapy, where the primary objective is simply to educate or cure citizens of their anxieties through arranged public events. This means they have no role in them think they are participating in governance when in fact they have no role in the process of decision-making or planning. Their involvement occurs only after decisions or plans are already completed.

Public participation [Tokenism] stages [level 3,4 and 5]: The low-middle stages of public participation are [3] informing and [4] consultation. The main objective of the power holder in two levels is to explain, and hear from, citizens on policies and decisions. On the other hand, the goal of the power holders is to inform the citizens and get their input on policies and issues, which will ultimately not affect the outcome of government’s decision-making or planning process.

The upper-middle stage of public participation [5] placation, is a higher level of tokenism because citizens have ability to not just hear and be heard by power holders, but also to provide advice during the deliberation process, although still the power holders keep the authority to make final decisions, therefore, public participation is more symbolic than meaningful.

Public participation [citizen/public power] stages [level 6,7 and 8]: The highest stages of public participation reveal increasing degrees of “citizen power” particularly in decision-making process of government. The lowest [6] partnership- which means that citizens can negotiate with power holders and thus decision-making responsibilities are shared. The two highest stages of public participation are [7] delegated power and [8] public control. These stages reflect increasing levels of public power especially as it relates to citizens having greater power over the decision-making process through such things as more seats on committee or even full managerial of a project as illustrated in figure 1.

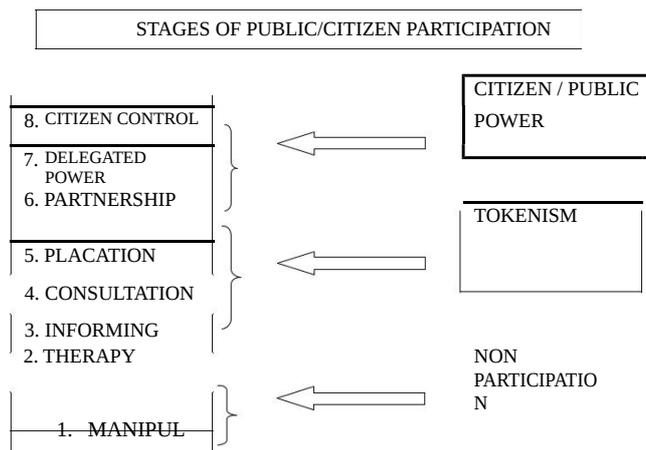


Figure 1

In the sustainable development the public participation is done conducted using different strategies of tools as follows; [1] **community forums**-hold open forums where local citizens can learn more information and provide feedback. The community forums deepen community ownership because they feel genuinely consulted on their views and if used correctly builds trust. This is a method of identifying community needs takes time and dedication, but community forums are vitally important to finding consensus among different factions of community members. An example of community forum is a citizen's parliament [Bunge la mwananchi], can be specific to men, women and youths.

[2].**Barazas**-are an excellent platform for engaging the community-some of a social affair where the community gathers to raise awareness, share knowledge, ideas network[form relationships]they are ways to bring large and diverse group of people together at a short notice. Examples are residents' meeting, chiefs' meetings and so on.

[3].**Roundtable discussions**-well-informed and well-organized groups of marginalized people are able to take on the individuals, institutions and policies that have traditionally excluded or restricted them.

[4].**Lobbying and advocacy**-it is practice of engaging with the governments, often from outside, to support change, request information or to hold officials accountable for their commitments.

[5]. **Public rallies**-the most effective way which brings together supporters in one place. A successfully rally should be held in a venue that is easy to access, has facilities to allow participants hear speeches from specific spokespersons and appropriate size to accommodate the number of the people expected to attend.

[6].**Advisory committees**-can be formal or informal group brought together by a larger body or single official to discuss issues, form consensus, and then offer recommendations. The idea or objective is to engage non-state actors in process of public policy making and ensure that public officials and government policy making bodies have direct access to key stakeholders at the community level.

[7]. **Town halls and public consultations**-all levels of government must offer the public opportunities to provide input into policies, programs and projects that have an impact on citizen's lives. It the responsibility of citizens to monitor, from radio,websites,social media sites[face book and twitter and so on]to stay to date with the on-going public consultations and town hall meetings that are being held in the community.

[8]. **Public petitions**-is an important avenue for those who wish to influence public officials. A well-documented and supported petition will always have persuasive influence in areas of public policy-making.petions targets [non-government] are also helpful to form or shape public opinion and finally bring change.

Conclusion

It realized although the new constitution brought new social, economic and political opportunities for Kenyans and is key that requires public participation to sustain development in most counties. Some others need more participation in some areas where they lagged behind in development while others need public participation to strengthen the areas need reinforcement, and others need to restructure where it was dismantled by the previous governments of the old constitution.

It is realized that public participation is pivotal to all kinds of sustainable developments. And it is through public participation which would make people become more competent to live with and gain some control over local conditions and changing world. In sustainable development in devolved governments, it is vital to note “public participation would change things from traditional to modernization or from analog to digital or micro to macro”. According to Ajayi and Otuya [2006], “sustained community development cannot take place through force or order, but is mostly likely bound to happen if, all actors participate and share ideas, visions and responsibilities equally and democratically in steering and implementing their community or village development”. This calls for all mobilized efforts of all people within a given area, region and county to act positively towards sustainability of any projects put in place by devolved governments.

Public participation in devolved government means people will not come from outside and decide, plan, implement and give way forward, but the people within the framework of the county expertise will give experiences in any projects for sustainability in the scope. According to Mulwa [2012’95] it is believed that community projects will continue to suffer poor sustainability as long as development professionally and change agencies keep on doing things for the people”. Many scholars have argued that for sustainable development to flourish, capacity building is necessary in devolved governments. Therefore, according to Eade and Williams [1995, 9-24], “capacity building is the process of strengthening people’s ability and capability to determine their own values and priorities in life”.

It is logical to note public participation works effectively and efficiently through capacity building. therefore, it is about all people both men, women and children participating to bring about positive changes in their lives to steer sustainable development. It is about personal growth, nourished by public participation, action and implementation. It entails the process and outcome challenging poverty, oppression and discretion and about realisation of human potential which was curtailed in the old constitution to bring justice through the new constitution. Public participation is all about enabling people to engage in the process of transforming their own lives, their villages, their towns and transforming their own societies are whole wholesomely. According to Bhatnagar and Williams [1992, 177], participation is; “a process by which people, especially disadvantaged people, influence decisions that affect them... participation means influence on development decisions, not simply involvement in implementation or [in sharing] benefits of a development activity, although those types of involvement are important and are often encouraged by opportunities for influence”. For others, participation is an effort to involve the community in the implementation of already drawn-up blueprint plans. For others, participation has meant the so called “community mobilization”. For some people, community participation mobilization has ability to solicit people’s local contribution, whether in labour, cash or materials [Mulwa, 2012, 96]. This means for sustainable development in devolved government needs a chain of requirements from **participation > empowerment > capacity building > ownership > learning > addictiveness > adjustments**, as illustrated in figure 2. **Participation** is the pivot for sustainable development which requires empowerment of everybody in the village, community and involves all variables. In this sense, empowerment can be conceptualized as a process of enabling people gain strength, confidence and vision to work for positive changes in their lives individually and collectively, with others. People become empowered by their own efforts, not by what others do for them [Mulwa, 2012, 118], in their counties. People in their counties need cooperation and coordination of all efforts available for realizing sustainable developments in all sectors, of

education, health, agriculture, public works, tourism and wildlife, energy and others which make the core prerequisites of sustainable development.

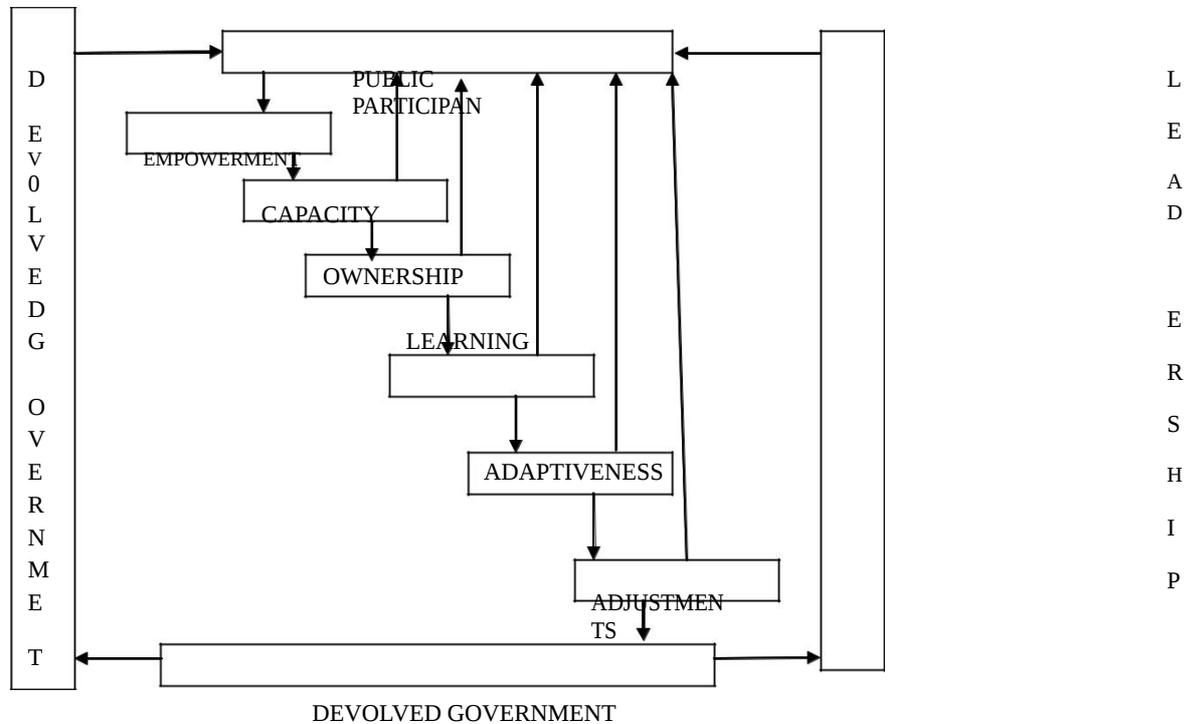


Figure 2: Chain of public participation in sustainable development in devolved government.

Source: researcher 2014.

Empowerment-in capacity building at all levels for active public participation is vital in sustainable development. Empowerment for capacity building refer to enabling the poor and powerless to take more control over their lives, and secure a better livelihood with ownership and control of productive assets as one key element. decentralisation or devolution of responsibility to local people in the name of empowerment enables them to generate their own innovations, find their own solutions and determine their own pathways[chambers,1993;11]. Also Mathie and Cunningham[2002,3]argues that marshalling of locally available resources is central to process of local empowerment. This involves deliberate effort to locate and human potential such as personal attributes and skills. It also entails building on relationships among people t5hrough social, kinship, or associational networks. Empowerment rests on the principle that the recognition of strengths, gifts, talents, and assets of individuals and

communities is more likely to inspire positive action for change than an exclusive focus on the needs and problems. This is relevant and applicable to all counties to curb criticisms of underdevelopment and underdevelopment and promote sustainable development through public participation

Empowerment will not be effective and efficient if capacity building is low. **Capacity building** is core in sustainable development without which projects would fail. Mulwa [2012,117] argues that capacity building is conceptualized as an on-going process of influencing and enhancing change agents' knowledge, skills, attitudes and ultimately their practices, in order to enable them to cause similar effect and impact on the people and communities they serve. This is an important aspect which should not be locked out of sustainable development. This process aims at transforming people's lives, from a state of conformity to a dynamic state of creative and innovative living. It involves building people up in such a manner as to strengthen their ability to make decisions that affect their lives as they assume full responsibility are consequences of those decisions. The process challenges people to efficiently marshal available resources towards meeting their own needs. They optimize on opportunities that either present themselves in life to be tapped or need to be created or cultivated. In the process, people seek to influence policies that govern their communities and the society at large to ensure that their individual and collective rights are accommodated [Mulwa, 2012].

The paper reveals that capacity building is important when there is "**ownership**" this refers to people will identify, with, protect and maintain what they have toiled to build and will not let anybody to destroy in whatever case and means. It involves the level of community involvement that builds true sense of ownership of local development initiatives. In this sense ownership is tied and chained with responsibility. Thus sustainability is created by whatever sense of local ownership and local responsibility should be more desirable as this ensure relevance to the local context for sustainable development.

Responsibility needs **learning** attitude development who have been successful on various aspects of the same set ups. The people should learn from others who have similar features, of the aspect required. It is important to note that the poor learn very fast because they do not have power. Their learning is more likely to come from above than below; and to follow current ideologies and fashions. Chambers [1983], any attempt to understand the poor and learn from them, has to begin with introspection by the outsiders themselves.

In successful sustainable development there must be room for **learning to adapt**. In the devolved government, sustainable development is realized and attained through the mindset requiring complete overhaul in organizational and procedural setting in all departments at all levels. Management should be changed to fluid changeable and adaptable to the needs of the people and development. In this case adaptive processes are open to learning from innovations and experiments from other social environments from other parts of the world, because problems have no universal prescribed solutions. Any given solutions for each problem will be found within culturally acceptable arrangements and practices in each county.

The adaptive processes are chained into **adjustments** so that the process of development will take place where targets are attained without minding the process involved attaining those goals. There are always involved in the process of development and having opportunities of learning and capacity [learning by doing] and leads them to a sense of dignity and selfworth, in the county as they participate public sustainable development.

Summary of the importance of public participation in sustainable development in country

1. Citizens feel they belong and trust in their community and local government.
2. People feel they have greater ownership over county government decisions when public officials consult them in county issues.
3. Increase credibility between public/county officials and the community on important issues and services in the county.
4. Increase capacity of the public /citizens to contribute to future public debates or discussions and decisions impacting their community.
5. County officials become better to understand and respond to the needs of their community.
6. It makes the public that is more aware of community concerns and can therefore more effectively judge government responses.
7. Enables people to give alternative views from a greater diversity and perspectives of citizens contributing to public debate on issues and decision-making. It makes people diverse and unique skill sets are revealed to government officials and the community.
8. It facilitates community concerns that are more focused and prioritized for public officials to address.
9. Enhances citizens who are better informed on projects and proposals undertaken by the government.
10. It fosters sectoral coordination since communities determine their priorities
11. It ensures people's control over services within themselves and bounding them to better coordination and sustainable development.

Recommendations

1. Establish baseline for various services and development of performance.
2. Establish structures for devolved services at the county, ward and village levels.
3. Publicize and ensure public hearing on sector, spatial, cities or towns or urban plans and integrated process in popular and local media to enhance public interest and participation for sustainable development.
4. County government develops and implement guidelines to ensure public participation in planning and budgeting process as required by the constitution
5. In the devolved government, identify and engage with citizen forum, lobby groups and local media-for public participation.
6. In the county government development Information Communication Technology [ICT] information, communication and education packages for effective awareness and dissemination of knowledge on relevant skills.
7. For sustainable development facilitates continuity of services and performance based incentives.
8. In the county governments, cultivate mutuality and build trust in project partnership and more importantly promote and nurture peaceful co-existence among communities.

9. Involve open communication and a relationship of mutual trust fostered through use of participatory methodologies.
10. Optimize on the use of local resources, local talents, local experience and local technology.
10. Give public/citizens an opportunity in appropriation and allocation of national and community resources meant for their own development, leading to wider scope of attaining social justice, basic human rights and freedoms required for sustainable development.
11. Ensure equity is achieved by sharing the resources [nationally and regionally] where more than one tribe involved or many clans, becomes a collective responsibility based on a policy framework that stipulates the modalities of such sharing.

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