

**ENHANCING COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN PROJECT MONITORING AND
EVALUATION: ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY BASED PROJECTS IN INFORMAL
SETTLEMENTS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

^{1*} **Karanja Munene**
muneneian@gmail.com

^{2**} **Nkirina Severina**
nkirinasp@yahoo.com

^{1,2} *Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya*

Abstract: *Community based projects are projects that are set out to benefit a particular group of community members. Community participation entails the engagement of community members in processes and decisions on matters that influence their wellbeing as pertains to the project in question. Participatory approach to project management by the community, influence many aspects of the project management. A key aspect of community participation is in the monitoring and evaluation which greatly improves the overall ownership and acceptance of the project by the target beneficiary. This paper seeks to bring out the aspect of community participation in projects' monitoring and evaluation as enhanced in community based projects in Kibera and Embakasi South constituencies in Nairobi County. Informal settlement projects are selected because this category of the population is often disadvantaged due to their low bargaining power which leads to them being underrepresented in most project affairs. Many projects are also being implemented by the government and donors for this target group in Kenya. The paper presents views from 59 project managers selected through cluster sampling method. The paper argues that community participation in monitoring and evaluation of projects has not been enhanced to the extent that the community does not influence the success of project to a meaningful extent. It concludes that if informal settlement projects have to succeed and improve ownership and value for the community, there is need to put a strong community team in place to help hold project implementers accountable.*

Keywords: *Community participation, monitoring and evaluation, project success, informal settlements*

1.0 Introduction and Background

Project management activities include monitoring and evaluation which is critical to discovering any anomalies in projects, with a view of making suggestions for corrective action as well as creating knowledge and competencies for future learning and direction. This crucial role of M&E in project is mostly undertaken by project teams since it is in-built in the project design. In most projects and especially community projects, the members of the community may not have adequate representation on the project teams. For informal settlement projects, representation maybe even more difficult given the low education levels and vulnerability of members. This may call for deliberate efforts to build capacity for community members to adequately monitor projects in their localities and provide a basis for corrective action where projects do not deliver the desired output.

Community project completion is one of the main agenda of national and international governments as well as development agencies. Completion of community projects is and has been facing challenges in developing countries despite the expenses undertaken to realize the completion and realization of the intended purpose of the projects. One of the key issues affecting the completion of community projects is in most cases lack of stakeholder involvement in the pre and post project work and in this case the community members. Community member's involvement can either be partial or full but one aspect is clear that they should be involved in all stages of a community project.

Kumar (2002) asserts that according to the World Bank and the International Monetary fund, community project completion and sustainability cannot be realized without community involvement in the planning process to ultimate management. Mansuri and Rao (2003) in support of this noted that community based approach to projects is on the rise in terms of being a mechanism of redirecting development funding to ensure efficiency. A high percentage of unsuccessful or uncompleted community projects are attributed to the phenomenon of imposing projects and programs that fail to accomplish the necessities of the targeted audience. This kind of system believes that there exists a level of primitivism and ignorance in the targeted audience for them to make decisions of what is good or bad for them and for them to identify and prioritize their needs (Mulwa, 2008). This top-down approach sadly has been adopted by development agencies and governments ignoring the fact that project completion and sustainability are heavily dependent on the involvement of the community. Inadequate community involvement of the top down method has been credited to collapse of different community development projects like health projects, water projects among others.

Mulwa (2004) assert that community participation was introduced to solve the problems resulting from the top down effects that hinder project completion or sustainability. Communities stand to reap a lot from projects that targets their developmental needs since they are centered on majority of community challenges. When community members participate in projects in their locality and those that meet their immediate needs, they improve their success and also impact. This in essence makes projects more acceptable and also creates value for money. Community participation is key aspect in the development process and this is signified by the attention it's accorded in national and international policies of governments and development agencies.

Involving the community in projects acts as an empowering tool towards their growth and development. According to Kakumba and Nsingo (2008), donors have made it compulsory for any project to integrate the community participation component before funding the projects. This is also supported by Mwangi (2014) who has asserted that inadequate involvement and participation of community members results to a less effective project outcome with low impact on the community. Despite these developments, community participation in project affairs has still remained low.

A critical aspect of community participation that adds immense value in project deliverables is the aspect of monitoring and evaluation. This involves participation in such aspects as; task force support, site visits, and giving feedback among others. Community members can be included in the monitoring and evaluation committees as part of the task force. Since they are the beneficiaries and they are selected by the community to represent their interests, it is expected that they will add value and deliver on the expectations of their members.

1.1. Problem and Focus

Monitoring and evaluation phase of a project is important in regards to tracking the project progress and the ability to make decisions arising from the project. (Sera and Beaudry, 2007). Community participation in project monitoring process is very critical with several studies delving into the issue.

The participatory monitoring concept involves the community involvement in monitoring phase in form of problem detection and provision of solutions to the problems to ensure the project objectives as outlined in the initial stages are achieved. The concept of participatory approach was concurred with by Lechner (2004), who argued that M&E focuses on planning and anticipating for problems or issues that are likely to face the final result of the project to the disadvantage of the expected outcome. A carefully designed monitoring and evaluation system stands to rid the project of rectifiable issues that if detected early corrective actions can be taken.

Despite the importance of community involvement in monitoring and evaluation, beneficiaries of these projects have continued to complain of poor outcomes. The most hit have been infrastructural and water projects. A survey on monitoring welfare projects in Kenya indicates that the intended beneficiaries of the development projects remain in the same position due to poor performance and low level of completion of the projects (GOK, 2011). The underlying factor is that there is limited or no involvement at all of the community individuals within the projects which is further fueled by the fact that Kenya has no clear legislation on matters concerning community member's involvement in projects. The low outcomes of community projects are also evident in the outcry of the community members who believe that the project intended purpose is not achieved because they are not involved.

The challenges witnessed by community members are evident that most projects may not have effectively embarked on enhancing community participation in monitoring and evaluation. Beneficiaries demonstrate very low satisfaction with projects after completion citing many problems such as over budgeting and poor quality. It is not uncommon in Nairobi to see community members holding street demonstrations in protest of poorly delivered projects or incomplete projects that have taken far too long. This paper embarks on identifying some of the efforts being put by projects teams to engage more community representation in monitoring and evaluation so as to improve project sustainability and completion rates.

1.2. Objectives, Scope and Justification

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the involvement of community members in the project monitoring and evaluation activities with a view of uncovering how project designers and implementers enhance the participation levels of project beneficiaries. This understanding will gauge how far community members are to be held responsible for their project outcomes and to what extent their involvement and participation in giving crucial feedback ensures successful completion of projects.

Specifically the paper focuses on the following aspects of community participation in project monitoring and evaluation:

- Community task force support in M&E activities
- Community involvement in project site visits to observe project implementation
- Feedback collection from community members through structured channels

These aspects create linkages where community members can channel their views about the project for onward consideration by project teams. Since community members are the first stakeholders in any project touching on their welfare, their input towards its improvement is key.

The paper explores these areas of community participation using projects in Nairobi informal settlements areas because according to Nairobi county records they host over 5300 projects, (National council of Community Based Organizations, 2019). Informal settlement also hosts approximately 30% of government and donor funded projects in Nairobi County. The paper is based on views from Kibra and Embakasi South Constituencies which hosts 600 and 720 projects respectively. This translates to 1320 projects in the county representing 25% or a 1/4 of all project in the county. The facts presented and the nature of projects in these localities justified the choice of this focus area for analysis of community participation in project M&E in Nairobi.

1.3. Literature Review and Theoretical Underpinning

Literature abounds on the role of community participation in projects and its possible benefits. Boon, Bawole and Ahenkan (2013) advocated for community involvement in project monitoring because the engagement of the target population was crucial to the project's success. He argued that community involvement at the monitoring stage, would ensure that the problems that arose at this stage would be solved by providing solutions that are local and unique to the community's circumstances therefore enhancing the chances of project completion and sustainability. Furthermore, community members who provide feedback during evaluations give suggestions on what they would like to see done so that their situations would improve. This enhances the development of home grown solutions to project challenges.

Community participation at the monitoring level is also important in terms of building trust between community members, as well as growing community members' understanding of the problem and enhanced support for the project. Boon, Bawole and Ahenkan (2013) further added that community member's involvement as stakeholders in this stage is not to be ignored and should come in forms of task forces, focus groups, interviews, meetings and advisory committees. Thus, it would then determine whether the intended purpose of the projects were met thereby determining the continuity or failure of the project.

Community member's participation in the project monitoring phases is credited to empowering the community members because there is reduction of community alienation since members are allowed to voice their suggestions and opinions in regards to how the project could be improved to adapt to the changing environmental, cultural, political and social spheres. Community participation at the monitoring phases by virtue of reducing the feeling of alienation or marginalization furthermore increases the community spirit of volunteerism and this ensures the running of the project is centered on the interest of the community members as opposed to those of project planners.

Yang *et al.* (2011) based on their knowledge on the right of human participation, underscored the importance of community participation at the M&E phase because of increased self-confidence and skills of the public through the knowledge gathered in the project planning and implementation phases. Furthermore, community participation at the project monitoring phase increases the social and economic situation and improves the networking aspect for the community members.

The paper uses the theory of change to help understand projects' outcomes as a result of embedding monitoring and evaluation phases in the planning and involvement of the community. This theory is used in development studies because most projects have a development agenda to accomplish. Specifically theory of change helps scholars see how projects bring about incremental development in a community. In essence the overall project outcome should be able to bring changes in a community's livelihood. The theory hence becomes relevant in the current discussion because we are analyzing projects in informal settlements areas which derive their livelihood and solutions to most of the pressing challenges from these projects. For example a project of drilling boreholes in informal settlements affects the lives of majority of the slum dwellers who have no source of

water and have to depend on water vendors who sell it at exorbitant prices as well as compromising the hygiene factors since most of these vendors draw the water they sell from unclean water sources.

The theory of change approach to understanding community projects has been lauded by many scholars because it offers a number of benefits. For example James, (2011) lists several benefits of using this theory to underspin community projects. One crucial benefit of the theory is that it has potential to promote innovation and out of the box thinking which creates new dimensions of solving project related problems. Jones (2010), proposes the possibility of customizing the theory of change to different situations to fit organizational and project contexts and dimensions.

1.4. Methods and Design

This paper is based on views gathered from 59 project managers in Kibra and Embakasi South of Nairobi County. This population was selected from projects that had been in operation for 8 years and above. This criteria was used because projects that had a longer lifespan were assumed to provide better insights into analyzing the role of community members in their monitoring and evaluation. They were also expected to provide more useful lessons since they had lived long enough to be understood by the project managers and the community in general.

Descriptive design was used to plan the study leading to the findings used in the paper. A descriptive design helps social science scholars to plan and execute a study whose findings bring out information about phenomena in its natural setting.

To obtain the required sample for the paper findings, a cluster sampling technique was used to select two clusters with the desired qualities of respondents. From the clusters, 59 projects were identified and their project managers interviewed.

1.5. Findings and Discussions

The paper gives findings from a field study conducted among project managers of community projects in the slums of Kibra and Embakasi south. These projects were selected because they were diverse and had been in existence for over 8 years. The projects formed the unit of analysis and project managers provided information required to answer the research question.

This section gives these findings as analyzed and discussions are made in light of the findings. The key point was to bring out to the aspect of community involvement in project key activities of monitoring and evaluation.

One aspect of community participation in project matters is through attendance of meetings to deliberate on project matters. Findings showed that members of the community were involved in meetings. Table one below shows according to most (59%) project managers, community members participated in between 3-8 meetings. This shows community members paid attention to the projects in their area. However the fact that, 41% of community members attended only 1-3 meetings is worrying. It implies that project managers are not sensitizing communities' members enough to attract them to the projects meetings. Lack of attendance in meetings disadvantages the community since they will not have a chance to raise issues relating to the project.

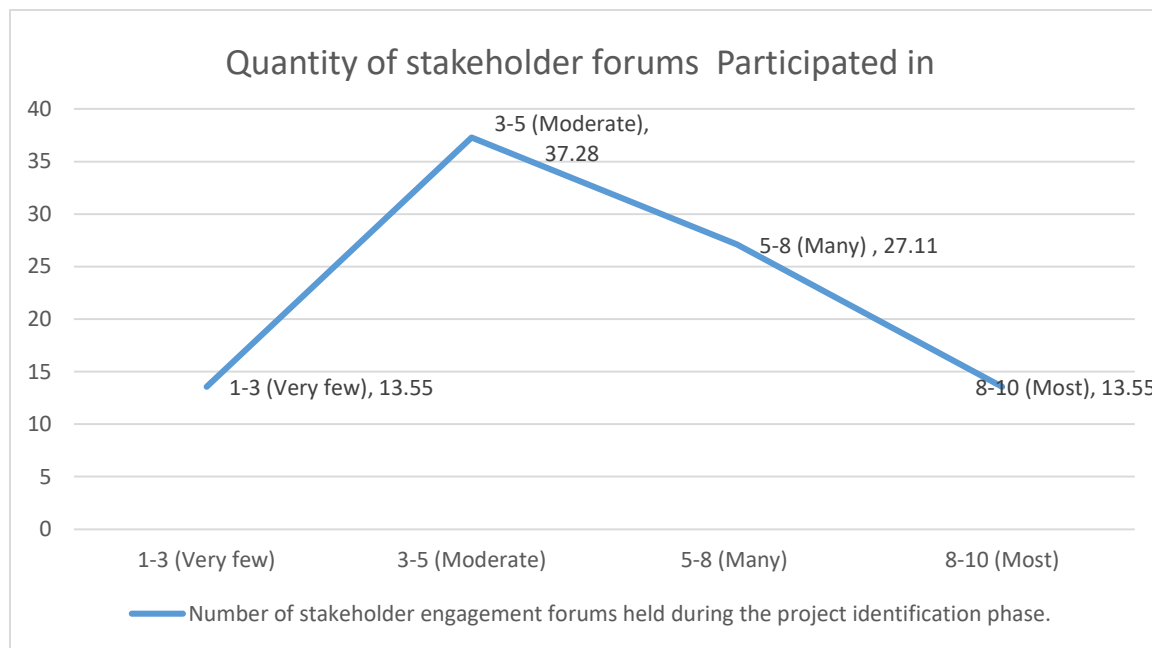
Table 1: Community Participation in Project in Initial Meetings

Response	Frequency	Percentage
1–2	9	15.25
2– 3	15	25.42
3– 5	20	33.91
5– 8	15	25.42
Total	59	100

Attendance of project initial meetings gives community members a chance to raise design issues as well decide on key monitoring areas to pay attention to when providing M&E feedback.

Another aspect of community involvement is following up on project activities by getting engaged in stakeholder forums where other project stakeholders have a chance to engage project managers and with each other. The graph below shows how community members participated in the stakeholder forums.

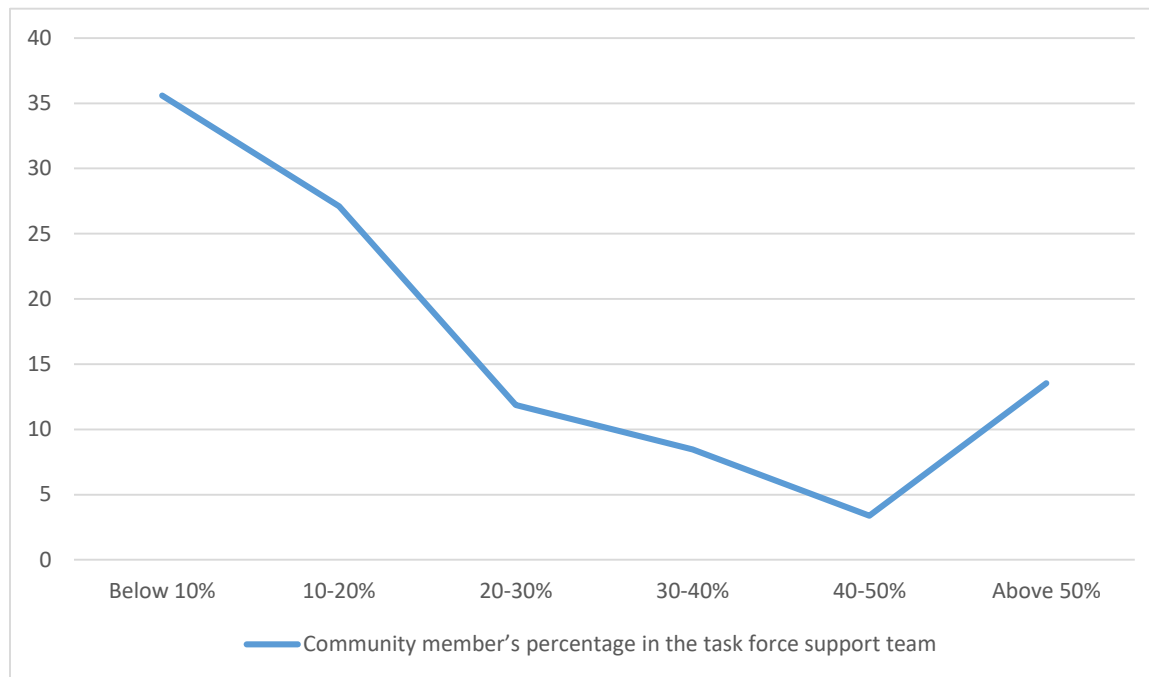
Graph 1. Quantity of stakeholder forums Participated



From the findings, community representation in stakeholder forums was moderate with only 13.55% attending most forums. This implies a poor performance on this criteria. Failure to engage with other stakeholders denies the members a chance to improve on the project outcomes. They may also miss important insights which reduces their bargaining power when it comes to project decision making. Clearly these finding indicate poor motivation for community members to participate in project engagements.

Another critical aspect the paper highlights and which is the focus of this paper is the enhancement of community participation in monitoring and evaluation of projects. This aspect of project management is critical because it allows community members to provide crucial feedback when called upon. From this perspective community members are expected to be included in the taskforce that is involved in M&E activities. Being part of such a taskforce allows members to gather views about the project and contribute to its performance.

Graph 2: Community member’s percentage in the task force support team



From the findings, majority of the projects have engaged below 10% of the community members in the projects M&E task force. This scenario puts communities at a disadvantage since they may not be in a position to know what the findings are and how issues are dealt with.

Another aspect related to M&E is involving community members to view projects in the field and observe any anomalies. Field visits are meant to create an interface between project implementers and the management team to share learning experiences and to address emerging issues. Involvement of community members gives them a feel of the project and also an opportunity to get clarification when things do not go as expected. These findings are presented below:

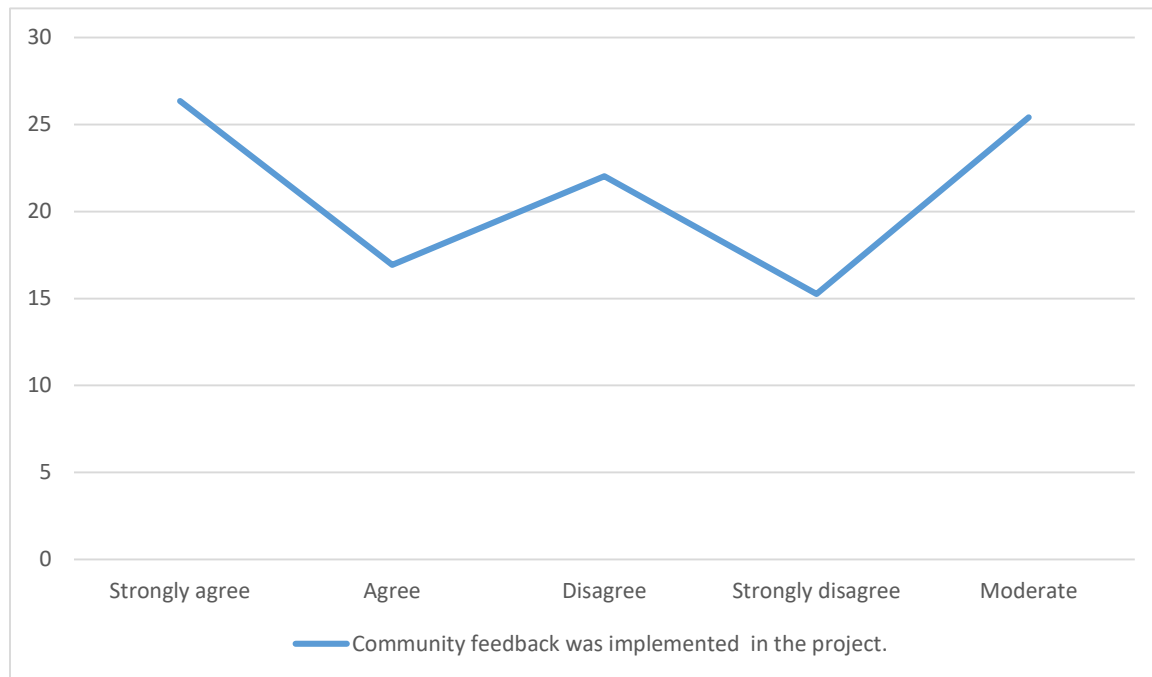
Table 2: Community members’ inclusion in project location visits

Response	Frequency	Percent
1 -Very Low	14	23.73
2- Moderately Low	18	30.50
3-Moderately High	9	15.25
4-Very High	11	18.65
5- Highest	7	11.87
Total	59	100

From the findings, most projects as indicated by project managers involved community members in field visit to a very low extent as shown by 54.2% of the respondents. This is a dangerous trend since community members are the beneficiaries of projects and their lack of participation in evaluation of the projects translates to low ownership. This also raises questions as to why project implementers would not encourage participation of community members in location visits. Community members should also seek to be involved because it is their right to get to know how projects targeting them are implemented as these projects represent their resource allocation from either the government or development partners.

Aside from field visits, community members are expected to provide feedback about the project. This feedback should be put into consideration when decisions and reports on project success in meeting community's needs is being prepared. Community members should always monitor how willing and ready are project teams in incorporating their views to the key decision points relating to the project. This feedback is what they can bank on to have their concerns addressed. The graph below shows these findings:

Graph 3: Community input Execution in the project



From the findings the views of the project managers were mixed as to whether they agreed that community members' feedback was incorporated in the project execution process. This mixed view shows lack of clear information on this aspect which could as well mean in some projects the feedback was incorporated while in others it was not. Community participation is core to the success of projects and therefore efforts must be put by project planners to ensure adequate representation of community members is achieved.

1.6. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

From the findings presented it is evident that community participation in projects' M&E activities in the informal settlement in Nairobi County is minimal. This therefore shows that project managers and implementers have not put maximum effort to ensure this situation changes. The implication of such a scenario is that community projects may not be completed within the expectations of the community members since they have no way of contributing their views. Since they are not represented in key forums they may also not understand the true value of such projects hence losing out to unscrupulous project leaders who may not have the interest of the community at heart. From the foregoing we can conclude majority of the community based projects in the informal settlement areas in Nairobi have failed to fully involve the community in the M&E system and hence implementing projects that have low stakeholder value. Failure to fully take into considerations community feedback creates a breakdown in the control system a situation that again creates a project for project managers as opposed to community projects.

This paper hence recommends that the government and donor agencies and anybody implementing projects in the informal settlements need to have the backing of community members before the project funding continues. In this regard, project managers should be tasked with the responsibility of ensuring full participation of communities.

The following specific recommendations are made to improve participation of community members in projects:

1. Develop project inbuilt strategies for community involvement that are verifiable at every stage of the project cycle.
2. Project managers need to set performance measurement criteria that underscores the contribution of community members in projects.
3. Capacity building programmes for community members before projects are implemented to ensure that members are equipped with skills and knowledge to provide oversight roles in projects that affect them.
4. Strengthening accountability procedures whereby project leaders are held accountable for non-community participation.
5. Transparency in project activities to ensure issues are raised as they occur not to wait until projects are completed and community members raise their views in retrospect.
6. Enhancement of two way project reporting and feedback system to ensure that project teams and the community members have a convergent point.

Future researchers can replicate this study for rural projects and in other disadvantaged groups. Research can also be undertaken to uncover challenges that community members encounter while seeking representation in project management especially for complex projects.

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