



Participatory Approaches in Community Development Projects: An exploratory study of NGOs in Northern Province

Diluxshana, T^a Nanthagopan, Y^b and Thirugnanasampanthar, S^c

*^{a,b,c}Department of Economics and Management, Faculty of Business Studies,
Vavuniya Campus of the University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka*

^adiluxshana1995@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to investigate participatory approaches in community development projects in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The primary data was obtained from 10 in-depth interviews with 10 NGO project managers in the northern province of Sri Lanka. Thematic analysis was used to identify participatory approaches in community projects. The study revealed that NGOs widely apply participatory approaches in the project initiation, planning, implementation and evaluation stages. Also, the study identified the following practices of participatory approaches in NGOs; Participatory meetings, teamwork, participation in fieldwork, participation in rural and needs assessments, cross-sectional walking, open discussions, community meetings, and participatory evaluation. The project managers emphasized that participatory approaches are very important for the project's success and sustainability in community development projects. However, they emphasized the following obstacles that hinder the effective application of participatory approaches such as political influences, different casts/groups in the communities, lack of technical knowledge among beneficiaries, and conflict between people in the community.

Keywords: community development projects, non-governmental organizations and participatory approaches

Introduction

The participatory approach is a development method where project stakeholders participate in the development process and are useful practices in community development projects to better identify community projects and plan, execute, and monitor projects (Sakalasooriya, 2013). Koralagama et al., (2010) emphasized that the best community participation is one of the key approaches to achieve sustainability in a project. Northern Province of Sri Lanka was severely affected by an internal conflict for thirty years until 2009. There were many NGOs that volunteered to improve the livelihoods of vulnerable communities that were affected by the lack of services of health, education, agriculture and infrastructure; However, previous researchers highlighted that community development projects do not produce the results



that the project expected in Sri Lanka (Piyasena & Fernando, 2016; Nanthagopan et al., 2019). Therefore, the study explores the participatory approaches of NGOs applied in community development projects and explores the level of applications and obstacles in the effective use of participatory approaches.

Literature Review

Participatory approaches are applied in different projects, such as the top-down, bottom-up, and stakeholder participatory approaches (Kadurenge, 2016). This approach revitalizes community development projects in developing countries. There are four types of participatory approaches depending on the circumstances. Such circumstances applied the following methods for development; Rapid rural assessment, Participatory rural assessment, Assessment and monitoring of participatory assessment and Participatory needs assessment (Koralagama et al., 2010). Community projects in different countries took various participatory approaches. Previous studies highlighted the participatory approach in initiating the effect of projects to the priorities that the community needs (Alam & Ihsan, 2012; Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya et al., 2016), in planning the effects for the empowerment of society, community mobilization and organization (Withanachchi, 2011; Ben-Meir, 2017), Effects of execution on self-management (Withanachchi, 2011); Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya et al., (2016). In Effect of monitoring and evaluation to obtain financial support and human resources support (Jamadar, 2015).

Methodology

This research is exploratory and the qualitative method is equipped in this study. The study applied in-depth interviews to explore participatory approaches in NGO community development projects. The purposive sampling technique is used to select the 10 NGO project managers from the 10 selected NGOs' community projects. The selected NGOs focus primarily on community development projects, such as livelihood development, pre-education, women's empowerment, and youth skills enhancement. The selected NGO managers have a wide range of project work experience and participate in participatory project approaches. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis.

Results and Discussions

The study explored the following participatory approaches (Table 1) that are applied in community development projects at the initiation, planning,



execution, and evaluation stage of a project. The finding highlighted that NGOs apply participatory approaches at all stages of the project. However, community participation is useful in the initiation and execution stages and, on the contrary, low in the planning and evaluation stages. Furthermore, the study revealed that the community contribution for self-physical and material is very high in projects and the financial and technical contribution is less in projects.

Table 1. Participatory Approaches in Community Development Projects

Details	Study Findings
Practices	Participatory meetings, teamwork, participation in fieldwork, participation in rural and needs assessments, transect walk, open discussions, community meetings and participatory assessment
Community Participation	In the initiation stage, the participation from the community is very high In the planning stage, the participation from the community is low In the execution stage, community participation is high In the evaluation stage, community participation is low.
Community Contribution	Self-physical - Yes / High Finance - No / Low Technical - No / Low Material - Yes / High Political influences
Obstacles in Practices	Different cast/groups in the communities Lack of technical knowledge among the beneficiaries The conflict between people in the community.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study explored the participatory approaches which are widely applied in community development projects of NGOs in Northern province, Sri Lanka, that are Participatory meetings, teamwork, participation in fieldwork, participation in rural and needs assessments, transect walk, open discussions, community meetings and participatory assessment. The study also revealed that the participatory approaches applied by NGOs are very satisfactory, several obstacles hinder the efficient use of participatory practices, which are political influences, different cast/groups in the communities, lack of technical knowledge among the beneficiaries, conflict between people in the community. The study is undertaken in the northern province of Sri Lanka, it is the post-conflict area. Therefore, the results are highly transferable; the countries have a similar context.

The study recommends that participatory practices in community projects are crucial to correctly identify community projects and be successful in project planning and execution. Therefore, NGOs should identify the correct



practices to suit their projects' nature and consider reducing or avoiding community obstacles by developing appropriate strategies. The appropriate participatory approaches and efficient use of them are very crucial to the success of projects.

References

- Alam, A., & Ishan, S. (2012). Role of participatory rural appraisal in community development: A case study of Barani area development project in agriculture, livestock and forestry development in Kohat. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 2(8), 25-38.
- Ben-Meir, Y. (2017). Participatory Planning of Housing and Community Development, *Journal of Business and Economics*, 8(1), 80-96.
- Ikechukwu-Ilomuanya, A. B., Omeje, J. C., Oyeoku, E. K., & Eseadi, C. (2016). Facilitating Participatory Approach to Resolving Problems Facing Nigeria's Rural Families. *International Journal of Applied Environmental Sciences*, 11(1), 43-54.
- Jamadar, N. (2015). The Community and Beneficiaries' Participation in Comprehensive Water Resource Management: A Case of the Brantas River Basin's Comprehensive Water Resource Management in Indonesia, *Journal of Kanazawa Seiryu University*, 49(1), 41-57.
- Kadurenge, B. M., Nyonje, R. O., Onguko, B. B., & Ndunge, D. K. (2016). The Evolving Nature of Community Participation in Public Development Projects in Kenya: A Literature Review. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 6(9), 31-38.
- Koralagama, D. N., Wijeratne, M., & De Silva, W. N. (2010). Emergence of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) technique as a strategy towards sustainable development: a Sri Lankan experience. *Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Tropics and Subtropics (JARTS)*, 108(2), 149-160.
- Nanthagopan, Y., Williams, N., & Thompson, K. (2019). Levels and interconnections of project success in development projects by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, 12 (2), 487-511.
- Piyasena, M.L.U.F. & Fernando, R.L.S. (2016). People's Participation in Development Projects in Sri Lanka (With special reference of Kalthota village. 3rd International Conference on Social science, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.
- Sakalasooriya, N. (2013), Sustainability of participatory development projects in local government area of Srilanka: The case study of



3rd Research Conference on Business Studies (RCBS) – 2020

community governance project in Nikaweratiya and Navithanvelli Divisional Councils. Culture, Globalization and the Developing World, 2nd International Conference on Social Science, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

Withanachchi, S. (2011), Participatory Development Approach in Local Governance – Its Relevance for Economic Development: a case study of Sri Lanka, *Federal Governance*, 8 (3), 50-68.