

The influence of community participation on decentralized community access road service delivery in Greater Bushenyi District.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the impact of community participation on decentralized community access to road service delivery in the greater Bushenyi District. The research aimed to understand the factors that hinder community participation in project design, resource maintenance, and management, as well as the success and challenges of decentralization and community participation in road service delivery. A descriptive case study design was used, with a sample of 123 from an accessible population of 179. The results showed a positive relationship between community participation in project planning, implementation, and maintenance of road services. The study concluded that a district development plan and budget are crucial for better access to road networks, and workshops and conferences can be effective for local mobilization. The study recommended conducting more consultative and feedback meetings, lobbying for funds, creating a task force to oversee awareness programs, improving remunerations, and addressing human resource gaps. The local government should also focus on sensitizing politicians, rewarding road maintenance, formulating road ordinances, and lobbying for more funding.

Keywords: Community Participation, decentralized, Community access road, service delivery, greater Bushenyi

INTRODUCTION

Community participation requires involvement of people actively in terms of their knowledge, capabilities, attitudes and activities for working together for the betterment of society. Peoples' participation creates a safe and reliable society where people can engage in community participation which leads to a better managed society [1]. Further, community participation is designated as an important aspect that is directly linked to social capital, establishing a strong bond, relationships, interaction, trust, and a sense of ownership among community members [2]. Government of Uganda has for a long period of time embraced aspects of road construction in a bid to harness efforts embedded in the National Development Plan [3]. Uganda has 21,000kms of national roads, 13,000kms of district roads, 2800kms of urban roads and about 30,000kms of community roads

linking communities to different economic activities within the districts and other neighboring countries. From the traditional point of view specifically in the African contemporary society, the issue of community participation was valued by the communities. For instance, in central Uganda, community participation was referred to as "*bulungibwansi*" and there were designated days when all members of the community would be required to participate in an activity for the benefit of all members through the collective community efforts to construct and maintain the community infrastructure. It is important to note that, the aspect of community participation, according to [4], has not been embraced on recent in the community and it would be seen that people are always waiting for Government to give them the services they require, including the construction of roads and

their maintenance. However, the community seems not to be ready to guard them for their benefit. The objectives of this study are; to examine the influence of community participation in project design on decentralized community access road service delivery, to establish the factors that stop communities from participating in project implementation of the decentralized community access road service delivery, to examine the influence of community participation in resource maintenance and management of the decentralized community access road service delivery and to examine the success and challenges of the implementation of decentralization and community participation in road service delivery. Worth noting, decentralization is an avenue for effective service delivery as a model of local governance which many developing countries have adopted based on principles of good governance. The model is important for local leadership and community, since it empowers the residents to choose their leadership and allows them leverage to participation in matters affecting their daily life activities. [5] suggested that local institutions are best placed to adapt the supply of a service to the requirements of people, by being close to the public, transforming citizens to service recipient consumers and ensuring greater transparency for service quality for citizens. According to [6], the recommendations of the World Bank to decentralize political and administrative decision-making powers and sub-national roles to facilitate the delivery of services are a result of decentralisation in Africa. [7] defines decentralisation within the state as involving a transfer of power to perform some service to the public, from an entity or some central government agency to some other person or agency closer to the public to be served. [8] agree with conventional claims in support of such changes, indicating that decentralisation produces productivity and quality improvements in the provision of public services, along with higher standards of transparency and responsiveness. Despite the advantages of a decentralised service delivery model, there is a significant and

potential danger in decentralisation. For instance, weakness in administration and managing staff and inadequate finance which is coupled with poor funding is regarded as a trigger towards the potential downfall of the framework and this can contribute to poor service delivery and result in community unrest [9]. In Namibia, [10] argue that local authorities play a pivotal role of being an effective and responsive driver of the local demands and should work towards improving the well-being and the living conditions of the residents. Some studies [11] show that the level of poor road service delivery is caused by the poor leadership, dysfunctional governance systems, misappropriation of the councils' funds, corruption and poor implementation of recruitment policies, have singularly or cumulatively contributed to poor local governance. [12] adds imprudent financial policies in terms of poor financial discipline, poor planning and ineffective financial management to the reasons for poor local government service delivery. Since 1990, after independence, the performance of many local authorities in Namibia in terms of service delivery has deteriorated [13]. The picture in other African countries has not been any better. For example, in Zimbabwe, [14] highlighted that the legislation that governs the Kadoma City Council had failed to instill the mandate of good service delivery by the local authorities. The poor service delivery by the local authorities has frustrated communities, resulting in frequent protests the standard and quality of the service delivery, leadership and lack of good governance [15]. [16], point out that these demonstrations are a sign that the delivery of services by the town council are not in line with the community's standards and expectations. [17,18] argue that in the city of Nairobi in Kenya, increasing urbanisation, rural-urban migration, and natural population growth resulted in an increase in the production of solid waste which did not follow an equal increase in capability to handle the waste generated. The ineffectiveness of leadership in Africa is a major issue that

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has led to a variety of problems in the region. Weak leadership results in poor governance in Africa, which is often characterised by weak institutions, weak rule of law, corruption, nepotism, lack of accountability, lack of transparency, and poor service delivery. Empirical evidence has linked poor infrastructural development to poor leadership, corruption, and unsustainable infrastructural projects, resulting in poor service delivery [19]. However, [20] perceived leadership as an intervening variable as it reduces or enhances service delivery depending on the policy, decision, and the implementation. Service delivery, as used in this context, refers to the provision of basic social services such as electricity, water, and other infrastructural facilities that are provided by the government. A significant revelation on how leaders influence service delivery is that the role of a leader

Kamusiime is to coordinate activities, improve business processes, motivate employees, secure commitment to the corporate strategy, and align organisational structure with the strategy [21]. Moreover, recent studies support the use of leadership skills to influence followers or subordinates and to enhance service delivery in organisations [22, 23, 24]. This study is based on the behavioural theory of leadership, which states that a leader's success is determined by his or her behavior [25]. Accordingly, the behavioural approach consists of task and relationship behaviour approaches. Task behaviour involves leaders who engage in spelling out the duties and responsibilities of group members. Comparatively, relationship behavior entails leaders who make followers feel at ease with one another, with themselves, and with their surroundings.

Methods Sampling

This study used both simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Simple random sampling was used because of its simplicity and the ability to allow all respondents an equal chance of being included in a sample. This technique was applied on identification of the LCI & II chairpersons together with Road User Committees to whom the questionnaires

were administered. Further, purposive sampling was used to select key informants for interviews. These included the district and sub county top leadership. The purposive sampling was used because it enabled the researcher to select the exact respondents who were involved in implementing road construction projects in the area under study.

Instruments of data collection

The study used questionnaire survey and interviews as methods of data collection. The questionnaire comprised closed ended questions which respondents answered in writing about the research variables of the study. The interview guide was semi-structured with some key guiding

questions designed to elicit key information about the different objectives but with room for exploration of alternative narratives. Each respondent was asked the same questions during face-to-face interaction during data collection.

Data collection methods

Data collection methods included interviews and questionnaire survey.

Interviews

Interviews were used to collect data from key informants who included district and sub county top leadership and local road contractors. This enabled the researcher to collect important in-depth information on the topic under study through probing for responses. An interview guide was developed as a tool to guide the researcher

during the interviews and contained mainly open ended. The method enabled the respondents to give detailed responses to the questions in the interview guide. According to [26], interviews increase the response rate since respondents cannot ignore the interviewer in front of them. Besides, the interviewer gets the opportunity to probe for answers hence reducing on the non-response.

Questionnaire survey

The questionnaires consisted mainly closed ended items. The method allowed the self-administration of the questionnaires to the respondents. This was important because respondents were allowed enough time to complete the questionnaires. The method enabled the obtaining of specific information on each of the research questions. The questionnaires were delivered to and retrieved from the respondents by the

researcher with the help of a research assistant. This helped to increase the response rate and minimised loss of the questionnaires. According to [27] notes that this method enables the respondents to give sensitive information without fear. The quantitative study which involved a survey using a questionnaire allowed the researcher to request the participants to objectively respond to various questions pertaining to service delivery [28].

RESULTS

Key findings from the study indicate that 74% score and a mean score of 3.7 show that majority of the respondents agreed that local resources were required to ensure better road service delivery in the district, however 23% disagreed to the statement and 3% were not sure of this progress. The results meant that greater Bushenyi district needs resources including donations, local revenue and grants from central government to boost its road construction operations. In addition, it can also be noted that the district is mandated to identify, collect and spend its local revenue sources obtained from sources including business park taxes, licenses, market dues, local service tax among others to ensure that it boosts its revenue and aid local road construction and boost social or public service delivery. On whether the local resources were readily available for use when needed in the district yielded n=45, 68% disagreed scores, while n=19, 29% of the respondents agreed and n=2, 3% neither agreed nor disagreed respectively, meaning that the district remains financially stretched whereby less resources or funds are readily available for use. Many of the respondents who participated in the study indicated that the resources were insufficient to cater for the many roads in the district, with a mean score of 2.86, standard deviation score of 1.311. However, 41% agreed to the statement that these were sufficient and only 1% neither agreed nor disagreed respectively. The results reveal that the district has no choice but to operate on an over stretched budget to boost its road construction projects. In addition, it can also be argued

that the district has numerous priority activities to which it allocates its funds; this tends to affect its plans to boost its local road network to acceptable standards. Majority of the respondents' (47%) agreed to the statement that there are standards followed while constructing the roads in the district, meaning that road construction requirements were made. The district technical officials led by the Planning and Engineering departments came up with key required standards and those requirements were made public for transparent bidding. However, 9% of the respondents were not sure; however, as indicated by 44% of the respondents, most of the specifications seemed not to have been followed hence a discrepancy in implementation hence negatively affecting road service delivery within the district. One contractor said;

"In the event that a road has been planned to be constructed, the district has got to ensure that all the bidding companies are prequalified and meet all necessary requirements needed to construct the road. This is important in ensuring or meeting required standards"

In addition, a mean score of 2.92 and 53% response revealed that many of the respondents indicated that supervision was done in a manner that ensured adherence to the set standards of road construction, meaning that a number of routine road site visits and meetings were scheduled and organized. The teams included personnel from the district procurement department, engineering department and contractors whose role

was to check on the progress of the road projects as this was intended to ensure that road works were done according to plan. This was supported by a key informant who said;

“The district allows and dispatches a team of staff who include Engineers, planners and procurement members to the respective road sites. The follow up is intended to obtain information and equally report to its management”

Results further revealed a mean score of 3.14, where the majority (53%) respondents agreed to the statement that a good road network existed in greater Bushenyi district that provided access to the locals. However, (41%) disagreed to the statement and 6% were neutral. In addition, 65% of the respondents with a standard deviation score of 1.299 indicate that a majority respondents agreed to the fact that the Ugandan Government had developed the local government road network to enable the community have free access to essential social services; 29% disagreed and 6% were not sure. The results can reveal that respondents appreciated that a good road network links one to health centers, education centers, and nearby markets, an indication that they value public service delivery. The results reveal that most of the respondents use roads and are aware of the need for continuous improvement/construction of the road network in their community to ensure that they, as community members continue benefiting from them.

In an interview with one district official, it was noted that;

“In our Local Government, road construction works are among the district priorities every financial year and as such, resources are allocated to facilitate maintenance of existing roads, construction of new roads, digging and de-silting road trenches to avoid instances where surface water stays on the road especially during the rainy season”.

Limited Community Participation

The findings reveal that there is limited local community participation in the

On whether there was a development plan for road construction in greater Bushenyi district, majority of the respondents, 85% agreed with fewer 6% not being sure and 9% disagreeing respectively. The statistics can reveal that there exists an inventory of all the roads in the district including their status and coverage in terms of number of kilometers of each road. In a related interview, one key informant at the district level said,

“All LGs are required to have 5-year development plans containing all projects to be implemented within the five years including roads and the plans are reviewed every year in consultation with the local communities”

On whether Government of Uganda allocates sufficient funds for the district development fund to support road construction, 96% of the respondents agreed, 0% disagreed and 4% neither agreed nor disagreed, meaning that despite the efforts by the Government to avail resources to the district to implement the better delivery of services for instance road construction, the resources or funds were insufficient to cater for the increased demand for better roads and other services within greater Bushenyi district. However, the researcher found out that the little that was released to the districts was equally used to support a few construction projects meaning that the bulk of the projects identified by the people were not implemented because of scarce resources. This was confirmed by one key informant, who said;

“With the decentralization policy, Local Governments are better placed than the Central Government to identify and respond to the needs of local communities and this is done through community meetings to discuss with the community members the issues they consider to be the needs that Government can solve for them”.

Council's affairs, stemming from inter-alia, poor relationship that exists between

the councilors and executive council members. Almost 47% 'disagreed' that the local councilors are effective drivers of public involvement and participation in matters of local government. These findings concur with that reported by [29] on their study in Nyanga Township in Cape Town, South Africa. These researchers found that the municipal official's

behaviour was attributed to the "know-all" attitude and the assumption that they have the expertise, experience and technological know-how to provide services [29]. They believed that there was no need to consult and involve the communities in the matters affecting their livelihoods.

Leadership

Democratic leadership promotes an atmosphere of participation, collaboration, and consensus-building [30]. It encourages members of a group to be involved in the decision-making process, allowing for open dialogue, and creating a sense of trust and safety. Democratic leaders strive to create an environment where everyone feels comfortable to express their ideas and opinions [31]. The following are the participants' opinions on democratic leadership and its influence on service delivery process: "The main focus is

knowledge exchange. A supervisor does not necessarily have all the answers. We see things differently, but your subordinates may have a solution, therefore you should let them share it". One of the key informants said; *"I like an environment where everyone is welcome to join and offer their suggestions for how to resolve the problem. This is important since you need other people to help you get outcomes, therefore decisions should take everyone's input into account to make them feel like they are a part of the process"*.

DISCUSSION

Community participation in planning was found to have a positive bearing on ensuring better road service delivery in greater Bushenyi district. This statement can be linked to a number of positive opinions obtained in this study, for instance respondents up to 65% agreed that they participated into availing information for any potential road project. This is in line with the views put forward by [32], recognising the importance of involving the beneficiary communities in the process of planning for rural infrastructure. In addition, [33] points out that local people would like to see their roles in road projects increased since they are the primary road beneficiaries and are the ones that are most committed to the quality and sustainability of these roads. They want to be particularly involved in the design and supervision stages of these

roads. The findings reveal that there is limited local community participation in the Council's affairs, stemming from inter-alia, poor relationship that exists between the councilors and executive council members. Almost 47% 'disagreed' that the local councilors are effective drivers of public involvement and participation in matters of local government. These findings concur with that reported by [29] on their study in Nyanga Township in Cape Town, South Africa. These researchers found that the municipal official's behaviour was attributed to the "know-all" attitude and the assumption that they have the expertise, experience and technological know-how to provide services [29]. They believed that there was no need to consult and involve the communities in the matters affecting their livelihoods.

CONCLUSION

Based on the prior discussions held on community participation in planning, it can be concluded that timely release of sufficient funds by the Government to Local Governments based on a designed development plan translates to better

service delivery including construction of good road networks easily access by locals. Local mobilization is needed to better road services coupled with awareness (using social gathering, workshops and conferences, road

contractors were instrumental in creating casual jobs for the locals while site visits and inspection closed a number of road construction gaps. In regard to community participation in maintenance, it can be

Greater Bushenyi district management should liaise with its local leaders and ensure that most of its stakeholders including the beneficiary communities engage in a series of consultative meetings with contractors among other parties. This will ensure that more reliable and valuable information is elicited from these service users and used to draw better road project plans and will address the problem of gaps in information elicitation and provide required information for the project. Further, the researcher recommends that greater Bushenyi district should plan and always hold feed-back meetings to inform the community members of the road project that have been selected for implementation in a particular financial year. The reason to this effect will be to encourage community members not to shun future meetings because they would have known that their views equally matter to their leaders. Also, on the issue of insufficient funds as released by the Government, the researcher recommends that greater Bushenyi district leadership with its planning unit may devise means of externally lobbying for funds from multinational agencies to support road construction. This is intended to address the issue of inconsistent financial flow from the Government and allow timely construction of local roads. On the issue of sensitization programs, researcher

RECOMMENDATIONS

Kamusiime concluded that increased promotion of corporate social responsibility and routine maintenance would prolong road life, while road sensitization programs mean good road utilization and maintenance

recommends that the district, sub-county, town council leadership should liaise with the local council leaders to create a task force to undertake awareness creation programs to support its road projects. There is always need to mobilize and sensitize the community about any road construction project before it commences. The details of the project including coverage, cost, time period and jobs available should all be discussed to create awareness and ownership of the project. Road maintenance should be given more priority by both the Central Government and the districts. In spite of considerable resources being injected into the roads sector by the Government of Uganda, the researcher found out that the recipient communities have not been brought on board to play their role in the process of having good quality roads in their communities. The issue of maintenance of all Government infrastructure should be made a law with the necessary sanctions for failure to adhere to it. The researcher recommends that greater Bushenyi district political leaders are sensitized to desist from telling people that Government will do everything for them but should instead mobilize their people and lead the efforts in undertaking maintenance works for existing infrastructure within their communities.

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