

# A Survey of Factors Influencing Community Participation in Public Development Projects in Tanzania: A Case Study of Siha District Council

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**Abstract:** *Community participation has been a concern in most projects especially in less developed countries. Cosmetic participation has been used purposely to justify projects and at the end of the day projects get stacked. The purpose of this study was to establish the factors that affect community participation in public development projects in Tanzania. A descriptive design was adopted for the study covering 100 a total population of 100 respondents comprising of staff, development committee and community members, and councilors. Data was collected through the use of self-administered questionnaires that were distributed to respondents at their work stations. Data analysis involved use of frequencies, percentages, means and Pearson's product moment correlation which was applied to establish the influence of independent variables on the dependent variable. According to the study findings, information access had a significant and positive correlation with participation at 0.322. There was also a positive correlation (0.357) between political will and community participation in public development projects. The results of Pearson's moment correlation test also revealed positive correlation (0.285) between civic education and community participation. Based on the findings, the study concluded that the level of community participation in development projects was high as a result of access to information, political will and civic education. Among the three factors political will had the greatest influence, followed by access to information and lastly civic education. The study recommends that the government and the other stakeholders should facilitate and increase awareness on community participation in public development projects in order to create a clear and common understanding of essences of their contribution and ultimate benefits.*

**Keywords:** Community participation, public development projects, cosmetic participation, information access, civic education, political will.

## 1. Background

The thrust of development agenda Tanzania since its independence has been on economic growth and poverty reduction, with the prime objective of ensuring the majority of Tanzanians have access to development opportunities and are able to enjoy the accruing benefits. In an effort to spearhead the pace of achieving the desired development agenda, the Government in 1999 launched the Tanzania Development Vision 2025. The gist of the Vision is that by 2025 Tanzania should have made unprecedented economic transformation and development to achieve middle-income status characterized by high levels of industrialization, competitiveness, quality livelihood, rule of law; and having in place a learned and pro-learning society.

An independent study that was commissioned in 2009 to critically review implementation of the vision after 10 years of its launch revealed that progress towards implementation of Vision 2025 had mixed results. The Government of the United Republic of Tanzania embarked on the empowerment of the local people from lower level to enhance the local participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the public development projects to ensure that people's demands and interests are in cooperated in the plans. While the effort to boost community participation has been on for about two decades, the issue is gaining critical importance in the wake of continued sub-optimal participation in the development projects. This also intends to enhance a sense of ownership of various project plans at the local level.

Policy makers, Government Officials and other stakeholders strongly believe that participatory planning and implementation can help development players address and allocate resources as per community needs for sustainable development. Participatory planning in public development projects provide the opportunity for people participation in the allocation of resources to priority social policies, and for them to monitor public spending and policy performance. As such, local constituents gain ownership of the policies/programs/projects for local development; thus, they are committed to support local government unit (LGU) social policies and development initiatives. Guimaraes (2009) argues that increased community participation was because of unsuccessful approaches to rural development and poverty reduction efforts that did not involve the community, including the poor, and as a result were often, misallocation, misdirected and ill informed.

After the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD- Rome, 1979), it was declared that participation of local people in public development projects, designing policies and programs that affect their lives should be 'a basic human right'. In response to that, many development agencies, international organizations, NGOs, donors and governments were obliged to adopt participatory approaches in order to ensure effectiveness and sustainability of development activities (Guimaraes, 2009). Project approaches to development remain a vital instrument by development agencies to reach and assist poor communities in the developing world. Development interventions in the past have tended to focus on resource and knowledge transfer to beneficiary communities through the 'top-down' approach (FAO, 1991). However, several decades of development funding have demonstrated the

failures of the 'top-down' approach to reach and benefit the rural poor (Cernea and Ayse, 1997). This realization has led to the adoption of the 'bottom-up' approach to development. However, despite this upsurge in the 'bottom-up' approach to development, project beneficiaries are still not fully participating in the identification, planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of projects that are meant to improve their lot (Blackman, 2003).

Even when an element of participation is built into projects, it is all too often largely in terms of local investment of labour and not in real decision-making. Beneficiary communities are only informed after plans have been made and that this is done through formal meetings where the officers justify their plans but modification is not considered (APO, 2002). Limited community participation in the implementation and management of projects means that the projects have few chances of sustainability (Rahmato, 1991).

## 2. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the factors influencing community participation in public development projects in Tanzania; A case study of Siha District Council. Specifically, the study sought to determine the influence of access to information, community participation, and civic education on community participation in public development projects in Siha District Council.

## 3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive research design covering a total population of 100 technical staff at Siha District Council. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire. Before administration of the research instrument, it was pilot-tested and subjected to reliability testing using Cronbach Alpha resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.788 which was above the critical minimum recommended (Robbins & Judge, 2007). Data collection comprised of two main domains; namely nominal and ordinal that call for both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques. The key statistical analysis tools used were frequencies, percentages, mean and correlation. Whereas descriptive statistics were used to determine the status of the variables under study, correlation was used to determine and explain the relationship between the independent and dependent variables

## 4. Results and Analysis

### Response Rate

The study achieved a response rate of 71% which was considered adequate for data analysis. The high response rate was due to the use of both English and Kiswahili during data collection.

### The Influence of Information Access on Community Participation in Development Projects

The first objectives sought to determine the influence of access to information on community participation in public development projects. It is important to note that information is essential to any project development as

supported by Melton (2012) who contends that the success of any project is greatly determined by the level of information people receive about the project itself beforehand. The results in Table 1 indicate that majority of the respondents felt that their understanding regarding community participation and public development was satisfactory (3.7465) owing to the amount of information given. They also noted that accessibility to information within the District Council was adequated and open to all Ward and Council staff including Councilors.

**Table 1:** Influence of access to information on community participation

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your understanding regarding community participation and public development is satisfactory	3.7465	1.02425
Accessibility of information within the District council is well and open to all staff, WARD and Councilors	3.3944	.81904
There is a relationship between effective community participation and positive public project delivery	3.4507	1.20462
Poor and or lack of proper information can lead to misunderstanding, mistakes and deviation of public project directions	3.9718	1.05522
Top down information sharing is an effective way of ensuring successful public project implementation	3.6143	.68721
District council staff/Councilors/WARD C members share timely, effective and accurate information to the community regarding planning, implementation and evaluation of public development projects	3.8592	1.09930
District Council staff/Councilors/WARD C members are timely, well informed and given accurate information from higher authorities regarding planning, implementation and evaluation of public development projects	3.7746	1.08493
In the past 6 Month as a council staff/Councilor/ WARD C member I have conducted meetings with community members in villages to plan, implement and or evaluate the public development projects.	3.4648	1.15673
My department/Office is always sharing public development project reports with the general public and reports are always accessible to the community	3.1143	1.16149
The patterns of information sharing in your district council needs improvement for effective public projects delivery	3.7606	1.12713

The respondents also somehow agreed that there was relationship between effective community participation and positive public project delivery (3.4507). They noted that poor and or lack of proper information can lead to misunderstanding, mistakes and deviation of public project directions (3.9718). Regarding information sharing, the

respondents confirmed that top down information sharing was an effective way of ensuring successful public project implementation (3.6143). They also stated that the district council staff, councilors and ward members shared timely, effective and accurate information to the community regarding planning, implementation and evaluation of public development projects (3.8592).

The respondents further confirmed that the information shared was timely and accurate (3.7746). It also emerged from most of the respondents that in the past 6 months, the council staff and members of wards had conducted meetings with community members in villages to plan implementation and evaluate public development projects (3.4648). The study also revealed that the concerned departments always shared public development project reports with the general public and that reports were always accessible to the community (3.1143). However, they felt that the patterns of information sharing in the district council needed improvement for effective public projects delivery (3.7606). The standard deviations were computed to check the level of scatteredness of the individual item responses. The higher the value of the standard deviation the higher the level of scatteredness. They ranged from 0.68721 to 1.16149, implying that the item responses were slightly varied.

#### **Testing of Hypothesis 1**

The study sought to test the hypothesis which stated that “*access to information does not significantly influence community participation in public development projects in Siha District Council*”. The analysis revealed a significant ( $p\text{-value}=0.007$ ) positive correlation (0.322) between access to information influence community participation in public development projects as shown in Table 2; the hypothesis was rejected. The correlation was significant at the 0.05 level of significance (2-tailed). This implies that an increase in access to information leads to increase in community participation in public development projects. The finding is consistent with a viewpoint by Pedersen (2006) who contends that in order to involve and hold stakeholders accountable, there must be a degree of transparency where involved parties have access to information and can scrutinize this information as well process and outcomes of the dialogue

**Table 2:** Correlation between access to information and community participation in development projects

Variable		Access to information	Community participation
Access to information	Pearson Correlation	1	.322**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.007
	N	71	68
Community participation	Pearson Correlation	.322**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.007	
	N	68	68

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### **The Relationship between Political Will and Community Participation in Development Projects**

The second objective sought to establish the influence of political will on community participation in public development projects. The objective was addressed through a set of statements regarding the influence of political will

on community participation in development projects. As shown in Table 3, most of the respondents felt that there was a very strong relationship between political will and community participation in public development projects (3.1143). Therefore, the council has had a close and smooth relationship with politically elected leaders (3.4648) because lack of political will in the council could pose a challenge in the effective community participation in public development projects (3.7887).

In order to enhance participation in the development project the council always met political leaders and other stakeholders to discuss strategies for the involvement in the project (3.3857). Paulo Freire (2006) argue that for the public development projects in the communities to succeed, communities need to actively take part in designing, planning, implementing and shaping the projects that affect them. The respondents further felt that training on leadership skills was required to make political leaders and council staff more accountable as well as equipping them with knowledge on how to make community members participate in public development projects (3.7465). The standard deviation ranged from 0.85721 to 1.06792 indicating a slight variation in the item responses.

**Table 3:** Influence of political will on community participation in development projects

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is a very strong relationship between political will and community participation in public development projects	3.1143	.95618
Our department/council has a close and smooth relationships with politically elected leaders	3.4648	.98316
Lack of Political will in our council pose a challenge in effective community participation in public development projects	3.7887	1.06792
You always meet with political leaders/Council staff/WARD C members to discuss strategies for community participation in public development projects	3.3857	.90558
Training on leadership skills is required to make political leaders and council staff more accountable and equip them with knowledge on how to make community members participate in public development projects	3.7465	.85721

#### **Testing of Hypothesis 2**

Hypothesis 2 stated that “*political has significant relationship with community participation in public development projects in Siha District Council*”. Pearson’s product moment correlation was run to establish whether a relationship exists between political will and community participation in public development projects. As shown in Table 4, there was a positive correlation (0.357) between political will and community participation in public development projects, thus the hypothesis was rejected. The  $p\text{-value}$  is 0.002 and thus, less than the alpha of 0.01 hence establishing a high significant relationship between variables. The findings are in line those of Wily (2003) who contends that working together as a team for both elected and appointed community leaders build a trust to the community and make them willing to participate effectively in the public development projects.

**Table 4:** Relationship between political will and community participation in public development projects

		Political will	Community participation
Political will	Pearson Correlation	1	.357**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.002
	N	71	71
Community participation	Pearson Correlation	.357**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	
	N	71	71

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

### The Effect of Civic Education on Community Participation in Development Projects

Objective three sought to establish the influence of civic education on community participation in public development projects. The objective was addressed through a set of statements regarding the influence of civic education on community participation in development projects. According to the study findings in Table 5, majority of the respondents felt that their understanding about civic education was satisfactory but more capacity enhancement required (3.9420). They also stated that civic education was important in ensuring community participation in public development projects (3.8857).

The respondents stated that the District staff, Councilors and Ward C members have enough civic education to well perform their responsibilities (4.0000). They also felt that adequate civic education was not being provided by the district council to the community on how they can better participate in public development projects (3.0154). They confirmed that poor civic education had been a hindrance factor to successful public project implementation (4.8730). However, the respondents stated that in the past 1 year they I had received training on civic education to support my daily work responsibilities (3.4500). The standard deviation ranged from 0.90988 to 6.19701 indicating high variation in the item responses.

**Table 5:** Influence of civic education and community participation in development projects

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your understanding about civic education is satisfactory but more capacity enhancement required	3.9420	4.88360
Civic education is important in ensuring community participation in public development projects	3.8857	.97122
District staff, Councilors and Ward C members have enough civic education to well perform their responsibilities.	4.0000	3.53351
Civic education is provided by the district council to the community on how they can better participate in public development projects	2.0154	.90988
Poor civic education has been a hindrance factor to successful public project implementation.	4.8730	6.19701
In the past 1 year I have received a training on civic education to support my daily work responsibilities	3.4500	1.07529

### Testing of Hypothesis 3

A Pearson's moment correlation test was run to test the hypothesis which stated that "*civic education on Community participation in public development projects in Siha District Council*". As shown in Table 6, there was a positive correlation (0.285) between civic education and community participation, thus the hypothesis was rejected. The p-value was 0.016 and thus, less than the alpha of 0.05 hence establishing a high significant relationship between variables. This implied that civic education had a significant influence on community participation in development projects. Field 2005 argues that civic education creates knowledge through groups rather than by isolated individuals; its origin lies in collective attempts to solve problems, and its meaning is only realized through application in an organizational setting.

**Table 6:** Relationship between Civic education and community participation in public development projects

		Community participation	Civic education
Community participation	Pearson Correlation	1	.285*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.016
	N	71	71
Civic education	Pearson Correlation	.285*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	
	N	71	71

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Level of Community Participation in Public Development Projects

It is often argued that people will participate and contribute significantly to something they feel part of, identify with, share control over decisions and resources which affect them (Odhiambo and Taifa, 2009). In order to assess the level of participation in public development projects, the study focused mainly on how informed the respondents were about the projects, their level of commitment as well as the level of community project ownership. The results in Table 7 indicate that majority of the respondents felt that their understanding regarding community participation in public development was satisfactory (3.3000) and the community always sought information about the projects from local government leaders (3.6552).

Further, the community members actively participated in public development projects (3.4839) and were also of the opinion effective community participation in public development projects is instrumental in project performance (4.1250). When community there is active community participation, projects become sustainable (4.0423); thus underscoring the need for community participation in public development projects (3.9563). Standard deviations were computed to show the level of scatteredness of the item responses around the means. All the items had standard deviations of less than 1 apart from one item that had a slightly higher deviation of 5.0000. Standard deviations of less than 1 indicated a slight variation in the item responses whereas that of 5.000 indicated that the respondents highly differed in their responses.



**Table 7:** Community participation in public development projects

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation
Your understanding regarding community participation in public development is satisfactory	3.3000	.88872
The community is actively participating in Public development projects in your area	3.4839	.82466
There is a relationship between effective community participation in public development projects and public projects performance	4.1250	5.0000
Poor participation of the community in Public development projects may lead to poor performance of public development projects	4.1690	.91927
Local government leaders involves the community members in Public development projects	3.6406	.96555
The community is always seeking the information about public development projects from local government leaders	3.6552	.86960
When community participates, public development projects become sustainable	4.0423	.92228
In the past 6 Month the community has participated in one or more public development projects	3.7344	.78158
There is a strong need for community participation in public development projects	3.9563	.78110

When asked to rate the level of community participation in the projects, 14.1% of the respondents felt it was very low, 7% rated it low, 46.5% rated it somehow high, 21.1% rated it high and 11.3% rated it very high. This shows that majority of the community members felt that the level of participation was in some way high; however, a significant number held a contrary opinion.

## 5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the level of community participation in development projects was high as a result of access to information, political will and civic education. Among the three factors political will had the greatest influence, followed by access to information and lastly civic education. The understanding of community participation and public development was satisfactory. Accessibility of information within the District council was somehow good and open to all however, inadequate information could lead to misunderstanding, mistakes and deviation of public project directions. The information shared was timely and accurate and it was always accessible to the community and therefore its accessibility had a positive effect on community participation

Political will also had an influence on community participation in public development projects and therefore, the council has had a close and smooth relationship with politically elected leaders because lack of political will in the council could pose a challenge in the effective community participation in public development projects. In order to enhance participation in the development project the council always met political leaders and other stakeholders to discuss strategies for the involvement in the project. Civic education was important in ensuring community participation in public development projects. However, it

emerged that adequate civic education was not being provided by the District Council to the community on how they can better participate in public development projects. Poor civic education had been a hindrance to successful public project implementation.

## 6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study recommends that the government and the other stakeholders should facilitate and increase awareness on community participation in public development projects in order to create a clear and common understanding of essences of their contribution and ultimate benefits. Vigorous awareness creation and sensitization of community to participate in the development process will play a key role in changing the perception of citizens especially the rural Tanzanians with regards to their participation in community development projects. The village leadership occupies a central focal position in the participatory development process where it plays an important role in ensuring community development including providing channels of communication for citizens to interact with ward leadership, District Council and other stakeholders, and guiding the planning processes and coordinating projects within the community and therefore they need to take up their roles more seriously.

The ultimate goal of civic education is to prepare generations for the essential principles and values of democracy embodied with a high sense of responsibility and active engagement in issues the society in their everyday life. Hence the District Council needs to design regular civic education programmes especially for the youth to increase their participation in the development projects.

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