

## **An Appraisal of Participation and Rural Development in Botswana: The Case of Mmankgodi Village**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is based on a study that sought to investigate the nature and extent of beneficiary participation in rural development planning and management in Mmankgodi village in the Kweneng District of Botswana. Data for the study was collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The study found that there was limited beneficiary participation in the identification, initiation, implementation and evaluation of rural development projects in Mmankgodi. This was attributed to a number of factors, including: the centralised nature of the rural development processes in Botswana, disjointed participatory structures, lack of a participatory framework, ineffective participatory forums and the negative perceptions of development workers towards the community's input. It was observed that these workers often impose their own perceptions of particular development situations, thus undermining those of the community.

### **Introduction**

The origins of participatory development can be traced back to the 1970s when development thinkers began to search for alternatives to the mainstream top-down approaches dominant in development thinking during the 1950s and 1960s. The concern was that development had become capital-centred rather than people-centred and tended to by-pass beneficiaries while it focused on building and constructing (Oakley 1991). As public participation gained popularity, rural development agencies increasingly acknowledged its contribution to addressing the plight of the rural poor. As a result, it has widely been adopted as a strategy to promote rural development. This has generated substantial interest among governments and international agencies tasked with designing strategies that involve the rural population in the development process. Development agencies have made people's participation in issues of development a central concern. Participation has enabled beneficiaries to influence decisions that affect their lives (Molosi-France and Dipholo 2017).

However, the use of participatory development has become so common that many development organisations and policy makers take it for granted. The mention of beneficiary participation in the planning, implementation and evaluation of development projects is well documented; the question is whether or not it is actually taking place (Mohan 2014).

The study on which this paper is based sought to investigate the nature and extent of beneficiary participation in rural development planning and management in Botswana, using the village of Mmankgodi as a case study. The study was conducted in 2015 and examined the participatory approaches adopted in rural development projects in the village, the extent of beneficiary participation, perceptions of ownership of development projects by the intended beneficiaries and the barriers to participation in rural development projects.

### **Background to the study**

In 1973, the Botswana government introduced the Accelerated Rural Development Programme (ARDP) that aimed to: eliminate the existing bias in service provision which was skewed in favour of towns and large villages; and to expand services into the rural periphery where most of the country's poorest people

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lived (Chambers 1977). The ARDP was hailed by many as a success because it highlighted the importance of developing rural areas. Within a short period of time, most settlements in Botswana had basic social amenities such as health facilities, schools and portable water. The ARDP viewed the participation of the people in its endeavour to build and construct as an unnecessary delay. The programme adopted a top-down development approach intended to ensure the rapid provision of basic facilities in rural areas. Although the ARDP created some job opportunities, it had little impact on the rural economy and rural livelihoods. This was attributed to the centralised nature of the development process. Communities became passive recipients of the new development style (Dipholo 2003).

Rural development programmes such as the ARDP were constantly reviewed by Government to measure their impact. This led to the recognition that communities should not just be passive recipients of development but should also take part in the planning and management process. In 1985, the government held 'The Theory and Practice of People's Participation in Rural Development' workshop in Kanye. The objective of the workshop was to discuss the possibility of mainstreaming people's participation in rural development planning and management. A subsequent workshop, held in 1990 in Palapye, sought to assess the implementation of the recommendations of the 1985 Kanye workshop which had called for more comprehensive participatory practices in rural development (Tsiane and Youngman 1985). The recommendations of the two workshops were used as the basis for introducing participatory rural development frameworks.

In 1995, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning commissioned a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) pilot project to assess the potential use of PRA in facilitating people's participation in rural development. In 1997, and subsequent to the pilot project, the government designed a detailed Community Based Strategy for Rural Development (CBSRD) in order to implement a participatory approach. To support the CBSRD, the Rural Development Unit under the Ministry of Local Government reviewed the 1973 Rural Development Policy. This review resulted in the Revised National Policy for Rural Development (2002) which highlighted the need to engage with communities in the process of development as one of its pillars.

In order to implement participatory rural development, the government has relied on local institutions to fully involve members of the community. The Village Development Committees (VDCs) are critical in this regard as they are responsible for initiating development and undertaking self-help initiatives at village level. They provide institutional co-ordination with local government departments; facilitate community engagement and participation in village development planning, as well as the formulation and implementation of general development plans (Mokwena and Fakir 2009). The *Kgotla* forum also plays a central role in the community's participation in rural development. The *Kgotla* is a traditional institution that acts as a traditional court of law and holds public meetings; they are usually headed by the village *Kgosi* (Chief). The *Kgotla* is extensively used to craft the District and National Development Plans, and forms one of the cornerstones for community development and social integration initiatives by the Botswana government. It allows for consultation and two-way communication between the government and the community on the formulation and implementation of public policies and local level development plans (Sharma 2010).

These participatory mechanisms have been central to rural development planning in Botswana and continue to play a central role in facilitating community participation in rural development. Village level planning has remained a key strategy for involving local community members in development planning. Proposals from village level participatory development planning inform both the district and national rural development planning policy and strategy (Sharma 2010).

The development community has, over the years, advanced beneficiary participation as a pre-

condition for successful rural development. This is in recognition of the need to involve the intended beneficiaries in the planning, implementation and assessment of development projects, in order to improve a society's living standards. In Botswana, evidence suggests that rural development projects have fallen short of expectations (Dipholo 2002). Many question why rural development projects have limited success in improving the people's quality of life in rural communities. A common belief is that the failure of rural development initiatives in the country is due to limited community participation in their planning, implementation and evaluation.

### **Aim, Objectives, Conceptual Framework and Methodology**

The main aim of the study was to investigate the nature and extent of beneficiary participation in rural development planning, and management in Botswana using the case of Mmankgodi village. The study sought to fulfil the following specific objectives:

- To explore the various participatory approaches adopted in rural development projects' planning and management in Botswana.
- To examine the extent of beneficiary participation in the initiation, implementation and evaluation of rural development projects.
- To investigate the intended beneficiaries' perceptions of development projects in rural areas.
- To examine factors that hinder beneficiary participation in rural development projects.

The analysis of the findings of this study was guided by Hamdi and Goethert's (1997) Community Action Planning (CAP) framework. The main tenet of the CAP framework is that communities should play an active role in the initiation, planning, design, implementation and evaluation of development projects that affect them. This is because communities are aware of the nature of their development problems and have preferred approaches to dealing with them. Within the CAP framework, Hamdi and Goethert (1997) identified five levels of community participation, namely: none; indirect; consultative; shared control; and full control. They further stated that dominant development planning approaches should move away from the orthodox trend where consultants plan, politicians decide and people receive development projects in favour of approaches that promote community empowerment. This, they argued, should involve those directly affected by development projects and the promotion of appropriate technologies in the planning process.

The framework also stipulates that, to maintain effective community participation, appropriate structures, skills, knowledge and the technical know-how are required. Denters and Klok (2010) elaborated further, stating that those in charge of development projects must ensure that they involve the right institutions and design in order to ensure effective participation. The advantage of the CAP framework is that it provides a clear direction for the realisation of effective community participation (Rakody and Schlyter 1981).

Since the 1970s, there has been a substantial amount of literature on participatory rural development. The definition of participation has generated a great deal of controversy. Different scholars have advanced different meanings for and interpretations of the term 'participation' (Nelson and Wright 1995). The World Bank (1994) defined participation as a process through which beneficiaries' influence and share control over initiatives, decisions and resources that affect their lives. Beneficiaries should be involved in all the

stages and cycles of development planning, and should not be restricted to their labour contribution. A definition similar to that of the World Bank was provided by Paul (1987). He defined participation as an active process through which beneficiaries or particular groups influence the direction and execution of a development project with a focus on enhancing their wellbeing in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values they cherish. Ondrik (1996) defined participation as a process through which stakeholders can influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources that affect them. In a participatory approach, stakeholders are expected to effectively identify the problems prevailing within their communities and provide effective solutions to the identified problems (Dinbabo 2003).

Mulwa (1987) asserted that participation is an approach that attempts to involve the people in the transformation process; not as development tools but as agents of social change. Participation implies voluntary or other forms of contribution by rural people (Oakley 1991). Chifamba (2013) noted that these contributions may include ideas, judgments, materials and unpaid labour. McArthur (1996) stated that while there are a variety of ways in which these contributions are forthcoming and managed, they form the core of participation.

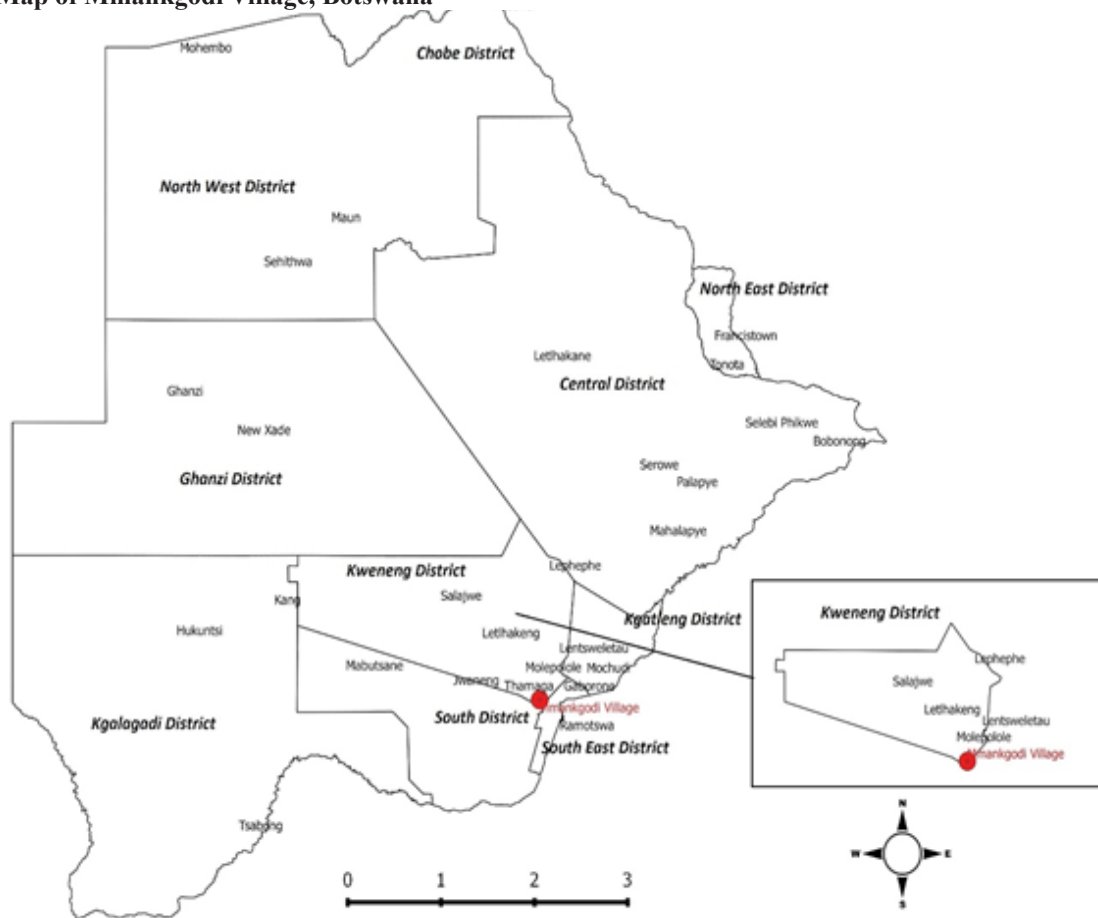
Mulu and Pinetah (2016) stipulated that participation is an empowering process through which people, in partnership with others, identify problems and needs, mobilise resources, as well as control and evaluate the collective action they have undertaken. Empowerment involves the transfer of power from the powerful to the powerless; a change in the sequence of decision-making from the centre to the periphery (Maphosa 2000). When all community members are involved at all stages then programmes have a far greater chance of success compared to those that are imposed from the outside or from above (Pettit 2012).

Development practitioners and scholars have identified two types of participation: participation as a means and participation as an end (Cooke and Kothari 2001). According to Burkey (1993), participation as a means is a way of harnessing people's economic, social and physical resources to achieve the aim and objectives of development programmes and projects more efficiently and effectively. Wistanley *et al.* (1995) noted that participation is used by stakeholders as a means to control development by contributing to the project design as well as holding public institutions accountable for the goods and services they provide.

Participation as an end is when participation is a goal. For Cooke and Kothari (2001), participation is an end when it is an active, dynamic and genuine process; its purpose is to develop and strengthen the capabilities of people to intervene more directly in development initiatives. From this view, participation is the empowerment of individuals and communities through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and experience, and leads to greater self-reliance (Oakley 1991). Proponents of participation as an end maintain that development cannot occur unless beneficiaries control the process and praxis of participation.

The study on which this paper is based was conducted in Mmankgodi village in the Kweneng District of Botswana. Mmankgodi village is located thirty five kilometres west of Gaborone, the capital city (Map 1). Mmankgodi was purposively selected because, while it is close to Gaborone, it has a typical rural setup. At the time of the study, the population of Mmankgodi was approximately 4997 (Central Statistics Office 2012). The people of Mmankgodi belong to the Bahurutshe ethnic group. The village falls under the Bakwena Tribal Authority which has its district headquarters in Molepolole.

Map 1: Map of Mmankgodi Village, Botswana



Source: Produced by Seleka Malatsi at the University of Botswana (2015).

A qualitative approach was used in this study. This approach aids our understanding and interpretation of the complexity, detail and context of the social world (Creswell 2003). Qualitative research produces rich data that can be directly applied to local situations, contexts and individuals (Patton 2002). A qualitative approach was suitable for this study as it sought to obtain the community of Mmankgodi’s views and experiences of participation and rural development in Botswana.

Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews. A semi-structured approach with open ended questions was used as it allowed the researchers’ to ask unscripted questions and to probe for more information. This approach allowed the researchers to seek new insights, ask questions, and assess the phenomena of participatory rural development from different perspectives. A total of eight in-depth interviews were conducted with key informants who were purposively selected from the community development workers within the Social and Community Development (S&CD) Department, VDC, tribal administration and the Village Extension Team (VET). The respondents were purposefully selected due to their knowledge of the practice of participatory rural development.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also used to collect primary data. FGDs were preferred as the researchers felt the group dynamics would generate more ideas and allow the participants greater personal expression when discussing participatory rural development. This technique was also appropriate as group dynamics frequently brought to the fore issues that would not have been captured if other data collection methods were used (Gilbert 2001).

A total of four focus groups, involving a total of twenty-four participants, were conducted. The participants included development project workers, Mmankgodi youth and elder community members. The FGDs were disaggregated on a gender basis.

A snowball sampling technique was used to select the participants for the FGDs. With the help of the VDC members, individuals who were relevant to each FGD sub-group were identified and asked to recruit more participants. Although time consuming, snowballing was effective because we had little prior information regarding the population of Mmankgodi. Thus, snowball sampling enabled us to include study subjects that might otherwise have been excluded from participation.

Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews and FGDs. The in-depth interviews and FGDs were conducted in *Setswana*, the main vernacular language. Secondary data was obtained from books, government policy documents, and academic journals. Among the policies consulted were the *Revised National Policy for Rural Development* (1997), *Community Based Strategy for Rural Development* (2002), *National Development Plan 9* (1997, 2002, 2008) and the *Strategic Framework for Community Development in Botswana* (2010).

### The Structure of Participation

There are differential levels of participatory development in Mmankgodi due to development projects formulated and managed at village level by the VDC, and those formulated and managed by the government through the Kweneng District Council. This study focused on the projects that were formulated by the government at district level as it sought to investigate the nature and extent of beneficiary participation in rural development projects at that level.

Community development workers stated that although there is no documented strategy on participation and rural development in Botswana, the government relies on community level institutions to involve communities in rural development planning and management. The district councils are tasked with facilitating participation based on the structure shown in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Participation structure**



The Mmankgodi community is at the bottom of the participation structure as they are the beneficiaries of rural development projects. The VDC sub-committees, such as the farmers, environment, education, agriculture and youth sub-committees, identify developmental needs and priorities. These VDC sub-committees report to the VDC which in turn engages the Kweneng District Council S&CD offices in Mmankgodi regarding their development needs and priorities. Subsequent to meeting the VDC, the S&CD officers then hold *Kgotla* meetings which are attended by the community, the *Kgosi*, the councillor and the district level S&CD officers who are based at the district council offices. These *Kgotla* meetings are designed to facilitate further discussions with the community on what has been proposed. After such meetings, community needs and development priorities are taken to the district council for assessment who later provides feedback to the community. The participation structure shown above (Figure 1) also reveals that development planning is based on a top-down approach with the community at the bottom rather than at the apex of the structure.

Participation is not only achieved through the S&CD. The councillor also liaises between the community and the District Council. The councillor usually holds *Kgotla* meetings with the community to gather their suggestions and contributions. During council meetings, the councillor then tables motions, proposals and suggestions pertaining to development issues as stated by his/her community. During the council meetings, the administrative wing, comprising of government officials such as economic planners, as well as the Council Secretary are present and take note of the suggestions presented by the councillor.

Though as noted by community development workers there is a participatory structure in Mmankgodi, the study found that the structure is ineffective; it lacks participatory guidelines and a strategy. During the FGDs, it emerged that the participatory structure in place was disjointed. Respondents pointed out that the district council stipulates that correspondence regarding development projects in Mmankgodi should go through their S&CD offices in the village. However, whenever community members submit queries on development issues to the S&CD offices, they are told to file their queries with the councillor. Sometimes, they are advised to submit their ideas and views regarding development issues directly to the Kweneng District Council. As a result, the community cannot hold any office or person accountable for ensuring and maintaining their participation.

In Hamdi and Goethert's (1997) CAP framework, a cohesive structure as well as trained and skilled personnel are necessary to effectively facilitate community participation. However, S&CD officers who have been placed in Mmankgodi by the district council to facilitate participation have not received any training in participatory methodology and practice. As community development workers at village level, they are the first point of contact with the community. The fact that they have not received the relevant training renders the whole participatory structure ineffective.

### **Forms of Participation**

There are different forms of participation found in Mmankgodi. This can be attributed to the nature and scope of development activities undertaken by the government in the village which result in the community participating in different ways and at different stages. To identify the forms of participation, this study sought to investigate perceptions of participation by both S&CD officers and the community at large. People from dissimilar backgrounds often define and interpret the term 'participation' differently (Nelson and Wright 1995). Government publications, such as the National Development Plan 9 (2008), do not adequately define participation in development initiatives. Furthermore, most of the research on participatory rural development in Botswana has overlooked community interpretations of participation.

There was no shared meaning of the concept participation among the research participants. The S&CD officers defined participation as 'consulting the community about development projects and

programmes in the village'. This interpretation of participation is vague and does not clearly explain what community involvement entails. It seems that participation to these officers is restricted to providing the community with information on development projects and programmes taking place in the village. Although the 2002 Revised National Development Policy states that project development planning is based on a bottom-up approach, officers tasked with facilitating participation at grassroots level cannot explain a participatory approach.

Respondents from the community explained participation in a more elaborate way as they captured the nature of their involvement. Both the elderly men and women from the FDGs interpreted participation as 'our involvement in identifying community development problems together with the district administration team, planning and implementing projects together through *Kgotla* meetings'. The youth, on the other hand, understood participation to be 'concerted efforts of [sic] the community and development practitioners in planning and implementation of development projects. The community should be given a platform to give suggestions and have their priorities known regarding development initiatives and be given feedback on whatever they propose'.

Probst *et al.* (2003)'s typology of participation, the interpretation given by the S&CD officers can be classified as consultative participation as their office makes the key decisions, and merely consults the community on projects that have already been planned and that are being implemented. However, the community's interpretation of participation can be classified as collegiate participation because they view it as different actors working together to identify development problems, creating solutions to them in the form of projects, and evaluating such projects.

### **Participation in Problem Identification**

As Paul (1987) stated, problem identification is the first and crucial step in formulating effective and efficient rural development projects. Problem identification should fully involve project beneficiaries as they are conscious of their problems and environment. Both the S&CD officers and the community noted that the community participates in problem identification predominately through *Kgotla* meetings with the VDC and S&CD officers. These meetings are often organised by the *Kgosi*, the councillor and the S&CD office. The community highlighted that although these meetings did provide them with a platform to voice their concerns regarding development problems they were not satisfied. The youth mentioned that 'we, as the youth, feel we can make significant contributions in the identification of developmental problems in Mmankodi but we are limited by the approach used. The *Kgotla* is not very appealing to us because we view it as an adult forum that perpetuates the dominance of certain interest groups'.

As demonstrated by the statement above, the approach used in problem identification is not suitable for all community members. Molebatsi (2013) concurred that the use of the *Kgotla* as an arena for participation has to some extent disadvantaged certain community members. This study found that problem identification also takes place through exercises carried out by VDC sub-committees at ward level. In this approach, the VDC submits its findings regarding developmental problems in the village to the district council through its S&CD offices. Although this has been encouraged by the district council, the VDC and the village elders stated that it is very frustrating because, even though they identified problems that need urgent attention, they never receive feedback from the S&CD and their problems are often overlooked. This was further confirmed by a respondent from the VDC who stated that 'It does not really make sense because we spend our time identifying development problems in our village but we are never given feedback on the actions taken to solve such problems. The district council advises that we do this, but the way they handle our suggestions makes us feel useless... it is only intended to make it look like the community is participating'.



The respondent gave the construction of a pedestrian bridge on a stream that runs through the village as an example. During the rainy season, parts of the village on either side of the stream become isolated from each other. As a result, villagers have to walk several kilometres to access educational and health facilities on the other side of the stream. The community has, for a long time, placed the construction of a bridge on its list of development priorities. However, the government has concentrated on, what the community deemed, insignificant development projects such as the paving of the road from the *Kgotla* to the primary school in the village. Respondents attributed this to the lack of an effective participatory problem identification process with the development administrators.

From Probst *et al*, (2003)'s model, it is clear that the problem identification process used in Mmankgodi falls under the contractual participation type. This is because the district council has the decision-making power that often overlooks the suggestions and contributions of the community at large. Although the community identifies problems that they feel are urgent, the district council has its own priorities.

### **Participation in Project Initiation**

Noor (2012) states that to make participation meaningful, local people must have the right to directly and actively participate in project initiation. Both the S&CD officers and the VDC members pointed out that development project initiation was done at district level. The S&CD, acting as a satellite office for the district council, is mandated to co-ordinate some of the projects that come from the district council. The VDC members also noted that the S&CD office asks them to help with the co-ordination of pre-designed projects. The community members who work in the development projects stated that they had been excluded from project initiation. One of the respondents stated that 'we are always called to the *Kgotla* to be told about the projects implemented, when they will commence and who facilitates them. The district council designs projects on their own and they never care what we say about them'. The respondent further stated that although they are sometimes asked to identify developmental problems in the village, they are side-lined when it comes to project design. All they see is the implementation of projects. As the community does not play a role in project design and initiation but is a passive recipient, this study showed that the process of planning development projects in Mmankgodi is, to some extent, non-participatory.

### **Participation in Project Implementation**

Participatory project implementation increases commitment, relevance and sustainability of projects (Pettit 2012). This study found that the majority of community members participate at this stage of the project cycle mainly through the provision of unskilled labour during various project works as well as through volunteering in committees that oversee project implementation. Through their membership in the VDC and its sub-committees some respondents are involved in the implementation of projects in the village. According to the S&CD officers, a majority of the people who participate in the implementation phase are between the ages of thirty and sixty years old. The VDC members also participate through committees that are established to recruit project workers as well as to supervise them.

Although there is a considerable level of participation at the implementation stage, VDC members voiced their discontent. One member mentioned that they only participated when the S&CD office had a staff shortage. 'The S&CD office thinks we are only here to be their assistants. When they are tired of doing something they dump it on the VDC', the member said. During a FGD, one of the youths stated that 'They refer to provision of labour as participation which it is not. VDC members are tasked with supervising development workers because the S&CD has a lot to do. For all VDC and community members to be said to be participating they should also be given the power to manage the entire process of implementing projects'.

While the respondents voiced their dissatisfaction with the nature of their participation in most development projects, community members who had worked in agricultural development projects stated that they had received training in order to participate in implementing those projects. They explained that people who had worked in agricultural development projects had received training in crop science, tractor maintenance and fertilisation techniques. A respondent stated that ‘we feel we are part of the implementation team because the more we receive training, the more we become useful. Training has made us valuable team members and we are often given permission to alter strategies during project implementation to suite the environment’. The responses suggest that participation at the implementation stage of projects is mainly used as a means to achieve project goals. Probst *et al.* (2003) referred to this as collaborative. Development workers in Mmankgodi collaborate with the community to implement projects through the provision of unskilled labour and administrative tasks such as recruitment.

### **Participation in Monitoring and Evaluation**

Participatory monitoring of rural development projects allows organisations to accurately determine whether or not they are achieving their goals. Evaluation is used to guide better planning and resource allocation (Pootschi 1986). Respondents explained that the monitoring of projects is done entirely by officials from the district council regional office. The VDC members stated that the community participates mainly by providing information during monitoring and evaluation exercises. Respondents pointed out that they never receive feedback from evaluation teams. The nature of participation at this stage is contractual because the district council controls the whole process while the community is only involved in providing information.

### **Community Perceptions of Rural Development Projects**

The sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness of rural development programmes is determined by the ways in which communities perceive them (Oakley 1991). The community should have a sense of ownership of projects. The lack of sustainability in development projects in Mmankgodi has been attributed to the attitudes of community members towards the projects. During FGDs with elderly women, it emerged that the majority of community members feel that the projects do not address their needs. A respondent stated that ‘the community of Mmankgodi does not take development projects seriously. For instance, the bridge is still not constructed yet resources are used to construct roads from the *Kgotla* to a primary school. Is that important? There are many other projects that have been abandoned because the community does not deem them important’.

This was a widely shared view among respondents. The youth felt that the projects and programmes that were meant for them were not effective and that the district council was wasting resources. A respondent from the youth group said ‘the Council brings youth projects and programmes that are copied from elsewhere forgetting that environments and situations differ. These projects would not in any way be successful here. The Council should consider our preferences when designing youth projects and programmes’.

This was corroborated by the S&CD officers who felt that the community moved from one project to another without completing previous ones. They attributed this to project incompatibility which they said forces beneficiaries to rotate between projects as they become disillusioned.

This indicates that the community perceives development projects implemented in their village as irrelevant. This is attributable to weak participatory practices that often overlook community preferences (Ondrik 1996). The community in Mmankgodi views development projects as weak on skills and capacity building, with the exception of agricultural projects. There was consensus that many development projects

provided temporary relief but did not empower them with the skills to fend for themselves. In a FGD with community development project workers, one participant pointed out that ‘Other than working in development projects, there is nothing we can do for ourselves. What we do in these projects does not require any skill because we only provide labour to the so-called experts. This makes us dependent on the projects because without them there is no life; they don’t teach us anything we can use for our survival’.

Although the community expressed negative views about the development projects in the village, this study found that there were some benefits. One of the participants stated ‘we don’t have a choice. At least we don’t sleep on empty stomachs’. Thus although the community felt that development projects did not meet their needs, they provided relief in the form of earnings from their labour.

Community perceptions of development projects in Mmankgodi were generally negative. Most of the respondents attributed this to their lack of participation in project initiation. The respondents stated that most of the projects fail because the community does not have an interest in them. Makumbe (1996) stated that, in order to improve the community’s perceptions of development projects, development practitioners should involve the community.

### **Barriers to Participation**

Participation in development projects is often constrained by a host of barriers. Understanding and anticipating these barriers is important when facilitating participation (Oakley 1991). This study identified a host of barriers to participation in development projects in Mmankgodi. The respondents identified the participatory structure as a barrier to effective community participation, which they believe has contradictions. In one of the FGDs, respondents explained that:

We really don’t know who should take our suggestions regarding development in Mmankgodi. Today we have a *Kgotla* meeting with the councillor, tomorrow with the District Commissioner, then comes the S&CD. Since they are from the same district council why can’t one officer address us and share our suggestions with other district council officers so we hold him accountable if we don’t get feedback.

Respondents felt that their participation was limited as they could not hold anyone accountable for their suggested projects. They stated that *Kgotla* meetings that are meant to facilitate their participation are often chaired by different district council officials. This makes follow-up difficult as they are often referred from one office to another. Oakley (1991) classified this as a structural barrier which stems from centralisation.

Another barrier identified by respondents is that of using the *Kgotla* as a forum for participation. Molebatsi (2013) argued that the *Kgotla* has often disadvantaged certain community members during development meetings and stated that, in recent years, *Kgotla* meetings have been poorly attended due to limitations on free speech. The youth in Mmankgodi described the *Kgotla* as an ineffective forum for participatory development. One of the youth stated that ‘the *Kgotla* has been established as a customary court which is why it is an ineffective forum for participatory development. This is because, even during developmental meetings, it’s like we are attending a court hearing. Our freedom of speech is limited because we are perceived as trouble makers and will therefore embarrass the *Kgosi* and the village if we say something’.

As a forum, the *Kgotla* has hindered the community from openly stating their concerns and suggestions. As a result, the majority of youth in the village never attend developmental meetings held at the *Kgotla*. The respondents felt that the *Kgotla* should not be the only means to communicate development issues and suggested the use of smaller village forums such as developmental committees and sub-committees. Furthermore, project information is often disseminated through pamphlets with little

explanation from the officers. This makes it difficult for the community to understand the values and objectives of the projects.

The VDC has been rendered less effective by the district council which the respondents suggested has limited their chances of participating in development planning and management. The respondents stated that the VDC was their parliament where they were free to express their views. However, they expressed concern about the level of recognition the district council gives to the VDC. One VDC member said 'The VDC is the only institution that can spearhead participation in rural development planning and management but the government continues to ignore it'.

The ethnic composition of Mmankgodi is another barrier to participation. The village is predominantly populated by Bahurutshe although it is located within the Kweneng District, which is under the Bakwena Tribal Authority. For respondents this affected the development of Mmankgodi as their views and suggestions on development continue to be overlooked because they report to an authority that bears a different name to them. Thus, they claim that the village is often ignored as its ethnic composition is regarded as 'foreign' and is therefore not given the opportunity to contribute to what should constitute development and its related processes. During the FGDs, one respondent said that 'we are marginalised because we are the Bahurutshe under a different tribal authority. Mmankgodi is one of the oldest villages in the area but the Kweneng District Council has overlooked our pleas for development. That is the reason why our development needs are ignored'.

Mompoti and Prinsen (2000) are of the view that participatory development methods rely on culturally structured realities of villages hence each ethnic group relies on its cultural norms and values to facilitate participation and sustainable development. This is the case with Mmankgodi village elders as they felt that being under the Bakwena tribal leadership deprives their village of development and prevents the villagers from facilitating their own development. However, further investigation revealed that the district council, which co-ordinates the developmental projects in the area, does not report to the tribal authority but rather to the Ministry responsible for local government. Furthermore, the district council's staff membership is drawn from different ethnic groups across the country while some are expatriates. Thus, as the staff members do not consist of only Bakwena this raises questions about the validity of the claim made by respondents.

Lastly, misconceptions about the rural population held by development administrators hinder community participation in rural development planning and management. The respondents explained that, quite often, development administrators impose their perceptions of particular development situations; and usually undermine contributions from the community as they perceive community members as uneducated and therefore not trained in development practice. A common belief among the respondents was that whatever they suggested was ignored if not shelved. This had resulted in community members losing interest in the practice of participatory development projects.

### **Conclusion**

This study has shown that there was limited participation in rural development project planning and management in Mmankgodi village. Thus, the community's contribution to initiatives that affect their lives was limited. However, there was consensus among respondents on the importance of participation and on the view that they had some knowledge of the practice of participation. Furthermore, the study found that sound participatory processes were not stipulated hence there were no guidelines on how to facilitate and co-ordinate participation in rural development.

The study also established that there were several barriers to participation in rural development project planning and management in Mmankgodi. These barriers seemed to be the result of the way

development administrators viewed the importance of community participation. The barriers were a result of disjointed participation structures and the development administrators' perceptions of rural people's educational capacity. Respondents felt that their voices were not heard as they were viewed as not being able to make meaningful contributions. Participation as a concept is difficult to actually put into practice. This is a view that is widely shared by development practitioners across the globe.

This study has shown that the term 'participation' is a widely misused term in development discourse. Development practitioners fail to unpack the meaning of participation which results in a mere consultative process being referred to as participation. As the literature reviewed in the study shows, participation is not as easy a practice as the development community asserts. When exercised effectively, participation tends to bring the most out of both the projects and the beneficiaries.

This research demonstrated that participation in the planning and management of rural development projects in Mmankgodi is significantly limited. This can be attributed to the centralised nature of rural development processes in Botswana. Even though there are structures to facilitate participation, there are no documented guidelines on participatory rural development. Additionally, the procedures and structures that are meant to foster participation are disjointed. A number of barriers affect the participation of beneficiaries in project planning and management. The study found that participation is predominately at the project implementation stage because the project implementers are usually understaffed and are, therefore, willing to have the community play a part. Furthermore, the study revealed that beneficiaries are not involved in all the stages of the rural development project cycle.

Based on the study findings, the claims of participatory rural development that pervade government publications and pronouncements in Botswana do not seem to be reflected in practice. The participation of the Mmankgodi community in development projects is limited which renders participation in rural development planning and management in contemporary Botswana more rhetoric than reality.

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