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Factors influencing the approach to community development in Ghanaian urban slums

Kwabena Frimpong-Manso^a and Jamal Appiah-Kubi^b 

^aDepartment of Social Work, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana; ^bSocial Policy Institute, Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, Ankara, Turkey

ABSTRACT

The approaches used in community development (CD) are critical to the success or failure of projects. Yet, we know little about approaches employed in CD in urban areas. This study investigates the approaches employed in two CD projects (construction of footbridges and cassava processing) in Ashaiman, an urban Ghanaian slum, and the factors that influenced the selected approaches. We used a qualitative technique by conducting semi-structured interviews with 23 stakeholders involved in CD activities in Ashaiman. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. The findings demonstrated that the two selected initiatives used both self-help and technical support approaches, with the latter approach dominating. The community's capacity, weak social ties among the residents, and nature of the project undertaken were the factors that determined the approaches taken. The basis for the approach used in CD should be the characteristics of the communities and how they facilitate the successful implementation of projects.

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With increasing efforts to promote human wellbeing and development, many local communities in developing countries have adopted community development (CD) as an approach to meet this goal (Pawar, 2014). CD in this study refers to using a community's resources and structures to meet the needs of its residents (Mendes, 2007). In the British colonies, including Ghana, Nigeria, and former Southern Cameroon, there was the promotion of CD as a professional practice from the 1940s to raise the standards of living among people in impoverished communities, particularly in the rural areas (Smyth, 2004). However, introducing professional CD in the colonies was only a reinforcement of practices used by rural communities before colonialization to manage their natural resources to address their challenges (Page, 2014). The British, through the indirect rule system, reinforced what the residents practiced (Tantoh et al., 2019).

The rural populace received CD warmly because it resonated with indigenous collectivist principles (e.g. reciprocity and self-help) and local structures such as farmers' cooperatives (Atampugre, 1998; Bonye et al., 2013). The rural areas used CD for a variety of purposes, including mass education, adult literacy, and home economics, besides raising money for

the colonial authority through agricultural cultivation and taxation (Amakye, 2017). The CD projects were carried out with the help of salaried community developers who worked with residents to determine their needs, organize projects, recruit volunteers, donate communal resources, and generate financial resources within the community (Page, 2014).

The focus of CD shifted toward economic development from the 1970s. Many African countries employed CD for its quick modernization program during the post-independence era. For example, state farms, run by locals, were used to aid villages in raising money for development projects (Brown, 1984). However, from the 1980s, rising poverty and Structural Adjustment Programs resulted in a major shrink in the state's involvement in CD, resulting in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly supplementing governments' efforts to combat problems like poor housing, water shortages, crime, and poverty, in both urban and rural communities (Opare, 2007; Quaye, 2015; Tantoh & McKay, 2018).

Despite its success as a tool for enhancing development and addressing community problems, CD faces certain hurdles. Intercommunal competition, resource mobilization issues, a skills deficit, corruption, unresolved land conflict, and project non-sustainability owing to a lack of monitoring and evaluation are among the hurdles encountered undertaking CD in developing countries (Makofane & Gray, 2014; Pasaribu et al., 2020). Rural communities typically lack the financial and human resources to execute certain projects, forcing them to rely on external development agencies for assistance. However, because they lack the skills to determine if these organizations are legitimate, they are vulnerable to exploitation (Jimu, 2008; Makofane & Gray, 2014).

While some studies (e.g. Gilchrist, 2019; Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2010; Nuttavuthisit, Quimbo et al., 2018; Udu & Onwe, 2016) have examined the methods employed in CD projects in Nigeria, the Philippines, and Thailand, research on the subject focusing on CD in urban communities is limited, especially in slum areas. This study, therefore, investigates the CD approaches employed in Ashaiman, an urban Ghanaian slum settlement, and the factors that influence the selected approaches.

Literature review

Approaches to community development

Burkhart-Kriesel (2005) categorizes CD approaches into self-help, technical assistance, and conflict. The self-help or bottom-up method emphasizes the use of local resources and the participation of community members in all aspects of CD projects, including a conception of the idea, implementation, and monitoring (Isidiho & Sabran, 2016; Samah & n.d.aaji, 2012). Locals in some countries have used this method to provide basic social amenities, such as access to water and sanitation (Samah & Aref, 2009). The participatory nature of the approach empowers residents and enhances the sustainability of projects (Acha, 2014; Kinyata & Abiodun, 2020; Quimbo et al., 2018).

In recent years, self-help projects in rural communities have witnessed a significant decline due to a myriad of factors, including corruption, lack of community spirit, urban migration, and poverty (Mbagwu et al., 2016; Shaibu, 2014). Bottom-up initiatives require

continued assistance from the government in developing nations, which are typically marked by poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and a weak economy, to make sure that beneficial outcomes are delivered (Annamalai et al., 2016).

The technical assistance approach entails the execution of projects by external agencies, such as the government that is usually characterized by centralized planning and implementation (Burkhart-Kriesel, 2005). The emphasis of this approach is on undertaking tasks requiring technical skills and financial resources that are often not available within the community and not the community's participation in projects (Gibson et al., 2015). According to Isidiho and Sabran (2016), a criticism of this approach is that it does not consider socio-cultural and economic elements that may affect the projects, including the lack of customization of solutions to meet local needs.

The conflict approach focuses on the professional organizers' deliberate use of confrontation to redistribute power by challenging forces impeding efforts to solve problems (Robinson & Green, 2011). This strategy is particularly effective when there is a sense of injustice, resulting in activities such as petitions and demonstrations to bring about change (Bunnell et al., 2010).

Factors influencing choice of approach

Multiple factors influence the approach to CD. A key factor is the goal of the project (Brown & Wocha, 2017; Gibson et al., 2015). In projects which emphasize the promotion of community participation, capacity building, and inhabitants' empowerment, the self-help approach is often adopted (Brown & Wocha, 2017). In addition, three elements influence residents' capacity and willingness to build projects and take part in them: the change agent's or developer's self-esteem, his or her ability to engage residents throughout projects, and the alliance between actors in project roles (Doe, 2004; Nuttavuthisit et al., 2015).

Awortwi (2012) discovered that socio-economic factors such as income levels influenced the strategy utilized in CD initiatives in African and Latin American nations, as these factors influenced community members' ability to contribute resources or time to the projects. The level of discussion among community members impacts the project approach they take. Additionally, the level of dialogue among community members influences the approach to CD. For example, Mendes (2019) found that income management programs in Australia were successful when the inhabitants engaged in a high level of consultation. Some authors (e.g. Gibson et al., 2015) argue that the interest of international organizations in regulating the development and political structures in developing countries has resulted in the promotion of the top-down approach. Projects, therefore, can serve as a conduit to change structures, such as leadership, community values, and institutional structures, to suit the expectations of international organizations.

Theoretical framework

Because community engagement is fundamental to the various approaches to CD, the study is based on Pretty's (1995) typology of participation. Pretty (1995) identified seven categories of involvement: manipulative, passive, consultation-based participation, material incentive participation, functional participation, interactive participation, and self-mobilization. Manipulative participation refers to situations in which powerless

representatives give community members an imitation of involvement. With passive participation, residents are not involved in choices but are informed about decisions by implementing agencies. Under the participation by consultation, the inhabitants are consulted on issues and provided the space to communicate their views. However, the officials who consult inhabitants are under no compulsion to consider their views.

Relating Pretty's (1995) typologies to the three approaches to CD reviewed in this study, manipulative participation and passive participation are experienced in projects based on the technical assistance approach in which inhabitants do not have any real control over projects. Participation for material incentives comprises residents taking an active role mostly by donating labor in initiatives for food and money (Pretty, 1995). They involve residents in decision-making to incorporate their perspectives into initiatives through functional involvement, even when officials make the original decisions. This can be seen in situations where NGOs plan projects before going to communities to seek inhabitants' views on how already designed projects can be executed. This depicts a hybrid of the technical assistance and self-help approaches whereby, although the projects are introduced by external agencies, the inhabitants have some level of control and ownership over the projects executed.

Regarding interactive participation, the participation of inhabitants is enforced as a recipe for successful project implementation and management. With this typology, the stakeholders jointly make pertinent decisions about projects with inhabitants. Self-mobilization is the level of participation in projects at which inhabitants of a community design projects and implement them without assistance from external agencies. This is the absolute level of community participation as inhabitants rely on their resources and expertise to define their problems, identify projects to solve the problems, and execute such projects (Cornwall, 2008). We see this level of participation in bottom-up projects, which emphasize community participation and capacity building, which translates into communities' control over development efforts and improved management of projects (Cornwall, 2008; Nikkhah & Redzuan, 2010).

This theory applies to this study because it enables researchers to explore the level of community participation in CD projects in Ashaiman, in each of the approaches adopted. Its relevance to this study can be seen in its adoption in other studies on CD (Daldeniz & Hampton, 2013; Tosun, 2006; Zomorrodian et al., 2013).

Methodology

Description of study setting

We conducted the study in Ashaiman, a municipality in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. Despite its proximity to Accra, the capital of Ghana, many parts of the municipality have deplorable and slum-like conditions. According to the 2010 Population and Housing Census, Ashaiman has an estimated population of 190,972 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). The residents are predominantly Christians from all across Ghana, with most (75%) engaging in self-employment such as service and sales. Less than half of the population over the age of 11 are illiterates. The study location was chosen because it is an urban slum with a significant concentration of developmental projects to address social issues such as poverty, poor housing, and sanitation issues (Appiah-Kubi, 2020).

The intense poverty in Ashaiman has been captured in Adu-Okoree's (2012) observation that 83% of the population in the municipality live on less than 200 Ghana Cedis (USD 40) a month, making US\$360 a year. Compared to the average income of US\$950 per year in Accra (Fink et al., 2012), which is in the same geographical space with Ashaiman around the same period, it is evident that poverty has been rife in the municipality. Further, poverty and other problems in the slums have even been more intense than in the organized parts of the area. The acknowledgment of the level of poverty and other problems in the municipality has manifested into the execution of projects to address the problems. Considering that this study sought to examine the approaches adopted in CD in slums, Ashaiman, therefore, suited the study. To enhance clarity in the findings concerning the approaches adopted in the communities, two projects (footbridge construction and cassava processing projects) were focused on in the fieldwork against the background that infrastructural deficits and poverty are crucial problems in Ashaiman (Ablo & Yekple, 2018).

Participants

Participants of this study were drawn from stakeholders of CD in Ashaiman, including local chiefs, inhabitants, assemblymen, and community developers, and they were opted for because they were deemed knowledgeable about the theme of the study due to their experience in projects undertaken in the study area. Assemblymen are constitutionally elected representatives of the central government in local communities in Ghana, who help the government execute its plans in local communities in a decentralized government system. Community developers recruited for the study comprised those from the Department of Community Development (DCD) and NGOs that had executed projects in Ashaiman slums.

Participants were purposively sampled, allowing the recruitment of participants knowledgeable in CD of the study area. The inclusion criteria were that participants must be proficient in English (languages which both researchers were proficient in and popular in the study area), and must have participated in the projects focused on in the selected slums for at least three years before this study. Twenty-three participants comprising two officials of DCD, three chiefs, three assemblymen, six inhabitants, and nine community developers from NGOs were recruited for the study.

Procedure

A qualitative research strategy was adopted because the researchers sought to get detailed information from participants based on their experiences in projects. The adoption of this strategy allowed the researchers to establish relationships with participants after many visits to the study area, and such relationships were crucial to their ability to obtain detailed information from the participants.

The first author gathered data through in-depth interviews, using a guide, in private locations chosen by the participants, such as their homes and offices. Some of the interview questions included in the interview guide are: What are the CD projects undertaken in the community, what approaches are adopted in undertaking projects in the community, in what ways do the inhabitants participate in development efforts in the community, and are there instances where the inhabitants of the community initiate

development projects on their own? Each of the 23 English-language interviews lasted 45 minutes on average. After obtaining consent from participants, the interviews were audio-taped. The data from the interviews were analyzed using Clarke and Braun's (2013) six recommended steps for thematic analysis. To begin with the analysis, both researchers read through the data from the interviews, many times to familiarize themselves with the information and gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. The researchers then created initial codes by analyzing the content of transcripts to create a descriptive picture of what participants said and used the responses to find themes and sub-themes. Before developing a report on the study's findings based on the primary themes, the topics were critically assessed and identified.

The findings of this study are part of a larger study undertaken for a master's thesis at the University of Ghana, and we got ethical clearance from the University's Ethics Review Board. All participants gave their consent, and the researcher ensured voluntary participation by not compelling any participant to take part in the study. The confidentiality of the participants was protected by keeping replies private and only using them for the study. The credibility of findings was also safeguarded by triangulating the views gained from various participants and through member checking.

Findings

We illustrate the findings that are presented with some quotes from the interviews. CD in Ashaiman involved various projects done to overcome the community problems. While different projects have been undertaken in the community studied, specific projects (footbridge construction and cassava processing) were selected for this study. The projects used two approaches, self-help, and technical assistance. The factors that influenced the choice of the approach used were the community's capacity, social ties, and nature of the project.

Types of approaches adopted in CD

The self-help and technical assistance approaches were both used to undertake projects in Ashaiman, but the technical assistance approach undertaken by external agencies dominated.

Self-help approach

Through self-help activities and locally generated finances such as levies, the approach often resulted in community-sponsored projects, which were designed and implemented by either charitable people in the community or by the entire community. The community used this strategy in projects for repairing or providing basic infrastructure, as well as empowering residents by providing them with job training or income-generating possibilities. This approach has been crucial in several projects, including the construction of wooden footbridges. The self-help initiatives rarely required large amounts of money or professional skill. Instead, the community depended on its labor and resources to complete them:

In projects that we do on our own, we decide how we can solve a problem we face. We contribute [money] to support what we get from people outside the community, like politicians or people who once lived in the community. Besides the monetary contributions, we give our labor as well. (P11)

However, there were a handful of the projects the communities initiated that required resources unavailable within the community. For such projects, the community got external support as expertise and resources from outside agencies or philanthropists. The participants felt that these were still self-help projects because they came up with the idea and engaged in their execution:

Some projects are from the inhabitants. They design them, but they call on us [community developers] to help raise the resources needed for their execution. Sometimes we assist with the skills they need, but they [community members] participate in the execution of the projects. (P7)

Residents typically had a stronger feeling of ownership toward initiatives that adopted this method, according to the participants, because of their active participation. As a result, such programs were better managed:

Because the projects come from the people in the community, they show more commitment to them. The commitment and training them sometimes get help with the project's management. (P4)

Self-help case study: A community-initiated footbridge project

Because residents were having trouble traversing a marshy region to go to the local market, the entire town came together to discuss the issue. During their discussions, they agreed to construct a wooden footbridge. Members in the community opted to contribute financially to the project. The chief also sought assistance from the community's legislator and other philanthropists. They utilized the proceeds to purchase supplies such as wood and cement, and community members volunteered to help. They completed the bridge a year after starting it.

Technical assistance approach

The findings from the interviews revealed that with the technical assistance approach, NGOs, government agencies, and private organizations funded and executed projects. This approach was used for the cassava processing and some more complex footbridges, with little input or engagement of community members. According to a participant who works for an NGO, they based decisions about these projects on the external organization's judgment of the community's needs or resources, or the district assembly's developmental plan, rather than the community's expressed needs:

In the community, we [NGO] and other external groups intervene. We choose projects based on our criteria, such as if we believe the community requires particular amenities. (P13)

NGOs and DCD have collaborated on several projects. They must, however, follow ASHMA's plans. The assembly's plans cannot contradict development projects. ASHMA has established a school in our community on its own, and we are currently working on that footbridge you saw. It should be ready shortly (P9)

In technical assistance projects, the aim was usually to complete them within the time schedules of the agencies to benefit the communities. Therefore, agencies designed, planned, and executed the projects with minimal involvement of the inhabitants. However, after execution of projects, the agencies handed them over to the communities, with the added responsibility of maintaining them:

For us [agencies] we aim to provide footbridges, houses, toilet facilities, and other amenities the community needs. So we go to communities with our programs already planned and resources gained. In this community, we designed the footbridge project ourselves. We then asked the communities for land on which we could execute projects. Such a project has helped them a lot. (P18)

Technical assistance case study: The cassava processing project

This project has been undertaken in the communities to help the inhabitants improve their economic communities. In this project, the NGOs which have spearheaded them go to the communities with the entire projects planned and resources allocated for their execution. They then seek the assistance of the chiefs to recruit inhabitants who are trained in the processing. They are then given the funds and other equipment to process the cassava acquired.

This project has been undertaken in the communities to help the inhabitants improve their economic communities. In this project, the NGOs which have spearheaded them go to the communities with the entire projects planned and resources allocated for their execution. They then seek the assistance of the chiefs to recruit inhabitants who are trained in the processing. They are then given the funds and other equipment to process the cassava acquired.

Factors that influence the choice of approaches

The factors influencing the selection of the approaches to use in a CD project were low community capacity, weak social ties, and the nature of projects undertaken.

Low community capacity

We found that the dynamics in the slums were influencing approaches employed in initiatives in Ashaiman. The community's high poverty levels prohibited them from using the self-help technique to tackle their problems, especially when these projects cost lots of money. Poverty was widespread in the community owing to the lack of employment possibilities, and most residents were working in menial and low-paying jobs. The Municipal Assembly, which previously had a budget for supporting community-led

projects, no longer had such funds available. Residents often could not grasp what was addressed when invited to meetings, according to the organizations that carried out technical efforts, because of their low levels of education:

For the first stages of the projects, the leaders represent the communities. Some leaders do not know what we are talking about, so they only listen and play a limited role in the discussions. (P15)

To help such communities, the agencies pooled their resources and experience to create programs based on their assessments of the communities' needs. The NGO representatives, for example, stated that they worked in the study village since it is one of the poorest in the Region:

We go to the communities with our resources to carry out projects that have already been planned. We don't require any resources from them, so I wouldn't say they help us. They are OK with you once you stop asking them to contribute. (P5)

Insecure land tenure was a crucial factor that hindered the community's ability to carry out various projects independently. Most of the residents did not own the land on which they lived. This deterred them from developing the community, especially given the constant threat of eviction. Poor land demarcation also exacerbated this issue in the slum, as it limited the amount of land available for construction:

Because they live in a slum, the residents rarely own the land. They are sometimes threatened with eviction. It is difficult for them to develop the land as a result of this. Even landowners are unsure of how much land they possess because it is not adequately demarcated. (P6)

Weak social ties

We found through the interviews that the inhabitants of Ashaiman had weak relationships because of tribal diversity and a shortage of social capital. For migrants, the slum is a popular destination. As a result, there are considerable differences in the values and interests of the residents, making cooperation difficult:

We are all from different parts of the world and seek better living conditions. Working together might be challenging. People from the same tribe are more willing to collaborate than people from other tribes. Because of differing interests, even choosing the same path is tough. (P1)

Volunteerism is scarce in the slums, making it difficult to persuade residents to undertake things for themselves. They expect some agency or government to handle everything for them, even when we [community developers] help them, they come up with solutions and give those tools and other materials to tackle their problems. (P23)

Nature of projects undertaken

The nature of the projects determined the approaches that were adopted. Self-help, with some support from DCD, was used in projects with modest technical skills and financing requirements, for example:

... In some cassava processing projects, we only support some communities with some materials, such as cassava and the pans needed. The inhabitants can mobilize the other resources needed. (P18).

However, because of the high cost, technical skill, and unfavorable impact of community dynamics, residents could not build the footbridges although they acknowledge their necessity in such communities. As a result, NGOs mostly carried out such projects in the community as they had the funding and expertise:

Lately, ASHMA has executed some projects as part of the government's programme to upgrade slums. A footbridge has been built in this community and there is another one being built just close by. But with this one, ASHMA is doing it in partnership with an NGO. (P6)

Given the large number of infrastructures required by the communities, the top-down method has proven to be the most effective. The lack of practicality of bottom-up programs compelled the dominance of this strategy, as the residents lacked the expertise and adequate materials needed to carry them out.

Discussion

The study investigates the CD techniques utilized in a Ghanaian slum and the factors that influenced their adoption. Self-help and technical assistance approaches are used in Ashaiman, but the latter option dominates, as the findings demonstrate. The dominance of the technical assistance approach in Ashaiman contradicts the self-help approach, which is widely advocated by development practitioners and researchers for CD due to its participatory nature and ability to build and increase community capacity, as well as increase project sustainability (Bonye et al., 2013).

The data shows that the technical assistance approach adopted by external groups (such as non-governmental organizations) has provided important services to the urban slum that was studied. The dominance of projects undertaken by external agencies in urban communities, including slums, has also been observed in other countries, showing the congruence between this finding and observations made by other studies (Asana & Wahid, 2013; Habib, 2009; Mutisya & Yarime, 2011). The limited adoption of the self-help approach results from specific dynamics in slums such as low community capacity and weak community ties, which made it difficult for the mobilization of local resources and community participation in projects. This study backs the findings of other researchers (e.g. Adamtey & Frimpong, 2018; Gyan & Ampomah, 2016), who showed that poverty levels, stakeholder conflicts, and a lack of social capital influenced the approach employed in CD initiatives in Ghana.

Although projects can be executed by external agencies, with limited community participation using this approach (Gibson et al., 2015), it limits capacity building among inhabitants, which is key to CD. Relating this to Pretty's (1995) typology of participation, inhabitants' involvement in the top-bottom projects is manipulative and passive which have not augured well for making inhabitants active participants of development efforts. As revealed in the findings, the adoption of this approach has not been characterized by high community participation, as the goal of implementing agencies in Ashaiman is often focused on the completion of tasks and the provision of amenities. This corroborates an observation by Gibson et al. (2015) that the technical assistance approach does not emphasize community participation in projects.

Project implementers distort participation into mere public relations instead of genuine community engagement, particularly as community leaders are insufficiently involved, even when they are invited to participate in meetings because they do not fully understand the project details. Also, because of the limited community participation in the planning and design phases of technical assistance initiatives, the spirit of project ownership appears to be lacking among the residents, resulting in a lack of community control over initiatives. The lack of community involvement and ownership in projects may affect their management and long-term viability (Laah et al., 2014). There is the need for attention to be paid to the blend of both technical assistance and self-help, to promote the successful execution and management of projects in Ashaiman, since they complement each other. This will bolster residents to use their social and cultural capital to support CD projects, even if they lack the financial means or expertise (Isidiho & Sabran, 2016).

Limitations of the study

A limitation of the study is that the information generated only speaks to issues in Ashaiman, whose dynamics differ from other slums in Ghana, although there are many similarities.

Implications of the study

The findings show that there is a need to address the residents' limited participation in CD projects. To enhance community engagement in projects, community developers in Ashaiman (both state and non-governmental) should include residents in the planning stages. This can be done through meetings with the chiefs and key opinion leaders in the communities. Community developers should educate community leaders on projects before their implementation, and this should be in a language that the leaders can understand. This would serve as a conduit through which the leaders will buy into the projects, and hence implore the inhabitants to get on board with the execution of such projects.

Additionally, enhancing community leaders' understanding of projects, and hence getting the interest of communities' inhabitants promotes dialogue between the project initiators and the communities. The dialogue established will enable community developers to factor the views of the communities into the design of projects and also execute projects which would address the communities' pressing needs. This strategy communicates to the inhabitants that their input and participation in the projects are needed, which empowers them as partners in development efforts in their communities. Some inhabitants can acquire specific skills pertinent to projects undertaken through their participation, which would enable them to better manage projects upon their completion.

Another issue that deserves community developers' consideration is the mobilization of inhabitants in the communities. There is the need to unite the inhabitants who, as mentioned earlier, belong to different ethnic groups, have divergent interests, and rarely consider the slums as their home. Through their mobilization, they can be conscientized to prioritize the development of their neighborhoods over their tribal differences. To achieve this, community developers in Ashaiman should devise ways to overtly work with the leaders of the communities such as the chiefs and assemblymen. Committees set up for

projects should represent the various ethnic groups so that it can encourage them to work together. Slum residents can form strong ties if they are brought together in initiatives, which will increase community participation and improve successful project management.

As a major initiator of CD in Ashaiman, ASHMA also has a role to play in encouraging inhabitants of Ashaiman to actively participate in projects. This can be done by leasing land in the slums to the slum dwellers. Against the background that most of the land in the slums belongs to the government, ASHMA can grant land ownership to the inhabitants, which will take away their fear of eviction from the communities. This would then encourage the inhabitants to develop such lands as their properties. Having been assured of their protection from eviction, inhabitants can then be encouraged to spend their resources on the development of their communities.

Based on the findings, the technical assistance approach is popular in undertaking CD projects in Ashaiman. However, the strict use of this approach may affect successful project management after they are handed over to the community. Thus, while the top-bottom approach is adopted in Ashaiman, attention has not been paid to the communities' management of projects in the long run due to the limited engagement of inhabitants in projects. This calls for the prioritization of community participation in projects. This can be done by actively seeking the views of community inhabitants during the design of projects and their involvement in their execution. Through their active engagement from the onset of projects and their views not only sought but captured in the design of projects, the inhabitants are encouraged to play active roles in implementing projects. Additionally, inhabitants' active engagement in projects initiated by external agencies will help them understand some issues, such as the essence of the projects in their communities and how their input is needed to make the project execution and management successful. Their participation in projects would also offer them the opportunity to learn basic skills which can help them manage projects after they are handed over to the communities.

Furthermore, the choice of approaches for projects should be based on the dynamics in the communities, such as the problems faced by the inhabitants, socioeconomic conditions, and ethnic characteristics. This will be crucial to devising means through which the entire community can be galvanized around projects. The self-help approach, although is being dominated by the technical assistance approach, has been adopted in some projects. This means it is still feasible for communities to execute projects on their own. Its adoption should, therefore, be encouraged to bring the inhabitants together for projects and empower them in the development agenda.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Jamal Appiah-Kubi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8048-7458>

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