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# Local Participation in Community-Based Development Projects in Ghana

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## ABSTRACT

The study critically analyses how the local people in Ga West municipality perceive local participation and socio-cultural factors that influence local participation. The study used the mixed method design. The lottery method of the simple random sampling technique coupled with Neuman and Neuman's recommendation on random convenience sampling were used to sample and collect data from 187 respondents. The study revealed that local participation provides the local people employment avenues. It was revealed that developmental projects brought to their communities do not allow the local people to be involved at the planning and implementation phases. The study further revealed that women were of the opinion that projects brought to them were not feminine enough and did not build their capacity. Education, social cohesion, peace, and stability were among some of the sociocultural factors that influence participation. The study again recommended that every community member should participate, regardless of their gender, ethnic group, or socio-cultural differences.

## KEYWORDS

Community, Community-Based Development Projects, Local Participation, Stakeholder

## INTRODUCTION

Local participation is not only believed to be the “panacea” to ensuring improvement, especially in the context of poverty alleviation (Boakyee-Agyei, 2009) but also justified as a prerequisite to, and a catalyst for sustainable socio-economic development and general societal well-being (Work, 2002). A number of authors have categorized participation in development projects into typologies with lower and higher levels (Chambers, 2005; Ahwoi, 2007; Ayee, 2000a; Ayoade, 2000). In lower levels of participation, the local people contribute labour, time, and resources, whereas decisions are controlled by the development organization. In contrast, higher levels of participation have the local people taking command of the project, undertaking their own analysis and making key decisions. Chambers (2005) analysed that, scholars have different opinions regarding higher and lower levels of participation, while some think higher level give more power to local people, others have the opinion that participating in lower levels may also be an empowering process.

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Local participation, particularly by the poor and marginalized, in development initiatives intended to benefit them have been acknowledged as important in achieving sustainable development (Blackburn & Holland, 2007; Dadzie, 2000; Korkor, 2014). The assumption is that the local people themselves better understand their economic and social milieu and probably have insights that can help shape initiatives intended to benefit them. Ideally, a good local participation program will enable those who are interested in or affected by a decision to have an opportunity to influence the outcome. However, Chambers (2005) points out that rural or community development projects have had a high failure rate because most program officers are external experts and outsiders, who are neither poor nor rural, and thus do not have a true understanding of the issues at stake. Community members must therefore be recognized to foster participation for development.

In Ghana for instance, many government projects that have been successfully delivered have suffered a backlash because of the lack of involvement of local people and neglect of the cultural, historical and social perspectives of the local people. Some typical examples of Government project that has suffered this fate are the Ayensu Starch Factory and the Komenda Tomatoes Factory in the Central Region (Boateng, 2012). To Boateng, this as a major concern, has led many stakeholders, particularly benefactors, to consider better ways of devising structures and/or measures that will ensure a social content as well as promote a social context within which participation in all community-based development projects can be enhanced.

Over the years, most studies conducted on the subject matter have largely focused on conceptualizing theories associated with local participation in community development (Boakye-Adjei, 2009; Amon, 2014; Fundi, 2005) with seldom any recourse to the dynamics and complexities of environmental context of participation (IJHSS, 2016). The problem, therefore, is “What socio-cultural factors influence community’s participation in community development projects?” This study takes the discussion to the local people in Ga West Municipality and presents an argument that substantiates a socially constructed position on local participation in development interventions.

The study critically analyses the Ga West communities’ perception about local participation and examines the socio-cultural factors that influence local participation in these communities.

The study seeks to:

1. Analyse how local people in the Ga West Municipality perceive local participation.
2. Identify and examine the socio-cultural factors that influence community participation.

### **Concept of Participation**

The term participation is generally operationalized differently depending on the context and field in which it is studied which makes it uneasy to be conceptualized (Samad, 2002). In ancient Greece, participation was viewed as a matter of voting, holding offices, attending public meetings, paying taxes and defending the state (Pateman, 1999). But in modern times, participation became synonymous with “sharing” (Kaler, 1999). Oakley and Marsden (1984), and Wolfe (1994) put forward that participation is closely linked with the concept of empowerment. Without empowerment, participation may be meaningless. People’s participation is the process of empowering the deprived, marginalized and the excluded (Samad, 2002). Cohen and Uphoff (1980) view participation with regard to development projects as “people’s involvement in decision making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes” and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programme. Mohammed (2010) defines participation as the active involvement of the local people in the planning and implementation of development projects. Mohammed argues that for effective plan formulation, control of projects and sharing of benefits of development to be realized, participation is necessary.

Social scientists, development practitioners and development agencies have conceptualized the term “participation” in their own view and its scope and meaning are still open to debate (Sill, 2016).

The USAID (1995) defines participation as: “An active engagement of partners and customers in sharing ideas, committing time and resources, making decisions and taking action to bring about a desired development objective”. According to the Swedish Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA), participation is “a basic democratic right that should be promoted in all development projects considering the means of increasing efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability in development project” (Rudqvist & Woodford-Berger, 1996). In this definition, SIDA laid emphasis on equity and democracy which are necessary elements in participation.

This study however defines participation as active involvement of local communities, civil society and community-based organizations in the planning and implementation process of projects at the grassroots level.

### Local Participation

According to Karfui (2014), governments, development institutions, and Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) deliver a range of services towards poverty alleviation and awareness creation via community development projects hence it is imperative to employ the best available practices in local and stakeholder participation. One justification for local participation is that it results in a strong sense of ownership over the intervention programme to be implemented (Reed, 2008). Boakye-Agyei (2009) adds that local participation can be used to achieve a project’s material benefits or can facilitate the social development processes of the people toward empowerment and sustained engagement in project activities. For example, in Tanzania, community members of Misasa perceived the community’s water project as the government’s property and hence local participation and ownership through cost sharing and management was absent which consequently led to the failure of the project. This attitude affected the construction, operation and maintenance of the water schemes as well as safety of project properties due to theft. Karfui (2014) had argued that such perception and attitude are usually developed in the community members when they are made passive to the project designed for them.

Contrary to a total neglect of ownership, Karl (2015) had posited that a section of the community perceives that participation in developmental projects is the responsibility of a selected few; usually the chief and other kinsmen and the assemblyman/woman. Members of the community acknowledge these selected few as community leaders or representatives of the people and so they have the full capacity to make meaningful inputs in any discussion on their behalf (Karl, 2015; Karfui, 2014). The sense of unity which is usually defined by the feeling of cooperation, commitment to the group’s welfare, of willingness to communicate openly, and of responsibility to and for others as well as to one’s self exist. Hence, community leaders who are appointed by the people to represent them are responsible for seeing to the success of any project designed for the people, depending on the needs of the community, and the leader’s own feeling (Asante, 2015). The onus of planning, operationalizing, safeguarding and maintaining such projects, therefore, becomes the sole prerogative of the community leaders and not the majority (citizenry) (Brodie, Cowling & Nissen, 2009).

### Approaches to Participation

The term “participation” has many perspectives from which meaning is derived; the development agency school of thought, the political school of thought and the capabilities school of thought.

The development agency school of thought views participation as one that brings about building partnerships and ownership from the bottom to the top and primarily involves making policies more sensitive to the poor (Work, 2002; World Bank, 2000). To the development agency school of thought, although the poor are more difficult to reach, their opposition can encumber the accomplishments of development projects. Supporting the development agency school of thought, Tandon and Cordeiro (1998) state that, participation is exactly the process through which the most affected influence and share control of their development initiatives.

The political school of thought stretches participation beyond the project framework (Blackburn & Holland, 2007; Thompson, 2005) to include influencing national policymakers in the planning

and implementation of large-scale government programs. In this regard, the political school argues that participation is a way to facilitate political change in favour of the dispossessed (Blackburn & Holland, 2007); and thus, underscores the direct community involvement in the decision-making process on the socio-economic development and the general well-being of the community. This, they believe makes development programs better understood, accepted, supported, valued and sustained.

The capabilities school of thought categorizes participation as a process of strengthening the capabilities of people to control their own development. In this way, participation of beneficiaries provides a training ground for, and helps to build, a pool of enlightened participatory citizenry (Nelson & Wright, 2005; World Bank, 2002). This school of thought suggests further that strengthening stakeholders' human, economic, social and cultural capabilities is necessary to help them control their own development in terms of participation (World Bank, 2002).

These schools of thought propose and integrate some important elements in participation for development; nonetheless, not much is said on how to leverage on the historical and socio-cultural perceptions and experiences of the communities to enhance participation in development projects.

### **Socio-Cultural Factors That Influence Participation**

According to Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995), the engagement of individuals and communities in decisions about the things that affect their lives help to ensure successful implementation of the project since the likes and dislikes, beliefs and taboos are made known to all stakeholders. To these researchers, culture offers breadth of activities from which individuals choose, create and define the resources they need to pursue. In particular, Verba et al., (1995) argue that some cultures segregate women by not allowing them to mingle with men who are not their husbands or relatives. In addition, there are certain beliefs that perceive young adults as inferior to old adults. With such a belief, Verba et al., (1995) argue that this may hinder the young adult's participation in community work especially where the implementation agency is filled with "older adults".

Limited community participation in the project implementation and management decreases the projects' chances of sustainability (Rahmato, 1991); as the project performs poorly and eventually fail because the socio-cultural factors that influence participation were not looked at. Local participation in community development projects are usually limited and in the form of labour investment and not real decision-making by the society. Beneficiary communities are only informed after plans have been made through formal meetings where the officers justify their plans with little room for modification (Community Development Society, 2012).

Burns and Taylor (2000) state that, the sponsoring agency should be working with and not for the people. Project donors/sponsors should recognize the central role of communities in the project cycle and thus take into consideration their cultural beliefs in order to ensure beneficiary ownership and also to instil virtues of accountability, transparency and sustainability among societal members. Members of the society will participate and contribute significantly to something they feel part of, identify with (culturally), and correlate with their efforts. Engaging individuals and communities in decisions about things that affect their lives helps to ensure the successful implementation of the project as their own. Their likes and dislikes, beliefs and taboos are brought to bear (Burns & Taylor, 2000). However, sometimes people do not want to be involved in decision making for development projects mainly not because they do not want to, but because the stage of involvement they are made to contribute to or the location of the development project puts them off.

Participation is a basic human right of every citizen that promotes many other rights. It is enshrined in article 27(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that "everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the society, to enjoy the arts and share in scientific advancement and its benefits". The concept of people's participation has lately been gaining momentum due to the introduction of gender empowerment rights (Rural Communities Impacting Policy Document, 2011). The Manila Declaration (1989) in Theron (2005) is another policy document which guides community participation. As stated in the Manila Declaration (1989), it provides a people-centered development

package that seeks to return control over resources to the people and their communities to be used in meeting their own needs. It further calls for active mutual self-help among people, working together in their common struggle to deal with their common problems in their society.

However, people often decide to act and reflect on their actions as conscious subjects of a greater group of a society. The common belief is that involving citizens in rural programmes and empowering them becomes a potential to boost their livelihoods and foster development in their community (Kakumba & Nsingo, 2016). Unfortunately, such seemingly involvement often facilitates inequalities through democracy to benefit a selected few in the society.

African Development Bank (ADB) (2013) indicates that offering society more choice to partake actively in their developmental needs would stimulate competition which might end up becoming a mixed blessing to the community. To ADB, massively consulting community members to consider socio-cultural factors often helps to make developmental projects more efficient, but can also stimulate intense debate and opposition to developmental plans which often cause delays in their executions.

Communities can be defined by their characteristic in terms of beliefs, culture, language, tradition, law, geography, class and race. As Shaeffer (2012), argues:

*Some communities are homogeneous while others are heterogeneous, and some united while others are conflictive. Some communities are governed and managed by societal leaders chosen democratically in the various communities who act relatively autonomously from other levels taking into consideration their socio-cultural roles. Bray (1996) identifies three types of communities; the first is geographical community, which is defined according to its member's place of residence, such as a village or district. The second type is ethnic, racial, and religious, in which membership is based on ethnic, racial, or religious identification, and usually cuts across membership based on geographical location. The third one is communities based on shared family or education concerns, which include parents, relations and similar bodies that are based on families' shared concern like traditions and norms for the welfare of the community members in a given society. Though the various definitions are by themselves not necessarily exclusive, they represent different forms of socio-cultural factors that influence participation.*

## METHODOLOGY

### Data Sources

Both primary and secondary data were obtained for the research. The researcher reviewed related literature from secondary sources to support or refute arguments and conclusions about the subject matter. Such secondary sources included journals, publications and the internet. The primary data were collected using the questionnaire and the focus-group interview.

### Population

The population of the study comprised of all the residents of Amasaman Constituency (that is Amasaman, Obeyeyie, Abehenease, Sapeiman, Opah, Afiaman, and Doblo-Gono) in the Greater-Accra region, totalling 56,960 (Ghana Statistical Service, 2010). The target population was residents above eighteen years old who had a minimum of four years permanent residency status within the municipality; which is about 14,960 respondents for the six towns within the constituency.

### Sample and Sampling Procedure

The lottery method of the simple random sampling technique was used to select three communities—Amasaman, Obeyeyie, and Opah, out of the six accessible communities for the study. The community projects used in the study were Amasaman Market Complex, Obeyeyie Toilet Project by International Central Gospel Church (ICGC) and Opah School complex.

Neuman and Neuman's (2006) recommended 2% random level convenience sampling and this method was used to select participants from the three communities for the questionnaire administration and focus group discussion. The researcher included in the sample nine opinion leaders from the respective communities also by convenience sampling. In all, a sample size of 187 respondents was used for the data collection for this study.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Questionnaire and focused group interview methods were employed for this study. The survey method helped collect quantitative data with the use of the questionnaire. A total of 187 questionnaires were administered and the response rate was 100%. Qualitatively, the focus group interview was used. Four focus groups were constituted by the researcher; one group of seven artisans, another group of five market women and two households comprising of four and five participants respectively.

### **Ethical Issues**

Ethical clearance was sought for and given by the University of Ghana Humanities Ethics Committee. Also, permission to conduct the study was given from the opinion leaders of the three communities. Written and verbal consent were obtained from respondents to participate in the study. The principles of anonymity and confidentiality were adhered to strictly. The researcher also emphasised that participants' information will only be used for academic purposes.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

The data collected from the questionnaires were numbered serially, edited, coded and then analysed with the version 22 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software. However, additional responses provided which was not part of the questions in the questionnaire were discussed and used as data for the qualitative analysis. In addition to the qualitative analysis, comments, statements and responses from the focus group interview was transcribed, coded and sub-themed for the analysis.

## **RESULTS**

### **Characteristics of Respondents**

Table 1 shows some selected characteristics of respondents.

Table 1 shows some characteristics of the participants. The population sample was fairly gender balanced with 49% and 51% representing male and female participants respectively. Majority of the participants fell between the ages 25 and 45 forming 79% of the participant. Majority of the participants (72%) had not schooled beyond secondary school. About 43% of the participants earn at most GHC 2,000 while 24% earn above GHC 2,000; the remaining 33% refused to indicate their income level.

### *Perception of People About Local Participation*

Following some gender biases and varying gender roles and interests observed in the communities, the researcher decided to interact with both sexes at separate occasions with not too different set of questions. The results of the findings are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2 presents the responses of men's perception on local participation sampled for the study. In reference to the attitude of external agencies, a great majority (83%) of the male respondents did not trust external agencies since they believe these agencies were often not transparent. Again, an overwhelming majority (92%) of the respondents asserted the agencies do not actually consider their needs as the basis for the projects. Most of the respondents (67%) intimated the amount of time men were allowed to participate in community-based projects were inconsequential in the execution and sustainability of such projects. All the male respondents (100%) agreed that they were barely involved

Table 1. Selected characteristics of respondents

Characteristics		Number	Percentage
Sex	Male	92	49
	Female	95	51
	Total	187	100
Age	18-24 years	4	2
	25-35 years	50	27
	36-45 years	97	52
	Above 46 years	36	19
	Total	187	100
Education	Primary	40	21
	Secondary	94	51
	Vocational	21	11
	University degree	25	13
	Masters	7	4
Income Level (GHC)*	Below 500	25	13
	501-1000	38	20
	1501-2000	19	10
	2001-2500	7	4
	2501-3000	13	8
	Above 3000	23	12

Source: Field survey, 2017

Note: \*Does not add up to total (187) because of missing cases

in the project budgeting and planning. About two-thirds of the male respondents (67%) indicated that the handling of project money over-empowered the benefactors.

Most of the male respondents (79%) saw their participation in community projects as a source of employment opportunities, the remaining 21% thought otherwise. There was a mixed-response among the male respondent as 51% and 49% of the male respondents responded “YES” and “NO” respectively to the statement: does local participation bring about “Marketing avenues for the local content and culture”? While 17% disagreed, 83% of the male respondents believed that their gender roles seriously influence their degrees of involvement in local participation. Majority of male respondents (79%) supposed that, the risk averse syndrome of “Do it and let us see” influenced participation while 21% of the respondents held a contrary view. The risk averse syndrome is a situation where local people look on for something negative to happen to someone or a property in question. This attitude is mostly exhibited when a condition which is due all people is discriminately given to only a few people.

Additionally, in the focus group discussion, the men reiterated their distrust for a greater number of donor agencies, which is often dominated by government officials who are not transparent with their dealings with the local people. In addition, the duration for men’s involvement in community projects had less impact on the planning and implementation of the projects. To most of the male interviewees, the length of project involvement is crucial because it impacts their availability to attend to another livelihood programme.

Table 3 shows the women’s perception about local participation. A great majority (90%) of the women believe community projects do not directly target women and children; hence their low

**Table 2. Response of men's perception on local participation**

Perception	YES		NO	
	Number	%	Number	%
Attitude of external agencies:				
-They are not transparent and cannot be trusted.	76	83	16	17
-Most often our own needs are not determined by us.	85	92	7	8
-Duration of participation of men often has minimal influence on community projects.	62	67	30	33
-Local involvement in budgeting and project planning is low, usually absent.	92	100	0	0
-Handling of money meant for projects confer power on benefactors	62	67	30	33
Local Participation brings about:				
-Opportunities for employment for community Members	73	79	19	21
-Marketing avenue of local content and culture	47	51	45	49
-Gender roles seriously influence men's involvement in local participation	76	83	16	17
-Risk averse particularly with the syndrome "do it and let's see".	73	79	19	21
Total	646	78	182	22

Source: Field survey, 2017

**Table 3. Response of women's perception of local participation**

Perception	YES		NO	
	Number	%	Number	%
-Projects that do not directly target women and children is what come into their communities	85	90	10	10
-No empowering programme to build the capacity of women	72	76	23	24
-Local involvement in budgeting and project planning is low. Usually absent.	77	81	18	19
-Handling of money meant for projects confer power on benefactors	82	86	13	14
-Local Participation provides opportunities for employment	85	90	10	10
- Local Participation provides marketing avenue of local content and culture	31	33	64	67
-Gender roles seriously affect women's involvement in local participation	77	81	18	19
-Risk averse particularly with the syndrome "do it and let's see".	31	33	64	67

Source: Field survey, 2017

participation. This was because they said they often participated in projects, which were targeted at them. About two-thirds (76%) of the women added that the projects seldom came with capacity building programmes for them although they believe their participation in development projects should offer them empowerment programmes that will build their capacity into leadership roles as well as opportunities for development. About 81 percent indicated that they were barely involved

in the planning and budgeting of the community projects. A vast majority (82%) believe handling project money empowered benefactors but the remaining 14 percent were of a contrary view. An overwhelming majority (90%) saw local participation as employment opportunities. Two-thirds (67%) of the women did not see local participation as an avenue to market local content and culture, however the remaining third believe the contrary. A large majority (81%) believe gender roles influenced their involvement in local participation. Majority (67%) did not believe in the risk averse syndrome, particularly “do it let’s see”, affected local participation.

### **Socio-Cultural Factors That Influence Community Participation**

This section sought to identify socio-cultural factors that impede or facilitate local participation. The study identified that every stakeholder is responsible for the promotion of local participation in development projects. The respondents asserted that it is imperative for stakeholders to partner community members to achieve this end.

The respondents added that, transparency and accountability are social values that positively influence participation. One respondent said that: *“when they are kept in the dark about the allocation and use of resources as well as how the activities were carried out in previous projects, it negatively reinforces the local people to participate in subsequent projects”*. Some other respondents also identified that: *“the absence or lack of reliable information on community members when it comes to participation negatively influences their participation”*.

Community or social cohesion is one sociocultural factor that influences local participation. The participants revealed that, when projects to be executed tend to disrupt the communities’ social and cultural cohesion, usually most community members withdraw from participating. They raised social attacks and cultural segregations as some reasons why some members would withhold their involvement and/or hesitate on fully contributing toward the project if socio-cultural conflict tag is given to a particular project.

They added that peace and stability is a major socio-cultural factor which promotes local participation within their communities. From the focus group discussion, the respondents said, *“there can be no development without peace and stability”*. They averred that, where there is conflict, people cannot move around freely to engage in activities that promotes development. They explained two forms of conflict that may ensue in the community and these were conflicts among the various groups in the community and conflicts in the community development process. With conflicts among community members people from an opposing camp may not want to associate themselves with initiatives coming from the other end. This makes community development difficult since more and more hands are needed in whatever form (financial or human) to successfully execute development activities. Conflicts in the development process normally arise from the entrenched positions taken by some members. This brings about formation of polarized groups who will not be willing to accept the views of other groups. In situations where the leadership lacks the necessary negotiation skills, community discussions may degenerate into conflicts.

Another socio-cultural factor found was the communities’ perception of local participation as a social right and not a privilege so they must exercise it to the fullest. Hence, recognizing that participation is a human right, any attempt by any leader to use his/her political office to prevent them from participating will be frowned at and kicked against. This is in line with the tenets enshrined in article 27(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that “everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural, economic and social life of the community and to enjoy the arts and share in scientific advancement and its benefits”.

Education was another socio-cultural factor identified by the participants. It was revealed during the focus group interviews that; the respondents appreciated the fact that education plays a pivotal role on the amount of input they can make in community-based projects. Education, whether formally or informally done, shapes and refines the quality and quantity of experiences and level of expertise brought on board during participation. The social function of education, when it is absent

or inadequate negatively influences participation at any of the various stages in the project execution. It was revealed that whenever a community-based project is to be designed or even implemented, the local people are to be informed, and trained on how to use, protect and maintain the property. This, they believe, enhances project ownership that is essential for the sustainability of the project.

Another social factor identified included the level at which the communities were engaged in the development process. It was revealed that the level at which major stakeholders such as the chiefs and other community leaders get to participate in decisions concerning the project usually does guarantee the cultural content of the people the project is meant for. During the focus group interviews, some respondents posited that, *“projects usually brought to them often do not take into consideration the local content demands of their respective communities”*, for this reason, it is believed by some of the community members that ‘some people have their project and so let them do it’. People will participate and contribute significantly to something they feel part of, can be identified with culturally, and correlate with their efforts.

The members of the community advised that projects brought to them should not be used for political points but instead as an opportunity to make them feel as being part of a state which cares for her citizens.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study sought to find out how the Ga West Municipality locals perceived local participation and also find out some socio-cultural factors that influence participation. The study found that participation among the sexes varied depending on the kind of developmental project and also there is a gross distrust among the community members, particularly the men, towards development agencies because the communities are less informed about the agencies’ activities. It was revealed that the people see local participation as employment opportunities as well as avenues for them to decide on their needs and how to satisfy these needs while encouraging accountability. The study also found out that the local people were barely involved in the planning and to a large extent the implementation phases of the developmental projects brought to their communities. It was further revealed that women were of the opinion that projects brought to them were not feminine enough and did not build their capacity.

The study revealed that all stakeholders were responsible for the promotion of local participation and that education and information were some socio-cultural factors which influenced local participation. Again, social cohesion, peace and security, and conflicts were also identified as socio-cultural factors that influenced local participation. Additionally, the locals’ perception of social right also influenced local participation.

Based on the findings the study recommends that community members should be empowered to participate more in the planning and implementation of development programmes or projects while all stakeholder groups (which include the local people), are also given the opportunity to contribute to decision making as this helps to ensure that the right need is satisfied so that ownership and accountability become the responsibility of all. Also, community leaders should champion developmental projects in their communities so as to create more employment avenues for their people. It is also recommended that community leaders take socio-cultural factors that enhance local participation more seriously.

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Volume 13 • Issue 1

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