Community Participation in Development Projects: A Study of Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District in Ghana

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Abstract

This study accessed the extent of community participation in development projects within the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District of Ghana. Development projects selected were water systems, market structures and KVIP's. This was a descriptive survey research design which used semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion guide and observation checklist to gather data from 72 respondents from six selected communities within the district. The findings indicated that both Development Agencies and beneficiaries 'participated' in the development projects as a means to an end. The end to the Development Agents was to meet externally induced welfare targets and to the communities, the end being meeting immediate socio-economic deficiencies. Both choose a course of action that best suited their interest, as explained by the rational choice theory. Participation in the district is functional. It is recommended that the District Assembly should sensitize the communities on their roles as channels in the decentralization process to encourage them to fully participate in the development process. Additionally, development Agents empower the communities to make project sustainability a possibility.

Keywords: community participation, development, development agents, projects, capacity building

1. Introduction

The number of poor people, the world over, is on the increase despite years of development work. In spite of the seemingly improvements in some countries, over 20% of the global population (1.2 billion) continue to live on less than US$1 a day (United Nations Development Program, 2004). Despite its seemingly failures, the focus of international development discourse still hinges on social development (Atal, 1997). According to Atal (1997), countries the world over have adopted their own methods in eradicating poverty as a result of the multidimensional nature of poverty. According to Fox and Brown (1998), the failure of the World Bank to reach the poor and even causing social and environmental damage through its structural adjustment programmes is generally condemned (Battikha, 2002; Pender, 2001). As a result, and on hindsight, the World Bank has adopted the Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF) to promote a more all-inclusive, participatory, and state-owned approach to the reduction of poverty and development (The World Bank, 2003).

This approach is meant to provide public welfare services to poor communities and more importantly, to empower such communities in decision-making and the implementation of development projects. Development interventions therefore emphasized popular participation as a springboard to empowerment. Oakley et al. (1991) argue that community participation will therefore lead to a type of development which is more respectful of the communities' position and interest. Decentralization denotes entrusting and transferring activities and tasks of the central government to local authorities to trigger participation and joint development planning. Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002), argue that the empowerment strategy of development is both an inherent part and a means for reducing poverty.

With decentralization as the thrust of Ghana's development process, the key words in most interventions of development agencies are the concepts of building deprived communities' capabilities and their eventual empowerment. These concepts have also intensified discussions on the community's contribution to moulding the kind of development interventions to bring the desired change in the lives of its members. According to McGee (2002), through community participation, the community can influence and share control over development initiatives, decisions and resources which affect them. The ability to take control over development, according to Srinivasan (1994), is dependent on the readiness of both government and communities to accept certain duties and carry out certain activities.

The government of Ghana, in this light, has since 1992, passed some laws and drawn up development plans to make community participation a reality. These laws include the 1992 Constitution of the Republic, the Local Government Law (Act 462 of 1993), the National Development Planning System Law (Act 480, 1994) and the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy papers I and II.

Despite the existence of these policy documents, which are meant to establish institutions or structures that explicitly specify the involvement of the people, their impact is yet to be properly ascertained. In the Ajumako-Esiam-Enyan District, for example, there are questions

regarding the extent to which the development process can be justified as being community-owned. Also, there are questions about the level of involvement of indigenes in the development process and how it leads to empowerment. It is what appears to be the lack of clarity on the extent of the community's participation in development projects within the Ajumako-Esiam-Enyan District which motivated the researchers to embark on this study.

1.1 Significance of the Problem

Though there have been several studies on community participation in Ghana, the focus has not been on the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam district. The study will therefore unearth the unique nature of project planning in the district and contribute to knowledge to strengthen the planning process currently being practiced in Ghana. It will also examine the people-centred 'bottom-up' approach to development which is the pivot for national development (Republic of Ghana, 1993). Again, most studies on community participation were conducted by Development Agents who had direct interest in the findings. This study is one of the few conducted by academics on the phenomenon; hence devoid of any interest.

1.2 Literature Review

The concept 'community' is differently defined by various authors (Garcia, Giulioni, & Wiesenfeld, 1999; De Beer & Swanepoel, 1998; Ferrinho, 1980). To Ferrinho (1980), a community is a specific system that arises when human populations settle in a given territory, have shared common characteristics and interest, and build mutual relationships for common benefits. De Beer and Swanepoel (1998) however define a community as a specific geographical locality with shared interest and needs of its members. A common and vital line running through these is that there is a grouping of people who reside in a specific locality with a plethora of basic needs. In a sense, a community is a socially, culturally and environmentally bounded group of people who have the right to make judgements in any kind of development activities to the advantage of its members.

Community participation goes under the many guises like popular participation, people's participation, and public participation. Indeed, there are varied views as to what community participation entails (Theron, 2005). It is therefore not surprising that there are many differences with regards to the best way to achieving it (International Association for Public Participation [IAP2], 2005; Theron, 2005; Oakley et al., 1991). The idea of community participation is grounded on the belief that there is a community that that is willing to be involved in the development planning process in their community. The form the participation takes, however, is dependent on the circumstances and the exclusive social context in which action is taken.

Participation as a concept, means different things to different authors. Mukwena (2005) for instance stated that:

> Participation may mean just attending a meeting even if one does not say anything at the meeting; contributing money to a community project; providing one's labour to a community project: providing information and opinion in a survey etc. thus the definition of participation includes passive participation, participation in information giving,

participation by consultation, participation for material incentives, functional participation, interactive participation, and self-mobilization (p. 1).

To De Beer and Swanepoel (1998) participation may mean that communities are allowed direct and total control in deciding what affect them. Midgley (1986, p. 2) cites a 1981 UN definition of participation as the "creation of opportunities to enable all members of a community and the larger society to actively contribute to and influence the development process and to share equitably in the fruits of development". According to Theron (2005), community participation basically empowers people by developing their capabilities so that they can discuss with Development Agents to decide on their felt needs. Theron (2005) further states that if participation is indeed 'doing' by the community, participatory interventions should lead to alteration in the present reality to a presumably better state. The implication is that community participation leads to a better state to indigenes. Armitage (1988) defined community participation as a process by which citizens' act in response to communal concerns, make known their views on decisions that affect them, and be liable for changes to their community. This implies community participation entails being responsible for one's actions.

1.2.1 Community Participation and the Building Blocks of Development

There is a link between community participation and the building blocks of development in that, the building blocks influence community participation. These building blocks are the catalysts of community participation in the development process. Its implementation leads to sustainable development. The building blocks are social learning, capacity building, self-reliance, empowerment, sustainability and indigenous knowledge system (Theron, 2005). The links are explored in details below:

Theron (2005) argues that the social learning approach stretches the decentralization and community participation process by arguing that Development Agents must adopt a learning attitude. This paradigm means adopting a learning attitude at all stages of development action from the community so that the indigenes, who are the "beneficiaries" of such action, are not included in the social learning process as mere actors in their own development but as partners and beneficiaries. Real participation according to Botes and van Rensburg (2000) entails more than just imposing decisions or selling proposals to communities.

This calls for the merging of the three elements of social learning as highlighted by Theron (2005) into project cycle to create a culture of mutual learning and partnership between the Development Agents operating within the district and the communities. These elements are:

> The community and the development project: the capacities of the people and the expected output must be linked; The community and the change or development agent: the formulation of needs and demands by the people and the decision-making process of the development agent should be integrated; and The project and the development agent: the project objectives have to be in keeping with the capacity of the change agent and that of the community.

As contended by Cook (1997) the crucial task in community participation is human resource

capacity building and the strengthening of institutions to ensure efficient and effective management of sustainable development. Development Agents need to understand that human resource development involves increasing the knowledge, skills and the capacity of people in society. To Nekwaya (2007) capacity building is a never-ending process of building the capabilities of individuals, groups and organisations to direct the affairs of their lives or operations. This ultimately, empowers communities and therefore ensures a sustainable development project.

Sen (1999) also contributes to the development discourse through the use of the capability approach. Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002) argue that to Sen (1999), the inability of people to satisfy their basic needs is the reason for their poverty. The analysis of poverty is central in Sen's (1999) contribution to the development discourse and he argues in terms of poverty as capability deprivation. To Sen (1999), empowerment is key to capacity building. The basic assumption from Sen's (1999) argument on individual poverty is that such individuals lack the necessary capacities to lead a meaningful life. Building capabilities therefore is a means to individual empowerment and a means to poverty alleviation.

Though the capability approach centres more on individual welfare, inferences can be made to explain development at the community level. This is made easier as a community is seen as a sum total of its individual members. Parpart, Rai and Staudt (2002) advocates that human empowerment is best carried out at the community level. The concept of capacity building is therefore used with reference to how Development Agents' interventions contributes to building capabilities of target groups or communities.

Community participation, according to Gebremedhin (2004), is the foundation of self-reliance. Burkey (1993) posits that doing things for oneself increases one's own self-confidence and makes one independent. Oakley (1991) argues that self-reliance act as a positive effect on rural communities by participating in development projects. It helps to break the mentality of dependence and promotes self-awareness and confidence. People therefore participate in development projects in order to meet their needs. The target community as a result, becomes a fertile ground for resource mobilization to Development Agents. In order to strengthen self-reliance, Dotse (1997) argues that it is necessary to develop structures and organizations that can help the poor become self-sufficient. The Ghana Local Government Law (Act 462) makes provision for such structures. It behoves on the Development Agents to take advantage of that to strengthen the capacity of the people to successfully implement community participation. According to Gebremedhin (2004), the concepts of self-reliance and participation is synonymous to engaging the beneficiaries of a development project.

Theron (2005) contends that matters of community participation and empowerment in the planning and delivery process are crucial to sustaining the project. He argues that empowerment is the exercise of power and not just its possession. According to Fitzgerald, McLennen and Munslow (1997) one becomes empowered by a sense of being able to do things not previously done, acquiring an ability to do new things and having opportunities opened up which were hitherto denied. Parpart et al. (2002) aptly assert that to empower is to

exert power, make things happen, and change for the better. It is this transformatory and promise of change that has made the empowerment concept gained so much ground in the development discourse. Friedmann (1992) points out that the household as an elementary unit for empowering people is particularly important and as such, Development Agents must direct their activities towards meeting individual needs which in effect, reflect community needs. Rai, in Parpart et al. (2002) insist that empowerment is best carried out at the local communities. According to Burkey (1993), Development Agents are to adopt the principle, "don't do anything for people that they can do for themselves". In effect, communities should be given the opportunity to do what they are capable of doing, as a means of empowering them.

Community participation, to Theron (2005) should always lead to sustainable development. To him, community participation and sustainability involves indigenous choices because people are the local experts due to their indigenous knowledge. This means for Development Agents to secure effective community participation and project sustainability, the local people; who are local experts, should be engaged in the development process through information dissemination. Nekwaya (2007) however reminded Development Agents that local knowledge must be sought for; and unless Development Agents gather information on the available local knowledge, it will remain a challenge to refer to and use that knowledge for community participation. Bearing in mind the key concepts related to community participation (highlighted previously), one can confidently decipher if communities are genuinely participating in development process or passively involved.

1.2.2 Experiences of Community Participation in Ghana

There are varying reports of community participation in the country. In a study conducted in the Upper West Region to examine the extent to which beneficiary communities participate in development projects, it was revealed that beneficiary communities' involvement at the design phase of projects was non-existent (Aalangdong, 2010). Projects were therefore wholly designed by the Development Agents, however, at the implementation stage; the communities' involvement was very encouraging. Communities within the Upper West Region participated at this stage of the project cycle in the form of cash contributions, offering labour and providing materials for the projects. The study further revealed that, at the monitoring and evaluation stages of projects, the communities' involvement was abysmally poor. On project sustainability, the study revealed that projects are sustained solely by the Development Agents because "they had the capacity to do so" (Aalangdong, 2010, p. 2). This is indicative that the beneficiary communities were not empowered. It is therefore not surprising that the commitment of beneficiaries of development projects within the region is low.

In the educational sector, traditionally, communities participate by providing school infrastructure (Baku & Agyeman, 1994). A study conducted in the Nanumba District in the Northern region on community participation in school development and its effect on school performance by Adam (2005) revealed that, "*The mandatory non-compulsory nature of participation has made communities adopt 'the desire to be there' attitude towards effective*

participation in the development of the school. Thus, it was discovered that participation was mainly through attendance of PTA meetings which was very low. This situation has affected the performance of the school with regards to infrastructure, teaching and learning materials, enrolment and retention, performance in academic and other extra-curricular activities" (p. 117). The study further found that the poor socio-economic conditions of community members inhibited their ability to financially contribute to the project. The result was that, the lack of basic amenities, teaching and learning materials culminating in poor academic performance. On the issue of the ability of the communities to sustain the projects, the study revealed that the Development Agents did not empower the communities, hence their capacity to sustain the projects were greatly hampered.

In the agriculture sector, an interim evaluation conducted by the Evaluation Division of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) on the Upper West Agricultural Development Project in May-June 2005 revealed that irrigation infrastructure (dams and canals) were generally uncompleted. The few that were completed were not used by the farmers. They report inadequate participation and capacity building training for prospective beneficiaries (IFAD, 2005). It can be observed from these accounts that people in various parts of Ghana have participated in the delivery of development projects that go on within their communities. They are, however, not empowered by the Development Agents to help sustain the projects. It is therefore not surprising that most projects are not sustained after the Development Agents' support (DWAP, 2008; Regional Planning Coordination Unit, 2008).

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to assess the extent to which the community is participating in development projects within the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District.

The specific objectives are to:

1) Examine if community participation is understood and is really working during project planning and implementation.

2) Explore the community's capacity to provide for their basic needs in the absence of a development agent.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions.

1) How does the involvement of Development Agents in the district contribute to meeting the communities' needs?

2) How do the activities of Development Agents enhance the capacity of the communities to provide for their basic needs beyond the agents' support?

1.4 Theoretical Perspective

The section deals with the sociological theory that is used to explain community participation; rational choice theory. Community participation is a sociological problem which lends itself to investigation through the use of the rational choice. Rational Choice theory is chosen because it vividly helps in identifying the reason for community participation in development projects;

how far members of the community are willing to commit themselves to the project after adding up the benefits and cost of their action.

Rational choice theory asserts that individuals behave in ways determined by their own self-interest; after analysing how they believe they will benefit from a choice of options opened to them. Motivation for particular forms of behaviour is primarily based on assessment of the incentive of material reward. It is assumed that the rational individual will choose the best action according to stable preference functions and constraints facing them. Most models have additional assumptions, but it is assumed that the rational citizen will behave rationally when presented with information about the development project.

1.4.1 Rational Choice Theory

Rational Choice theory assumes human behaviour as guided by instrumental reason. As a result, individuals always choose what they believe to be the best means to achieve their given end. The main proponent of this theory in sociology is James Coleman. His focus on social theory led him to believe that the appropriate level for social analysis is at the micro-agent level. Whiles focusing on the 'micro-macro' link, the author equally recognised the movement from individual-level behaviour to the behaviour of a system. Thus, he was also concerned with the 'macro-micro' connection or the ways in which social structures shape behaviour, and the 'micro-micro' link, or how the behaviour of individuals affect the behaviour of other individuals. According to Abell (1991), individualism is an assumption that rational choice theorists make; that individual social actions are the ultimate source of larger social outcomes.

The next assumption is that of optimality. Abell (1991) opines that optimality takes place when no other course of social action would be preferred by the individual over the chosen course of action. Based on the information available to them, they act within the given constraint. The relationship between the preference and constraints basically, is that of a means to an end. The theory posits that individuals must anticipate the outcomes of alternative courses of action to determine the best choice of action. Rational individuals ultimately, choose the alternative that is likely to give them the greatest satisfaction (Heath, 1976; Carling, 1992; Coleman, 1973).

The last assumption is that of self-regard. This assumption holds that individual's actions are purely self-centred Abell (1991) notes that various types of group sentiments could exist, but these sentiments could be cooperation, altruism or self-sacrifice, charity, or self-denial. Rational choice theorists assert that in the long run, these sentiments are in pursuit of self-interest. Handouts, for instance, could be to make one feel good or, be a means of raising one's own social esteem in the eyes of others.

1.4.2 The Linkage Between Rational Choice Theory and Community Participation

Rational Choice theory is chosen because it vividly helps in identifying the reason for community participation in development projects; how far community members are willing to commit themselves to a project after considering the benefits and cost of various courses of action. Rational choice theory asserts that individuals behave in ways which are determined by their own self-interest, based on cost-benefit analysis of options opened to them. Motivation

for particular forms of behaviour is said to be based primarily on assessment of the incentive of material reward.

Another trait of rational choice is the view of choice as an optimizing process. Borrowing from economists, rational choice theorists have argued that the interactions of resources as time, information, approval, and prestige can be organised by the market forces (Scott, 2000). This is the form of analysis that Mansbridge (1990) terms "inclusive" modelling, because analysts "are in principle happy to abandon the claim that self-interest is the sole operative motive and willing to work with any motive, provided that the decision maker maximize and be consistent" (p. 16).

The idea of 'rational action' according to Scott (2000), has generally been taken to imply a conscious social actor engaging in calculative strategies; shaped by the rewards and punishments that are encountered. People engage in things that are gratifying and avoid whatever that is punishable. Those who experience a loss will withdraw and will seek out alternative interactions where they are more likely to benefit. People learn from their past experiences, and that is all we need to know in order to explain their behavior.

With regard to this mode of participation, and indeed, in all the modes of participation discussed, individuals make a rational choice as to the extent of their participation, given the information available to them and the benefit or loss that confronts them when they participate. Individual members of the community therefore choose between alternatives that gives them the greatest satisfaction. In exercising their preference, they make rational choices (Carling, 1992). The activities of previous Development Agents also inform the choice-making of the community.

2. Method

The main design employed for this study was the descriptive survey as it seeks to assess the opinion of community members on their participation in development projects in the district. Specifically, the research approach seeks to establish out how community participation works in the district and ultimately, its effect on projects in the district. The descriptive survey design allowed the use of multiple data collection tools in seeking to address the research questions in an in-depth manner. Qualitative data was therefore sought and utilised to assess opinions, attitudes and perceptions of people in the case study area. This referred to seeking knowledge on; relationship between Development Agents' activities and people's needs, community perceptions about Development Agents approaches, and also community perceptions on sustainability of Development Agents pioneered projects. Prozesky and Mouton (2001) rightly stated that in order for researchers to capture the essence of the descriptions rooted in the life-worlds of participants, it is best to use the qualitative methods. This method gives an insider perspective of the actors and their practices.

2.1 Sample and Sampling Procedure

As a qualitative study, the research had a small sample. The number of respondents was arrived at after considering the information needed for the study. Mikkelsen (1995) is of the view that information maximisation guides the selection of respondents, who are unique key

persons and are known to have particular knowledge. Acting on this, the research subjects were as follows;

Six (6) representatives of Development Agents working within the study area;

Six (6) representatives of the District Assembly. These are the Assembly members for the selected communities;

Twenty-four (24) opinion leaders from the six communities where the study was carried out (4 opinion leaders each were selected from the six communities) and;

Thirty-six (36) respondents for the six sessions of focus group discussions.

A purposive sampling technique was used to pick 6 area councils out of the 9 in the district. This was necessary since some area councils were so close to each other that the area tended to have the same characteristics. To avoid having respondents giving the same responses, the area councils were purposively selected. The selected area councils were Abaasa, Ajumako, Bisease, Breman Essiam, Enyan Dankyira and Etsii Sunkwa.

The study focused on the following development projects whose delivery had community participation elements: market structures, water systems and toilet facilities. Communities that had these projects were purposively selected. A community each was selected from an area council. The selected communities were Abaasa, Abrofua, Bisease, Essiam Anaafo, Nkodwo and Ekwamase. The purposive sampling was again used to pick the respondents from the district assembly and the representatives of the Development Agents. From the district assembly, the assembly members whose jurisdiction covered the selected communities were purposively selected. Representatives of the Development Agents whose projects formed the basis for this thesis were also selected purposively.

The snowball method was used to select four opinion leaders from each of the six communities. Four opinion leaders were chosen since the study was interested in leaders of the community (chief/regent); women's leader, youth leader and a prominent citizen of the community. This method became necessary since the opinion leaders were unknown to the researcher. The chief/regent of a community was first contacted for the interview, after which they directed researchers to another opinion leader who in turn directed us to another after the interview.

The focus group discussions were homogeneous in structure as they were made up of beneficiaries of a particular project. This was to ensure some flexibility in the group discussion and to help respondents remain focused on the issue at stake. Respondents were selected using the quota sampling technique. The basis of choice being sex and the number needed in each community. For each project, a focus group discussion had six males and six females from the two communities that had the development project in question. The research subjects were selected based on the type of data required, accessibility and convenience within the study period. The main selection procedure was therefore non-random

2.2 Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were used for the study, namely, semi-structured interview guide, focus group discussion tools like the audio recorder and an observational checklist which were used to conduct in-depth open-ended interviews, focus group discussions and observation respectively. Data was collected by the researchers. During each interview, the interviewers manually marked, recorded and wrote down responses to the questions as the respondents answered each question face-to-face. The average interview duration per respondent was 35 minutes, and 1hour, 25 minutes for a focus group discussion.

3. Results

3.1 Data Processing and Analysis

Data collected had to undergo a series of actions before they could be used for the purpose of the investigation. The raw data collected came in the form of notes taken from FGDs, interviews and observations. It also came from transcripts of proceedings at the group discussions as well as from some recorded interviews. The first step in the data management stage was to obtain transcripts of all electronically recorded information. This was done by listening to the audio tapes and writing down responses verbatim. To ensure that the right responses were written, the tapes were listened to several times during the transcript process. Field notes were also reconciled after a debriefing session after each discussion and after each day's interviews.

The transcripts and notes from the field provided a significant amount of information which still needed to be processed before any analysis could be carried out. A manual sorting out was carried out, this involved reading the notes and transcripts several times, identifying and writing down major points and themes emerging from each question from the discussions and interviews. The aim was to put the information into easily identifiable categories that would make it simple for analysis. Quotes that were judged to be very interesting were written down into a response sheet to be used in the text of the analysis to support the arguments being made. Interview responses were taken through similar processing. They were sorted into those that had transcriptions, those recorded and response sheets and notes. After this, the responses were coded, recoded and processed into the appropriate themes.

3.2 Status of Respondents

The status of respondents showed that majority were direct beneficiaries (50 percent). Opinion leaders were 33.4 percent of the respondents, indicating that more than a third of the respondents were therefore leaders within the communities the research was conducted. Assembly members, who are the direct intermediaries between the communities and the District Assembly, formed 8.3 percent of the respondents. Development Agents also formed 8.3 percent of total respondents.

The results showed that status greatly influenced participation as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Status and the level of participation in development process

Level of participation	Status				
	Development Agents	Assembly members	Opinion leaders	Beneficiaries	Total
Identification					
	Number	Number	Number	Number	
None	0	0	0	0	0
Poorly	0	0	0	0	0
Moderately	0	0	4	16	20
Deeply	6	6	20	20	52
Total	6	6	24	36	72
Preparation					
None	0	0	0	6	6
Poorly	0	0	1	5	6
Moderately	1	0	8	3	12
Deeply	5	6	15	22	48
Total	6	6	24	36	72
Appraisal					
None	0	0	1	17	18
Poorly	0	0	21	19	40
Moderately	5	0	1	0	6
Deeply	1	6	1	0	8
Total	6	6	24	36	72
Implementation					
None	0	0	13	19	32
Poorly	0	0	5	17	22
Moderately	0	6	6	0	12
Deeply	6	0	0	0	6
Total	6	6	24	36	72
Monitoring and Evaluation					
None	0	0	16	36	52
Poorly	0	3	5	0	8
Moderately	0	3	3	0	6
Deeply	6	0	0	0	6
Total	6	6	24	36	72

While all respondents were highly involved in project identification and preparation, it was only the Development Agents and Assembly Members that were greatly involved in project appraisal, implementation and the monitoring and evaluation. This is at variance with Nekwaya's (2007) assertion that to build the capacity of the community, there is the need to involve them throughout the project cycle.

3.3 Educational Background of Respondents

In all, 30 out of the 72 respondents, representing 41.7 percent had no formal education. Sixteen respondents, representing 22.2 percent had up to primary education. For Junior High/Middle School, there were 8 respondents, representing 11.1 percent. Six respondents, representing 8.3 percent had secondary education. Out of the 72 respondents, 12 had tertiary education, representing 16.7 percent. Educational background of respondents seems to influence their participation in the development process as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Education and the level of participation in the development process

Level of participation	Level of Education					
	No formal education	Primary	Junior High	Senior High	Tertiary	Total
Identification						
None	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poorly	0	0	0	0	0	0
Moderately	5	6	6	2	1	20
Deeply	25	10	2	4	11	52
Total	30	16	8	6	12	72
Preparation						
None	2	1	1	1	1	6
Poorly	1	1	1	2	1	6
Moderately	2	4	3	1	2	12
Deeply	25	10	3	2	8	48
Total	30	16	8	6	12	72
Appraisal						
None	10	6	1	0	1	18
Poorly	20	9	6	1	4	40
Moderately	0	1	0	2	3	6
Deeply	0	0	1	3	4	8
Total	30	16	8	6	12	72
Implementation						
None	18	11	2	0	1	32
Poorly	12	4	3	1	2	22
Moderately	0	1	2	3	6	12
Deeply	0	0	1	2	3	6
Total	30	16	8	6	12	72
Monitoring and Evaluation						
None	28	13	6	2	3	52
Poorly	2	3	2	0	1	8
Moderately	0	0	0	2	4	6
Deeply	0	0	0	2	4	6
Total	30	16	8	6	12	72

While all were strongly involved at project identification and preparation, the highly educated one's were very much involved at the appraisal, implementation and monitoring and evaluation stages of the project cycle, possibly because they were much more technical. This perhaps gives credence to the assertion that community participation may be an "ideological favour" to the elite (UNICEF, 2002) whose interest lies in simply promoting a developmental approach.

3.4 Activities Undertaken by Development Agents

Respondents were asked whether they knew of other activities undertaken by the Development Agents. This was to ascertain how well the communities knew the Development Agents and the level of interaction between them. Interesting responses were gathered. All 6 respondents (100 percent), from the Development Agents said members of the communities in which they were working knew of the projects they undertake. Four (4) out of the 6 Assembly members representing 66.7 percent said they knew nothing of the operations of the development agent except the project they were undertaking in their constituency.

Two (2) representing 33.3 percent said they knew of other projects being under taken by the said development agent. All 24 opinion leaders, (100 percent) knew nothing about other projects undertaken by the development agent apart from what was done in their communities. All 36 direct beneficiaries, (100 percent) also knew nothing about other activities undertaken by the Development Agents. Sixty-four respondents representing 88.9 percent knew little about the activities of the Development Agents. Only 8 out of the 72 respondents, representing 11.1 percent had knowledge of the activities of the Development Agents. Notable responses are reported below:

> All I know is that we were asked to clear that area (pointing to the site of the public toilet) for the toilet. I don't even know the name of the company or group that built it (A beneficiary of a toilet facility at Ekwamase).

> I was just summoned to a meeting by the chief and told some people will be digging a well for us and so I should see to it that my people provide stones for the project and also, they should be around when they start work. The chief could not provide any details. As a youth leader, I do not even know the name of the company. (An opinion leader at Essiam Anaafo).

The responses clearly indicate that Development Agents working in the communities treated the communities as mere recipients of the projects and not as actors in the development process. This is contrary to the first principle of community participation as stated by Oakley et al. (1991) which argue that the community members should be 'subjects' of the development projects and not 'objects'. It is evident therefore that the initial collaboration between the Development Agents and the community as partners, was absent. The communities were therefore not seen as equal partners.

3.5 Development Agents Approach and Strategies for Community Participation in Activities

Development Agents were asked the strategies they employed to involve the communities in

their activities. The question, "Do you involve the community in the planning process?" was asked the staff of Development Agents. It was reframed for the assembly members, opinion leaders and direct beneficiaries. Sixty-three respondents, representing 87.5 percent responded that they were involved. A follow up question was to ascertain their level of involvement in the project cycle. Their views are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Level of community involvement in project cycle

Level of Involvement	Planning process (n = 72)									
	Identification		Preparation		Appraisal		Implementation		M&E	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
None	0	0	6	8.3	18	25	32	44.4	52	72.3
Poorly	0	0	6	8.3	40	55.6	22	30.6	8	11.1
Moderately	20	27.8	12	16.7	6	8.3	12	16.7	6	8.3
Deeply	52	72.2	48	66.7	8	11.1	6	8.3	6	8.3
Total	72	100	72	100	72	100	72	100	72	100

At the identification stage, all respondents said they were highly involved. Only 27.8 percent felt their involvement was moderate. The level of involvement was therefore very high at the identification stage. The high level of involvement indicates that the community was involved in selecting their own projects, which is key to identifying their problems or felt needs. At the preparation stage, 16.6 percent were either not involved or were poorly involved, while 83.4 percent were involved. At the appraisal stage, 80.6 percent were not involved, while 19.4 percent were involved. It was realised that the low community involvement was as a result of the technical nature of project at this stage of the project cycle.

Participation at the implementation stage of the project cycle was low. Only 25 percent actively participated at this stage. It was realised that 30.6 percent were poorly involved while 44.4 percent did not participate at all at this stage of the project cycle. It was realised that participation at the monitoring and evaluation stage was equally poor. Only 16.6 percent participated, while 11.1 percent poorly participated. A colossal 72.3 percent were not involved at this stage of the project cycle.

A close look at the results revealed that the strategy of the Development Agents in roping in the community to participate in their activities was simply to involve them in project identification, preparation and to some extent, implementation. This is contrary to the assertion of De Beer and Swanepoel (1998), that participation means allowing communities direct and ultimate control in deciding their own affairs. The analysis suggests that apart from project identification and preparation, the communities did not play any meaningful role in the project cycle. An indication they were not in control in deciding their own affairs.

4. Discussion

The readiness of the Development Agents to work hand-in-hand with the community was

therefore minimal, yet, the community worked with them anyway, after weighing the cost and benefits. On the involvement of the communities in the project cycle it came out that, apart from project identification and preparation, the communities were poorly involved in the other aspects of the project cycle. This clearly indicate that the Development Agents only involved the communities in aspects of the project cycle that they felt the community's inputs were needed; namely to identify their needs and to help reduce cost as in project preparation. According to Duta (1997), the material component of a project cost ranges from 60 percent to 70 percent of the total cost. This means the material component of a project is considerable and as such, the cost can reduce when the community participates by offering it. As stated earlier, the communities provided sand, stones/gravel and water; materials that were locally available. The strategy of the Development Agents was to reduce project cost, hence the reason for involving the community at the project preparation stage.

4.1 Sociological Analysis of the Findings

Reflecting on the study findings from the rational choice theory, it is clear that both the communities and Development Agents decided on the course of action that best satisfy their interest; a central theme of the rational choice theory (Elster, 1986).

The findings revealed that the communities knew little about the activities of the Development Agents. This showed that the initial trust and openness required for effective community work was absent. The study also revealed that the communities felt needs were met by the Development Agents in that they saw the projects as appropriate. Juxtaposing the findings against each other showed that the communities worked with the Development Agents after critically weighing the benefits of their activities; a central argument in the rational choice theory. The communities therefore made a rational choice by deciding the benefit of getting a needed project outweighed their exclusion in the activities of the Development Agents.

The study again revealed that that the Development Agents only involved the communities in aspects of the project cycle to reduce project cost as a strategy for community participation. From a rational choice perspective, both parties considered the benefits that accrue to them in the partnership.

4.2 Conclusions

It should however be noted that these conclusions are applicable to the population from which the sample was drawn. Based on the data analysed, a primary conclusion was that community participation in the study area is functional.

Community members' participation in the development process was limited to providing labour and materials readily available in their communities within the project cycle, their participation was restricted to project identification and implementation. The main strategy of the Development Agents was to reduce project cost by cashing in on what community members provided.

The involvement of Development Agents in the district contributed to meeting the

communities' needs, however, the capacity of the community members was not enhanced by the Development Agents to enable community members provide for their basic needs in the absence of the Development Agents.

On the whole, the study established that both Development Agents and community members participated in the development projects as a means to an end. The end to the Development Agents was to meet externally induced targets and to the community, meeting immediate deficiencies or needs. As a result, community participation in the district is functional (Theron, 2005).

Juxtaposing the findings against each other showed that both the communities and the Development Agents worked with each other after weighing the cost and benefits of their activities; a central theme in the rational choice theory.

4.3 Recommendations

Based on the research findings and observations, the following recommendations are made:

1) As implementers of the decentralisation policy in the district, the district assembly should sensitize community members of their roles as channels in the decentralisation process. This will encourage them to fully participate in the development process in their communities;

2) Development Agents must encourage the participation of the community in decision making processes, by building the capacity of the community and ensure a sense of ownership as this will lead to increased sustainability of projects and programmes;

3) In terms of project ownership, both parties should come to an understanding at the start of a project who will ultimately own it. The district assembly should see to that; and

4) With regard to project sustainability, it is recommended that the communities take token fees from users of the facility handed over to them by the Development Agents. This will enable them to properly maintain the projects and hence sustain them.

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