

ASOCSA2011-69

# Community participation for housing development

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The aim of this research is to explore the roles of community participation in the development of housing, as the concept is known to be important over the world. The paper also looks at the barriers to community participation in housing development as well as the role of community participation in housing development.

**Methodology/approach:** The study is conducted with reference to existing theoretical literature, published and unpublished research. The study is mainly a literature review focused on the concept of community participation in housing development.

**Findings:** One of the primary findings of this study is that citizens need to build capacity and resources in order to achieve community participation in planning and project development. Also, the study shows that citizen's participation in community development projects does not usually occur by chance, but because certain principles are observed at an acceptable level to the participants and to other stakeholders. Other finding include that Citizens will voluntarily participate in a community activity if they could derive benefit to themselves and the entire community.

**Originality:** The study explores the concept of community participation, as it is seen as a way for locals to influence development by contributing to project design, influencing public policies and choices, and holding public institutions accountable for the goods and services they provide. The study presents a robust background to the concept of 'community' and 'participation', and on the roles of community participation to development project scheduled to change the lives of the citizens. The paper contributes to this body of knowledge.

**Keywords:** Community, participation, development, Housing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Active community participation is a key to building an empowered community. However, Fleming (2010) alludes that participation does not always lead to empowerment, but it will take a supportive environment in

which to nurture people's aspirations and skills for empowerment to ultimately occur. Community participation is one of the key ingredients of an empowered community. According to Norman (2000), participation is seen as the heart that pumps the community's life blood- its citizens- into the business affairs. It is a principle so important that many countries has made active citizen involvement in all aspects of strategic plan development and implementation a condition for continued participation in it empowerment programs. Community participation is critical to community success and sustainability (Norman, 2000). Community participation is seen by some as a way for stakeholders to influence development by contributing to project design, influencing public policies and choices, and holding public institutions accountable for the goods and services they provide (World Bank, 1996). Still others view community participation as the direct engagement of affected populations in the project cycle, assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in a variety of forms. It is also referred to it as an operating philosophy that puts affected populations at the heart of humanitarian and development activities as social actors with insights, competencies, energy and ideas of their own (ALNAP, 2003).

Community can play a variety of roles in the provision and management of housing planning and development. Community participation is a concept that attempts to bring different stakeholders together for problem solving and decision making (Talbot & Verrinder, 2005). It is considered necessary to get community support for housing planning and development (Aref, 2010). It plays an essential role in promoting quality of life according to Putman (2000). Community participation in housing processes can support and uphold local culture, tradition, knowledge and skill, and create pride in community heritage (Lacy et al., 2002). It is one of the processes to empower people to take part in housing development. It is a key concept of development in the 21st century development and projects. Increased participation is a means to achieve development in order to resolve the housing problem that is a major challenge to the majority of the world and most especially to the developing nations. The paper starts out by looking at the meaning of community participation; secondly the meaning of 'community' and 'participation' is decoded to understand the meaning of the concept 'community participation', followed by the barriers to community participation in housing development as well as the role of community participation in housing planning before conclusion is drawn.

## **2. Community participation**

Theories of citizen's participation have received substantial academic attention particularly since the early 1900's, but have been a source of discussion since the 1960s (Justin, 2009). However, the influential theoretical work on the subject of community participation was by Arnstein (1969). The precise importance of Arnstein's work comes from the obvious recognition that there are different levels of participation, from manipulation or therapy of citizens; through to consultation, and to what we might now view as genuine participation, that is the levels of partnership and citizen control. The fundamental theoretical concept in Arnstein's model [is] that

"participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit and to maintain the status quo." Nevertheless, it is vital to understand the meaning of community participation as it has been misused and abused in many projects claiming to have community participation as a project development component. Furthermore, an understanding of the word 'community' and 'participation' individually can best explain the term 'community participation' (discussed in the next section).

The concept of community participation according to McCutcheon (1995) and Ogunfiditimi (2007), originated about 40 years ago out of the community development movement of the late colonial era in parts of Africa and Asia. In the colonial era, "community participation was used as an avenue to improve local welfare, training the local people in administration and extending government control through self-help activities (McCommon, 1993; Ogunfiditimi, 2007; Thwala, 2009). However, the intention of the colonial administrators failed to achieve many of its aims, primarily due to the bureaucratic top-down approach adopted by them (McCommon, 1993; Thwala, 2009). Nonetheless out of these experiences, various methodologies were developed that have been successful and have gained broad support from all major players in the development field (Abbott, 1991). Participation is a rich concept that means different things to different people in different settings. For some, it is a matter of principle; for others, a practice; and for still others, an end in itself.

According to the World Bank (1994) community participation is a system through which the community influences and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them. Community participation entails involving individuals, families and communities in any part of developmental and planning processes of a project. Community participation in housing entails that communities and beneficiaries should be actively involved in interventions to promote development and the reduction of poverty within them through empowerment. The motivation for community participation is not only for people to influence the activities affecting them in relation to housing, but also to meaningfully participate as this will help the communities to build capacity and empower the communities through skill transfer (Ogunfiditimi, 2007; Thwala, 2009). In community participation, people are the central point of development process as emphasis is placed on the development of capacities, skills to enable them negotiate and source materials they require in order to improve their lives (UNDP, 2000).

Community participation can also be defined as the direct involvement of the citizenry in the affairs of planning, governance and overall development programmes at local or grass roots level (Williams, 2006). Likewise, Davidson et al. (2006) informs that it involves how and why members of a community are brought into these affairs. The significance of community participation is said to draw from three main factors. Primarily, it is alleged to allow for cost reduction through the utilisation of local labour and expertise (Davidson et al., 2006). Secondly, it potentially leads to the implementation of appropriate responses through the involvement of locals in collective decision-making, through the assessment of their needs and expectation (Davidson et al., 2006), thus guaranteeing housing satisfaction and other benefits. Thirdly, it helps in directing scarce resources towards the more needy identified by fellow

locals (Davidson et al., 2006; Mayavo, 2002). Thus, community participation is seen as an undertaking that results in the empowerment of the local population. However, it also has numerous non-benevolent political significances, as it is referred to as a curious element in the democratic decision-making process (Mcdowell, 1986). While the roots of community participation can be traced to ancient Greece and colonial New England, its significance reflects a contemporary recognition that societies are simply too remote to be truly “of, by and for the people” without their involvement in the development that affects them (Mcdowell, 1986).

Friedmann (1992) in his work on empowerment, the politics of alternative development, also defined community participation as everybody possessing of his/her own and nobody can interpret it better than that person, which is the reason why development is positioned around people who understand their livelihood better than any other person. The objectives of community participation as an active development process are: empowerment of individuals in the community, building beneficiaries capacity, increase project effectiveness, improve project efficiency and project cost sharing.

### **3. Understanding ‘community’ and ‘participation’**

Young (1990) indicates that there is no universally shared concept of community, but later found out that to most people, it is a small ‘home area’, much smaller than a local authority. Likewise, Sarkissian (2006) informs that defining a ‘community’ more specifically is a hazardous undertaking, that ‘community’ should in itself be seen as a flexible, changeable component in participatory processes. Hence, Wates (2000) defined community in the Community Planning Handbook, as a group of people sharing common interests and living within a geographically defined area. Also, Nabeel and Goethert (1997) in their book, Action Planning for Cities: A Guide to Community Practice, points out that the term community has both “social and spatial dimensions” and that usually the people within a community come together to accomplish a common objective, even if they have certain differences. Nabeel and Goethert further informs that the notion of a community works on the age old philosophies of ‘unity is strength’ and ‘united we stand’. This is because it is believed that a group of people always have advantage over a single individual in getting his or her voice heard, particularly in the case of have-nots of the society. According to Abrams (1971), community can be seen as, “that mythical state of social wholeness in which each member has his place and in which life is regulated by cooperation rather than by competition and conflict”. It is clear that a community generally has two certain elements, that is, physical boundaries and social interests common among the people. On the other hand, a community occasionally may have one element dominating the other, for instant, a community of house wives or a community of painters generally need not belong to the same physical boundaries. In this case, they come together on certain ideological grounds.

Furthermore, Nabeel and Goethert (1997) presented an opposing view that communities are not necessarily always organized and cohesive and sometimes lack the “sense of community” and “social identity”. They explains that for community participatory projects, it is not a necessity to have an already well organized community right from the beginning but the

sense of community can be achieved during the course of the project, which can also be one of the objectives of including community participation in development. Abrams (1971) gives a good illustration of the sense of community in the case of people living in a squatter settlement. Abrams informs that these squatters, living inside the boundaries of the same settlement, have common aims and work together to protect and validate their dwellings. Their existence against the authorities rests upon collaboration among them and hence, the sense of community is fortified by their mutual goals.

Furthermore, Hillery (1955, cited in CAG consultants works on [www.cagconsultants.co.uk](http://www.cagconsultants.co.uk)) also defined community saying that a community “consists of persons in social collaboration within a geographic area and having one or more additional common ties”. However, a number of issues are left untouched by this definition though, such as the extent to which the persons concerned need to be aware of the common ties, and the extent to which those ties can change over time. Likewise, it should be noted that in this age of global digital communications, communities are less bound by geography than ever before. In reality, communities are a lot more changeable and complex than the Hillery’s definition suggests. Atkinson and Cope (1997) speak of the “fluid and overlapping membership of communities”, but the intricacy and close interlacing of communities is perhaps best captured by Etzioni (1993), who submits that “communities are best viewed as if they were Chinese nesting boxes, in which less encompassing communities are nestled within more encompassing ones”. However, Burns et al. (1994) informs that “community is not a singular concept but in reality represents a mere umbrella under which shelter a multitude of varying, competing and often conflicting interests”.

The word participation can also be referred to as the act of being involved in something according to the Community Planning Handbook by Wates (2000). Likewise, Habraken (2005) informs that participation has two definitions with opposite meaning. Habraken posits that participation can also denote allocating certain vital roles of the development process to the citizens, where they share the decision-making responsibility with the professionals. The other type according to Habraken is where there is no transference of responsibility between citizens and professional, but instead only the opinion of the citizens is considered while making decisions.

Based on the above definitions, it can therefore be inferred that participation can be understood in various ways, depending on the perspective in which it is used. However, Shaeffer (1994) elucidates the different degrees or levels of participation to include: involvement through the contribution of money, materials and labour; involvement through attendance of schedule meetings, implying passive acceptance of decision made by others; involvement through consultation on a particular issue; participation in the delivery of a service, often as a partner with other actors, and participation as implementers of delegated powers and participation in real decision at every stage, including identification of problems, planning, implementation and evaluation according to Uemura (1999). Nevertheless, Shaeffer emphasized that the first four levels use the word involvement and suggest essentially a passive collaboration, while the last three item use the active role (Uemura, 1999).

Furthermore, participation is mainly concern with human development and increases citizens sense of control over issues which affect their lives in the case of housing development, helps to learn how to

plan and implement and, on a broader front, prepares them for participation at regional or even national level (Aref, 2010). In principle, participation in housing development is a good thing because it eliminates citizen's isolation and sets the groundwork for them to have not only a more significant influence on their housing development, but also on creating great independence, such as the transfer of skills in self-help housing development, where citizens are trained in different building trades and empowered to have a control over their lives (Arfe, 2010; Oakley 1991; Thwala, 2009). Without community participation, there is apparently no partnership, no development and no program. Therefore, the absence of community participation in decision-making to implement housing development can lead to failure in the community development initiative (Miranda, 2007; Ogunfiditimi, 2007). There exist different levels of participation in a typical development project, such as manipulation (Arnstein, 1969); informing (Arnstein, 1969; Wilcox, 1999); consultation (Arnstein, 1969; Burns et al., 1994; Wilcox, 1999); interaction (Pretty, 1995); partnership (Arnstein, 1969; Burns et al., 1994; Wilcox, 1999), and empowerment (Choguill, 1996; Dewar, 1999).

#### **4. Research methodology**

The research was conducted with reference to existing theoretical literature, published and unpublished literatures. The study is mainly a literature survey/review and looks at the roles of community participation in the development of housing, as the concept is known to be important over the world. The paper also looks at the barriers to community participation in housing development as well as the role of community participation in housing planning.

#### **5. Barriers to community participation in housing**

In addition to identifying the usefulness of community participation, it is equally importance to recognize some of the problems involved in participatory development approaches. An understanding of the barriers can help community and others who lead organisation more effectively impact the housing development policy-making process. Overcoming the barriers to housing development will serve to facilitate the policy making process and thus the overall citizen's meaningful participation in the housing development process.

When participation is used as an end to development process, it becomes a time-consuming process and since time is directly proportional to money in development projects, it will be quite difficult to justify such an approach (Moatasim, 2005) as the process will escalate the overall project cost. Moreover, there is fear amongst government of uncontrolled empowerment of people and lack of trust in their ability to make informed decisions, which prevent governments to change their paternalistic approach in decision-making according to Moatasim (ibid). The only way to overcome this is to look at participation from a wider perspective and by measuring its benefits against the limitations. Though, it takes more time for a fully participatory development project to achieve its goals, but the end result in the form of community empowerment goes a long way. Other

barriers that can be faced include: stakeholders forgoing genuine participation, due to political and social pressures to show that the development process is advancing; lack of support by the community for the development project because of limited involvement of the community, particularly the affected community, in planning and design; failing to understand the complexity of community involvement and believing that the community is a united, organised body; disregarding how the community is already structured when introducing participatory activities and underestimation of the time and cost of genuine participatory processes amongst others.

However, one other paramount barrier to participation is the lack of feedback to the concerned community. For community participants, taking part is a time and energy-consuming process. But all too often, communities never find out what difference their efforts have made in the development process (Davy, 2006). Where people hear nothing about the impact of their work, they are unlikely to feel that they have been treated as partners in the project, or with the respect they are worthy of. This is because "People are not stupid. They know that they will not always get everything they want. But they do expect to know what difference their participation has made, and if they are not informed of the difference their participation has made, they assume it has not made any effect". Once decisions are made and implementation begins, stakeholders and others involved move on to other work. Most times, no-one is left with the responsibility for providing feedback to communities. Also, an unfair distribution of work amongst members of the community can be a great barrier to effective community participation. Likewise, some members in the community may feel that they are asked to take on extra work tasks that provide them little financial/social or other incentives; a highly individualistic, movement oriented society (Snel, n.d.). Individuals may not feel a sense of community and thereby question the purpose of their involvement in a development project; the feeling that the government should provide the facilities for them, will thus makes the community feel that the development project is simply another way of exploiting people.

## **6. The purpose of participation in development**

Community participation is seen as a way for stakeholders to effect development by contributing to project design, influencing public choices, and holding public institutions accountable for the goods and services they provide to them (World Bank, 1996). Likewise, others view participation as the direct engagement of affected populations in the project development cycle, such as assessment, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation in a variety of forms. Still others consider participation as an operational philosophy that puts affected populations at the core of humanitarian and development activities as social actors with insights, competencies, energy, and ideas of their own (ALNAP, 2003).

According to World Bank (1996), participation allows stakeholders to collaboratively carry out a number of activities in the development cycle, including the following: analysing, that is, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of existing policies and service and support systems; setting objectives- deciding and articulating what is needed; creating strategy such as deciding, in pragmatic terms, directions, priorities, and institutional

responsibilities; formulating tactics- developing or overseeing the development of project policies, specifications, blueprints, budgets, and technologies needed to move from the present to the future and monitoring, which encompasses conducting social assessments or other forms of monitoring of project expenditures and outputs (World Bank, 2006). Participation is also known to have roles that are social in nature, such as empowering individuals, increasing local capacity, strengthening democratic processes, and giving voice to the marginalized and disadvantaged communities and groups (World Bank, *ibid*). Another set of roles has to do with program effectiveness and leverage: creating a sense of ownership, improving program quality, mobilizing resources, and stimulating community involvement in execution.

## 7. The Importance of Citizen Participation

Community participation can be seen from the viewpoint of benefits to be gained and costs to be borne. Implicit in this "penchant for getting involved" is the notion of the relationship between self and society (Snel, n.d.). Most times, participation on volunteer groups is an important science for individual's definitions of self-esteem and self-identity in development that concerned them, mostly when they have been neglected for so long.

Participatory groups function as links between individuals and larger societal structures (Kornhauser 1959) with every member of the group seeking a common good. Most times participants ask themselves what are the benefits that will accrue to them in the process? Bridges (1974) states five advantages to be gained from active participation in community development programme like housing development: the citizen can bring about desired change by expressing one's desire, either individually or through a community group; the individual learns how to make desired changes in their own lives through what they have learnt from the process; the citizen learns to understand and appreciate the individual needs and interests of all community groups thereby forging a common good for themselves; they also learn how to resolve conflicting interests for the general welfare of the group, the individual begins to understand group dynamics as it applies to mixed groups.

Heberlein (1976) informs that public involvement usually results in better decisions. This he argues that community decisions that involve citizens are more likely to be acceptable to the local people because better community decisions, by definition, should be beneficial to the average citizen. Citizen participation in development also serves to check and balance political activities. Also, participation allows fuller access to the benefits of a democratic society. Cahn and Camper (1968) propose three basic motivations for community participation in development. First, they propose that merely knowing that one can participate promotes dignity and self-sufficiency within the individual. Second, it taps the dynamisms and resources of individual citizens within the community. Finally, participation provides a cradle of special insight, information, knowledge, and experience, which contributes to the soundness of community solutions. The result is an emphasis on problem solving to eliminate deficiencies in the community (Christensen & Robinson 1980).

Cook (1975) notes that community participation in development can legitimize a program, its plans, actions, and leadership. To legitimize



can often mean the difference between success and failure of community efforts. Unsupported leaders often become discouraged and drop activities that are potentially beneficial to community residents. Community participation can also reduce the cost for personnel needed to carry out many of the duties associated with community action. Without this support, scores of worthwhile projects would never be achieved in many communities (Snel, n.d.). In summary, decision making that is delegated by others will not always be in the best interest of an individual and his or her neighbours. Community development is a direct product of citizen involvement and empowerment.

## 8. Conclusion

The article start out by looking at the meaning of community participation; secondly the meaning of 'community' and 'participation' is decoded to understand the meaning of the concept 'community participation', followed by the barriers to community participation in housing development as well as the role of community participation in housing development. In conclusion, in order to promote community participation for housing development, it is necessary to always assess the communities' capacity to carry out what they are expected to achieve in a long run. From the literature, community participation is a goal in housing development informed by the government to the disadvantage group, as an avenue to solve complicated issues contributing to poor housing development and the promotion of empowerment to the community.

Thus, Citizen Participation in housing development projects does not usually occur by chance alone. It happens because certain principles are observed at an acceptable level to the participants. Citizens will voluntarily participate in a housing development when they see positive benefits to be gained; have an appropriate organizational structure available to them for expressing their interests; see some aspect of their way-of-life threatened; feel committed to be supportive of the activity; have better knowledge of an issue or situation and when they feel comfortable in the group. Further, citizen participation in any housing development can be improved by: stressing participation benefits; organizing or identifying appropriate groups receptive to citizen input; helping citizens find positive ways to respond to threatening situations; stressing obligations of each participants toward community improvement; providing citizens with better knowledge on issues and opportunities and helping participants feel comfortable within the development group.

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