



Assessment of Youth Participation in Community Development Activities in GVH Kalonjere Under TA Sitola in Machinga, Southern Region Malawi.

Gertrude Mphande¹, Dr. S. Benjamin Franklin²

¹MSW Student, ²Associate Professor

Department of Social Work, Faculty Of Social And Behavioral Sciences, Sri Ramachandra University (DU), Chennai, India

ABSTRACT

The responsibilities and contributions of young people in community development initiatives are examined in this study. Three main goals are being pursued: first, to investigate the kinds of community development projects that young people participate in; second, to look at the variables that affect their engagement; and third, to come up with tactics to increase their engagement. Using a mixed-methods approach comprising interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the research captures an all-encompassing picture of youth involvement in community development. The results show that young people are involved in a variety of important activities, such as health and education programs, environmental protection programs, and more. However, a number of obstacles prevent them from fully participating, including restricted access to financial resources, social and cultural norms, and insufficient government support. The report suggests a number of tactics to encourage young involvement, such as improving

KEYWORDS: Malawi Household Population Census, Asset-Based Community Development, Community-Based Participatory Research

INTRODUCTION

Malawi is a youthful population according to Malawi Household Population Census (2018 PHC). It's important to recognize the potential impact of youth participation in community development on the overall progress of a nation. Engaging the youth in community development activities not only empowers them but also contributes to the sustainable development of the country. According to (World Bank, 2010) about 50% of the developing world population is youths' estimated at about 1.2 Billion of age between 15 and 24 years.

The active engagement of young individuals in collaboration with adults significantly contributes to the development of local communities. This partnership not only provides opportunities for personal growth, skill improvement, and leadership development but also fosters successful youth-adult collaborations. Such partnerships empower youth to build the capacity to serve in organizations and can effectively nurture them into becoming community leaders.

The exploration of youth participation in community development initiatives has unveiled a nuanced landscape shaped by diverse factors, theories, models, and policy frameworks. This comprehensive journey has delved into the dynamics of youth engagement, recognizing the pivotal role young individuals play in fostering economic growth and social cohesion, particularly in the context of Malawi. The theoretical underpinnings, encompassing Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation, Intersectionality, Empowerment Theory, and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), provide a robust framework for understanding the multifaceted nature of youth involvement. Furthermore, the conceptual framework, elucidating variables such as education, socio-cultural influences, financial accessibility, and available opportunities, serves as a guide for analyzing the intricate interplay of factors influencing the extent of youth participation in community development activities.

The policy frameworks examined, ranging from the National Youth Policy (2023-2028) in Malawi to the Africa Youth Charter and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscore the importance of a supportive legal environment in enhancing youth engagement. However, the study has also unearthed a disconcerting gap between the perceived significance of youth participation and the practical challenges faced on the ground, prompting a call for further investigation.

In the realm of interventions, various models, such as Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), Hart's Ladder of Participation, and the Risk-Reduction Model, present distinct approaches to promoting youth involvement. Each model contributes to the discourse on leveraging the strengths of youth, fostering meaningful participation, and addressing potential risks.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter seeks to review the work of various scholars and professionals who have extensively contributed to the study of “youth”, “youth participation and engagement”, “youth development”, “community development” as well as “youth participation, particularly in the community development context”. This review is therefore confined to and only underscores the presently acknowledged knowledge within the field. The areas of discussion that have been highlighted within the chapter include; literature assessment on the Definition of Youth, youth participation, and community development; the demographic overview of the youth in Malawi; Youth participation in community development projects and its advantages; Factors that affect youth participation in community development; Exclusion of the youth from community life; Barriers to youth participation; Strategies that are used to promote Youth Participation; and finally Empirical Studies that have been conducted within the field. Following the literature review, the chapter will delve deeper by introducing the theoretical framework, examining and exploring four theories/models applied in this study: Arnstein’s theory of community participation, Intersectionality, Empowerment theory, Youth Development Framework, and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). The chapter ends by exploring a legislative framework that has been drawn from local and regional conventions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aims to investigate and assess the scope of youth participation in community development activities within GVH Kalonjele under Traditional Authority Sitola in Machinga district. Despite previous research on this topic, there is limited information available on several critical aspects. Firstly, the quality and depth of youth participation remain underexplored. It is essential to understand not just whether young people are involved in community development, but how deeply they engage and what roles they play. Secondly, the role of intersectionality factors such as gender, religion, and socio-economic status in determining youth participation in Malawi is not well-documented. These factors can significantly influence who participates and how they engage, making it crucial to explore their impacts comprehensively. Lastly, regional variations within Malawi may influence youth participation differently across various parts of the country. Understanding these regional considerations is vital for developing targeted and effective community development strategies.

The chapter outlines the sources of data collection, distinguishing between primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected using methods such as surveys and one-on-one interviews. Surveys provided a structured way to gather quantitative data, while one-on-one interviews allowed for in-depth qualitative exploration of individual experiences and perspectives.

The tools for data collection and data analysis are described in detail. These tools include the specific instruments used for surveys and interviews, as well as the software and techniques employed for analyzing the data. This section ensures transparency and replicability in the research process, allowing other researchers to understand and potentially replicate the study's methodology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2.1

VARIABLE		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
GENDER	MALE	21	42.9
	FEMALE	28	57.1
	TOTAL	49	100.0
AGE	10-14	11	22.4
	15-18	12	24.5
	19-24	12	24.5
	25-30	9	18.4
	31-35	5	10.2
	TOTAL	49	100.0
EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND	PRIMARY	33	67.3
	SECONDARY	14	28.6
	TERTIARY	2	4.1
	TOTAL	49	100.0
OCCUPATION	BUSINESS	7	14.3

	FARMER	8	16.3
	EMPLOYED	1	2.0
	UNEMPLOYED	8	16.3
	STUDENT	10	20.4
	TAILOR	2	4.1
	OTHERS	13	26.5
	TOTAL	49	100.0

2.1.1 GENDER

Table 2.1 describe that a more females with a percentage of 57.1 were involved in the research that represented 28 respondents of the sample size of while males had a percentage of 42.9 represented by 21 respondents from the sample size of 49. The gap difference between males and females will not affect the findings but rather help with the clear insight.

2.1.2 AGE

Table 2.1 describe that age group of 10-14 there were 11 respondents representing 22.4 %, 15-18 and 19-24 there were 12 respondents representing 24.5% respectively, for 25-30 the respondents were 9 representing 18.4 % and 31-35 was represented by 5 respondents representing 10.2%. The number of respondents for each age group differs because of their percentage in the community.

2.1.3 EDUCATION BACKGROUND

Table 2.1 describe that most of the respondents their educational background in primary bearing 67.3 % representing 33 respondents, 28.6% secondary representing 14 respondents and 4.1% tertiary representing 2 respondents.

2.1.4 OCCUPATION

Table 2.1.4 describe that 26.5% representing 13 respondents are involved in other occupations rather than the options, 20.4% were students representing 10 respondents, 16.3 were farmers and unemployed bearing 8 respondents respectively, 4.1% were tailors representing 2 respondents and 2.0% was employed representing 1 respondent.

Table 2.1.2: Youth involvement in community development activities.

VARIABLE		FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
ARE YOUTH INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES	YES	22	44.9
	NO	27	55.1
	TOTAL	49	100.0

Table 2.1.2 and represent if youth are being involved in community development activities. 55.1% responded that youths are not involved representing 27 respondents while 44.9% responded that youths are involved in community development activities representing 22 respondents.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Despite the literature that states on participation and involvement of youth in the implementation of community development initiatives as a means of economic growth (Mwei, 2016). The findings of this research shows that youths are not fully involved in community development activities. Just like the literature states that the role of the youths in fast-tracking Community Development initiatives is widely recognized, particularly, in local communities where they have been seen playing a pivotal role in various sectors of life including but not limited to; education, health, environmental sanitation, mass mobilization, religious activities this research also found that youths are involved in teaching in CBCCs, environmental sustainability and sanitation as well as road and bridge construction but do not receive enough support from local leaders, government and organizations.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish dedicated youth forums and platforms to amplify the voices of young people and facilitate their engagement in community decision-making processes.

Provide leadership training, skill-building workshops, and mentorship opportunities to empower youth as active agents of community development.

Improve coordination and strengthen partnerships between youth groups, community leaders, local authorities, and development organizations to enhance collaborative efforts.

Develop and implement targeted outreach and awareness-raising campaigns to inform youth about available community development opportunities and how to get involved.

Offer incentives, resources, and support (e.g., financial, material, technical) to enable and encourage greater youth participation in community projects and initiatives.

Address prevailing societal attitudes and biases that undervalue or marginalize the role of youth, through public education and advocacy efforts.

Ensure inclusive and equitable representation of youth, including those from diverse backgrounds and marginalized groups, in all community development planning and implementation processes.

Regularly monitor and evaluate youth participation to identify successes, challenges, and areas for improvement, and use these insights to inform ongoing program and policy refinements.

Foster a culture of youth empowerment and intergenerational collaboration, where young people are recognized as vital partners in driving sustainable community transformation

CONCLUSIONS

This study has provided a comprehensive assessment of youth participation in community development activities within the local context. The findings present a mixed picture, highlighting both the active engagement of young people as well as the significant barriers that limit their full involvement.

On the positive side, the research identified numerous examples of youth taking initiative and contributing to community projects, particularly in areas such as education, environmental protection, and infrastructure development. This demonstrates the enthusiasm and capability of young people to be change agents within their local communities.

However, the data also revealed that youth participation remains uneven and constrained by a variety of factors. Key barriers include lack of awareness of opportunities, limited resources and support, exclusion from decision-making processes, and prevailing societal attitudes that undervalue the role of youth. These challenges appear to be hampering the ability of young people to fully leverage their energy and ideas for community progress.

To address this gap, the study points to several promising strategies that could enhance youth participation. These include establishing dedicated youth forums, providing leadership training and skill-building, improving coordination between youth groups and community leaders, and offering incentives and resources to facilitate greater involvement. Implementing such measures could help unleash the vast potential of young people as partners in community development.

Overall, this research underscores the need for a more concerted, multi-stakeholder effort to meaningfully engage youth in local development initiatives. By investing in the capacity and agency of young people, communities can tap into a powerful force for positive change. Sustaining this momentum will be crucial for achieving equitable, youth-inclusive community transformation in the long term

REFERENCES

- Alvarado, G., Skinner, M., Plaut, D., Moss, C., Kapungu, C., and Reavley, N. (2017). *A Systematic Review of Positive Youth Development Programs in Low-and Middle-Income Countries*. Washington, DC
- Youth Power Learning, Making Cents International.
- Berrada, N. (28/11/2017). Youth as a Social Construct.
- Bretty, E. A. (2013). *Participation and accountability in development management*: The Journal of Development Studies, 2, 57-68.
- Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, January 25). affirmative action. Encyclopedia Britannica.
- Çamur, H. (2006). Barriers to Young People's Active Participation and Role of Civil Society Institutions. SSRN Electronic Journal. 10.2139/ssrn.1000412.
- Canaday-Talley, M. Clemens, L. et al. (2019). Kids These Days: Increasing Youth Engagement in Community Heritage and Social Justice Through the Implementation of a Youth Participatory Empowerment Model. *Dissertations*. University of Missouri,

-
- Checkoway, B.N. and Gutierrez, L.M (Eds). 2006. *Youth Participation and Community Change: An Introduction*. Social Work with Groups, Volume 31, Number 2. Binghamton, Haworth Press, Inc.
 - Christens, Brian. (2012). Targeting empowerment in community development: A community psychology approach to enhancing local power and well-being. *Community Development Journal*. 47. 538-554. 10.1093/cdj/bss031.
 - Curran, S., Harrison, R., & Mackinnon, D. (2013). *Working with young people*. SAGE Publications, Inc.,
 - Common Wealth Local Government forum. (2024). Malawi-Key Facts
 - Cornwall, G. P. (2010). *Youth Participation in Local (Community) Level Development: A Development Strategy*.
 - DFID. Department for International Development. (2014) Youth Participation in Development.
 - French, M., Bhattacharya, B., & Olenik, C. (2014). Youth Engagement in Development: Effective Approaches and Action-Oriented Recommendations for the Field. JBS International, Inc.
 - Gilchrist A. & Taylor, M. (2011). *The Short Guide to Community Development*. Policy Press. pp. 2+. ISBN 978-1-84742-689-5.
 - Global Partnership for Youth Employment (GPYE). (2014). *Strengthening Life Skills for Youth: A Practical Guide to Quality Programming*. International Youth Foundation.
 - Hassan, A. H. (2023). Socio-Economic Factors and Youth Participation in Community Based Projects in Wajir County, Kenya. *International Journal of Public Policy and Administration*. Vol.5, Issue No.2. pp 14 – 41
 - Izebuno, D. (2015). Are Youths Ready to Be Leaders of Today or Tomorrow? From the Situation Room of Monologue to Dialogue. 10.13140/RG.2.1.5018.2489.