

# **Bridging the Knowledge Gaps between Actual Community Practices and Policy Making for Inclusiveness in Lusaka Province of Zambia**

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## **Abstract**

In recent years the Zambian government has been implementing the decentralization policy. This policy has its own short comings as it has so far only gone until the districts, leaving out the key stakeholders in governance, the governed (communities at household levels). Research goes further to indicate that community participation in policy formulation is an important part of the democratic process, but one which governments are not always comfortable with. This paper draws clearly on our experience in the implementation of projects in as far as participatory approach is concerned.

According to the case study on the implementation of the Community Based Monitoring System for poverty alleviation and Sanitation in Zambia (CBMS), it is evident that participatory approach in project implementation yields lasting results as compared to non participatory oriented projects (as EIF Zambia). In the CBMS implementation team members originated from the project site with a sampling method employed to embrace a community representative approach. Questionnaire design and management was done with inputs from the team members, engagement with Local Government units and local development committee in the project site for data relay/ exchange of experiences and to make sure protocols and frameworks were created to facilitate the use of this research 's outputs .

It has been leant that team members who come from the local community are more likely to give reliable data, than those who come from areas other than the project site. It is thought that poor people, regardless of their ability to read and write, have a far greater capacity to present and analyse their realities, and to act, than many suppose. This paper shares experiences from the implementation of CBMS in Zambia. Further it substantiates the widely acclaimed hypothesis that development initiatives can best be drawn with participatory approach with respect to the local community.

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

PMT – Project Management Team  
CBMS – Community Based Monitoring System  
CSO – Central Statistics Office  
PRP – Poverty Reduction Paper  
ZRDC – Zambia Research and Development Center  
GRZ – Government of the Republic of Zambia  
CBO – Community Based Organization  
PRSP – Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper  
PRSP – Poverty Reduction Strategy  
EIF- Engineering Information foundation project  
PES- Project evaluation study

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Participatory approach implies “empowering people to mobilize their own capacities, be social actors, rather than passive subjects, manage the resources, make decisions, and control the activities that affect their lives.” Cernia 1985. Since their introduction in the 1970s, participatory methods and techniques have become central tools for community development. These methods have been applied in a variety of contexts and sectors, including livestock management, village health promotion, urban sanitation provision, impact assessments and gender awareness. Participatory approaches to development are promoted on the basis that they support effective project implementation and enhance the well-being of the poor. This re-orientation towards greater participation in development by individuals was motivated by the development communities desire to move from an emphasis on topdown, technocratic and economic interventions towards greater attention to bottom-up, community-level interventions (Kanji and Greenwood 2001).

Although the poor are becoming increasingly involved in the various stages of development, questions remain as to whether their inclusion constitutes genuine participation and whether people’s capabilities have been increased in such a manner as to enable them to chart the course of their destinies in collaboration with the government, NGOs and the international community.

This paper highlights the importance of participatory approaches in as far as CBMS implementation is concerned. CBMS encourages participatory decision making, where all stakeholders are considered. This enables the community identify, in logical frameworks, specific objectives, opportunities, obstacles, steps for implementation, etc. It is a cost-effective system and approach to confronting the poverty problem, as has been evidenced in other countries. It uses enumerators and Teams from the community without the use of the much expensive experts in data collection, processing and validation.

One of the major impediments to the execution of poverty-reduction programmes has been a lack of inclusion of local community members in project design and decision making at large. The implementation of the CBMS in Zambia addresses two broad areas of needed action:

Strengthening local capacity for research and policy analysis in support of formulation of appropriate interventions and policies for reducing poverty. Rationalizing and synchronizing with the operations of state institutions responsible for collecting information pertinent to analyzing and monitoring poverty; and setting up mechanisms for the effective transfer of knowledge from experts availed through technical assistance to local experts.

In general, CBMS provides adequate information that facilitates accelerated rural development in areas such as; roads (and canals), education, health, water, sanitation, and HIV/AIDS as well as economic empowerment. On top of this, there are area-specific objectives dictated by the local context. For example, disease (cholera, dysentery, HIV/AIDS) monitoring in Lusaka province is important. The Monitoring systems in education, health, and sanitation are important too. Regarding economic empowerment, it is recognized that many parts of rural Zambia are well endowed with resources like land, water, wildlife, and forests; often better endowed than some urban areas. Rural areas have remained underdeveloped because they have lacked quality investments to exploit the resources. So, from the implementation of the CBMS, certain econometric insights are going to be evident on how these resources can be effectively utilized. The immediate potential in most places is in agriculture due to the abundance of land. This does not preclude other areas such as tourism, forestry, fishing, and mining. In the past, Zambia's focus on rural agriculture assumed every rural dweller was a farmer and must be given assistance to farm better. In actual fact, many take farming as a way of life rather than business. CBMS enables equal access to information from the grassroots and equal assistance delivery to rural farmers.

## **2. PARTICIPATORY PLANNING OF CBMS**

Effective planning by different developmental partners is achieved when local community members are directly or indirectly involved in all levels of decision making and policymaking. In this way, reliable data is collected from communities by local community members and made available to policy makers. The various surveys conducted in rural Zambia have shown that these surveys are done at irregular intervals because of the limited resources of the project implementers and the government at large. In addition, most of these surveys only take a representative sample of the population as target and the people are not in any instance involved in the processing of the collected data. Further, the people do not have the free and easy access to the processed information of the data they provided. This is not to say the governing bodies in Zambia do not realize the flaws in this type of institutional framework but rather that the institutional capacity does not allow all these constraints to be addressed due to resource limitations.

In this regard, the CBMS implementation focuses on providing up-to-date data from the community members / households (grassroots) and fully promotes the demand-driven participatory approach with a goal towards achieving sustainable development. Unlike the sample surveys by the CSO and EIF, CBMS is done at household levels thereby bringing decision-making to the doorsteps of the people (encouraging decentralization). This creates an open framework for the database that created, and allows research results to be validated by the community members themselves. In addition, the multi-disciplinary nature of this project and the involvement of many stakeholders increase the confidence levels in the data generated from this implementation by the general population in

Zambia. This set of attributes to the CBMS makes sure that a reliable source of data is created thereby putting in place a more disintegrated approach to decision/policymaking.

A necessary component of this action is long-term capacity building in education and skills training in data collection, processing and validation. Capacity building activities at the grass-roots level will improve poor people's ability to participate effectively in the political process and empower them to become full stakeholders in their own development. This action is based on the realization that people have the duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of projects within their communities.

With the on going implementation of the Poverty Reduction Programme (PRP) under the guidelines of the PRSP, the government seeks to actively deal with poverty levels using the data from the CSO up to the district levels, thereby completely ignoring the villages in the rural areas where much development should be directed. The PRP recognizes the need to involve people in the planning and implementation of sustainable development projects with a view of reducing poverty. However, these PRPs only focus on surface involvement of people in projects and hence do not ascertain well what happens at the grassroots of the socio-economic setups. Efforts to effective monitoring and management of developmental projects are also compromised because individual people, households are not included in the planning and implementation phase. In this regard, the feasibility of CBMS implementation in Zambia and the vision to have it nationwide adopted fills the gap in the fight against poverty that has been ignored for a long time. CBMS implementation promotes a paradigm shift in poverty reduction frameworks.

### **3. KNOWLEDGE GAPS**

The implementation of CBMS is inter-disciplinary and participatory in nature, hence enables effective mobilization of local knowledge and capacity building. However, there are several constraints in participatory project implementation that need to be tackled. Currently, the necessary participatory project implementation involving local groups has high transaction costs. Capacities and resources are limited or fragmented in many communities. This leads to extensive resistance in adopting external knowledge by local groups. Participatory approach provides for inclusion and cultivation of local knowledge in project implementation. Therefore, to yield better results, it has been observed that communities need to have capable and resource-rich local groups.

#### **3.1 EIF's Implementation approach**

- The EIF project strategies were not *community-led* but are induced or even imposed by ZRDC central staff.
- Many strategies were not *integrated* into a communities mainstream

decision-making systems as the project was being implemented. Hence, the project implementation missed potential incentives for effective local institutions and mechanisms to contribute to the strategy, or make use of the strategy. The results, therefore, were frequently mere 'planners' dreams' (like the provision of internet services at Mukobeko), with little political, civil society or business commitment and demand for further actions.

- During EIF implementation, there were often few links between *policy* and *on-the-ground realities*, thus policy debate did not learn from the field, and people in the field did not participate in debate. As a result, opportunities to link progress in both areas were missed.
- There was often a very narrow base of *participation*, usually due to lack of time and resources, no recognized means to identify the stakeholders that counted most, and weak rules on participation processes and outcomes. Any participation was often late in the process. As a result, *consensus* was forced, fragile or partial; and few people felt a sense of 'ownership'.
- Also, *Information* employed in EIF was not challenging existing assumptions, and throughout the life of the project there were inadequate time and resources available. Existing *sources of (local) knowledge* were often overlooked in favour of the analyses of (external) strategy consultants. As a result, credibility has often been low because the knowledge produced was not measured in terms of its relevance, utility and accountability to local stakeholders.

#### **4. EXPERIENCES**

The exchange of knowledge and the opportunity to learn from each other was an experience that was often positively mentioned by the PMT: "I have learned things from others I never used to know, which was a great experience." Consulting with community members led the PMT to achieve higher success indicators in project implementation.

However, as noted earlier the most crucial findings of our study on participatory approach in communities are that most local groups or existing partnerships are based on family relations. This is one of the crucial issues in the local setup in Zambia. Experiences therefore were often linked to comments of how positive it is to work with relatives: "It is nice to work with my brother. At least I can trust him." This statement shows the advantage and the reason why local groups are mostly based on family relations: for security reasons.

The following quote is from one of the community representatives from the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction. “When you don’t have equal access to information you don’t expect equal participation. The group that doesn’t have access to information especially the critical information is affected in terms of its input. This is the characteristic of the local communities. We have been called to participate in CBMS, but at the same time not getting equal access to information.”

One of the PMT members gave a comment on whether the participatory framework of CBMS was significant and beneficial to the project’s success. “Roughly yes, although I tend to think that the participatory process in a number of cases did not bring anything new because the issues were all known. When we went out in the field, there has been a lot of participatory research done by the universities and other people. But on the other hand it was difficult to say we already know your problems so we are not going to come and talk to you. So in that context this time around, yes.”

When interviewed on local radio in the project site, the CBMS project leader stressed that it is not up to ZRDC to decide what processes to take during CBMS implementation. ZRDC may comment on the process, but is in close consultation and the idea is to help the PMT with ideas during the process. So that when CBMS goes to the board it is really not for ZRDC to say that, no you can’t do this you can’t do that. It is for ZRDC to buy into what the local people decide, the way they are going to do.

## 5. LESSONS FROM IMPLEMENTATION

1. **Ownership:** Multi-stakeholder groups should design the information gathering; analysis and research process themselves, to ensure ownership of the implementation strategy and its results. Reference here is made to the CSO, local development groups like the Bwafwano community, local establishments like the chief and headmen.
2. **High-level support:** The project should be commissioned, agreed and endorsed at the highest level, involving recognised policy and research authorities, politicians and all stakeholders - thus increasing the chance that the research results will be utilised. The CBMS, memoranda of understanding were signed with the following organisations:
  - Office of the President, Lusaka province
  - Ministry of Community and Social Development
  - CSO
  - Lusaka City Council among others
3. **Good project implementation co-ordination:** Many players should be involved, sharing the knowledge they gain. If one institution co-ordinates the work, there should be considerable space for others to contribute from the poverty and environmental research communities and sources of local

knowledge. We have extensively involved the headmen and local people and headmen for solely this purpose.

4. **Stakeholders doing their own analysis:** Groups affected by key issues, especially local people with capacity should be enabled and encouraged to engage in research and analysis themselves. Special efforts should be made to identify 'who counts most' and involve them, with a focus on groups who are often marginalised from policy- and decision-making but who may hold critical (and often ignored) knowledge.
5. **Existing capacities:** Most of the research tasks should be implemented through bringing together, and supporting, existing local centers of information, technical expertise, learning and research, i.e. bwafwano centers, CSO central points for data collection like schools.

#### EIF Compared to CBMS approaches

EIF	CBMS
<b>Project team</b> alone is responsible	<b>Society</b> as a whole is responsible
<b>Narrow</b> participation	<b>Multi-stakeholder</b> approach
<b>Single Sector-based</b> research and planning	<b>Partnerships</b> and <b>integrated</b> implementation and planning
<b>Fixed</b> ideas and solutions	An <b>adaptive, learning</b> system offering coherence between activities
<b>Imposed</b> on the local communities	<b>Participation</b> of community members essential and integral part of the process
<b>Top-Down</b> implementation approach	<b>Bottom-up</b> implementation approach
focus is on <b>accountability</b>	focus is on <b>learning</b>
<b>predetermined</b> design	<b>flexible</b> design

#### Strengths and shortcomings of the participatory approach

STRENGTHS	SHORTCOMINGS
Provides more reliable and qualitative understanding of various group vulnerabilities and capacities.	
Creates a strong community ownership in the assessment process.	Participatory approach requires greater sensitivity, time and resources to conduct.
Builds a stronger foundation for creating sustainable programmes with local communities.	May lead to unrealistic expectation of assistance offered in future development programmes by the local communities.
Effective in developing both a long- and shortterm approach to risk and hazard mitigation and response.	



## 6. DISCUSSION

This paper outlines the framework for mainstreaming participatory development processes into ZRDC operations that was introduced in 2000. This was prepared in response to recommendations in the Report of the Task Force on Improving Project Quality, which emphasized the need for ZRDC to do more to enhance the sense of ownership among community members, and for greater community participation in all aspects of the project cycle. This project evaluation study (PES) was initiated in view of the consequent proliferation of participatory approach in the CBMS project and the poor performance of EIF project using top-down and supply-driven approach.

The problems in EIF project include, in particular, less relevant project interventions and poor project sustainability. Considering the top-down and supply-driven approach as the cause of these problems, a new set of participatory or bottom-up approach has emerged as a solution. In the CBMS project, bottom-up approaches include (i) community consultation and participatory planning, (ii) community development support, (iii) engagement of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), (iv) local government involvement, and (v) private sector participation.

Findings from the case studies of CBMS and EIF projects show that the actual application of the participatory approach spent substantial resources and long periods on community consultation and participatory planning. There was evidence that the participatory approach improved information flows and created new delivery mechanisms. However in the case of intensive consultation, there was evidence that the increased participation empowered communities in resource control and decision making, it gave them authority to hold ZRDC accountable, enhance their ownership and motivate them to take care of project facilities that were formally transferred to them (bicycles etc).

The PES identifies a set of issues from the cases studied, including community ownership and project sustainability, downward accountability of providers to beneficiaries, the real value of community consultation and participatory planning, poverty reduction through the efforts of the nonpoor, the need for contextualized project design instead of following a standard model, the need to simplify monitoring and data requirements, and the critical importance of thorough fieldwork at the project design stage. Factors underlying these issues are investigated, leading to suggestions for better alternatives.

However, PES observed that of the five central elements of service delivery-resources, information, decision making, delivery mechanisms, and accountability-control of resources was the most critical, determining the power in decision making and the authority as the principal to hold providers as the

agents. In a competitive market, clients individually act as the principal to hold providers accountable, because they control payments to providers. In the projects examined, project funds were controlled by project implementers.

Further it was noted that since participation is not a goal in itself but a means to achieve an objective, the use of participation should have a clear purpose. The form of participation may vary depending on that purpose, as well as on local conditions in particular project areas. The practice of applying a standard package of participation in all rural development projects without a clear purpose - by hiring NGOs, organizing local groups, conducting consultation workshops, providing training courses, and developing village plans - might not be effective. Customisation of projects to local settings is very essential in as far as consultative approaches are concerned.

One issue that comes up in such approaches is when the information has been shared. In order to achieve a meaningful participation the information has to be given within a timeframe that allows the project participants to read and discuss the documents. Otherwise the input cannot be expected to be of a very high quality and participation is hardly meaningful. Another very important question here is who has been consulted? Previous research has shown that there has been a strong technocratic norm when selecting the participating CBOs. There is not necessarily any correlation between a strong organisational capacity among the CBOs and the level of popular support. The consultations have been heavily centred on Moomba and Mutakwa despite the satellite center's consultations. The centralised consultations in EIF are better than nothing but to create a national ownership there probably have to be consultations at a lower administrative level. Even though Zambia is one of the countries with the highest degree of urbanisation in Africa, the process probably has to be moved out to the villages. It is also of great importance that the people who are being consulted are updated and get feedback on their suggestions. Being consulted and then not knowing what happens with the suggestions is not a sustainable way forward and it does not contribute to either empowerment or democratisation. Arnstein would probably label it manipulation and non-participation.

Depending on specific conditions, alternative forms of participation may be explored, such as those focusing on the establishment and strengthening of direct relationships between communities and providers by making providers more accountable to communities. In cases where the direct approach is not practical, appropriate incentives should be designed for policymakers and providers so that their best interests, given the incentives, lie in achieving the objectives of the public. The PES proposes alternative measures, with a view to encouraging innovation and discussion of these. The need for pilot testing of such measures is highlighted, and this should be followed by an evaluation of the pilot testing before more widespread application.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This paper discusses participatory approach in the implementation of the Community Based Monitoring System (CBMS) for poverty reduction and sanitation in Zambia. The paper also discusses the advantages and disadvantages of participatory approach in CBMS project implementation as compared to non participatory oriented projects such as EIF project. The PES study reaffirmed the position that participatory approach requires greater sensitivity, time and resources to conduct. Capacities and resources are limited or fragmented in most communities, leading to extensive resistance in adopting external knowledge by local groups. However, there is no doubt in the PES team that the introduction of participatory approaches to projects has effectively demonstrated the capacity of men and women from poor communities to participate actively in research, project design and analysis. Experience with these methods has also demonstrated that the manner in which these individuals are included in a process sets the context for the results ultimately generated. In conclusion, by using participatory approaches in project implementation the CBMS reported here was able to collect detailed information at local levels, and by using participatory approaches, we obtained a much clearer understanding of the underlying relationships involved effective project implementation. This approach was definitely successful in giving a listening ear to disadvantages faced by the worst-off: poor, rural, un-educated, and female.

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