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Full Length Research Paper

Community participation is a necessity for project success: A case study of rural water supply project in Jeppes Reefs, South Africa

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In South Africa more than 12 million people do not have access to clean water and less than half of the rural population has a safe and accessible water supply. The study attempts to investigate the challenges that hinder participation of rural communities in the delivery of a clean water supply. The study looks at the definition of participation, the involvement of the community in decision making, and the role of the planner in the delivery of clean water with a specific focus on the Jeppes Reefs community as case study. The paper closes with recommendations for the future.

Key words: Community, empowerment, participation, project success, water supply.

INTRODUCTION

Water is a human right and to save water is a human responsibility. Despite water being a very basic need, not everyone has access to it. The challenges found at the root of a shortage of water, come not always from lack of resources but rather from the disparity of its distribution. The availability of a pollution-free supply is not sufficient to meet all the demand, and the consequent need for treatment makes the supply of water expensive, and indeed beyond the means of the poor. More recently, thinkers and practitioners from many countries, international agencies, and bilateral aid donors have focused on meeting basic human needs as a primary objective of development and this is included in their development plans (Streeten, 1984). The basic needs strategy is concerned with removing mass deprivation, which has always been at the heart of development. Sufficient empirical evidence is now available to suggest that education and health services often make a greater contribution to improving labour productivity than do most alternative investments (Streeten, 1984). Safe water is an essential pillar of health and yet large shares of Sub-Saharan African populations are deprived of safe drinking water (World Bank, 1994a, b). The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that 80% of all illness in developing countries is related to water (World Development Report, 1993). Waterborne diseases are those which are mainly spread through contaminated drinking water. Water development projects are intended to improve the quality of the human environment. The chief concerns of water quality control are the spread of diseases with water. Recognising the importance to public health and well-being of an adequate water supply for drinking, personal hygiene and other domestic purposes, and an adequate means of waste disposal.

The United Nations declared the 1980's as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD). The ambitious goal manifested in the declaration was that by 1990, all the inhabitants of the world would have access to safe drinking water. This goal has clearly not been achieved, and certainly not in South Africa, where the vast majority of the rural population does not have access to safe and adequate water supplies (Hollingworth, 1988; Pearson, 1991).

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In post apartheid South Africa, the role of community participation is becoming very important, and communities are now given an opportunity to identify and define their problems. This is endorsed in the Re-construction and Development Programme (RDP) which states that development should be people driven. The central objective of the RDP is to improve the quality of

of life of all South Africans and in particular the poor and marginalised sections of the communities (African National Congress, 1994). This objective should be realised through a process of empowerment which gives the poor control over their lives and increases their ability to mobilise sufficient development resources. In this end-eavour, Thwala (2001) asserts that public participation in the planning and management of developmental projects is crucial to their lasting success. However, communities have had little say in the provision of water and in decision-making processes in South Africa. A privileged minority dominates access to water resources while the majority of the population enjoys little or no water security. The fundamental principle of the water resources policy is the right to access clean water -"water security for all" (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, 1998).

In the past, development tended to entail a top-down approach whereby the community did not have a say in any development initiatives. Development was initiated by the state, centrally planned and was dominated by state ideology. There was no recognition at all that planning is an integral part of the whole process of government, and that bad plans would materially alter the distribution of wealth and real income in a negative manner (Friedmann, 1973). As a result, this approach failed to allocate adequate resources to the poor and excluded them from the planning processes. Community participation requires that the values and interests of the community should be the guidelines for development processes. Communities in rural areas should be given an opportunity to identify and define their needs since they are better informed about their local situations. Their participation would allow development that is appreciated by themselves as beneficiaries and in turn would encourage sustainability. The aim of the research was to conduct an explanatory investigation into the role of community participation in planning for delivery of clean water to rural communities.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study was based on the difficulties the Jeppes Reef community had to access a clean water supply. It provides a proposal for addressing the problems facing the community in planning for the delivery of a clean water supply as a way forward to address future rural water delivery strategies. This does not imply that the study will be a panacea for delivering clean water to rural disadvantaged communities, rather it will be one of the many approaches decision-makers can adopt when faced with challenges of water delivery in rural communities in South Africa. The paper will not focus on water related issues in themselves but will demonstrate how community participation takes place at the local level during project planning and implementation. The paper starts by reviewing the theoretical framework with regard to community participation.

In sum, the paper attempts to:

- Identify problems faced by rural communities which hinder participation in the delivery of clean water,
- Demonstrate how self-help projects have a competitive advantage, to promote effective water delivery.

The review of literature will focus mainly on three concepts, that is, participation; empowerment and infrastructure development.

DEFINING THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The concept of community participation is viewed as a basis for project success. The World Bank (2004) defines participation as "a process through which stakeholders' influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them". The concept of community participation originated about 40 years ago from the community development movement of the late colonial era in parts of Africa and Asia. To colonial administrators, community development was a means of improving local welfare, training people in local administration and extending government control through local self-help activities (McCommon, 1993). However, during this era, the policy failed to achieve many of its aims primarily due to the bureaucratic top-down approach adopted by the colonial administrations (McCommon, 1993).

The objectives of community participation are the following: empowerment; building beneficiary capacity; increasing project effectiveness; improving project efficiency; and project cost sharing. The framework identifies four levels of intensity of participation, namely: information sharing; consultation; decision making; and initiating action (Thwala, 2001). Community participation generally is more successful when the community takes over much of the responsibility than when higher level public agencies attempt to assess consumer preferences through surveys or meetings (Thwala, 2001). In order for community participation to work, projects must include special components. Villagers can be recruited to help in all phases of designing, implementing, maintaining, supervising, and evaluating new water supply and sanitation systems, but only if the time, effort and money is spent to do it right. Special attention must be paid to the development of local committees and governance structures that can adequately oversee local participation. This framework has been largely accepted by development agencies worldwide. However, a criticism of the model is that it is "project based" and does not include the full spectrum of community participation approaches. As such, the framework can be defined in planning terms as "means"

orientated. The "means" approach views community participation as a form of mobilisation to achieve a specific, generally project related goal (Abbot, 1991). The alternative paradigm is the "ends" approach. This approach views community participation as a process whereby control over resources and regulative institutions by groups previously excluded from such control is increased, namely: the legitimacy of the authorities; and the nature of development. On the one hand, situations in which the legitimacy of the authorities is in question will result in projects where participation is identified as an "end". On the other hand, situations in which the development of services and housing is the main objective and requires meaningful participation at a grassroots level are more likely to adopt the "means" approach.

THE THEORETICAL BASE OF PARTICIPATION

A proper evaluation and understanding of public participation can be better achieved when it is viewed against a theoretical framework built on decision-making. The background includes social organisation, political process (which includes decision-making), planning theories, urban management and ideologies in light of society. Planning theory is perceived as the vehicle through which planners engage in introspection about what they do as planners. Planning theory focuses on the very nature of the planning process. It examines what distinguishes planners from other fields that also deal with public policy issues, and it entails a continuous search for ways to improve planners' effectiveness in society (Hemmens, 1980).

Planners are suffering from the scarcity of compelling and useful theories of planning processes (Hemmens, 1980). The rational comprehensive planning model has been attacked from all angles, though it remains utilised because of the absence of a competitive set of ideas that can attract sufficient support to supplant it (Hemmens, 1980). This does not mean, however, that the rational comprehensive planning model was, or is, anti-participatory. As a matter of fact, participation goes hand in hand with the concept of 'public interest' upon which the rational comprehensive planning was based. Planners, prior to the 1960's, were concerned with helping to guide urban decision-making to reflect "community values" through rational planning (Babbie, 1992). This was based on the assumption that the public interest was the embodiment of community values and that the public interest could be identified.

Participatory action research

Participatory action research is "learning by doing" a group of people identifies a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and, if not satisfied, try again. While this is the essence of the approach, there are other key attributes of action research that differentiate it from common problem-solving activities that we all engage in every day. A more succinct definition is,

"Action research aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction (O'Brien, 2001).

ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

Gerald Susman (1983) gives a somewhat more elaborate listing. The author distinguishes five phases to be conducted within each research cycle. Initially, a problem is identified and data is collected for a more detailed diagnosis. This is followed by a collective postulation of several possible solutions, from which a single plan of action emerges and is implemented. Data on the results of the intervention are collected and analyzed, and the findings are interpreted in light of how successful the action has been. At this point, the problem is re-assessed and the process begins another cycle. This process continues until the problem is resolved. The following are the five phases:

Diagnosing: Identifying or defining a problem
Action planning: Considering alternative courses of action
Taking action: Selecting a course of action
Evaluating: Studying the consequences of action
Specifying learning: Identifying general findings

When is action research used?

Action research is used in real situations, rather than in contrived, experimental studies, since its primary focus is on solving real problems. It can, however, be used by social scientists for preliminary or pilot research, especially when the situation is too ambiguous to frame a precise research question. Mostly, in accordance with its principles, it is chosen when circumstances require flexibility, the involvement of the people in the research, or change must take place quickly or holistically. It is often the case that those who apply this approach are practitioners who wish to improve understanding of their practice, social change activists trying to mount an action campaign, or, more likely, academics who have been invited into an organization (or other domain) by decision-makers aware of a problem requiring action research, but lacking the requisite methodological knowledge to deal with it.

Current types of action research

Traditional action research

Traditional Action Research stemmed from Lewin's work within organizations and encompasses the concepts and practices of Field Theory, Group Dynamics, T-Groups, and the Clinical Model. The growing importance of labour-management relations led to the application of action research in the areas of Organization Development, Quality of Working Life (QWL), Socio-technical systems (e.g., Information Systems), and Organizational Democracy. This traditional approach tends toward the conservative, generally maintaining the status quo with regards to organizational power structures.

Participatory rural appraisal (PRA)

Participatory rural appraisal is an approach to enable local people to share, enhance and analyse their knowledge of life and conditions, to plan and act (Chambers, 1994:1). The PRA five central concepts:

Empowerment: Knowledge arises from the process and results of the research that, through participation, come to be shared with and owned by local people. Thus the professional monopoly of information, used for planning and management decisions, is broken. New local confidence is generated, or reinforced, regarding the validity of their knowledge.

Respect: The PRA process transforms the researchers into learners and listeners, respecting local intellectual and analytical capabilities. Researchers have to learn a new "style". Researchers must avoid at all costs an attitude of patronizing surprise that local people are so clever they can make their own bar charts etc. The "ooh-aah" school of PRA works against its own principles of empowerment and indicates shallow naiveté on the part of the researcher. A good rule of thumb is that when you can really understand the local jokes, poetry and songs, then you may feel you are starting to understand the people's culture.

Localisation: The extensive and creative use of local materials and representations encourages visual sharing and avoids imposing external representational conventions.

Enjoyment: Participatory Rural Appraisal, well done, is, and should be, fun. The emphasis is no longer on "rapid" but on the process.

Inclusiveness: Enhanced sensitivity, through attention to process; include marginal and vulnerable groups, women, children, aged, and destitute techniques.

The more developed and tested methods of PRA include participatory mapping and modelling, transect walks, matrix scoring, well-being grouping and ranking, seasonal calendars, institutional diagramming, trend and chance analysis, and analytical diagramming, all undertaken by local people. Among many applications, PRA has been used in natural resources management (soil and water conservation, forestry, fisheries, wildlife, village planning, etc.), agriculture, health, nutrition, food security and programs for the poor.

Validity and reliability

Some facilitators of PRA have been exhilarated by a sense of liberation and discovery. The presentation and analysis of detailed knowledge in maps, models, matrices, diagrams and the like by local people has impressed them deeply in a personal way which has challenged preconceptions, and affected beliefs and behaviour. Validity and reliability can also be assessed in more conventional ways. Validity here refers to the closeness of a finding to the reality, and reliability refers to the constancy of findings. Highly valid findings are also highly reliable, but where there is a systematic bias, reliability can be high but validity low. Validity and reliability are not absolute values. There can be tradeoffs, through optimal ignorance and appropriate imprecision, where lower validity and reliability can be more cost-effective, and can enhance utility through less cost or greater relevance or timeliness.

THE PRINCIPLE OF EMPOWERMENT

In order for rural communities to participate meaningfully in projects initiated to improve their lives, it is imperative that they are empowered. The principle of empowerment states that people participate because it is their democratic right to do so (Wignaraja, 1991) and participation means having power (Tascconi and Tisdell, 1993).

According to this concept, participation is the natural result of empowerment. Empowerment is not a means to an end but is the objective of development. Empowerment entails more than having the power to make decisions. It demands the knowledge and understanding to make correct decisions. Communities cannot make wise decisions if they do not have the required information. The support organisations are required to be sources of information and should be a channel of information to the communities so that they will be able to make right and informed decisions.

JEPPES REEF CASE STUDY

Geographical description of the study area

The study was conducted in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa (Figure 1) using Jeppes Reef area as a case study as shown

in Figure 2 below. It is located in the Lowveld of the Mpumalanga Province, in the former KaNgwane homeland. The relief of the area is relatively flat with few isolated hills on the western side. The altitude of the area is about 500 - 1400 m above sea level. The area is well drained, with warm to hot summers and cold winters. The mean annual temperature is about 26°C. The rainfall is mainly conventional and occurs in between November and March. The climate of the area is the tropical type as it includes one rainy season, one dry season; it is hotter during dry season and cooler during wet season. Winter rainfall is very uncommon in the area. The mean annual rainfall for the area is about 500 - 750 mm per year. The vegetation of the area consists of a Tropical dry savannah. There is no man-made forest. Overgrazing, which is a common practice in the area, has contributed quite substantially to the deterioration of the natural vegetation. A foreseeable negative consequence of this lack of concern is a further reduction in the area presently put under livestock grazing land.

The main form of public transport is buses and taxis. Some of the noteworthy development includes a farming input depot, fenced communal grazing land, electricity, a clinic, a hospital (Shongwe Hospital), three Primary schools (Sisini Primary School, Buyani Primary School, Sabatha Primary School), one High school, (Tinhlonhla High School) a post office, and a business area where one finds different groceries, butcheries, a garage, a petrol filling station and a fruit and vegetable market (Field Work, 2007). The population of the area is approximately 8 000 people. The majority of the population (more than 50 percent) is less than 21 years old. The people over 65 years old also increase the dependency ratio. Human activities in the area revolve mainly around two activities: subsistence farming and wage employment. Subsistence farming is the only type of farming which is practised in the area. There are different food crops and livestock found in the area. This includes cassava, sorghum, sweet potatoes, beans, (groundnuts being the major ones), and maize is the most grown crop - and is grown during the rainy season only. The major livestock found in the area are cattle and goats. There is no large-scale crop and livestock farming in the area. Most of the people in the area work in Nelspruit, Malelane and on the neighbouring farms as farm workers. Employment opportunities in the area are very limited but the area's proximity to major industrial centres such as the Nelspruit Industrial Site makes it particularly attractive to rural migrants who seek employment in the industrial areas in order to supplement their incomes. There are also non-farm activities in the area which include handicraft, brewing, milling, dressmaking and brick-making, fence, maize, tank making and welding to mention just a few. The western side of the area is suitable for crop production and is where the community grows its crops. About 70% of the area under cultivation is too steep making it difficult to cultivate the area using tractors. The best alternative is to use an ox-drawn plough for ploughing. Furthermore, before a person starts cultivating he/she must clear the piece of land because it is a natural forest area. Thus, those people who do not own cattle must till a large piece of land using a hoe. Most of the households use family labour in clearing the forest. The land distribution within the village would appear unequal. Some households own several hectares of land while others have only less than a hectare. There are a number of perennial streams and mountain springs which do not flow through the community but are about 2 km away from the community. The springs in the area are not protected from being contaminated and polluted by both human activities and animals.

Background to the water project

Jeppes Reefs water project was chosen as a case study by the author of the paper as it resembled both top-down and bottom-up or participatory approaches in both project planning and implementation. The case study is significant in the sense that it is an example of a project that was implemented after 1994 with the main goal of improving the life of the rural people who form the majority of the South African population. The project was initiated by the elders in the community. The elders realised that members of the community, mainly women and children, were spending most of their time fetching water. As a result, they had less time to work on other productive economic activities. The project planning was done by the Local Authority. The implementation process became the responsibility of both the Local Authority and the Traditional Leaders. The community was informed about the water project after the Traditional Leaders and the Local Authority had agreed that the project should be implemented. The function of the Local Authority is to oversee development in the whole area in consultation with the Traditional leaders. On other hand the role of Traditional leaders is to assist the Local Authority in the mobilisation of the people and to support developmental projects in the whole area. The author was engaged with the community project at the end of the project and the project already provided water supply. The main aim of the study was to assess the concept of participation as a tool that enhanced project success. How is community participation undertaken and how can the process be improved in future water supply projects in South Africa to enhance project success and sustainability. In order to gather more information on the community participation process interviews were conducted.

Interviews

The aim of interviews was mainly to complement and substantiate information collected from field observations. It must be noted that an elaborate explanation of respondents' views and opinions on water problems cannot be acquired in any other way than by interviews. In Jeppes Reef, formally structured interviews and informal interviews proved to be a feasible strategy to get information from the community respondents. Questioning was done primarily in a structured and semi-structured manner and was highly open-ended. The interviews with the community leaders were highly structured and used guided questionnaires. Note taking and recording was allowed by the leaders. However, unlike those in the community, these interviews took place under extreme time limits set by the government officials. There were two formats adopted in interviewing the community: focus group interviews and individual interviews. This group consisted of community members who were involved in the actual project committees. The sample size was made small (ranging from six but not more than fifteen) deliberately for the author to be able to ensure control over discussion and debates. The use of both field observation and interview process was suitable for the gathering of comprehensible information on the project. The field observation was used to ascertain the project location and what really happened at project level. To supplement the field observation information interviews were conducted to get more information on how the project was plan, organized, implemented and how were the people involved. Key informants both in the community and the government's office were selected in the following manner:

- A senior position in the community or in the relevant government department or water delivery agency.
- The role the individual plays in the community for example, water project committee members and community liaison in the government.
- Community personalities according to their economic, educational, and other achievements in the society, or simply prominent community individuals.

When using the questionnaire, the selection of community members was through random sampling with replacement. The population sample was justified as it represented most of the

Figure 1. Shows the map of South Africa including the Mpumalanga Province.

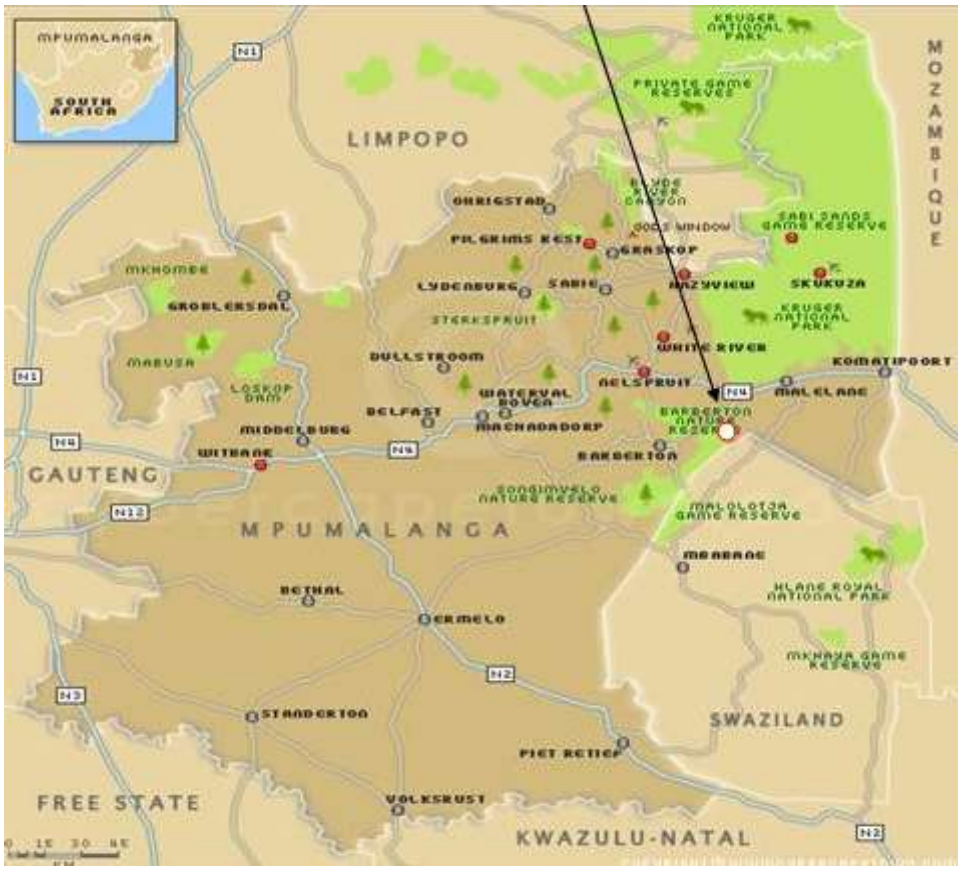

Figure 2. Map of Mpumalanga Province showing the location of the study area- Jeppes Reef.

people who were involved in the project from the beginning to the end. A sample population of thirty households was selected. The households in the same street were given numbers and these numbers were written down on different pieces of paper. These pieces of paper were then put in a plastic bag and shaken thoroughly before and after picking the number. In a case where a household was picked for the second time, it was taken back to the plastic bag and the selection process restarted. This worked very well, as there was no bias in the selection of the households to be interviewed. The residents were informed in advanced by the community liaison officer and the participation was voluntarily.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Community organisation

90% of the people interviewed clearly stated that the supply of community tap water has improved their lives. For example, children in the Jeppes Reefs community are now able to arrive on time at school because they are accessing water at a shorter distance of 200 m from the household compared to two kilometres (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, 1998).

One of the respondents said that

> "I used to wake up at 5 am, carrying my 25 l drum, to the spring and if I get there late there is no water. But even if there is water it's often muddy and undrinkable. After school my daughters heave a wheelbarrow up a steep, rocky path carrying two full 25 l drums. I used to spend six hours a day collecting low-quality water".

Most of the people who are affected by the project were women both working and unemployed. Those women who are employed must arrange ways to fetch water either in the morning or in the evening when they are from work. About 10% of the respondent had individual boreholes. The Jeppes Reef community was no different from thousands of other rural households where collecting and queuing for water, often undrinkable, dominates each day. Rural women in South Africa spend up to 15 hours daily on household chores- the lion's share on using and collecting water (Sowetan, 1998).

Community development

40% of the respondents claimed they had never been involved in water projects before. There was no proper consultation in the first water project and a top-down approach was therefore used. As a result, some people were very reluctant to participate in the water project. 60% of the responded indicated that they have been involved in the protection of the springs in winter. The people would fence the spring around so as to prevent animals from drinking the water. About 60% of the respondents highlighted that due to the spread of cholera in the area in the 1980s, the government initiate standpipe water projects in order to solve the problem. The project failed due to the lack of co-ordination among the community members who were involved in the standpipe water project. This project did not involve the whole community. The project was imposed on the community and there was no consultation with regard to how the water infrastructure was going to be maintained. There was no planning for maintenance that was done. This means there was no maintenance plan that was put in place. The current water project was a second attempt to have a clean water supply in the community. The water trenches were dug by community members. It was a good idea to use the local people so that they would feel that they were part of the project. The main problem that faced the project was the lack of experts who were going to advise the community such as planners and engineers, just to mention a two. Each household contributed R200.00 ($25) towards the purchasing of pipes and other materials which were required.

The Jeppes Reefs local authority wanted the water to be used for drinking purposes only so as to save cost. It requested those people who wanted to have water taps in their premises to pay a R50.00 ($6, 25) monthly. The local authority involved the community in this process and the community members were very happy to be part of the process. 70% of the respondents indicated that they are willing to pay for the service because they were consulted on time and made their own input in the process. The majority of the community members indicated that they are willing to pay between R10.00 ($1, 50) and R20.00 ($2, 50) for water maintenance services. 80% of the people who were involved in the project were women and they played a variety of roles such as digging the trenches, supervision role, and community mobilisation. Furthermore also young people played a major role on the project and mostly in the digging of the trenches. The respondents indicated that their second need after clean water is the upgrading of the internal roads within the community. The internal roads within the community are in bad condition in such a way that taxis and buses do not want to use them. As a result, the taxis and buses drop people at the main roads and some people had to walk more than 4 km to reach their homes. By the time they reach home they are tired and cannot do any work. The Chief-Runner of the area alluded that he had tried several times to ask the Jeppes Reefs Local Government Authority to maintain the internal roads within the community but there in fact was no action at all.

HOW COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION WAS UNDER-TAKEN

The community was informed about the water project

after the traditional leaders and the local municipality had agreed that the project should be implemented. The elders came with the idea of the water project. 70% of the respondents were very keen to take part in the community project initiative. 95% of the respondents wanted to be part of the decision-making process - to be part of the whole process from problem identification to implementation because they knew their day to day problems better than any outside person. The residents will be called to a meeting and issues relating to the project will be discussed and the residents will vote on the decision to be taken. 90% of the respondents were against the idea of employing a contractor to lay down the pipes but they wanted the local people to do the work. This was seen as a way of empowering the local people both in terms of skills and income.

According to the respondents, local government and the traditional leaders were supposed to make sure that local people were trained on such skills as laying pipes, supervision, management, and standpipe connection. These are skills that can be learnt easily especially if they were going to be used in a small community project which does not need highly skilled specialisation. 77% of the respondents alluded that they are eager to organise the community as to get their views on issues that affect their lives. One respondent highlighted that “it is very difficult to really decide on what people want… they should be the ones who voice out their problems”. 60% of the unemployed indicated that they have time to work on community projects. On the other hand 40% of the people who were employed and self-employed indicated that due to the lack of free time it is difficult for them to work on community projects. 98% of the respondents have no idea about planners since they have never seen a planner in their community. 2% of the respondents only knew the Development Officer who is based in Nelspruit. The community members want the Development Officer to come and work in the area on a full time basis to advise the community on developmental projects. The community sees the Development Officer as a person who can be resourceful but is not helping the Jeppe’s Reef community on a full time basis. The Jeppes Reefs area still lacks planners because it belongs to a rural municipality. Rural municipalities are not well resourced in terms of skilled people as they lack financial capacity to pay better wages as to attract experienced planners.

The role of development planners after 1994

The development planner’s role in South Africa is crucial in facilitating a process of implementing broad development frameworks. Previously planners worked under a different banner and they exercised different roles than they do today. Planners did not involve the community in the planning process but developed plans on behalf of the community. Planning had not changed after 1994 due to the lack of capacity at community level to challenge the old way of thinking that characterised the pre - 1994 period. Planners need to assume non-directive roles in the promotion of community participation. Roles taken by planners today need to epitomise professionalism which involves accountability and service in the public interest. Special skills will need to be acquired to assume the roles of reconstruction and conciliation, namely: communication, conflict resolution through mediation and negotiation, and problem solving skills. The Jeppes Reefs areas still lack planners because it belongs to a rural municipality. Rural municipalities are not well resourced in terms of skilled people as they lack financial capacity to pay better wages as to attract experienced planners.

Planners have a crucial role to play and this is primarily a process in which ordinary people will play a leading role with governments and other agencies playing a facilitating role from problem identification up to the implementation of the project. Therefore, it is important that the planner informs the community about development issues and advises and assists them in articulating their needs. This will allow communities to make informed choices and to enable a process of inter-dependence. The planner, through assisting, advising, facilitating and coordinating is also learning from some of the inputs made by other stakeholders including the community, private sector or NGO’s. In addition, the negotiating, organizing and mediating skills of the planner would be enhanced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This is based on literature reviewed and on the case study at Jeppes Reef, Mpumalanga Province. Responses from the interviews indicate that teamwork was a value that was fading away in the community and that the community is becoming more individualistic. The community members maintained that teamwork is essential for the community’s success because it engenders a sense of commitment on the part of community, leaders, and stakeholders and this is ultimately transmitted to any developmental project in the area. One of the respondents noted that “in case one party fails to perform according to the expected standards of the project that party feels that it was letting the team down”. The team members should form a tradition of assisting each other wherever possible for the success of any project. Since the different stakeholders had a shared vision and purpose, they should usually plan together and share ideas as to how best they could enhance their effectiveness in promoting community participation.

There is a shortage of development planners in the Jeppe’s Reefs community. During the interviews with the community members it was noticed that most of the

community members have no ideas about the role of planners. In interviews with the local government officials, it was also found that most of the officials in the community development department do not have relevant training in development planning. Most of the officials in the local government are simple college and university graduates with diplomas and first degrees in Social Sciences and Natural Sciences with little or no background in planning. The local municipality relies on outside development planners, experts, or consultants who have little experience in development planning. In project design, the local government relies on consultants. The Jeppes' Reef community needs a planner who is going to be a spokesperson for the community in developmental projects. With the absence of qualified planners to work with the community there is no one to assist the community to properly articulate their needs from the problem identification to project implementation.

Community participation and decision making

Another objective of this research was to explore community participation in the delivery of clean water to rural communities and to encourage communities to get involved in decision-making processes. Through the study undertaken, it was found that one of the major issues in rural communities was the fact that people in leadership make decisions on behalf of the communities. The communities are not involved in community decision making. Leaders only call a meeting to sell a particular idea. The other problem which the study gathered was that there are 40% people in the community who are illiterate and have no skills. Therefore, community participation should be aimed at empowering people by ensuring that skills are developed and that employment opportunities are created. To overcome these problems a labour intensive programme is considered to be appropriate as it solves a number of problems simultaneously. Firstly, it addresses the problem of illiteracy by offering training on skills development. Secondly, it promotes local employment, and thirdly it ensures that services are provided at a low cost and thus the living environment is improved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the problems and challenges encountered during the planning and implementation of the project are not new or unique, but are resonant of those encountered in other projects both internationally and locally. The slow pace of transformation and skills transfer to communities hinder project community participation. Abrams contends that in community-based projects the community controls a project and makes important decisions, although professionals such as engineers may provide expertise, and finance may be provided by external financial sources (Abrams, 1996). For a community to control projects, it must acquire administrative and management skills. Phillips et al. contend that South Africa at present is faced with similar difficulties to community participation since local institutional management capacity is not sustainable without an enabling local authority legal framework (Philips et al., 1992). Although the planners' task is a crucial one, it is somewhat difficult. With the improvement of the life of the communities, come various difficulties including the divisions, conflicts and incoherencies that may exist within communities. It has become evident that under the new dispensation, planners have to acquire new skills to deal with such contingencies namely: negotiation, communication, and the ability to bring to the fore the differing needs of all actors.

There exists a multitude of planning tools that may or may not assist the planner in working with communities. Although utilizing the appropriate method in the appropriate context is essential, more crucial is the angle from which community development is approached. Apparently a top-down, blueprint approach to planning has left us the dismal state we find ourselves in as planners today: social infrastructural backlogs, unserviced townships, poverty, landlessness, environmental degradation and unemployment. Consequently, community participation must be the new approach to planning if we wish to relieve society from the mess we have inherited from apartheid. However, to gain certainty that such an approach will lead to the successful implementation of community plans, planners need to assert themselves in national policy formulation and thereby gain some influence over which direction development plans will assume. The planning process embarked on during apartheid was linear and product-orientated. It was not people-orientated; the people to be affected by the product were not considered. It is the criticisms of blueprint planning that planners need to pay close attention to, take note of, learn from, in order to be able to avoid the mistakes of the past by not involving the communities in decision-making that affect their lives. Community participation is the approach which planners should adopt and it will take us to the next millennium.

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