

The Role of Community Participation in Local Economic Development: The Case of Bensa Woreda, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study is to examine the role of community participation in local economic development in the case of Bensa Woreda, Ethiopia. To this end, the researcher used descriptive statistics with a mixed research approach. An enumerator-assisted questionnaire was used to gather data from the sampled households. The qualitative data that were collected through a semi-structured interview were analyzed using narration for triangulation. The result indicated that community participation is vital for development at local, regional and national levels and is accepted as one of the development criteria. In line with technical challenges and problems, there are no trained and devoted community participation professionals at different offices. Therefore, it is recommended that the current program does not empower the community as much as needed and that there has to be a role for stakeholders to ensure that this gap should be filled.

Keywords: *Community Participation; Local Development.*

1.0 Introduction

Local economic development has three important dimensions. First, it is assumed that the community will play an active role in the economic development process and gain access, participation, and ownership of the economic activities in the locality. Second, it is argued that community development strategies and community-building activities can contribute to sustained economic development and vice versa. Third, the field looks for outcomes relating to community building and community development in addition to economic outcomes. In this sense, the community is treated as an input and an output in community economic development (Guzmán & Auspos, 2011).

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Community participation plays a significant role in developmental activities by mobilizing active local participants (Samah & Aref, 2011). Theoretically, entrepreneurship expansion of small and micro enterprises is to be fully owned by the local community. Moreover, the local development works must create employment opportunities for the local community. New businesses must flourish; small, medium and large industries must also emerge from the community's effort for participatory local economic development. However, in African countries, including Ethiopia, the local community's direct involvement in the developmental project is insufficient. Development is inseparably linked with community participation. Without a plurality of actors and approaches, development cannot be realized. However, community members often complain that there is a problem involving the community in decision-making. The works undertaken by the community and the effects of the participatory works are not as visible. It created a gap in participatory development activities and sustainability (OECD, 2010).

Previous researchers such as Dinberu (2014) and Lisanu (2017) studied community participation issues explored in different country areas. However, they did not examine the contribution of community participation in local economic development. Therefore, the current study tried to assess community participation and its contributions to local economic development in the case of Bensa Woreda, Sidama Regional State, Ethiopia.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Participation in local economic development

Participation is not a new concept in development activities. According to Caroline (1987), community participation has been an essential component since the early 1950s. The importance of participation in urban development activities has lagged. One reason may be that rural projects are mainly production-oriented, and it is quite evident that the beneficiaries, as producers, must be involved in the development of production systems. In urban projects, beneficiaries have been seen primarily as consumers of services, and their role in developing supply systems has been accorded less importance. Benefits derive from cost reduction and resource mobilization and better targeting of project measures to peoples' real needs through their involvement in the planning phase. Furthermore, participation enhances the ownership of the facilities by the user community and thus ensures a more extensive and efficient use of facilities, better maintenance, and more reliable operation (Ayman, 2011).

Participation is now widely recognized as a basic operational principle of

development, but the debates around this approach are fervent. Conventionally, the participatory approach is considered a reaction to the shortcomings of top-down development practices, externally imposed and expert-oriented (Chambers, 1983 cited in Nour, 2011). The advantage of these new approaches is that they are centered on the role of the local community as a primary actor that should be allowed and enabled to influence and share the responsibility and possibly, the costs of the development process affecting their lives (Kothari *et al.*, 2001).

2.2 Community participation

The word community is a multidimensional and complex concept that is defined differently by different scholars, in the sociological point of view, community mean a group of people who live in the same place, share an interest, a neighborhood or a common set of circumstance (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2007). The characteristics and behavior of communities differ from one community to another depending on the historical background.

From a political point of view, a community can be defined as a political constituency that has the right to participate in political activities such as electing its leader and making the decision to run its government. In defining community, I decided to choose the meaning as defined by a sociologist.

Therefore, a community is defined as a group of people who share the same characteristics. My focus on community is based on the community in the way it is organized as one element of that group of people.

According to ILO (2010), local economic development is a locally owned, participatory development process undertaken within a given territory or local administrative area in partnership with both public and private stakeholders. The local economic development approach makes use of local resources and competitive advantages to create decent employment and economic growth. Although primarily an economic strategy, local economic development simultaneously pursues social goals of poverty reduction and social inclusion. Its design and implementation structures create space for dialogue between different groups within the community and enable them to actively participate in the decision-making process. Target groups at various levels are involved, such as local government authorities, employers' organizations, trade unions, the local business community, and other social partners, such as indigenous peoples' associations, or civil society organizations representing women and youth.

Nel (2001) argues that local economic development, internationally, has emerged as a result of the increasing decentralization of power and decision-making to

the local level which came as the result of the neo-liberal era which strived for a reduction in the role of the central state in the economy. Local economic development has also emerged due to economic changes within localities, varying from de-industrialization to local innovation which requires local leadership initiative, response and direction (Nel, 2001).

According to Morgenrood (2007), the generic definition adopted is appropriate, it is an “approach towards economic development which allows and encourages local people to work together to achieve economic growth and development thereby bringing economic benefits and an improved quality of life for all residents in a local municipal area.”

3.0 Research Methodology

The research design employed in this study was descriptive. A descriptive research design aims to accurately and systematically describe a situation or phenomenon. The researcher also used a mixed type of research approach. This approach helped the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative approach involves a subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions, and behavior, whereas the quantitative approach is concerned with generating data in a numeral form (Kothari, 2012). The qualitative data helps triangulate the findings from the quantitative data. This is because it is believed that the weakness of one method is supplemented by the strength of the other (Creswell, 2009).

The sampling frame for the study was a complete list of households in four kebeles. Accordingly, the sample size was determined by using the formula developed by Yamane (1967) as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{4678}{1 + 4678(0.07)^2}$$

$$n \approx 196$$

Where: n = Sample size

N = Total Population

e = Sampling Error

The researcher used probability proportional to the size sampling technique to decide the sample size for each Kebele. Selection of respondents for the survey was selected by employing a systematic random sampling technique.

The study used questionnaires as tools for data collection. The data that was collected through the questionnaire was edited, coded, and entered into the computer using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Software Version 26. The analysis techniques were performed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation to summarize. Furthermore, inferential statistics like correlation.

4.0 Results and Interpretation

The socio-demographic characteristics of HIP employees including sex, age, educational level and work experience have been analyzed.

Table 1: Background Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	180	89.6
	Female	21	10.4
	Total	201	100
Age	25-34	56	27.9
	35-44	118	58.7
	45-54	17	8.5
	55-64	10	5.0
	Total	201	100

Source: Own Survey Data, 2022

Sex refers to the physical and physiological difference between males and females. These characteristics are included in this study to show that the respondents are either male or female. As the results of Table 1 show, 89.6% of respondents in the study area were male, whereas 10.4% of them were females. This indicated that the majority of respondents in the study area were male.

Age is the number of years that is a continuous variable referring to someone who has lived since she/he was born. In connection to age distribution, 58.7% were found in the age category of 35-44 years, and 27.9% of them were in the age category of 25-34 years. The other 8.5% and 5% of sampled respondents were in the age group of 45-54 and 55-64. This indicated that the majority of respondents in the study area rely on 35-44 years old.

Table 2: Social Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage
Marital Status	Married	178	88.6
	Widowed	23	11.4
	Total	201	100
Education Level	No formal education	22	10.9
	1-8	34	16.9
	9-12	43	21.4
	Certificate/Diploma	29	14.4
	Degree and above	73	36.3
	Total	201	100

Source: Own Survey Data, 2022

Marital status is a person's state of being married or not. As far as marital status is concerned, 88.6% of sampled respondents were married, whereas 11.4% of them were widowed. This implies that the majority of sampled respondents were married. The key informants indicated that marital status is a certain individual commitment to involve in social, economic and environmental issues for both individual and communal benefit. Most of the time, people who are married are likely to be involved in various issues rather than single people who do not always get involved in issues happening in their community. So married people are more responsible and committed to being involved in any activity for their family, community and environment than single persons.

Education is a certain individual level of learning that indicates whether she/he attended formal education. Also, it is the process of receiving or giving systematic instructions, especially at a school or university. Hence, the result of Table 2 shows that 36.3% of sampled respondents have a first degree and above, 21.4% of them attended grades 9-12, 16.9% of them attended grades 1-8, and 14.4% of them attended certificates/diplomas. This indicated that the majority of respondents were at least first-degree holders.

Occupation refers to the respondents' principal work or business, especially as a means of earning, a living; any activity in which a person engaged, possession, settlement, or use of land or property. As the results of Table 3 present, sampled respondents were asked about the main types of occupation they have. Accordingly, 48.8% of sampled respondents replied that their main type of occupation is government employee followed by self-employed (25.4%). The other 12.9% and 5%

are daily laborers and unemployed, respectively. This indicated that the majority of the respondents were government employees which is a dominant economic activity in the study area.

Table 3: Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage
Occupation	Government employee	98	48.8
	NGO employee	9	4.5
	Self-employee	51	25.4
	Daily laborer	26	12.9
	Unemployed	10	5.0
	Student	7	3.5
	Total	201	100
Income in Birr /month	Below 10000	124	61.7
	10000-20000	63	31.3
	Above 20000	14	7.0
	Total	201	100

Source: Own Survey Data, 2022

It is expected that members with high monthly incomes are more likely to participate in local economic development activities than those with smaller monthly incomes. Thus, regarding sampled respondents' current monthly income, 61.7% of them had a monthly income of below 10,000, 31.3% of them had a monthly income of 10,000-20,000, and 7% of the sampled respondents had a monthly income above 20,000. The result indicated that the majority of sampled respondents had a monthly income below 10,000.

4.2 Status of community participation in local economic development

The results of Table 4 indicated that 60.7% of sampled household heads have a medium community participation level, 31.8% have a low participation level, and 7.5% have a high participation level. The result indicates that the participation level of the community in local economic development is medium.

Regarding the way of participation, 40.8% of sample respondents participated by raising money, 37.3% participate as a workforce, 17.4% of them participate by sharing experiences, and 4.5% participate by supporting materials.

Table 4: Community Participation Level and ways of Participation

Variables	Categories	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Community participation level	Low	64	31.8
	Medium	122	60.7
	High	15	7.5
	Total	201	100
Main way of participation	Raised money	82	40.8
	Sharing experience	35	17.4
	As a workforce	75	37.3
	Supporting material	9	4.5
	Total	201	100

Source: Own Survey Data, 2022

The results of Table 5 indicated that the available type of community programs was presented, among them, 25.9% of them indicated public toilet construction, 28.4% indicated green development, 22.4% of them indicated supporting elders, and 19.9% indicated pure drinking water. Regarding the type of community program, the respondents participate in, 30.3% of them participated in supporting elders, 29.9% of them participated in green development, and 16.9% participated in public toilet construction.

Table 5: Types of Community Programs Available and Community Participation

Variables	Categories	Frequency (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Types of community programs available in your area	Pure drinking water	40	19.9
	Supporting elders	45	22.4
	Public toilet construction	52	25.9
	Green development	57	28.4
	Others	7	3.5
	Total	201	100
Types of community programs the respondent participates in	Pure drinking water	36	17.9
	Supporting elders	61	30.3
	Public toilet construction	34	16.9
	Green development	60	29.9
	Others	10	5.0
	Total	201	100

Source: Own Survey Data, 2022

4.3 The contribution of community participation in local economic development

Table 6: Perception of Respondents on the Role of Community Participation

S. No.	Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	Community participation helped me to have an awareness	36	17.9	26	12.9	38	18.9	87	43.3	14	7.0
2	Community participation helped me to know the importance of conducting it	7	3.5	25	12.4	47	23.4	78	38.8	44	21.9
3	Community participation helped me to provide new ideas	11	5.5	25	12.4	53	26.4	64	31.8	48	23.9
4	Community participation helped me to have self-reliance	8	4.0	23	11.4	41	20.4	88	43.8	41	20.4
5	Community participation can ensure project responsiveness	12	6.0	27	13.4	35	17.4	89	44.3	38	18.9
6	Community participation assists in breaking the mentality of dependency	13	6.5	23	11.4	36	17.9	93	46.3	36	17.9
7	Community participation can enhance the goal of sustainability	11	5.5	10	5.0	31	15.4	97	48.3	52	25.9

Source: Own survey data, 2021

Concerning item 1, as presented in Table 6, 50.3% of sampled household heads agreed that community participation helped them to have an awareness of the problems and solutions of local economic development, while 30.8% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that almost half of the respondents agreed that community participation helped them to have an awareness of the problems and solutions of local economic development.

In line with item 2, the results of Table 6 indicates that 60.7% of sampled household heads agreed that community participation helped them to know the importance of conducting local economic development, while 15.9% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that community participation helped them to know the importance of conducting local economic development.

On the subject of item 3, as presented in Table 6, 55.7% of sampled household heads agreed that community participation helped them to provide new ideas in development plans, while 17.9% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that community participation helped them to provide new ideas for development plans.

With respect to item 4, the results of Table 6 indicate that 64.2% of sampled

household heads agreed that community participation helped them to have confidence in the fairness of the local economic development activities, while 15.4% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that community participation helped them to have self-reliance in the fairness of the local economic development activities.

Regarding item 5, as presented in Table 6, 63.2% of sampled household heads agreed that community participation can ensure project responsiveness to people's needs, while 19.4% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that community participation can ensure project responsiveness to people's needs.

On the subject of item 6, as presented in Table 6, 64.2% of sampled household heads agreed that community participation assists in breaking the mentality of dependency, while 17.9% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that community participation assists in breaking the mentality of dependency.

Regarding item 7, as summarized in Table 6, 74.2% of sampled household heads agreed that community participation can enhance the goal of sustainability, while 10.5% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that community participation can enhance the goal of sustainability.

4.4 Challenges that hinder community participation in local economic development

Concerning item 1, as presented in Table 7, 59.7% of sampled respondents agreed that females were not actively participating in local economic development, while 24.4% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that females were not actively participating in local economic development.

In line with item 2, the results of Table 7 indicate that 62.7% of sampled respondents agreed that young-aged groups of the community were not actively participating in local economic development, while 20.9% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that young-aged groups of the community were not actively participating in local economic development.

On the subject of item 3, as summarized in Table 7, 70.2% of sampled respondents agreed that low-educated community members were not actively participating in local economic development, while 10.5% of them disagreed with the

idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that low-educated community members were not actively participating in local economic development.

Table 7: Challenges of Community Participation

Item no	Statements	SDA		DA		N		A		SA	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1	Females were not actively participating	2	1.0	47	23.4	32	15.9	97	48.3	23	11.4
2	Young aged groups of the community were not actively participating	1	0.5	41	20.4	33	16.4	100	49.8	26	12.9
3	Low-educated community members were not actively participating	4	2.0	17	8.5	39	19.4	92	45.8	49	24.4
4	Unmarried groups of the community were not actively participating	15	7.5	12	6.0	32	15.9	74	36.8	68	33.8
5	Low-income community members were not actively participating	2	1.0	13	6.5	18	9.0	91	45.3	77	38.3
6	Those community members who had high mobility of living had low participation	54	26.9	70	34.8	22	10.9	34	16.9	21	10.4
7	Those community members who had no savings had low participation	8	4.0	16	8.0	45	22.4	84	41.8	48	23.9
8	Members of the community who were not well informed did not actively participate	2	1.0	44	21.9	29	14.4	100	49.8	26	12.9
9	Local working culture challenged the community to the adoption of new development programs	45	22.4	65	32.3	41	20.4	31	15.4	19	9.5
10	The existence of political intervention hinders the community to participate	2	1.0	8	4.0	17	8.5	76	37.8	98	48.8

Note: SDA= Strongly disagree, DA= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA= Strongly agree

Source: Survey data, 2022

Regarding item 4, the results of Table 7 indicate that 70.6% of sampled respondents agreed that unmarried groups of the community were not actively participating in local economic development, while 13.5% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that unmarried

groups of the community were not actively participating in local economic development. With respect to item 5, as presented in Table 7, 83.6% of sampled respondents agreed that low-income community members were not actively participating in local economic development, while 7.5% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that low-income community members were not actively participating in local economic development.

In line with item 6, the result of Table 7 indicates that 61.7% of sampled respondents disagreed that those community members who had high mobility of living had low participation on local economic development, while 27.3% of them agreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents disagreed that those community members who had high mobility of living had low participation in local economic development.

Concerning item 7, as presented in Table 7, 65.7% of sampled respondents agreed that those community members who had no savings had low participation on local economic development, while 12% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that those community members who had no savings had low participation in local economic development.

On the subject of item 8, the result of Table 7 indicates that 62.7% of sampled respondents agreed that members of the community who were not well informed did not actively participate in the local economic development, while 22.9% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that members of the community who were not well informed did not actively participate in the local economic development.

With respect to item 9, as summarized in Table 7, 54.7% of sampled respondents disagreed that the local working culture challenged the community to the adoption of new development programs, while 24.9% of them agreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents disagreed that the local working culture challenged the community to the adoption of new development programs.

Regarding item 10, the result of Table 7 indicates that 86.6% of sampled respondents agreed that the existence of political intervention hinders the community to participate in local economic development, while 5% of them disagreed with the idea. The result implies that the majority of sampled respondents agreed that the existence of political intervention hinders the community to participate in local economic development.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Most communities are not active participants in economic development activities. The reason is that there is no awareness creation work from the side of the government and the committees. Hence, the communities did not know that participatory effort toward local economic development will really change and improve life. Therefore, communities are not fully involved in their locality's economic development. Few communities are participating but the majority are not. Especially, the lack of participatory effort in planning the local economic development is damaging the community's initiative to be participating in development programs. Hence, a wide movement of awareness creation must be done. Motivating the community in collective decision-making and image building by the concerned bodies is necessary to attract the communities towards communal development agendas.

The community has not been involved in playing a great role in local economic development projects. Most community members are unaware of the benefits of the participatory development approach. A lack of knowledge in this regard on their part may have contributed to their misunderstanding and misconception. Launching training programs or workshops may help change the mindset of the community members regarding participatory practices in development interventions. The study also recommends that community leaders should be empowered so that they are able to participate in development projects.

Participatory local community economic development works and fundraising systems should be supported by community mobilization and the local communities must contribute resources voluntarily. The current program of local economic development has limited room to be the community movement agenda by empowering the community. As the literature indicates, empowerment is the best way to bring about community participation in local economic development. Therefore, it is clear that the current program does not empower the community as much as needed and that there has to be a role for stakeholders to ensure that this gap should be filled.

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