

## **Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation: Case Study of Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariat in Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

Rural development projects are advancing slowly in rural areas partly due to a lack of community participation in project implementation. In the Sri Lankan context, state-governed projects are often planned by the Ministries and Departments, yet beneficiaries get the chance to engage with projects at the implementation stage. Divisional Secretariats play a major role when implementing projects at the rural level in Sri Lanka. Hence, this study aims to explore the reasons for lower community participation in rural development project implementation in a selected divisional secretariat called Kandaketiya in Sri Lanka, to examine issues encountered in community participation in rural development project implementation, and to make suggestions to increase active community participation. The study used a qualitative case study design by collecting data from the field officers engaged in rural project implementation and community members separately. Six focus group discussions were employed, and data analysis was done thematically. As the reasons for lower community participation, the study found that lack of awareness, negative community perception, administrative and management issues of government institutes, time constraints, geographical barriers, and limited infrastructure availability. The study revealed that issues encountered in community participation in rural development project implementation as intergenerational conflicts and poor teamwork, insufficient monitoring by field officers, poor officer-community relationship, and lack of transparency in financial matters. Introducing a daily wage system, enhancing communication facilities, conducting need analysis tests, increasing financial transparency, conducting community awareness and capacity-building training for officers, and introducing people-centric project designs were stated as suggestions for increasing community participation.

**Keywords:** Community Participation, Project Implementation, Rural Development

## 1. Introduction

In the Sri Lankan context, rural development has been identified as one prominent area for reaching developmental goals due to primary-level production occurs at the rural level and most of the natural resources are available far away from urban cities (National Physical Planning Department, 2019). Generally, in Sri Lanka state-governed projects are planned by higher officials yet beneficiaries get the chance to engage with projects in the implementation stage (Yalegama, Chileshe, & Ma, 2016). State-level rural development projects are planned by Ministries and Departments (Kruse, 2007; National Physical Planning Department, 2019). Divisional Secretariats play a major role under the direction of the District Secretariat when implementing projects at the field level in Sri Lanka (Samarasinghe, 2014; Kruse, 2007). There are field officers such as Grama Niladhari (Rural Officer), Development officers, Samurdhi Development officers, etc. to implement, monitor, and control the project-based activities at the rural level. Community at the village level are motivated by a wide range of factors to initiate and participate in rural development projects. Community support is an inevitable strategy to overcome difficulties and reach the outcomes of the projects. Though the higher authority of the government has planned the projects, beneficiaries of the project can tremendously impact the project's success based on active participation at the implementing stage. All these projects are aimed at uplifting the living conditions of rural beneficiaries.

Rural development initiatives in their particular communities are advancing slowly due to lack of engagement (Kritzinger-Van Niekerk, & Govender, 2015). These initiatives with limited community participation are not meeting their objectives. Numerous studies have been performed to investigate the low level of community engagement in the planning phase of development projects. Few studies have been conducted on the variables influencing poor community participation during the implementation phase of rural development initiatives (Khan, & Qureshi, 2016).

Particularly in the case of Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariate Division (DSD), it was found that several rural development projects have been implemented such as household agricultural projects, community projects to delist the lakes and irrigation channel, community water projects, the construction of bridges, and roads, Shramadana campaign, etc. (Divisional Secretariat Kandaketiya, 2022). According to the resource profile of the Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariat, the following projects have been carried out by the Kandaketiya DSD during the past few years (Table 01). However, it was reported that the number of actual beneficiaries participating in all

those projects is much less than the targeted beneficiaries. It indicated that though the benefits derived from those projects are for the community, their participation in such project implementation is at an unsatisfactory level leaving a gap to explore reasons for lower community participation in rural development project implementation.

***Table 01: Projects Implemented in Kandaketiya DSD during 2018-2022***

<b>Project name</b>	<b>No. of Target Beneficiaries</b>	<b>No. of Participated Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Funding Agents</b>
A community project to delist the Kuda Ela Irrigation channel	199 farmers	14 farmers	Community funds
Providing clean drinking water using a tube well (Bokanoruwa)	30 families	20 families	Government
Construction of road towards the bridge (Udakiwedara- Maladumgolla)	107 families	35 beneficiaries	Community funds
Home-based cultivation project (26 GND)	3900 households	570 households	Government
Dengu Shramadana Campaign (Havandana)	1061 beneficiaries	78 beneficiaries	Non- Government Agency

*Source: Resource Profile, Kandaketiya Divisional Secretariat (2018-2022)*

Lack of community participation poses significant challenges to the successful implementation and sustainability of projects aimed at addressing community needs and improving socio-economic conditions. Hence, exploring and understanding the reasons for lower community participation is essential for designing effective policy interventions to enhance community participation in rural project implementation. In this context, this study attempts to fulfil the following research objectives.

1. To examine the reasons for lower community participation in project implementation in Kandaketiya DSD.

2. To find out issues encountered in community participation in rural development project implementation in Kandaketiya DSD.
3. To propose policy measures to increase active community participation in rural development project implementation in Kandaketiya DSD.

Community participation is critical for the long-term sustainability of rural development projects. By studying factors influencing participation, policymakers and other stakeholders can work to foster greater ownership and accountability within communities as well as establish strategies to enhance the effectiveness of rural development projects. As most newly planned projects follow a participatory project approach, it is highly important to make a platform to identify the reasons, and issues of the lower community participation in project implementation.

Research on community participation in rural development projects can contribute to the broader knowledge base on participatory development approaches, benefiting both academia and practitioners. This knowledge can be shared across contexts and used to inform future research and programming in Sri Lanka and beyond.

Succinctly, studying lower community participation in rural development projects in Kandaketiya DSD in Sri Lanka is significant for improving the effectiveness, inclusivity, and sustainability of development efforts, empowering local communities, and informing policy and practice in the field of rural development.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Participation in Rural Development Projects**

Modern theories on rural improvement place a premium on public involvement (Sabet & Khaksar, 2020). Rahnema (2020) found that there is growing agreement that people's active engagement is crucial to the success of any initiative aimed at progress. The current worries about participation have deep historical roots. Fu & Geng (2019) state that at every stage of rural development in postcolonial Asia and Africa, the voice of the people has been a continuous motif. Depending on the nature of the development programs and activities, "the people" can refer to a wide range of demographics, including but not limited to the intended audience, clientele, beneficiaries, men, women, young, old, formal, and informal community leaders, and members of various community segments and strata. By contributing their ideas, interest, material, money, and time, people are full partners with development agencies in determining programs and activities, setting priorities, taking the lead, and carrying out initiatives. According to Mitra (2021), the extent to which people

participate is determined by several factors, including the type of activity, how long it takes to carry out, how technical is it, to whom to serve (whether it is for a targeted group or the entire community), where it is located, how much money is at stake, and what are the requirements of the development agencies.

## **2.2 Theoretical Background**

### **2.2.1 Actor-Network Theory (ANT)**

Actor Network Theory (ANT) explains the relationships between actors (both human and non-human) in various networks. In the context of rural development project implementation, ANT helps to analyze the dynamics and interactions between different actors involved in the process, such as government agencies, NGOs, local communities, and resources. When it comes to lower community participation in rural development projects, ANT can shed light on the reasons behind this phenomenon and helps to identify the key actors that influence community involvement, such as power dynamics, resource distribution, communication channels, and conflicting interests (Latour, 2005). Further, the theory helps Stakeholders to gain a deeper understanding of the complex network of relationships and develop strategies to enhance community participation. This may involve addressing power imbalances, improving communication channels, building trust between actors, and involving local communities in decision-making processes (Latour, 2005). Overall, the relevance of Actor-Network Theory in understanding lower community participation in rural development project implementation lies in its ability to provide a comprehensive perspective on the interactions and relationships that shape the success or failure of such initiatives.

### **2.2.2 Stakeholder Theory**

Stakeholder Theory is a management theory that focuses on the relationships between an organization and its stakeholders, including individuals or groups who have an interest in or are affected by the organization's actions. In the context of rural development project implementation, it can be highly relevant in understanding and addressing lower community participation (Bonnafous-Bouc & Rendtoff, 2016). Stakeholder Theory also highlights the need for effective communication, collaboration, and relationship-building with stakeholders to foster trust, transparency, and mutual understanding. By involving local communities in decision-making processes, listening to their feedback, and incorporating their perspectives into project planning and implementation, stakeholders can increase community ownership and participation in rural development initiatives (Bonnafous-Bouc & Rendtoff, 2016).

Stakeholder Theory emphasizes the importance of identifying and engaging with all relevant stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, NGOs, and other organizations involved in the project. By recognizing the interests, concerns, and expectations of these stakeholders, project implementers can better understand the reasons behind low community participation and work toward solutions that address these issues (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

The relevance of Stakeholder Theory in addressing lower community participation in rural development project implementation lies in its emphasis on stakeholder engagement, relationship management, and inclusive decision-making processes. By applying Stakeholder Theory principles, project implementers can create a more participatory and sustainable development approach that benefits all stakeholders involved (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

### **2.3 Empirical Evidence on Community Participation in Rural Development**

The results of a study conducted by Oedl-Wieser, Dax, & Fischer, (2017) in Georgia using participative methods for rural development, despite high hopes, found that community engagement is challenging to achieve in development projects. Similarly, a previous study conducted by Narayan & Lutz (1998) in India, revealed that determining the best way to incorporate the villagers, particularly the impoverished ones, in the whole development process, may be one of the challenges it faces. Poor people are less likely to take part in community activities, as noted by Cohen and Uphoff's (1980). Narayan & Lutz (1998) also argue that as a rule, those at the bottom of society's economic food chain lack the education and resources necessary to participate actively in their communities' political systems. Cohen and Uphoff's (1980) idea of participation may prove to be the most useful framework for rural development. Using a project cycle as a framework, Cohen and Uphoff (1980) describe participation as active involvement in all phases of rural development initiatives, from planning to implementation for reaping the benefits to assess the program's success. According to Nordberg et al. (2020) at every point in rural development, there are a wide variety of local traditions, customs, and projects that have their advantages and disadvantages when it comes to foster citizen participation in the process. It is believed that certain traditions, such as formality, discourage active participation. The accountability system is found to emphasize formal techniques, such as reporting to the district administration and village council, which harms the quality of participation.

### 3. Methodology

This qualitative research study is designed by a case study method in Kandaketiya DSD. Primary data were collected from six focus group discussions with the community members and field officers in Bokanoruwa, Kilwagedara, and Havandana Grama Niladari Divisions in the Kandaketiya DSD. The sample was selected using the convenient sampling technique (See Table 02). Each selected sample of the respective GN division consisted of 5 members of field officers and 5 members of community participants. Accordingly, a sample of Community members in each division was selected by considering participation in rural development projects during 2018-2022 in those selected areas. Two members actively participated in project implantation and 3 of them did not participate in community projects concerning each GND. The sample of officers in each GND consists of Grama Niladari(GN), an Economic Development Officer (EDO), an Agriculture Research Production Assistant (ARPA), and Midwives (MW) who are directly involved in community-based development projects in each GN division.

***Table 02: Sample Selection for Focus Group Discussion***

<b>Strata</b>	<b>Bokanoruwa GND</b>	<b>Kiwlegedara GND</b>	<b>Havandana GND</b>
<b>Field Officers</b>	5	5	5
<b>Community Members</b>	5	5	5
<b>Total</b>	10	10	10

*Data Source: Field Data (2024)*

Thematic analysis was carried out to offer a structured yet flexible approach that helps researchers make sense of qualitative data by identifying meaningful patterns and themes. Its versatility and focus on rich descriptions made it a valuable tool for uncovering insights in a wide range of research contexts in this study. To ensure the quality of the data, several measures were taken. First, the Focus Group Discussions (FGD) guide was pre-tested to ensure that the questions were clear and relevant to the study. Second, the moderator ensured that all participants had an equal opportunity to express their opinions and that the discussions remained focused on research questions.

## 4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The findings from this study are significant because they provide insights into the challenges of implementing rural development projects in the Kandaketiya DSD, particularly about community participation. The results can inform policy and practice to improve community engagement and participation in rural development projects, which could ultimately lead to more effective and sustainable development outcomes.

### 4.1 Demographic Data

Table 03 shows demographic characteristics of the participants who attended the focus group discussion of the community in Havandana, Bokanoruwa, and Kiwlegeara Grama Niladari divisions. The sample of community FGD consisted of both females and males. When considering occupations of the sample farming activities, laborers, government pensioners, private job holders as well as people who have no jobs are included. Education level was categorized as no education, primary education, grade 5 to 11, and above O/L. The sample of the community also consists of nonparticipants of community projects and participants for projects that are implemented in the 2018-2022 period.

***Table 03: Data Gathered from FGD of Community Members***

FGD	Participant No	Gender	Age	Occupation	Educational level	Participation in community projects 2018-2022
<b>FGD 1- Community of Havandana GN division</b>	Participant 1	Male	26	Farming	Up to O/L	Yes
	Participant 2	Female	42	No job	Pass grade 8	No
	Participant 3	Male	58	Farming	Primary education	Yes
	Participant 4	Male	62	Labor	Up to grade 1	No
	Participant 5	Female	42	Labor	Primary	No
<b>FGD 2 - Community of Kiwle Gedara GN division</b>	Participant 6	Male	43	Farming	Up to O/L	No
	Participant 7	Male	54	Farming	Pass grade 8	No
	Participant 8	Female	35	No job	Primary education	Yes



<b>FGD 3 - Community of Bokanoruwa GN division</b>	Participant 9	Female	66	Government pensioner	Pass the A/L	Yes
	Participant 10	Female	32	Private job at Garment	Pass grade 10	NO
	Participant 11	Male	60	Farming	No education	Yes
	Participant 12	Male	40	Farming	Pass grade 10	Yes
	Participant 13	Male	30	Daily wage labour	Pass grade 9	No
	Participant 14	Female	37	Housewife	Up to grade 1	No
	Participant 15	Female	51	Labor	Primary education	No

*Source: Field Data (2024)*

Table 04 indicates a focus group discussion of field officers in Havandana, Bokanoruwa, and Kiwlegeara Grama Niladari divisions. The sample consists of both females and males. When considering working experience, it consists of below 5 years to above 15 years range.

***Table 04: Data Gathered from FGD of Field Officers***

<b>FGD</b>	<b>Field Officer (FO)</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Working Experience in years</b>
<b>FGD 1- field officers of Havandana GN division</b>	FO 1	Female	29	5
	FO 2	Female	37	2
	FO 3	Male	45	18
	FO 4	Male	37	11
	FO 5	Female	41	19
<b>FGD 2 - field officers of Kiwle Gedara GN division</b>	FO 6	Male	37	35
	FO 7	Male	36	12
	FO 8	Female	44	21
	FO 9	Male	51	25
	FO 10	Female	39	23

<b>FGD 3- field officers of Bokanoruwa GN division</b>	FO 11	Female	58	35
	FO 12	Male	40	12
	FO 13	Female	48	21
	FO 14	Female	51	25
	FO 15	Female	47	23

*Source: Field Data (2024)*

## **4.2 Reasons for Lower Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation**

Data was gathered from field Officers and selected community participants under the first research objective. The following themes emerged from the data:

### **4.2.1 Ignorance Among the Rural Community in Rural Development**

The theme highlights that individual with limited educational background and little exposure, particularly those who have not advanced beyond the General Certificate of Education - Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) encounter barriers to their engagement in community development initiatives. The lack of knowledge about economic matters and unawareness about developmental dynamics acts as a deterrent, inhibiting their inclination to participate actively in projects aimed at enhancing their community:

#### **4.2.1.1 Lack of Education in The Rural Community**

Many villagers have not pursued education beyond the General Certificate of Education - Ordinary Level (GCE O/L). This educational gap has resulted in a lack of familiarity with economic concepts, developmental aspects, and related matters concerning Kandakatiya:

*"Most of the people in these areas have no proper education. They have primary education. They have no exposure to development societies. They don't have a sense of development. Such concepts like Development and sustainability are far from their knowledge and mindsets. They normally pay attention to their day-to-day activities and earnings only" (FO3).*

#### **4.2.1.2 Lack of Awareness Among the Rural Community**

According to the officers and community members, it was revealed that unawareness and infrequent exposure to such development projects has led to poor participation among the community members in rural development project implementation.

#### **4.2.2 Negative Perception of Rural Development**

A significant number of individuals hold the belief that these regions are inherently incapable of development, and it is the responsibility of government-authorized officers. Consequently, they harbor a perspective that investing their time and efforts in enhancing these areas would yield minimal returns:

*"We hold reservations about the potential success of development initiatives but due to existing obstacles we cannot achieve those goals, we have doubts about the efficacy of developmental efforts. We lack motivation to follow these development projects due to their unsuccessful behavior" (FO 2).*

##### **4.2.2.1 Skepticism Towards Rural Development Projects**

The prevailing sentiment embedded in these direct statements suggests a shared belief that investing resources, such as time and effort, might not yield substantial improvements. This skepticism, shaped by perceived limitations and past experiences, contributes to a prevailing reluctance among community members to actively engage in developmental activities.

##### **4.2.2.2 Belief That Developmental Projects Are Responsibility of Authorized Officers**

Certain community members perceived that development efforts should solely be the domain of authorized officers, absolving the community from active involvement. This perception is rooted in the conviction that officers are remunerated for this task and, therefore, community members need not actively participate. This emphasizes the conviction that development initiatives fall under the purview of authorized officers:

*"Authorized officers, are entrusted with the responsibility of development activities. They are paid for it. As a community, we cannot contribute to those activities due to our day-to-day activities. Project implementation is the duty of the officers" (Participant 9).*

This perspective reflects a shared belief among participants, indicating an inclination to delegate development responsibilities to the appropriate officials. The direct statements from the people involved emphasize a consensus on the role of authorized officers, particularly officers, in leading and overseeing development activities.

#### **4.2.3 Administrative Issues of the Government Authorities**

A significant proportion of projects encounter hurdles, resulting in deviations from the initially outlined schedules. This disruption in project progression generates several problems that are coming from government authorities such as management and administrative issues.

Participants highlight challenges stemming from regulatory frameworks and managerial inefficiencies that hinder effective project execution. The direct statements from people affected highlight the tangible impact of project approval delays on the community's welfare and the broader development context:

*"We face challenges arising from the government, they do not provide an exact timeline for when to start or finish, and some projects stop suddenly without any information due to money problems of any other. But those mistakes mislead our day-to-day earnings"* (Participant 11).

The postponement of approval processes ripples into project implementation, disrupting subsequent phases. This cascading impact not only compounds community frustration but also underscores the urgency of streamlining project timelines. The direct statements from people affected highlight the interconnected nature of project phases and emphasize the critical need to address delays for a more effective and seamless implementation process:

*"We face intricacies in obtaining approvals and permissions, often causing delays in the commencement of projects. Then we're witnessing diminishing levels of trust within the community because projects are not adhering to stipulated timelines"* (FO1).

#### **4.2.4 Time Constraints and Limited Participation in Rural Development Projects**

Embedded within this theme underscores occupational engagements and personal commitments as primary reasons for not having adequate time to be involved in rural development projects.

#### **4.2.4.1 Occupational Engagements**

This leaves minimal room for individuals to allocate sufficient time toward community development endeavors. The direct statements from people, as conveyed by FO8, emphasize the considerable impact of occupational demands on individuals' inability to actively engage in community development activities:

*"The demands of various occupations, particularly those involving demanding physical activities like farming, consume a substantial portion of their time"* (FO8).

*"The demands of our daily work, such as engaging in agricultural activities, significantly limit the time available for our participation"* (Participant 13).

#### **4.2.4.2 Personal Commitments**

The delicate balance between personal obligations and community involvement emerges as a formidable challenge. The direct statements from people, and field officers, bring attention to the significant impact of domestic and family responsibilities on individuals' capacity to engage actively in community development projects:

*"Villagers are occupied with domestic chores and family responsibilities, which limits their ability to allocate time for community development projects"* (FO5).

#### **4.2.5 Geographical Barriers and Challenges to Participation**

The topographical features of mountains, off-road areas, rivers, and forested regions contribute to these hindrances:

*"The geographic characteristics of certain areas create substantial challenges for us who wish to participate. The difficulty of navigating through mountainous terrain and off-road areas, compounded by the lack of proper pathways, compounds the challenges that community members face"* (FO1).

Embedded within this theme is a sub-theme that brings attention to the inaccessibility of certain locations:

*"Specific villages, such as Kivlegedara, are isolated due to our geographic characteristics." The presence of mountains, rivers, and challenging terrains makes it difficult to participate"* (FO7).

It is a barrier for community members to reach these areas, thereby inhibiting their participation in development projects. The direct statements from people, as reported by FO 7, highlight the tangible challenges posed by geographical characteristics, impacting the feasibility of community members engaging in development projects in these specific locations.

#### **4.2.6 Limited Infrastructure Availability**

The central theme around the challenges arising from the inadequate availability of infrastructure leads to impacting community members' ability to participate in various activities, including community development projects:

*"We face challenges posed by a lack of reliable public transportation options. The absence of suitable public transportation options contributes to challenges in traveling significant distances, particularly in rural settings"* (Participant 3).

*"We face the absence of a phone signal, which affects our communication and access to information. We cannot get information at the earliest. So, we missed some kind of community activities"* (Participant 7).

The sub-theme highlights that these infrastructure deficiencies compound the difficulties community members face in participating actively in development initiatives. The direct statements from people emphasize how inadequacies in transportation options and the lack of communication systems contribute to the cumulative impact of poor infrastructure, exacerbating difficulties in their active participation in development initiatives.

### **4.3 Issues Encountered in Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation**

Problems confronted while engaging in community projects are presented based on the data gathered from field officers and rural community members.

#### **4.3.1 Inter - Generational Conflicts and Poor Teamwork**

Mismatched ideas among the different community members in the rural area and the lack of team spirit in engaging in rural development project implementation have been identified as one such problem.

#### **4.3.1.1 Prevailing Conflicts in The Community**

The central theme centers on conflicts arising from differing ideas, perspectives, and skills among community members of varying age groups, impeding active participation in rural development projects:

*"We face the emergence of conflicts due to differing perspectives between older and younger community members. The conflicts often discourage us younger members from participating actively" (FO14).*

#### **4.3.1.2 Poor Collaboration Among Community Members**

The major problem that prevents community involvement in active rural development initiatives is the difficulties brought on by poor collaboration. The core subject emphasizes the difficulties that arise as a result of poor collaboration, which impedes successful community engagement in rural development programs:

*"We face difficulties in planning events and promoting harmony among neighbors. Some work hard and some do not contribute much. Officers also do not force them to engage in work. Some only participate if they are getting some benefits. And others try to attack the community and officers. So, all are not working as a team" (Participant 8).*

The phrase highlights how community members may find it difficult to work together to accomplish project objectives without great collaboration, perhaps leading to dispersed efforts. Participant 08 emphasizes the challenges arising from a lack of harmony within the group, indicating that this difficulty in collaboration may hinder the collective efforts of community members to achieve project objectives.

#### **4.3.2 Insufficient Monitoring by Field Officers**

The core subject emphasizes difficulties caused by a lack of effective monitoring by field officers, which contributes to discouraging community members from participating in developmental project implementation:

*"We face difficulty caused by insufficient supervision by field officers. People who know everything about projects. Due to lack of supervision, some community members are trying to do what they want in the field. It can lead to project failure" (Participant 6).*

*"We believe adequate supervision by field officers is critical for resolving disagreements and developing teamwork" (Participant 14).*

The phrase highlights that the lack of adequate monitoring may impede the timely resolution of community problems. Participant 14 emphasize the importance of sufficient supervision by field officers, indicating that it is crucial for resolving disagreements and fostering teamwork within the community. The sub-theme underscores that the absence of such supervision may impede the timely resolution of community problems.

#### **4.3.3 Lack of Financial Transparency**

The central focus covers issues related to financial transparency, which impedes community engagement in rural development programs:

*"We face difficulties in acquiring precise financial information from officials. Without knowing where money goes, we can't contribute our participation in development matters. Officers argue or ignore us when we ask about financial matters in the field. Officers do not share the financial information with the community" (Participant 12).*

Participant 12's perspective draws attention to the challenges community members face in obtaining accurate financial information from officials, indicating that a lack of clarity in financial communication may hinder effective interaction within the community. The sub-theme underscores the importance of transparent financial communication for facilitating effective engagement among community members.

#### **4.3.4 Poor Officer-Community Relationship**

The central subject covers the issues that arise as a result of insufficient communication between officers and community participants, and feelings of disconnection among the community members which impede community participation in rural development initiatives.

##### **4.3.4.1 Lack of Communication**

Participants emphasized that challenges stemming from a lack of communication between law enforcement and the community, indicating that a lack of meaningful engagement may lead to difficulties in successful interaction between the two:



*"We believe that the problems are caused by a lack of communication between officers and community people. Officers do not provide information about ongoing projects, and they do not pass messages in time. They act rudely in community projects. So, people are not happy to engage with work"* (Participant 4).

#### **4.3.4.2 Feeling of Disconnection**

The community participants expressed their feelings of disconnection with the officers who made them stay away from participating in rural development project implementation. It made it very difficult for them to engage successfully with the project if they did not have a solid connection.

### **4.4 Suggestions to Increase Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation**

This section provides ways to improve community participation in Rural Development Project Implementation.

#### **4.4.1 Introduction of a Daily Wage System**

The key subject emphasizes the importance of instituting a daily pay system to attract community engagement in rural development initiatives. This subject expresses the concept that people are eager to participate in these projects but need a way to reconcile their engagement with their everyday lives:

*"We emphasize the community members' desire to engage in events. However, the difficulty is sacrificing daily revenue owing to project involvement. So, it is feasible to pay a daily wage to people who contribute to the community projects"* (FO 1).

*"Compensating members of the community for their involvement in development activities is a must. We believe that providing daily pay might increase individuals' commitment to community development efforts"* (Participant 3).

It highlights that introducing a daily wage system could alleviate financial burdens, making project involvement more feasible for community members. The direct statements from field officers underscore the willingness of individuals to participate in community initiatives despite facing financial constraints. It suggests that implementing a daily wage system could be a potential solution to alleviate financial burdens, making project involvement more feasible for community members and encouraging their active participation.

#### **4.4.2 Strengthening Telecommunication Infrastructure**

The key subject emphasizes the importance of improving communication infrastructure, particularly mobile signal coverage, to build efficient communication channels for message transmission. This subject emphasizes the need to break down communication obstacles to improve participation in rural development programs:

*"This issue is caused by insufficient cell signal coverage. It is critical to address poor signal strength as a communication obstacle that needs to be improved, and we require updated information "* (Participant 3).

The theme highlights the need to remove communication barriers to provide effective communication for project-related concerns. Participant 3's perspective draws attention to the challenges arising from insufficient cell signal coverage, indicating that these issues impact effective communication for project-related concerns. The theme underscores the importance of addressing communication barriers to enhance effective communication and facilitate the discussion of project-related matters within the community.

#### **4.4.3 Need Analysis for Project Implementation**

The key topic emphasizes the need to complete rigorous need analysis testing before executing initiatives. This topic emphasizes the need to tailor programs to the unique requirements of the community and prioritize their well-being:

*"It is critical to evaluate project relevance and ensure that efforts meet actual community needs. It facilitates the development of useful projects for the community who motivates to finish the projects with their collaboration if a particular project caters their needs"* (FO 1).

*"A need analysis enhances project results and can pinpoint critical areas that need to be intervened in, leading to more effective and results-driven initiatives"* (FO 11).

This perspective underscores the significance of requirement analysis to improve project outcomes. The sub-theme highlights how to conduct a need analysis that can identify critical areas for intervention, ultimately leading to more effective and results-driven initiatives within the community. The importance of a people-centered approach in project planning is emphasized by another sub-theme which emphasizes that creating initiatives that genuinely benefit the community begins with a comprehensive need analysis.

#### **4.4.4 People - Centric Project Design**

It is important to promote projects that are in line with the wants and requirements of the neighborhood. The research emphasizes the necessity of project design that gives local expertise, culture, and goals priority:

*"The attention to the range of initiatives that may be in line with community needs, including water projects, attempts to build schools, early childhood development centers, and road upgrades" (FO 4).*

The above discussion highlights the community-relevant projects. The sub-theme highlights the crucial nature of giving priority to projects that are relevant and responsive to the specific needs of the community.

#### **4.4.5 Transparency in Financial Matters and Build Trust Among Community Members**

It emphasizes the importance of transparent and open communication regarding the financial aspects of development initiatives to promote trust among community members:

*"Transparency in financial transactions is necessary to lay the groundwork for trust and confidence. Without knowing where the money goes, we cannot contribute our participation in development matters. Correct information about funds of projects will motivate the community and it builds the trust between officers and the community" (Participants 3).*

The emphasis of the sub-theme is on the value of transparency in promoting responsibility and trust. It underscores the necessity of transparent communication regarding financial concerns to foster confidence. The sub-theme highlights the importance of open financial communication as a means to build trust and confidence among community members. Financial transparency builds trust and will result the improved officer–community relationship.

#### **4.4.6 Conducting Community Awareness, Capacity Building and Leadership Development Training for Field Officers**

The overarching topic emphasizes the significance of conducting awareness and leadership programs to educate both villagers and the officers about rural development. This subject emphasizes the need to improve their awareness and competence in many parts of rural development programs:

*"Leadership programs can empower community people and enable them to contribute successfully to rural development initiatives" (FO 6).*

*"There is a need to build capacity of officers via awareness and education initiatives. It needs to motivation, knowledge, attitudes, and skills of officers that support the implementation of rural development projects" (FO 11).*

Further investigation reveals the necessity of improving knowledge and abilities and that emphasizes the possibility of greater awareness to provide officials with the skills and information required for effective rural development efforts. It also, highlights the necessity of building capacity through awareness and education initiatives, suggesting that these efforts can equip officials with the skills and information needed for successful rural development endeavors. It is also important to initiate knowledge enhancement programs promoting effective community engagement.

## **5. Findings and Discussion**

### **5.1 Reasons for Lower Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation**

The findings of the study suggest that there are several reasons why community participation in rural development projects is low in the Kandakatiya DSD. One of the major reasons is the lack of formal education among villagers, as most of them have not received further education after GCE (Ordinary Level) or primary education. The findings of this study are consistent with previous research conducted on community participation in rural development projects. A lack of knowledge and awareness among the community members was a significant barrier to community participation in development projects in rural Bangladesh. (Akter et al.,2019; Atapattu & Wijesinghe, 2018).

Traditional mindsets can be resistant to change or being distrustful of external interventions, making it challenging to mobilize community members for active participation. The community may lack a sense of ownership and responsibility towards these projects, as they perceive that officers are solely responsible and being paid for the development activities (Kamau, Kariuki & Gichohi, 2019). Negative attitudes towards community members, attitude problems, and negative thoughts about their capabilities can result in reduced community participation (Sharif, 2015).

Administration and management issues of government institutes are also considered significant factors for lower community participation in rural development projects by both the community and officers. Lack of trust in government officers and government projects, coupled with poor time management by the government, may further impact community participation (Paul, 1987). This inconsistency causes frustration among community members and diminishes their trust in government officials and development projects. Community members' day-to-day work and livelihood activities may leave them with limited time to actively participate in the projects (Cohen & Uphoff 1980).

Moreover, officers may encounter difficulties in communication and engagement with communities in remote and geographically isolated areas (Sharif, 2015). Atapattu & Wijesinghe (2018) identified geographical barriers and conflicts among community members as factors that hindered community participation in development projects in Sri Lanka.

Shafique (2022) and Elahi et al. (2016) found that communication is a critical factor that influences community participation in rural development projects. Poor communication infrastructure, including weak signal strengths in rural areas, can hinder officers' communication with the community (McBride, 2007). Therefore, it is important to improve communication channels to enhance community participation in rural development projects.

## **5.2 Issues Encountered in Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation**

The findings revealed several factors that contribute to the issues in community participation. When teamwork is poor, there may be a limited ability to address complex challenges and find innovative solutions, which can discourage participation and engagement in project activities. It can have a demotivating effect on community members, leading to decreased enthusiasm for participating in development projects. Poor teamwork can result in fragmented communication, leading to misunderstandings, misalignment of objectives, and a lack of clarity about project activities. This can deter community members from actively participating in rural development projects.

Another significant factor contributing to the issues in community participation is the lack of a strong relationship between officers and participants. This finding is consistent with the study conducted by Khan and Qureshi (2016) which states that the relationship between officers and participants is a significant factor that influences community participation in rural development projects. Therefore, it is important to strengthen relationships between officers and participants to enhance community participation in rural development projects.

Effective monitoring by field officers positively influences community participation in rural development projects (Sulemana & Amakye, 2019). Community members may feel that officers are not effectively monitoring project activities or maintaining a positive relationship with them, which can lead to reduced motivation and engagement (Golay, 2022).

Furthermore, a lack of transparency in financial matters, such as unclear financial reporting or mismanagement of funds, can erode community trust and negatively impact their willingness to participate (Bertolini et al., 2008).

### **5.3 Suggestions to Increase Community Participation in Rural Development Project Implementation**

Both the community and officers also emphasize the importance of the introduction of a daily wage system as a potential solution to promote community participation in rural development projects. Kritzinger-Van Niekerk & Govender (2015) also confirmed that a daily wage system can help to encourage community members to participate in project activities and promote ownership of the project.

Enhancing communication facilities was another strategy identified in the findings. According to Kim and Lee (2014), effective communication is essential for building trust between community members and project officials, which is crucial for successful project implementation.

One potential strategy identified was conducting need analysis tests before implementing projects which was also suggested by field officers. This can help to identify community needs, priorities, and preferences, which can inform the design and implementation of projects (Uwizeyimana & Kim, 2020). This suggests a shared understanding that community-centered project design can enhance community engagement and ownership.

According to Khan & Qureshi (2016), transparency is essential for building trust and accountability between community members and project officials. Involving community members in the decision-making process and being receptive to their feedback and concerns can also help rebuild trust.

Finally, developing interpersonal skills of officers who directly work with people was suggested in the findings. According to Sharif (2015), interpersonal skills, such as communication, active listening, and empathy, are crucial for effective community engagement and project implementation.

However, findings emphasize that top management of government or any entity engaging in the planning of rural development projects should thoroughly focus on the timely implementation of projects, and proper funding to build trust among the community. Introducing community-friendly projects using need analysis and valuing community ideas also has a massive impact on increasing community participation in rural development projects.

Theories of the rural development project implementation also explain the objectives which are made before. Actor Network Theory (ANT) focuses on the relationships and interactions between various actors, both human and non-human, within a network. In the context of lower community participation in rural development projects, ANT can help identify the key actors involved, such as government agencies, NGOs, local communities, and resources, and analyze how their interactions influence community involvement (Latour, 2005).

Stakeholder Theory also emphasizes the importance of engaging and managing stakeholders effectively in project implementation. It recognizes that stakeholders, including local communities, have a vested interest in the outcomes of development projects and should be actively involved in decision-making processes (Donaldson & Preston, 1995).

By combining Actor-Network Theory and Stakeholder Theory, stakeholders can gain a comprehensive understanding of the complex network of relationships that impact community participation in rural development projects. This integrated approach can help identify barriers to participation, such as power dynamics, conflicting interests, and communication challenges, and develop strategies to address them.

Overall, the relevance of Actor-Network Theory and Stakeholder Theory for lower community participation in rural development project implementation lies in their ability to provide a holistic perspective on the relationships, interactions, and interests at play, and to inform more effective and inclusive approaches to community engagement.

## **6. Conclusion and Policy Implications**

This study revealed the reasons for lower community participation in rural development project implementation at the Kandaketiya DSD, issues encountered in community participation in rural development projects, and suggested policy measures for increasing community participation in rural development project implementation. The findings highlight the implications for national-level project planners, field officers, and community members as how to obtain effective participation from the community for rural development project implementation at the divisional level.

Policy initiatives should be focused on making awareness and capacity-building among rural communities to effectively engage in development projects. This may involve providing adequate information, technical assistance, and resources that can empower community members to take on active roles in project implementation.

Policy interventions should aim to facilitate collaboration and networking among community-based organizations, local governments, and other stakeholders involved in rural development to address the challenges of lower community participation and encourage collective action in development projects.

Fostering inclusive and participatory processes will help overcome barriers to teamwork and encourage greater participation from all community members. Policies should incorporate robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of community participation on rural development projects. Since the ultimate beneficiaries of rural development projects are the community, their participation in such project implementation is crucial.

## **7. Limitations and Further Research**

This research is based on qualitative research method using a smaller sample with reference to a selected divisional area.



Further research could be conducted using a larger sample covering other areas of the country. Research could be conducted using quantitative research methods to validate the research findings of this study.

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