

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT DURING PROJECT INITIATION: A SUSTAINABILITY FACTOR OF SMALLHOLDER DONOR-FUNDED IRRIGATION PROJECTS IN ZVIMBA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine whether the involvement of stakeholders during initiation of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district, Zimbabwe, was a critical sustainability factor. Donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects investments enhance water security for agricultural production and improve peasant farmers' livelihoods in the face of climate change induced risks. While these donor-funded smallholder irrigation investments have historically empowered local communities, ensured food security and contributed to economic growth, we have an incomplete understanding of why they collapse after the withdrawal of the donors. This paper addresses this gap by adopting the pragmatism philosophy which prompted the use of whatever works to explore how involvement of stakeholders during initiation of irrigation investments influences its sustainability. To do so, stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select a population of 360 people who included donor-funded irrigation project beneficiaries, community, local leaders and Agritex officers for a Zvimba district case study. The results advance that collapses of investments are consequences of non-involvement of beneficiaries in initiation of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects. The findings highlight that in the context of irrigation projects in Zvimba district, donors, government officials and political actors were the only participants during needs assessment, stakeholder identification and project designing phases. Project beneficiaries from the communities and suppliers of irrigation equipments and inputs only came on board during the project construction phases. While findings remain contextual to the Zvimba district study area, the study concludes that non-involvement of beneficiaries, inputs suppliers, buyers, interest groups in the initiation process of the donor-funded irrigation project was a critical sustainability factor. In that context, the study recommended the adoption of a participatory donor-funded smallholder irrigation project initiation model, which calls for the involvement of all stakeholders for the entire irrigation project development life cycle.

Key Words: Stakeholder involvement, donor-funded irrigation project, project initiation.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The successful development of donor-funded irrigation project to enhance food security and improve farmers' livelihoods in the face of recurrent climatic change induced droughts was the desire of every stakeholder in an agriculture-dependent society such as those in Zvimba District, Zimbabwe. How could this be achieved? Scoones et al. (2019:88) asked "through what

technologies, financing, institutions and governance regimes?” could lead to successful development of donor-funded irrigation projects. While most researches on donor-funded irrigation projects focused on the fore-mentioned factors as key ingredients to sustainability of irrigation projects, this paper builds upon prior work analysing governance regimes under the auspices of stakeholder involvements. In particular, it centres on stakeholder involvement during the initiation process as a sustainability factor of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district.

Agricultural production is at the highest risk from water stress as climatic change induced-drought is decreasing the reliability of available water supplies worldwide (Postel et al., 1996; Bakker, 2012; FAO, 2017; Garrick et al., 2020). The situation is particularly dire in low income countries with high dependence on rain-fed agriculture (Sadoff et al., 2015). Nhundu and Mushunje (2010) reported that the Zimbabwe government viewed the development of irrigation as the only gateway to augmented agricultural, water and land productivity, improved household and national food security. Irrigation is the way to go, however, Makombe et al. (1998) had observed that with such an important role plays in agriculture, small holder irrigated schemes assisted by ARDA and communal small holder irrigated systems accounted for only 2.9% and 6.1% respectively of the total area of land under irrigation. Moyo et al (2017) echoed that households at Mkoba and Silalatshani utilized only 9% and 23% respectively of the total land area allocated to them. Zawe et al. (2015) concurred that irrigation schemes and covered only 14.7 percent of the total potential irrigable area of 1.5 million hectares.

In the face of the climate change induced complexities and challenges in relation to the concept of water security globally, Mutambara et al. (2017) lamented that most smallholder irrigation schemes in Africa had not succeeded in achieving the objectives of their establishment. For example, the beneficiaries of Mambanjeni, Ngezi Mamina, Rozva and Principe felt that the schemes belonged to the government, (FAO, 2000). This confirmed that the bulk of the irrigation projects were more of fly-by-night projects which contributed almost nothing to the host countries' GDPs and the livelihoods of the farmers, (Mutambara et al., 2017). However, Mutambara et al. (2017) stated that the reasons for the unsustainability of these smallholder irrigation projects were then not yet known.

In Rhodesia, prior to 1927, the earliest recorded irrigation initiatives were undertaken by the indigenous people in Manicaland province using their own effort and resources, (Matsika and Chinamasa, 2020). The government was not involved in their development and management but missionaries only came in to learn how indigenous people undertook their irrigation projects (Matsika and Chinamasa, 2020). Thus, both government and missionaries left the initiation of the small holder irrigation projects to local indigenous people.

In the context of government involvement in irrigation projects, Rukuni (1986) noted that it came on board in 1927, placing its interest on sharing expertise of the management of existing irrigation projects. As such, it was not involved in the initiation of the smallholder irrigation projects. This culminated in the indigenous people continuing to initiate their own irrigation projects so as to get technical assistance from the government, (Rukuni, 1986). The indigenous people identified their

own problems, provided their own solutions and pulled together their own resources to construct the irrigation projects, (Matsika and Chinamasa, 2020). Thus, the people worked hard to ensure sustainability of their irrigation projects.

In 1950, the government began initiating the construction of smallholder irrigation projects (Rukuni, 1986). According to Mosello et al. (2017) these smallholder irrigation projects were constructed without any input from the intended indigenous beneficiaries. Several irrigation projects were developed in Natural Regions IV and V. As a result, the indigenous farmers were forcibly resettled in Natural Regions IV and V, well known for erratic, unreliable rainfall patterns, (Mosello et al., 2017, Matsika, 2020). The resettlement triggered conflicts between government and the indigenous black farmers, (Matsika and Chinamasa, 2020). As such, the productivity of the irrigation projects declined.

In the independent Zimbabwe, the government adopted irrigation development as an important economic and political tool, (Mosello, et al. 2017). The involvement of stakeholders in irrigation projects development was more of a mixed bag. According to FAO (2000) irrigation projects initiated at the request of the beneficiaries such as Chitora, Longdale, and Murara irrigation projects exhibited a sense of beneficiary ownership whilst there was none at those initiated by the government, for example, Mambanjeni, Oatlands and Ngezi Mamina irrigation projects. It was in this context that this study examined stakeholder involvement during the initiation of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects as a sustainability factor in Zvimba district.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

The reviewed studies on stakeholder involvement have substantiated the lacking capacity to include stakeholder participation in all stages of the project cycle as one of the hindrances to the ongoing of donor funded projects. In particular, available literature by Mutambara et al., (2017) pointed out that most smallholder irrigation projects in Zimbabwe collapsed soon after they are initiated hence were described as more of fly-by- night projects which contributed almost nothing to the host countries' GDPs and the livelihoods of the farmers. Smith (2008) concluded that the lack of stakeholder involvement in some phases of project cycle was related to limitations on financial and material capacity. While Mutambara et al. (2017) stated that the reasons for the unsustainability of these smallholder irrigation projects were then not yet known, Matsika and Chinamasa (2020) concluded that unsustainability of the irrigation projects pointed to non-involvement of stakeholders during the project initiation stage. In Wajir County, Nyamasege, (2015) concluded that the completion of irrigation projects is the major problem as they are not successful and falling out of use at an alarming rate due to lack of effective stakeholder participation in the projects. This discovery cements what Zawe (2006) had discovered and announced that stakeholders had divergent views on the drivers of the Kutama smallholder irrigation project. In particular, Zawe (2006) pointed out that the former head of state Robert G. Mugabe initiated the Kutama project in response to the 1992 drought and the beneficiaries felt it was their share of the land redistribution exercise, for them to raise income and get nutritious food. While the Zimbabwe government has continued to invest in the execution of development projects, the ideal situation for Zvimba District, and as per the government requirement, stakeholders should have been in all these projects in every phase. Stakeholders' participation throughout the project

cycle was in isolated episodes during the project and in some took the form of induced participation as opposed to voluntary participation. This practice could be the reason why the donor-funded irrigation projects suffered lack of sustainability as soon as donors withdrew their support. It is on this premise that the study seeks to establish the influence of stakeholder participation on performance of donor funded irrigation projects in Zvimba District, Zimbabwe.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

- a. What was the beneficiaries' understanding of stakeholder involvement?
- b. Who were the stakeholders of the smallholder donor-funded irrigation projects in Zvimba district?
- c. How were the stakeholders involved during the development of donor-funded irrigation projects in Zvimba district?
- d. Which stakeholder involvement strategies could facilitate the successful development of donor-funded irrigation projects in Zvimba district?

1.4 Significance of the study

The study revealed the relationship between stakeholder involvement and project performance at different phases of the donor-funded smallholder irrigation project life cycle, and it is classified information that is useful to development partners and communities as it will reduce project failure that is related to lack of or insufficient stakeholder participation in projects. It will contribute towards the development of sustainable smallholder irrigation projects in rural communities.

The findings will also be helpful to researchers as it contributes to existing literature in the field of stakeholder contribution in donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects. Furthermore, the findings can be used by government and project beneficiaries in augmenting governance by improving stakeholder engagements and participation in initiation projects and other stages of their projects. The project implementation committee in several government irrigation projects may also benefit from the findings of the study it impresses the need to consider relevant stakeholders in the project involvement phase. They can, therefore, be able to determine efficient measures which can enable the organisation to effectively involve stakeholders. This was a crucial contribution as most research studies paid attention to other factors of irrigation management.

The project management team and stakeholders will also realize the importance and factors influencing stakeholder's involvement for successful donor-funded smallholder irrigation project execution. Factoring stakeholder involvement into the project implementation can aid in ensuring that the project is in line with the community's needs and gains support from the locals to ensure its sustainability.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Lesnick et al. (2013) the major categories of donors in project formation were bilateral institutions, small philanthropists, multilateral institutions, private public partners and the

government. Whoever the donor was, the community where the irrigation project was to be established should be involved in project identification, pre-feasibility studies, feasibility studies, conditional approval, detailed designs, final approval, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, (Savva and Frenken, 2001, Morardet, et al. 2005). The World Bank (1988) cited in Plusquelle (2002: p.21) reiterated that the "planning, design and construction process must produce a system and conditions capable of accommodating effective management practices." In view of that this study sought to examine whether stakeholder involvement was a critical factor for the sustainability of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district.

This study was guided by the stakeholder theory. According to Ramakrishnan (2020) the stakeholder theory acknowledged that business organizations had so many stakeholders and depended upon all of them for their success. The stakeholder theory further noted that the purpose of business organisations was not only just to create economic value for shareholders, but also to serve societal needs and their focus was broadened to include social and the community, (Ramakrishnan, 2020). In view of that, each type of stakeholder for the irrigation projects in Zvimba district had some stake in them, hence they needed to be involved.

2.1 What is stakeholder involvement?

Hughes (1998: p 3) defined stakeholder involvement as a process which encompassed all the "interaction between stakeholders (governmental, non-governmental, business/private sector, service providers, the public etc.) and the decision-making process." In addition to that, Hughes (1998) posited that the term encompassed both consultation and participation. Also, Beutler (2005: p. 35) viewed stakeholder involvement as relating to all processes whose thrust was to "bring together all major stakeholders in a different form of communication, fact finding, and possibly decision-making, on a particular issue." Thus, stakeholder involvement was the bringing together of all critical stakeholders to discuss and find solutions on issues affecting the community.

Commensurate with stakeholder involvement, Compassion (2009) established that 50% of income generation projects fail the first year of initiation because of inadequate stakeholders' involvement among other factors. In the same vein, Golicha (2010) conducted a study in Garissa and equally discovered that stakeholder participation was inadequate in crucial stages of the project formulation, design and execution. In Ghana, Boon et al (2012) highlighted that majority of projects that were abandoned as there was little or stakeholder participation hence, they failed to meet the priorities of the community. In Kenya, studies by Nyagithi (2013) found that 78% of primary stakeholders were not consulted in Mwea rice irrigation scheme are not involved in activity execution. In the same country, Kenya, Nyamasege (2015) concluded that donor funded projects are not successful and fall out of use at an alarming rate due to lack of effective stakeholder participation. Stakeholder participation leads to development of lasting, constructive and responsive relationships that are critical to sustainability and ownership in in projects (UNDP, 2017).

Involvement of the stakeholder is a component of authoritative ability that bargains with stakeholder- related leadership, with regards to programme execution. They found that compelling basic leadership through involvement with stakeholders influences association's project execution.

Senior pioneers in associations can embrace stakeholder involvement as a chance to impact different associations and make arrangement structures and procedures to help the vision and mission of project execution (Katiku, 2011).

According to Hughes (1998) stakeholder involvement entailed two major processes of participation and consultation. Participation was the process by which stakeholders influenced decisions which affected them, whilst consultation related to the degree to which stakeholders were allowed to influence, share or control the decision-making process, (Hughes, 1998). Savva and Frenken (2001:3) articulated that the “purpose of stakeholder participation in project development is to give planners and the parties involved an overview of all persons, groups, organizations and institutions involved in or connected with the project.” According to Savva and Frenken (2001) participation encouraged the identification of relevant interested stakeholders with influence or influenced by the project, their level of influence and involving them in all decision-making processes. Thus, participation assured and made stakeholders feel that they had the power to influence the course of development. Therefore, stakeholder involvement became an important ingredient of any programme intended to improve the quality of life of the community.

The above mentioned, important as it may sound, Chancellor and Hide (1996) cited in Savva and Frenken (2001) bemoaned that there was very scant information published on stakeholder involvement during project initiation as a critical sustainability factor of smallholder donor-funded irrigation projects in developing countries. The involvement of the stakeholder is a component of authoritative ability that bargains with stakeholder-related leadership, with regards to programme execution. Senior pioneers in project teams can embrace stakeholder participation as a chance to impact different associations and make arrangement structures and procedures to help the vision and mission of project execution (Katiku, 2011). This study endeavours to fill in that gap and generate new ideas and insights related to the initiation of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district.

2.2 Identification of Stakeholders

Stakeholders are people, individuals or groups likely to affect or be affected by projects, (Gebre, et. al. 2008). Also, Beutler (2005: p. 36) views stakeholders as “those with a stake in what happens as a result of any decision or action”. Stakeholders are therefore individuals or groups potentially capable of messing up the development of the smallholder irrigation projects. These stakeholders include environmentalists, consumers, communities, farmers, government or investors (Gebre, et. al. 2008). Savva and Frenken (2002: p. 3) concluded that for irrigation projects, stakeholders were normally farmers, persons to be displaced by the project, lending institutions, government, donors, input suppliers, service providers and buyers. Trethowan (1991:89) concluded that stakeholders possessed different expertise on development tasks and involving them added quality to the analysis, decisions and commitment to the tasks. The identification of stakeholders during the project initiation becomes a critical factor for sustainability.

Stakeholder participation gave planners and other interested people involved a synopsis of all persons, groups, organizations and institutions taking part in the project, (Savva and Frenken, 2002). Furthermore, Abdul Quium and Moon (2003: p. 6) reiterated that stakeholder involvement

helped in “learning about people’s needs, attitudes, aspirations, ability to pay, desires, priority, possible contribution and help, how they could be affected by growth or changing land use and activity patterns, etc.” In the same vein, stakeholder analysis needs to be undertaken to ensure that the opinions, welfare and concerns of various farmers and related government institutions affected by the project are correctly captured (Gebre, et al. 2008). According to Beutler (2005) the early involvement of stakeholders would allow them to present their concerns and priorities. The early consideration of the stakeholders’ opinions, welfare and concerns ensured community project buy-in, (FAO, 2000). Darradi, et al. 2005) emphasised the need for active participation of all stakeholders including the local community to achieve sustainable management of the projects. In order to verify this notion, Magret (2016) led a study into impact of stakeholder involvement on the implementation of benefactor subsidized projects and found that stakeholder participation in project inception impacts project execution decidedly.

2.3 Stakeholders’ level of Influence

In relation to stakeholders’ level of influence, Curley, Steve and Ricky (2012) revealed that real and substantial stakeholders should be distinguished and their capacity and impact comprehended to deal with their potential effect on projects. Savva and Frenken (2002) emphasise the need to determine the level of influence of the stakeholders on a project. According to Gebre, et al. (2008: p. 1) stakeholders have contradictory interests and views about the projects. Poolman et al, (no date) concur with Gebre et al (2008) that stakeholders with similar or opposite perceptions, interests and goals react differently towards the projects, (Table 1). As such, stakeholders are considered as either dedicated or non-dedicated whilst the level of influence in each category would be either critical or non-critical, (See Table 1). Thus, eight classes of stakeholder influence emerge, for instance, biting dogs for an irrigation project are people to be displaced such as women and these have stronger influence likely to block the implementation of project. The people to be displaced are concerned about losing their land, compensation issues, the project early launch and the kind of treatment they will receive in the new resettlement areas, (Gebre, et al. 2008). As a result, these people tend to resent the development of irrigation projects when their interests, concerns and priorities were not taken on board. However, project resentment usually occurred despite the benefits associated with the irrigation projects.

Table 1: Classification of Stakeholders'

	Dedicated		Non-dedicated	
	Critical	Non-critical	Critical	Non-critical
Similar perceptions, interests and goals	Actors that will most likely participate and could possibly become partners.	Actors that will most likely participate and could possibly become partners.	Valuable potential partners who are difficult to activate	Actors who do not initially have to be involved
Opposite perceptions, interests and goals	Potential "blockers" of (certain) changes "biting dogs"	Potential criticasters of (certain) changes "barking dogs"	Potential "blockers" who will not immediately spring into action "sleeping dogs"	Actors who initially do not require attention

Source: Poolman, et. al. (no date: p. 5).

2.4 Level of participation and decision-making

According to Abdul Quium and Moon (2003) they were five purposes for stakeholders' participation which were to provide information to stakeholders (project awareness), collect input from stakeholders, negotiate with stakeholders, solve a problem and support people's initiative. Abdul Quium and Moon (2003) emphasised the need to afford all stakeholders opportunities to participate to ensure qualitative improvement in planning and decision making. According to Abdul Quium and Moon (2003) there were five levels of stakeholder involvement (see figure 2).

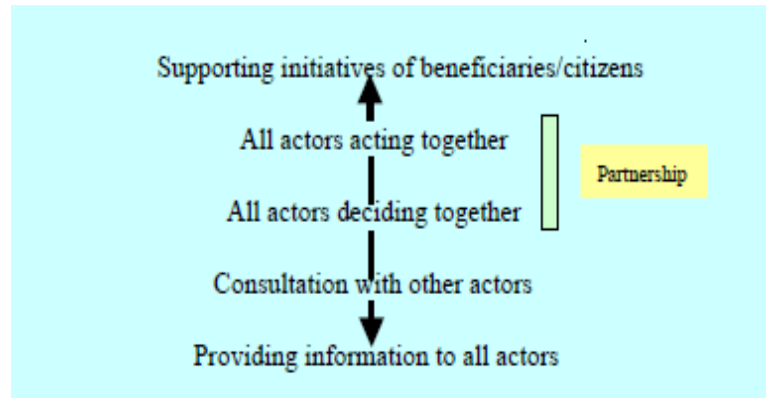


Figure 2: Stakeholders' levels of Participation

Source: Adopted from Abdul Quium and Moon (2003: p. 7).

Being participatory, as shown in Figure 2, stakeholder involvement as concluded by Mulwa (2013) redistributes control for setting on choices and giving this capacity to the general population who

are immediate recipients of the project (Mulwa, 2013). The lowest level was that whereby government/ donors provided information to all stakeholders about planned projects. Thus, the government/ sponsor were the decision-makers and other stakeholders were mere recipients of intended projects. In addition to that, the next higher level was that of consultation. This level enabled the irrigation sponsor to identify the problems, offer possible solutions and wait for stakeholder feedback. Furthermore, the third level entailed the coming together of all stakeholders to decide on the most appropriate way forward. The level witnessed the beginning of a partnership between project initiators and stakeholders. The fourth level was of acting together. This level ensured higher participation of stakeholders in making decisions together and forging a stronger partnership to implement the decisions. Finally, the fifth level involved the community being assisted by the authorities to support their own initiatives. The World Bank (2006:33) emphasised that “in designing an arrangement, the government needs to consider the interests of different stakeholders, including customers, potential customers, workers, private operators and financiers, and taxpayers.” Thus, the level of stakeholder involvement is critical in determining the level of project buy-in. In respect to the above discussion, this study sought to examine stakeholder involvement during initiation as a sustainability factor for Zvimba district donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects.

2.5 Research Gap

The literature review has unraveled some of the latest academic thinking and theories that has emanated from various studies on stakeholder involvement in irrigation projects. Most sources strongly support the importance of stakeholder involvement in project outcomes. However, most researchers most of the researchers tend to analyse the influence not holistically but as peripheral factor to measuring project performance. In addition, only a few of these sources show genuine stakeholder involvement in donor-funded during project initiation bears a correlation to its sustainability and they were silent on possible negative influence lack of stakeholder involvement in the initiation phase may have on project performance. From the reviewed literature on stakeholder involvement in donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects, it is evident that many questions remain unanswered. This study sought to find out how stakeholder involvement in the project initiation stage influences project continuity and identify whether there were any negative effects.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Philosophy

This study which examined stakeholder involvement during initiation as a sustainability factor of donor- funded smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district adopted the pragmatism research philosophy. The philosophy employed both the deductive and inductive approaches. The deductive approach was a top-down approach whilst the inductive approach was a bottom-up approach. By using the mixed research paradigm, the researchers had the freedom to employ appropriate data collection and data analysis procedures from either the quantitative or qualitative approaches. This allowed the researchers to employ strategies which worked within the precepts of research in order to understand a phenomenon. The researchers adopted the descriptive and diagnostic research design. Data was collected through the questionnaire, interview and document analysis methods.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population comprised of 360 people who included beneficiaries, community leadership, Agritex officers as well as various national policy and research report documents. These were regarded as rich sources of information. The sample included 56 participants, national policy and research report documents. Walliman (2011) said a sample consisted of certain groups within the population that were of interest to the researcher. Patton cited in Marshall et al. (2013) stated that there were no rules for sample size in pragmatism-oriented studies as they depend on what the researcher wanted to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what was at stake, useful, credible and what could be done with available time and resources. In addition to that, the researchers continued selecting their cases gradually until the data reached saturation point, (Ishak and Bakar, 2014). Marshall et al. (2013) claimed that data saturation was reached when the research gathered data to the point of diminishing returns, that is, when nothing new was being added.

This study employed the stratified sampling technique. The researchers purposively sampled community leaders, Agritex officers and research project documents. According to Pandey and Pandey (2015) purposive sampling used the best available knowledge concerning the sampled subjects, enabled better control of significant variables and sample group data could easily be matched. The researchers made all the effort to ensure that the sample struck a balance to be a true and accurate reflection of the population.

3.3 Data Collection

The researchers were the main data collection instruments, (Chinamasa, 2014). The researchers designed and structured the questionnaire, interview guide and document analysis guide. Open-ended questions sought definitions of stakeholder involvement, how stakeholders were identified, stakeholders' involvement levels during initiation, participation and decision-making influence levels.

The use of the questionnaire, interview and document analysis methods helped to triangulate the data. The survey collected primary data from a pre-defined group of respondents to gain information and insights on areas of interest to the researchers, (Sekaran, 2003). The researchers used the survey method to answer raised questions, solve observed problems, and to describe what status quo, in what amount, and in what context, (Matsika, 2020). The researchers also used the interview and document analysis methods to augment data collected in this study. The researchers checked completeness and answering of all the key questions. The collected data was grouped around identified themes. We decoded all the responses on the frequency table in sequence. The data was analysed using frequency tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

The reliability and validity of the study results was censured by making use of the irrigators themselves and current government policy documents. The researchers endeavoured not to introduce bias as much as possible and if ever any part reveals any form of bias that was not intentional.

4.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 What is Stakeholder Involvement?

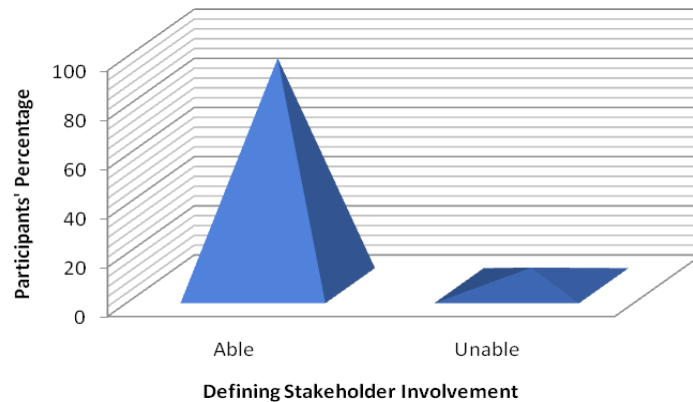
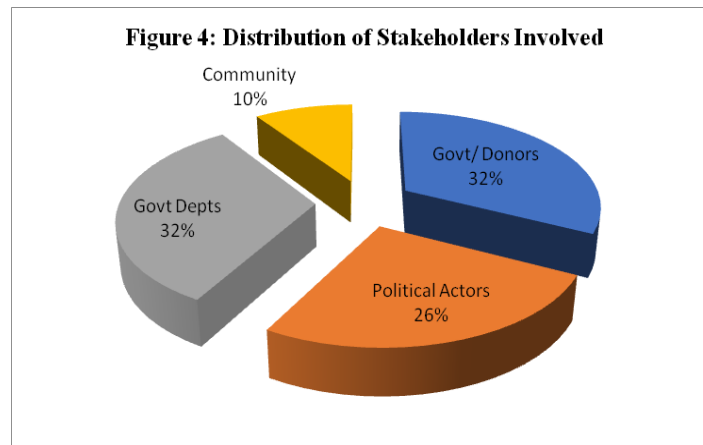


Figure 3: Distribution of understanding of Stakeholder Involvement (N = 54)

Figure 3 shows that 92.6% were able to articulate their understanding of the term ‘stakeholder involvement.’ On the other hand, only 7.4% faced challenges in enunciating the meaning of the term. This was an indication that the majority had a clear conscience of the meaning of the term stakeholder involvement. Thus, the participants were conversant with the implications of their non-involvement during the initiation of the donor-funded smallholder holder irrigation projects as either interested stakeholders with influence or influenced by the project. In view of that, stakeholder involvement was therefore a critical sustainability factor for any donor-funded smallholder irrigation project in Zvimba district.

4.2 Who were the stakeholders involved during the irrigation project’s initiation?



According to figure 4, the majority of the participants claimed that the government/ donors (32%) and government departments (32%) were the major stakeholders involved during the initiation of the donor funded smallholder irrigation projects. In addition to that, there was significant involvement of the political actors (26%). Alternatively, the involvement of the community (10%) was very insignificant. Thus, the government and its related arms dominated the initiation process as they totaled 90%, i.e. (32%+32%+26%).

In addition to that, the government did not take time to learn about people's needs, attitudes, aspirations, ability to pay, desires, priorities, possible contribution and help, how they were to be affected by growth or changing land use and activity patterns, (Abdul Quium and Moon, 2003). This created room for the barking dogs, biting dogs and sleeping dogs to spring into action to block the small holder irrigation projects. In that respect, the sustainability of the irrigation projects hanged in the air as there was no project buy-in.

4.3 Stakeholders' level of influence during initiation phases

Table 2: Distribution of stakeholders involved (N = 54)

	Stakeholders									
	Govt/ donors		Community		Suppliers		Govt dept		Consumers	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Needs Identification	90	10	-	100	-	100	90	10	-	100
Stakeholder Identification	100	-	20	80	-	100	100	0	-	100
Irrigation designing	100	-	10	90	-	100	100	-	-	100
Irrigation Construction	20	80	100	-	100	-	100	-	-	100

Table 2 shows the different stakeholders, who were involved during needs identification, stakeholder identification, irrigation designing and irrigation construction phases. These phases constituted the initiation phase.

The donors (90%) and government departments (90%) were reported to have had much influence during needs identification phases. All the other critical stakeholders including the communities who were to be affected by the projects did not take part, hence they had no influence at all. In view of that, the donor (government) and related government departments undertook the needs identification process alone, thus adoption of the first level of participation whereby other stakeholders are just informed of the donor's intentions, (Abdul Quium and Moon, 2003). Zawe (2006) revealed that the government identified the need for Musarurwa irrigation project. There was a high probability of the same having happened for Mukadzimutsva irrigation project. As a result, there was no synchronisation of the projects' initiation purpose among the donors, the former president Robert G. Mugabe, government departments and the beneficiaries, (Matsika, 2020). In view of that, the smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district lacked influential processes, quality social benefits and stakeholder project buy-in, hence their sustainability became questionable. Matsika and Chinamasa (2020) revealed that the communities mostly resented the projects as evidenced by responses such as "Vamwe vanhu havana kugutsikana nazvo, vamwe vakaramba vachiti hatidi kutorerwa minda yedu yatinorima," (Some people were not convinced whilst others declined saying they did not want their fields to be taken away), and "Vanhu ndokumboramba in fact*, kuti aihwa hatidi irrigation" (People declined in fact, saying we did not want irrigation). (* emphasis on views). As such, stakeholders' level of influence during needs identification was a critical sustainability factor for irrigation projects in Zvimba district.

Also, Table 2 reveals that the donor and government departments had much influence in stakeholders' identification. The participants claimed that the government identified and brought in those stakeholders whom they viewed were necessary at different times. Evident, from that was that the stakeholders brought in had no/ little knowledge of where the irrigation development process was coming from and where it wanted to go in the long run.

Furthermore, Table 2 highlights that the irrigation designing phase saw the government and government departments (100%) having more influence on the activities. Only 10% of the community indicated that they were consulted. This was indicative of that the government and its departments dominated the irrigation designing phase. Such findings were in sync with Zawe (2006) who revealed that the irrigation officials did not embrace the contributions given by the beneficiaries, a case in point was their refusal to incorporate intended users' contributions on the choice of the water source point site. However, Mubita et al. (2017: p. 238) advanced that stakeholder participation allowed "the incorporation of local knowledge, skills and resources in the design of interventions" as well as empowering them with the opportunity to think and develop solutions for themselves. As a result of the government officials' decline to incorporate the knowledge of the locals, Matsika (2020) highlighted that the irrigators later experienced water shortages when Zinwa stopped regular releasing of water from the Darwendale dam upstream.

Finally, all the participants (100%) concurred that the level of stakeholder influence during the construction phase was quite significant from the community, suppliers and government departments. The construction activities went on very well as the major stakeholders were involved, (Zawe, 2006). Thus, stakeholder involvement during the construction phase of the Musarurwa and Mukadzimutsva irrigation projects was a critical sustainability factor as it bred a sense of ownership of the smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined whether stakeholder involvement during initiation was a critical sustainability factor for donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district. It established that the majority of the beneficiaries understood what stakeholder involvement implied and what was expected of them. The needs analysis, stakeholders' identification and projects designs were dominated by the government/ donor, politicians and government departments. The other stakeholders were only involved during the construction phases. The government/ donor, government departments and politicians' influence overshadowed the initiation process at the expense of other critical stakeholders. Thus, the outcome of the non-involvement of the relevant stakeholders during initiation was the demise of the irrigation projects in Zvimba district a few years after the withdrawal of the donors. The beneficiaries were left out lacking the appropriate level of commitment and skills to run the irrigation projects on their own. In that respect, stakeholder involvement proved to be a critical sustainability factor during initiation of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects in Zvimba district.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that:

1. The desire for the projects should be triggered by the communities to ensure ownership.

2. All the relevant stakeholders should be identified at the commencement of the donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects.

3. The level of influence of every category of stakeholders should be determined during the early life of the initiation process.

4. All the relevant stakeholders should be involved as equal partners wherever necessary during the initiation of donor-funded smallholder irrigation projects to ensure project buy-in.

In view of the recommendations of this study, the researchers recommend the adoption of a participatory donor-funded smallholder irrigation project initiation model. The model advocates for the involvement of all relevant stakeholders during needs analysis, stakeholders' identification, project designing and project construction. The involvement of stakeholders would be based on their degree level of influence. Thus, the stakeholders to be involved must include but not limited to those shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Participatory Donor-funded Smallholder Irrigation Project Model

Project phase	Involvement Strategy	Relevant Stakeholders
Needs Identification	1. Stakeholder awareness. 2. Stakeholder engagement in decision-making	Donors, Government departments, Business/Private Sector, Community, Interest Groups.
Stakeholder identification	1. Stakeholder awareness. 2. Stakeholder participation in decision-making	Donors, Government departments, Business/Private Sector, Service Providers, Community, Interest Groups, Consumers.
Project Designing	Consultation	Donor, Government departments, Intended beneficiaries, Community, Interest Groups, Service Providers
Project Construction	Stakeholder participation in construction	Donors, Government, Service Providers, Intended beneficiaries, Business/ Private Sector

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