

**An Investigation on the Impact of Developmental
Projects on Individuals and Communities:
A Case Study of Siavonga District**

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David Kaluba¹

School of Humanities

Information and Communications University

Lusaka, Zambia

davkaluba@gmail.com

Dr Serah Mbetwa²

School of Business

Information and Communications University

Lusaka, Zambia

Abstract

Despite the number of development projects that are carried out by the government and other entities such as business, little is known about the impact these projects have made in both communities and individuals. The overall picture that emerges from literature has failed to address the impact that developmental projects have made on the living standards, incomes and jobs of individuals in the communities.

This study has analysed both global and local literature in order to explore the impact of development projects on individuals and communities. The literature review showed that development projects bring various impacts to individuals, communities and environments.

By using a qualitative approach to research inquiry, a nongovernment projects were examined for this purpose in Siavonga District. The study showed the impact of development projects on the living standards, jobs and incomes of individuals and the communities.

The research compared and analysed different cases of non-government projects using the content analysis method in order to come up with findings and conclusions. Development projects bring different impacts to both individuals and communities.

This study is closely examined the non-government projects in order to shed more light on the neglected or rarely acknowledged and published changes that have resulted from the implementation of the development projects. In using the untapped source of the development projects data, this study will contribute to the future of research on similar topics.

Key words: *Development project, Living Standards, Jobs, Incomes, Case*

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

One of the major issues facing many countries is lack of development that is meant to change the living standards of people and the communities. The essence of undertaking development projects is to uplift the living standards of the people as well as the communities in which these projects are carried out. This study was undertaken to look at the impact of developmental projects on individuals and the communities in which these projects are done. Developmental projects have been carried out by successive governments, the business community as well as non-government organizations with the view that the communities and individuals can receive a facelift in their economical status. The purpose of development is to improve the standard of communities, reduce poverty, and improve the economic and social conditions of the people (Diallo 2013).

Infrastructure development is not the only line of projects carried out by governments but there have been other methods that are involved in impacting the communities and individuals. In 1995 for instance, the Zambian government introduced the community development fund (CDF), a fund that was established to support the micro community projects as a way of enhancing or taking development to the communities.

1.1. IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

Several examples abound in different countries on the impact that developmental projects leave on the individuals and communities in which they carried out.

1.2. The Albanian Case

The research by Diallo (2013:25) conducted in Albania states that concerning social capital outcomes, having a project in the community seems to foster social cohesion and social capital in the community. The researcher further mentions that looking at other sets of social capital measures at the household level, it appeared as though the treated communities were better-offs, it has significant effect on trustfulness and on the willingness of people to trust and help each other, leading them to participate more in communal activities. The treated population also seem to have been more empowered. The findings of Diallo (2013) showed that access to infrastructures (electricity, water, sanitation) was higher in treated communities.

1.3. The Ethiopian Case

Amrouk1 *et al* (2013) in their research on the impact of projects reported that project activities have shown relatively significant positive effects on smallholder livelihoods. In Ethiopia, it was reported that although it was not possible to compare income changes in the absence of a baseline, but project beneficiaries acknowledged that revenues and livelihoods improved, a situation they associated with the implementation of the developmental projects.

1.4. The Botswana Case

Mpotokwane and Keatimilwe (2012) reported that the 595-km Trans-Kgalagadi Road developmental project identified the impacts of the project as being the reduction of transport costs and the cost of goods. The other noted impacts include increased demand for water initially during construction, but also during the operational stage as the population settled near the road, increased generation of waste during construction, increased economic activity, increased migration as a result of improved transport and improved access to health and administrative services in the area. All these impacts have been attributed to the development of the Trans-kgalagadi road project.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative method. A nongovernmental organization developmental project was chosen for this study. The sample consisted of sixty beneficiaries and participants. The beneficiaries were those that had benefited from the projects and questionnaires were used to collect data from them using the snowball sampling technique. The participants and some other key informants were purposively chosen and data was collected from them using a structured interview that allowed for flexibility. Data was collected from project facilitators or custodians as well as project beneficiaries and participants. Data was analysed using content analysis.

3. RESULTS

There was a great indication of the number of benefits that the respondents get from the projects which include employment, income, food security and skills. There are many individuals that had indicated an improvement in the living standards as a result of the projects that had been investigated in this research.

The respondents also stated that as a result of the project, most of them had been able to acquire assets such as TVs, home theatres, cell phones and computers. The project principals have further gone to acquire vehicles, land with some going as far as becoming landlords as a result of the benefits from developmental projects.

As regards to community development, the projects have had several impacts on the community of Siavonga District. The community has been able to see the development of new infrastructure.

There is also an indication that the impact in the community has been received through the training of community members in income generation projects, education on several subjects such as nutrition and the impartation of skills such as fish farming and record management skills as well as the assimilation of skills through employment.

3.1. THEMES THAT EMERGED CONCERNING THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS ON THE INDIVIDUALS.

3.1.1. The recognition and understanding of the purpose of developmental projects

The recognition and understanding of the purposes of developmental projects is one of the cardinal themes to emerge from this research. Developmental projects are carried out for

various purposes and have to meet those purposes to be relevant. It was noted in this research that the developmental projects involved exist to develop individuals, skills, communities and empowering in income generating activities.

3.1.2. Awareness of project activities in impacting individuals

Another theme that emerged from this research is the awareness of project activities in impacting the individuals, particularly by the project custodians. The custodians and other respondents indicated that they were aware of the projects impact not only on their lives but also on the community at large.

3.1.3. The interpretation of the projects impact on individuals.

It was noted according to this theme that there are several interpretations to the projects' impact on individuals. In the presence of a baseline, it was noted that there are many projects that stand out to fail despite the impact that they were making in individuals. Baselines that have not been met indicate a possible failure of the project. The research however, revealed that many projects do have a lot of impact on individuals except that some baselines are far beyond their reach. The impact on individuals may not meet the benchmark but that does not take away the fact that projects have impact on individuals.

3.2. THEMES THAT EMERGED IN TERMS OF THE IMPACT OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROJECTS ON THE COMMUNITY.

3.2.1. The challenges encountered by developmental projects

The first theme that emerged concerning the impact of developmental projects on the community is the challenges encountered by developmental projects. Various stakeholders of these projects indicated that developmental projects encounter a lot of challenges from the initiation stage to the maturity stage. The key respondents indicated the lack of community involvement at the initiation of projects as the main challenge encountered.

3.2.2. Community perception of development projects

The community perception of developmental projects is the other theme that emerged in the study. Most of the respondents indicated that the community has a good perception of projects and therefore regard them highly. This public perception has been created by the fact that the community appreciates the differences these projects have brought into the community as well as individuals. There was a view that developmental projects will benefit more people effectively and genuinely when the perception is devoid of political influence or inference. When the perception of the community and individuals is that developmental projects are election campaign tools, the benefits are lost by many and their purposes become insurmountable to achieve. Developmental projects should not create the impression or perception that they are campaign tools or should not be associated with an election let alone a political party.

3.2.3. The way of measuring the impact of projects on the community

The last theme that was raised concerns the way of measuring the impact of projects on the community. Projects impact can be measured in different ways but as indicated by most of the responses, the projects under this research have left an impact on the communities of Siavonga District. The infrastructures, skills, training, education and improved knowledge levels are some of the benefits the community can talk about.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The discussions and interpretation of the findings are structured in the light of the following research objectives:

The specific objectives of the study were to;

1. To establish the purposes of developmental projects.
2. To identify the impact of developmental projects on incomes, jobs and living standards.
3. To examine the impact of developmental projects on the community.
4. To determine the causes of the failures of developmental projects in changing the living standards of individuals and communities.

4.1. Introduction - The impact of Nongovernmental developmental projects

The aim of this chapter is to present the discussions pertaining to the impact of developmental projects on the community and individuals. The discussion is based on the nongovernmental organization the researcher focussed on.

There are quite a number of Nongovernmental organizations operating in Siavonga District and of significance to this study was the Siavonga Nutrition Group (SNG). SNG is a non-profit community based organization whose aim is to assist in improving nutritional conditions and food security for the villages, peri-urban and urban areas of Siavonga, Zambia. The SNG projects include the provision of nutrition education to mothers of malnourished children, a skills training centre where the mothers are taught tailoring and designing as well as agriculture (www.sng-zm.org 2017).

The researcher found that the group is working hard to impact both the community and the individuals through the various projects and programmes they have undertaken particularly in the villages where most of their work is undertaken. It can be noted from the respondents that the need for the services provided by the SNG is on demand and their projects can have a negative impact on the communities if they were discontinued.

SNG is carrying community programs to educate the masses on the need for good nutrition through workshops and community outreach programmes. The activities of SNG also include training in tailoring and designing, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, fish management and disease control, fish feeding and record keeping.

4.2. To establish the purpose of developmental projects.

The researcher established that there are many purposes of developmental projects and in this particular case the SNG existed to improve the lives of the vulnerable women and youths in the areas of education, livelihood, social harmony, health and the environment. The main activities attributed to this project involve nutrition education and empowerment in income generating activities or projects. It was also noted from the respondents that the projects exist to impact skills in tailoring, nutrition to mention but a few. SNG is also impacting the individuals by empowering them with income generating skills and activities such as fish farming. The beneficiaries of this project are being impacted so that they can be able to create jobs, have an income and change their living standards.

4.3. To identify the impact of developmental projects on incomes, jobs and living standards.

The research also showed that the project has been having an impact on individuals in terms of incomes, jobs and living standards. The respondents indicated that through the projects they have been able to receive an income which was not present before joining the project. Through the use of the knowledge they have acquired in income generating ventures and other skills, they have also seen a change in terms of the living standards as they are able to meet some of the basic needs that they previously could not.

SNG has been able to provide part time, volunteer and permanent jobs to some individuals. SNG delivers income generating activities as well as a local volunteer development program. In one of their projects in the villages for instance, SNG was able to identify a volunteer who had already started training in the skills of an IT technician.

The project has not just given direct jobs but also indirect jobs to other individuals. There are other respondents who have been impacted by receiving skills and knowledge that have made them get self employed. The skills have been noted in the areas of tailoring and aquaculture.

The respondents have indicated some changes in their living standards which have been attributed to their involvement in the project. There was some indication from the respondents that they have been able to acquire some assets as a result of the incomes and services they have been getting from SNG. Through the skills, knowledge and incomes from the project, the respondents indicated that they have been able to meet some of the basic requirements such as food, rent, school fees and so forth.

The significance of such impact is demonstrated by the indication that the demise of the project can leave a negative effect on the beneficiaries and the community at large. The projects of SNG are having an impact on individuals and hence they should be encouraged to do more so that many individuals and the community at large can be able to benefit.

4.4. To examine the impact of developmental projects on the community

The impact of the project on the individuals is generally a reflection of its impact on the community. At community level the group has been able to do some significant activities that have a long-lasting effect on the community. Apart from the provision of services, the SNG was able to make donations to schools. In one case, they donated Raspberry Pi computers to nine (9) different schools in the project. In addition to the donation of the said computers, the group went on to hold computer training days for teachers so that they could be able to address the ICT curriculum. In another case, SNG impacted the community through the donation and installation of the solar panels at Bbakasa School and the upgrade of the same at Kabbila School.

The community impact by the group further goes to the provision of nutrition education, knowledge and skills through the holding of workshops with the members of the community. There are other outreach programs done in the community to ensure social harmony and the proper maintenance of the environment. The project has brought value in the application and understanding of nutrition by the community.

4.5. To determine the causes of the failures of developmental projects in changing the living standards of individuals and communities.

The respondents agreed that the project cannot be considered a failure as it has been able to help a number of people and the community at large in acquiring knowledge and skills necessary for their wellbeing. The fact that the project still exists after so many years of existence is testimony to its impact and success.

However, the respondents attributed the failure of most projects to change the living standards of people due to their failure to meet the needs of the community. It is the view of the respondents that there are many projects that are carried out that are out of touch with the communities. It is the considered view of most respondents that for projects to be effective and change the living standards of people, the projects need to be up to date with needs in the community and appeal effectively to those needs.

The other causes given are the facts that projects require a lot of resources and knowledge. The custodians of projects need to be well versed in the projects that they are undertaking as well as have sufficient resources particularly financial and human to accomplish the project objectives. Projects that are done with very little resources have a tendency to fail to change the lives of individuals and communities.

There was a great response from the informants including the key ones that projects further fail to change the living standards of people and the community due to lack of ownership by the community as well as the lack of involving the community members during the initial stages of development. Community members are rubber stamps of most projects.

The other response noted from the informants is that projects fail to change the living standards of people due to the fact that donors just want to meet their targets because of limited time and resources. It was suggested that the involvement of the community in the designing and implementation of projects is cardinal for their success. A project that doesn't appeal to the community stands very little chance of succeeding.

5. CONCLUSION

The investigation of the impact of developmental projects on individuals and community of Siavonga District has been backed by the conceptual framework of community development, jobs, incomes and living standards. The nongovernmental projects usually carry a service related purpose to the individuals and communities with a view to improve their living standards. They also major in providing training, skills and educational knowledge to empower power in incoming generating activities.

Developmental projects certainly have an impact on the three aspects of income, jobs and the living standards. The indication received from the respondents is clear that the projects have brought jobs, incomes and to some extent improved their living standards.

Developmental projects bring different impacts on the community. Some of these impacts are direct whereas others are indirect. Nongovernmental projects impact communities through the provision of services, skills and knowledge.

There were some notable indications as to the causes of projects failing to change the living standards of people and among them are that most projects lack the participation or input of beneficiaries from the initial stage, lack of ownership of projects by beneficiaries, the mindsets of people, the lack of leading roles from community members and the fact that there is just a tendency by project custodians to reach a given target irrespective of the outcome due to limited time and resources. The perception of projects being campaign tools and finally lack of proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are the other cited causes.

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