Full Length Research Paper

Voicing participation in large-scale infrastructural projects: A contextualization of participatory communication in Lamu Port, Kenya

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This study argues that, although public participation is a mechanism of connection and collective struggle, its practice lacks strong operational foundation. A re-conceptualization of participation as a planning and social reform tool is expounded through examination of how project affected people in the Kenya Lamu Port project, voiced their participation concerns. Lamu Port is a key infrastructural project in the Lamu Port - South Sudan - Ethiopia Transport Corridor Project (LAPSSET). LAPSSET is one of the biggest and costliest projects in Africa. It suffered major completion delay and by November of 2021, only three of the 32 berths were functional. Four objectives were pursued: describe how the local people understand participatory communication, determine what people ‘voice’ their participatory concerns, expound how the local people voice their participation concerns and explain the challenges of participation. A mixed method approach was used where key informants and a sample of 385 residents were studied. Data were analyzed using descriptive techniques and thematic analyses. Key findings were that, it is not the quantity of participation that matters in safeguarding community and individual interests, but the quality and voicing strategies that are adopted by the participants. Similarly, not all communication and participation agenda by projects implementers are perceived as genuine and reflective of community’s’ interest. It is recommended that, people who fight for community rights should be recognized and empowered via mechanism such as legislations and regulations. Participation gives a community surveillance power on matters that affect it and is an encounter process.

Key words: Communication style, participatory communication, social influence, infrastructural project

INTRODUCTION

All people are called to take full part in their affairs (Cornwall, 2008; Stokke and Törnquist, 2013). People involvement in matters that affect them is valued because it safeguards and enhances the citizens’ rights, provides spaces for voicing concerns, and is a setting for learning and understanding, and is a governance structure that guarantees public opinion. From classical democratic theories individual participation in matters that affect them is regarded as a virtue, a right, a civic duty and a method of ensuring private interest are not neglected. It is also a

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sine qua non of democracy, Dowse and Hughes (1972). Citizens must be allowed a voice; be informed, consulted, be free in their towns and villages, to manage their own purely local interests. Participation empowers and protects the community from what is called impersonal bureaucracies. Whereas participation is viewed as a right and as a virtue, in reality majority of people are not interested in participating in matters that concern them. Writers such as Beierle (2002), Chambers (1997), Mefalopulos (2005), Kesby (2005), Dowse and Hughes (1972), Ball (1978) and Holden (1974), take low view of the capabilities of masses for self-government in participation or their desire for it, arguing that most people are too eager to give their burden of making decisions to those willing to do so. Hill (1974, 149) typcast individuals as apathetic persons, spectators, and gladiators and argue that it takes real effort, or shock of specific events before people change their behavior from one kind of role to another. He argues that about 60% of populations in most societies play a spectator role, 30% are always apathetic and don’t know a thing about major issues concerning their society and lastly only 10% of population are actively engaged in matters of public concern. That a majority of citizens are apathetic to matters of concerns to them is a serious irony and indicates that how to actualize peoples’ participation remains an unsettled discourse. McClosky (1968) defines public participation as voluntary activities by which members of society share and get involved directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy. It is engaging the public in decision-making and giving full consideration to public input in making that decision. Table 1 illustrates how participation (political) is visualized and the scope and extent of participation.

As seen in Table 1, 14 levels of political participation are identifiable starting from the lowest, 1, to the highest level, 14. Level one captures the apathetic that are unaware literally of the political part of the world around them. Levels 2-6 constitute spectator activities. Levels 7-9 are transition activates and levels 10-14 are the gladiator activities. From table 1, one can see that there is a diminishing involvement of people as one goes up the participation ladder. It is observed that, people may, for one reason or another, fail to participate at all, whether by choice or because of factors beyond their control. Take the case of a voter, it is one of the least active form of participation since it requires minimal commitment which ceases one a vote is cast and is restricted by the frequency of elections. Ascending the hierarchy of participation is not easy for it involves costs in terms of time, energy and resources. At each participation level, fewer people are able or are prepared to make the necessary investments to enable them move to the next level. From this observation participation in any engagement or project is seen as a consequence of social, psychological and political circumstances associated with involvement. Arnstein (1969) ladder of participation is also illustrative of the participation process (Table 2).

As shown in Table 2, eight levels of participation are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizen’s power in determining the end-product. The bottom rung are manipulation and therapy and represent the non-participation. ‘Citizen Control’ is at the top of the ladder. In the manipulation rung, the citizens are misled into believing they are being given power in the name of their participation. They are placed in rubber stamp advisory committees in order to give their support. At this level, participation is a power relations vehicle for the power holders (Table 2).

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| Participation level | Hierarchy of participation | Role | Activity |
|---------------------|----------------------------|------|----------|
| 14                  |                            | Holding political Office |          |
| 13                  |                            | Being a candidate for office | Gladiator |
| 12                  |                            | Soliciting for party fund |          |
| 11                  |                            | Attending strategy meeting |          |
| 10                  |                            | Contributing time for campaign |          |
| 9                   |                            | Attending political meeting |          |
| 8                   |                            | Making monetary contribution | Transition |
| 7                   |                            | Contacting public officer/leader |          |
| 6                   |                            | Wearing a button/sticker |          |
| 5                   |                            | Attempting to influence others into voting | Spectator |
| 4                   |                            | Imitating political discussion |          |
| 3                   |                            | Voting |          |
| 2                   |                            | Exposing self to political stimuli |          |
| 1                   |                            | Total apathy | Apathetic |

Table 1. Level of political participation.
Under the therapy strung, the citizens are projected as the problem and the participation is to cure citizens' pathologies. The informing level, participation is largely one way, from officials to citizens with no feedback channels. The participation strung, people are perceived as statistical abstraction, participation is measured by how many came or how many answered a questionnaire. Power holders gather evidence that they have gone through the requirements of involving people. Placation involves some degree of influence. A few people are appointed to the board of committee or authority, but the people are not the majority in the boards. Under partnership rung the citizen negotiate better deals and they can even veto decisions, at this stage there are structures such as joint policy boards, planning committee and mechanism of resolving impasse. Delegated power ensures that there is some level of autonomy and the citizens are given power to manage some function. Finally, under the citizens' control rung, the citizens govern a programme or institution and are in charge of the programme. Individuals need to understand and internalize why they should participate in projects. The participations models are useful tools which illustrate the participation concepts and its processes. What we can infer from table one and table two is that, participation is about giving man equal consideration and equal opportunity in matters that affect him and his community. From Aronstein's formulation, citizen participation is a categorical term for citizen power. It is the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in matters that affect them. It is the strategy that empowers the have-nots to have a say in determining how information is shared, goals and policies are set, tax resources are allocated, programs are operated, and benefits like contracts and patronage are parceled out. It is a process that induce social reform through empowerment of the people and which Hill (1974) cautions as a difficult process for “the work of representation and social reform would not be handed down to the citizens by the existing elites.”

When examined from the point of implementers, the hierarchy of participation models helps us to visualize the role of management in project implementation. Those charged with management roles are supposed to operate in a manner that is considerate of the social dynamics and public good. This requirement creates the initial space of participation and is considered as defining good development practice and policy. Seen this way, participation is a mechanism of connection where change is aligned to the collective struggle (Kesby, 2005). When Project Affected Persons (PAPs) participates in projects designs and implementation it leads to more widely accepted decisions and better governance (Mansbridge, 1995; Bohmann and Rehg, 1997). However, we, like Lefebvre (1991) and Long and Vander (1989), infer that, any new space that is created for participation bears traces of social relations. These relations animate the ‘people’s practices’ that constitute everyday forms of participation in development. Kohn (2000) cautions that spaces created by the powerful may be discursively bounded to permit only limited citizen’ influence, colonizing interaction and stifling dissent. While ‘rules’ of free exchange and ideals of mutual understanding inform the creation of spaces for participation, inequalities of status, class and social position are often reproduced and affect how people participate in matters that affect them. What is needed is an exploration of the intersect between invitation by project implementers and demand for participation as well as an examination of how these spaces for citizen participation are occupied, negotiated and voiced.

From the foregoing, participation can’t occur unless there is communication. People need clear and accurate information in order for them to keep community life under surveillance. This surveillance is what empowers the people to probe and expose those engaged in social vices such as corruption and abuse of power. Citizens

| Level | Participation role | Participation category |
|-------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 8     | Citizens control   | Citizen control       |
| 7     | Delegated power    |                       |
| 6     | Partnership        |                       |
| 5     | Consultation       |                       |
| 4     | Informing          | Tokenism              |
| 3     | Placation          |                       |
| 2     | Therapy            | Non participation      |
| 1     | Manipulation       |                       |

Table 2. Arnstein’s participation ladder.

Source. A ladder of citizen participation. Journal of the American Planning Association 35(4): 216-224. https://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation_en.pdf. Arnstein (1969).
need to observe what is happening with accuracy, discuss it and evaluate it in the light of their own interest and that of their community. This is what we are calling ‘voicing participation’. Such voicing is dependent on the way the messages are transmitted, structures and ‘the rule of the game’ of participation. These rules illustrate the factors enabling or stifling the public voices. Indeed, Servaes et al. (2005) argues that, under participatory models, information becomes knowledge only when people are able to interpret it in their own context to derive meaning. 

Mefalopulos (2008) posits that when community members within a project area are not involved, they tend to be more suspicious of project activities and are less prone to support them. The involvement of stakeholders in defining development priorities has advantage of giving the outside experts valuable insights into local reality and knowledge that ultimately lead to more relevant, effective, and sustainable project design. Chambers (1983) exposes the Achilles heel of very many development agencies; they come in seeking to change things before they first understand the perspectives of the locals. Hertogh (2008) argues that any development initiative that ignores the stakeholders’ views set itself on the path of its downfall. Servae and Malikhao (2005) argue that participatory communication necessitates listening. We add that one cannot listen if there are no voices to listen to. Indeed, the African Development Bank encourages its staff to utilize a “participatory approach” in their day-to-day operations (ADB, 2001). Mazzei and Scuppa (2006) argue that, most World Bank supported projects have in the past few decades, witnessed a major acceptance after involvement of PAPs in their implementation and design. Deakin (2001) argues that, the social, economic, and environmental prosperity of a nation lies in its ability to properly plan its infrastructural development, capable of withstanding the test of time and versatile enough to allow for the rapid societal transformations.

Kenya has many development projects. For instance, Vision 2030 is a long-term development blueprint which aims to transform the country into a newly industrializing middle-income country by year 2030. Such endeavors is not easy to achieve for as the World Bank (2014) observes, in developing countries post-world war II planning period there have been far more development project failures than those which succeeded.

The Kenyan Lamu Port is part of the seven key infrastructural projects that form what is generally called: the Lamu Port - South Sudan - Ethiopia Transport Corridor Project (LAPSSET) estimated to cost a total of 2.5 trillion Kenya shillings. As of June 2019, LAPSSET had missed its initial completion deadline of July 2017 (LAPSSET, 2016). The causes of the delay of the Lamu Port project range from unavailability of adequate funds (Ngal 2020), pulling out of the project by investors and governments (Muchira, 2019), terrorist attacks in Lamu County, (Watkins, 2015) legal tussles (Kiganda, 2017), and organized protests by residents on allegations of failure by the implementers to engage fully the community in the project area. This mega project consists of seven key infrastructure projects. It incorporates a new 32 berths port at Lamu Port Project and Interregional Highways. The other elements of the project are the crude oil pipeline, an interregional standard gauge railway line, international airports, three Resort Cities and the construction of a multipurpose High Grand Falls Dam along the Tana River (GoK, 2017). This Paper explores how the local community in Lamu voiced their participation concerns for the Lamu Port project.

**Problem statement**

The Kenyan Government’s desire to transform the country from a developing nation to an industrialized nation is faced by myriads of problems and obstacles. Amongst these obstacles is the inability of the country’s large scale infrastructural projects to chart conducive paths for participations which would enable and enhance smooth projects implementation and projects completion. For example, LAPPSET project was supposed to have been completed in 2007, five years down the line, only three berths of the 32 berth are complete and operational. The setbacks for the Lamu Port project began when a high court ruling on 30 April 2018, (Mohamed Ali Badi vs. Attorney General & 11 others, 2018) affirmed the local Lamu communities’ grievances against the project. The judges stated that the owners of the Lamu Port project failed to conduct proper and effective public participation, by not providing the residents with adequate information as required by law. They also castigated them on their refusal to recognize and consider the fisher community’s traditional fishing rights and rights to a clean and healthy environment. The Lamu Port Project was found culpable of failing to demonstrate that the residents of Hindi Ward were furnished with sufficient and relevant information leading to the conception of the project that would allow them to fully participate in the project before implementation commenced. The respondents violated the residents’ rights to access information on the Project. As a result, the court ordered the project proponents to craft a demonstrably effective programme to disseminate information on the project as part of the public participation legal requirements, specifically on the areas that affect residents of Lamu County and in addition, the affected local communities were to be compensated with Ksh. 1.76 billion, owing to the adverse effects brought about by the construction the Lamu Port. Failure to conduct proper and effective public participation was cited as a big problem.

The development agenda of the country is jeopardized whenever the development projects face obstacles and derailments due to issues that can be sorted at planning, and implementation phases of projects. A re-conceptualization about how participation can be
imagined as a planning tool, as an engine of reform and as a decentralizing decision making tool to the grass-root and peoples' loci is needed. This reconceptualization is not easy because participation constitutes a terrain of contestations in which relations of power between different actions shapes and reshapes the spectrum of people’s actions. In ‘participation spaces’ societal rupture occurs and this rapture need to be understood for it contains important insights about how this instrument of empowerment can be harnessed. This paper argues that, understanding how a community voice its participation concerns is a critical element that illustrates insightful perspectives about how local communities define what participation is and how it affects the environment. Such an understanding would give impetus of the much needed acceleration of participatory development agenda in Kenya. Indeed, the Lamu Port project’s legal loss in (Mohamed Ali Badi vs. Attorney General & 11 others, 2018), is a living testimony that, project implementation in Kenya needs rethinking in matters of ‘participation’. The legal loss has become a beacon that marks the ruined landscape of Lamu Port project’s dented history that will remain as a constant reminder that ignoring or lack of involvement of the grassroots in matters that affect them in any development agenda is a rich source for project implementation resistance and an obstacle that undermine development agenda of community and country.

Objectives of the study

The study had the following objectives:

1. Describe how the project affected persons (PAPs) understand participatory communication at the Lamu Port project.
2. Determine what issues project affected persons’ voice as their participatory concerns for Lamu Port project.
3. Determine how the project affected persons voice their participation concerns as occasioned by the Lamu Port Project.
4. Explain the participation challenges that are faced by project affected persons of the Lamu Port project.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do the project affected persons (PAPs) understand participatory communication at the Lamu Port project?
2. What issues project affected persons’ voice as their participatory concerns for Lamu Port project?
3. How do the Project affected persons voice their participation concerns at the Lamu Port Project?
4. What participation challenges do project affected people face at the Lamu Port project?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study site

The Study was conducted in Hindi Ward, in Lamu West Sub-County, Lamu County in Kenya. The inhabitants of this region are mainly fisher folk communities, subsistence farmers, small scale business people and a small number of pastoralists (Ngala, 2020). The 32 berths Lamu Port is located in Hindi Ward, Lamu West constituency (Figure 1).

Research approach

The research used a mixed method approach. To determine how the local voiced their participatory concerns in the context of large-scale infrastructural projects, Lamu Port is studied. The data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data sources were collected from key informant interviews and 385 residents of Hindi ward via research questionnaire. Secondary data were drawn from published literature. The study target population was the 10,039 residents of Hindi Ward. The data for the paper were extracted from a MA thesis titled: Participatory communication in Kenya’s large-scale Infrastructural Development Projects’ Planning & Implementation: A case of Lamu Port in Hindi Ward, Lamu West Sub-County, Kenya, by Author 2. The first author was the project supervisor for the said work. The conceptualization of the paper was done at a World Wide Fund (WWF) funded research validation workshop held on 2-9 September 2021, Mombasa, Kenya, where the first author was a key mentor in the theme of academic writing and publication.

Sampling procedure

Purposive sampling was used for qualitative data and Yamane (1967) formula used to determine the study sample size:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where:
- $n$ - The desired sample size (when Population is ≤ 10,000).
- $N$ - Total population. Hindi Ward population was 10,039, (KNBS, 2013).
- $e$ - accuracy level required Standard error is 5%
- $n = 385$

Data collection

Document analyses and direct interviews were deployed. The unit of analysis was the individual who was reached through survey questions. Six key informants were interviewed, they included; Representative from LAPSSSET, Government of Kenya Official working in the Ministry of Transport and Public Works, Security person/OCS LAPSSSET Police Station, leader of Save Lamu lobby group and a development communication expert.

Data analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive techniques. Frequency tables, figures, charts and percentages were used in analysis of the
Voicing participation concerns by local people at Lamu port Project

The study had sought to understand and conceptualize how the LAPSSET Project of the Lamu Port affected the local people and how they voiced their concerns about the Lamu port project. To situate the debate, we started by analyzing the demographic statistics of the respondents.

Respondents’ demographic information

47% of the respondents were female and 53% male, which reflected good gender representation. The six key informants were male. 37% of the respondents had attained secondary school education, 35% had primary school education and 21% of respondents had attained tertiary education. According to the Lamu County Spatial Plan (2016) the County has adequate school facilities corresponding to the settlement pattern. Education status

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study set out to contextualize the discourse of participation by exploring how participatory communication is understood by Project affected persons (PAPs) at a large infrastructural project (the Lamu Port project). The study set out to answer four research questions as follows: how do the Project affected persons (PAPs) understand participatory communication at the Lamu Port project? What issues do Project Affected Persons voice as their participatory concerns for Lamu Port project? How do the Project affected persons voice their participation concerns at the Lamu Port Project? What participation challenges do project affected people face at the Lamu Port project?
of community is important following Muigua (2014) argument that, that education is a key enabler of participation (Figure 2). As can be seen from the figure 2, seven in ten of the respondents of this study had attained primary and secondary education and two in ten had college and university education.

**Age:** The majority of respondents fell under the age category of 18-30 and 30-45, 33% and 35% respectively. 23% of the respondents were in the category 45-60 years and about 10% of the respondents were above the age of 60 years. 42% of respondents were farmers. Hindi area falls within the agriculture zone in Lamu County. Other occupations included business owners 22%, employed 19%, fishers 9% and others 10%.

**Voicing participation in the Lamu Port Project**

To explain how project affected persons voice their concern, the study explored the question: how do the project affected persons understand participatory communication at the Lamu Port project? From this question, respondents gave their opinion as follows:

**Involvement in participatory communication**

There was little involvement of the local community in participatory communications needs assessment, only four in ten (36%) responded in the affirmative to having been involved while six in ten (64%) indicated that they were not engaged. The study then sought to understand what this participatory communication meant and how the respondents voiced its meaning. The answers were as varied as they could get, they varied from economic variables, social and cultural variables, political variables and psychological variables. First, participation was understood as a mechanism of ‘provision of equal opportunity’. The term opportunity here referred to the personal benefit that accrues to an individual. Locals wanted the LAPSET project of Lamu Port to give them employment opportunities as well as opportunities to start businesses and trade within the port. A respondent stated:

‘To participate for me, means my personal interests are catered for and I am given an opportunity to work either as an employed person at the port or I am given an opportunity to do business with and within the port’ (Respondent no 23).

Secondly, participation was defined as economic empowerment, issues like giving the local people school and colleges’ scholarships, soft loans to start small-scale businesses as well as societal benefits like provision of access roads networks and building of market places. Thirdly, participation was understood to mean ‘political acceptance’. Participation was equated to local politicians and elites’ approval or disapproval of projects. The residents of Hindi wards placed high premium on local leaders’ decisions on what projects meant for the community and for individuals. This observation sits well with the literature of participation which typecast individuals as apathetic persons, spectators and gladiators and goes on to argue that it takes real effort, or shock of specific events before people change their behavior from one kind of role to another and that a majority of citizens are apathetic to matters of concerns to them. Fourthly, participation was understood to mean preservation of cultural rights. There were fears that the port of Lamu would bring about cultural assimilation and dilution due to influx of population from all over the country and from the world. Participation therefore was equated to the safeguarding of cultural norms and traditions and rites. A respondent captured the issue as follows:

‘Let the Port (Lamu Port) be built as long as our cultural inheritance, beliefs and traditions are left intact, let our cultural traditional sites be preserved, and lets the way we do our rite of passage be respected and not be treated as backward, let foreigners come with respect and dignity’, (Respondent 38).

Clearly, the issues raised went beyond cultural preservations to psychological factors such as the fear of cultural degradation. Fifthly, local people understood participation to mean interpersonal communications and relationships between the project implementers and the local people. It was stated that participation is sharing of information among the stakeholders of a given project. A respondent stated:

‘For me participation is that process where the project
Table 3. Local people’s involvement in Lamu port project.

| Level of adoption and deployment of participatory communication                                                                 | No extent (%) | Little extent (%) | Moderate extent (%) | Great extent (%) | Very great extent (%) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Local community was involved in Lamu Port project designing and initial stages.                                                  | 27            | 27               | 28                  | 2               | 6                     |
| Local community is involved in Lamu Port project implementation on a regular basis.                                               | 29            | 32               | 28                  | 6               | 5                     |
| Local community was informed of the impacts on Lamu Port project on their livelihoods.                                           | 22            | 28               | 27                  | 13              | 10                    |
| Implementers of Lamu Port conduct participatory communication whenever there is conflict.                                       | 27            | 32               | 24                  | 11              | 5                     |
| Lamu Port project implementers took seriously locals’ peoples’ views and proposals.                                            | 24            | 28               | 30                  | 9               | 9                     |
| Local people were engaged on Lamu Port corporate social responsibility (CSR) decisions.                                          | 26            | 32               | 25                  | 10              | 5                     |
| All engagement with Lamu Port project implementers was based on free, prior and informed consent.                                 | 28            | 28               | 24                  | 13              | 7                     |
| Lamu Port Project implementers conducted regular monitoring of communities affected by the project.                              | 30            | 29               | 28                  | 6               | 7                     |

Source: Author’s compilation

implementers avail to me the plans of the project, the reports of the impacts of the project on my community and disclosure of how I benefit from the project in a language that I UNDERSTAND’. Respondent 124

From respondent (124), the concept of being heard, of being listened to and of being treated as important in matters that concern an individual is brought to fore. An inference can be made from the comments of no 124 that, slowly the community is awakening and soon or later something new is cooking and the concepts of people’s rights and especially the environmental right have become part of what project designers will have to think about and deal with. Sixthly, participation was understood to mean, effective participation of locals in matters that affect them. Access to primary reports on the economic, environmental and cultural impact of the project. It also included elements of inclusion and equality of treatment of local people on matters of their concern. A respondent said:

‘participation is to be in (where the decision is made) when important decision is being taken, including being taken to places where they go to benchmark…the local has rights just like the politicians who always do the benchmarking for projects’ respondent 96.

From respondent 96, participation carries the meaning of equal treatment for all people affected by the Project. The statement implies that implementers of Lamu port seemed to favor politicians’ in terms of involvement. It is them (politicians) that were taken to workshops and conferences and benchmarking tours. Indeed, 54% of respondents indicated that they were not meaningfully involved in the Lamu Port project design. 59 and 56% of the respondents indicated that they were not meaningfully involved in resolving conflict occasioned by the project and neither did the project owners obtain free, prior and informed consent respectively (Table 3). As can be seen in Table 3, the implementers of Lamu Port project stand accused of a myriad of issues. For instance, 8 in 10 (82%) respondents said that they were not involved meaningfully in the design and planning of the Lamu project. A similar number said that they were never informed about how the projects would impact their lives and livelihood. Equally, 8 in 10 (82%) and 80% of the respondents said that there was little commitment to local peoples’ views and that the implementation of the Lamu project was not based on free, prior and informed consent respectively. 29% of the respondents felt the community did not fully understand the complexity of issues that arose from the lamu port project. And 25% of the respondents felt that the community is used symbolically to show appearance of participation. 84% of the respondents said that there was little commitment to local peoples’ views and that the implementation of the Lamu project was not based on free, prior and informed consent respectively. 29% of the respondents felt the community did not fully understand the complexity of issues that arose from the lamu port project. And 25% of the respondents felt that the community is used symbolically to show appearance of participation. 84% of the respondents said that there was little commitment to local peoples’ views and that the implementation of the Lamu project was not based on free, prior and informed consent respectively.
Table 4. Typology of participation in development.

| Level | Extent of participation |
|-------|-------------------------|
| 1     | Manipulation (community not understanding issues confronting them) |
| 2     | Decoration (community used as needed) |
| 3     | Tokenism (community used symbolically to show appearance of participation) |
| 4     | Community informed though not understanding the need to participate |
| 5     | Community is informed and consulted (understand project design and operation) |
| 6     | Community participates in project implementation (contribute opinion and have high degree of responsibility) |

Source: Modified from Arnstein (1969).

and operation. A paltry 2% indicated that the community contributed adequately and that they bore a high responsibility in the project (Figure 3). Figure 3 indicates how the local people perceived their participation at the Lamu port project. It was generated from a sample of 385 respondents of the study. Column six indicates that only 2% of respondents thought the local people were meaningfully involved in the Lamu Port project. The findings in Table 3 and Figure 3 give credence in support of the typology of participation as provided by Arnstein (1969) that the majority of Project affected Persons (PAPs) are not meaningfully involved in projects design and implementation and whenever they are involved their involvement is cosmetic and without consequences. As seen in Table 4, in level 1, communities are manipulated, as they do not understand issues that confront them. Specifically, they do not get feedback regarding problem analysis and actions taken. In level 2, communities are used as needed (decoration) because their participation is incidental. In other words, external providers to support their cause indirectly use them. In level 3, communities seem to have been given a voice, yet in real sense, they have little choice concerning the subject matter as they are not allowed to formulate and express their opinions and ideas freely. In level 4, communities are provided with complete, accurate information regarding the project and are made to understand why their involvement and participation is required. In level 5, external agencies do the project design and operation, communities clearly understand the process, with their opinions being considered actively. In level 6, communities have a high-degree of responsibility and contribute ideas and opinions before implementation despite decisions being initiated externally. Indeed, one respondent stated as follows:

We have seen these people (project implementers) come here and pick a few hangs-on and turn- coats/spanner boys and girlfriends (sycophants) and take them to what they call project meetings, pay them some pocket money and then they say citizens are involved…we know their
Respondent 41 is quite blunt in the assessment of what citizens' participation is and what the respondent's opinion was on the flaw in selecting those who were to participate. Clearly, the respondent see those selected for participation as not representative of community arguing that they are selected on basis of cosmetic participation and for personal benefits. The respondent goes on to blame project owners as well as community and government officials in the flaws found in participation process. The key finding here is that, not all participation and communication by project implementers is perceived as genuine and beneficial to societal needs. The paper finds that the respondents have clarity of what genuine participation was. They were clear on the extent they would like to be involved in the project design and implementation. Indeed, the finding in this section sits well with the argument of Beierle and Crayford (2002) who described public participation as "any of several 'mechanisms' that are deliberately institutionalized in a bid to involve the lay public or their representatives in administrative decision making." The duo argues that over and above town meetings and public hearings that have defined the public-participation paradigms there is need to expand its view to account for context, process and results that are dialogic as opposed to monologic. Similarly, the findings align well with Cox (2006) who defined public participation as "the ability of individual citizens and groups to influence decisions through: access to relevant information; public comments to the agency that is responsible for a decision; the right, through the courts to hold public agencies and businesses accountable for their decisions and behaviors." This view by Cox (2006) describes precisely the three rights espoused in a participatory process, namely: the right to knowledge (openness) the right of standing (answerability) and the right to comment (voice). In most instances, descriptions of public participation are steeped in bureaucratic processes that in a way negate the very purpose of participation. The following section carries on with this discourse and highlights the issues the local people identify as constituting their key concerns for participation, their voicing strategy and participation challenges.

The issues respondents' voice as their key concerns, voicing strategy and participation challenges

Large-scale infrastructure projects affect a variety of stakeholders in different degrees. This diversity of effects, calls for effective 'listening of the variegated voices. Indeed, Servaes and Malikhao (2005) argue that such listening builds trust, reduces the social distance between communicators and ensures smooth exchange of information and feedback. From this background, the study explored the question: what issues do project affected persons voice as their participatory concerns for Lamu Port project? The respondents identified many issues that constituted their voice. They included issues of how the Lamu Port affected: Peoples' Livelihoods, ecosystem, fisheries activities and challenges they faced as occasioned by the project, (Table 5 highlights the issues). As can be seen in Table 5, the Lamu Port project has real effects on peoples' livelihoods and their environment. The effects are both positive and negative. Table 5 also captures the challenges encountered by the local people, the challenges addressed our last question which was: What participation challenges do project affected people face at the Lamu Port project? From Table 5, the respondents gave a mixed bag of effects of Lamu port on their livelihood and environment. Negative effects were listed as follows: First, dredging was said to inhibit local fishermen from accessing the deep sea and also destroyed fishing grounds; second, pollution of the ocean via various port activities; third, coral destruction; fourth, destruction of Lamu Town as UNESCO heritage site. On the contrast it was felt that the construction of the Lamu Port would enhance the ecosystem of the region and would create both national and local wealth. From Table 4, the key informants ably explained how the Lamu port project affected the livelihood of people and the environment. The issues listed in Table 5 capture the complexity of participation process and sit well with the literature of participation. For instance, Balit (1999) described participatory communication as a process whose intention is to achieve a common understanding among all participants, then, have them act on the basis of the consensus achieved as opposed to its representation as a static model. Thus, participatory communication is present in all stages of any development project.

Mekkote (1991) states that in its own nature, there can never be a predetermined prescription for a common channel, message or models to be followed in a participatory communication but instead a constant search for the most suitable format based on the prevailing circumstances and culture. Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009) connect participatory communication to issues of dialogue, which allows the sharing of information, perceptions and opinions among the various stakeholders and thereby facilitates their empowerment. The most important issue in participatory communication is an assessment that provides an avenue to jointly identify and define key issues deemed important by stakeholders, assist to jointly establish a common place where all stakeholders feel comfortable to share their views, ask questions and seek clarifications on the project, provide a
| Item | Stakeholder | Effects on PAPs | Ecosystem | Fisheries | Challenges |
|------|-------------|----------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 1    | LAPSSET Representative /KPA | Reduced income, less fish, Job creation, tourism promotion, Improved transport network, improved social amenities, Scholarships to locals, Employment opportunity. | Dredging- Made the ocean deep, inhibits access to the deep sea | Limited access to fishing grounds | Lack of sensitization on how to manage compensation money |
| 2    | Officer of Lamu county/Planning Department | Reduced volume of fish, reduced income, real estate boom | Dredging- Disturbed and destroyed fishing and fish breeding grounds, destruction of corals | 80% of locals depend on fisheries | Delay payment of compensation money |
| 3    | Leader Save Lamu lobby | Reduced income, Reduction of grazing land | Interfered with fishing grounds, clearing of the mangrove forests, fear of destruction of Lamu as a UNESCO heritage site | Majority depend on fishing | Conflict between port security personnel and local people freedom movement, Cultural assimilation and dilution, lack of consultation of the effect of the project on UNESCO world heritage site, Land compensation was not adequate |
| 4    | Development experts Conservationist | Reduced income, Population influx, fear of prices of food going up | Destruction of sea turtle species, destruction of community conservation areas, Environmental degradation (excavation & construction), Dredging increased turbidity hindering visibility of fishermen in locating fish, Blockage of wildlife corridors, Pollution of the ocean, wildlife habitat loss, Soil sedimentation, Mangrove clearance, Lack of proper rehabilitation of borrow pits, Loss of biodiversity around port site, pollution from oil spills, silting affects corals sea weed, fish and sea grass, destruction of turtle grazing land | Fishing has become very costly | Navy scares away the fishermen, something that had not been happening previously |
| 5    | Development communication Experts | Value of land went up, Employment opportunities | Enhanced conservation of the ecosystem | Migration of fish due to destruction of corals | Undue influence from local and international investors for land acquisition for speculative purposes |
| 6    | Security officer /OCS Lapsset police station | Improved security (deployment of specialized forces, Like Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU) conflict between security officers and the local community | Migration and influx of many people to the area, thereby degrading the environment and causing increased crime, Oils spills from vessels/ ship. | Restriction of fishing within shipping channels, security zones | Influx of Drugs, increase of crime, Land grabbing, conflict between Marine police and PAPS/ residents, Discrimination of the locals in employment opportunities, Noncompliance with Environmental impact assessment |
platform to assess needs, problems, inherent risks, opportunities and solutions, support both project owners and stakeholders to prioritize issues for change and reconcile different perceptions. Erkul et al. (2016) argues that participatory communication is a process by which community concerns, needs, and values are incorporated into government and corporate decision-making. As such, public participation can be practiced by actively engaging stakeholders, citizens and communities on matters affecting their lives.

Media platforms used in voicing participation concerns and strategies used

To understand how the Project affected persons conceive and understand participatory communication, the study posed the question: How does the project affected persons’ voice their participation concerns at the Lamu Port Project? From the results obtained, both the Lamu Port Project’s Affected People (PAPs) and Lamu Port Project Implementers used many platforms to voice their participation concerns. The platforms included the following: Public Barazas (gathering), mass media institutions, courts, politicians, community meetings, religious leaders and community elders.

Public barazas

They were the most preferred platform of voicing peoples’ concerns. Barazas are formal and informal meetings organized at the grassroots where members of a community congregate to canvass issues affecting them. They are widely accepted as the most preferred communication platform in development projects. The preference may be attributed to community’s perception of ownership of these meetings. Despite the Barazas being the most preferred by the local people project implementers decried the complexities involved in their planning. A key informant put it as follows: “Hosting public barazas was an expensive affair for the simple reason that all participants needed to be reimbursed their transport costs incurred to the venue of the meeting including subsistence costs. Back in 2010 during the design of the project, cheaper options such as social media and even radio were not as popular. Now in Lamu we have more than three radio stations that we use to communicate with community members.”

Figure 4 indicates the respondents’ preferences of voicing platforms. As can be seen from Figure 4, it is easy to identify the strategies that were deployed to voice the participatory concerns. The most preferred voicing platform was public baraza followed by radio broadcast, then what was referred to as community arenas (these are places that offer local people opportunity to meet and talk about their issues, such as, neighborhood and village meetings). From Figure 4, the project managers and implementers were not among the popular platforms of voicing concerns. Similarly, worth of mention is the deployment of court platform, even though the respondents did not identify it as a major platform for voicing their concerns, and indeed, it was listed among the least preferred category; it was the deployment of the court platform that yielded the most significant impact on the governance and the implementation process of the Lamu port project. It is from the court process that the interests and concerns of PAPs were articulated and enforced via compensations and other legal redresses. We also note that, even though the fishermen constituted only 9% of the occupation affected by the Lamu Project, the fishermen were the ones who took the entire project to court to enforce their rights. The court ruling set a major precedent to all would-be-large scale infrastructure developers to always heed to the voices of the minority in society. Clearly, it can be inferred that, it is not the quantity of participation but the quality of participation and the right selection of voicing strategy that counts in yielding results of PAPs concerns. Court petition was among the least of preferred avenue of voicing (classified among the ‘others’ of participatory platforms) yet one of
the strongest platform in yielding results. Other strategies used to voice peoples’ concerns included: participating in public meetings called by stakeholders, participating protest, forming and joining local lobby groups. Such strategies enhanced the local people’s voices. Village elders, politicians, teachers and faith leaders were used as channels of airing concerns. Filing complaints with officials in various levels of government was another technique of voicing. Agitating for meeting, placement of radio announcement, newspaper announcement, neighborhood meetings, joining protests/picketing/riots, seeking and applying for employments/ and agitating for reservations of employment opportunities for local people were also used as voicing strategies.

**Barriers to voicing that are connected to voicing strategies**

Only 14% of the respondents felt that the community was informed and consulted during the design and implementation of the Lamu Port Project. 8 out of 10 respondents did not have a grasp of the project and its implications and were therefore unlikely to participate and voice their concerns. In addition, language barrier was identified as a major challenge of voicing participation. Most respondents preferred Swahili language 82%, English 12% vernacular languages 10%. Despite the preference of Swahili as the language of choice for respondents, majority of communication outputs and inputs for the Lamu port project by both the government and the project implementers were done via the English language, (Figure 5). Other participation barriers/factors that the respondents identified included geographical remoteness, culture and marginalization in decision making. 44% of the respondents felt that remoteness was the factor that hampered their participation, while 38% felt language barrier was their hindrance, 28% attributed marginalization in decision making as their hindrance, while 24% attributed culture as their hindrance to participation in the Lamu Port project. From Figure 6, several factors are identified as possible impediment to public participation. For instance, remoteness referred to the distance that needed to be covered by a local person if she/he needed to attend to a scheduled participatory meeting. For instance, holding a participatory meeting at the Lamu Island meant that people living in the mainland had to hike a boat-ride to access the meeting and vice versa for the people living in the Island whenever a meeting was held at the mainland. This was cited as costly and an impending factor for participation. Cultural values and tradition were also cited as barriers to voicing. It was stated that gender was a major issue when it came to voicing concerns. Women were for instance, discouraged from addressing public gathering. Married women were culturally forbidden to contradict their husbands in public arena. Failure of Lamu port project implementers to provide information in Swahili and/local languages greatly affected participation of the community: to expect the PAPs to adapt to the languages used by project implementers and policy makers is to ask too much from them. It is the project implementers who should go to the people and speak their development agenda in a language the locals understand. Conflict between the security personnel manning the Lamu port was also cited as a major barrier to voicing their concerns. There were a lot of mistrust between security personnel, project implementers and the local people. Another barrier was that participation was not a priority for many respondents. One respondent stated as follows: ‘Getting concerned with issues of the ocean and the port (Lamu Port) is not my priority, it (participation) cannot give me food for my children and even if I participate or not the government will go ahead and implement its agenda anyway—only God can help the poor. (Respondent 330)

The statement by respondent number 330 indicates a
sense of lack of faith on the process of participation at the Lamu port. It is a statement of feeling of powerlessness by PAPs when faced by a big government project like the Lamu port. From it we learn that peoples’ attitudes and frustrations are issues that inhibit respondents’ power to voice their concerns. Peoples’ participation in matters that concern them requires what Pope Francis (2021) calls ‘attention, time and willingness to encounter others and sensitivity to what troubles them’.

Conclusions

The participation discourse is complex and affects all spheres of peoples’ life. The paper has demonstrated that participation is about social relations, it animates peoples’ thoughts and practice in matters that concern them especially via the development agenda. Participation creates spaces where PAPs can voice their concerns. The voicing is a powerful mechanism that gives citizens surveillance power to probe and expose abuses and vices of development agenda, the voicing is also connected to people’s collective struggle. The authors argue that, perhaps the sabotage of the participation agenda in many projects are connected to the fear of this ‘citizens’ power’ - what is generally called the ‘legitimate liability concerns’ that discourage reporting of errors and mistakes by people leading and managing projects. The paper demonstrates that, large-scale project owners can only muffle but not silence the voices of project affected persons (PAPs) in the areas of intervention. The papers’ findings point to new vocabularies of public participation; public participation is about encounter- a call for openness, courage and willingness of managers of projects to let themselves to be challenged by the presence and stories of others. Public participation is about listening to what others have to say, it is about building rapport, being sensitive to the questions of project beneficiaries or stakeholders, it is about enrichment by the variety of voices encountered in project implementation. This is what Pope Francis (2021) say is a process of change in which true encounter open up new and unexpected possibilities. It is not about offering prepackaged solutions but it is about learning to listen to the voices of the people caught in the spectrum of the development agenda. Public participation is about discerning new ways and new paths that empowers the people by making room for their voices and letting their perspectives shutter project implementers’ barricades of certainty and perhaps what they call good intention of projects wired via their pre designed solution which may sometimes make them closed and deaf to the issues the people yearn and consider important. By successfully petitioning against the loss of their livelihoods to the LAPSSET Corridor Development Authority and by winning the court case, the fishermen of Lamu have demonstrated that, peoples’ voice is a powerful weapon of change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that voicing of both individuals’ and communities’ right is a critical component of project design. Thus, exploring and examining how spaces for citizen participation are occupied, negotiated, voiced and mediated demands an analysis of how projects implementers creates these spaces. Similarly, an understanding about what spaces are available for the citizens and how the citizens voice their issues should be considered as an important planning tool. Therefore, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Desirous of success, any large-scale infrastructure projects must incorporate voicing strategies in their design and Implementation. Specific budget components for participation should be made compulsory for all large scale infrastructural projects. In Kenya, both the National Parliament of central government and County Assemblies of devolved governments should pass legislation specifying the magnitude and scope of community participation for large scales projects. Community should be empowered via participation legislation to even assume control and management of some functions of projects.

2. Community participation is both a governance and an environmental issue. It is complex, multidimensional process which cannot be addressed by project owners and selected few alone. It needs interdisciplinary and dynamic perspectives. Project owners must conduct adequate and effective participatory communication that incorporates the local communities’ voices. Such ‘voices’ are critical in identification of both environmental and livelihood concerns. By law, large infrastructural projects should be compelled to use a certain per cent of the local human and material resources from their area of intervention and operation as a way of harnessing local peoples’ needs and rights.

3. All large infrastructural projects should review their public policies to avoid the ‘routine’ of making plans as guided by externalities largely defined by government and donors but instead they should align their projects to the local peoples’ needs and priorities especially at the grassroots. People who fight for community rights should be empowered and be recognized as community heroes. Legislations on award of state medals in Kenya and in other countries should have specific consideration for community heroes.

4. In Kenya, public participation in matters that affect people is a constitutional requirement. There is need for creation of an institution that would ensure compliance to this participation right. Similarly, a coordination ministry should be created at the national level to enforce this right.
5. The study recommends that to enhance voicing of participation concerns, then Like Servaes and Malikhao (2005) argue, participatory information only becomes knowledge when the recipients of that information interpret it in their own context. Project implementers must align their projects’ objectives to be in line with recipients’ needs through the emblematic of horizontal communication which would emphasize on the redistribution of power to bring change to the status quo. If change is for people, then the people must assume control of the change they want. It is the systems of governance that need to be changed and be made people oriented. Meaningful horizontal communication should be made compulsory for large scale infrastructural projects via international laws, state laws and local governments’ legislations.

The study highlighted a heightened consciousness of project affected persons on how they relate with large infrastructural projects. Specifically, it is demonstrated that, there is need of reshaping and restructuring of the development paradigm in order to incorporate peoples’ voices. These peoples’ voices should reflect both the community interest and individual interests. It is inferred that, incorporating the agenda of creating collective spaces in project management is a good practice which give life and support the agenda of community solidarity. Such an activity is no longer a cosmetic proclamation but reclamation of local peoples’ concepts of sustainable livelihood and their sovereignty. It is a power movement that will continue to alter the contours of the development agenda.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest.

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