



Village Council Transparency Roles and Community-driven Project Management: A Case of Mlimba District Council, Morogoro Region, Tanzania

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined village councils' transparency in managing Community-Driven Projects (CDPs) in Mlimba District Council, Morogoro Region, Tanzania. For project success, Community-Driven Development (CDD) strategies emphasize community engagement and local autonomy. CDP management relies on village councils to involve community members in decision-making to match projects with local priorities. This qualitative case study collected data from 24 purposively selected respondents of Chita and Ikule villages through interviews with village leaders and focused group discussions with village council members. The data were analyzed through a thematic analysis of how the village council practices transparency in CDP management. The study found that community meetings, notice boards, public speakers, and structured documentation increase transparency. Regular audits and project document accessibility ensure financial integrity. For

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CDPs to succeed, diverse communication, transparency, and community involvement were crucial. The study emphasizes CDP management transparency and inclusivity by highlighting diverse communication strategies to address local challenges. It is recommended that village councils maintain and continue to implement current transparency measures while enhancing and broadening their communication strategies. This may entail leveraging social media and digital platforms to effectively engage a wider audience, particularly the younger demographic. It is recommended that village council members undergo regular communication and community engagement training in order to enhance their current capabilities. Establishing a sub-committee within the village council's team that is specifically focused on enhancing transparency and communication strategies has the potential to enhance these endeavours. Communication strategies should be studied for their long-term effects on community engagement and project outcomes. Studies on how cultural and social dynamics affect communication in diverse communities could help tailor strategies to specific contexts.

Keywords: Community-Driven development; community-driven projects; village councils; transparency practices; community engagement; participatory development theory.

DEFINITIONS, ACRONYMS, ABBREVIATIONS

Terms

Village councils

Village councils are primary decision-making bodies at a local level, established by the LGA Act of 1982. They enact regulations to meet the unique needs of their respective villages and play a crucial role in driving CDPs. As noted by John and Kabote (2017), village councils ensure the resolution of land conflicts and maintain control over decision-making within their villages. Additionally, Ringo (2023) highlights their responsibility in promoting community development and ensuring the sustainability of projects. In this study, village councils referred to local administrative bodies established by the LGA Act of 1982, playing a vital role in decision-making, enacting regulations, and driving community development within their villages, particularly in the context of CDPs.

Community-driven projects

Community-driven projects are initiatives led by a local community to address specific development needs. They encompass a range of projects, including community health clinics, vocational training centres, water supply systems, and irrigation schemes. These projects contribute to improved access to essential services, increased income generation, and enhanced social cohesion, as stated by KDC (2013). Nwoba and Michael (2016) emphasise that CDPs prioritize transparency, participation, and local empowerment through collaboration between

communities and stakeholders. This collaboration leads to enhanced accountability, improved local capacity, and greater socio-economic progress. In this study, CDPs referred to initiatives driven by a local community to address specific development needs. They prioritize transparency, participation, and local empowerment, resulting in improved access to essential services, increased income generation, and enhanced social cohesion.

Project management

Project management refers to the process that involves different activities such as initiating, planning, executing, controlling, and closing projects in a systematic and coordinated manner to achieve specific goals and objectives (PMI, 2021). It also involves the use of appropriate project management methodologies and tools to ensure the successful completion of the project within the specified time, budget, and quality (Kerzner, 2017). For the purpose of this study, project management refers to the process and practices employed by village councils in overseeing and coordinating the various aspects of CDPs. It involves making informed decisions, allocating financial resources, implementing accountability measures, and ensuring transparency in the management of CDPs.

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CDD : Community-Driven Development
CDPs : Community Driven Projects
DED : District Executive Director
FGD : Focus Group Discussion
LGA : Local Government Authority
URT : United Republic of Tanzania
VEO : Village Executive Officer

1. INTRODUCTION

Community-driven development (CDD) strategies stand as beacons of hope, celebrated for their transformative potential in fostering local autonomy, alleviating poverty, and nurturing citizen engagement [1]. The World Bank's CDD programmes, epitomizing this approach, place a strong emphasis on engaging communities to enhance transparency, accountability, and local capacity for effective project implementation and decision-making (Wong & Guggenheim, 2018). Within this framework, the intrinsic knowledge and expertise that communities possess in identifying their sustainable development needs are acknowledged and valued [2]. CDD serves as a vital catalyst, equipping communities with resources and information to empower them in steering their own development and enhancing their overall well-being [2]. At the core of CDD are community-driven projects (CDPs), granting communities authority over the development process, resource allocation, and crucial decision-making [3].

Village councils, acting at the grassroots level, emerge as crucial enablers, empowering communities and managing CDPs [4]. They act as local decision-makers, shaping regulations that resonate with the unique needs of their communities [5]. Involving community members in decision-making ensures that projects align with local priorities and aspirations, fostering community ownership and pride while addressing specific challenges and opportunities [6].

Across various African nations, village councils play pivotal roles in local development. Notably, in Nigeria, the implementation of CDD programs has empowered communities by granting them control over decisions and resources, translating into improved livelihoods and sustainable development [7]. Village councils' active involvement in decision-making processes enables communities to identify needs, allocate resources effectively, and implement projects that significantly enhance well-being. In Nigeria, the emphasis on CDPs has positively impacted accountability, local capacity, and socioeconomic progress [8]. These instances underscore the critical role village councils play in promoting transparency within the realm of managing CDPs.

Tanzania's local government system thrives on decentralisation by devolution, championing principles like local autonomy, decentralised

resources management, accountability, transparency, effective service delivery, and democratic participation. Community engagement in project decision-making ensures alignment with local needs and priorities, fostering ownership and support for these initiatives. This decentralised approach empowers grassroots communities with functional responsibilities, powers, and resources to influence local affairs [9]. Village councils are at the forefront of this approach, making essential local decisions and passing laws that meet the unique needs of their communities (Kessale, 2016).

Tanzania honours CDPs and village councils for their pivotal roles in grassroots empowerment and sustainable development. The nation advocates for inclusive and participatory development, tailoring projects to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of its citizens [10]. Village councils, through effective collaboration and engagement, can drive positive change, promote social cohesion, and enhance the well-being of Tanzanian communities [11].

Community-driven projects, such as community health clinics, vocational training centres, water supply systems, and irrigation schemes, epitomise the positive impact of CDPs on local development and community well-being in Kilombero District [12]. Successful CDPs significantly enhance access to essential services, income, and social cohesion (Esenaliev et al., 2017), underlining their importance in local development and community empowerment.

Nevertheless, despite the achievements, CDP management is riddled with challenges. Issues such as poor financial resource management, limited decision-making capabilities, unaccountability, and insufficient transparency can result in failures and ineffective management of the CDP (Wong & Guggenheim, 2018). The insufficiency of government support, poor stakeholder coordination, and difficulties in mobilising resources for long-term maintenance compound these issues, affecting both community members and the village councils (Carrick-Hagenbarth, 2021).

While village councils' roles in local government development, rural community livelihoods, and community participation in CDPs have been studied [13] (Chaligha, 2014), a critical gap exists in understanding their specific contributions to transparency in CDPs management, with limited

empirical information available [11,14]. Investigating transparency practices by village councils in CDP management is crucial, benefiting policymakers, local authorities, and community members and ultimately enhancing CDPs. This study aimed to unveil the transparency practices of village councils in CDPs management in Mlimba District Council of Morogoro, Tanzania.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Review of Theoretical Literature

This study was underpinned by Participatory Development Theory, which emphasizes local community participation in development project decision-making, planning, and execution. All of the theory's three elements are enhanced by transparency [15,16]. Top-down development ignored local contexts and needs, prompting this theory. It gained popularity in the 1970s and 1980s due to criticisms of traditional development paradigms. The theory emphasizes that communities need external and internal resources to implement development projects. Financial, human, and natural resources are included [15,16]. The theory matches this study's goals of exploring village councils' transparency practices, community engagement, empowerment, and decision-making processes for Community-Driven Projects.

2.2 Review of Empirical Literature

Transparency in the management of CDPs by village councils is a critical aspect that directly influences the success and impact of these initiatives. To enhance transparency, village councils employ various information-sharing techniques that aim to keep community members informed about the objectives, progress, and outcomes of CDPs. One of the primary methods employed is the organization of community meetings and public forums [17]. These gatherings serve as platforms for open communication between village councils and the community. Village councils present updates on the progress of ongoing CDPs, discuss upcoming projects, and seek input and feedback from community members. Through these interactive sessions, community members are well-informed about the projects, and their voices are heard in the decision-making processes. It is a crucial step in ensuring that the management of CDPs aligns with the needs and aspirations of the local population [11].

Another effective method employed is the distribution of newsletters or similar periodic updates [17]. These written communications provide detailed information about the ongoing and upcoming CDPs, financial allocation, progress reports, and success stories. Newsletters reach a broader audience and serve as a reference for community members to understand the trajectory and impact of various projects. They contribute to building trust and credibility in the management of CDPs by village councils [18]. In addition to disseminating information through meetings, forums, and outreach programs, ensuring the availability and accessibility of CDP-related documents is pivotal [19]. Village councils make project-related documents such as proposals, budgets, and progress reports accessible to community members. These documents can be accessed at village council offices, community centres, or online platforms. By providing easy access to relevant documents, village councils promote transparency and allow community members to review and verify project information. This, in turn, ensures informed decision-making and strengthens community confidence in the management of CDPs.

Furthermore, village councils actively engage in awareness campaigns and community outreach programs [14]. These initiatives involve public meetings, educational sessions, and community-led discussions, all designed to educate the community about CDPs and the role they play in local development. These campaigns empower community members by imparting knowledge about their rights, the projects' objectives, and the importance of their active involvement in decision-making. This heightened awareness fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the success of the projects. In summary, transparency in the management of CDPs is a multifaceted effort that involves open communication, active community engagement, accessible project-related information, and educational outreach. Village councils employ a combination of techniques to uphold transparency and ensure that CDPs truly benefit the community they are designed to serve.

2.3 Study Analytical Framework

Fig. 1 presents how transparent practices contribute to the management of CDPs. It illustrates the relationship between independent variables, including transparency practices employed by village councils. The dependent

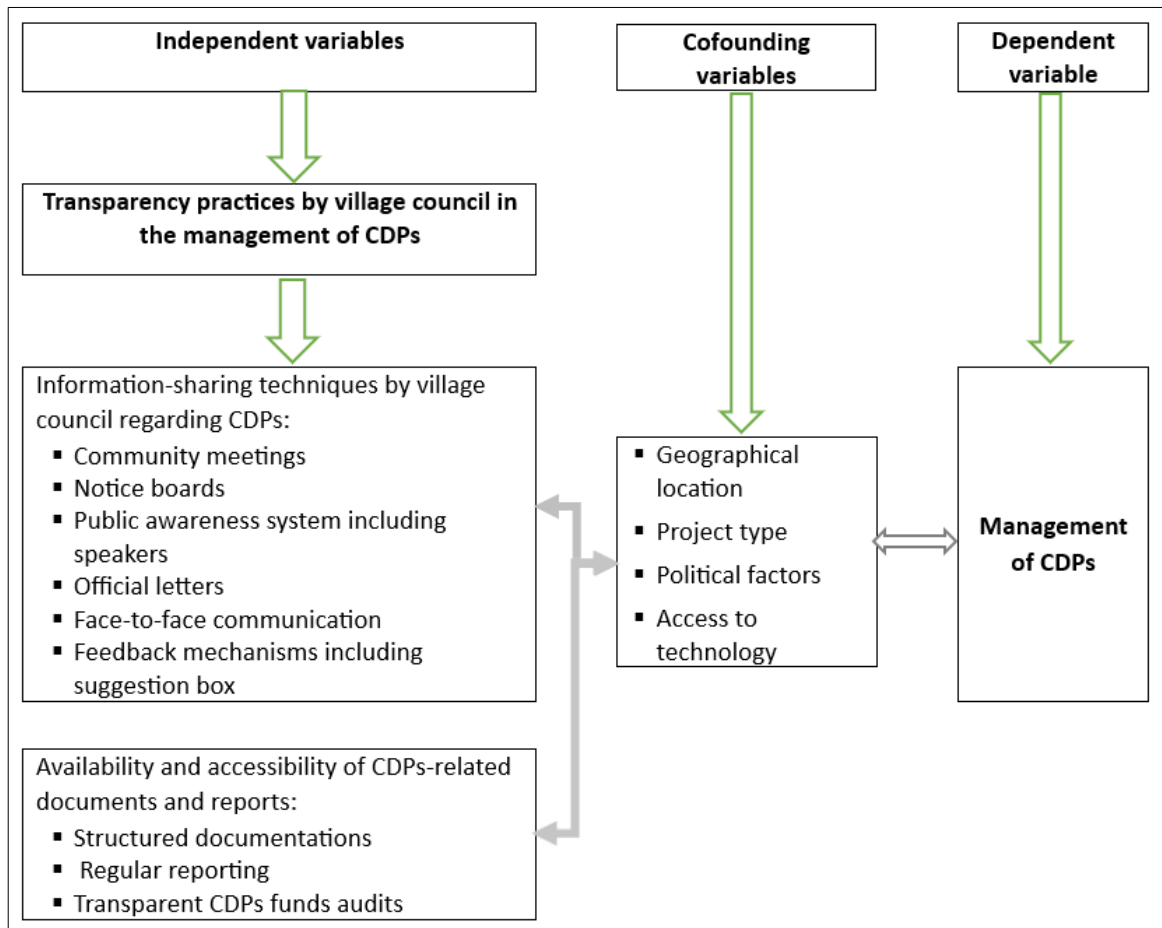


Fig. 1. The analytical framework of this study

Source: Author (2023)

variable is the management of CDPs. In which the confounding variables influence the transparency practices and the management of the CDPs. The framework highlights two indicators to demonstrate how village councils contribute to CDP management.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was conducted in the villages of Chita and Ikule, located in the Chita and Mchombe wards of the Mlimba District Council, located in the Morogoro Region of Tanzania. This study represented an approximate land area of 11,025 square kilometres, as reported by the Kilombero District Council (n.d.). The district of Mlimba, located in the central region of Tanzania, is geographically bordered by the Uluguru Mountains to the east and the Selous Game Reserve to the south. According to the Kilombero District Council (n.d.), the estimated population of the Mlimba district is approximately 292,536

individuals. The rationale for selecting this study area was primarily influenced by its history of successful CDPs, which have consistently resulted in significant and dependable data for research purposes. The study focused on a specific population consisting of village council members and influential community leaders. The objective was to thoroughly investigate transparency practices in the management of CDPs. The research utilized a qualitative approach and employed a Case Study Design to thoroughly investigate the subject matter. The researchers employed purposive sampling as a method to guarantee the inclusion of individuals with specific characteristics among the sample of 24 respondents. The data collection process involved conducting four interviews, two focus group discussions, and utilizing secondary sources. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data, with the aim of ensuring credibility and confirmability through the use of triangulation and recorded interviews.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Information Sharing Techniques Used by Village Councils Regarding CDPs

In CDPs, effective communication is paramount. Village councils utilize various strategies to share crucial information about CDPs to enhance accessibility, understanding, and community engagement, ensuring informed and empowered participation in CDPs:

4.1.1 Building CDPs awareness through community meetings

Village councils play a proactive role in organising community meetings, which include gatherings with the VGAs and Hamlet meetings. It emerged that public assemblies serve as critical platforms for the village councils to share comprehensive information about ongoing and upcoming CDPs. In the case of the construction of a primary school in Chita Village, we had community meetings and among them were convened where the village council chairperson provided updates on the progress of the school project, explained its objectives, and outlined the anticipated benefits for the community. During an interview with the key informant, it was reported that: "...The community meeting was enlightening; the villagers got to know how the school project was progressing..." (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August 2023).

During an interview with a key informant also it was observed that:

...I believe that engaging the community through regular meetings was fundamental to the success of our primary school construction project in Chita Village. These community gatherings allowed us, as the village council, to keep everyone informed about the project's advancements, its goals, and the positive impacts it would bring to our community... (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August, 2023).

4.1.2 Enhancing CDPs transparency through notice boards

Recognizing the importance of visibility and accessibility of project information, village councils have strategically established the use of village office notice boards to disseminate CDPs information. It emerged that these notice boards serve as focal points for the display of updates,

notices, and crucial information related to CDPs, such as displaying the funds received and spent for the construction of the health dispensary project. The village council used this approach to ensure that project updates, key announcements, and relevant details about the health dispensary were easily accessible to the community. During an interview, key informants said that. *"The notice board has been helpful; villagers can access get updates about the health dispensary project at their convenient time"* (Respondent, Ikule Village, 17 August 2023).

The insights shared by a key informant resonate with the significance of utilizing community notice boards, as discussed with the key respondent. The respondent emphasized the importance of visibility and accessibility of project information, which the village council ensured through their strategic use of notice boards at the village office:

...These notice boards served as central hubs for displaying vital updates and information related to the health dispensary construction project, including financial details like funds received and expenditures. The effectiveness of this approach, highlighting how it empowered villagers to access updates about the health dispensary project at their convenience... (Respondent, Ikule Village, 17 August, 2023).

The village council promptly shares project fund updates with the villagers by displaying them on the notice boards within 30 days of receiving the funds. This practice ensures transparency and keeps the villagers informed about the project funds, promoting the early implementation of the project (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August 2023).

4.1.3 Amplifying awareness of CDPs through public advertisement using speakers

In discussions with village councils, it emerged that public speakers are an effective means of disseminating information concerning community development, including updates about CDPs. This strategic approach ensures that information reaches all members of the community, transcending potential barriers such as literacy or accessibility issues. An illustrative example of this effective approach occurred during the construction phase of a primary school in Chita Village. A representative of the village undertook the responsibility of addressing

the community, elucidating the need for active participation in the upcoming events. Specifically, the message urged the youth within the community to partake in the foundational work for the new classrooms at Kaduduma Hamlet. The representative emphasized the communal effort required for the successful construction, encouraging all eligible youth to engage in the digging process. The profound impact of public speakers was highlighted during the interview by one respondent who stated, "...Public speakers make sure everyone in the village is informed about the projects..." (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August 2023). This testimony underscores the significance of employing public speakers in effectively disseminating project-related information and fostering community-wide awareness and engagement in developmental endeavours.

While discussing the impact of the public advertisement using speakers with the key informants, it was noted that:

By utilizing public speakers, we effectively bridged gaps related to literacy or accessibility, making project updates accessible to all community members. This approach facilitated a collective understanding of the project's objectives and the vital role each member could play in actively contributing to the construction process of Chita Primary School at Kaduduma Hamlet. It illuminates the communal spirit and inclusivity fostering a sense of unity and engagement within the community (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August, 2023).

4.1.4 Effective communication through letters with higher authorities

The village councils adopt a formal and documented approach to communication by utilizing letter-writing as a means to communicate with higher authorities such as the DED office. Specifically, in the case of the health dispensary project, the village councils drafted and dispatched formal letters to the DED office, providing detailed information about the forthcoming project and seeking necessary approvals. During interviews with key informants, it was reported that: "...Letters ensure our communication with higher authorities is clear and official..."(Respondent, Ikule Village, 17 August 2023).

4.1.5 Face-to-face information sharing technique to enhance community engagement

Understanding the diverse preferences and circumstances of community members, village councils have recognized the significance of direct face-to-face information exchange. It emerged that this technique holds particular importance for those community members who face challenges in attending community meetings. In response, village representatives engage in personal, face-to-face discussions to update and inform community members about CDPs. For example, in Chita Village, the village council members actively sought out individuals who were unable to attend meetings, engaging with them directly to ensure they were adequately informed about the primary school construction project. An interview with key informants stated that: "...Direct communication is important, it helps villagers understand the project better..." (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August 2023).

In the context of CDPs, effective communication is a cornerstone for ensuring active community involvement and informed participation. The village councils of Chita and Ikule employ a range of strategies to disseminate vital information about CDPs, aiming to enhance accessibility, comprehension, and engagement within the community. Community meetings, a fundamental technique, serve as central platforms for sharing comprehensive project-related information, a practice observed during the construction of a primary school in Chita Village. These gatherings allow the village council to update the community, elucidate project objectives, and emphasize the anticipated benefits, effectively promoting transparency and fostering informed engagement. Similarly, leveraging community notice boards strategically placed at village offices, councils ensure that project updates and relevant announcements, such as financial details for the health dispensary project in Ikule Village, are readily accessible to all community members. This tactic aligns with the need for visibility and accessibility highlighted in prior studies [20].

Furthermore, the use of public speakers as a communication strategy stands out as a powerful tool to transcend barriers like literacy or accessibility issues, as witnessed during the construction phase of a school in Chita Village. This aligns with findings emphasizing the

importance of public forums and open communication [17]. Embracing various communication techniques tailored to community preferences, including face-to-face interactions, the village councils of Chita and Ikule demonstrate a commitment to inclusive and transparent CDP management, aligning with the ideals of community participation outlined by Vasstrøm & Normann [11]. These efforts collectively empower community members, enabling them to actively contribute, provide feedback, and hold village councils accountable for project outcomes, aligning with the goals of enhancing community engagement [14,10,21]. The amalgamation of these diverse strategies underscores the village councils' dedication to transparent communication, effective community involvement, and ultimately successful CDP management.

4.1.6 Regular and transparent progress reporting in CDPs

The village councils emphasize the importance of regular progress reports to keep the community well-informed about the ongoing projects. Basically, a report is required after each meeting regardless of its type whether it was a regular or emergency meeting. However, the village council provides quarterly reports to the public and district apart from the specially requested report. This practice of providing detailed insights into achievements, challenges, and future plans ensures transparency and fosters trust within the community. During the FGD, a village council member underlined this by stating, "*We make it a point to regularly update the community about the progress of the Primary School Construction project. This transparency-built trust and encourages community involvement*" (Respondent, Chita Village, 16 August 2023).

4.1.7 Engaging influential figures for community involvement

Recognizing the significance of community leaders in influencing opinions and decisions, village councils actively involved respected figures like councillors and religious leaders in project discussions and decision-making processes wherever necessary when their influence matters. Their participation not only adds credibility to the information shared but also ensures accurate dissemination within the community. A village council member expressed this perspective during the FGD by stating:

...Having our councilor, religious leaders, and traditional healers involved in discussions about the Health Dispensary project ensures that the information is received with trust and authenticity and disseminated further without a formal village gathering through village leaders... (Respondent, Ikule Village, 18 August 2023).

4.1.8 Enhancing participation through feedback mechanisms

Village councils prioritize establishing accessible feedback mechanisms to encourage community participation and gather valuable insights. Suggestion boxes are a common approach, enabling community members to share their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions regarding CDPs. During the FGD, a village council member emphasized the importance of such mechanisms, saying, "*...We encourage the community to use suggestion boxes to share their thoughts on the Primary School Construction project. Their feedback helps us make informed decisions...*" (Respondent, Chita Village, 16 August 2023). These mechanisms empower the community and guide informed decision-making processes, reflecting a sense of community ownership and collaboration.

The strategies employed by village councils in ensuring transparent communication and information sharing regarding CDPs are fundamental for promoting community engagement and informed decision-making. The emphasis on regular progress reports, quarterly updates, and timely meetings, as evidenced in this study, resonates with the findings of Anosisye [9] regarding the exercise of fiscal decision-making authority in local government authorities in Tanzania. The practice of involving influential community leaders, such as councilors and religious figures, in decision-making processes, aligns with Wafirotin et al. [22] exploration of initiatives to improve transparency and accountability in the budget process. Additionally, the establishment of feedback mechanisms like suggestion boxes, as highlighted in this study, is reminiscent of the call for improved transparency and accountability discussed by Gilmore et al. [17]. These linkages underscore the relevance and effectiveness of the strategies employed by village councils, aligning with broader efforts to enhance transparency and community involvement in governance and development processes.

4.2 Availability and Accessibility of CDPs Related Documents and Reports

This section examines the accessibility and availability of documents and reports related to CDPs, shedding light on the transparency and information dissemination practices employed by village councils in this domain.

4.2.1 Structured documentation to enhance transparency and accountability in CDPs

The village council demonstrated a structured approach to documenting and archiving project-related information. During the FGD, it emerged that the village council has standardized procedures, including specific steps such as meetings with required quorums, voting systems to document issues, agreement on voted issues, and detailed recording of agreed decisions. This meticulous documentation ensures consistency and ease of access for authorized personnel, promoting a transparent project management process. During the interview, a key informant highlighted this structured approach by stating, "*Our documented procedures help us maintain consistency and transparency in managing the Primary School Construction project. Everyone knew the agreed decisions, which fosters accountability*" (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August 2023).

4.2.2 Public availability and regular reporting in CDPs

Transparency is a key principle in the management of CDPs by village councils. The village councils ensure the availability of non-confidential project documents and reports to the public through designated community VGAs, village offices, and notice boards. Regular project reports are generated and shared with stakeholders, including the community members, ward, and district. This practice of making information accessible and sharing regular updates provides insights into the project's progress and outcomes, instilling a sense of transparency. In the interview, a key informant emphasized this approach, stating, "*...Regular reporting keeps the community informed about the Health Dispensary project. It was essential for building trust and fostering community engagement...*" (Respondent, Ikule Village, 17 August 2023).

4.2.3 Regular audits for transparent CDPs funding utilization

Ensuring financial integrity and compliance, village councils conduct both regular internal audits and undergo external audits by appointed auditors from the Local Government Audit Authority (LGAA) at the district level. Internal audits involve a thorough review of financial records, operations, and compliance with laws and regulations by the council's internal audit committee. It emerged that external audits by LGAA assess the financial statements and accounts of the village councils, ensuring compliance with financial regulations and accounting standards. This dual audit process enhances transparency and accountability in the utilization of project funds. During the interview, a key informant stressed the significance of these audits by stating, "*...Our regular audits keep us accountable for the funds allocated to the Primary School Construction project. It is a vital aspect of ensuring transparency and responsible use of resources...*" (Respondent, Chita Village, 15 August 2023).

During FGD with members of a village council, it was noted that:

... it became evident that our rigorous documentation and frequent audits weren't just about financial integrity. They also served as a tool for self-reflection, guiding us to improve our approach in overseeing the Primary School Construction project... (Respondent, Ikule Village, 18 August, 2023).

In focusing on the availability and accessibility of CDP-related documents, the village council in this study displayed a structured and meticulous approach. Standardized procedures were adopted, encompassing specific steps such as formal meetings with required quorums, defined voting systems for documenting issues, arriving at agreements on voted matters, and maintaining comprehensive records of these decisions. This structured documentation process ensures consistency and facilitates ease of access for authorized personnel, underscoring a transparent project management process. This aligns with the findings of January [13] regarding the importance of structured procedures within village councils to ensure transparency and consistency in local government development initiatives. Additionally, the practice of ensuring public availability, regular reporting, and sharing of non-confidential project documents and

reports was highlighted as a fundamental principle in managing CDPs. This approach resonates with the insights from Brown and Dillard [19], emphasizing that providing accessible project-related documents promotes transparency and informed decision-making within the community. Moreover, the emphasis is on conducting regular internal and external audits to ensure financial integrity and compliance align with established practices, highlighting accountability and transparency in resource allocation and utilization [13,23]. The testimonials from council members in the FGDs emphasized the significance of these audits, further reinforcing the commitment to transparency and responsible resource management in the context of CDPs [24-33].

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, transparent communication and community involvement are pivotal for successful CDPs led by village councils. The study showcases varied communication strategies tailored to address local challenges, such as community meetings and notice boards for accessibility. Public speakers bridge literacy gaps, while in-person engagement ensures inclusivity. Transparent project management through structured documentation, regular reporting, and financial audits enhance accountability. To further engage the community, involve influential figures, implement feedback mechanisms, and promote collective decision-making. These practices underscore the significance of diverse communication, openness, and community involvement, aligning with sustainable development goals and promoting successful CDPs.

5.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that: (i) village councils maintain and continue to implement current transparency measures while enhancing and broadening their communication strategies. This may entail leveraging social media and digital platforms to effectively engage a wider audience, particularly the younger demographic. (ii) village council members undergo regular communication and community engagement training in order to enhance their current capabilities. Forming a subcommittee within the village council team with a specific focus on

enhancing transparency and communication strategies has the potential to strengthen these initiatives (iii) Further investigation should be conducted to find out the impact of communication strategies on long-term community engagement and project outcomes. (iv) research examining the impact of cultural and social dynamics on communication within diverse communities could contribute to the development of context-specific strategies.

CONSENT

As per international research standards, Participants' written consents were collected and preserved by the author.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical considerations were crucial with measures including obtaining a research permit, respecting the rights and welfare of the respondents, invasion of privacy, informed consent, and confidentiality of information provided by the respondents.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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