

ANALYSIS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: THE CASE OF WARDAK PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN

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Biographical Note

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Abstract

Community participation has been a vital factor for the success and sustainability of development programmes. Community participation is *sine qua non* for developmental projects. Therefore, this research was conducted to assess the level of community participation in developmental projects, identify promoting factors of participation, and determine the affecting factor of community participation in Wardak, Afghanistan. Data were collected from 400 people by using face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions in the targeted area. For data collection, the multi-stage sampling method was applied. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods such as tabulations, graphs, arithmetic mean, and ratio. The study found out that the level of community participation was low in the case of Saydabad and Nirkh districts while it was moderate in the case of Markazi Behsud district. In addition, the study identified that financial benefits, material incentives, gaining new skills, serving the community, previous experience, interest for development, and receiving prestige were the promoting factors of people's participation. Several factors influenced community participation such as security challenges, lack of awareness, sex, income, cultural factors, low capacity of community development councils (CDCs) members, high illiteracy rate of beneficiaries, and local leaders' interferences. The study recommends that the government and

implementing NGOs create public awareness regarding developmental projects and provide consistent training for beneficiaries. Furthermore, the implementing agencies should cut off the interferences of local leaders and give chance to all strata of the communities.

Keywords: Community, Development, Participation, Sustainability

JEL Classification: Q01, R1, F63,

1. Introduction

Participatory development approaches have been gaining momentum since the mid-nineties, when most of the top-down development approaches failed to meet the needs and expectations of the most marginalized and disadvantaged strata of the societies. Top-down approaches ignore the participation of beneficiaries in the planning and execution of the development projects. (Salari, 2014). Therefore, “in most countries, top-down policies caused the isolation of the people, increased poverty, social, and economic inequalities, and deprivation.” (Salari, 2014, p. 1). Likewise, Chambers, Todaro and other scholars argued that top-down approaches failed to incorporate the ideas, experiences, and contributions of local communities, which resulted in them not feeling like equal partners in development efforts (Jacob and Bernard, 2014). Therefore, the bottom-up paradigm was raised as an alternative to using the endogenous sources and experiences of local communities.

Further, the concept of participation is not a new phenomenon. It has existed in different cultures throughout history. In ancient Athens, decisions regarding policy and other important issues were made intentionally. In public affairs, every male citizen had a chance to state his opinion. In Buddhism and Hinduism, public discussion and deliberation have been seen as a superior form of discourse (Sen, 2005, cited Mansuri - Rao, 2012). In Islam, the Holy Quran also emphasizes that communal affairs and any other decision should be decided by mutual consultation (Shura)¹. In addition, the concept of participation in community development dates back to colonial times. In colonial Africa, Zulu chiefs could not decide without first consulting their councils (Mansouri - Rao, 2012).

Though, the concept of participation in development come to be popularized in the 1990s after the World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD) which was held in Rome, Italy in the late 1970s (Cornwall, 2006). After WCARRD, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the issue of participation was widely accepted in general development and gradually in rural development by governments, donors, and international organizations (Salari, 2014).

¹ Shura in Islam is a gathering of people who decide affairs in mutual consultation.

Furthermore, community participation is a vital element of development projects, and the level of community participation determines the success or failure of the project. (Salari, 2017). First, community participation can contribute to the achievement of four primary objectives of rural development projects; effectiveness, efficiency, empowerment, and equity (Narayan, 1995). Next, intended participants are important because people are the ones who can decide to continue or stop the use of services created by projects. Therefore, authentic stakeholders' participation could be a crucial factor in enhancing rural development projects (Oakley, 1991; AusAID, 2000). In addition, the direct participation of people helps to the sustainability of projects; beneficiaries will learn new skills and techniques and be able to work for their societies and people. (Salari, 2017).

The agriculture and livestock sectors play a vital role in the rural economy of Afghanistan. According to the NSIA report (2020), the estimated rural population was 23.4 million (71%) where agriculture is the primary activity and the only mainstay for their livelihood. Despite the many challenges, only the agriculture sector contributes a quarter of the country's GDP.

In addition, the country was exhausted by decades of war, revolutions, and political instability and conflicts. Due to the past three decades of war Afghanistan had lost social and economic infrastructures, millions of people migrated, and most Afghans experienced internal displacement (Rahimi, 2013). After three decades of war, the Afghan government, with the help of the International Community in 2001, started new development programmes to rebuild the country. These programmes have had some positive impacts on the livelihood and poverty reduction of the rural communities, but people were not satisfied. According to the SIGAR (2021) report, the U.S. government has spent over 145 billion dollars to reconstruct the governmental institutions, civil society and economy. But in the end, the Afghan government collapsed, and the Taliban returned to power. Despite all these efforts, above 90% of the entire population live under the poverty line, thousands of people left the country and thousands more scrambling to flee the country. One of the key challenges was the lack of participation, the Afghan context was not understood and most projects were imposed on people, as a result, billions of dollars were wasted.

To sum up, Zakhilwal and Thomas (2005), suggest that for lasting peace and stability, the government and donors should apply participatory policies. This will provide a chance to those people and layers of the communities who were mostly excluded. "Especially women who have historically been victims of imbalanced development." (Salari, 2014, p. 2). Moreover, the country's economic, social, and political context should be well analyzed, the tradition, beliefs and values of the people should be respected.

2. Literature review

There is plenty of research on community participation, but in Afghanistan critical literature is relatively rare on this topic. The literature shows that the level of community participation is varied with respect to region, people, implementation policies, and other factors. Salari (2014) researched people's participation in rural development projects in Afghanistan, where 100 people were surveyed through random sampling. The result showed that people's participation was low to moderate and several factors were recognized as affecting factors such as gender, income, security, and implementing policy. Likewise, Sibiya (2010) carried out a study on community participation trends in the rural development process in KawaZulu-Natal. Seventy people were surveyed, through both a questionnaire and focus group discussion methods. The study found that people in rural communities have insufficient knowledge of community participation. Therefore, there was a lack of community participation and decisions were taken by the municipality. Similarly, Josiah et al. (2019) studied community participation and rural development in Nasarawa State of Nigeria. Questionnaire and focus discussion group instruments were used for data collection. The research results stated that there was a positive correlation between community participation and rural development.

However, people's participation works as a heart that pumps the community's lifeblood (Aigbavboa and Thwala, 2011). Community participation is undoubtedly vital for the development process. However, dozens of internal and external factors, including social, political, and economic factors, influence community participation. Kwena (2013) researched factors which affect community participation in Narok County of Kenya. Data were collected through document analysis and hundred community members were interviewed. The studying findings showed that lack of awareness was the major factor that affects community participation. The study recommended that the government and other stakeholders should create an enabling environment and awareness for the local community to fully take part in the development initiatives. Public awareness is not the only factor that affects community participation, but several other factors influence people's participation. Tesha. et al. (2014) investigated factors influencing community participation in public development projects in Tanzania. The study revealed that there is a positive correlation between political will, access to information, civic education, and participation.

Brahmi and Thakur (2011) investigated factors influencing people's participation in a development project in Himachal Pradesh. A survey was conducted for data collection with a total of 428 farmers and 71 project personnel which were interviewed. Respondents indicated a total of 22 factors that influenced their participation, where 18 were socio-economic. The major factors were: lack of awareness regarding programmes, unfavorable economic conditions, high illiteracy rate, lack of visits, lack of interest in money contribution, bureaucratic behaviour of the officials, interference

of the politics, and lack of transparency. Similarly, Faham, Hosseini and Darvish (2008) conducted a study to analyze the factors influencing rural people's participation in the national action plan for sustainable management of land and water resources in Iran. A questionnaire method was administered for data collection, a total of 60 household heads being surveyed. The findings showed that the size of households, times of visiting towns, previous participation in projects, awareness regarding the impact of natural resources degradation, relation with experts and visit of same projects were the key factors that influenced rural people's participation.

Further, active community participation is a crucial factor for projects' success and sustainability. Several researchers found a positive and significant correlation between people's participation and projects' success and sustainability. Narayan (1995) argued that people's participation can contribute to the achievement of four principal objectives of rural development projects, namely effectiveness, efficiency, empowerment and equity. Oakley (1995) reviewed theories and practices of people's participation in development projects. Participation implies a greater chance that the resources available for development projects will be used more efficiently and also participation will make projects more effective as an instrument of development. It will also enhance the self-reliance of the participants and will extend the coverage of the project's benefits.

Participation is a critical factor for the enhancement of sustainability because it depends on the stakeholders' role, especially those directly concerned with the programmes or projects. For instance, government and implementing agencies and those who will receive the benefit. Moreover, sustainability cannot be achieved without community involvement and support, enthusiastic participation of men and women can influence the direction, design, and implementation of the project (Austrian Agency for International Development, 2000). Projects are more sustainable which are initiated with people and implemented by people, compared to those imposed on people. Hence, people's participation is a must factor for the sustainability of the projects because people improve skills for collective action, maintenance, and sustainability throughout the project (Olukotun, 2008).

Chhetri (2013) argues that people's active participation makes officials aware of the community's problems and ensures efficient and smooth implementation of projects. He added that direct participation of people in different stages of the project, especially in implementation, ensures transparency and accountability that helps the sustainability of the projects. Similarly, Noori (2017) studied community participation in the sustainability of development projects in the case of National Solidarity Programme Afghanistan. The study found that participatory techniques and approaches have a positive impact on project sustainability. Participatory planning, design, implementation, need assessment, and monitoring and evaluation respectively have a positive impact on the projects' sustainability.

To sum up, community participation is an important factor, but the level of participation varies from community to community. Several factors affect community participation, such as economic factors, social and cultural factors and political factors. Furthermore, active community participation can lead to the projects' sustainability and success of the development initiatives.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study area

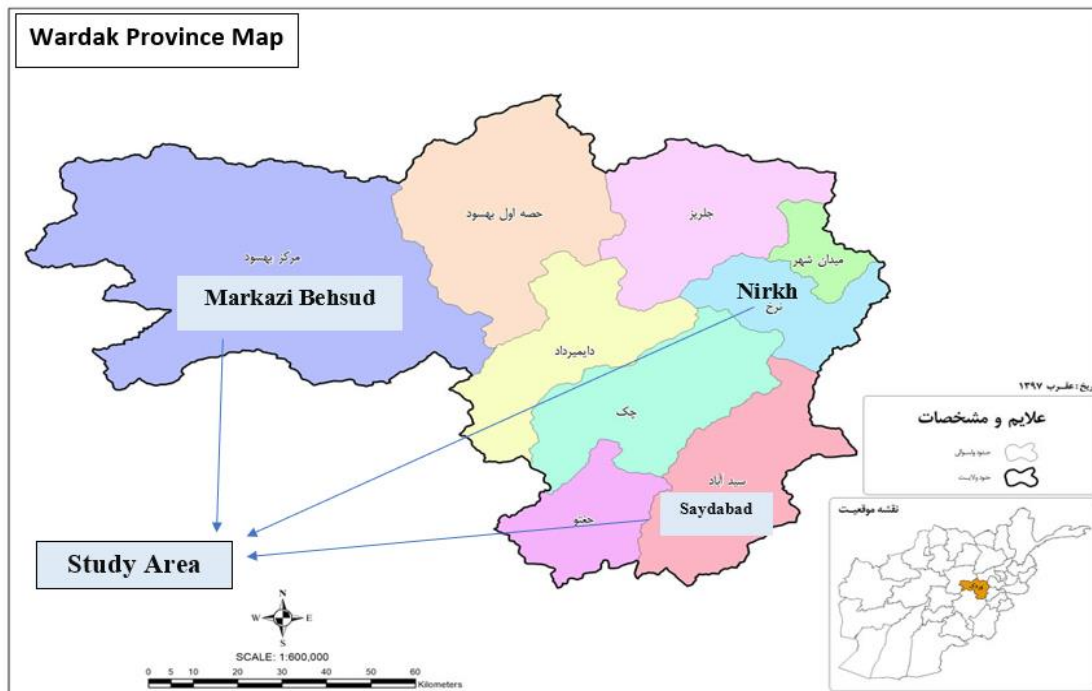
This study was conducted in Wardak province. Wardak is one of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan and is located in the central zone of the country. Based on NSIA (2020/21) annual report, the total area of the province is 10348.3 Km², which covers 1.6% of the total area of the country. The estimated population is 656,720, and the density of the settled population is 61 people per square kilometer. The majority of people in Wardak province live in rural areas (NSIA, 2021). Wardak province has eight districts, Saydabad, Chak, Nirkh, Day Mirdad, Jalrez, Jaghato, Markazi Behsud, Hesa-i- Awal Bihsud, and Midan Shahar is the center of the province.

Saydabad is one of the main and biggest districts in terms of population. Based on the NSIA (2020) the total population of the districts is 131,264 people. Saydabad district has a strategic location in which the Kabul-Kandahar highway crosses this district, and most of the families reside along this highway. The district covers 1165,7 km², and is situated 2400 meters above sea level. Based on IDLG (2021) Saydabad district has six valleys and a total of 173 villages.

Nirkh is an agricultural district, located near the centre of the province. The majority of the population is engaged in agricultural activities. Apple, apricot, peach, cherry and tomato are the major cultivated plants of this district. According to NSIA, the total population is estimated at 64,436 people and covers a 594.9 km² area (NSIA, 2020). Based on the IDLG database, this district has 148 villages.

Markazi Behsud is the largest district of the province in terms of area. The majority of the residents are Hazara ethnic, agriculture is the mainstay of livelihood. The total area of the district is 3094.9 Km², and the total population reported is 134,852 people. Markazi Behsud district has 781 villages (NSIA, 2020 and IDLG, 2021). This district was a peaceful district of Afghanistan for the past 20 years. Due to this fact, several development projects were implemented by multiple organizations.

Figure 1. Wardak province study area (Saydabad, Nirkh and Markazi Behsud districts)



Source: Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) 2016

3.2. Data collection methods

Data for the current study were collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and focus discussion groups. The schedule was used for the interview. The interview schedule covered three major areas: people’s perception toward community participation, level of participation, and challenges of community participation. The study sample was selected using a multistage random sampling procedure. First, these districts were purposely selected for the study, thereafter the villages were randomly selected. A total of 400 people were selected for the study. Since the community is conservative, women are rarely allowed to take part in development initiatives. So, only 60 women were included in the sample. Secondary data were collected from various national and international sources. Also, written reports of the organizations, previous research, national databases and books were used for this study.

Table 1. Sample size of the study

No	Districts	Sample size		
		Male	Female	Total
1	Saydabad	140	15	155
2	Nirkh	120	40	160
3	Markazi Behsud	80	5	85
Total		340	60	400

3.3. Data analysis techniques

The data were collected and entered into sheets by the researcher. Extensive and deep cleaning and editing of the data were conducted during the data entry and after its completion. Finally, the data were made ready for analysis and producing results. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics methods such as simple arithmetic mean, ratio (percentages), total, frequency distribution. Subsequently, the data were presented via graphs, tables, and charts. For measuring the level of participation, Pretty's typology of participation was used.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Socio-economic background of the participants

Wardak is a conservative community where women are rarely allowed to work outside, even they cannot talk with males except their relatives. As a result, 87.5% of the respondents were male while only 12.5% were female. The study covers a diverse group of people, the age of the respondents is reported in Table 2. It appears from the table that the majority of the respondents (40.75%) are 46-60 years old, followed by 31-45 years old (26.75%), above 61 years old (19.75%) and the rest (12.75%) are 16-30 years old. The majority of the households are headed by aged people and they mostly have involvement in development related activities.

Furthermore, the majority of the respondents are illiterate or had informal education. The educational background of the respondents is reported in Table 2. It is obvious from the table that the majority of the respondents have no formal education (58%), followed by secondary school (15%), primary school (13.75%), high school (8.25%), and bachelor or above (5%).

In addition, farming is the major source of livelihood, as most of the population is engaged in agricultural activities. The main occupation of the respondents is farming (72.25%). The remaining are reported to be school teachers (5.5%), government employees (3%) and the rest (19.25%) are engaged in small businesses.

Table 2. Socio-economic profile of the respondents

Variables	Options	Saydabad	Nirkh	Markazi Behsud	Overall
Gender	Male	90.32 (140)	94.12 (80)	75.00 (120)	85.00 (340)
	Female	9.68 (15)	5.88 (5)	25.00 (40)	15.00 (60)
	16-30	12.26	9.41	15	12.75

		(19)	(8)	(24)	(12)
	31-45	30.97	28.24	21.88	26.75
Age		(48)	(24)	(35)	(107)
	46-60	40.00	38.82	42.50	40.75
		(62)	(33)	(68)	(163)
	61>	16.77	23.53	20.63	19.75
		(26)	(20)	(33)	(79)
Education	No-formal education	50.96	50.59	68.75	58.00
		(79)	(43)	(110)	(232)
	Primary School	14.19	22.35	8.75	13.75
		(22)	(19)	(14)	(55)
	Secondary School	16.12	18.82	11.87	15.00
		(25)	(16)	(19)	(60)
	High School	10.96	4.71	7.50	8.25
		(17)	(4)	(12)	(33)
	Bachelor or above	7.74	3.53	3.12	5.00
		(12)	(3)	(5)	(20)
Occupation	Farming	76.77	72.94	65.00	71.25
		(199)	(62)	(104)	(285)
	Education	7.74	10.59	15.63	11.50
		(12)	(9)	(25)	(46)
	Governmental	3.87	9.41	7.50	6.50
		(6)	(8)	(12)	(26)
	Small Business	11.61	7.06	11.88	10.75
		(18)	(6)	(19)	(43)

Source: Own analysis, survey conducted in Wardak province in 2021

Note: Figures in brackets denote the number of observations for the corresponding variable.

4.2. Level of community participation in the projects

Dauids et al. (2019) stated that community participation in development initiatives contributes to capacity building, which leads to efficiency and effectiveness in the process of identifying, implementing, monitoring and evaluating of development initiatives. A project can be sustained when the beneficiaries are directly involved in the project cycle; they will be trained throughout the project and could work for their community in the future. Meaningful participation leads to the projects' acceptability, community mobilization and ensures projects' sustainability. Without community involvement, projects will not realize the actual needs and expectations of the people. In addition, community participation builds a sense of ownership. Therefore, community participation is one of the vital factors for the success of the development projects. People should take part in the entire cycle of a project. Tables 3 and 4. Shows community participation in the projects cycle for all three districts.

Table 3. Male respondents' participation in the projects

Project phases	Saydabad district	Nirakh District	Markazi Behsud	Overall
Decision Making	20.00 (28)	16.25 (13)	45.00 (54)	27.94 (95)
Planning	5.70 (8)	8.75 (7)	25.00 (30)	13.24 (45)
Execution	50.00 (70)	40.00 (32)	75.00 (90)	56.47 (192)
M&E	13.60 (19)	17.50 (14)	37.50 (45)	22.94 (78)
Closure	2.10 (3)	2.50 (2)	7.50 (9)	4.12 (14)

Source: Own calculation based on the survey Wardak province 2021

Note: Figures in brackets denote the number of observations for the corresponding variable.

Community participation in the development projects is reported in Table 3. The table exposes that community participation is varied at the district level due to the socio-cultural characteristics of the districts. As stated in the previous parts, Pashtuns live in Saydabad and Nirakh districts while in Markazi Behsud district Hazara ethnic group live, which differs from socio-cultural perspectives. Pashtun people are conservative and strict to cultural affairs, but Hazara people are open-minded. They allow girls and women to study and work outside.

In the case of Saydabad and Nirakh districts, community participation is low, especially in the crucial stages (decision making and planning). Where active community participation in the decision making and planning phases are very important. Participation will only gain full meaning when the people fully participate in the planning and implementation phases of the development projects (Mubita et al., 2017). This study shows that community participation in the case of all three districts is low in the first and last phases, in the case of Markazi Behsud district, the level of participation is relatively better.

Table 3 shows that almost 28% of the respondents participated in the decision-making process, 13.24% in planning, 56.47% in the implementation stage, 22.94% in monitoring and evaluation, and only 4.12% of respondents took part in the closing of the projects. Community participation in the implementation phase of the projects is relatively high, about 57% of respondents stated that they were directly involved in the implementation phase of the projects. In this phase of the projects, the community provides labour that will be paid for physical activities. This kind of participation has short-term benefits. The government should provide them with a chance to participate in the complete cycle of the projects, which will have a long-term impact on their

livelihood. Furthermore, the result demonstrated that community participation was low in the monitoring and evaluation phase. The people were rarely involved in the monitoring activities. In order to meet the needs and expectations of the rural people, the development should focus on the active participation of the people.

Table 4. Female participation in the development projects

Project phases	Saydabad district	Nirkh District	Markazi Behsud	Overall
Decision Making	13.30	20.00	20.00	18.33
Planning	20.00	20.00	7.50	11.67
Execution	60.00	60.00	67.50	65.00
M&E	13.30	40.00	22.50	21.67
Closure	6.7	20.00	5.00	6.67

Source: Own calculation based on the survey Wardak province 2021

Female respondents' participation is reported in Table 4. Research findings indicate that there is low participation of women in the development projects. In the case of Nirkh and Saydabad districts, participation is low. In the case of Markazi Behsud district, women's involvement is relatively better. Table 4 demonstrates that 18.33% of the women respondents were involved in decision making followed by planning (11.67%), implementation (65%), monitoring and evaluation (21.76%) and closure (6.67%).

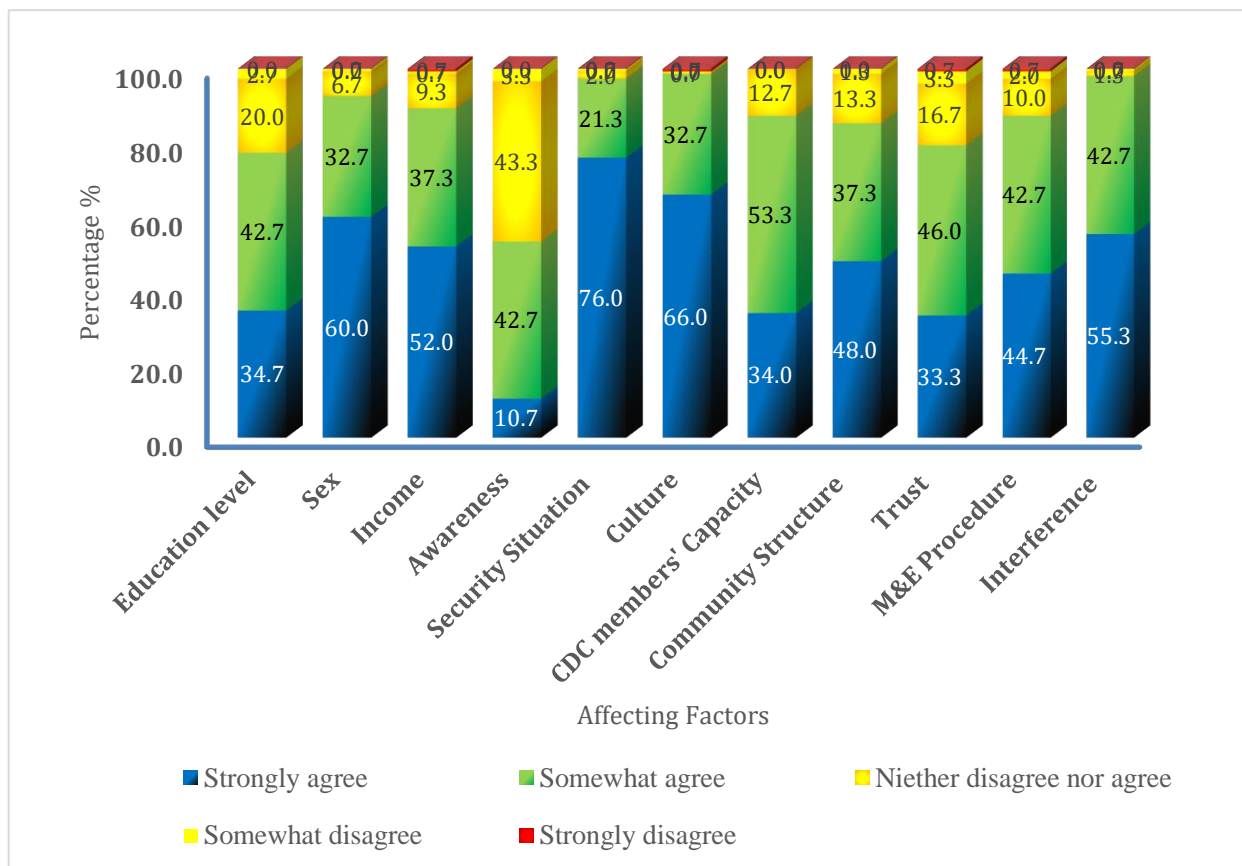
There are several typologies and tools for identifying the level of participation, such as Arnstein ladder of participation, which has six rungs from manipulation to citizen power, or Pretty's typology of participation, which comprises seven degrees from manipulative participation to self-mobilization. Also, Oakley (1991) distinguishes participation in three broad different classes, which include participation as a contributor, as an organizer and as empowering. CARE international developed a typology that has five stages: passive participation, non-participatory, negotiation participation, spontaneous participation and active participation. All the above typologies have some advantages and disadvantages. In this study, the level of participation is scaled based on the Pretty's typology which has been used worldwide.

In the case of Wardak province based on the Pretty's typology of participation, the level of participation is ranked as functional participation, which is the fifth step. Here, the agencies tried to achieve the project goals, reduce the costs. The people were involved to meet the predetermined objectives of the projects. The communities were involved in the decisions, but the key decisions were made by the main stakeholders (government and NGOs).

4.3. Factors affecting community participation

Participatory activities take place in a social context and in groups. So, several factors affect community participation such as political, social, cultural, spatial, and temporal. Hence, “to ensure successful participation, there is need to contextualize it within the existing local environment” (Mubita et al. 2017, p 239). Likewise, from an individual’s point of view, this study found that several factors affect community participation shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Factors affecting community participation in Saydabad and Nirkh districts



Source: own analysis based on the survey Wardak province 2021

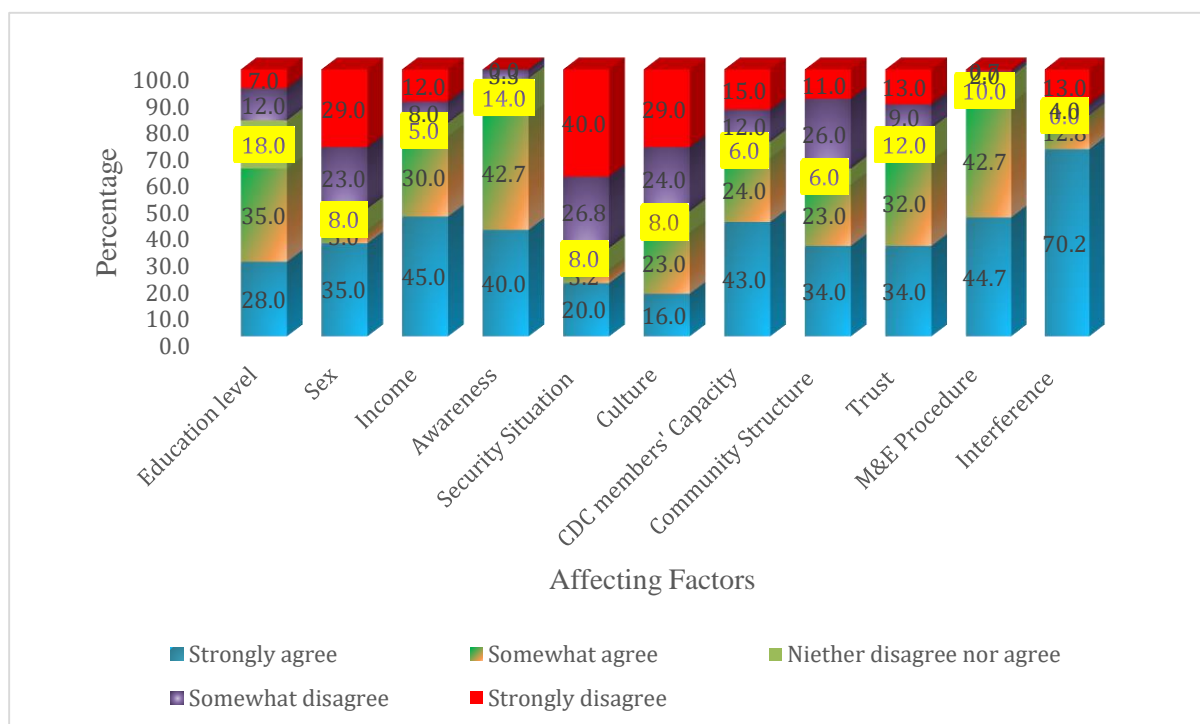
The above graph demonstrates the factors affecting community participation in Saydabad and Nirkh districts. People noticed that mainly eleven factors affect their participation in development projects. The key factors are security situation followed by culture, sex, interferences of authorities, income, community structure, lack of trust among people, M&E procedure, education level of the respondents, and lack of public awareness regarding projects. According to the people, security

situation and cultural customs are the major factors that affect their participation. According to the local individuals, armed groups prohibit them from participating in development projects.

Moreover, socio-cultural factors affect community participation. These two districts are conservative and the majority of the families do not allow women to study and work outside. About 85% of people mentioned that socio-cultural factors affect community participation. Women rarely engaged in the development initiatives; especially young women are not allowed to take part in the development projects.

The scenario is different in the Markazi Behsud district the Figure 3, demonstrates the factors affecting community participation in this district.

Figure 3. Factors affecting community participation in Markazi Behsud district



Source: own analysis based on the survey Wardak province 2021

Figure 3, shows that local leaders' interference, community structure, monitoring and evaluation procedure, income, CDC members' capacity, education level, awareness and sex have a profound impact on community involvement, while security and culture have less influence on community participation. Though the security situation is stable in this district as people can take part in the development projects with no fear. Likewise, cultural factors do not affect community

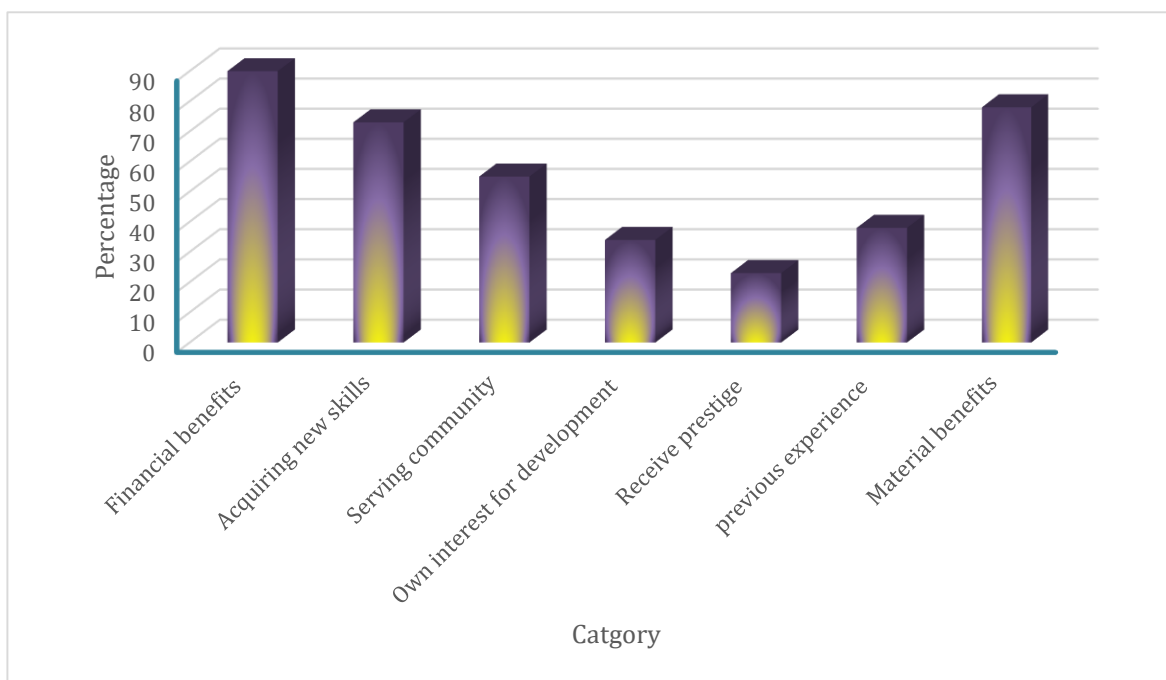
participation. Hazara people are more open as they allow women and young girls to study and work outside.

Women are the disadvantaged and marginalized layer of the Afghan community. Women are rarely allowed to take part in the decisions which affect their lives. However, according to the survey in Markazi Behsud district, women's participation was about 87% in the rural development projects.

4.4. Factors promoting community participation

Community mobilization is undeniably important for people's motivation. Rural people are passive and they expect from government and donors to provide living facilities for them. This spoon-feeding habit hurts rural communities. It is important to work *with* them not work *for* them. Therefore, rural people should be encouraged to participate in the development initiatives and work for themselves. This study sought to ask the motivation of people's participation in the development projects. The promoting factors are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Factors that promote community participation



Source: own analyses based on survey, 2021

Figure 4 shows that people mentioned seven major factors which promote their participation in the projects. Maraga (2010) found that there was a strong and positive relationship between community participation and the benefits which people receive from projects. Likewise, in this study, 90% of the respondents stated that they took part because of the financial benefits. Further, 78% participated in material incentives. About 73% participated to learn new skills, mostly agricultural

projects provide training for the participants. Moreover, 55% of people participated to serve their community, 38% mentioned previous experience, followed by 34% own interest, and 23% for acquiring prestige in the community.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Community participation has been identified as an important element for the sustainability of rural development projects. Governments, NGOs, and donors seek to involve local communities in rural development projects, but this approach is often faced with problems in developing countries. A small number exist in communities that monopolize vital decisions and hinder the community's hidden potential and ability.

However, this study was conducted in Wardak province to analyze community participation in the development projects. The results show that community participation is low in the case of Saydabad and Nirkh districts, while it is moderate in the case of Markazi Behsud district. Saydabad and Nirkh districts are conservative, women are rarely allowed to study and work outside. Based on Pretty's typology, participation was ranked as functional participation where people take part for earning and they provide a physical workforce. People were not active in the crucial stages, such as decision making and planning.

Moreover, the study demonstrates that financial benefits, material incentives, learning new skills and severing the community are key factors for community participation. The findings also indicate several factors that affect the involvement of people, such as security, cultural factors, sex, income, lack of awareness, trust, low capacity of CDCs' members, interferences of the local leaders and warlords.

The study recommends that equal chance be given to everyone regardless of distinction of sex, tribal factors as well as economic status. This can happen through religious people, so called Imams². Moreover, while identifying, formulating and planning the development projects, the community's cultural norms, values, needs, and expectations should be considered. Furthermore, awareness programmes should be provided by community mobilizers and consistent training should be arranged for CDCs' members as well as for community members.

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²Imam is an Islamic leadership position and Imam is a religious leader, who leads prayers, delivers preaches and provides religious education and counselling.

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