

THE EXTENT TO WHICH KNOWLEDGE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S INDIGENOUS PEOPLE (AS KEY STAKEHOLDERS) IS PART OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades, the dawn of democratic governance in South Africa has influenced relevant authorities to systematically integrate indigenous knowledge (IK) into rural development project management. These projects are intended to uplift the socio-economic conditions of underdeveloped rural communities which, despite the existence of rural development projects, remain characterised by high levels of inequality, unemployment and poverty. These characteristics suggest a lack of success in rural development projects. In order to enhance their success, these projects may need, among other things, the integration of IK into rural development project management. The study used the Northern Cape Province as a case study to measure the extent to which the knowledge of South Africa's indigenous people (as key stakeholders) is part of rural development project management. The study employed qualitative design with individual and focus group interviews being employed to collect data which was then analysed with Atlas.ti software. The sample consisted of seven development projects from various districts in the study area. Results indicated minimal involvement of IK in development project management process, and where there was involvement, it was on an ad hoc basis and was done without the knowledge of other critical stakeholders. The article recommends the inclusion of IK in rural development project management, as well as the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in project management process.

Keywords: Community development projects, indigenous knowledge, project planning, rural communities.

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The need to involve indigenous people in the management of development projects is based on the belief that, like all other citizens, indigenous people potentially want to play meaningful roles in making decisions about their own future. This article focuses on the involvement of indigenous people and their IK in the planning of development projects. The World Bank (2011) argues that from a cultural perspective, indigenous people possess unique knowledge that is a basis for local decision-making, in say agriculture, health and natural resource management. South Africa has demonstrated the recognition and affirmation of IK in 2004 through the adoption of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) policy which guides how holders of IK can contribute to development. From the stakeholder perspective, it is believed that as key stakeholders being involved in making decisions about their own future, indigenous people will contribute positively towards successful completion of these projects rather than opposing

and sabotaging such projects with ultimate negative implications for project success.

Failure to involve local communities and their knowledge in project processes in South Africa leads to poor delivery of development projects (Keene, 2007; Carrim, 2010). In the Northern Cape Province which is one of the nine provinces of South Africa, there are rural areas with a number of development projects and unique cultures. Based on the fact that various cultural groups may have their indigenous knowledge which may be useful in development projects, an assumption is made that the development projects can improve if IK is integrated in their management.

CONCEPTUALISING IK

IK is defined as a “complete body of knowledge, know-how and practices maintained and developed by people through generations, generally in rural areas” (Lodhi and Mikulecky, 2010). The uniqueness of this knowledge to specific cultures (World Bank, 2011) and its enabling nature for the survival of communities encouraged researchers, development agencies and governments, both globally and locally to increase their focus on indigenous knowledge. For instance Ntsoane (2007), a well-known South African advocate of IK supports the need to value the indigenous knowledge holders by involving them in matters that affect their lives. Similarly, the then Minister of the Department of Science and Technology (DST), M. Mangena acknowledged IK as an important means of formulating more suitable interventions in the drive to eradicate poverty (Department of Science and Technology (DST), 2004). One of the interventions discussed in this article is to make IK part of the project management process to enhance the success of rural development projects.

A discussion of the nature of knowledge with the aim of relating IK with project management knowledge would be incomplete without reference to Tripathi and Bhattarya's (2004) definition of knowledge as the appropriate collection of information such that it becomes useful in decision-making. Furthermore, Liew (2013) states that knowledge is meant to increase the value for the enterprise and its stakeholders. Since the decision-making process is critical for project management, knowledge management is a crucial component of project management. Moreover, there is a need to improve the success rate of development projects. There are two types of knowledge, namely tacit and explicit knowledge (Bautista-Frias *et al.*, 2012).

Tacit knowledge is described as personal, practical and context-specific to the extent that even the knowledge holder may not be aware of its existence (Kothari *et al.*, 2011). This description epitomises indigenous knowledge as tacit knowledge as will be seen in the ensuing discussion. Due to the tacit nature of indigenous knowledge, its integration into the planning of rural development projects necessitates that it should be available to development practitioners. This implies the importance of collecting IK from the rural communities prior to project planning to enable project team members to access the knowledge,

codify it and provide proper guidance on initiating and managing projects that will impact human lives positively.

Explicit knowledge exists outside of the individual and is readily communicated, providing an organisation or institution with a memory for reference (Finestone and Snyman, 2005). These authors argue that explicit knowledge can be described in formal language and presented in the form of manuals, mathematical expressions or copyrights and that it can be easily communicated and shared through print or electronic methods.

IK exists in various forms which can be integrated into project management. Examples include indigenous food preservation, indigenous music and communication, indigenous games, indigenous education and ethno-development.

IMPLICATIONS OF POLICY FOR IK INTEGRATION

The South African Government introduced a number of policies with the aim of improving the lives of rural communities. These include the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP, 1994), an integrated policy framework aimed at, among other things, empowering people to become self-reliant, build local capacity through development support and initiate development programmes and projects on a participatory basis (Davids *et al.*, 2011). In addition to the RDP was the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR, 1996) policy where the main objective was to increase economic growth and create significant new job opportunities (Davids *et al.*, 2011). The Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Strategy (ISRDS, 2000) was also launched to improve rural livelihoods. The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform further envisioned the creation of vibrant and sustainable rural communities through the Comprehensive Rural Development Framework [CRDF] (Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, 2009). While all these policies seem to have the same basic purpose, namely to uplift rural communities, this has not always been successful especially when seen against the background of the persistent challenge of unemployment in rural areas (Kahn, 2013). The National Development Agency Strategy (2013-2015) affirmed that despite progress made in the past to transform the economy for the benefit of all, South Africa is still faced with challenges of unemployment, poverty and inequality.

It is against this background that the involvement of IK in the management of rural development projects is viewed as significant to enhance the success of projects and ultimately ensure sustainable livelihoods.

INVOLVEMENT OF IK IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

While the project process comprises of five phases, namely initiation, planning, execution, monitoring and closure, in order to determine whether indigenous people and their knowledge are involved in planning of development projects, this article only focuses on the project planning phase. Project planning defines the project objectives and outlines the programme of action (Project Management Institute [PMI], 2013). After initiating a project, planning should be done.

Mochal (2009) states that time spent in proper planning of the project will reduce the duration and increase the quality of the project. A variety of tools were advocated by Ika *et al.*, (2010) for project identification and planning. Ika *et al.* (2010) point out participatory strategies such as workshops, community based methods for collaborative decision-making and stakeholder consultation. This collaboration ensures the buy-in from and commitment of communities. Planning with communities allows them the opportunity to share their vision for meeting local needs using their known strategies (Ika *et al.*, 2010).

The planning document must entail the scope of the project which includes defining and documenting the stakeholders' needs (PMI, 2013). The scope also includes work breakdown structure where project work is divided into smaller manageable components. When all these facets of the project are documented in a written plan, the important consideration is that they need to be communicated to the implementers of the plan in a clear manner that can be understood by all (Russel, 2007). If communication is not done in the language which indigenous communities understand, it may contribute to their non-involvement in the compilation of their plan. This is where development practitioners need to assist with the compilation of the team (human resource planning) that has the necessary skills for specific tasks. However, it still becomes the community's responsibility to give direction because they know the skills available amongst them. This will further ensure that continuous negotiations are maintained regarding decisions to be made during the project planning (O'Faircheallaigh, 2010).

Among other critical aspects of planning are planning for financial resources (PMI, 2013) and risk management. According to Veatch (2011) these are also critical for development projects. In this regard, indigenous communities must be afforded an opportunity to participate in the budgeting and risk management process and to choose strategies which they are comfortable with since they are the ones responsible for implementation. Setting time frames for completion of activities should also be part of the plan to enable proper control and monitoring throughout the project process. For project participants to be able to execute specific activities planned, training should also be included in the planning (PMI, 2013). A well-executed project depends on the monitoring planned for the whole process and Russel (2007) contends that the stakeholders of the project are the key players in determining what the end result will be. The findings in literature prove that the involvement of indigenous communities in the process is not only significant, but is imperative. This ensures that they share knowledge and, in cooperation with other stakeholders, are able to determine if they know how to carry out activities of every phase, including evaluation before project closure. If not, then they must be empowered to do so through training.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AS KEY STAKEHOLDERS OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The study centred on involving indigenous knowledge in the management of rural development projects and this section justifies their involvement. Indigenous people are holders of indigenous knowledge and if their knowledge is to be

incorporated into development projects, they become key stakeholders who must not be left out. It is critical to be aware of Desta's (2009) conclusion that processes sometimes get too mechanistic and tend to exclude people who hold the tacit knowledge in their heads. The involvement of indigenous people with their knowledge will therefore assist in the development of project process. Maon *et al.* (2012) state that indigenous people are in control of many projects in the developed and sometimes in the developing world. Maon *et al.* (2012) further urge that they need to be engaged so that projects and strategies can succeed. This study therefore looks at engaging indigenous people as key stakeholders in the management of development projects.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is grounded on Vygotsky's social constructivism which assumes that learning takes place through social interaction. Powell and Kalina (2009) argue that for one to learn from others, there should be social interaction. In a similar manner, it is argued in the study that there should be interaction between indigenous communities and project leaders so that the process of knowledge construction can take into consideration the indigenous knowledge already possessed by indigenous communities. In order for rural development projects to succeed, the project leaders and indigenous people should learn from each other. According to Liu and Matthews (2005) learners are socialised into their learning community and appropriate knowledge based on their integration with the immediate environment. The learning process involves networking to determine how people, specifically indigenous people, make sense of themselves and their world through their experiences, as well as the social interactions in their environment (Jaramillo, 1996).

Involving IK in project management may also apply the principles of social constructivism especially when designing the framework for knowledge sharing with indigenous communities. However, it is essential that the needs of the indigenous communities should be taken into consideration and this can be achieved if an agile project management approach is followed where communities and other stakeholders are allowed to participate in decision-making (Conforto and Amaral, 2010). This is further illustrated in the conceptual framework below.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework illustrated in Figure 1 (Dzansi and Dzansi, 2009) depicts what needs to be achieved through the application of the theories discussed above. Since theories cannot be measured, the conceptual framework becomes a building block for theories and creates meaningful phenomena (Walliman, 2010). The conceptual framework consists of two dimensions, namely community involvement and community empowerment. Community involvement means that needs identification, projects conceptualisation, data collection, project planning and management must be done locally. When these are done, the dimension of

community empowerment will be achieved because jobs will be created, communities will be trained and involved in various communication strategies relevant to their own environment. Each community will also be able to evaluate its own projects by compiling reports and keeping important records for future reference. The expected outcomes of these interventions include sustainable projects, high success rate of development projects and empowered communities.

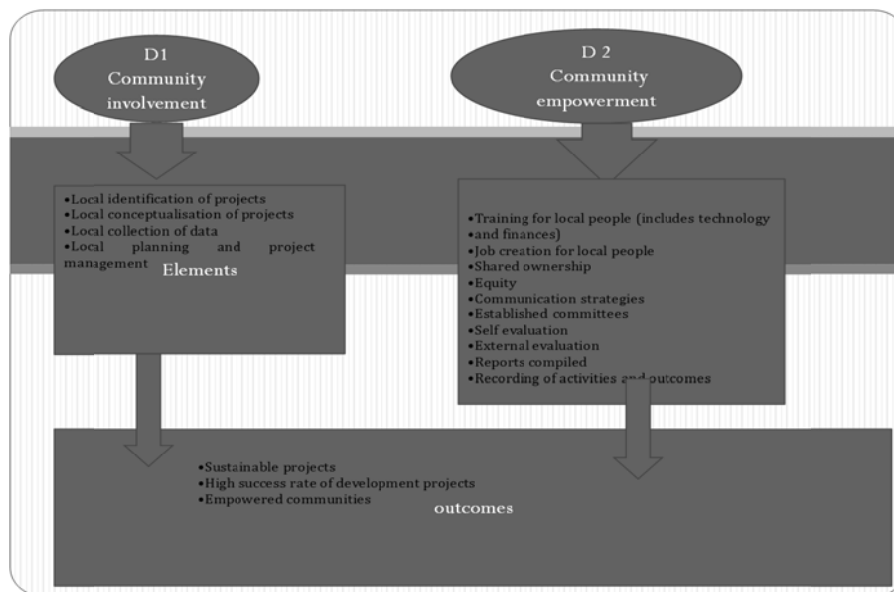


Figure 1: Conceptual framework. As adapted from Dzansi and Dzansi (2009: 453).

OVERVIEW OF STAKEHOLDER THEORY IN GENERAL

The focus of this section is on the theoretical underpinning of the communities' involvement in development project management using the stakeholder theory. This theory assumes that projects or businesses need to take into consideration the needs of people who may be affected by the outputs of the project or business (Branco and Rodrigues, 2007). Considering that the rural development projects are meant to uplift the socio-economic conditions of indigenous communities living there, it can be argued that their needs must be identified before a development project can be initiated. This assertion is supported by Wushe (2014) that the goal of community engagement is the development of stakeholders. This means that rural development projects must be carried out with indigenous communities in rural areas so that these communities are empowered to contribute to their own development especially when their own resources such as IK are used. The next section discusses the methodology of the study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

The singular research question was to investigate the extent to which IKS of the Northern Cape are part of the rural development project management process. This question was addressed through the following research objectives: to determine the extent to which the IKS of the Northern Cape are part of the rural development project management; to make recommendations for inclusion of IKS in rural development project management; and the best ways to involve relevant stakeholders in rural development project management.

An interpretivist paradigm was followed in this study because real facts needed to be accessed regarding indigenous communities and development projects by interacting with them (Henning *et al.*, 2011). Through this approach, one is able to get a clear understanding of how projects are managed through all the phases from the actual participants.

Research Design

The study followed a qualitative research design which focuses on reflections and interactions (Maxwell, 2012) by participants within their contexts. The design allowed the use of open-ended questions and provided an opportunity to understand the meaning which participants ascribe to their situation of context (Creswell, 2013). This choice is informed by the two domains in the study, namely indigenous knowledge (contextual) and project management (conceptual knowledge).

Sampling

Purposive sampling was followed. According to Lapan *et al.* (2009) purposive sampling aims at drawing a specific sample from a population that will allow a researcher to examine a phenomenon effectively. The sample comprising seven projects was obtained by consulting with the two major government departments responsible for rural development in the province, namely the Department of Economic Development and the Department of Agriculture, to explain the purpose of the study. However, the researcher was also referred to the representatives of the national Department of Rural Development and Land Reform in the province because of their role in rural development. These three departments then provided guidance with regard to the rural development projects to be included in the sample. With the assistance of these Departments and the National Development Agency (NDA) seven projects were then selected representing all five district municipalities of the province. Projects were hydroponics, ostrich project, language project, agricultural co-op, ecotourism project, day care centre and agricultural project focusing on rooibos and sheep farming.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance for the study was obtained from the Central University of Technology, Free State in the Faculty of Management Sciences. With regard to the empirical work, permission was requested from the two departments named above. The purpose of the interviews was also explained in detail to the participants to obtain their cooperation. With regard to the third department to which the researcher was referred to (Rural Development), a verbal explanation of the purpose of the study was provided since letters had already been compiled in advance and it had not initially been included.

Data Collection

The main data collection methods were interviews and focus group discussions which were used to obtain in-depth knowledge from the participants (Patton, 2014). Interviews were conducted with four project financiers and development practitioners while focus group discussions were conducted with project team members and leaders of the selected development projects. The interviews and focus group discussions lasted 45 minutes to an hour and enabled a dynamic exchange of ideas based on questions and responses (Trainor and Graue, 2013). Both sessions (interviews and focus group discussion) were audio recorded and handwritten notes taken.

Data Analysis

Analysis was carried out using the Atlas.ti software program because of its ability to increase the level of abstraction and interpretation of data (Shiellerup, 2008). The captured interview data were transcribed and then loaded onto Atlas.ti by creating hermeneutic units under the primary documents where all the transcribed data were stored for the purpose of coding. The data were then retrieved from the primary document, coded and categorised into different themes which, in this case were aligned with the phases of project management. Using these categories and themes from the code manager, a network or visual mapping of findings was created from Atlas.ti. According to Lapan and Quartaroli (2012) this quality analysis involves reducing the many words collected from interviews into a manageable form. Through Atlas.ti, it was possible to present the findings regarding planning from all the data collected in Figure 1.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings discussed hereunder relate to the participation of indigenous people as holders of IK in planning of development projects. Figure 2 below summarises the findings regarding planning and will be elaborated on in this section.

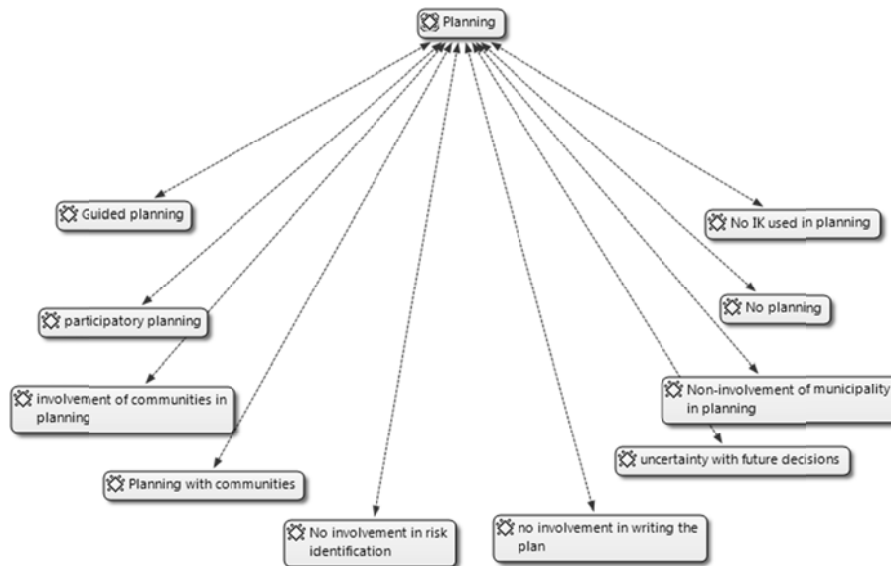


Figure 2: Planning for community development projects.

Findings on the side of government revealed that a participatory planning approach is advocated by the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform. The Department reported that their planning process entails conducting household profiling which results in communities' needs being identified to assist in project planning. The profiling is reported to be done by community members organised into structures called the council of stakeholders. These structures later interact with the technical committee at government level to discuss the outcome of household profiling and identified projects.

The National Development Agency reported the use a standard application form to be completed by the project members and assisted by development practitioners. The Agency representative indicated that they did not use specific IK in planning.

With regard to their awareness on the Indigenous Knowledge Policy, none of the representatives from either the government department or the Agency were aware of this policy which was approved by the Department of Science and Technology.

On the side of project participants, some reported having been assisted with planning by the departments which are responsible for development projects. For instance in the rooibos agricultural project, the project leader reported that one representative from the department would go to them to facilitate a planning process while obtaining ideas from them. However, it appears that it was just a session of questions and answers because the participant did not know all the risks that their project was facing and even the ones which were known, there was uncertainty about what decisions to make to manage those risks. One example of a risk was the drought but the leader specifically said, "Perhaps next year we are going to have less rain but the thing is, you can do nothing about it".

The project leader further indicated that they understood the plan but the implementation was difficult. This suggests that if these project members were fully included the planning and if the IK of older people in the community was put to use, risks such as these could be planned for. Implementation would also be easier because the community would be clear about what decisions to make based on their own plan. As it was, the older community members were not even involved because of their low level of literacy.

In another project (the language project in Upington), it was found that there was no planning done at all. Project members indicated that they just started carrying out activities of the project. "No planning. We just started with the dance, and Naama music and as people saw us, they started showing interest", said one of the members who is the granddaughter of the old lady who initiated the project. The reason given for this lack of planning was the low level of education and lack of knowledgeable people to assist with the management of the project. In this project the local municipality indicated that they were not involved in the planning of the project at all, but were only responsible for handling the project's application for land. The Rural Development Framework briefly discusses the need for participatory planning which in this case was not implemented at all. For this project, it is recommended that there should be close collaboration between the project and the municipality to ensure participatory planning and capacity building for project members in terms of various levels of planning.

When people are not involved in the planning process, they subsequently do not know the risks involved and how these can be managed. The result of this is uncertainty about decisions to take which could cause the project to stagnate or fail altogether. To address this challenge, by using their indigenous knowledge, project members must be involved in the identification of the risks in their projects. Risk identification may seem to be a difficult thing to do if introduced to indigenous people from the scientific perspective. However, creating an opportunity for indigenous people to develop and implement their own risk management plan will enhance the success of projects.

The end product of planning is usually a written document which stipulates what must be done with the allocation of responsibilities. This is one major form of communication in the project management process because the plan communicates all the decisions to be taken. It was, however, found that in some projects there was no written plan and in cases where it was available, it was not written in an indigenous language. Reference here is made to the Ecotourism project whose representative indicated that they were never involved in the writing of the plan. In this case it was found that there is currently no management structure and the project has been placed under administration due to funds being misappropriated. The administrator of this project was never available for an interview.

On the positive side, almost all the project participants indicated that the plans were communicated in their meetings and their indigenous languages are used during meetings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated in the introduction of this paper, the focus has been on determining the extent to which the IK of selected rural areas of the Northern Cape are part of planning and decision-making in rural development projects. The findings revealed that, although policies and government departments advocate for a participatory planning approach to rural development projects, no specific effort is made to obtain and utilise the indigenous knowledge of the project participants. It was also found that in the case of both the government departments' representatives and the National Development Agency there was a lack of awareness of the indigenous knowledge policy. This may be the reason for having planning processes that do not take the use of indigenous knowledge into consideration.

In view of these findings the following recommendations regarding planning for rural development projects are made:

- That participatory planning should be done and indigenous communities should be involved by conducting consultative meetings to set out the vision, objectives and activities of the project.
- That a data base be compiled of the indigenous knowledge collected during the initiation phase and that this knowledge should be used to plan the projects.
- That the Local municipalities be involved in the planning of projects together with local communities so that they can provide guidance and assist with capacity building on identified needs.
- That awareness should be created on the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Policy among development workers and the community.
- That a written plan comprising all deliverables be made available in their indigenous language to all team members who participated in the process.
- That the communication strategy for the project be determined together with indigenous communities.

These recommendations can be effectively implemented together with the relevant government departments in the Northern Cape Province as they will in turn improve the Department's performance on rural development planning.

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