University community engagement practices: A case of Gomo rural community, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study which explored one Zimbabwean state university's community engagement (CE) interactions with the Gomo rural community (not its real name). The paper focuses on the policies for CE, how they were formed and implemented. An exploratory qualitative case study embedded in the interpretive paradigm was employed to investigate the interaction process between the state university and the Gomo community. A sample of 50 participants was used. A total of 18 participants from the university, including two very senior staff members, one dean and 15 lecturers participated. 32 participants drawn from the community, including women, men, businesspersons and youths made up the community's key informants. The interviews, observations and documentary analysis findings revealed that the university had put in place structures to facilitate the engagement with the community. However, at the inception of the project, there were many teething problems affecting both the university staff and the community members. Results showed that some of these problems were caused by competing ideologies, corruption, poor leadership and dysfunctional communication structures, which tended to shut out any community voice during various stages of the project. The paper recommends that there be a more value-driven university community engagement programme, which would enable critical thinking and embrace sustainable development. Universities could also play a leading role in incubating ideas to promote the growth of industries within the communities by providing education and skills. The study also recommends that community assets be considered from the planning stage.

Key terms: Zimbabwe, community engagement, state university, community assets

Introduction and Background

University community engagement is there to help solve many interconnecting problems at community level. The purpose of this study was to explore the processes of university community engagement (CE) in Zimbabwe. It does this by assessing the interaction between a selected Zimbabwean state university (SU) and the Gomo community in the Midlands Province in Zimbabwe. University CE is regarded internationally as an important aspect of engaging students, lecturers and other stakeholders in developmental work in order to produce socially responsible citizens (UNESCO, 2009). UNESCO (2009) further states that the role of universities is to produce highly qualified graduates who become responsible citizens as well as provide opportunities for learning throughout life. It is the duty of higher education to ensure that a culture of peace prevails in communities.

According to the Report of the Presidential Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (1999), higher education in Zimbabwe is influenced by policies which support the sustainable development of communities. These policies are meant to produce both socially and economically responsible citizens who are able to solve their day-to-day problems. At the State University studied in the Midlands Province, the CE programme is run by a committee named Community Engagement through the Scientific Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CESIK). The current arrangement is that the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture chairs that committee. The main reason this faculty was chosen to chair was because it was the one, which normally dealt with community development projects. Agricultural development or rural development cannot be divorced from rural activities. Most smallholder farmers eke out a living from agricultural activities and enterprises (SU CE minutes, 2006).However, all faculties at the SU are involved in the CE partnership (SU, 2011). The main reason for community engagement at the state university is to transfer technologies, which are generated by the institution as well as borrow from the community's indigenous knowledge systems (SU Minutes Report, 2011). It is for the above reasons that the SU went into partnership with Gomo community. The thrust was to empower people in the rural community so that they become self-reliant and solve community problems on their own (Rogers et al., 2008). It was a process in which both the university and

community were expected to exchange information, skills, knowledge and expertise (Mazrui, 1986). It is in this backdrop that the study sought to address the following research questions:

- How does the SU interact with the Gomo community?

- How do the university and community benefit from the engagement?

- What can be done to improve the engagement process?

Literature Review

Definition of community engagement

Jones and Wells (2007) define 'community engagement' as:

the process of working collaboratively with relevant partners who share common goals and interests or working collaboratively with and for groups of people affiliated by geographical proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people.

(Jones & Wells, 2007: 407)**.**

Community engagement is also defined as a reciprocal process of sharing knowledge, information, skills and expertise between the university and the broader community (both internal and external) (De Lange, 2012).

The common feature found in these definitions is that engagement is a reciprocal process. This entails that the university collaborates with the community, conducts research that involves community participants, shares information and skills with the community, also learns from the community, develops social responsibility and builds trust between itself and the community. Networking and collaboration between different stakeholders and community mobilisation are other common features.

Schuetze (2010) suggests that the idea of engagement between universities and communities complements the other three missions of universities, which are; teaching, research and university service. However, for the Zimbabwean institutions, two other dimensions have been added, specifically innovation and industrialisation. These five pillars constitute what is known as Education 5.0. Education 5.0 emphasises and promotes the production of goods and services. Still, research on community engagement has remained minimal, particularly in Zimbabwe. It is important to note that Schuetze (2010) suggests that in community engagement, universities are committed to community partnership so as to address critical issues and as part of their outreach missions. Community engagement is intended to benefit communities through partnership activities such as development of effective community leadership, and reduction of poverty by engaging in activities that would develop self-reliant and self-sufficient communities.

According to Holland (2005) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development OECD (2001) some of the benefits of community engagement include strengthening public trust between communities and agencies, improving transparency, enhancing civic capacity and creating more sustainable development policies. Holland (2005) adds that conducive working relationships such as respect, openness, two-way communication, and commitment encourage communities to be self-reliant and creative. Relationship building between universities and communities provides good communication approaches that can be used in different contexts. Finally, Holland suggests that collaboration between universities and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can help NGOs and universities to assess, track and judge their own programmes.

Critiques of University Community Engagement

University community engagement research has been criticised for not focusing sufficiently on community voice and for not addressing power differentials between the university and the community (Preece, 2016; Osman & Castle, 2006). Power dynamics, for example, affect the communication processes, and how the community and the university consult each other in the process of community engagement. Osman and Castle (2006) observe that university-

community engagement has been criticised for power imbalances. Community and community-university relations are known for their political and power struggles, which may undermine the value of community engagement. Sinclair (2003) notes that the disadvantaged and minority groups are less likely to participate in the governance of projects. The more educated and wealthier members of a community usually dominate in participation.

Fryer (2012) also suggests that some of the challenges of community engagement are power dynamics. It is argued that universities wield more power than communities. For example, the experience of either being judged or marked by professors, being criticised by professors or even the feeling of being intimidated by professors can sometimes be humiliating. This study sought to find out how the community felt while working with the SU academic doctors and professors and what impact that had on the partnership.

The other challenge, according to Fryer (2012), was caused by cultural differences between the academy and the community. People of a homogeneous culture will interact and share the same norms, values and beliefs. However, in a community relationship involving different cultures, interactants may break the rules of either culture. If universities fail to recognise that they are entering into a different cultural space and fail to adjust their behaviour, they may alienate potential community collaborators.

Finally, Sinclair et al. (2003) note that supporting community engagement processes can drain resources, with the result that the activity takes too long and costs too much. Operational factors may include pressures which have to do with people's time, lack of funding, overcoming competing priorities and institutional differences and distances between campuses and community settings. There is need for both partners to learn new skills. There is also need to engage and maintain community involvement and commitment beyond the initial engagement phase.

More recently, researchers have begun to explore community empowerment dimensions. Vander Merwe and Albertyn (2009) have carried out studies using community development theories, which advocate for participatory approaches. Van der Merwe and Albertyn (2009) advocate for the emancipatory approach. They claim that the emancipatory approach is a valuable tool for individuals who engage in learning through transformation of experiences and self-understanding. Van der Merwe and Albertyn (2009) further suggest that the emancipatory approach is the best way to accomplish the goal of empowerment as it focuses on participation, dialogue, critical thinking and consciousness-raising.

Community engagement entails collective involvement between communities and universities. This means that there is a partnership relationship which may involve a number of agencies. The researcher understands that community engagement must have a two-way relationship that forms partnerships which are mutually beneficial. University community engagement also involves helping the community to solve some social issues among the disadvantaged and promoting the development of the cultural and intellectual fabric of the community. Community engagement deals with responding to social ills and community problems and should be seen as a catalyst for positive action. It is one aspect of university responsibilities to develop productive and responsible citizens. This represents the role that universities play for the public good. Students also benefit by learning how to address social, political and cultural issues of a community. This encourages responsible graduates to work for the improvement of the quality of life for all sectors of society. However, when organisations or groups work together they tend to go through evolutionary stages, which are forming, storming and norming (Tuckman quoted in Bonebright, 2021).

The forming stage is the initial orientation stage. In this stage, there is mutual exchange of information between the parties involved in the partnership. The storming stage is second and characterised by fights, resistance from members, and members attempting to withdraw from the situation. The third and final stage is the norming stage. Here, there is evidence of development of group cohesion, characterised by cooperation and mutual support. These three stages will be used in the presentation of the data later.

Theoretical Framework

Three theories formed the basis of this study. These were asset-based community development, the adaptive leadership, and Ujamma, leading to self-reliance as indicated in Figure 1 below. These theories enabled the researcher to examine the community engagement relationships.
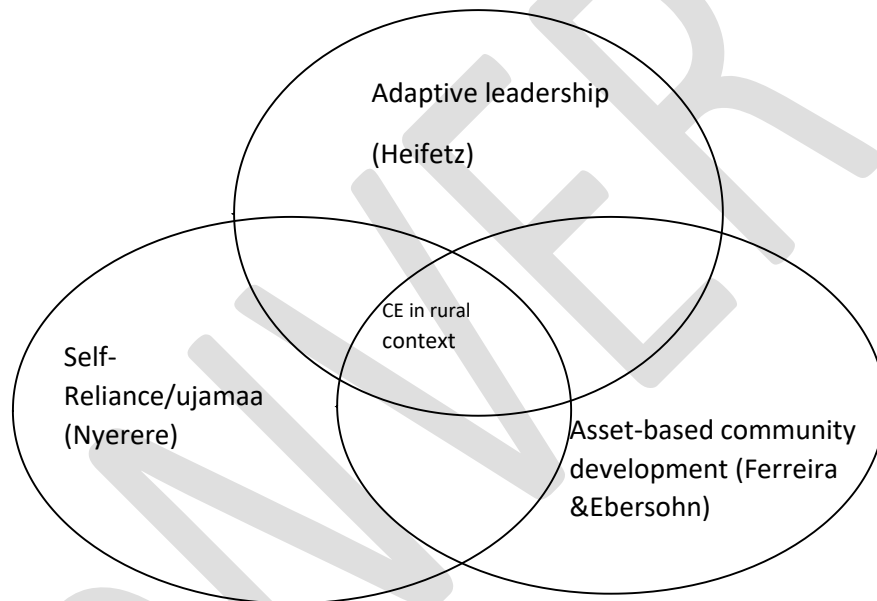

Figure 1: **Interface of the three theories for community engagement**

How the theories inform each other

The theories inform each other in that they share common characteristics and also offer different insights, which together make a useful lens to understand the university-community relationship. For instance, Stephenson's (2011), and Preece's (2013) reference to adaptive leadership in university engagement demonstrate recognition of the unique and unequal power relationship between the university and its surrounding communities in a context which needs an understanding of the need to facilitate community ownership over decision-making. In adaptive leadership, the theory focuses on the co-creation of knowledge, clarifying competing values, social change, helping communities to become active in addressing their issues or concerns, and sharing responsibilities (Keys, 2012). Leaders are no longer the ones solving problems. There is an element of sharing of information and management of conflicting views and values. Adaptive leadership involves participation by communities, which aims to improve responsiveness, creativity and innovation by organisations.

Community asset-based development is a grassroots method. It is designed to encourage a bottom up perspective. Communities are encouraged to create their own power. In the asset-based development theory, the focus is on communities understanding issues from the community's perspective (Ferreira & Ebersohn, 2012). A combination of these two theories provides a complementary lens to explore precisely what is happening in the SU community engagement approach. The differences add value to the theoretical approach in that they provide complementary features that reflect the particular nature of a university-community relationship. Community asset-based development focuses specifically on the participatory learning process. It is characterised by partnership and building on existing assets so that the community members are able to co-construct knowledge rather than have new knowledge imposed on them. However, the power dynamics of universities engaging with their communities also means that universities draw on the resources of knowledge and understanding within the communities whilst at the same time providing leadership that encourages community ownership over decision-making, thus reflecting the adaptive leadership approach.

Finally, Nyerere's theory of Ujamma/self-reliance was chosen as a third lens because it is embedded in adult education principles of building on people's experiences and starting where they are (Knowles, 1980). The above development theories, and Ujamma, are compatible with the adult education philosophy of starting where people are, promoting dialogue and consultation, promoting self-concept, self-identity, and respect and drawing on existing experiences to create new knowledge and understanding. The adaptive leadership theory is compatible with a collaborative approach towards change, which recognises power differentials between the participating agencies. Such theories are indispensable as lenses through which to view university engagement practices.

Methodology

The study is located in the interpretive paradigm. A case study design was adopted to ensure an in-depth understanding (Rule & John, 2011; Cohen et al., 2010) of the selected state university-community interactions. The sample was made up of 18 university staff members including one vice chancellor, one dean, 15 lecturers as well as 32 participants from the community. The total number of participants was 50. In the community, four key informants, namely; the village chief, the councillor, a business person and the village head, were purposively selected. The snowball or referral technique was used to select twenty family heads and eight youths, based on recommendations from those already interviewed. Purposive sampling was used for university participants. Interviews were used for university participants. Data was collected through documentary analysis and interviews with university staff. Community members were interviewed using focus group discussions. Observations through a transect walk were undertaken with key participants in the community. The reason for using several different methods was for triangulation purposes (Cohen, 2010; Yin, 2009).

Participation was voluntary. Each of the participants gave consent to participate in the study. The researcher ensured that the participants received thorough explanation beforehand, on the benefits, rights, risks and dangers involved as a consequence of their participation in the

research project (Creswell, 2017). In this study, the researcher kept information about other respondents confidential as emphasised by Nachmias and Nachmias (2015). In order to ensure transferability, the researcher provided transparency of methods and data.

The researcher ensured member checking where the correctness of the data collected was checked so as to improve the dependability of the study (Lincoln &Guba, 2011). The researcher also triangulated data from different data collecting instruments such as interviews, focus group discussions, observation and transect walks (Cohen et al.,2010). Gendered focus group discussions were held to discuss sensitive issues that could not be discussed in mixed groups.

Data analysis was organised through the qualitative programme Nvivo. This allowed the researcher to inductively identify patterns of responses and themes that were relevant to the study and which could then be examined and re-categorised through the relevant theoretical lenses. Data analysis in this study was initially done inductively and then deductively. The interview items were codified and organised by grouping together the related responses. Patterns were identified and a careful study of the data was done and emerging themes were highlighted (Fereday& Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The first thematic analysis phases were, therefore, inductive. These thematic findings were compared with the theoretical framework for a second level of analysis. In addition to the analysis of interview and focus group transcripts, the analyses also included data from observation, field notes and photos..

Findings

In this paper, the findings were divided into the following themes: forming the process stage, the storming stage and the norming stage. In this section, the paper describes how the university project was set up, and how the project went through the three phases. Firstly, there was an initial consultative needs analysis stage initiated by the university. The stage included the donation of land from a key family member of the Gomo community who was also an academic in the university. The second stage appeared as if the processes were disempowering the community. Then, there was a third phase where the community decided to form their own

constitution and take charge of different conflicts. The findings from the interviews, focus group discussions, observations and documentary analysis are analysed in relation to these three phases.

Forming the process

Data collected during the interviews concerning the university's community engagement revealed that university academics felt that there was a formally constituted committee structure, which enabled a two-way flow of communication through committees in the university. This was explained by three senior academic staff respondents:

A committee was formed by the university, which was then named Community Engagement through the Scientific Indigenous Knowledge Systems (CESIK). All the faculties were represented in this committee. We were appointed by the faculty-planning meeting to represent the faculty in the (CESIK) committee. The aim of the committee was to transfer knowledge and technologies to the community (Respondent 1)

We do have a committee in the university that discusses and plans about the university community engagement and I am the coordinator (Respondent 2).

We are members of a committee that was tasked to run a project called CESIK standing for Community Engagement through Scientific and Indigenous Knowledge. We were actually nominated by our faculty boards into the committee(Respondent 3).

However, there seemed to be a discrepancy between what senior management and what the lecturing staff felt was happening. One of the lecturers, for instance, felt that the formal structure was not known to all university staff members. It appeared that the reason for these discrepancies in understanding was that the administrative academic staff members were more

involved in policy design, while the lecturers experienced the policy as an implementation issue. Respondent 2's comment indicated that the university committee did not see CE as a two-way process. This resulted in the other party (the community) being excluded from all discussions on major issues on the project. The second sub theme is formal community structures, which I now turn to.

Formal community structures

There were formal decision-making structures connected to the CE project at community level. These were in line with the way the university committee operated, and comprised community members only. The community had its main committee which was in charge of all project commitments. Actually, Village Head confirmed that there was a communication route from the grass roots community level up to the university committee. He said:

The community had a committee, which was formed in 2011. The committee was made up of a representative from each village. The aim of the committee was to spearhead activities around the centre. The chairperson of the committee would then liaise with the full-time member of staff working at the centre, who would give the university feedback on what was happening at the centre and appropriate action would be taken.

From the data, it was evident that the dialogue passed through several hands. This idea was also affirmed by a youth who said that:

Different committees made up of representatives from each village are in place. These then communicate the different issues to the community. For example, the indigenous knowledge committee which reported that they had marula fruit tree and bees all over, which just needed to be taped. They also had manure to use in the plot instead of inorganic fertilizers. They also had access to indigenous poultry breeds. All these local resources were identified by the community for use in the partnership between the community centre and the university.

The youth continued to say: *The other committee in place is that of the different chairpersons of different activities at the centre.*

The men's focus group (MFG) supported the view that efforts at community level were intended to provide inclusive representation. One of them said the following during the 'forming' stage:

All committees are made representative by selecting a member from each village, which is headed by a headman. We also try as much as possible to accommodate tribal and ethical issues such as culture. Language differences are also taken into account in order to reduce conflicts. We believe that only when Gomo people can live together, work together, have mutual respect for one another and speak freely to one another can the Gomo community hope to protect its environment and establish sustainable development.

The Gomo committee ensured adequate representation of community voices through valuing differences within the community structures such as culture. However, from the findings, it appears there were communication gaps in the partnership. These gaps are evidenced by the lack of cross representation of both the community and the university members in the different committees. This was confirmed by the youth, who observed that:

The university does not invite the community to attend the main committee meetings where most of the major issues on the project are discussed.

The Headman also confirmed the above findings as he suggested that the:

The state university should always include community members in their planning meetings in order for correct information to cascade to the community.

From the women's focus group (WFG), one said: "We accept all things the university brings or tells us. We now have a library and a zero grade class for our children." It appeared the

Gomo community had no membership in the CESIK and the Work Related Learning committees. This made it difficult to explain why decisions were being made on their behalf. In other words, there was a sense that Gomo community members received, rather than negotiated, university involvement.

In the SU's case, there was some evidence of institutional support. In 2011 the university had a budget to enhance CE projects as stated in the university CE document, and corroborated by the senior academic. The senior academic member affirmed that:

Community engagement is embedded in the university's philosophy. The university came up with a budget in order to build infrastructure and to develop the project.

The third sub theme is formal communication.

Formal communication

The formal communication structures such as CESIK committee meetings were put in place by the university at the initial 'forming' stage of the project in 2011. Both the university and community participants made similar comments about formal communication. They stressed that there were different communication structures in place at the SU. For example, an academic respondent commented: "Formal communication is done through the CESIK committee meetings. The whole system is run on a committee system".

One senior academic member also affirmed another strategy used by the University. He said that: *A full time member of staff works at the Gomo centre. His functions are to communicate information from the centre to the university on issues at the centre.*

While this structure provided a direct link between the community and the university, the implications were that communication mechanisms were running in parallel, rather than in synergy with each other. The community was prevented from directly communicating their issues to relevant university committees since they did not have a representative from the community. This resulted in their concerns getting diluted. At the community centre, however, communication was operating through community members. In the WFG interview, one of the women said:*We were invited to this partnership by the councillor through our headman.*

A senior academic staff member also highlighted that although the university did not want to make decisions for the community, the structures in place were accepted as separate, rather than integrated. This suggested that the level of trust between the two entities remained fragile, in spite of the intended good will from the university. He also added:

The community had a committee, which was formed in 2011. The committee was made up of a representative from each village. The aim of the committee was to lead activities around the centre since we realised that we would not make decisions on behalf of the community.

The WFG confirmed that university and community structures operated separately. Yet, they felt that the decision-making systems complemented each other. One member in the WFG said:

Both the university and the community make decisions when it comes to the project. For example, the community made the decisions on which days different villagers would come to work at the project site, whilst the university made decisions on resource persons to train the community.

She further said, *We also made decisions through voting at community meetings heldby the councillor. For example, voting for which project should come first – poultry or mushroom.*

These findings suggest that the communication structures in place in the partnership served different purposes. They had evolved over time, so that the formal community level arrangements would provide the necessary link with the formal university structures.

Another form of communication also functioned in the form of research. According to the SU (2006) CE minutes (SU, 2006), university students on attachment were also mandated to conduct interviews with community members, and capture data on different issues on the project such as history and culture. Data would then be forwarded to the university for processing (but not necessarily discussed with the community). Now the paper turns to the donation of the land.

Donation of the land

The community highlighted that land had been identified and donated to the University for the CE project by a senior member of the university academic staff. A community member, observed: *The centre is located on land which belongs to the Sibanda family and this was a cause for concern.* Donation meant the beginning of the storming phase, which is addressed below.

Storming Phase -Challenges in the process

There were different challenges that influenced the storming phase process. These were identified here as: ideology of university community engagement, non-representation of key stakeholders in the major key committees, transport, location of the community plot, and leadership issues*.*

Ideology of university community engagement

Interviews, which were conducted at the state university and the Gomo community, enabled the researcher to elicit views and experiences regarding the ideology being followed in the CE

partnership. From the responses by some of the senior academic staff members, the university had a university policy on CE as indicated below:

The university does have a policy on university community engagement. It is part of our philosophy. The university is not going to impose new ideas; 'No' it is going out there with an open mind. The university is going out to learn. We also want to get information from their side and blend it with scientific information.

In the interview, the community leader also highlighted that, *Skills acquired from the centrewere meant to help us by replicating them at our homes.*

Comments from the respondents on their expectations of the partnership seemed to suggest that there was a contradiction of purpose and expectation between the two parties. The university senior academic indicated that*: The institution wanted to learn and not to impose ideas on the community.* Meanwhile, the Gomo community participants indicated that they wanted the university to give them new skills. In other words, they expected a transfer of technical knowledge and skills from the university to the community. This was done during needs analysis assessment.

The university's purpose also seemed to contradict how the relationship operated. Responding to the question 'Is there co-creation of knowledge in this partnership?' one lecturer said: *It should be like that but at present it's hazy. Some of these projects are meant to benefit the communities more than the university.*

A senior member of the academic staff, made a similar comment when he said: *Currently, most of the activities are from the university's proposal which was a top down approach and not very effective.*

These exchanges of information indicated that the notion of a collaborative, shared relationship was mixed. In some cases, Gomo community members felt empowered and involved in decision making. However, there were other instances where both academic and community members felt the ideology had not been fully realised to date.

Transport

It was widely agreed that transport was a challenge in this university CE project. There was no vehicle allocated for the project by the university which is 250km away from the university. This was affirmed by lecturers who said:

When we have to go to the project centre we use a bakkie[van]. *We are talking of five lecturers travelling in an open truck.*

One of the lecturers further said: *We cannot go there as often as we would want to, and therefore, we cannot interact with the community as often as we should. There is need to dedicate a vehicle specifically to the project.*

This, therefore, minimised the interaction between the two parties. A vehicle was needed to transport staff and materials to and from the centre.

Work overload

Lecturers also complained about the work overload. Complaints reflected lack of leadership in the institution, concerning how CE work was managed in relation to other staff roles. This is what one of them said:

Over and above the full university load of teaching, setting and marking examinations, research supervision and work related supervision, we have CE However, and there are no

incentives for that. The lecturers are already overwhelmed. University community engagement comes in as an extra burden.

 Lecturers also indicated lack of sufficient resources. They noted:

Every time we go to the centre we probably use the Director of   Work Related Learning's vehicle or go by bus. This makes travelling to the centre difficult. It is difficult to achieve the type of interaction we really want, and the type of decisions we expect to be taken to our satisfaction. When we arrive at the centre we are expected to walk to all the distant places.

Land donation

As a result of the land donation by an individual, majority of the participants raised concern on the legal status of the land on which the project was set up. This was noted in the response given below:

The community would have preferred the council to allocate state land for this project. This would work well for the project, as there would be no ownership problems.

One member from the women group felt that they "were being abused by the Sibanda family as a result of the land donation." They felt belittled. The women felt this was abusive to the community members. This suggested poor management skills, which are addressed below.

Leadership issues

The youths suggested that there was poor leadership and management. This idea is summed up in the words of one youth who said:

There were elements of poor management skills, nepotism and corruption in the community engagement leadership at community level.

The MFG also agreed to this and said:

Corruption was rife at the centre. For example, the majority of the teachers were related to the (Sibanda family) with no teaching qualifications for the

programme.

The corruption, as indicated above, led to the withdrawal of community children from the programme. The community complained that they had lost faith in what was happening at the centre.

The WFG echoed similar sentiments of poor management. One of their members said:

Leadership should have positive attitude towards the project. The leadership should be able to influence the community and bring about change.

It would appear that from inception, the university CE experienced teething problems. Some of these problems had a negative impact on the project and a demotivating effect on the university and community participants. However, after all this, the community felt that it was their duty to come up with their own constitution for the project. A constitution should highlight who performs what, why and when.

Norming Stage

The community's initiative to produce a constitution was an example of the norming stage where the community became a unit and worked cooperatively in order to change for the better. This was revealed by the MFG one of whose members indicated that:

The constitution changed the whole organisation of the project. The project now has clear goals, objectives, targets and success criteria.

Below are some of the issues that were addressed by the constitution as indicated by different respondents in the study.

One respondent from the women's group stated that "The issue of land ownership had since been resolved by the District Council which had issued a land lease to the university."

Allocations of gardens were streamlined to meet the demands of the situations. For example, a participant from the women's focus group, stated:*Everyone in the project was allocated two seedbeds each*. There was equity in the distribution rather than favouritism and nepotism. The role of the government agent was clearly spelt out in the minutes of the meeting dated October 2015 and he was able to resume and execute his duties accordingly.

The councilor also made similar comments when he said:

Attitudes towards the project improved, more males now participated in the different activities at the centre. We now dialogue, resolve conflict, forgive and care for each other. We are now working as a family. For example, we look after each other's plots when it comes to watering. This was a result of the education that we received from the project coordinator.

The university began to deploy relevant students to the centre, who are useful at the project centre"

As a result of this community initiative, there has been development of group cohesion. Relations between the university and community have also been harmonised. I now turn to the discussion section.

Discussion

This section discusses the results under the following headings: forming process, challenges and reconstituted phase.

Forming Processes

It emerged in this study that there were three distinct phases which showed different forms of participation and communication among the participants. These were 'forming', 'storming' and 'norming' as identified by Tuckman quoted in Bonebright (2021). These findings suggest that establishing community assets was not the primary goal of the university. The university carried out a needs assessment instead of mapping assets of the community. This confirms studies by scholars such as Eleberi (2012) and Beaulieu (2002), who highlight that communities do have assets that may be used to solve their problems. From the researcher's view, this implies that the community participants could have been encouraged to take more responsibility for their own actions at the outset of the engagement relationship. For instance, the community could have mapped its local resources and abilities before engaging on the project.

Sub Themes of Forming Process

The community structure

The findings on community structure revealed that there appeared to be a strong institutional commitment to establishing CE through the various committees such as those for the university CE and WRL (SU, 17 November, 2011). In order to facilitate communication, the state university took responsibility to initially establish a university committee structure, from management to departments, which was also replicated at community level. It was, therefore, expected that both formal and informal communication lines would be open so as to enable both parties to communicate freely. Policies which cemented official channels of communications through committees and regular meetings were formulated. Communication structures were put in place to enable community members to present their concerns and needs. This was reflected in the different committees that were made up of representatives from each

village. Both the university and the community were used as conduits of information via committee meeting minutes to share information.

However, neither the community nor the university was represented in their counterpart committees. The two committee structures, thus, seemed to run parallel to each other, rather than as an integrated whole. The committee structure indicated that, on the one hand, the university was committed to the notion of CE, but on the other hand, there little understood on how the university and the community could interact for mutual benefit. The findings reflect similar approaches to CE by universities elsewhere such as at the University of the Free State (Preece, 2017) and at Makerere University (Openjuru&Ikoja-Odongo, 2012). However, the structure seemed to fall far short of addressing the principles of asset-based community development theory as outlined by Ebersöhn and Fereirra (2012), or of those outlined by Nyerere, which require a closer interaction between community members and the university curriculum (Nyerere, 1968). This suggests that limited access to open and on-going communication structures that allow free flow of information and feedback affected the smooth co-ordination of the project by both parties. The findings are consistent with those of Preece (2017) who observed that open communication and interaction in community engagement projects are vital as they lead to the success of the project.

Storming Phase – Challenges

The results indicated that there seemed to be two competing ideologies in the running of the community engagement project at Gomo. For example, the SU wanted to learn and not impose, but the community wanted the university to give them new knowledge and new skills. The SU entered the community with authority and status because it was able to produce material, human, and financial resources. There was also a discrepancy between the ideology and practice. For example, what was policy on paper for university's community engagement and what was taking place on the ground were at variance. That is, when the project was being started the community was invited to the main committee but afterwards the community was no longer being invited. The study affirms Stephenson's (2011) study which revealed that universities often marginalised the communities and identified them as poor, and with nothing

to offer. The researcher noted that the Gomo community appeared to be on the receiving end of the university's interventions. For example, the principles of adaptive leadership as an on-going process of clarifying competing goals and values (Heifetz, 1994) and asset-based community development principles (Chambers, 2007) which emphasised exploring community assets were not central to the community engagement (CE) process at Gomo. This was despite the ideology of community engagement indicating that the process should be a mutually beneficial partnership.The researcher, however, contends that there is potential for further understanding of how to facilitate the community empowerment process.

Norming Stage – Reconstructed phase

The study revealed that the Gomo community had a constitution which outlined what the community intended to achieve from the project. The drafting of the Gomo community constitution empowered members to participate and be able to solve their own problems. Participation led them to have a feeling of self-respect and self-worth. Scholars such as Chambers (2007) and Tickey and Kothari (2009) affirm that active participation in community development activities builds trust, and empowers and benefits the marginalised who can then improve the quality of their lives. It is, therefore, important to note that empowerment enables communities to become stronger and more confident in using their resources to achieve set goals.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The paper concludes that the state university used both the top-down approach and bottom-up approach in university CE initiatives. The study, however, affirmed that the project experienced a lot of challenges at its inception. It further noted that project participants are key in any community engagement by universities. It is crucial that communities be consulted on a continuous basis in order to ensure openness and transparency. Both university and community programmes/projects may fail due to unsuitable policies. Top managers should, therefore, consult widely before they finalise policies. This suggests that continuous dialogue and

feedback between the university and the community are necessary features for the success of a CE partnership.

The study has also shown that conflicts are inevitable in any complex society, for example, differences in culture. This means that communities should be trained in conflict management and transformation. This could enable universities and communities to deal with minor challenges without having to wait for someone from outside. This recommendation takes into account the fact that once communities are given space to grow and solve their own problems; they will do so without help from outside. This would indicate that communities have reached a state of self-sufficiency and self-reliance.

Lecturers in the university CE programme should be provided with necessities and incentives for them to participate whole-heartedly in the programmes. They should also be provided with transport to take them to the project sites as well as suitable accommodation on site. University CE should, in turn, be considered in the academic promotion criteria for lecturers, alongside other teaching and research outputs. This has been proposed in many CE reports (Watson, 2007, for instance).

Another recommendation is that universities take up an asset-based development approach rather than needs analysis since most communities have own assets. In this case, the university's initial approach failed to capitalise on the community's strengths of leadership and initiative. The whole idea of CE should be to avoid falling into the trap which seems to suggest that the university has all the answers and not the community.

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