Crucial factors in the implementation of participatory development communication in Papua New Guinea

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Abstract

This ethnographic study examines the key factors in the implementation of participatory development communication (PDC) in four development projects of an international development organisation in Papua New Guinea. The findings from participant observation, interviews, and documents disclose that ten highly interrelated factors around three themes influence the implementation process in this specific context. The critical themes for an environment supportive of PDC are (a) that staff have positive attitudes and behaviours toward implementing PDC, (b) that the perceived needs of the beneficiaries are met, and (c) that a level of trust between the development organisation and the beneficiaries is established. In this context, in particular three factors hinder the implementation of an ideal PDC approach: the organisational culture, the communication context between the organisation and the beneficiaries, and the time-restricted, donor-driven project design.

Key words: participatory development communication, ethnographic research

Introduction

This ethnographic research set out to investigate the crucial factors influencing the implementation of the participatory development communication (PDC) model within the context of development projects initiated by a non-governmental development organisation in Papua New Guinea (PNG). By identifying the critical factors in the PDC implementation, as well as investigating how PDC is applied in the specific PNG context, this research is highly relevant for development studies in general and PNG studies in particular. The focus of the study was on the communication processes in four projects in Port Moresby and Madang in the areas of HIV/AIDS (H), women's livelihood (W), literacy education (L), and food security (F).

Most development agencies incorporate PDC in their programmes due to its promise to lead to sustainability (Anyaebgunam, Mefalopulos, & Moetsabi, 2004; Huesca, 2002; Mefalopulos, 2005). However, many studies, mostly qualitative, indicate critical factors in the implementation of PDC, which can be grouped into three broad areas: contextual factors, project-related factors and people-related factors (see Agunga, Aiyeru, & Annor-Frempong, 2006; Balit, 2004; Bessette, 2004; Cadiz, 2005; Huesca, 2002; Melkote & Kandath, 2001; Melkote & Steeves, 2001; Muturi, 2005; Muturi & Mwangi, 2006;

Onabajo, 2005; Shahjahan, Khan, & Haque, 2006; Stuart, 1994; Thurston, Farrar, Casebeer, & Grossman, 2004; Yoon, 1996). Contextual factors of the specific developing country, such as the socio-cultural context, the power structure, the religious context, and the existence of other agencies, impact whether implementing PDC is applicable in a specific setting. In addition, several factors relating to the specific project influence the PDC implementation. such as time and effort, type of participation, communication infrastructure, communication training, and constant evaluation of the project. Contributing people-related factors include the attitudes of all stakeholders involved, development workers, project communities, and their leaders. The PDC process is not sufficiently discussed, and these factors are investigated only by few authors (Agunga et al., 2006).

All of the influencing factors are interrelated and impact on other factors in the process of implementing PDC. The context-specific nature of the PDC approach, and the finding that most of the above-mentioned studies indicate context-related factors, led to the initial assumption that these may be the crucial factors in the PDC implementation. However, findings of these studies are specific to a certain development project, to its context, and to the people involved. The studies investigated a variety of development projects with diverse objectives from different countries. Generalisations cannot be made to the specific PNG context.

Although no best, single PDC strategy for addressing development issues exists (Anyaebgunam et al., 2004; Bessette, 2004; Yoon, 1996), the 10-step framework by Bessette (2004) was considered a guideline for PDC implementation for this research and is discussed in detail in Hermann (2007).

Method

For this ethnographic research, participant observation and interviews form the main sources of data and were triangulated with documents of the organisation to verify and validate findings. For the purpose of this research, the organisation is referred to as Unnamed Development Organisation, "UDO". A special focus was placed on understanding the communication processes and factors from the UDO staff perspective, as these are the implementers of the projects.

In mutual agreement with UDO, I followed the organisation's staff in their daily routines and observed the PDC activities in detail and depth, as argued by Chilisa and Preece (2005). As participant observer, I attended internal and external meetings, visited project sites, and participated in workshops and other project activities.

In total, 24 persons were informants for this research. Informed consent was obtained for all data gathered. Seven in-depth interviews were conducted with experts and staff of UDO, including one senior manager (SM), the managers (M) in charge of the projects under investigations (MH, MW, ML, MF), one technical advisor (A1) and one field worker of project W (FWW). The

interviews were conducted after a period of orientation to the setting and observation. Drawing on the findings of participant observation and the literature review, a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was developed as a guideline. In addition, 13 field interviews were conducted with another advisor (A2), two field workers, a volunteer of project L, three farmers of project F, as well as a pastor and five participants of a business skills workshop of project W. Due to safety risks and limited accessibility of project sites without UDO staff, I could not undertake formal in-depth interviews with these interviewees. However, field interviews followed a similar structure. In addition, two field workers and two senior managers were informants.

The data analysis started during the data collection, as suggested by several authors (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Corbetta, 2003). All raw data were initially coded according to the thematic categories that emerged through the literature review without putting any limits on the emergence of new categories and sub-themes. Focused coding was repeated until all themes had been categorised in a meaningful manner. These findings were then compared with the findings of the literature, thereby analysing recurring events, supporting arguments and contrary statements. The findings and conclusions were reported back to UDO, as considered crucial in development research (Binns, 2006; Mercer, 2006; Smith, 1999).

The fact of being a European, female, young, white researcher may have had an impact on the reliability of the data gathered, the findings presented and the conclusions drawn. Research in development also carries risks that informants say what they think the researcher wants to hear or that they refuse to share critical opinions, if it becomes too closely associated with a NGO (Bessette, 2004). However, ethnography, especially participant observation, can be particularly useful to limit the impact of these risks, as findings enable the (Western) researcher to "interpret the social world in the way that the members of that particular world do" (Collis & Hussey, 2003, p. 71).

Findings and analysis

The original research (Hermann, 2007) processes the findings of the field research in four groups of factors influencing the PDC implementation: project-related factors, UDO staff-related factors, beneficiaries-related factors and context-related factors. Thereby, a similar structure identified by reviewing the literature was adopted. Through repeated focused coding a number of factor areas emerge within these four groups, which are presented in detail in Hermann (2007).

The subsequent analysis of the findings and emerging issues reveals ten highly interrelated factors and three underlying themes influencing the PDC implementation in this specific context, which are the focus of this article. The three underlying themes are (a) the attitudes of UDO staff toward PDC approaches, (b) meeting the perceived need of the beneficiaries, and (c) establishment of a level of trust between the beneficiaries and UDO. Most of

the factors impact on several other factors. The communication context shapes the ground for the entire PDC implementation process, and is discussed separately.

Theme 1: Attitudes and behaviour of UDO staff toward PDC

The first theme, as supported by UDO staff (A1, A2, FWW, SM) and studies by Bessette (2004), Cadiz (2005), Stuart (1994), and Yoon (1996), indicates that the attitudes of the development workers toward PDC impact the way they interact with the local people, and, in turn, impact whether the local community participates. As emphasised by Yoon (1996), being dependent on people is an integral part of the nature of the PDC approach that falls and stands with the people involved.

All managers considered the beneficiaries active stakeholders of the development initiative, as is considered essential for the implementation of a PDC approach (Bessette, 2004; Cadiz, 2005). However, the managers' understanding of what defines an active stakeholder and the general attitude of the project team members towards beneficiary involvement and participation varied. ML, MH and FWW saw the benefit of participatory approaches primarily in empowering the beneficiaries to be able to help themselves, which is the ultimate goal of ideal PDC approaches (Melkote & Steeves, 2001).

FWW was convinced through studies that the success of development programmes depends on participatory approaches to initiate action and bottom-up planning. As a result of her conviction, she approached communities with the idea of a participatory literacy programme that put the decision-making in the hands of the beneficiaries. Following Stuart's (1994) suggestions of implementing a PDC approach that includes putting the local people at the forefront and the project implementers in the background, she approached the community members with the following attitude:

> *I told them it is very important that you take ownership over this project. This is your project; it's based on your need, so I will not come down and do whatever I want. You know the problem, you know your community, you take it. […] I am only here to facilitate.*

MH indicated his willingness to integrate the beneficiaries fully in the development initiatives by reporting from a newly established initiative within project H,

> *We are really happy because we are making them to realise that they can do something for themselves and get themselves actively involved and then generate something … to sustain their own livelihood.*

However, MH mentioned difficulties in translating the instructions of the project proposal, such as appropriate HIV/AIDS awareness raising strategies at the community level and participatory HIV/AIDS information sessions, into PDC activities Although both could be designed as highly participatory

activities, he did not seem to understand how the beneficiaries could contribute to the activities. He considered "directing [into] new directions" to be the role of the manager and not the role of the beneficiaries.

Two of the managers (ML, MW) described their responsibility as teaching the beneficiaries "how to catch fish" instead of directly giving them the "fish". This view demonstrates a general openness to a PDC approach that encourages self-development of the communities (Servaes, 2001). ML saw clear benefits in involving the beneficiaries in the decision-making process and to empower them to change their lives in the long-term: "when we just feed them information and they think for themselves, it motivates them and gives value to them. They feel that they are valuable". By contrast, MW, using the same metaphor, appeared to have the attitude that he has to motivate the beneficiaries to participate in the development initiative, instead of the attitude that the initiative reflects the beneficiaries' need. He asserted that he can only collaborate with groups interested and willing to participate in UDO's activities because the project design puts pressure on him to train a certain amount of women in a given timeline. He further considered the participatory literacy programme, initiated by FWW a "one-off idea". This could lead to the conclusion that MW actually sees the goal of PDC as people participating in the activities so that his own targets are fulfilled, and not as empowering beneficiaries. Such a conclusion explains his lack of support observed by FWW for this programme.

MF emphasised that through the participatory technology development meetings that are part of project F, farmers can learn from each other and exchange information. However, she also appeared to understand PDC activities as a means to facilitate the implementation of her project, as expressed in her statements, "[this meeting] really helped in changing the attitude of the other farmers," and "I really wanted that because we had good farmers in other districts where they didn't complain; they worked really nicely with us." Her understanding, similar to MW's understanding, contradicts an ideal PDC approach, which critics participation-as-a-means as being "a process where the participation of the intended beneficiaries is obtained to actually serve the ends of authorities"(Melkote & Kandath, 2001, p. 192). The argument of Melkote and Steeves (2001) that PDC approaches have never really taken root among development organisations due to their lack of appreciation by development workers, was supported in the case of MW, MF, and MH. This was further supported by A2 who argued that it would not be possible within UDO to integrate an ideal PDC approach because the staff would only understand how to integrate participatory activities and elements but would not understand how to implement a thoroughly participatory project that is based on an idea coming from the beneficiaries.

The findings indicate that four factors influence the attitude of UDO staff toward PDC, and consequently impact also their behaviour in the interaction with the beneficiaries: the experience of staff, the organisational culture of UDO, the project design and the socio-cultural background of staff. Figure 1

shows the interrelation between the factors. The socio-cultural background is discussed as part of theme three.
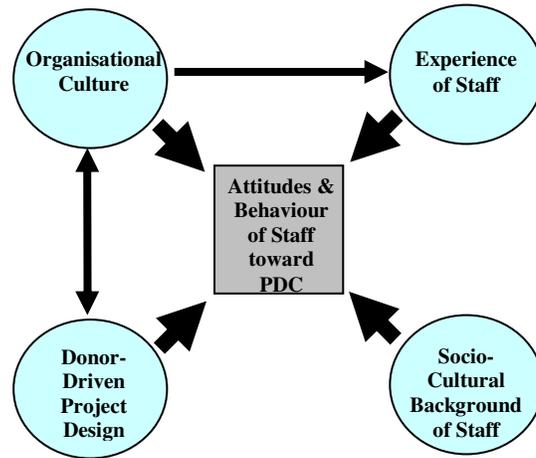

Figure 1. Factors influencing attitudes and behaviours of staff toward PDC

Experience of UDO staff

UDO staff (SM and FWW) emphasised that the implementation of any participatory approach depends on the commitment and passion, as well as the competence and quality of staff. However, the skills and knowledge of staff differ widely.

FWW, who had studied PDC approaches, was the only field staff who initiated a process in which the beneficiaries' decision-making started with the project planning phase. FWW was truly convinced about the sustainability of PDC approaches and was eager to implement a PDC approach. The case of FWW supports the link between the experience of a development worker and the worker's attitude toward PDC, as argued by Yoon (1996) and Muturi (2005).

Organisational Culture

The organisational culture of UDO further influences the attitudes and behaviour of its staff toward implementing a PDC approach. This result is surprising, as only few authors of previous studies (Huesca, 2002; Melkote & Steeves, 2001) direct their attention to organisational philosophies. Although the vision and mission statements of UDO—the stated organisational culture— emphasise participatory approaches, UDO did not (yet) fully integrate PDC approaches in its actual organisational culture. At the time of research, the organisation was going through several structural and managerial changes. Just before my study, the staff in Port Moresby underwent training in a new approach commonly used in all UDO programmes worldwide that puts emphasis on community ownership and active participation of all stakeholders

in design, monitoring and evaluation processes, which follows a participatory communication approach.

It is particularly crucial that the managers and senior managers understand and support PDC approaches, since the employees at the highest level are the main creators and carriers of the organisational culture (Clampitt, 2005). This was also stated by FWW:

> *these people in the management team, they will be able to develop something for the community that we will be working with in terms of participatory community development. We just need people with the ideas to actually initiate and implement it. If there is no idea, you cannot implement anything.*

However, in the organisational culture as observed, the highly-participatory literacy component of the project W was not sufficiently supported by the other managers. Lack of organisational support and understanding of PDC approaches was also identified by FWW as one of the key factors hindering the implementation of this programme.

The organisational culture also affects the prevalent attitude toward staff being trained in PDC skills, and therefore impacts whether staff gain appropriate skills and procedural knowledge of how to implement a PDC approach. UDO staff have little development experience and are not yet trained in PDC skills. Similar to a study by Muturi and Mwangi (2006), these findings suggest that UDO's current organisational environment constrains the successful implementation of the PDC approach and are in accordance with Melkote and Steeves (2001) who argue that PDC approaches generally have not been fully integrated in the practices of development organisations.

Donor-driven project design

The behaviour of UDO staff is further biased by the donor-approved project proposal, since this outlines the general framework for the project activities. Due to the NGO's financial dependency on donors, the initial project ideas often develop out of an open funding opportunity. UDO's project proposals are written to fit the funding criteria of donors, even if this means that its work is adapted to donor's priorities and that the stated organisational culture is not followed, as commonly experienced among NGOs (Mango, 2005). In accordance with Mango (2005), this ultimately implies that the funding agency has a powerful position in the implementation of UDO's development initiative and determines the timeframe, the specific focus and the amount of money allocated for the project (SM, A1).

Once the overall proposal is approved, individual activities can be modified to a certain degree in the implementation process, as stated by three managers (MW, MF, MH). An interesting finding is that all of their activities (income-generating activity of project H, participatory literacy programme of project W, women's cooking group of project F) developed through dialogue with the beneficiaries. In contrast to the low PDC level of these three projects, as

identified and discussed in Hermann (2007), their activities are actually highly participatory.

Theme 2: Meeting perceived needs

Meeting the needs of the beneficiaries is the second theme considered crucial for implementing PDC, by both UDO development workers (MF, A1, A2, SM, ML) and beneficiaries (Volunteer L, business skills workshop participants, farmers). MF even categorised meeting the needs as one of the three main factors influencing the applicability of PDC approaches, in addition to the community entry and the community's acceptance of the development workers and the project. MF emphasised that:

> *whatever you are introducing to the community has to be something that the community really wants, so that they are really interested in that activity. If they are crying out for it and finally you brought it, then they will always work with you ... and then they want to really participate in your project.*

The findings further indicate that project L has the highest PDC level, as analysed in depth in Hermann (2007). Project L fully meets the needs of the participating villagers, according to Volunteer L and ML. Most of the interviewees suggested that literacy is a basic need in most of the communities. Volunteer L emphasised that the beneficiaries only participate because they "see that [literacy] is a basic need, that it needs a programme". According to ML, the actual literacy rate in Madang district is even lower than the official literacy rate of 46 percent. Education services are insufficient, particularly in rural areas of PNG. ML explained that communities participate in the UDO literacy programme because it contributes to a preservation of their local language and culture, it enables community members and not expatriates to teach, and it meets other needs, especially of women, such as functional literacy and numeric skills required for selling produce at the local market.

As meeting the local needs is the basis of a PDC approach (Servaes, 2001), the relevant literature does not consider meeting the needs a factor influencing the implementation but rather an essential requirement for the implementation (Anyaebgunam et al., 2004; Bessette, 2004; Servaes, 2001). However, a crucial factor for the acceptance of a PDC approach in project L is that the need is also acknowledged to be a need by the beneficiaries. Nagai (1999) states that people feel only responsible for change if they perceive the need. By contrast, communities who refused to participate in project L did not consider the prevalent low literacy rate an issue that needed to be changed. Similar links between meeting the needs of the project community, the needs perception of the beneficiaries, and the application of a PDC approach, were found in the other three projects. These findings are in line with Stuart (1994) and Onabajo (2005), who argue that only development initiatives that are perceived to be relevant and responsive by the local people result in permanent commitment of the local people, even after the development organisation withdraws. In turn,

permanent commitment leads to sustainable development (Onabajo, 2005; Stuart, 1994).

The findings identify five factors that influence whether the perceived needs of the beneficiaries are met: needs analysis, donor-driven project design, collaboration with existing groups, expectations of communities, and the communication context, as presented in Figure 2.
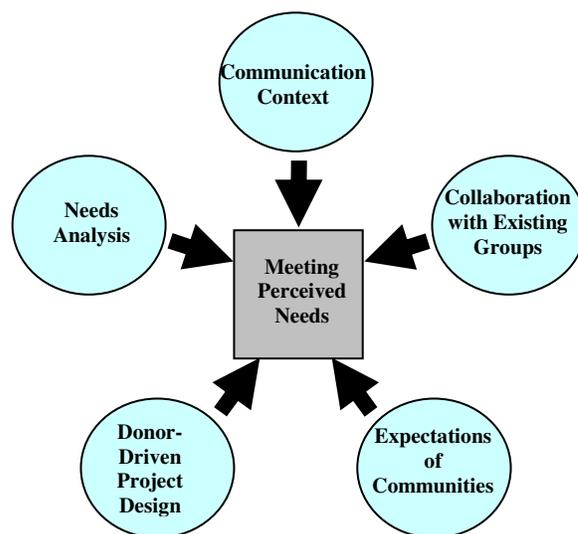

Figure 2. Factors influencing meeting perceived needs

Needs analysis

As perceived needs differ, FWW argued that a needs analysis for each individual community group is essential for the project design. Project L with the highest PDC level is the only project that developed out of the evaluation of a previous project where a community-specific needs analysis was conducted. For the other three projects, only generally available statistics were used for the needs identification, and as a consequence, the perceived needs of the beneficiaries are not reflected in their project designs. Similarly, Balit (2004) argues that research on the needs of a community is often not carried out before the implementation of a development initiative. Furthermore, many project proposals were written in the overseas support offices and, therefore, did not integrate sufficiently the "local situation, [and] the problem[s] of this country" (FWW). These findings extend the findings of Shahjahan et al. (2006)—that formative research ensures comprehension and cultural acceptability—by revealing that formative research also ensures that the perceived needs of the beneficiaries are known. Therefore, formative research, in particular a needs analysis among the beneficiaries, contributes to the project's meeting the

perceived needs of the beneficiaries and, in turn, increases the beneficiaries' willingness to participate. Mefalopulos' (2005) point of view applies here: "Achieving sustainability in rural development depends largely on the way stakeholders perceive the proposed change and the way they are involved in assessing and deciding about how that change should be achieved" (p. 248).

Donor-driven project design

The donor-driven project design also affects, for three reasons, whether the perceived needs of the beneficiaries are recognised in the planning of the development project. First, to avoid raising false expectations, UDO normally approaches the project communities after the project is designed and approved by the donor, with the result that no community-specific needs analysis is conducted. Second, since project proposals need to fit the criteria of funding agencies, the perceived needs of the specific project communities are not necessarily integrated, as described by SM: "you end up responding to an input that doesn't come from the community". Third, similar to experiences disclosed by Huesca (2002) and Balit (2002), once the funding is approved, UDO needs to start promptly with the implementation of the project to meet the set objectives within the given timeline, which does not allow time for a needs analysis. These reasons explain why the three projects (F, H and W) that follow a typical funding scheme do not necessarily meet the perceived needs of the project communities.

Collaboration with existing groups

The findings further suggest that collaborating with exiting working groups—as practised in projects L, W and F—ensures that the perceived needs of the beneficiaries are known and met, as their perceived needs are engrained in their groups' objectives. Similar to a study by Thurston et al. (2004), the common goal fostered the active participation of the beneficiaries. UDO staff (A2, FWS, ML, MF) pointed out that collaborating with one group entails the risk that the project is commonly perceived to be an activity open to a specific group only—unless working with a church group, which is perceived to be an initiative open to the public. However, UDO's projects aim to help a small target group and not the entire community anyway. According to FWW, due to the clearly structured ethnic groups in rural PNG, PDC approaches are more easily implemented in the rural areas.

Further, the findings of this research, as well as of the studies of Bessette (2004), and Melkote and Steeves (2001), reveal that particularly church groups, provide the infrastructure and practices supportive of implementing a PDC approach, such as regular meeting. Church-based groups and NGOs often provide basic services, including health posts and schools (Watson, 2006). Generally, "if there is an existing group in place, it's easier for group participation and community participation" (FWW). Christian church-based groups in PNG have generally a bottom-up structure that creates a space to participate in civil society (Maisonneuve, 2006). The findings display that in particular the social and practical aspects of religion, such as encouragement of

dialogue, solidarity, and social activities, foster the participation of all stakeholders and create a supportive environment for implementing a PDC approach—aspects also pointed out by Melkote and Steeves (2001), although to a lesser degree of importance.

Expectations of communities

Another factor influencing the needs perception of the communities is their set of expectations: to be provided with a complete implementation plan, to be paid for their participation (SM, FWW), and to receive free services (SM, MW, FWW, A1). UDO staff (SM, ML, MW, FWW, A1, A2) assumed most of these expectations developed through experiences with other development organisations, which primarily applied non-participatory, top-down approaches (FWW; Nagai, 1999). Some communities had experienced NGOs' promising to work in the communities but then never starting, which decreased the beneficiaries' general trust of NGO activities, as described by FWW.

In particular, the project communities' expectation to be compensated hindered finding new volunteers and contributed to losing some volunteers. Both, UDO staff (A2, MW, FWW, MF, ML) and Volunteer L reported that without payment, the volunteers' willingness to engage in PDC activities is negatively influenced. Whereas all UDO projects provide training for the volunteers as a form of reimbursement for their engagement, differences in compensating volunteers exist. In some projects, participants are recognised with monetary and other non-monetary means, such as special assistance and access to services. FWW emphasised that it is essential to keep in mind that "people rely on money for their day-to-day living". Similarly, Cadiz (2005) and Yoon (1996) also critique the ideal PDC approach that assumes that poor people have time to participate in a project that helps in the long run but does not feed their families day-by-day. A2 called attention to the ethical issue arising out of the payment of volunteers. He questioned whether the beneficiaries participate because of the payment, or because they see the long-term impact of the development initiative.

Considering money to be the perceived need of the beneficiaries, their motivation to participate therefore reflects the argument that the perceived needs of the beneficiaries have to be met to enable a PDC approach. Payment is particularly crucial when their participation in the project is so time-consuming that it hinders their ability to earn money and fulfil their monetary needs in a different way (Cadiz, 2005; Yoon, 1996), which were stated reasons for the dropping out of previous volunteers (Volunteer L, ML).

Interestingly, none of the present volunteers involved in project L, project F, and the business skills workshop of project W mentioned time issues or compensation issues. As these activities fulfil already the perceived needs of the beneficiaries, the conclusion is drawn that the beneficiaries' monetary needs do not dictate their willingness to participate when their other perceived needs are fulfilled by the development initiative.

Theme 3: Trust level

The findings further show that the third underlying theme influencing the PDC implementation in this specific context is the establishment of trust. Project communities are more likely to participate in the development initiatives when they accept and trust it, according to UDO staff (SM, ML, MF) and findings by Bessette (2004). In accordance with Onabajo (2005), acceptance of and trust in the development initiative is facilitated when field staff establish a relationship with the beneficiaries.

Six factors influence whether the beneficiaries and UDO staff enter into a relationship and a level of trust is established: donor-driven project design, acceptance of UDO staff, socio-cultural background of staff, leader-support, collaboration with existing groups and communication context. Figure 3 displays the relationship. Collaboration with existing groups was discussed as part of theme two.
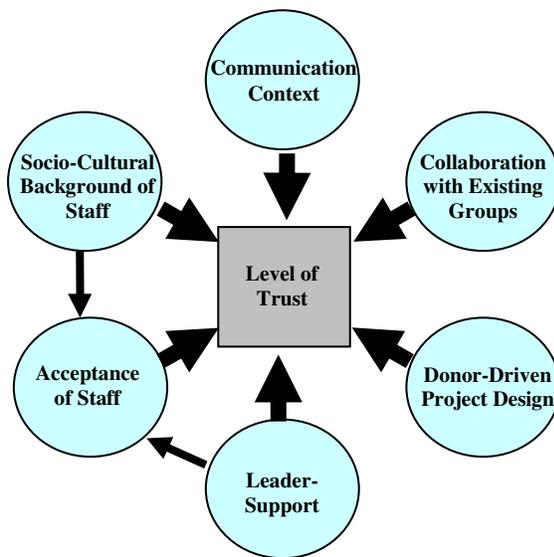

Figure 3. Factors influencing trust level

Donor-driven project design

The short timeframe of the donor-driven projects limits the time to establish relationships and trust. All projects have a three or four year timeframe. However, "[a project] is probably most successful when you have long-term funding. We are talking about five years" (SM). Usually the starting phase of participatory approaches takes a minimum of six months, and up to one year (A2). UDO's implementation plans do not contain a budget for such a long starting phase, even when that would benefit the communities in the long run (A2). In particular, "it seems that it needs more time to establish a project in a new community" than in a community where UDO worked already (FWS).

In addition, the set timeframe given by the donor contributes to the project's starting at a date that may not be suitable for the project community (SM). As pointed out by SM, it is often uncertain "that the community is actually willing to do that at the appointed time. They can have a funeral or they can have elections; they couldn't care less about gathering and doing that [at the appointed time]". This may further negatively impact the establishment of trust. SM further added:

> *[The timeframe is] not generated by the community; it's not the community that says "it   has to take one year." If you go to a community, they will always be disappointed when you leave after two years or three years. They will say, "Oh, you are abandoning us." They don't understand that a project is a finite kind of action; that when it reaches an objective, it's supposed to close the door, [pull out] the key, hand it to the community, thank you, good bye! It was a mutually beneficial experience. They perceive it as an ongoing kind of relationship. It is a relationship. It becomes a very personal tie. It's not a project to them; it's a mutual exchange that then stopped.*

By the time good relationships and a level of trust are established, most of the projects are already finishing. However, SM's insight explains why communities that were already involved in previous literacy programmes, and consequently had the time to establish a relationship with the UDO project team and a level of trust, are generally interested in participating in further projects. The conclusion is further supported by A1's statement: "if the project gets extended, it is possible to have a real participatory approach".

Acceptance of development workers by the community

To trust the development project, communities have to trust the field workers. Generally, an accepted and trusted development worker is someone who integrates well into the norms and standards of the community (MF; Bessette, 2004) or, in the best case, "someone from the same community who has started poor and has made [it] all the way up to the elevated circle and is educated" (SM). In turn, whether the development worker integrates into the community ultimately depends on the person's behaviour and attitude when approaching the communities, including following cultural protocol and wearing culturally appropriate clothing (MF; Stuart, 1994; Bessette, 2004). As summarised by MF, "people have different ways of accepting. But generally they have to like you".

The findings of project L offer evidence that the application of PDC demands a high level of immersion and credibility of field staff (Stuart, 1994). UDO staff have a very good reputation and credibility throughout the Madang area through previous projects, which facilitated the openness of the communities to work on UDO projects (ML, Volunteer L). Consequently, underlying factors such as the characteristics, behaviours, attitudes, and credibility of the development workers influence whether the development worker is accepted and trusted. This, in turn, influences the likelihood that the beneficiaries trust

the project and are eager to participate and be involved in the development initiative.

Socio-cultural background of development workers

The socio-cultural background of the field staff can increase the trust level of the community members, particularly when the field staff come from the same village and belong to the same *Wantok* kinship group. Whereas SM pointed out that the ideal development worker would originate from the project community, in project F field workers were not placed in their home districts to avoid bias and privileging (MF). The strong influence of the *Wantok* system in PNG (Lockwood, 2004), and the fact that all field staff are Papua New Guineans, entail a risk of bias toward one's ingroup and undermines the principles of a PDC approach. The *Wantok* system entraps people into doing favours for one's ingroup, even if these favours are not in the best interest for oneself (Crocombe, 2001; Romer & Renzaho, 2007), and, in this case, for the implementation of the project and the PDC approach.

Leader-support

The findings are in line with findings of authors (Bessette, 2004; Shahjahan et al., 2006) who reveal that cooperation and support from the authorities contribute to establishing a level of trust, support and ownership in the programme, which, in turn ensure people's participation. "When you go into a community, it is the Big Man that you have to see in the village or the Big Woman, whoever is the leader of the village" (MF). MF considered the community entry through a leader one of the three main factors influencing whether a PDC approach is accepted. The findings support the argument of Bessette (2004) and Shahjahan et al. (2006) that the critical authorities vary across different projects. PNG's decentralised provincial governmental system (Matbob, 2006) may explain why either the chief or the councillor is the critical partner, depending on the prevailing chieftaincy.

The findings also demonstrate a link between the attributes of the local leaders and the applicability of a PDC approach, thereby supporting findings of studies by Agunga et al. (2006), Cadiz (2005) and Yoon (1996). In line with findings from Cadiz (2005) and Yoon (1996), these findings offer evidence that the local leader can fire the enthusiasm of the people and create faith in the initiative, which contribute to their willingness to actively participate. This was particularly found in project L and W, but also, to a lesser degree, in project F. By contrast, difficulties in establishing a participatory literacy committee were experienced by FWW due to the lack of a respected and supportive leader.
In contrast to Onabajo's (2005) findings, all leaders in the UDO project communities have formal leadership roles within their community, although no political roles. Collaborating with and being dependent on formal leaders to implement a PDC activity means disadvantages can arise when positions change, as experienced in project L due to the forthcoming election.

ML stated that a higher level of trust can be achieved through collaboration with church leaders instead of political leaders due to their higher prestige in the community. In addition, due to UDO's Christian roots, Christian church leaders and groups tend to support the UDO initiatives (FWW).

FWW stated: "if you want the community to participate fully in the project, you expect to have a leader who stands up and speaks, and the people will obey." Her statement describes participants who are extrinsically motivated by cultural norms and obey the decisions of the leader, rather than intrinsically motivated because they trust and accept the activities. Here, participation does not involve responsibility and the right to express divergent opinions, but refers to following the indisputable superiority of the Chief's opinion, which is an integral part of many traditions (Bessette, 2004). Consequently, this assumption contradicts the principles of the PDC approach (Servaes, 2001) and also questions whether the ideal PDC approach is appropriate when the local cultural norms and traditions clearly respect the leader figure.

Communication context

The general communication context between the UDO project team and the beneficiaries hinders the successful implementation of PDC. The findings reveal that both UDO staff (FWW, MW) and the beneficiaries (Volunteer L) assume that communication that is exact, precise and transparent, as well as fully informs the beneficiaries about the project increases their motivation to be involved in the project. Onabajo (2005) maintains this aspect, the open and honest communication, will translate into a higher level of trust between staff and the beneficiaries, and then, in turn, into a higher level of participation in the activity. Other studies conclude that open communication reduces the risk of raising false expectations (Bessette, 2004; Stuart, 1994; Thurston et al., 2004). Hence, to create an environment of trust and to correct the non-PDC expectations generally encountered by UDO staff in PNG, open and honest communication is essential.

However, although all projects integrate mechanisms of participatory two-way communication, such as regular meetings between UDO staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, all participants presented the communication rather as one-way information flow from UDO staff to the beneficiaries with little opportunities for the beneficiaries to interact. This was seen in the staff's and Volunteer L's descriptions of communication as *informing* the beneficiaries what UDO *intends* to do for them instead of *exchanging* information about what the beneficiaries *want* to do.

PDC advocates (Bessette, 2004; Stuart, 1994; Thurston et al., 2004) emphasise that the communication system needs to facilitate the interaction among all stakeholders in a two-way format. The underlying reason for the UDO staff interpretation of communication as a one-way action may be, as previously discussed, the attitude of the development workers. This perception of the communication flow was also prevalent among the beneficiaries (Volunteer L), which may be another consequence of experiences with other agencies.

MH described his experience of the establishment of a steering committee with the following words: "the goal in that committee was to steer the activities . . . I identified people who are with status in those different communities . . . and I highlighted and explained what I expected from them". His statement shows that only selected stakeholders with status are involved in the meetings. Similar findings were made in project F where people are appointed by the chief or councillor, which constrains participation of all people involved.

The variety of languages in PNG, in particular in the urban settlements (Crocombe, 2001; Nagai, 1999) further constrains the two-way communication exchange (FWW). The project team usually approaches the community members in either Tok Pisin or English, since "it is not possible to speak in the local language because two kilometres further they speak another language" (A1). This impacts negatively on the equal participation of people without these language skills, who are most likely the most vulnerable ones (Crocombe, 2001). To avoid this unequal opportunity to participate, UDO staff collaborate with local translators, as suggested by Balit (2004), Bessette (2004), and Thurston et al. (2004). However, FWW experienced constrained communication between UDO and the project beneficiaries through an intermediary translator. Although FWW had the role of facilitating the communication between all participants, as argued essential by several scholars (Melkote & Kandath, 2001; Muturi & Mwangi, 2006; Thurston et al., 2004), the additional language issues transcended the reach of a facilitator and complicated the participants' participation. As summarised by FWW, "people who communicate, they participate. When they don't communicate, they don't participate."

Consequently, UDO's tendency for a one-way flow of information constrains the beneficiaries from raising any questions, from fully understanding the development process, and from expressing their perceived needs. Therefore, a one-way flow of communication negatively influences the establishment of trust and interest in the initiative and consequently decreases the likelihood of a successful implementation of a PDC approach.

Conclusions

Analysis shows that the process of implementing a PDC approach in the specific context of the four development projects in PNG initiated by UDO is shaped by a complex, interwoven set of ten factors. All of them are grouped around the three themes a) attitudes and behaviour of UDO staff, b) meeting perceived needs, and c) trust level between UDO and the beneficiaries. PDC approaches can only be implemented when these three themes provide an environment supportive of PDC. Analysis discloses that it is crucial that UDO field staff have a positive attitude toward PDC approaches to facilitate an environment that enables beneficiaries' participation. In contrast to the relevant literature that considers meeting the needs of the beneficiaries a requirement for the implementation, the findings of this research indicate that it is essential that the need must also be perceived to be a need by the beneficiaries.

Additionally, a level of trust between the development organisation and the beneficiaries is key in PDC, since trust motivates people to participate continuously.

The ten interrelated factors include (1) communication context, (2) experience of UDO staff, (3) organisational culture, (4) donor-driven project design, (5) socio-cultural background of development worker, (6) needs analysis, (7) collaboration with existing groups, (8) expectations of communities, (9) acceptance of development workers by the community, and (10) leader-support.

The major themes are crucial to implementing a PDC approach. However, some of the ten factors are of particular importance and impact on several other factors. The communication context generally forms the base for PDC but is not sufficient for a PDC implementation in this context. The time-restricted, donor-driven project design creates the ground on which the project is implemented but does not promote the implementation of an ideal PDC approach. The funding agency has therefore a major position in the PDC implementation. This study reveals that the cultural context of PNG provides an environment for PDC approaches. However, the organisational culture and the dependency on funding policies hinder employing a PDC approach that follows guidelines, such as the ones developed by Bessette (2004). The main decisions will, therefore, be made by UDO staff, and not by the beneficiaries themselves.

These findings are specific to the context of UDO in PNG. They can form the basis for further investigations in PNG in the development initiatives of other organisations, or in further projects of UDO in other countries.

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