

Assessing the Impact of Community Development Projects in Sustaining the Livelihoods of Project Beneficiaries: Evidence from Selected Projects in Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality in Limpopo Province

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to assess the impact of community development projects in sustaining the livelihoods of communities in Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality in Limpopo Province. Community development projects play a significant role as a tool to improve socio-economic development of communities. These projects have been widely implemented in South Africa to promote and sustain the livelihoods of communities. Even though many projects are expected to generate income, assets, and capabilities for beneficiaries, their impact in sustaining livelihoods of communities is not clear when they are assessed. The study is based on mixed method approach with a sample of 20 participants, from five different types of projects, 4 participants from each project including project managers and beneficiaries. Interviews were used to collect primary and secondary data from the literature review and participants. The findings showed that although project beneficiaries assessed benefited in terms of income and employment, project interventions had a limited impact because they did not lead to any significant acquisition of assets by the beneficiaries. The study recommends that in order to promote and sustain the livelihood of the beneficiaries, customised training should be provided, community projects should be viewed as businesses, there should be continuous monitoring and evaluation from the investors or donors.

Keywords: Capability, Development, Livelihoods, Projects, Sustainability

1. Introduction

Community development projects play a significant role as a tool to enhance social and economic development of communities globally (Gilbert & Schipper, 2009:14). Rural households are engaged in many livelihood strategies to alleviate poverty. Pieterse (2010:55) stated that agricultural-based livelihood strategies are used by rural households include community gardens, (such as farming), keeping of large and small livestock, and poultry production. Community development had fostered an increase in international investments in agriculture, mainly in the form of financially strong private and public investors buying or leasing arable land on a long term basis in countries in Africa, East Europe, Central and Southeast Asia or Latin America. These land deals are seen as development opportunities by investors and governments of target countries, while NGOs and some media outlets refer to them as "land grabs" with a negative connotation (Nel & Binns, 2002:67). Governments and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) also mobilised people in the local communities in order to establish community development projects in every local community. The

motivation was that community members would be encouraged to create their own jobs for their own empowerment. The idea was that the community members will be able to improve their livelihoods and capabilities by generating incomes, through skills development, assets ownership, and efforts to save and invest into business (Ferdoushi, Chamhuri & Nor Aini, 2011:811). Development projects have been widely implemented in South Africa and the rest of the world in order to promote social and economic development. In South Africa, such projects date back to the pre-1994 era and have also been the hallmark of national development in the era of democracy (Tondaro & Smith, 2006:66). Since attaining democracy, the government has developed policies and strategies to advance community development. These include Reconstruction of Development Programmes, White Paper of 1998, and Local Economic Development Programmes (LED) (IDP, 2016/2017:09).

Community development is integrated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) under provisions on developmental local governance, section 152 and 153 and mandated local government to

assume a developmental role. Through the instrument of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP), local government, in consultation with communities, identifies their development priorities and is expected to allocate resources and support implementation thereof (IDP 2016/2017:12). Local government is one of the spheres of government nearest to local communities is well placed to identify, drive and implement programmes aimed at addressing growth and development challenges facing South Africa. Pieterse (2000:37) stated that increasingly, municipalities have assumed an important role in ensuring that substantive and beneficial development takes place within their jurisdictions. One of the challenges facing the municipality is the alleviation of poverty and the creation of job opportunities in rural areas (IDP, 2016/2017:10). The paper presents: the definition of concepts, problem statement, aim and objectives, literature review, theoretical framework adopted, research methodology, results and discussions and lastly conclusion and recommendation of the study.

2. Problem Statement, Aim and Objectives of the Study

In response to the many development challenges facing the Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality, a number of community development projects have been initiated such as crop farming, poultry, tourism, livestock projects and etc. Some of these projects are successful and some are collapsing, municipal IDP indicates that livestock projects are more successful than others (IDP, 2016/2017:48). However, it is not clear if whether these projects had a positive impact on the livelihoods of the beneficiaries. Some projects are collapsing and projects beneficiaries become jobless, those who are still working complain about the status of their projects. The main aim of this paper is to assess the impact of community development projects in sustaining the livelihoods of project beneficiaries in Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality. The study was guided by the following key research objectives: (i) To assess the impact of these projects on the livelihoods of community members, (ii) To examine the monitoring and evaluation of the community development projects and (iii) To suggest strategies that can be implemented in order to address any issues that might emerge from the study. The key research questions were: (i) What is the impact of projects on the livelihoods of community members, (ii) How are projects implemented, monitored and evaluated,

and (iii) Which strategies that can be implemented in order to address the emerged issues?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Community Development Projects as a Tool for Development

Poverty in rural areas is strongly associated with lack of assets, or inability to put assets to productive use. Capital assets that can be used productively by rural people to sustain and secure their livelihoods are human, physical, financial, social and natural capital (Ferdoushi, Chamhuri & Nor Aini, 2011:811). Hamilton-Peach and Townsley (2004:44) describe the sustainable livelihood approach as a way of improving understanding of the livelihoods of poor people. Different livelihood strategies are employed in order to reach livelihood security. Livelihood security is the adequate and sustainable access to income and resources to meet basic household needs (including adequate access to food, potable water, health facilities, educational opportunities, housing and time for community participation and social integration).

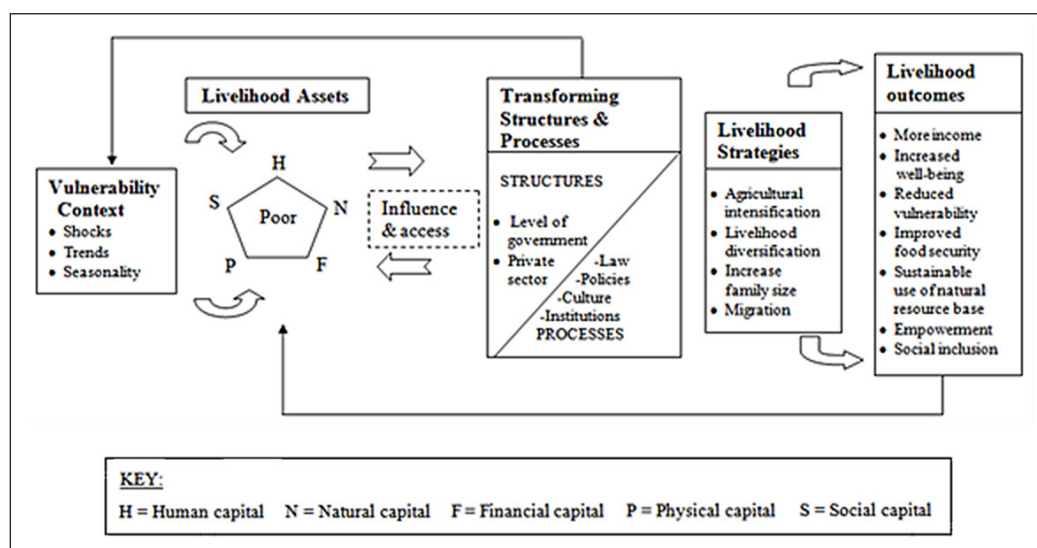
Agricultural community projects play a significant role in sustaining the livelihoods of community members nationwide. Studies conducted on crop farming shows that projects play a major role in agriculture and the enhancement of livelihood of communities. Crops may be grown for own consumption and for marketing by communities. Different types of crops are grown in different seasons of the year. A study conducted by Dinka (2010:67) in KZN shows that crops grown in that area by project beneficiaries include sweet potatoes, maize and sugar-cane. The marketing of these crops is done to generate income and to improve the living standards of the households. Sugar cane has a well-established market since there are sugar millings, where sugar cane is processed to sugar in most rural areas.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Linking Projects to Sustainable Livelihoods

3.2.1 Sustainable Livelihoods (SLA) Approach

The approach takes into account the livelihood assets of people (human, natural, economic or financial, social and physical capital). The livelihoods of the people are influenced by the context (shocks, trends and seasonality) and by policies, institutions and processes. If policies, institutions and processes assist people to survive and prosper in

Figure 1: Sustainable Livelihood Framework Diagram



Source: Ferdoushi *et al* (2011)

the vulnerability context (of shocks, trends and seasonality) and improve livelihood outcomes without negatively affecting the environment, sustainable livelihoods are enhanced (Ferdoushi *et al.*, 2011:811). The framework helped the researchers to be able to assess the impact in terms of project beneficiaries being able to afford a better living standard for example, being able to save, invest, buy materialist, asset accumulation and sending their children to varsity. See Figure 1.

4. Research Methodology

The research method adopted in this study is mixed method approach, which uses a combination of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study relied more on qualitative method but also made some limited use of quantitative method in the form of frequency distributions and graphs. The qualitative method enables the researchers to gather authentic data from participants who live in the specific reality that is being explored and analysed. The researcher is therefore able to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of study (Rawal, 2001:33). It was for this reason that the researchers carefully choose to interview the beneficiaries of selected projects.

4.1 Sample, Sampling Methods and Sample Size

In this study the sample was based on the target population of various community development projects in Lepelle-Nkumpi municipality (Zone A, Mathabatha, Makurung village, Mamaolo and Sepanapudi Area).

The researchers have adopted purposive sampling which falls under non-probability sampling method. The study was based on mixed method approach where a small sample of 20 beneficiaries (5 managers and 15 employees) within five different types of projects (crop farming (4 participants), chicken farming (4 participants), ECD (4 participants), tourism (4 participants) and manufacturing (4 participants)). Five community projects were selected out of 70 community projects and only 20 participants were interviewed.

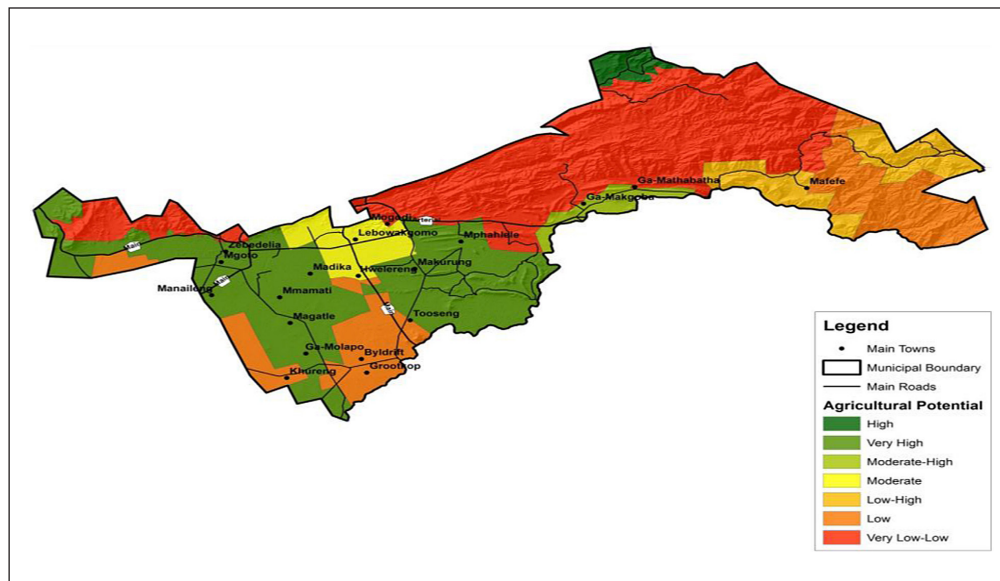
4.2 Data Sources

Data were obtained from both primary and secondary source, for the purpose of this study, primary data were collected from projects beneficiaries of Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality. Therefore, secondary data were collected through the review of project documents from Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality. Journals, articles, books, internet, municipality documents, IDP reports, municipality annual reports and other literature also contributed to enriching the findings of this study.

5. Data Collection Procedure

The procedure for data collection started with sending of a letter to the municipality requesting permission to conduct the study. This was followed by a consultation with relevant stakeholders in the LED unit, project managers, beneficiaries and community development officers. The purpose of the consultation was to seek permission to interview them. The

Figure 2: Area of Study



Source: www.maps.lepelle-nkumpi.gov.za (16/04/2017)

topic under investigation was discussed during the meetings with the participants before they gave their consent to participate in the study.

5.1 Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews were used as a data collection method and the interview schedule guide was used during interviews on twenty participants involved in five identified projects within the municipality. Face to face interview was fostered with projects managers who were involved in community development as they were knowledgeable about the issues involving community projects and livelihoods and focus groups were administered with project beneficiaries because they tend to encourage participation.

5.2 Data Analysis

The data collected in this study was in a form of qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used to process the data. This is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006:87).

5.3 Area of Study

Figure 2 portrays the area of study which was at Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality which is located 61km southern part of the Capricorn district and

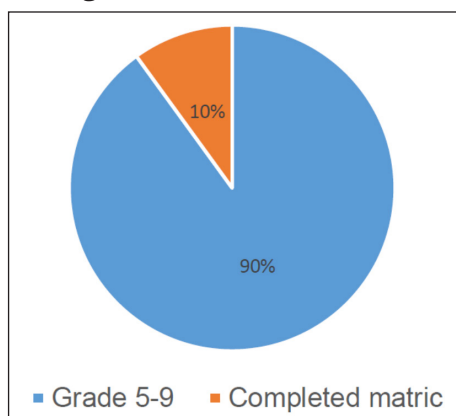
Polokwane city. According to the Stats SA Census 2011 results, the municipality has an estimated population of 230 350 people with a total of 59 682 households and an average household size of 3.9. There are 30 wards in the municipality with an average size of 8000 people (IDP, 2016/2017:59).

5.4 Population

The population of the study was 70 community projects which are spread in five clusters within the municipality named: Lebowakgomo, Zbediela, Mafefe, Mathabatha and Mphahlele clusters (IDP, 2016/2017:58). The sample for the study were five different projects so that each type of project can be explored based on its uniqueness.

6. Results and Discussions

The main objective of this paper was to analyse and present data collected in the experience of the respondents in terms of the impact of community projects in sustaining the livelihoods of the community at Lepelle-Nkumpi Local community. Data were gathered through observations and interviews with respondents participating in various five community projects (Mamaolo Crop Production, Mbaol Poultry, Mathabatha Arts and Cultural Projects), Phaahla Nkushu ECD project and Itsoseng Bakery project with a sample of nine project beneficiaries and two municipal officials. The data collected were subjected to qualitative analysis through thematic coding. Based on the analytical framework of SLA; the interview

Figure 3: Educational Level

Source: Authors

guide examined a wide range of issues. The results are presented in the following way: responses from project beneficiaries.

6.1 Personal Characteristics of the Respondents

6.1.1 Gender and Age of Participants

The description of the personal profiles of the respondents is as follows: the participants were mostly middle-aged men and women between the ages of 45-50. The result suggests that married women and men benefited more from the project as compared to single men, in terms of gender most of participants were females.

6.1.2 Educational Attainment

The findings showed similarities across different types of projects investigated in terms of educational qualifications of the beneficiaries. These similarities are that most of the participants attained western education and dropped out in grade Five-Nine, as indicated in Figure 3, few of the participants reported to have completed matric. The findings imply that most of the participants are illiterate or uneducated, and lack of participation in projects by the learned fraction in communities.

7. Description of Projects

7.1 Mamaolo Crop Production

The project is located in between Zone A and Mamaolo village and was initiated in 2008. It was established by two women. Their aim was to alleviate poverty and to create employment. The project had twelve employees, including the project manager and assistance manager. The products found

within the project are crops or vegetables such as spinach, tomatoes, cabbage and beetroot. The project gets their inputs from the Department of Agriculture. Sometime they buy their inputs from NTK (industrial) in Polokwane.

7.2 Mbao Poultry Project

Mbao Poultry Project is situated at Sepanapudi village near Lebowakgomo shopping mall. The project was initiated in 2010 by a community member who is now a project manager. The aim of the project was to alleviate poverty and to create employment. The main activity of the project is production of chickens. The project buys small chicks at a factory in Polokwane called Limpopo Voere. The project also buys chicken feeds for these chickens, and when they are fully grown, the chickens are sold to the community.

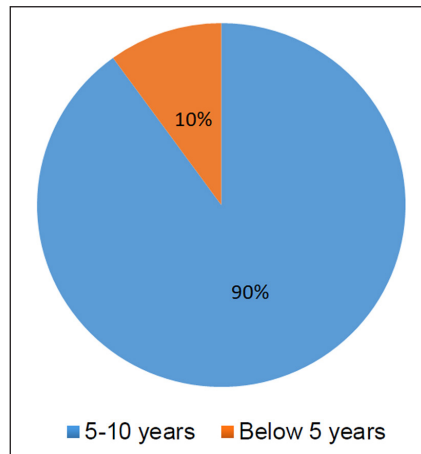
7.3 Mathabatha Arts and Cultural Project

Mathabatha Arts and Cultural Project is located at Lebowakgomo area. The main activities of this project is to preserve culture and to attract tourists. The project produces and promotes traditional symbols and cultural dances, and sews cultural necklaces, bracelets, clothes, visual arts and crafts. The project generates funds by selling cultural products and charging entrance fees from tourists and local community.

7.4 Phaahla Nkushu Project

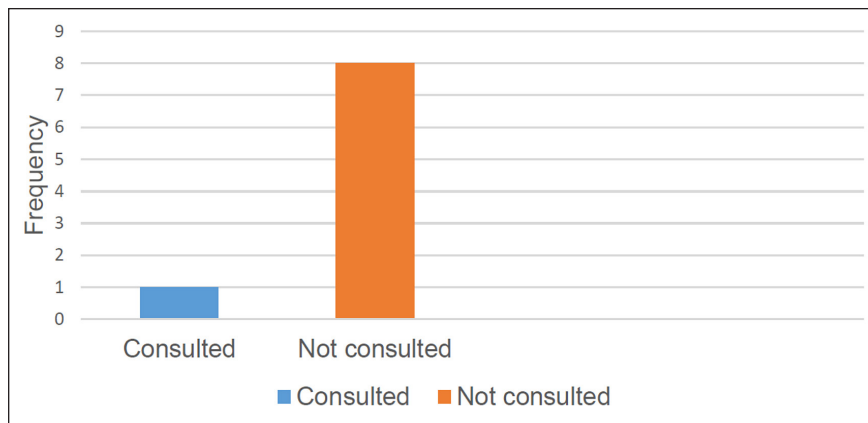
Phaahla Nkushu ECD Project is situated at Makurung village. The project was initiated by four women from the community. The aim for initiating the project was to alleviate poverty, to create employment and to protect children from abuse. The main activities of

Figure 4: Years Participating in the Project



Source: Authors

Figure 5: Participants Consulted in Initiation and Implementation of Projects



Source: Authors

this project is to nurture, care and protect children in the community by offering them pre-education, care and protection.

7.5 Itsoseng Bakery Project

Itsoseng Bakery Project was located at Makurung village and it was initiated by five women within the community. The project had 14 employees, and their duties were to produce and sell bread, pancakes products in the community. The project sustained itself through consuming inputs from Polokwane factories such as A1 supermarket, Macro Company and the project has collapsed.

8. Results and Discussions

The study looked at the number of years participating in project and the impact of community development projects on the livelihoods of beneficiaries. The following are the key results from the study:

8.1 Number of Years Participating in Project

The findings showed similarities between the projects as portrayed in Figure 4. Most of the participants showed to have had more than 5-10 years working experiences in the projects. Few participants showed variations of below 5 years. This implies that the community development projects have long been operating in the local municipality of Lepelle-Nkumpi. But their impact in sustaining the livelihood of communities remains questionable.

8.2 The Impact of Community Development Projects on the Livelihoods of Beneficiaries

In this context the following were probed, initiation of projects and implementation, Projects monitoring and financial support, Products and marketing, Income and Asset acquired and training or workshops attended for skills development.

8.2.1 Initiation of Projects and Implementation

Based on the findings from the above mentioned projects, the results show similarities between the projects in terms of initiation, implementation and consultation. Most of the participants indicated that they found the projects operating when they applied for employment. Few participants in management positions reported to have been involved in the design and implementation of the projects. The results showed that most of the participants were not involved in decision-making and implementation of the projects and, as a result, the sustainability of livelihoods of the participants was not enhanced as they did not feel a sense of ownership of the projects. Coles and Genus (2016:87) argue that local participation in community development projects play a significant role and community members need to be consulted and involved in decision making in order to ensure the success of the projects, failure will lead to ineffective of community projects. See Figure 5.

8.2.2 Projects Monitoring and Financial Support

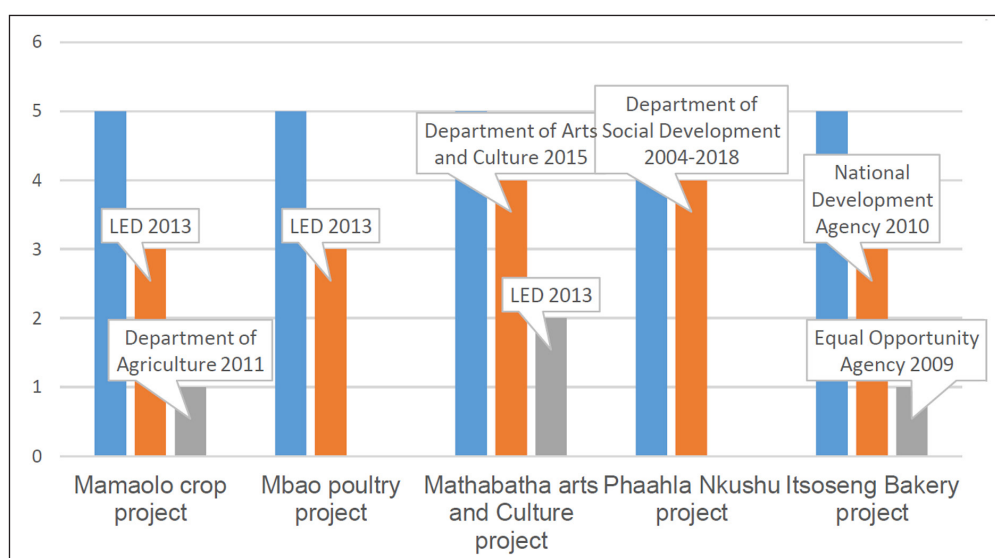
As shown in Figure 6, based on the evidence from the above mentioned projects, there were similarities in terms of funds received from various government departments and donors. The projects showed that they were financially funded after applying to various departments. Some similarities shown were that the projects were not monitored by government officials and donors. The results showed that the projects were initiated by community members not by government. The findings are validated by

scholars such as Moon and Indemudia (2012:44) who argue that in order to promote the sustainable livelihoods of communities, governments and private sectors need to engage in activities intended to build the community's human capital (e.g. training for skills development, expanding the leadership base and developing an entrepreneurial spirit).

8.2.3 Products and Marketing

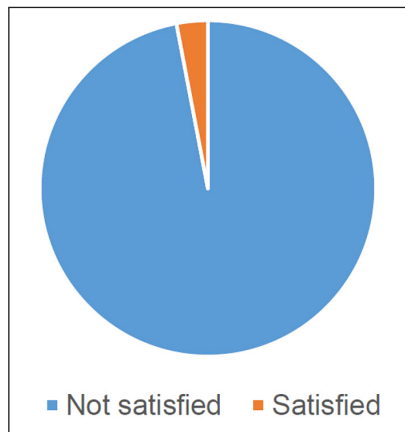
Evidence revealed that lack of appropriate up-markets for the products also reduced the possibility of most of the projects to break-even and subsequently thrive in the competitive business industry. The environments in which the majority of these projects are operating are at rural and township settings where the buying power is not sufficient to increase their financial viability. The markets targeted by the projects are pay-points and communities; the projects do not have specific suppliers. This has serious financial implications on the profitability of entities operating in such environments. However, the findings revealed that most community projects did not have a positive impact in sustaining the livelihoods of the beneficiaries and, as a result, some participants are unmotivated and discouraged. The results indicated that most of the projects adopted charity characteristics of expecting continued financial support set in most of the projects without proper marketing, management, quality assurance and market research being conducted. Most projects therefore found it difficult to maximise profits due to the market's lack of positive response to their products.

Figure 6: Financial Support



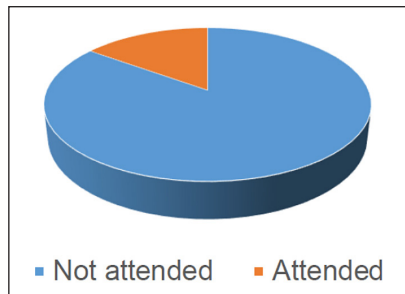
Source: Authors

Figure 7: Income and Asset Received



Source: Authors

Figure 8: Workshops Attended



Source: Authors

8.2.4 Income and Asset Acquired

Evidence revealed that most of the participants from five projects earned less than R2000.00. The income was not adequate to meet their household needs or well-being. It was indicated that the income that the participants received was not enough to buy household groceries, and they showed dissatisfaction of the income that they received as portrayed in the pie chart. Therefore, the findings indicate that the projects investigated do not have a positive impact in sustaining the livelihoods of the project beneficiaries in terms of income, capabilities, empowerment, sustainability and assets. This led to the collapse of one project as it was unable to have a positive impact on the livelihood of project beneficiaries. See Figure 7.

8.2.5 Training or Workshops Attended for Skills Development

The SLA indicates that livelihood assets for human capital are enhanced when project beneficiaries are able to receive adequate health, nutrition, education, knowledge and skills, capacity to work and capacity to adapt (Ferdoushi *et al.*, 2011:811). As indicated in Figure 8, the findings indicate that most of the participants did not receive formal training and

workshops for skills development since they have been employed. The findings further revealed that most of the project beneficiaries have been working within their projects without skills, knowledge and competency of managing projects. This had a negative impact in sustaining their livelihood where few participants from Phaahla Nkushu ECD Project indicated that they received training and capacity building. Lack of capacity building and skills development led to incompetency of operating projects, which had a negative impact in sustaining the livelihoods of beneficiaries. This may be one of the reasons which led to the collapse of Itsoseng Bakery Project. The findings are contradicting with the following theories: the capability approach and the sustainable livelihood approach Sen (2005:44) and Ferdoushi *et al.* (2011:17).

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

It was evident that the projects were initiated in response to poverty, unemployment and other social challenges which exist in the municipality. The findings revealed that the projects were initiated for the purpose of promoting culture, the creation of employment and the alleviation of poverty. Although

the study was based on a small sample of projects in Lepelle-Nkumpi Municipality, some useful findings were unearthed. Based on the analytical framework of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, it was found that even though these projects did generate some jobs and incomes to the beneficiaries, they were not impacting significantly on their livelihoods.

A number of observations led the researchers to this conclusion. Firstly, most of the participants were not included in the design of the projects and decision-making. Secondly, the impact of the projects was not as expected because the income generated was not adequate for the needs of the beneficiaries. Thirdly, the beneficiaries did not acquire any assets from the income received, and did not feel empowered by virtue of having participated in the projects; as a result, there was no ownership. Lastly, the projects were not financially sustainable, implying that their future existence was questionable. The researchers therefore concluded that these projects are not a viable basis for the sustainability of livelihoods of the beneficiaries. Therefore, it is recommended that the municipality can also draw lessons from this study. In particular, they could consider the following specific recommendations which emanate from the study:

9.1 Customised Training of Community Project Members

Community projects that are funded by government departments should be taken through a series of customised training programmes that suit the respondents' educational levels and the type of business ventured into with a view of improving on the current levels of performance.

9.2 Community Projects as Businesses

Community projects should be seen or viewed as business ventures than just mere poverty alleviation projects. They should therefore be run as businesses rather than as projects entitled to funded by sponsors. Currently, members expect to be recipients of financial support from sponsors rather than refine the quality of their products in order to appeal to, and attract, more clients.

9.3 Monitoring and Evaluation of Sponsored Community Projects

Municipalities need to assist in the monitoring of state funded projects and integrate their update

reports during their public participation programmes for the projects to be held accountable on the utilisation of public funds and resources.

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