

LIMITATIONS TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN KENYA: A CASE STUDY OF KAKAMEGA FOREST NATIONAL RESERVE AND THE ADJACENT COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The survey on limitation to community participation in tourism development process in Kenya, using Kakamega Forest and national reserve as a case study was carried out between 2008 and 2009. The main purpose of the study was to determine the factors that hinder active participation of local communities in tourism development process. Simple random sampling was used to select the local residents while purposive sampling was used to select the Forest Reserve Management Team. Data were collected mainly through the use of structured questionnaire, personal interviews and field observation and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The study revealed that the level of participation in the region was passive. Therefore, implementation of participatory tourism development approach requires total change in social, political and economic structures in tourist destination.

Keywords: Community, participation, development process, tourism

INTRODUCTION

It is an irrefutable fact that the people who enjoy or suffer the main impacts of tourism are those who live in the communities in tourist destination areas. Thus, the communities in tourist destinations areas must be given a chance to participate in decisions regarding tourism planning and development (Murphy, 1985). Community participation in tourism development process can be regarded as an impetus to successful and sustainable tourism development. Moreover, communities are the destinations for many tourists that is, it is in the communities that tourism happens, and because of this, tourism development and management must be brought effectively to bear in communities (Blank, 1989). It is noted that the outcome of the various tourism impacts and resident attitude studied Prentice, 1993, and Wishctemi 2008 in host communities in many tourist destinations in Kenya has been a call for increased public participation and in particular a more community oriented approach to tourism development. Hence, community participation in tourism development is needed for a reasonable degree of consensus that is essential for long-term success of the tourist destinations, strong community support that is essential for successful tourism development, desired guest-host relationship and for increasing the quality of tourism benefits to national development.

Nevertheless, it may be naïve to suppose that participatory tourism development approach will change the existing structures of local tourism industry in Kenya without changing dominant socio-economic and political structures of that locality. On the other hand, it should be noted that community participation as a citizen power is not a simple matter but it involves different ideological beliefs, political forces, administrative arrangements, redistribution of wealth and power, and varying perception of what is possible which seems to be unacceptable to the prevailing elites who tend to feel that their views and wants should be prioritized in the process of decision making for tourism development. Hence, community participation in the development process cannot become much of a reality unless specific and deliberate strategies at local and national levels are developed to tackle the outlined limitations.

Obviously, there is no single blue print and a set of fixed rules to operational participatory tourism development approach. As Prentice (1993) states, "Community participation is the watchword for tomorrow". Therefore, community demands for active involvement in the setting of tourism agenda and its priorities for tourism development and management cannot be ignored. Furthermore, community oriented tourism development requires to find a way of creating a more workable partnership between the tourism industry and local communities and develop facilities both for hosts and guests. The conceptual argument regarding community participation in Kenya seems to focus more on political dimensions and ignore the economic and financial considerations which are often the primary drivers at local levels. This may be owing to the fact that it is the political structures or systems that determine preconditions for participation in the development process.

Besides, community involvement in tourism can be considered from at least two view points; in the decision making process and in the benefits of tourism development. However, community participation in many developing countries including Kenya has been recognized as helping local people to get more economic benefits either through employment or encouraging the establishment of small scale businesses, rather than creating opportunities for local people to have a say in the decision making process of tourism development. Wishitemi (2008) recommends that local communities should be allowed to give their views during conservation and tourism planning process, comment on tourism project proposals and perhaps be involved in their implementation as well as monitoring. In his view sustainable tourism can only thrive if it is participatory, acceptable and appreciated by the host communities, who should be empowered to take active as opposed to passive roles in the process of tourism development.

Effective and sustainable tourism development depend, to a greater extent, on the involvement of local communities who are identified as the people who are directly hit by the waves of tourism development. Moreover, community participation in the process of tourism development can be considered in two perspectives that is, active and passive participation. The various limitations that act as obstacles to community participation in the development process are broadly cited as structural,

operational and cultural limitations which combined together determine the level at which communities will participate in tourism development.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a survey design where variables were investigated without any alteration and descriptive methodologies used in exploring the interrelationship between variables. The research was conducted in and around Kakamega forest national reserve where the target population sample was derived from the local residents of the surrounding communities especially those where there are ongoing or potential tourism activities. Apart from the local residents the sample was also made up of the Forest Reserve Management Team, particularly the Kenya Wildlife service (KWS) staff. Kakamega Forest National Reserve (KFNR) is situated within Kakamega and Vihiga Districts of Western province of Kenya. The southern parts of the forest run along Yala River which lies within Vihiga district while the northern part of the forest lies in Kakamega district. The area comprises Kakamega, Malava and Bunyala forest blocks and KFNR. These are situated mostly to the south of Kakamega district. Approximately 17838 ha of KFNR lies at 34.9°E and 0.25°N and straddles two administrative districts of Kakamega and Vihiga with Kibiri block lying and managed as a station within Vihiga district. The rest of the forest is in Kakamega administrative district. Kakamega district lies between longitudes 34°32" and 34°57'30"E and latitude 0°07'30"N and North 0°15" (KIFCD, 1994). To the east is Nandi North district, to the north is Lugari district, to the west is Butere/Mumias and Bungoma districts and Vihiga district is to the south.

The population of the study was made up of local residents both from the general public and those already in tourism development projects. A total of seventy respondents were selected to constitute the sample size for this study. This sample was obtained from the local community residents and the forest reserve staff in which case sixty of the respondents were derived from the local community residents through random sampling technique to whom questionnaires were administered and the remaining ten respondents comprised the Reserve Management Team who were interviewed purposively. Data were collected through the use of questionnaire, personal interview and field observation. Out of the sixty questionnaires distributed, a total of 54 were recovered back giving a 90% response. Data obtained was analyzed to relate the research findings to the objectives of the research and help in discussion and drawing of the conclusions. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and cross-tabulation were used to analyze responses to various items on the questionnaires after which data was presented in synchronized forms using graphical techniques such as tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relationship between Occupation and level of education of the residents: Analysis of the educational level of the respondents indicated the various levels of education reached by the respondents in different occupations. Among those who

had only attained the basic primary education were farmers, traders and blacksmith. Residents in other occupations identified had more than primary level of education. In the secondary level of education, farmers emerged as the dominant group followed by traders. Also in this category were teachers, students and tour guides. However, teachers with this level of education were teaching in pre-primary schools or untrained teachers in the local primary and secondary schools (Fig. 3).

A good proportion of the respondents with various occupations had also attained up to tertiary level of education; the dominant in this group are retired, while teachers who had attained tertiary education comprised 18.2% of those in this category. Similar figures were also recorded for students who were currently pursuing their professional studies in various institutions of higher learning (Fig 3). This is an indication that the long-known higher illiteracy level in these communities is in transition to literacy thus in future the residents' capacities shall be developed enough to enable their participation in tourism development.

Relationship between the village/residence and the length of stay: The length of stay in various villages varied considerably as shown in figure 4. Among the respondents who had stayed in the region for a period of 1-5 years, majority came from Shihongo, followed by Buyangu while Ichina and Kakamega town each had 14.3% of the respondents within this range of period of stay. Moreover, Buyangu village had the greatest number of respondents who had stayed in the region for a period of 6-10 years. Other villages like Bukhaywa, Ichina, Isecheno and Kakamega town had the least number of residents in this range with each having only 5% of the total residents who have stayed in the region for a period of 6-10 years. What's more, Buyangu village again had the highest number of respondents who had stayed in the region for a period of more than 10years. In this category, Bukhaywa, Shihongo and Lugusia had the least number of people who had stayed for a period of more than 10 years with each having only 3.7% of residents who had stayed for this period.

Benefits derived from tourism: Majority of the respondents said that they derive benefits from tourism, though not always at individual level as regards local residents' perception of tourism. The benefits derived from tourism included employment, providing market for local produce, acting as catalyst for the growth of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and initiation of development project in the area among other benefits. 43.1% of the respondents identified development projects initiated by the government or conservation and tourism authorities in the area as the leading benefit accruing to the local communities as a result of tourism. These projects were identified as water projects, that are the supply of pipe borne water to various communities around the forest reserve, improved road networks especially those linking the forest reserve with major feeder roads.

Among the roads that have seen facelift as a result of tourism in the region were identified as the road from Salaazar circuit to Buyangu hills, KWS office to Buyangu hills, Kakamega-Shinyalu-Kakamega forest station road and the road from the main Webuye-Kakamega road to KWS office. Although, the primary goal for constructing or upgrading these roads is to boost tourism in the area, they are also

available for use by the local communities. Moreover, 21.6% of the respondents identified employment as another key contribution made by tourism to the local communities. Although temporary, local residents are often employed in the reserve as casual labourers, the most notable one being during the branding facelift. Others are also employed in the tourist facilities such as Isecheno forest guest house and Isecheno campsites, Udos campsite situated in Buyangu nature reserve. Tourism as a catalyst for growth of SMEs and market for local produce each stood at 17.6% response, meaning that tourism has provided a ground on which residents can develop their capacities through enterprise development.

Community involment in tourism development: In an attempt to determine whether the local residents are involved in tourism and conservation activities in the area, 52% of the respondents said that they are not involved in any way in tourism and conservation activities in the area.

Organizers of community tourism activities and reasons: Among those who had been involved in tourism activities, 62.5% of the respondents said that the events in which they had been involved were organized by the government or KWS for the main purpose of educating the local communities on the benefits of tourism, 20% had attended educational forum organized by the local administration, where as Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) only held events for educational purposes. Other purposes for organizing such events were cited as soliciting community's views and opinions as well as seeking community's consent on planed projects. Among those who had been involved in the events meant to solicit community's views and opinions and seeking community's consent on planned projects, 18.8% and 40% cited government and local administration respectively as the organizers.

Consultation and level of participation: As shown in figure 9, 53.7% of the respondents stated that the residents of the local communities are indeed consulted by the national reserve administration or decision makers especially prior to introduction of changes. However, the rest of the respondents denied being consulted. Those who said the local people are not consulted reasoned out that the key decision makers are not confident in their competence to handle certain issues related to tourism development in the area. A probe into the level of community participation in tourism affairs in the area revealed that there is still passive participation of local residents as opposed to the active participation required for sustainable tourism development. 76% of the respondents termed it as passive whereas others referred to it as active. Those who said the local communities are passively involved revealed that local residents are normally intended to facilitate externally formulated plans and achieve projects objectives rather than allowing power sharing in decision making. However, some of the respondents who termed it active participation said that the level being exercised is much beyond which communities could not efficiently handle conservation and tourism affairs.

Factors limiting effective participation of local communities: A number of factors were identified as the key deterrents to effective participation of local communities

in tourism activities in the KFNR region. These factors were identified on various scales by the respondents and are a typical representation of any rural tourism destination in a developing country. Lack of information was identified by the respondents as the leading limitation (Fig. 10). The respondents argued that the available tourism information was not accessible to them in an easily comprehensible way and that those with the information were not willing to give it out to the poor locals.

Moreover, 27.8% of the respondents cited limited capacity of local residents to handle tourism affairs as another dominant factor restraining their participation in tourism affairs. This follows that the local communities are invariably rendered incapable by the decision makers thus not quite often involved. Other factors cited include centralization of power, the domination of elites and lack of interest in tourism affairs by the local residents. Those who mentioned centralization of power said that the decision makers confined all the powers in their control leaving no room for sharing of such powers whereas those who alluded to elite domination said that there are certain individuals, both from the communities and outside who tend to block the majority's efforts for their own interests.

Possibility of achieving active community participation in tourism development:

As shown in figure 11, 89% of the respondents showed confidence that achieving active participation of local communities in tourism affairs in KFNR is still a possibility. Only a few pessimists, believe that there is no possibility whatsoever of achieving active participation of local communities in tourism affairs. Those who were skeptical about the fact believed that the overpowering technocrats who have taken full control of tourism affairs are still not in position to decentralize their powers to the community level.

Ways of enhancing effective participation of local communities: Local community residents proposed various ways in which they think their active involvement in tourism affairs can be achieved. Among those interviewed, a greater proportion suggested equitable sharing of tourism benefits among all stakeholders while 13% of the respondents proposed empowerment of the locals as a way of motivating residents to participate in tourism affairs. Other suggestions recorded include involvement of local communities at all levels, provision of incentives and infrastructural development whereas 9.3% of the respondents suggested education of residents and initiation of more community based projects. Another 7.4% of the respondents cited partnership among stakeholders while only 3.7% proposed provision of employment opportunities to the local communities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall discussion regarding the limitation of community participation in Tourism Development Process revealed that implementation of participatory tourism development approach requires total change in socio-political, legal and economic structures prevailing in many tourist destinations in the country. Moving towards a more participatory tourism development would require decentralization

of public administration system of tourism planning activities. The Government, as the key stakeholder in tourism, should take a leading role in defending, protecting and reflecting concerns and interests of local people in their administrative territories.

Measures should be put in place to ensure equality of all stakeholders. This can be achieved through proper education and information provision at the grassroots level as a way of ensuring that the poor local residents are educated about their rights and are empowered to exercise them. The role of other stakeholders in tourism development should be acknowledged and enabling environment provided that will enhance a level play field for all to work towards the realization of participatory tourism development. For example, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) have an increasingly important role to play in the enhancement of community participation in tourism development. The government, in collaboration with other stakeholders, should establish mechanisms that allow active participation of local communities as opposed to the ongoing passive participation. The local residents should organize themselves into proactive institutions with clear missions, through effective resource mobilization that will give them a collective might to push for their rights without fears of objection. This will break all the barriers and alienations amongst local populations which have prevented them from having sufficient knowledge about the nature of tourism development in the locality.



Fig. 1: Map of Kakamega Forest

Source: Kenya Indigenous Forest Conservation Program (1994)

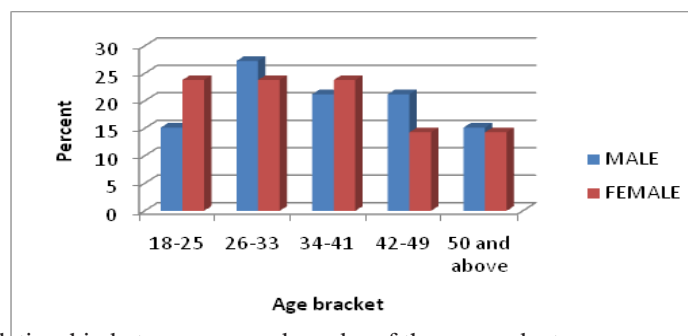


Fig. 2: The relationship between age and gender of the respondents

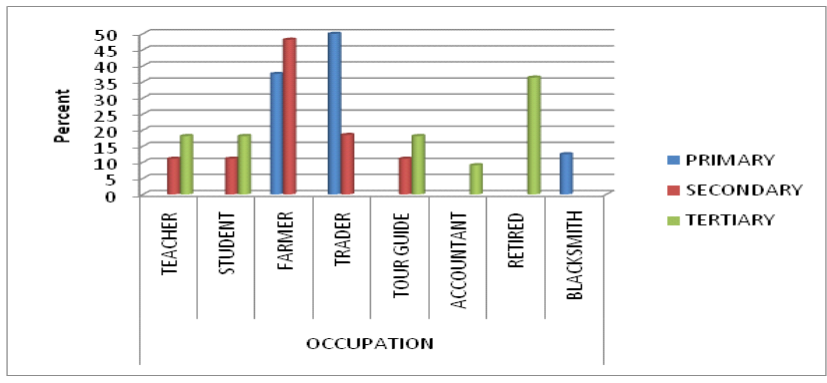


Fig. 3: The relationship between level of education and occupation of the respondents

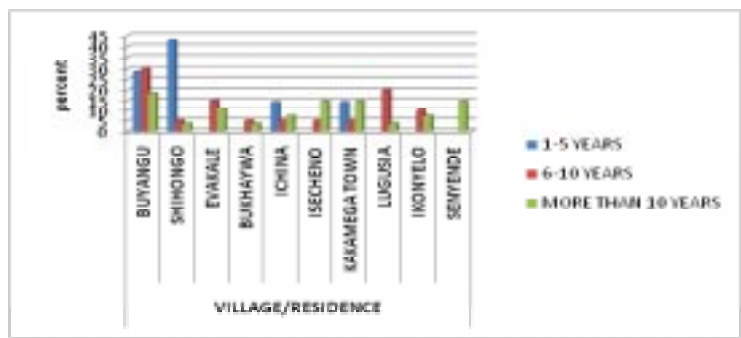


Fig. 4: The relationship between village/residence and length of stay

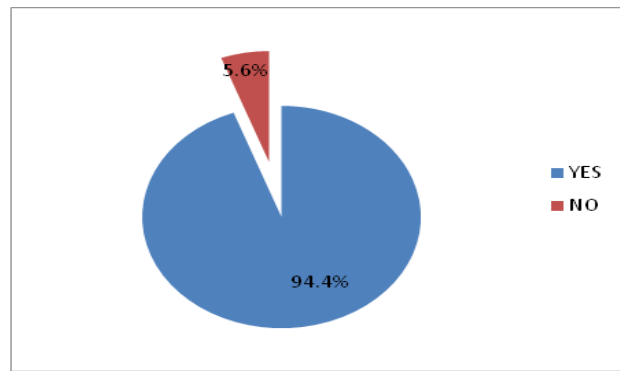


Fig. 5: Do local residents benefit from tourism in the area?

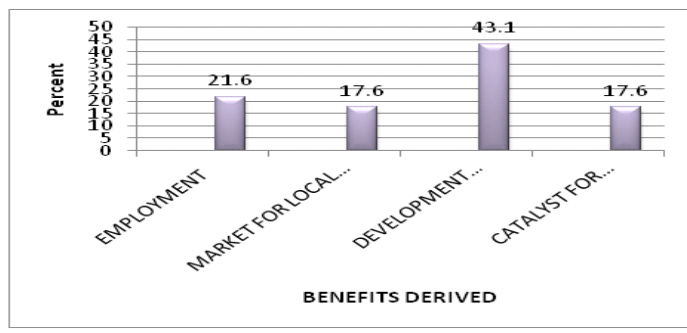


Fig. 6: Benefits derived from tourism

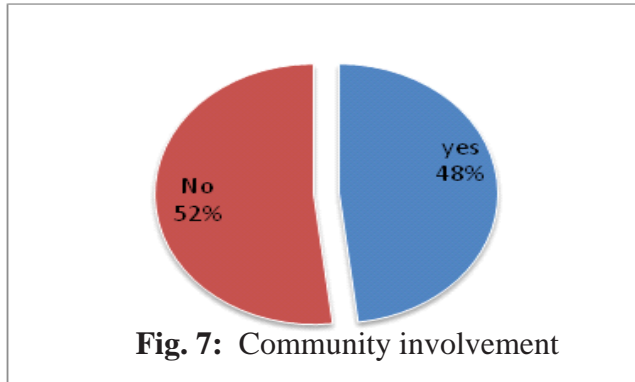


Fig. 7: Community involvement

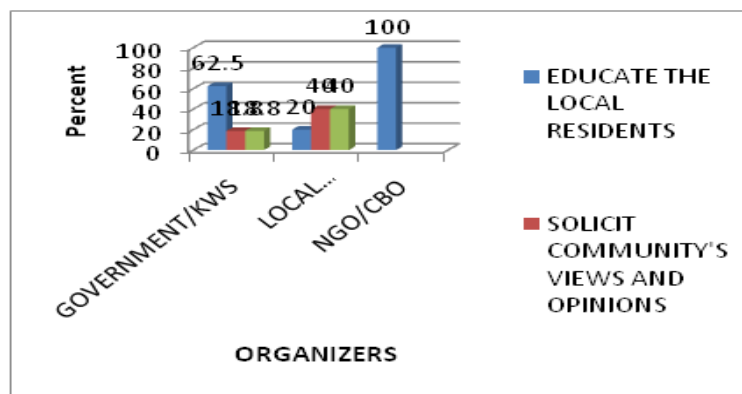


Fig. 8: Organizers of community tourism activities and reasons for such activities

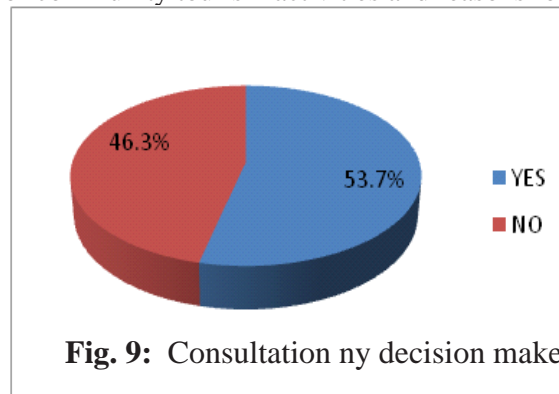


Fig. 9: Consultation by decision makers

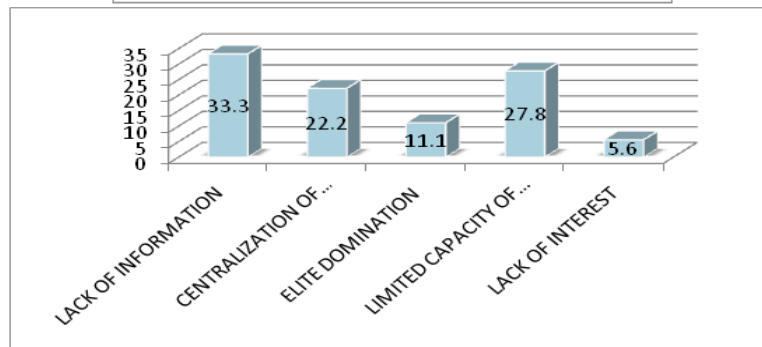


Fig. 10: Factors limiting effective community participation

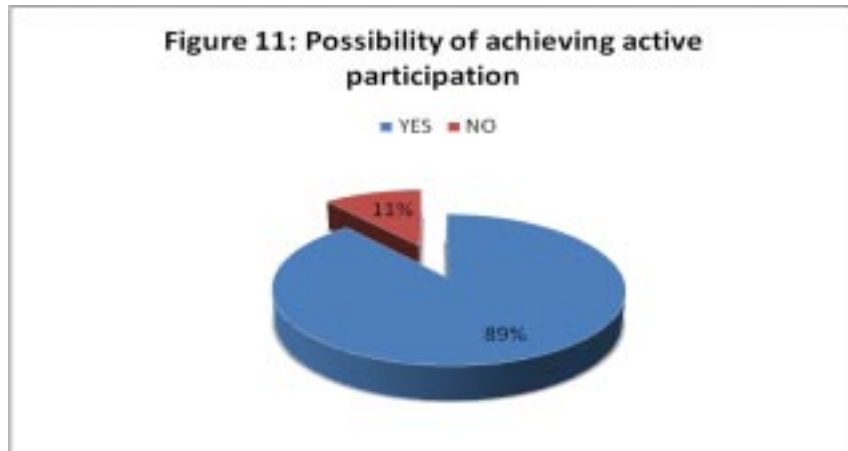


Fig. 11: Possibility of achieving active participation

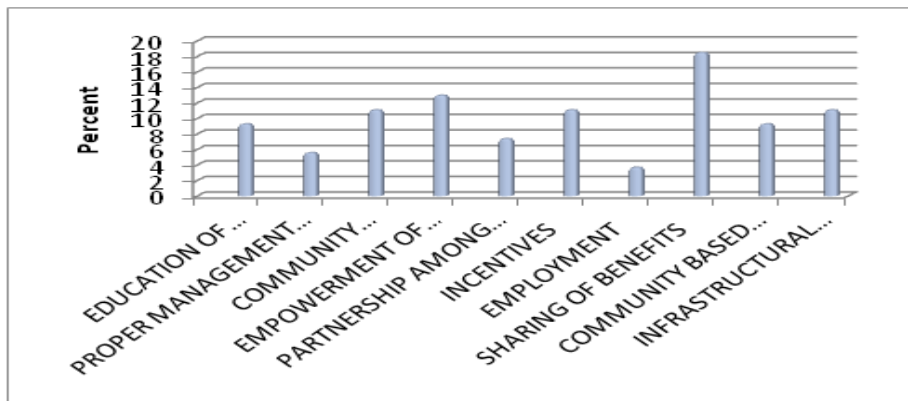


Fig. 12: Ways of enhancing effective participation of local communities

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