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**Assessing the Level of Beneficiaries’ Participation: A Case of Medicinal and Food Plants Extension Project**

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 ***ABSTRACT***

*The level of participation of the bénéficiaires was assessed using Typology of Participation by Mefalopulos, 2008- passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation and empowered participation. All three barangays are within Cabagan, Isabela : Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag consisting of 37 respondents comprising three barangay chairmen, three barangay health workers and 31 project beneficiaries. Guided survey questionnaire which was translated in vernacular dialect (Ybanag), key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussions (FGD) were employed during the conduct of the survey. The participation of the beneficiaries of the project resulted to empowerment in the planning and monitoring and evaluation phases; however, there was less participation during the implementation phase due to the use of mediated communication- with the use of radio. This modality affected the level of participation of the beneficiaries because of lack of face-to-face interaction among implementers and beneficiaries. The salient result of this research would be useful in conceptualizing a participatory communication plan for the project by considering an “empowered participation” of the beneficiaries in all its phases to achieve empowerment and sustainability of the project.*

***Keywords*** *level of participation, participatory communication*

**Introduction**

Participatory communication is an approach based on dialogue, which allows the sharing of information, perceptions and opinions among the various stakeholders and thereby facilitates empowerment (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

According to Servaes, 2002, participation in decision-making process is vital in order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment and right attitude in any development projects.

 It further states that the, participatory communication does not only focus on exchange of information and experience but also an exploration and generation of new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that need to be improved. This is also associated with community-driven development, however, it could be used at any level of decision making in local, national, and international regardless of the diversity of groups involved (Tufte and Mefalopulos, 2009).

On the other hand, universities like Isabela State University (ISU) are large repositories of knowledge, manpower and physical resources. They cannot function and exist in isolation of the society and communities where they are located. They have an obligation to cater to the overall and diverse learning needs of the segments of the neighboring people and communities (Islamia, 2016).

It is for this reason that ISU is fulfilling its role to transfer matured and relevant technologies and practices generated from research. These are in the forms of Extension Programs, Projects, or Activities (PPAs) which are conceptualized to support the local government units, barangay government units, associations, and individual member of the community (ISU Extension Services Manual of Operations, 2014).

Hence, this research is an attempt to evaluate the level of participation by the beneficiaries on the project conducted by the Department of Natural and Applied Sciences (DNAS) entitled “Medicinal and Food Plant Nursery as Alternative Health Care and Livelihood Opportunity in Barangay Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela” as a conduit in the realization of a socio-economic development that enhances the quality of life of the people in the province of Isabela (ISU Extension Services Manual of Operations, 2014).

**Methods**

***Population and locale of the study***

The respondents of the study were identified through purposive sampling, specifically the stakeholder sampling. The strategy used concerns the identification of major stakeholders who are involved in managing the programs and services. In this case, were the barangay leaders and the project beneficiaries.

As presented in the Table 1, there were three barangays where the project was implemented such as; Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela. The respondents were the Community Chairmen (Punong Barangay) being the overseer of the project, the Barangay Health Workers (BHW) who served as barangay field coordinators and participants during the project implementation of the medicinal and food plants project. The researcher first handed a permission to conduct a research on the medicinal and food plants project conducted by ISU, likewise, seek their approval to reveal their names as respondents of this study. Hence, the names of KII and FGD beneficiary-respondents were listed below.

Table 1. Profile of FGD and KII Beneficiary-Respondents

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| INTERVIEWEE | YEARS IN THE SERVICE | SEX | BARANGAY |
| Community Chairmen |  |  |
| Wilfredo Macapallag | 10 | Male  | Angancasilian  |
| Melchor Zipagan Jr.  | 11 | Male  | Catabayungan  |
| Teodora Guiyab  | 12 | Male | Cubag  |
| Barangay Health Workers |  |  |
| Melitina F. Allauigan  | 6 | Female | Angancasilian  |
| Jesusa Palacay  | 11 | Female | Catabayungan  |
| Carmen Aligod  | 12 | Female | Cubag  |

Meanwhile, there were 65% or 37 of 56 barangay respondents composed of Punong Barangays, BHWs and other project beneficiaries were the respondents of the research that represent the barangay stakeholders. The beneficiary-respondents (except for Community Chairmen and Barangay Health Workers) were informed of their right to refuse participation and their consent to provide their personal data such as name age in the survey forms provided, as presented in the Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of beneficiary-respondents

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| BARANGAY | NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS |
| Angancasilian | 14 |
| Catabayungan | 14 |
| Cubag | 9 |
|  | Total: 37 |

***Data Collection Instrument***

To ensure efficient collection of data, the researcher used survey questionnaire for the 37 project beneficiaries. The survey questionnaires designed is the 4-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) for interpretation of data. Statements which was used in the questionnaire are formulated and analysed based from the typology of participation (passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation and empowered participation) defined by Mefalopulos (2008).

Secondly, was the used of key informant interview (KII), through interview to the people in the community who have direct contribution and involvement in the project. The purpose of the key informant interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was to gather salient information to validate the responses gathered in the survey questionnaire, particularly the Punong Barangay and the Barangay Health Worker (BHW). KII and FGD were done per barangay composed of beneficiaries in every barangay to avoid comparing their responses.

***Data Collection Procedure***

The researcher personally administered the survey questionnaire and conducted the KII and FGD among its identified respondents. The Table 4 show the sequence of the data gathering procedure.

Table 3. Sequence of data gathering procedures

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Venue | Research Activities | Respondents/Materials  |
| Beneficiary-Respondents |
| February 9, 2019 | Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela  | Coordinated the data gathering to the barangay chairmen | Barangay Chairmen  |
| February 10, 2019 (Morning session)  | Angancasilian, Cabagan, Isabela  | Conducted guided survey questionnaire  | 1 Barangay Chairman1 BHW14 Beneficiary-respondents  |
| February 10, 2019 (Afternoon session)  | Angancasilian, Cabagan, Isabela  | Conducted KII to Barangay Chairman and BHW followed by FGD. During the FGD other participants were hesitant to vocally share their insights but they answered the survey questionnaire administered to them. | 1 Barangay Chairman1 BHW14 Beneficiary-respondents  |
| February 11, 2019 (Morning session)  | Catabayungan, Cabagan, Isabela  | Conducted guided survey  | 1 Barangay Chairman1 BHW14 Beneficiary-respondents  |
| February 11, 2019 (Afternoon session)  | Catabayungan, Cabagan, Isabela  | Conducted KII to Barangay Chairman and BHW followed by FGD. During the FGD other participants were hesitant to vocally share their insights but they answered the survey questionnaire administered to them. | 1 Barangay Chairman1 BHW14 Beneficiary-respondents  |
| February 12, 2019 | Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela  | Conducted guided survey among BHW and other participants of the project. The researcher was not able to get the desired number of beneficiary-respondents  | 1 BHW 8 Beneficiary-respondents  |
| Date | Venue | Research Activities | Respondents/Materials  |
|  |  | because others were busy at the farm at the time of survey although the coordination was already made.  |  |
| February 15, 2019 | Josefina Albano, Gymnasium, Cabagan, Isabela  | Conducted guided survey interview and KII. The venue was not in the barangay because the Barangay Chairman was the ABC president and this is the only way the researcher could conduct the interview.  | 1 Barangay Chairman |

***Treatment of Data***

The quantitative data was analysed and computed by computing the weighted mean of each answer. For data interpretation, computed values was 4-point Likert-scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) and weighted mean and rank of statements on the level of participation in different phases of the project (Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation) of the respondents. After which the results was analysed inorder to categorize the respondents’ typology of participation such as: passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation and empowered participation). Moreover, KII and FGD answers were enumerated and analysed in thematic approach. This is to allow new impressions and shape interpretation to conceptualize a participatory plan appropriate to the conduct of extension project.

The mean, frequency counts and percent values, following scales was used for the descriptive equivalent, to wit: the respondents’ Typology of Participation in the implementation of Extension project in the barangay was measured using the following scales;

SCALE DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT (DE)

3.35- 4.00 Strongly Agree (SA)

2.50 – 3.24 Agree (A)

1.75- 2.49 Disagree (D)

1.00 – 1.74 Strongly Disagree (SD)

**Results and Discussions**

***Level of Participation of Beneficiaries in the Planning Phase of the Project***

Table 1 shows the statements formulated to determine the participation of the beneficiaries in the planning phase of the project. The statements are based on the typology of participation by Mefalopulos (2008) which states that participation may be passive, consultative, functional and empowered. The 4-point Likert scale where 1-1.74 means Strongly disagree; 1.75-2.49 Disagree; 2.5-3.24 Agree and 3.25-4 Strongly Agree was used to assess the participation of 37 project beneficiary-respondents of the medicinal and food plants project conducted at barangay Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela.

Table 1. Participation of beneficiaries during planning phase of the extension project

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PARTICIPATION | MEAN | DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT  | RANK  |
| Planning |  |  |  |
| Passive Participation |
| S1. I was only informed to be one of the participants of the project.  | 1.92 | D | 5 |
| S2. I was only informed that the project will be on medicinal and food plants but they did not consider my opinion about it.  | 2 | D | 4 |
| Participation by Consultation |
| S3. The implementers asked my opinion about the project but they did not include me in the decision-making.  | 3.57 | SA | 2 |
| Functional Participation |
| S4. There were discussions and analysis made between us and the implementers on what we want to achieve in the project. | 3.05 | A | 3 |
| Empowered Participation |
| S5. I willingly and actively participated in the discussions of the project during the planning stage.  | 3.7 | SA | 1 |

Legend: 1-1.74 -Strongly Disagree

1.75- 2.49 -Disagree

 2.5-3.24 -Agree

 3.25- 4 -Strongly Agree

The Table 1 shows that the beneficiaries have empowered participation. While other beneficiaries disagree that they have only passive participation. This means to say that, beneficiaries really participated in the different levels of planning phase of the project. The Punong Barangays of the Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela affirmed that they were involved in the planning phase of the project. Collectively, they shared that prior to the actual implementation of the project, ISU implementers gave a letter of consent followed by a dialogue with the barangay officials on how they are going to put up the barangay nursery. The Punong Barangay of Catabayungan and Cubag shared that the collaboration was supported with a memorandum of agreement (MOA). Below, is the statement of the Punong Barangay of Catabayungan:

*Una, pumunta sila sa akin at nagbigay sila sa akin ng sulat na gusto nilang makipagtulungan sa amin. Tinanong nila ako kung may nursery kami, sabi ko hindi na active, kaya sabi ko kung gusto naming magtayo ulit basta kasama ang ISU para maturuan nga kami doon sa mga herbal na sinasabi nila sa amin. Tapos tinanggap ko, sakto noon na may pondo kami sa nursery at doon na nagsimula ang partnership naming ng ISU*. (First, the ISU team gave me a letter about our possible collaboration, they asked me if we have a barangay nursery, I said it is not active anymore, but if ISU will assist us in the establishment we are very willing to do partnership and we will handle our counterpart in terms of monetary and it started there).

Punong Barangay of Angancasilian:

*Bago nagumpisa mam y project, nakibbidda labbi ira tu ikaya mi kanu y magkaroon tu barangay nursery. Kinagi gapa hoo mam ngay basta egga kamu kaduvvum mi. Y kinagi da mabba, y taga ISU kanu y mangiyawa tu memula basta egga y pammulam mi yari ta nagpaprovide kami mam tu gibaw, counterpart ng barangay*, *doon na po nagumpisa*. (Before the project started mam, they talked to us if we want to establish our barangay nursery, I told them, yes, provided you will help us to put up one. They told us that, ISU will be assisting us and will give us planting materials as long we provide space where we could plant the medicinal plants, as counterpart of the barangay, it all started there).

Punong Barangay of Cubag:

 *Minay ira di Mam Jane, Mam Karen, sir Arsen bi tawe nakibbida anna inagalak ku bi yuri ira kagawad ku nagkaroon ng quorum. Nabbiridam mi tungkol lagu ta pamadday mi tu barangay nursery. Nagkaroon noon ng MOA between ISU and Cubag. Ang Counterpart ng Barangay ay space anna manpower. Open yari nursery ta Barangay nu sinni maya manga umay lamang manga*. (The ISU faculty like ma’am Jane, ma’am Karen, sir Arsen visited us and asked for a dialogue, I called my Barangay Kagawads and there was quorum that time. They discussed about the collaboration of having a nursery in the barangay, we also signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Barangay and ISU. The counterpart of the barangay was space for the establishment of barangay nursery and manpower for maintenance. The nursery was open to all barangay residents, if anyone wants to get.

Based on the statements of the barangay leaders, there was participation happened in the ground. As pointed out by Servaes (2002) in order to share information, knowledge, trust, commitment and right attitude in development projects, participation is very important, especially when it comes to decision-making process mainly because it is at the community level that the problems of living conditions are discussed, and interactions with other communities are elicited. This was also agreed by another author (Mefalopulos, 2008) who states that the reason why many development projects and program fail can be linked to the fact that they do not involve the local people during the process of making decisions.

***Level of Participation of Beneficiaries in the Implementation Phase of the Project***

Table 2 shows the statements formulated to determine the participation of the beneficiaries in the implementation phase of the project. The statements are based on the typology of participation by Mefalopulos (2008) which states that participation may be passive, consultative, functional and empowered. The 4-point Likert scale where 1-1.74 means Strongly disagree; 1.75-2.49 Disagree; 2.5-3.24 Agree and 3.25-4 Strongly Agree was used to assess the participation of 37 project beneficiaries of barangay Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela.

Table 2. Participation of beneficiaries during implementation phase of the extension project

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PARTICIPATION | MEAN | DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT  | RANK  |
| Implementation |  |  |  |
| Passive Participation |
| S6. I listened to barangay nursery on medicinal and food plants aired through radio just to finish the training course.  | 2.68 | A | 4 |
| S7. I attended training demonstration just to finish it. | 2.84 | A | 3 |
| Participation by Consultation |
| S8. I listened on barangay nursery on medicinal and food plants aired through radio and gave insights about the topic/s discussed.  | 3.22 | A | 1 |
| S9. I attended lectures, demonstration and gave insights about the topic/s discussed. | 2.57 | A | 6 |
| Functional Participation |
| S10. We were encouraged by the resource speakers and implementers to ask questions and share our ideas on the topic discussed.  | 2.51 | A | 7 |
| Empowered Participation |
| S11. I willingly and actively participated in the discussions every session and was recognized by the resource person/s. | 2.92 | A | 2 |

Legend: 1-1.74 -Strongly Disagree

 1.75- 2.49 -Disagree

 2.5-3.24 -Agree

 3.25- 4 -Strongly Agree

The data revealed that the beneficiary-respondents have participation by consultation as rank 1. This pertains to listening on radio about the different topics on medicinal and food plants, aired over DWRA, carrier station of the project located at CDCAS Building, ISU, Cabagan, Isabela. According to Mefalopulos (2008) participatory communication is not just exchange of information and experiences, it is also the exploration and generation of new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that needs to be improved. Based from the FGD conducted, the beneficiary-respondents were very much interested about the technology being promoted as stated them, Beneficiary 1:

*Y Pinakamakasta tu kinnua da, yore mam asunto ta herbal uses ira, ta actual tu pangimula mi, nikagi da nu kunnasi pangiyosa na abbabbing ira maski dakal lalo na yore cerpentina tu nuyawa da tu nimula mi, aru balo y pede na gamutang tu taki.* (The good thing they did was, they discussed about the use of herbal medicine, how we are going to use it in our own home, they thought us how to use it in children and even in adult and the Cerpentina they gave to us, we planted it, with this project, now I know that there are many illness it can be cured).

Beneficiary 2;

 *Aru mam natudduam mi mas ngana ta natural ira tu herbal ira tu mula. I Oregano, adde sangawe yari I usak ku nu magigag nga pati ana ku*. (We learned many things, especially in the preparation of natural medicines, like Oregano, I have been using it to cure my cough and even my children).

Beneficiary 3;

*Adde sangawe mam egga lapa mula mi ira ta balay mi tu Oregano, Cerpentina.* (Until now mam, we have existing planting materials like Oregano and Cerpentina).

Beneficiary 4;

*Nituddu da labbi nu kunnasi y fustu tu ammula anna anni yari ira I abono tu mepay tapenu makasta yari attalovu na mula ira. Tapos sumunod ngana yari nu kunnasi y mappatuma tu herbal ira tu niyawa da gitta na cerpentina, oregano, lemon grass tu adde sangawe ay kuak ku lapa ta balu mi* (The ISU implementers first thought us how to plant the herbal medicines identified, after that they thought us the proper ratio of taking the medicinal plants like cerpentina, oregano and lemon grass which until now, I am doing it in our household).

While it was revealed that beneficiary-respondents have different level of participation. Never the less, the beneficiaries have their own way of practicing what was being thought to them, especially if they find it useful to them as revealed by majority of beneficiaries, they even argued that they share one another as community. This goes to say that, people in the community are hesitant to participative when there are activities being offered by outside people but they have their own way of applying it in their day-to-day lives. The researcher’s observation during the FGD was that the participants are more vocal on sharing their experiences in the project to their neighbourhood or seatmates.

***Level of Participation of Beneficiaries in the Monitoring and Evaluation Phase of the Project***

Table 3 shows the statements formulated to determine the participation of the beneficiaries in the monitoring and evaluation phase of the project. The 4-point Likert scale where 1-1.74 means Strongly disagree; 1.75-2.49 Disagree; 2.5-3.24 Agree and 3.25-4 Strongly Agree.

Table 3. Participation of beneficiaries during monitoring and evaluation phase of the extension project

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| PARTICIPATION | MEAN | DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT  | RANK  |
| Monitoring and Evaluation |
| Passive Participation |
| S12. Implementers did not involve us in the monitoring and evaluation of the project.  | 2.89 | A | 4 |
| S13. Project implementers only did the evaluation of the project.  | 2.86 | A | 5 |
| Participation by Consultation |
| S14. Implementers solicited feedbacks from us but did not consider it for improvement of the training sessions. | 2.78 | A | 6 |
| Functional Participation |
| S15. Implementers gathered feedbacks to improve the lapses in the training for smooth implementation of the project.  | 3.14 | A | 2 |
| Empowered Participation |
| S16. Project implementers and participants worked hand-in-hand to resolve limitations observed in the implementation. | 3.19 | A | 1 |
| S17. Stakeholders and implementers willingly conducted the project evaluation and both agreed in the result of the project evaluation.  | 3 | A | 3 |

Legend: 1-1.74 -Strongly Disagree

 1.75- 2.49 -Disagree

 2.5-3.24 -Agree

 3.25- 4 -Strongly Agree

There were six statements identified in this research as possible participation by the beneficiaries during the monitoring and evaluation phase of the project. To do that, according to Wambura (1995), participation in extension should focus on joint decision making with regard to problem analysis, solution planning, activities implementation and evaluation of results, because external stakeholders want to know what difference extension education programmes make in the lives of people for whom they are intended. In like manner according to According to Chipili (2009), monitoring is a continuous process that starts from the initiation through all the phases of the extension project. This is to keep tract on the implementation. Chipili added that the implementers and participants should ask the following questions while the project is on-going: Was the project implemented according to plan? Is the activity truly serving the people’s needs? Is the community participation in the activity is still good? What improvements can we do to make our performance better? Does it use local resources? And does it build skills for the future?

The results revealed that the beneficiaries have empowered participation in the project, although all of them only “Agree” with their participation in the Typology of participation which is according to Mefalopulos (2008) the two basic reasons why the project tends to achieve its objective were lack of participation and ineffective communication. On this research, it means that some beneficiaries need to be reinforced. This can be done according to Davide as cited by Torres (2010) by engaging the farmers to watch things, read, find out how things work and how they can be better wonder. He states that, the design of the extension and communication setting is important as the appropriate communication strategy itself. During the KII, the BHW revealed reasons what the project was not sustained as expected;

Beneficiary 1;

*Bilang parent leader ng 4Ps, sakang gapa nina da tu gitta na mangamful ta nursery. Kailangan iddam mi tu importansiya tapenu mapakinabangan ng taong barangay, yari y kurang tawe nu mittang*. (As parent leader of 4Ps, I am in-charged in taking care of the nursery. We have to put importance in taking care of the barangay nursery so that barangay people will benefit from it that is one lacking here).

Beneficiary 2;

*I tadday mam tu pakkurangang, yari balamang y disiplina na tolay, maski anni mam ikaya mu tu mangiyawa kasi y karwang tu tolay ay awang tu kooperasyon na maski anni ituddung tu kunte, siyempre mam kezziga mangamful tu tolay*. (The lack of discipline is one thing I observed, even if you want to give something for their benefit if they do not have cooperation, it is hard).

But this could be resolved according to Renfro (2004) if there is a strong and clear partnership between communities, stakeholders and local municipalities. Furthermore, participation of stakeholders in the design, operation, and maintenance of projects is now, more or less, accepted even in the international circles. The benefits of participation include increased productivity, reduced conflicts and increased involvement of the poor.

**Conclusion and Future Works**

Participation takes place through communication. It is now increasingly recognized that people’s active participation is an essential component of sustainable development. According to Bessette (1996) any intervention with the intent of achieving a real and sustainable improvement in the living conditions of people is doomed to failure unless the intended beneficiaries are actively involved in the process. Unless people participate in all phases of an intervention, from problem identification to research and implementation of solutions, the likelihood that sustainable change will occur is slim.

No attempts made to critique or provide commentary on the achievements of the projects, but an attempt was made to draw possible approaches on how to best implement an extension project such as medicinal and food plants in a participatory manner. The participation of the beneficiaries of the project resulted to empowerment during the planning and monitoring and evaluation phases; however, there was less participation during the implementation phase due to the use of mediated communication, with the use of radio. This modality affected the level of participation of the beneficiary-respondents because of the lack of actual or face-to-face interaction among implementers and beneficiaries. Participation of the beneficiaries may be enhanced by using other forms of communication activities that may enhance interpersonal communication processes and by close monitoring of the project.

**Ethical Considerations**

 Ethical measures were practically imposed in the conduct of this study. Prior to gathering of data, respondents and key informants willingly approved and consented to participate in the study. There was no violation of their right as respondents were inflicted on them. Objectives of the study were also explained and agreed by the respondents.

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