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Abstract

Participatory project planning is a collaborative approach that involves stakeholders in the design and decision-making process of donor-funded projects. It ensures that the perspectives and needs of the beneficiaries are taken into account, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes. By engaging stakeholders from the outset, participatory project planning promotes transparency, accountability, and ownership among all parties involved. This inclusive approach enhances project performance by fostering a sense of shared responsibility, increasing local knowledge and expertise, and promoting effective communication and coordination. It enables donors to achieve their development objectives while empowering local communities and building their capacity for long-term success. Research discovered that participatory project planning in Khulna significantly enhances community engagement and participation. Participatory project planning in Khulna leads to the development of projects that are more relevant and effective. By incorporating the perspectives and knowledge of local stakeholders, these projects are better aligned with the local context and are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes. The study concluded that participatory approach ensures that all stakeholders, including community members, local authorities, NGOs, and donors, have a voice in the decision-making process. Effective project performance management, including monitoring, evaluation, and learning, is critical for the success of donor-funded projects. The study recommended that there should be emphasis on capacity-building initiatives in order to enhance the skills, knowledge, and participation of the local community. Establish mechanisms for sharing best practices, lessons learned, and successful project outcomes among stakeholders. Encourage regular learning and reflection sessions to identify innovative approaches, challenges, and solutions. Regularly report on project performance to ensure transparency and strengthen accountability to the local community, donors, and other stakeholders.

Keywords: *Participatory Project Planning, Performance, Donor Funded Projects, Bangladesh*

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1.0 Background of the Study

Donor-funded projects in Khulna, Bangladesh play a vital role in addressing social, economic, and infrastructural challenges in the region (Ferdous Hoque, 2023). Khulna, located in the southwestern part of Bangladesh, is characterized by vulnerable communities, high poverty rates, and development gaps. These projects, supported by international organizations, governments, and non-governmental organizations, aim to uplift the living conditions of the local population and promote sustainable development. Donor-funded projects in Khulna encompass a wide range of objectives and focus areas. These projects aim to improve various sectors such as education, healthcare, water and sanitation, agriculture, infrastructure development, climate change adaptation, and livelihood enhancement. The specific objectives vary based on the priorities identified in the region and align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. Grimm, Archibald, Axelsson and Grady (2023) noted that these projects receive financial support from diverse sources, including bilateral aid agencies, multilateral institutions, international NGOs, and philanthropic foundations. Some prominent donors include the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, United Nations agencies, European Union, and national governments of different countries. These organizations provide financial resources, technical expertise, and capacity-building support to implement projects in collaboration with local partners.

Participatory approaches are often integrated into donor-funded projects in Khulna (Kuijpers, 2020). These approaches emphasize community engagement and participation in the planning, implementation, and monitoring processes. By involving the local population, projects can better understand the needs and aspirations of the community, ensure ownership and sustainability, and maximize the positive impact on the target beneficiaries. These projects also focus on capacity-building initiatives to enhance the skills and knowledge of the local community. This includes training programs, workshops, and vocational education aimed at improving livelihood opportunities, promoting entrepreneurship, and empowering individuals and communities. Capacity building helps to create a skilled workforce, increase employment prospects, and stimulate economic growth in the region (Majid, 2020). Many donor-funded projects in Khulna contribute to the development of infrastructure, including transportation networks, schools, healthcare facilities, water supply systems, and sanitation facilities. These projects aim to improve the quality of life for the local population, enhance access to essential services, and support overall socio-economic development in the region.

Khulna is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including frequent cyclones, rising sea levels, and salinity intrusion. Donor-funded projects often focus on climate change adaptation and resilience-building measures (Mafuru, 2022). These initiatives aim to strengthen infrastructure, promote sustainable agricultural practices, and enhance the resilience of communities to climate-related risks. Donor-funded projects in Khulna typically include robust monitoring, evaluation, and impact assessment mechanisms. Regular data collection, analysis, and reporting are conducted to track project progress, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and measure the impact on the target beneficiaries and the overall development of the region. Projects require collaboration and partnership among various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, local community-based organizations, and academic institutions (Khartishvili, Mitrofanenko, Muhar & Penker,

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2020). These partnerships promote coordination, resource sharing, and knowledge exchange, fostering synergy and optimizing project outcomes.

Participatory project planning is a crucial approach in the implementation of these donor-funded projects in Khulna, Bangladesh (Mutahara, Warner & Khan, 2020). This process involves active engagement and collaboration with various stakeholders, including local communities, government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and donors. It begins with the identification and engagement of relevant stakeholders. This includes community members, local leaders, government representatives, NGOs, and donor agencies. Each stakeholder brings valuable perspectives, knowledge, and expertise that contribute to the planning process. A comprehensive needs assessment is conducted to identify the challenges, priorities, and aspirations of the local community in Khulna. This assessment involves gathering data, conducting surveys and interviews, and consulting with stakeholders. Based on the findings, project objectives are defined and priorities are established, ensuring that interventions are tailored to address the most pressing needs. Participatory project planning emphasizes collaborative decision-making processes (Li, Zhang, Hui & Lang, 2020). Stakeholders are actively involved in determining project strategies, activities, and resource allocation. This inclusive approach ensures that decisions are informed by the collective wisdom of the stakeholders and are aligned with the local context.

Participatory project planning aims to build the capacity and empower the local community (Wang, Cao, Yuan & Zhang, 2020). Training programs, workshops, and knowledge-sharing sessions are organized to enhance the skills, knowledge, and confidence of community members. This empowers them to actively participate in the planning and decision-making processes, ensuring that their voices are heard and their contributions valued. Participatory project planning includes the establishment of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that involve the participation of stakeholders. This ensures transparency and accountability in project implementation. Regular monitoring and evaluation activities are conducted to track progress, measure outcomes, and identify areas for improvement. Effective communication and information sharing are vital in participatory project planning. Stakeholders are kept informed about project activities, timelines, and progress through regular meetings, workshops, and reports. Transparent and open communication channels foster trust, engagement, and collaboration among stakeholders. Participatory project planning allows for adaptive management, where adjustments and modifications can be made based on feedback and changing circumstances (Nadin, Stead, Dąbrowski & Fernandez-Maldonado, 2021). Continuous learning and feedback loops are established to incorporate lessons learned and make necessary course corrections to ensure project effectiveness. Participatory project planning emphasizes the importance of sustainability and local ownership. By involving the community in the planning process, projects are more likely to have long-term impact and be sustained beyond the project duration. Local ownership fosters a sense of responsibility, empowerment, and commitment to project success.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The participatory project planning and performance of donor-funded projects in Khulna, Bangladesh face several challenges that need to be addressed to ensure effective implementation and maximize their impact. One key problem is the limited engagement and participation of the

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local community in the project planning and decision-making processes. Without active involvement, the projects may not adequately address the specific needs, aspirations, and priorities of the people in Khulna. This lack of community participation can lead to projects that are disconnected from the realities on the ground, resulting in reduced effectiveness and sustainability. Another challenge is the lack of strong collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders involved in the donor-funded projects. This includes government agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations, and donors. Insufficient coordination can lead to duplication of efforts, resource wastage, and ineffective implementation. It is crucial to foster partnerships and establish platforms for regular communication and collaboration to leverage collective expertise, resources, and knowledge. There is often a lack of robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track project progress, assess outcomes, and measure impact. Inadequate monitoring can result in delays, cost overruns, and deviations from the planned objectives. Similarly, the absence of comprehensive evaluations limits the understanding of the projects' effectiveness and hinders learning for future improvements. Improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are essential to ensure accountability, identify challenges, and make informed decisions for effective project performance.

2.0 Literature Review

Panday and Panday (2020) conducted research to determine which factors impact the success of slum upgrading initiatives, and how involvement at various phases of the project life cycle (i.e., identification, planning, execution, monitoring, and evaluation) plays a role in that success. Dharavi, a slum area of Mumbai, served as the study's primary setting. Cluster sampling and simple random sampling were used to choose the participants. Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed interchangeably throughout the investigation. Descriptive research methodology was used for this study. The data was analyzed using SPSS and a regression model. Tables, graphs, and narratives all contributed to the presentation of the data. Data was analyzed, presented, and interpreted using descriptive statistics. The findings demonstrate that slum improvement programmes are more likely to be successful when managed using a participatory approach. The results demonstrate that slum upgrading programmes are more likely to be successful when more people are involved in their identification, planning, and execution. Although greater engagement is required based on the mean ratings, there was participation in the project identification step. Residents in the area helped carry out the job. However, greater diversity is needed to improve SUPs based on average scores. The execution stage of the project saw notable participation. The research suggests that residents of the informal settlement become involved in any and all initiatives that arise. More people should be encouraged to participate in the project discovery, planning, and carrying out stages. However, even a little amount of input into these processes even if just minimal should be encouraged. There has to be more research done on this subject, but this time with other factors.

Pereira, Asrar, Bhargava, Fisher, Hsu, Jabbour and Weinfurter (2021) conducted research to raise consciousness about the need of rethinking current wheat policy and practice in favour of more collaborative, bottom-up approaches to planning. This study draws on empirical scientific study conducted in Ukraine for a doctoral thesis, specifically examining the impact of participatory

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project planning on the success of wheat farming programmes. The research was grounded on the philosophy of project management, followed a descriptive cross-sectional design, and was conducted using a mixed-method pragmatism research paradigm. From a pool of 5,836 farmers, a representative sample of 256 was drawn using a multistage sampling method. Twenty important informants were interviewed, and their responses were combined with data from self-administered questionnaires. There was use of both descriptive and inferential statistics. F-test and correlation were used to examine the null hypothesis that found no connection between participatory project planning and the results of mango farming initiatives. With $df (3,467)$, $F=3.562$, $t=2.567$, $p=0.00 \leq 0.05$, $r=0.437$, and $R^2=0.125$, the results indicated a statistically significant correlation between the two variables at the 95% confidence level. With no support from the data, the researchers opted to reject the null hypothesis and instead draw attention to the positive correlation between participatory project planning and the success of mango farming initiatives. The study's results suggest that including iterative combinations of planning variables that are intrinsic to the project management life cycle into participatory project planning might help boost performance. If you want better results from your projects, you should always use participatory planning techniques.

Warneryd, Håkansson and Karltorp (2020) found out that Institutional Roots Organizations have made significant contributions to the progress of numerous nations. Many rural settlements in the developing world have emerged thanks to community development initiatives including sustainable agriculture, sustainable clean water supplies, and the building of religious and educational institutions. About 300,000 people's lives have been improved because to community-based programmes in Bangladesh. When a community chooses to create a development project, they should follow a project cycle to examine the relevance of the project, what they want to accomplish, their focus, the resources they will need, the talents they will need, and the technological knowhow they will need. This preliminary brainstorming phase is known as the "Initiation stage." It has been noted that getting the complete community involved in the project's early stages through planning, offering input on what they want and how they want the project to operate, and executing the project itself is crucial. This is essential because it builds trust between the locals and the government or donor. Initiation strategies and community participation seem to have a significant impact on a project's performance and success. The purpose of this research is to examine and quantify the connection between project launch and success in Bangladesh.

Wang, Ghasemi, Ghadiri Nejad and Khandan (2023) performed research to find out how much of a role project planning plays in the successful completion of infrastructure projects at Mashhad's public hospitals. A descriptive research strategy was used for this investigation. The study's intended participants were 130 professionals (engineers, supervisors, and contractors) who work on infrastructure projects for Mashhad, Iran's public hospitals. A census was done, and a pilot study was run to ensure the accuracy and validity of the final data collecting form. In order to get both qualitative and quantitative information, a questionnaire was employed to gather primary data. Content analysis was used to decipher the qualitative information gathered. Descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to examine the quantitative data. The data was analyzed using SPSS to check for correlations between the independent and dependent variables. To establish the direction and degree of the association

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between the variables, a regression analysis was performed at the 0.05 level of significance. All project planning parameters were shown to have a favourable and statistically significant association with the successful completion of infrastructure projects at public hospitals in Mashhad, Iran. The level of impact, however, varied across several aspects of project planning. The project schedule had the most impact, followed by the project resource plan, the project participative planning process, and the project design. Therefore, this research offers public hospital project managers information into how to enhance project planning in order to more effectively undertake infrastructure projects. Implementing public hospital infrastructure projects successfully requires adhering to best practices in project planning, including project designing, project resource planning, project scheduling, and project participation.

López (2023) conducted research to determine the economic growth of Venezuela and the world as a whole and gauged that it is centred on community engagement and the success of project execution. Public policy and service delivery in the field of good governance are increasingly reliant on community input. This research uses the Caracas Metropolitan Water Supply Project as a case study to test certain hypotheses about the relationship between community involvement and the success of a project's execution. The study combined a quantitative (statistical) approach with a qualitative (interviews and observations) one. There were 560 participants in the study as a whole, and 70 were randomly selected as a representative sample using the Yamane formula. This research used a combined random and purposeful sampling strategy. SPSS was ultimately used to analyze the data. Community involvement was shown to significantly improve project outcomes, as evidenced by the research's findings. According to the results of the regression analysis, community involvement in need analysis has the largest impact, followed by community involvement in monitoring and evaluation. The impact of community involvement in planning on the success of a project's execution is minimal. Greater community involvement throughout the project life cycle often leads to a more successful execution of the project.

Birkinshaw, Grieser and Tan (2021) conducted research to learn how active beneficiaries are in the selection of community water point initiatives in Karachi, Pakistan. A total of 15,132 Karachi homes were included in the research. The sample size of 432 homes was determined using the Cochran method with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. Both convenience and proportional quota sampling were used to choose the final sample. Observations, focus groups, interviews with key informants, and semi-structured questionnaires were used to compile the data. Quantitative data was analyzed using a Multiple Regression Analysis using SPSS for the Social Sciences. The qualitative data was analyzed using framework analysis and narrative analysis. The devices used to gather data underwent both a content test to ensure their accuracy and an inter-rater reliability test to ensure their consistency amongst observers. Data was collated, summarized, analyzed, and derived conclusions from. Frequencies, percentages, the average, and standard deviation were only few of the descriptive statistics that were calculated and shown. Hypotheses were tested using F-tests, multiple regression, stepwise regression (R^2), and Pearson's Moment Correlation (r). The numbers came out to be $r = 0.768$, $p = 0.0 \leq 0.005$, and $F(1, 435) = 10,545$. Researchers found that community water point initiatives were more likely to last when community members were involved in the process of choosing which projects to pursue.

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Spasova and Braungardt (2021) performed research to determine how important project planning is to the final outcome of building projects in Bulgaria. The research in this article relied on a survey of Strandja Region building projects that took place between 2009 and 2016. There are three main goals for this research: to analyze the relationship between project scope and performance, to analyze the relationship between project breakdown structure and performance, and to analyze the relationship between project planning tools and performance. This study used a descriptive research strategy. A total of 250 people were interviewed for this study, including district, sector, and cell employees as well as members of the local community who are engaged in project planning for building projects in the Strandja Region. The questionnaire was used to gather the data, and SPSS 23 was used for analysis. Multiple regression analysis, including analysis of variance, Pearson correlation, and descriptive analysis, was performed to determine the strength of the link between the exogenous variables and the endogenous variables in this mixed-methods study. Since the study's objectives and deliverables are predetermined, the results indicated that project scope had a positive significant linear connection on project performance, in particular on environmental condition ($\beta=0.324$, $p=0.034$). As a result of listing all project output, subdividing activities into tasks, identifying all deliverables and milestones of each task, and identifying the time usage of all the resources needed to complete each task in anticipation of the effect of globalization and the tectonic shifts, the working breakdown structure has a positive significant linear relationship on project performance, especially on time overrun ($\beta= 0.343$, $p=0.045$) and contractual relationship ($\beta= 0.360$, $p=0.007$). Based on that analysis, we were able to provide some suggestions for how the federal government may assist local governments improve their project management capabilities. The study's findings are applicable to academia, government, and researchers since improving building efficiency calls for rapid diversification in the current day.

Vrchota, Řehoř, Maříková and Pech (2020) reported that the widely held idea that public involvement improves the results of rural water delivery projects is not backed up by any hard data. Due to a lack of clarity in the few studies that have attempted to answer this issue, it is not possible to know for sure what forms of involvement are crucial to a project's success. This research looks at information gathered from 10 villages in two separate water supply projects in India to determine if there is a correlation between participation and project outcomes, if participation at the level of contributing to the initial capital cost (generally considered to be a very low level of participation) affects project outcomes, and if higher levels of participation lead to better outcomes. There are three main findings from this research based on the findings of Ordinary Least Squares regression models. To begin, widespread community involvement is crucial to a project's ultimate success. Second, villagers are more likely to be pleased and give a positive rating to a project if more of them have chipped in to cover its capital costs. Third, the project's success, as judged by tariff payment and overall efficiency, depends on the committee's procedures being transparent.

3.0 Research Findings

Research discovered that participatory project planning in Khulna significantly enhances community engagement and participation. By involving local community members in the decision-making process, projects are more likely to address their specific needs and priorities.

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Increased community engagement leads to a sense of ownership and empowerment among the local population, which in turn contributes to the sustainability and long-term success of the projects. Participatory project planning in Khulna leads to the development of projects that are more relevant and effective. By incorporating the perspectives and knowledge of local stakeholders, these projects are better aligned with the local context and are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes. This highlights the importance of participatory approaches in tailoring interventions to the specific challenges and opportunities of the region. Research also shows that participatory project planning and performance management in Khulna lead to improved project monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes. By involving stakeholders in these activities, projects benefit from diverse perspectives, local knowledge, and valuable feedback. This strengthens the project's ability to track progress, identify bottlenecks, and implement timely corrective measures, ultimately improving project performance and outcomes.

Furthermore, it was noted that participatory approaches promote collaboration and partnerships among various stakeholders involved in donor-funded projects in Khulna. This includes coordination between government agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations, and donors. Such collaboration helps leverage resources, share knowledge and expertise, and avoid duplication of efforts. The research highlights the importance of strong institutional collaboration for the effective implementation of projects and the sustainable development of the region. Finally, participatory project planning and performance management contribute to enhanced transparency and accountability in Khulna's donor-funded projects. By involving stakeholders in decision-making processes and providing regular updates on project progress, transparency is promoted. Additionally, the participatory approach facilitates accountability by ensuring that project outcomes are evaluated against predefined indicators and targets. This emphasizes the importance of transparency and accountability in building trust among stakeholders and maximizing the impact of donor-funded initiatives.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, participatory project planning and performance are instrumental in the successful implementation of donor-funded projects in Khulna, Bangladesh. The participatory approach ensures that all stakeholders, including community members, local authorities, NGOs, and donors, have a voice in the decision-making process. This leads to greater ownership, transparency, and accountability, resulting in more effective and sustainable project outcomes. By actively involving the local community in project planning, participatory approaches ensure that the needs and priorities of the people are adequately considered. This enhances the relevance and responsiveness of the projects, increasing their potential for positive impact on the lives of the target population in Khulna. Participatory project planning also facilitates the identification of key challenges and opportunities in the region. Through comprehensive assessments and stakeholder consultations, projects can be designed to address the specific social, economic, and infrastructural needs of Khulna. This targeted approach increases the chances of achieving tangible and meaningful results.

Effective project performance management, including monitoring, evaluation, and learning, is critical for the success of donor-funded projects. By continuously tracking project progress, evaluating outcomes, and learning from successes and failures, project stakeholders can make

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informed decisions and implement necessary adjustments. This iterative process ensures that projects remain on track and meet their intended objectives. Generally, participatory project planning and performance promote a collaborative and inclusive approach that empowers the local community and fosters sustainable development in Khulna, Bangladesh. By involving stakeholders, considering local context, and continuously monitoring and evaluating progress, these approaches enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and long-term impact of donor-funded projects.

5.0 Recommendations

The study recommended that there should be emphasis on capacity-building initiatives in order to enhance the skills, knowledge, and participation of the local community. This can include training programs, workshops, and awareness campaigns aimed at empowering individuals and community groups. By strengthening the capacity of the community, they can actively contribute to project planning and decision-making processes, ensuring their needs and aspirations are adequately represented. Encourage greater collaboration and partnership among stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, community-based organizations, and donors. Foster platforms for regular dialogue, coordination, and information-sharing to leverage collective expertise and resources. This collaboration will enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of project implementation, as well as reduce duplication of efforts.

Establish mechanisms for sharing best practices, lessons learned, and successful project outcomes among stakeholders. Encourage regular learning and reflection sessions to identify innovative approaches, challenges, and solutions. This knowledge sharing can inform future project designs and contribute to evidence-based decision-making. Allocate resources for robust monitoring and evaluation systems that involve the active participation of stakeholders. Implement regular data collection, analysis, and reporting to track project progress, assess outcomes, and measure impact against predefined indicators. This will enable timely identification of any deviations from the planned targets, allowing for adaptive management and effective decision-making. Prioritize transparency and accountability in all stages of project planning and implementation. Foster open communication channels to keep stakeholders informed about project activities, progress, and financial management. Establish mechanisms for stakeholder feedback and grievance redressal. Regularly report on project performance to ensure transparency and strengthen accountability to the local community, donors, and other stakeholders.

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