

Reaching the Unreached: Factors Affecting Community Participation in Local Development Project - A case of Taukhel

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Abstract

The approach of "community participation" now stands as an established development strategy to promote a more equitable and sustainable development targeting the poor and vulnerable communities in developing countries [1]. After the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 2015, local governing bodies have been provided with new judicial, legislative and executive power with renewed focus on urban planning and effective service delivery. Furthermore, the Local Government Operation Act, 2017 made a provision to promote cooperativeness, co-existence and coordination between the federation, province and local level and deliver efficient and quality services by ensuring people's participation, accountability and transparency. These changing settings bring major prospects as well as challenges to demand for effective public services and policies by re-evaluating the concept of citizen participation and strengthening public accountability in shaping social policy and improving public services towards attaining sustainable development. In any local development project oriented to community, citizens participation is largely influenced by several internal and external factors which may have intrinsic importance in determining the extent of participation in an uneven context. The participation should always be planning with people, implementation with people and sharing the benefit with people. Therefore, there is need to understand the factors that impact participation from community perspective for local government, policy makers as well as citizens themselves. This study therefore, aims to unpack mainly internal factors that are crucial to be considered during community participation in local development projects. It has basically tried to look into the three main internal indicators; socio-economic, level of awareness and capacity building with a case of community managed reconstruction of settlement after 2015 earthquake at Taukhel, Machhegaun initiated by Lumanti Support Group for Shelter.

Keywords

Community Participation, Sustainable Development, Socio-economic Factors, Level of Awareness, Capacity Building

1. Introduction

"Community Participation" in development programs is now regarded as an established development strategy around the world. With time it has clearly evolved as one of the most used development approaches which has dominated and outlasted many other development approaches [1]. The traditional formal modeling approaches were based on a conventional planning framework which emphasizes top-down planning focusing on limited objectives with optimal solutions without consensus and participation of citizens for whom the policy is being made [2]. However, in a wake of economic changes, globalization, and changing demography; scholars

around the world have shifted from imperative and technocratic method of development method towards more participatory and democratic shape [3, 4]. In today's world of urban planning, community participation is conceptualized as a framework for sustainable and efficient development through a comprehensive understanding of communities demands and empower the citizens themselves to transform the commitments made into successful planning actions [5]. The initiatives of engaging citizens in local development projects build a suitable environment for local government to work with them in addition to building civic capacity and strengthening transparency and accountability in all phases of planning process [6].

In context of Nepal, citizen participatory development has been one of the consistent reform strategies and can be traced long back to 1990. However, participatory development strategy in the policy making and development projects has been regarded as the most challenging task in Nepal's public sector management for past decades. The modern form of participatory planning in Nepal endorses a bottom-up approach that encourages people to participate in local developing projects and voice their demand on matters affecting their lives. Moreover, the Local Government Operational Act 2017 has clearly mentioned that the planning and implementation of any activities of local government should ensure inclusive participation and equity (Government of Nepal, 2017).

After the devastating earthquake of 2015, the whole dynamics of participatory planning have drastically changed in Nepal. Despite the paucity of disaster preparedness, Nepal's immediate rescue efforts and reliefs operations by voluntary participation of communities to help the affected vulnerable group showed an applaudable solidarity. The post-disaster assessment and reconstruction acknowledge the potential role of community participation in local reconstruction and recovery projects. Moreover, participation in planning is now increasingly recognized by local governance as necessary strategy for successful and sustainable development. Therefore, there is a need for governments and policymakers to have clear understanding of participatory approach from grassroot level and should make a structured approach in identifying factors influencing successful community participation and incorporate the strategy in development policies and projects for effective, and sustainable local development projects.

Therefore, this study tries to look into the community managed post-earthquake reconstruction in urban poor communities led by Lumanti Support Group for Shelter (NGO), particularly with a case of rebuilding settlements with communities at Machhegaun to look into the factors affecting community participation in local development project. The study tries to unpack mainly the internal factors effecting community participation from citizens perspective in development intervention and their constituencies.

The main objectives of this research are to understand the impact of socio-economic factors, level of awareness and capacity building on community

participation in local development projects.

2. Literature Review

The concept of 'participation' has been widely used as part of the development discourse from the past many decades. Various conceptual definitions of participation are found in the development literature. Within this discourse, community participation can be explained as "the practice of involving member of the public in the agenda setting, decision making, and policy formulation activities of organization/institution responsible for policy development" [7].

2.1 Theories in Community Participation

Arnstein (1969) – A ladder of citizen participation suggested a typology of eight levels of participation from no participation to tokenism and to citizen's control. According to Arnstein [8], citizen participation is "the redistribution of power that enables the have not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic process, to be deliberately included in the future".

Similarly, Pretty [9] and Tosun [10] also developed typology of participation. Pretty typology can be resolved into seven clear types ranging from manipulative participation which is the lowest level to self-organization which is the highest level. Moreover, Tosun typology can be classified under three main headings namely spontaneous participation corresponding to the highest degree of participation, induced participation correlate to top-down ration approach and coercive participation referring to non-participation and high degree of tokenism and manipulation.

2.1.1 Factors affecting Community Participation

Socio-Economic Factors: Individual attributes can have an impact on group activity, individual mobility and financial capability. Several studies have found that socioeconomic characteristics such as gender, age, education, income influence the active participation in any project. According to [11], youth with better education level, more communicative citizens with confident voice, in general, influences demand for people's participation in governments activities.

Level of Awareness: Easy access to information and proper consultation helps to develop awareness

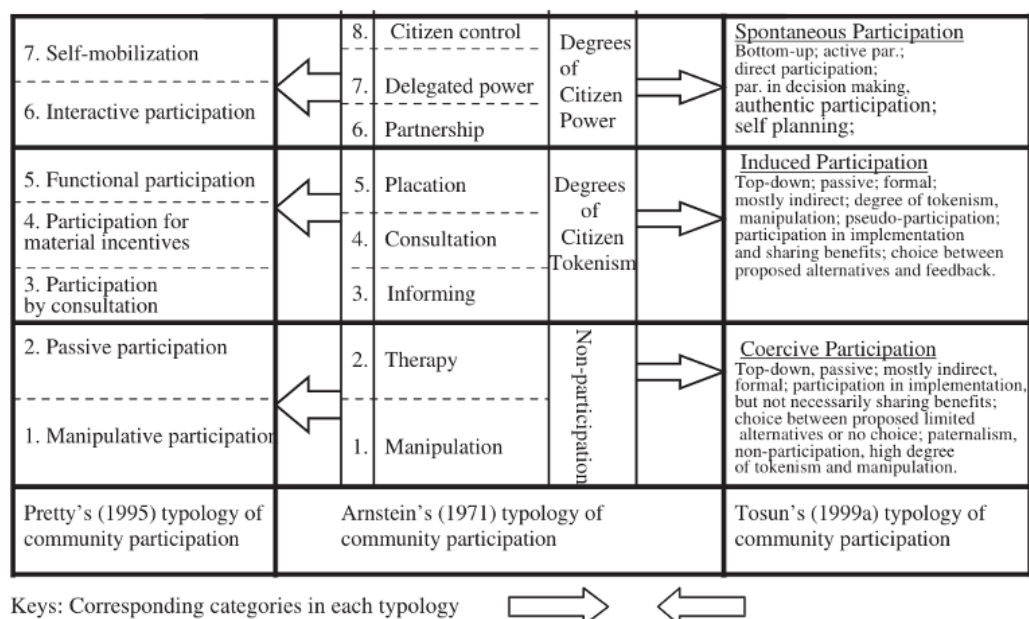


Figure 1: Typologies of community participation

among people which consequently breaks the negative social norms and barriers and strengthen them to express themselves. To encourage and motivate active community participation and participatory approach, there is a need of sensitizing and developing level of awareness among local authorities and citizens [12]. Raising community awareness may help people define their own needs, knowledge and understanding to solve their issues, which is a prerequisite for true sense of participation [13].

Capacity Building: The capacity building process is paramount in facilitating action in communities for accountability and transparency. Community's dedication, abilities to manage and utilize resources which are important determinant to strengthen people's ability to solve local issues is referred as capacity building. Capacity building sessions helps to develop community awareness of local problems and issues will increase local participation in developing and demanding a project that will satisfy the needs of the community.

3. Study Area

The study area of this research is delimited to the Taukhel area of Machhegaun, Chandragiri Municipality. Taukhel is one of the seventh century ancient settlement in Kathmandu valley with historic and cultural significance. Taukhel

During the devastating earthquake of 2015, Taukhel area of Machhegaun was hit the hardest with almost 70% of the houses completely damaged. Out of 86 houses, only 26 of them were standing but were also in critical condition and 7 out of those needed to be demolished as most of the houses were made out of brick and mud. Hence, Lumanti support group designed a community managed reconstruction project with people participation in community level decision making to reconstruction at Taukhel.

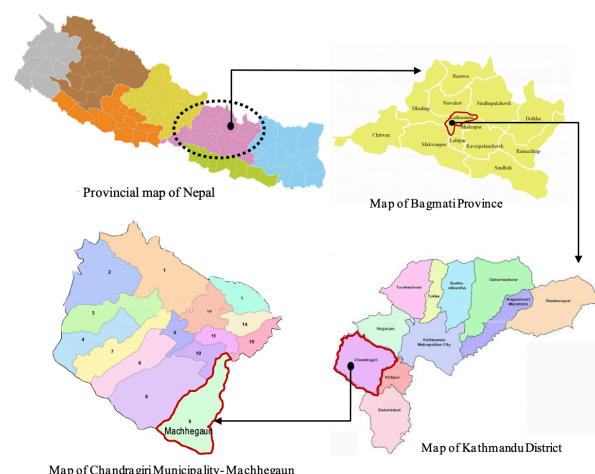


Figure 2: Location map of study area

4. Research Design and methodology

The methodology is guided by a case study approach with both qualitative and quantitative method. A case

study is an empirical research into a phenomena in its real-world setting, generally based upon in-depth examination of a particular person, group or event. The case study enables the researcher to an insightful analysis of the context as well as provides an explanation of the phenomenon (Van Thiel, 2014).

On the basis of respondents engagement in the project, they were divided into two categories: project beneficiaries and key informants, which were used to determine the sample size. Purposive sampling technique has been used to select key informants which includes ward chairman, representative from Lumanti support group, academic expert, local users committee, women's group and youth club. Further, snowball sampling was used to identify the beneficiaries for questionnaire survey. Out of 86 target group for questionnaire survey, 80 people responded which is 93.02% response rate adequate for analysis and reporting.

This research used a combination of primary and secondary data. For primary data collection, in-depth online and telephonic interviews were carried out to collect data from key informants whereas, structured questionnaire survey was conducted to reach out the beneficiaries of the project. The responses were documented for the three indicators of determinant of participation; socio-economic factors, level of awareness and capacity building. However, due to limitation of Covid-19 pandemic situation, all data were collected remotely. Furthermore, the secondary data was relied upon the government publications, internal records of the Lumanti, reports, books, journal articles, websites and remote sensing imagery approaches.

The data collected were analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods to ensure data triangulation. In order to improve data interpretation, qualitative data was analyzed using thematic method, which took into consideration of frequent repetitive words, phrases and patterns. The quantitative data was subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The descriptive statistics involved the use of frequency counts, percentages and arithmetic means and results were presented using frequency distribution tables. All the quantitative data collected was further analyzed using the Excel and STATA as empirical analysis tool.

5. Data Presentation and Analysis

The findings of the study are based on 6 key informant interviews and 80 questionnaire survey respondents to look into the internal factors influencing community participation.

5.1 Socio-economic Factors

5.1.1 Impact of gender in community participation

Table 1: Frequency table analyzing impact of gender in participation

Indicator	Summary of response	Frequency
Gender influences the participation	To a project to become successful, gender equality and inclusive is most.	5
Women and man have equal opportunities to participate	Man do not have to think or get permission to get involved in such communal project whereas women need to get permission from family head or husbands.	4
Being a man or women enables to participate better	Still a patriarchy society with wide gap between male and female equality. Women are still deprived of their freedom.	3

Number of Respondents (N)=6

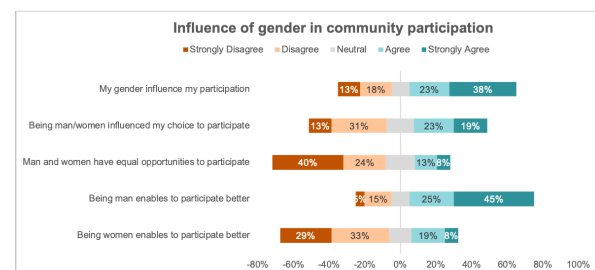


Figure 3: Impact of gender in participation

The findings from the interview from the table and figure above showed that gender equality and inclusive participation in any project is important. However, majority of the respondents explained that male and female do not have equal opportunities to participate. It indicated that being a man enables to participate better. As per the questionnaire survey result, majority of 38% strongly agreed that gender is important factor in participation. Similarly, 40% respondents acknowledged that there is wide gap between gender equality as being a man enables one to participate better than woman.

5.1.2 Impact of age in community participation

Table 2: Frequency table analyzing impact of age in participation

Indicator	Summary of response	Frequency
Age influences the ability to effectively participate	Younger and active working-class populations were engaged in every phase of the project	5
Youth or older group participate effectively	Initially every group were engaged, whereas in between older group started to part away	3

Number of Respondents (N)=6

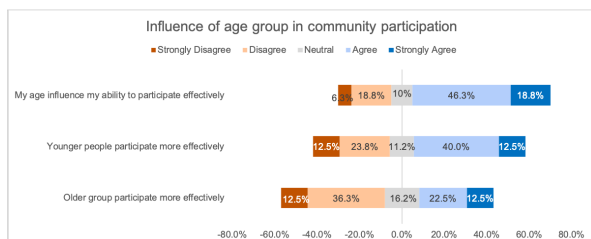


Figure 4: Impact of age in participation

From the interview results, it is clear that the age definitely influences the ability to effectively participate as younger people participate more actively than the older age population. According to the survey, highest 46% of the respondent were of the opinion that age plays a major role in people participation as 40% strongly agreed that younger people actively participate in all phases of project whereas older people seemed to be passive.

5.1.3 Impact of education in community participation

Table 3: Frequency table analyzing impact of education in participation

Indicator	Summary of response	Frequency
Education level influences the ability to effectively participate	People with higher education tries to question and find out about the project and its objectives whether if its beneficial for them and their community	4
People with higher education level participate more effectively	With higher education level, people understand the project objectives and process easily and make them participate	5
People with lower education level participate more effectively	With lower education level, it sometimes become difficult to make people understand the technical terms and process	3

Number of Respondents (N)=6

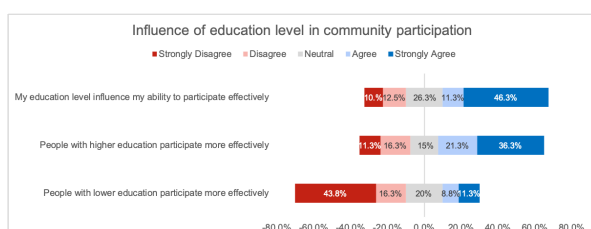


Figure 5: Impact of education in participation

The findings from the interview as well questionnaire survey clearly illustrated that education level showed significant and positive impact on community participation. Education increases the understating level of people and engage them to explore and learn new skills and techniques easily. Further, 36.3% strongly agreed that people with higher education level participate better in comparison to people with lower education level.

5.1.4 Impact of income in community participation

As per the results from interview and survey illustrated in table and figure below, it indicated that income level of individual has minimal influence on community participation. Majority of the respondents 45% strongly disagreed that income level influences community participation in local development project. Moreover, 33.8% declined both the opinion that people with higher or lower income participate effectively.

Table 4: Frequency table analyzing impact of income in participation

Indicator	Summary of response	Frequency
Income level influences the ability to effectively participate	People were encouraged to participate regardless of their economic status. Every individual's presence was unbiasedly regardless of their income level	1
People with higher income level participate more effectively	Small traditional compact Newari village, living in harmony by sharing caring giving. Less disparity of people in terms of income	2
People with lower income level participate more effectively		2

Number of Respondents (N)=6

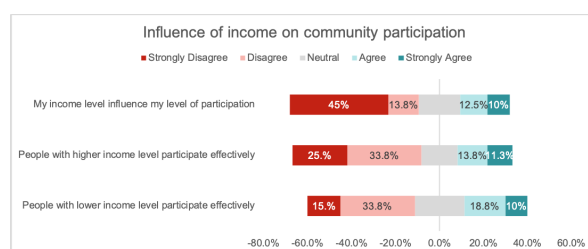


Figure 6: Impact of income in participation

5.2 Level of Awareness

Table 5: Frequency table analyzing impact of access to information in participation

Indicator	Summary of response	Frequency
Access to information influence the effective participation	Citizens were kept well informed using different mediums and information desk were made to provide easy access to information at any time.	4
People with higher access to information participate more effectively	People were provided with workshops schedule and content beforehand and further each workshop's output were summarized and well informed to all	5
People with lower access to information participate more effectively	Lower access sometime increases your curiosity and encourage to explore more about it	2
Transparency, accountability and credibility of project influence effective participation	All the decisions, plans and process were discussed in mass for consent and plans were well illustrated for transparency	4

Number of Respondents (N)=6

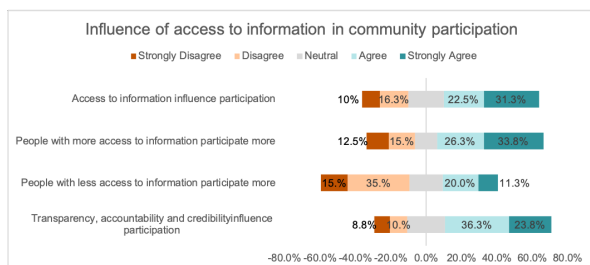


Figure 7: Impact of access to information in participation

From the interview results, 4 out of 6 respondents indicated that people's access to information have significant impact on community participation as higher access to information enables people to understand the project and objectives better making them easier to put their opinion and ideas clearly. Similarly, as per the questionnaire survey the findings suggested that access to information shows positive significance to participation. Furthermore, 33.8% people supported this by strongly agreeing to higher, easy and transparent access to information positively impact the effectiveness of participation whereas, 35% respondent declined that lesser access to information increase effective participation. In addition, 23.8% strongly agreed and 36.5% agreed that sharing and learning through clear process attracts people's attention and participate effectively providing their inputs and feed backs, increasing the accountability and credibility of the project.

5.3 Capacity Building

Table 6: Frequency table analyzing impact of training and resource management in participation

Indicator	Summary of response	Frequency
Capacity building trainings impact on effective community participation	Citizens get common platform and are free to share their interests and trainings were provided according to their need.	3
Resources mobilization for reconstruction process	Resource mobilization did not only take place through government and technical team, but also through citizens initiatives to link community cooperative with commercial banks and INGOs.	3
Effectiveness of leadership and skill development training in community participation	People were provided trainings from trained facilitators and kept well informed and taught effectively.	2
Satisfaction of the trainings to strengthen citizens capacity	Tried our best to encourage people to engage actively and regularly in trainings. Even provided with required tool and materials needed for training	2

Number of Respondents (N)=6

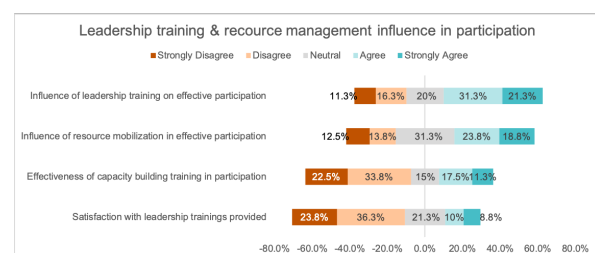


Figure 8: Impact of training and resource management in participation

The result from the interview and survey clearly indicated that the leadership and skill development training as well as resource management has a significant impact on community participation as it provides the common ground to the people to make their unheard voice heard and share their interest and needs, strengthening their capabilities to make a better change in their livelihood. However, in terms of effectiveness of and satisfaction of the training provided, as majority of the people were inclined that the training were not much effective. Majority of the respondents argued that the leadership training experienced poor attendance due to difficulty in time management as people were occupied with their agriculture work and household chores. Further, they also argued that sometimes, the venue of training and information flow makes them difficult to regularly participate, consequently the training could not provide high level of opportunities for people to acquire enough technical skills and knowledge

6. Findings and Discussion

This research tried to study the factors affecting community participation in local development project. The study looked into internal factors:

socio-economic, awareness level and capacity building. The summary of the findings is shown below.

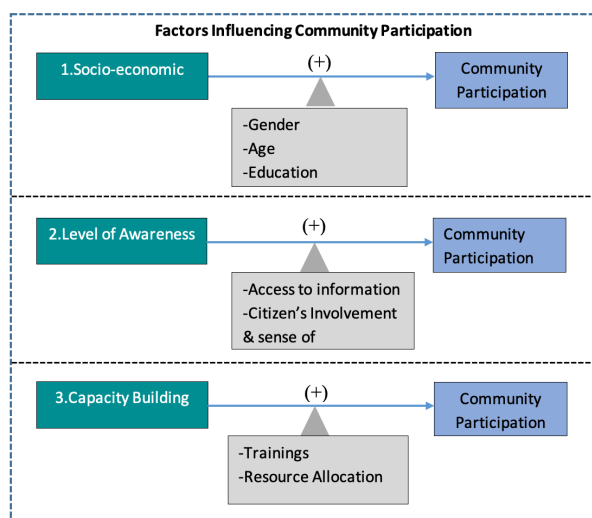


Figure 9: Summary of findings

From the figure above, the findings of the study suggested that all the three indicators of internal factors have significant and positive impact in community participation.

Socio-Economic Factors In terms of socio-economic factors, it can be inferred that gender, age and education level are important socio-economic indicators that impact participation whereas, income level does not show any significant impact on participation. Although gender and education showed significant influence in community participation, the results from the interview clearly illustrated the huge gap between gender equality and inclusiveness in local projects. Women face challenge in participation due to men dominance, relatively low education, multiple roles of women in the family setup and lack of confidence. Another challenge according to the respondents is that the educated and politically active with power still have dominance in decision making process, resulting in unequal distribution of benefits among poor and disadvantaged group. These challenges need to be seriously reviewed by the regulatory provision and policy makers.

Level of Awareness In terms of level of awareness, the study looked into the variables access to information and citizen's involvement and sense of responsibility. From the study, it can be deduced that awareness level is an important factor of community

participation in local development project. However, when looked upon the result from survey and questionnaire in terms of citizen involvement and sense of responsibility, the result contradicts with each other. Majority of respondents from survey indicated that their opinions are not properly addressed and listened by community representative and the decisions were more inclined towards the group with more access to politics and power. As a result, the opinion of the poor and underprivileged groups are silenced in different ways. These challenges are crucial and need to be addressed carefully by sensitizing the local authorities and community representatives towards level of awareness and citizens sense of responsibility.

Capacity Building When looked upon the impact of capacity building into community participation taking leadership skills development training and resource allocation variables, the findings of the study showed that capacity building is also an important and significant factor that positively influence community participation. Capacity and skills building training such as cooperative training on orientations regarding earthquake safe constructions, loan management, account keeping and small-scale business for livelihood development were provided. However, the participation of women was not satisfactory as respondents argued that they were occupied with their household chores and agricultural work and could not give regular time for such training. Therefore, for its effectiveness in ground level, innovative framework such as incentives provisions might motivate people to participate actively.

7. Conclusion

When looked into the holistic approach of community managed reconstruction project by Lumanti Support Group, it is interesting to know that it has followed the IAP2 model of participation approach that supports bottom-up approach in a way that intended beneficiaries take matters into their own hands, mobilizing own resource and making own decisions to solve their issue. The study looked upon the socio-economic factors, level of awareness and capacity building as the internal variables to see its influence on community participation. The findings of the research concluded that all the three internal indicators have a significant influence (main effect) on the community participation. Although it showed

positive and significant influence, there seemed several issues and challenges related to community participation in local development project. It still faced a gap in some structural, organizational and societal challenges. Gender inequality, social exclusivity, dominance by privileged and power one and lack of good governance are the key issues that have been identified which should be addressed in future in order to ensure active and effective participation. Therefore, for active participation and empowerment of local people, policy makers should give attention in more inclusive, equitable and pro-poor approaches.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, following policies recommendation might be beneficial for leaders and policy makers.

- In terms of regulatory provisions, policies aimed to ensure the gender equality and social inclusiveness should be initiated.
- Policies directed in reforming the regulatory framework on sensitizing local authorities and increasing awareness level should be considered for active participation.
- Policies aimed to support the educational and vocational training improvement should be emphasized for fostering capacity building and empowerment of the poor, marginalized and disadvantaged groups.
- Policies should consider to include an incentive budget when designing the project budget defining clear milestone and likely erode participants.

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