Managing Beneficiary Involvement in Non-Governmental Organisations

Implementing with, for, and by the Beneficiaries

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ABSTRACT

Lack of appropriate level of beneficiary involvement during the project lifecycle may lead to mismatch between the project output and needs of beneficiaries. Therefore, involving beneficiaries in the project helps to assure that the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) provide the right solution to needs of beneficiaries as well as sustaining project results. Although beneficiary involvement is useful, the challenge is to determine how and when to involve beneficiaries in the project.

The purpose of this study is to improve the process of managing beneficiary involvement in NGOs. To achieve this, a review of the existing literature was done to have an initial understanding of beneficiary involvement. During our literature review, we identified six progressive levels of involvement which include: information sharing, listening and learning, joint assessment, shared decision-making, collaboration and empowerment. Based on this literature review, we suggested a framework for managing beneficiary involvement.

In addition, we conducted a multiple case study and collected data from five different cases through interviews. Our respondents were professionals with several years of experience in developing and implementing development projects which are aimed at improving the livelihood of vulnerable communities. Through the analysis of the empirical findings, we got new insights on how the process of beneficiary involvement is managed. We identified four additional levels of beneficiary involvement within the project cycle. These include incentive system, peer facilitators, group forming, and cost sharing.

The study also reveals the factors that affect beneficiary involvement, such as cultural context and, donors’ influence and requirements. We also highlighted that the appropriate level of beneficiary involvement should be chosen depending on the project context. Regardless of these factors, the research findings show that beneficiary involvement creates a sense of ownership, enhances project outcome and is useful in sustaining a project’s results in the long term. Therefore, NGOs should endeavour to involve beneficiaries as much as possible to ensure that the projects being implemented are addressing community needs.

Keywords: Beneficiary Involvement, Development Projects, Project Cycle, Project Stakeholder.
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Evode and Oybek
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AFDB</td>
<td>African Development Bank</td>
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<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSF</td>
<td>Civil Society Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>DANIDA</td>
<td>Danish International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>Department for International Development-United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFAD</td>
<td>International Fund of Agricultural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSPME</td>
<td>Master in Strategic Project Management (European)</td>
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<td>NGOs</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
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<td>PM4NGOs</td>
<td>Project Management for Non-Governmental Organisations</td>
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<td>PMI</td>
<td>Project Management Instituted</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMEs</td>
<td>Small and Medium Enterprises</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter commences with the presentation of the problem background through reviewing the existing literature with the purpose of presenting the research gap. It also presents the research question as well as the purpose of the study, which guided us throughout the research process.

1.1. Problem Background and Research Gap

Over the last three decades, the number and involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the development process has been increasing both in developing and developed countries. Locally, they have been providing basic services to the underprivileged and advocating for the vulnerable groups. At international level, NGOs from developed countries have been funding and providing technical support to local socio-economic initiatives in developing countries. (Barr et al., 2005, pp.657-658; Navarro-Flores, 2011, p.48).

To provide support to development initiatives, NGOs use projects due to the fact that these are temporary interventions aiming at improving living conditions of local communities in terms of economy, education, or health (Golini et al., 2015, p.650; Nanthagopan et al., 2016, p.1611). These projects may be managed through different project cycles depending on the nature of the project and the organisation implementing them. However, Project Management Institute (PMI) highlights five phases that compose a project cycle. These include design and initiation, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and control and, close-out and transition phase. It is important to note that the phase of monitoring, evaluation and control is an ongoing phase during the life of a project, it starts from the beginning till the end of the project. It is through this phase that the project progress is assessed which allows to identify gaps and take corrective measures where necessary (PMI, 2013, p.38).

The growth of the NGO sector and the shift of their position from being minor actors to central actors in development have been accompanied by heightened expectations and accountability requirements (Okorley & Nkrumah, 2012, p.33; Hermano et al., 2013, p.22). This requires NGOs to be effective, flexible, and innovative in managing development projects considering the uniqueness and the complex environment in which they operate (Brass, 2012, p. 387). In their study, Ika et al., (2012, p.106) noted that development projects are unique in the sense that they are characterised by complexity, multitude of stakeholders and the intangible output and outcome.

Throughout the project life, NGOs engage with a wide range of stakeholders such as donors, governments, local communities and beneficiaries to understand their needs, interests and expectations (Nanthagopan et al., 2016, p.1611). Each of these stakeholders play different roles in the project; donors fund the project and they are the ones who often specify the project objectives and targeted beneficiaries. Governments play an oversight role and also provide guidance to both donors and NGOs. On the other hand, beneficiaries are community members who benefit from the project output and their role is occasionally limited to providing information about their needs. As different stakeholders have different roles in the project, their level of influence is also different (AbouAssi, 2014, p.971; Reith, 2010, p.450).
Contrary to commercial projects where the customers have significant influence over the project output, beneficiaries of development projects are less powerful. This is due to the fact that they are members of local communities who don’t fund the project even though they ultimately benefit from the project output (Golini et al., 2015, p.651). Moreover, they live in poor conditions, and they are happy to welcome any interventions that aim to improve their welfare (Rusare, 2015, pp.243, 249). Furthermore, the relationship between donors and NGOs follows a supply-led approach. On one hand, donors provide and control the funding and on the other hand NGOs are required to demonstrate how they fit into the requirements set by the donors if they are to receive the funding. Therefore, this relationship gives more influence to donors than any other stakeholders since they are the ones who fund the projects (AbouAssi, 2012, p.586).

To manage these stakeholders, Winters (2010, p.219) and Eskerod et al., (2015, p.44) claim that project managers tend to use traditional stakeholder management approach which emphasises on giving more attention to those who can affect the project over those who are affected by the project. Consequently, due to resource dependency in NGO sector, using tradition stakeholder management approach implies that project managers should focus more on complying with donors’ requirements. The challenge for project managers is therefore, to find the right balance between complying with the requirements of donors who in most cases are likely to assess the project in terms of accuracy of financial accountability and appealing to the needs of beneficiaries throughout the life of the project (AbouAssi & Trent, 2016, p.283; Eskerod et al., 2015, p.44; Hermano et al., 2013, p.28).

Although project beneficiaries may have little influence on the project, their involvement in project activities is important to ensure that the project is successful. Cornwall & Nyamu-Musenbi (2004, p.1432) claim that to achieve positive transformation, the current development approach should enable those affected most to express their needs and priorities and empower them to hold accountable all involved actors. In addition, Batti (2015, pp.24-25) argues that inadequate stakeholder involvement especially beneficiaries may result in the identification and implementation of interventions that do not respond to the local needs. She argues that for NGOs to succeed, they should seek to implement projects which are addressing community needs as well as linked to their strategic goals. Lawther (2009, p.168) also noted that beneficiary involvement was key to ensuring sustainability in post-disaster recovery projects. Moreover, international development institutions like The World Bank and African Development Bank (AFDB) have been advocating for beneficiary involvement as essential in achieving their objectives of poverty reduction and sustainable development (AFDB, 2001, p.1).

Regarding how beneficiaries are involved in the project, Hamukwala et al., (2008, p.193) argue that the approach to managing beneficiary and any other stakeholder’s involvement varies from one organisation to another. It ranges from being passive listeners to involving and empowering them to participate in defining objectives and implementing project activities. Furthermore, AFDB (2011, p.2) presented six different levels of beneficiary involvement which are divided into two forms; the first form is consultation and it includes three levels: information-sharing, listening and learning and joint assessment. The second form, participation also has three levels of involvement which include: shared decision-making, collaboration and empowerment. As the involvement level moves from information sharing to empowerment, beneficiaries gain more influence and control over the project activities.
However, Botes, (2000, p.43) claims that sometimes, the involvement of beneficiaries is not about involving them in the decision-making process, it is rather about legitimizing the already planned projects. This claim is based on findings from cases where beneficiaries were involved only after the project had been designed and when no big changes could be made at that stage. Although Botes’ claim questions the intentions of involving end users at later phases of the project, it shows that beneficiaries can still be involved after the project has been designed and planned. Therefore, project managers still have to decide on how and to what extent they should involve them. The challenge here is to determine the appropriate level at which beneficiaries will be involved considering that other stakeholders like donors and governments already have high influence on the project design. Regardless of when and how beneficiaries are involved, Hamukwala et al., (2008, p.215) argued that an effective involvement should empower beneficiaries to influence the decisions that are taken during the project life since the project is intended to benefit them.

Considering that development projects are always implemented in very complex environments and involve numerous stakeholders (Levie et al., 2016, p.12; Nanthagopan et al., 2016, p.1620; Golini et al., 2015, p.658); the success of these projects is not only determined by the competence and skills of the project manager, but also the approach used to manage different stakeholders and their level of involvement. Moreover, lack of an appropriate level of beneficiary involvement during the project cycle may lead to the mismatch between the project output and needs or priorities of the beneficiaries (Risal, 2014, p.894). Therefore, there is need for a customized approach to engage and involve different categories of stakeholders, especially beneficiaries, taking into account the nature and complexity of development projects (Brière et al., 2015, p.124).

As we discussed before, projects are managed through a cycle of five different phases (PMI, 2013, p.38). Each phase of the project cycle has its own distinctive characteristics which present different opportunities and threats for the project as well as stakeholders. In addition, stakeholders’ influence and interests may change as the project progresses from one phase to another mainly due to the changes in threats and opportunities of the project. Thus, a close attention to each phase would be useful in determining how to engage and involve each category of stakeholders (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2010, p.383).

Although different studies have emphasized the benefits of beneficiary involvement in development projects, they all take a holistic view of involvement. During our literature review, we did not find any research that focuses on beneficiary involvement at different phases of the project to identify the levels of involvement that would be appropriate at each phase. We therefore, aim to contribute to filling this gap by developing a framework that is based on project phases which can be used by project managers in the NGO sector to manage beneficiary involvement. To develop this framework, we started by reviewing the existing literature on beneficiary involvement and then combined it with empirical findings collected during this research.
1.2. Research Question

Based on the above problem background, we believe that there is still an opportunity to improve the process of beneficiary involvement in NGOs to ensure that projects being implemented are addressing the needs of targeted beneficiaries. Therefore, this study is designed to answer the following research question:

*How to improve the process of managing beneficiary involvement during the project cycle in NGOs.*

1.3. Research Objectives and Purpose

The purpose of this study is to improve the process of managing beneficiary involvement in NGOs. To fulfil this purpose, we started by reviewing the existing literature on beneficiary involvement to gain an initial understanding. We also collected empirical findings which helped us gain more insight on how this process is managed. Based on the existing literature and new empirical findings we suggested a framework that would be useful in improving the process of beneficiary involvement. Moreover, this research focused on achieving the following specific objectives:

a) To gain initial understanding on managing beneficiary involvement by reviewing existing literature.

b) To understand the practical process used by project managers in NGOs to manage beneficiary involvement through empirical findings.

c) To suggest a project phase based framework for managing beneficiary involvement based on the understanding gained through literature review and empirical findings.

The results of this study will mainly contribute to existing knowledge of project management in NGOs; this study will also provide insights to project managers on how to manage beneficiary involvement at different phases throughout the life of the project.

1.4. Limitations

Based on Vakil (1997, pp.2063–2066) essential descriptors of NGOs such as orientation: welfare development and advocacy, or level of operation: national or international, this research will be limited to the NGOs that focus on social and economic development. Those that focus on advocacy/activism activities will not be included since it is hard to determine the specific categories of beneficiary they target. In addition, for the purpose of getting comparative data, we are interested in NGOs operating at an international level.

1.5. Structure of the Research

This study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter: Introduction, presents the problem statement, research gap, research question, the purpose, objectives and limitation of this research. Second chapter presents the conceptual framework of the research. Concepts relating to Non-Governmental Organisation and beneficiary involvement are presented and the chapter ends with a theoretical framework on managing involvement of project beneficiaries.
The third chapter: Methodology, covers the research philosophy that framed and guided the process of this research. It also presents the research approach, strategy and design. In this chapter, we also discuss data collection methods, as well as selection of the case study, the interview guide, the approach and process used in conducting interviews.

The fourth chapter presents the empirical findings that we collected during this study.

The fifth chapter: Analysis and Discussion, covers the analysis of the empirical findings using appropriate analysis strategy. Relationships and patterns found in the findings are discussed in-depth.

The last chapter: Conclusion and recommendations covers the conclusions which are drawn based on research findings and previous studies. Theoretical and practical implications are also discussed in this chapter.
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter we discuss in more detail the theories and concepts related to our research question and purpose. We discuss what other authors have said about the different concepts which are relevant to our topic. We start by describing what NGOs are, we discuss project in NGOs and then continue with concepts relating to beneficiary involvement which mainly include needs assessment and beneficiary participation. Furthermore, we present challenges in managing beneficiary involvement and conclude with a theoretical framework.

2.1. Non-Governmental Organisations and Projects

2.1.1. Non-Governmental Organisations

Vakil, (1997, p.2060) defined Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as self-governing, private and non-profit organizations whose work aims at promoting interest of underprivileged communities and improving their welfare. This definition is further expanded by UN (2004) who defined NGOs as any non-profit or voluntary group which promotes the interests of the poor, provides basic social services, undertakes community development, or works towards the protection of environment on a local, national, or international level. NGOs are not motivated by profits; they have a charitable or philanthropic purpose. They are not state and or quasigovernmental organizations; they are voluntary in both membership and activity and are geared to address social problems. They finance their activities by seeking funding from public and international donors (Barr et al., 2005, p.675; Amagoh, 2015, p.221).

In this study, we also used a framework developed by Vakil (1999, pp.2063-2066) to differentiate different types of NGOs. This framework describes NGOs based on two elements: essential descriptors and contingent descriptors. Essential descriptors include the organisation’s orientation such as welfare, development, advocacy or research. Another essential descriptor is level of operation, whether NGOs are international, national, or community based. Regarding contingent descriptors, Vakil highlighted sectoral focus such us health, agriculture and others. Another contingent descriptor is the evaluative attributes, such as accountability, efficiency, values, gender equality, and others. This research is therefore focusing on international NGOs that are working in the areas of welfare and development.

Regardless of the sector, focus and geographical location, over the past three decades, the position of NGOs in development around the world has shifted from being minor actors who advocate and promote the interests of the poor to becoming major actors who influence policies on an international level with some even receiving more funding compared to their partner states. Locally, NGOs have been part of socio-economic development initiatives whereas on the international level, especially those from developed countries have been funding local NGOs in developing counties and doing advocacy on their behalf (Brass, 2012, p.387; Navarro-Flores, 2011, p.48). It is also worth mentioning that, the increased role of NGOs in global development has been accompanied by heightened expectations and accountability requirements which requires them to be flexible, efficient and innovative in delivering their interventions (Okorley & Nkrumah, 2012, p.331)
2.1.2 Development Project

A project is defined as a temporary endeavour undertaken to achieve a specific goal. The temporary nature does not mean that the project is of a short time nor does it apply to the output of the project. It rather shows that the project has a known start and end points. When the project goals are achieved in the specified parameters (time, quality, cost), the project is considered to be successfully completed. The project can also be terminated because its objectives will not or cannot be met, or when the need for the project no longer exists (PMI, 2013, p.2; Prasad et al., 2013, pp.54, 70).

Developmental projects are differentiated from commercial projects by virtue of having soft goals of achieving sustainable social and economic development. They are often executed in a complex environment characterised by intangible outputs, many stakeholders, and they face political interferences and manipulations which affect time, cost and quality of the project (Ika & Hodgson, 2014, p.1185). Furthermore, Project Management for Non-Governmental Organizations (PM4NGOs, 2013, p.7), claim that development projects are responsible not only for delivering tangible outputs, but also for delivering less tangible outcomes related to promoting social change. In contrast to commercial projects that focus on delivering concrete products and/or services as the ultimate goal of the project; development projects consider these products as a means to improvements in the well-being of the project’s target beneficiaries.

Generally, development projects aim to address complex problems of poverty, inequality and injustice. They tend to operate in exceptionally challenging contexts including limited resources, high risks, complex procurement networks, unstable political/financial environment and unsafe conditions. Project implementation is often managed through a complex array of stakeholder relationships such as partner agencies, government ministries, community-based organizations, contractors, global consortia and many others. The project approach is often as important as the outcomes themselves including a high priority placed on participation. In addition, transferring knowledge and learning to the target beneficiaries is a priority during each and every phase of the project (Ika & Hodgson, 2014, pp.1185-1188).

2.1.3. Development Project Cycle

Project cycle is a set of stages any project goes through from its beginning till the end of its life span (Ochen et al.; 2013, p.597). Generally, a project lifecycle is made of project processes that are grouped into five project phases. These phases are: initiation, planning, execution/implementation, monitoring, evaluation and control, and closing or close-out phase. Figure 1 below shows the interactions among these phases.
Each of the above phases comprises different activities that should be performed during the project life. The initiating phase groups all activities performed to define a new project or a new phase of an existing project and obtaining authorization to start the project. Planning phase consists of all required activities to establish the scope of the project, refine the objectives, and define the course of action required to achieve project objectives. Executing phase groups all activities performed to complete the work defined in the project plan to satisfy the project requirements. Monitoring and controlling phase comprises a set of all activities and processes required to track, review, and regulate the progress and performance of the project; identify any areas in which changes to the plan are required; and initiate the corresponding changes. Closing phase groups all activities performed to finalize all activities across all phases and formally close the project (PMI 2013, p.48). As it can be observed from Figure 1, the monitoring and control phase overlaps and interacts with the other phases; this helps to assess and evaluate the progress made, detect deviations and take corrective actions in time.

Another model of the project cycle was developed by PM4NGOs (2013, p.2). This cycle comprises six phases which include project identification and design, project setup, project planning, project implementation, project monitoring, evaluation and control, and end of project transition. Although this cycle has one additional phase, activities performed under each of the above phases are similar to the ones presented by PMI (2013).

The only difference is that, PM4NGOs splits the initiation phase into two separate phases: project identification and design, and project setup. Activities relating to defining needs, exploring opportunities, analysing the project environment and designing alternatives for project design are performed under project identification phase whereas the project setup consists of processes relating to formal authorisation to start the project. Moreover, in their study on adoption of project management methodology in development projects, (Golini et al., 2015, p.651) noted that there is no difference between the project cycle of business projects and the one of development projects developed.

Although the above mentioned two models of project cycle are widely used by project management professionals, they have also been criticised by some researchers. For instance, Archibald et al., (2012, p.10) claim that these models do not fully recognize the origin of project idea before the initiation phase, and also fail to consider the post-project evaluation phase to evaluate the success of both the project and its output or results. They therefore, proposed model that has two additional phases, namely the incubation phase which consists of all activities relating to ideation process prior to the initiation and post-project evaluation phase which consists of all activities relating to assess the success of the project and its output.
2.2. Project Management in NGOs

Project management is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and techniques to project activities to meet the project requirements. It is the discipline of planning, organizing and managing resources to bring about the successful delivery of specific project goals, outcomes and outputs. These goals should be achieved within the limits of triple constraints of project management: time, cost and quality (PMI, 2013, p.4; PM4NGOs, 2013, p.9). Project management also involves the art and science of management. The art of project management focuses on the people elements such as leading, motivating, communicating with team members and stakeholders. The science of project management focuses on the use of tools and techniques in executing project activities (PM4NGOs, 2013, p.11).

Due to the uniqueness of development projects which include complex environments, numerous stakeholders and intangible project outcomes (Ika et al., 2012, p.106), project management in NGOs is slightly different from that in business projects. In Business projects, control tools are based on quantitative information such as financial data. Whereas in development projects these tools tend to focus on behavioural issues and intangible output (Rusare, 2015, p.241). In NGOs more emphasis is put on stakeholder management to ensure that their needs are considered during the project life time (Boon et al., 2013, p.52).

Moreover, Ika & Hodgson (2014, p.1194) argued that project management in development projects is moving from a traditional approach that seems ideal for all projects, towards contingent approaches that are suited to the context of development projects. In addition, Golini et al., (2015, p.657) in their study on the adoption of project management tools in NGOs, found out that some tools such as logical framework and progress report are often used, while others like critical path method and earned value management system appeared to be less adopted. They claimed that NGOs are more likely to adopt simple techniques that suit their context instead of focusing on those that are more sophisticated.

In summary, managing development projects involves identifying and addressing the various needs, concerns, and expectations of the stakeholders in planning and executing the project; managing relationships with all stakeholders to ensure that the project achieves its goal and managing the project management constraints which include scope, quality, schedule, budget, resources and risk.

2.3. Project Stakeholders in NGOs

One of the first definitions of the concept of stakeholder was given by Freeman (1984, p.46), who defined stakeholder as the someone who can influence or be influenced by the achievement of organizations goals. Moreover, stakeholders are seen as people to whom the organization is accountable where the organization maybe responsible for their well-being, or when they have a moral or legal claim on it ( Alkhafaji, 1989, p.36; Langtry, 1994, p.433).

Development projects are characterized by having numerous stakeholders. They include those who are impacted by or can impact the project in a positive or negative way. Some of these stakeholders may have a limited ability to influence the project, while others may possess significant influence on the project and its expected outcomes. Thus, the ability to correctly
identify and manage these stakeholders in an effective way can mean the difference between success and failure (PMI, 2013, p.390; Freeman, 1984, p.49; Andersen, 2008, p.81).

In the NGO sector, stakeholders may include: donors, national and local governments, project staff, civil society organizations, private-sector organizations and, most importantly beneficiaries who are the primary stakeholders (AFDB, 2001, p.2; Nanthagopan et al., 2016, p.1611). These stakeholders have different roles in the project; donors fund the project and they are the ones who often specify the project objectives and target beneficiaries. Governments play an oversight role and also provide guidance to both donors and NGOs. On the other, beneficiaries are community members who will benefit from the project output and their role is occasionally limited to providing information about their needs. As different stakeholders have different roles in the project, their level of influence is also different (AbouAssi, 2014, p.971; Reith, 2010, p.450).

Stakeholder influence in the NGO sector is also discussed by Rauh (2010, pp.33-34) who claims that because donor agencies provide access to funding, they are in a position of high power. They set the agenda and conditions required for receiving grants and if NGOs failed to meet those conditions they would lose the funding. Therefore, NGOs often have to make trade-offs to satisfy both donor requirements and their grassroots beneficiaries since it is challenging to fully meet the demands of both sides.

Furthermore, AbouAssi (2013, p.972) claims that donors’ influence is not only observed at the project level but also at a national level. They shape national policies by negotiating priorities with governments and conditioning, and controlling aid. To cope with this high level of influence, NGOs decide to adjust their activities to favourably comply with the donors’ requirements and objectives in order to secure funding. Moreover, Rauh (2010, p.34) argued that due to uncertainties relating to donors’ priorities, NGOs tend to implement projects that are likely to be seen as successful rather than those which address the root of the problem, which are usually the more complex.

Stakeholder management in the NGO sector therefore, includes the processes required to identify the people, groups, or organizations that could impact or be impacted by the project. Analyze their needs, expectations and impact on the project and develop appropriate management strategies for effectively engaging them in project decisions and execution (PMI, 2013, p.390). Due to resource dependency, donors are likely to receive more attention compared to other stakeholders. Hence, Project managers in NGOs are inclined to focus more on complying with donors’ requirements than addressing the needs of the beneficiaries who are supposedly the primary stakeholders (Rauh, 2010, p.34; Reith, 2010, p.449).

2.4. Managing Beneficiary Involvement
2.4.1. Beneficiaries Engagement and Needs Assessments

According to Eskerod et al., (2015, pp.45-46), stakeholder engagement means to undertake practices that involve stakeholders in a positive manner in organizational activities. This may include inviting them for open dialogue to understand their requirements or informing them about what is happening in the organisation. For NGOs, engaging beneficiaries helps to maintain the trust and support for the project. In the context of complex social interventions,
NGOs may initiate this engagement through dialogue about the nature of the issues faced and appropriate responses (Jacobs & Wilford, 2010, p.799). Moreover, Golini & Landoni (2014, p.125) argued that consultation with local community helps in identifying the characteristics of the environment and context such as political and cultural factors in which the project will be implemented, which is important for project success. Furthermore, they claim that failure to consult and engage beneficiaries may result into inaccurate definition of the project objectives thus leading to project failure.

Due to the benefits of beneficiary engagement, it is advisable to initiate this process during the early phase of project identification to be able to get their input while it is still possible to influence fundamental decisions regarding objectives and goals of the project (AFDB, 2001, p.11). In addition, Prasad et al., (2013, p.70) claim that using collaboration processes towards beneficiaries at the beginning of the project, can help solve the issue of conflicting interest of stakeholders and managing their expectations. It is therefore, evident that the relationship between an NGO and its intended beneficiaries is important for effective interventions. In fact, some NGOs have integrated the values of participation and empowerment in their practices because they recognise them as critical for project success (Jacobs & Wilford, 2010, p.801).

Although engaging beneficiaries during early stages of the project helps to identify the community needs, some of the issues identified at this stage may be irrelevant to the project or represent unrealistic expectations. In this case the project team should clearly explain to the beneficiaries that those issues are beyond the project scope and where possible share these issues with relevant stakeholders who would be able to address them (DFID, 2015, p.3).

2.4.2. Beneficiary Participation

Participatory approaches are often used in decision making process to ensure that there is consensus among all involved parties. This involves having a common understanding of the problem, assessing the needs and interests of each party and together, finding solutions to the identified problems (Monnikhof & Edelenbos, 2001, p.3).

Participation in development projects can be defined as the process through which people with an interest (stakeholders) influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them. In practice this involves employing measures to: identify relevant stakeholders, share information with them, listen to their views, involve them in the processes of development planning and decision-making, contribute to their capacity-building and, ultimately, empower them to initiate, manage and control their own self-development (AFDB 2001, p.2; Van Heck, 2003, p.6). Moreover, participation allows beneficiaries to express their views and in so doing, changes the power relationships among all involved parties. Participation should also be seen as a human right, where beneficiaries have the right to be involved in activities and decisions that affect their lives (IFAD, 2001, p.10).

Edelenbos & Klijn (2005, p.428) noted that participation can be viewed in two dimension, these are the width and depth of participation. The width of participation refers the degree to which each member of a community is offered a chance to participate in each phase of the interactive process. The depth of participation is determined by the degree to which citizens have the
opportunity to determine the final outcome of the interactive process. The combination of the two dimensions strengthens the process of participation.

In addition, in a study on how citizens participate in the development of policy proposals, Edelenbos (2000) as cited in Edelenbos & Klijn (2005, p.429) presented five levels at which citizens could participate. These include:

- **Informing**: at this level, political leaders determine the agenda for decision making and inform other involved stakeholders.
- **Consulting**: here, political leaders determine the agenda but regard those involved as useful discussion partners in the development of policy.
- **Advising**: In principle politicians and administration determine the agenda but give those involved the opportunity to raise problems and formulate solutions.
- **Coproducing**: political leaders, together with involved parties determine a problem solving agenda and search for solutions together.
- **Co-deciding**: the development and decision making of policy is left to those involved in the process, at this level, political leaders act as advisors.

As it can be seen from the above levels of participation, the results of each the citizens’ participation in policy development would be different depending on the level that was applied. Similarly, Hamukwala et al., (2008, p.193) also argue that beneficiary participation may take different levels depending on the organisation. It ranges from them being passive listeners to involving and empowering them to participate in defining objectives and implementing project activities. With an emphasis on development projects, AFDB (2001, p.2) presented six progressive levels of involvement. The first three levels are categorized as consultation whereas the other three are categorized as participation.

The first level is **information-sharing** which may be done through dissemination of documents, Public meetings or information seminars; at this level, the flow of information is asymmetric since the project team may not be interested in getting feedback from beneficiaries at this point. This kind of involvement is similar to what Edelenbos (2000) identified as Informing. Information sharing would be applicable at the initiation phase where beneficiary involvement is still limited due to the fact that the project is yet to be approved.

The second level is **listening and learning**: this includes field visits, interviews and consultative meetings. This level of involvement helps to gather information about needs and expectations of the targeted beneficiaries. This should be a two-way traffic of information, where beneficiaries express their view but also receive feedback. Listening and learning is similar to what Edelenbos (2000) called Consultation. This level of involvement would be useful in the early phases of the project notably initiation and design and, planning where beneficiaries’ inputs and feedback would be used to design and plan the project.

The third one is **joint assessment** which may include participatory needs assessment, beneficiary assessments and evaluating project progress together with beneficiaries or their representatives. Joint assessment would be applicable at monitoring and evaluation phase as well as close-out phase when beneficiaries would participate in evaluating the project progress and the overall impact of the project.

The fourth is **shared decision-making**: it may include public review of draft documents, participatory project planning, workshops to identify priorities and resolve conflict. This level of involvement is identified by Edelenbos (2000) as Co-deciding. Shared decision making
would be applicable at the planning phase as well as monitoring and evaluation phase, where beneficiaries would contribute to the decisions relating to corrective measures in case of any deviations from the initial project plan.

The fifth level is collaboration: this may include joint committees or working groups with all stakeholder representatives and shared responsibility for implementation. Collaboration is what Edelenbos (2000) identified as Coproducing. Collaboration can be used at planning phase, where beneficiaries could work together in setting goals and objectives of project and follow them through the implementation phase as well.

The final level is empowerment which may include capacity-building activities and self-management support for beneficiary initiatives. The aim of this level of involvement is to ensure that beneficiaries have the required skill to develop initiatives that help them to address their challenges. Considering that most of the capacity building activities start at the implementation phase we argue that empowerment would be useful at this phase. It can also be used at the close-out phase to ensure that beneficiaries have the required skills to look after the project output once the project ends.

Although the level of participation maybe different, the effective participation form is one which allows people to influence the definition of project activities, increase their commitment to those objectives and consequently lead to project effectiveness (Hamukwala et al., 2008, p.196). Nanthagopan et al., (2016, p.1613) argued that beneficiary participatory approach helps NGOs to get appropriate field level information, share knowledge and skills which are important in undertaking joint projects that address complex community issues.

Furthermore, involving beneficiaries early in the project cycle and making the development project more participatory, improves accountability in aid programs. It results in projects that better respond to recipient needs and facilitates donor accountability to the end users. Participation in one project may also serve as a catalyst for future development efforts at the local level. Moreover, beneficiary participation creates a monitoring mechanism such that those responsible for the project receive feedback from end users over the course of project implementation which allows them to take necessary actions making the project more responsive and useful (AFDB, 2001, p.3; Winters 2010, p.228). In addition, beneficiary participation should result in the sense of self-development and self-reliance where beneficiaries take a lead in finding solutions to their challenges (Van Heck, 2003, p.6).

Although beneficiary participation during early phases ensures transparency, proper project selection, draws community support and increases the sense of ownership which in turn lead to beneficiary satisfaction and sustainability of project output (Lawther, 2009, p.166; O’ Dwyer & Unerman, 2010, p.467; Hermano et al., 2013, p.28; Yalegama et al., 2016, p.655); it also entails certain risks. These risks may include: higher upfront costs in terms of time and resources; the risk of undertaking poorly planned or merely token participatory activities due to limited time, capacity, commitment or resources; difficulty in reaching out to the targeted beneficiaries and ensuring that the true priorities and needs are represented; creation of unrealistic expectations and weak capacity of beneficiary (AFDB, 2001, p.5).

2.5. Challenges in Managing Beneficiary Involvement

Although beneficiary involvement and participation is important for the success of development projects, there are still issues which may affect the way and extent to which beneficiaries can be engaged. First, development projects are geared towards addressing socio-
economic problems that need to be urgently solved. This puts pressure on NGOs to commence implementation of development interventions which affects the level of consultation and participation of all involved parties (Boon et al., 2013, pp.51-52). Another challenge is that donors develop policies and priorities and revise them at an ever-increasing pace, while NGOs lack technical capacity and resource to help them adapt quickly to these changes, hence, they struggle trying to figure out how to react to these developments (AbouAssi & Trent, 2016, p.387).

In addition, NGOs still face the challenge of aligning the commitments that they make, and the dialogue they pursue, with the interests of different stakeholders; considering the fact that the development sector is somehow characterised by contract relationships, here the donors specify exactly the scope of the project and how it needs to be implemented (Prasad et al., 2013, p.70; Jacobs & Wilford, 2010, p.799). Finally, Eskerod et al., (2015, p.50) cautions that engaging project beneficiaries heavily may lead to escalating their expectations which may result into disappointment when the project fails to deal with their inputs at the end.

2.6. Theoretical Framework for Managing Beneficiary Involvement

2.6.1. Project Phase Based Framework

To develop this framework, we linked the six levels of beneficiary involvement identified in the literature to the phases of the project. We considered activities performed at different phases to identify different levels of involvement that would be appropriate at each phase.

![Figure 2: Theoretical Framework](image-url)
2.6.2. Understanding the Framework

a. Initiation and Design phase

As the project is being initiated, information sharing would be useful to give potential beneficiaries some updates which would also ensure smooth transition to the subsequent phases. In addition, it is during this phase that the needs are defined therefore, *listening and learning* would help to understand the needs of the target beneficiaries and where possible base on them to design the project.

b. Planning phase

When the project team is developing the detailed implementation plan, *listening and learning* would be useful to ensure that they set goals and priorities which are aligned with beneficiaries’ needs. Moreover, *shared decision-making and Collaboration* would help to create the sense of ownership in the early phases of the project.

c. Implementation phase

Involving beneficiaries in the implementation increases the sense of ownership among them, however, they need to have appropriate skills to participate. Therefore, *empowerment* would help to equip them with required skills so that they can effectively participate at this phase. Moreover, *collaboration* can also be used at this stage where beneficiaries work alongside all stakeholder representatives on different activities during implementation.

d. Monitoring and Evaluation phase

This phase extends through the entire life of the project and continually measures the project’s progress and identifies appropriate corrective actions where needed. Therefore, *joint assessment* would help to get the feedback from all involved parts. It would also be useful to have mechanisms for *shared decision-making* so that when there is need for changing the plan or taking corrective action, the interests of all stakeholders are represented.

e. Close-out and transition phase

During this phase, activities relating to confirming the deliverables with beneficiaries, collecting lessons learned, and ensuring sustainability of the project results are performed. Therefore, *joint assessment* would help to evaluate what has been achieved and get beneficiary feedback, completing the administrative, financial and contractual closure activities. *Empowerment* could also be used to ensure that there is a proper process of knowledge and skills transfer. This would result in sustainability of the project outputs as the beneficiaries would have the required skills to look after these outputs.
Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter we present our philosophical point of departure along with our ontological, Epistemological and Axiological points of view. Further, we discuss our research methodology, that guided us during the research process. We also explain how we came across the theories we used. Lastly, we present the practical methods on how we collected and analysed the data.

3.1. Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to how the researcher views and interprets the reality and how the values and preconceived knowledge is likely to affect the study (Collis & Hussey, 2014, pp.43-49). The research philosophy adopted by the researchers contains important assumptions about the way in which they view the world. These assumptions are the basis of the strategy and methods chosen for each study (Saunders, 2012, p.108). Below, we discuss our philosophical assumptions: ontological, epistemology, and axiological viewpoints we took in this study; which in turn have influenced the way we have designed our research.

3.1.1. Ontology

Ontology refers to how researchers view the nature of reality. There are two major types of ontological standpoint. The first one is that of an objectivism viewpoint which considers reality to be of objective nature and cannot be influenced by social actors. The second one is that of constructionists who believe that reality is affected by social actors. In other words, this standpoint does not exist outside the existence of social actors (Saunders et al., 2012, pp.110-111; Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.47). Our research follows an ontological stance of critical realism viewpoint which combines elements of both objectivism and constructionist stances. Realism considers that reality exists independently of our mind; however, this reality becomes the truth through our senses. In other words the same reality can be perceived differently by different people depending on how they analysed it (Saunders et al., 2012, p.114).

We have taken this viewpoint because we believe that project beneficiaries and their needs exist regardless of our knowledge. However, the way these needs are assessed and responded to is dependent on the social actors, thus they would be meaningless outside the existence of such social actors. One of the objectives of the research is to develop a framework that can be used in managing beneficiary involvement. To do so, we will rely on the existing literature and complement it with empirical findings. In NGOs, project managers and other decision-makers’ perception of the reality of beneficiary involvement differs from one person to another depending on their expertise, values, preferences in choosing one project to another. Thus, the empirical data collected carries elements of subjectivity generated from those who participated in this research.

3.1.2. Epistemology

According Saunders et al. (2012, p.112) Epistemology is concerned with the assumptions we make regarding what is valid knowledge in a given field of study. The major epistemological viewpoints are positivism and interpretivist. Positivists consider only phenomena that can be
objectively observed and measured as the acceptable knowledge whereas an interpretivist viewpoint is based on the argument that validity of knowledge depends on the social actors’ individual beliefs (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.47).

As (Saunders et al., 2012, p.109) argue, it is rare to have a research question that perfectly fits in one philosophical standpoint. We also know that it is possible to take different epistemological standpoints in this research. In our case, we are interested in understanding the process of interaction between project managers and beneficiaries in NGOs during the project lifecycle. In addition, this study is dependent on project managers’ perception and beliefs. Therefore, we decided to take an interpretivists viewpoint; we believe that the concepts we are studying are socially constructed and the subjective interpretation of all actors involved in this study would be important in conducting this research.

3.1.3. Axiology

Axiology refers to role of the researchers’ values during research. When a positivist standpoint is taken, the research is conducted in a value-free way; here the researcher is independent and objective in relation to the phenomenon under study. On the other hand, with an interpretivist viewpoint, researchers are value bound and subjective since they are involved in the study and their subjectivity is likely to influence the findings (Saunders et al., 2012, p.119).

In our case, we recognise that the choice of topic under study was influenced by our previous experience and interest in activities of not-for profit organizations and social projects. We are both from developing countries with a great number of NGOs implementing development projects. Our countries are also dependent on the development aid from various donor agencies and developed countries. In addition, one of us has over three years of experiences working in the NGO sector. We are also interested in being part of organisations that are committed to eradicating poverty and fighting against all kinds of social injustice. We are therefore, aware that our interests and previous knowledge may affect the findings of our study; however, we are committed to staying as neutral as we possibly can to avoid any biases.

3.2. Research Approach

A research approach refers to the logic of research, whether it is structured by moving from general to specific or the other way around. A deductive research concerns the development of a theoretical framework from existing literature by testing it with empirical phenomenon. According to Bryman and Bell (2015, p.13), the key feature of the deductive approach is structured methodology in order to ensure reliability, an ability to measure the facts quantitatively and a reduction of problems to the simplest elements and generalization all of which require a careful selection and sufficient sample size.

An inductive research approach on the other hand involves development of theories from observation of a particular phenomenon which results in generalisation of the findings (Collis & Hussey, 2014, p.7; Saunders et al., 2012, pp.124-125). In addition, a third type of research approach known as abductive is given by the combination of the two approaches mentioned above. This approach moves back and forth between the existing theory and new finding (Saunders et al., 2012, p.147).
In this thesis we have used an abductive research approach as this research aims to improve the process of managing beneficiary involvement by going back and forth into the existing theory and new empirical findings. Moreover, this thesis intends to develop a framework based on the existing knowledge which will later be improved using the empirical results by using elements of both the inductive and deductive research approaches. The abductive approach is suitable for this study since we do not formulate a hypothesis to be tested or generate a new theory that needs to be tested by collecting additional data.

3.3. Research Design

According to Creswell (2014, pp.1-3.), research design has three main approaches, qualitative; “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” and quantitative; an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables”, or mixed approach which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The main difference between qualitative and quantitative approach is the focus on numerical and non-numerical data. When a quantitative approach is used, numerical data will be collected using tools like questionnaires, and then analysed using statistical methods. In contrast, a qualitative approach collects non-numerical data through interviews and other tools; non-numerical analysis procedures are used to process and analyse the collected data (Saunders et al., 2012, p.151).

As we are not interested in statistical relationships between variables, we have decided to use a qualitative approach. We believe that asking ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions would be more useful in giving us insights on how to improve the process of managing beneficiary involvement hence answering our research question. A qualitative research design is also aligned with our interpretivist epistemological standpoint and critical realism ontological assumption.

3.4. Research Strategy

Ghauri & Grønhaug (2010, p.110) argued that “How” and “Why” questions are better answered using a case study research strategy. In this research, we adopted a multiple case study strategy, where we investigate different projects to understand how beneficiaries are involved in each. In this research, the case studies we are investigating are not the NGOs we selected, they are rather the individual projects implemented by each NGO. Although, this study’s purpose is not to generalise the findings, we believe that the results from different projects would help us to make conclusions and contribute to the existing literature on beneficiary involvement.

3.4.1. Data Collection

Data collection methods need to be in line with the research philosophy, methodology, approach and strategy. Given that we have taken an interpretivist approach, and a qualitative design, we have chosen to use interviews in collecting data for this research. We have chosen interviews because they are considered the most used methods for collecting primary data in a
case study design (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p.109). There are three main categories of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. The main difference in these three categories of interviews is that structured interviews are based on a predetermined set of questions that are administered by the interviewer, any other question other than those predetermined are not considered during the interview. On the other hand, semi-structured and unstructured interviews use guiding questions and allow a degree of flexibility for the interviewer to add or remove a question depending on the flow of the interview (Saunders et al., 2012, p.320-321).

With this consideration in mind, we believe that semi-structured interviews represent the most suitable data collection methods for our study. Semi-structured interviews will help us to understand the “how” and “why” of the phenomenon we are studying (Saunders et al., 2012, p.320). Furthermore, they present the opportunity of having an in-depth discussion on different areas related to the concepts of this research which is useful in answering our research question.

3.4.2 Data Sampling

In line with our philosophical assumptions and research design, we selected non-random sampling technique which uses an element of subjective judgement to select the sample for the study (Saunders et al., 2012, p.233). Our research aims to improve the process of managing involvement of project beneficiaries in NGOs. To achieve this, we need to have a deeper understanding of the process used by project managers in NGOs to manage beneficiary involvement which allows us to develop an appropriate framework that combines both the existing theory and empirical findings. Thus, a non-random sampling would help us to determine those who have enough experience and knowledge that would help us to answer our research question.

There are four major non-random sampling techniques, quota sampling which is used to select participants when a sampling frame is not available, purposive sampling where participants are chosen on the basis of judgement, volunteer sampling where participants volunteer to participate and haphazard sampling where participants are included for convenience (Saunders et al., 2012, p.236).

Setting the sampling requirements was done at three levels. Firstly, we set the requirements for the organisations we were interested in. We agreed to focus on international NGOs working on socio-economic projects with preference in health sector for the purpose of comparability. The reason, we focused on international NGOs is motivated by the fact that they operate in different countries with different political, social and cultural contexts which could be problematic in involving beneficiaries. In addition, in such NGOs major decisions maybe taken from their headquarters which are always in countries that are different from those in which they implement the projects. As there could be many international NGOs that are working in the socio-economic area, we decided to narrow down to one small geographical area and we decided to focus on the East African Region mainly because one of us if from that region which would be an opportunity during data collection phase. Furthermore, we chose Rwanda and Uganda as they seem to have more international NGOs compared to other member states due the impact of genocide and wars that affect those two countries. Thus international NGOs have
been working alongside different development partners to help these countries to rebuild their socio-economic sector. By searching through the directory of NGOs in East African region, we established that there are about 380 international NGOs registered in Rwanda and Uganda in 2016. Based on our criteria, we had about 82 potential NGOs that we could reach-out to.

The second level was about potential participants. For potential interviewees, a minimum of three years of project management experience in NGO sector was considered. We believed that someone with three years of experience should have had the opportunity to work through all project phases.

The third level was about the projects which are also the case studies in this research. For the project to qualify for our study, it should have received funding from bilateral and multilateral agencies such as USAID and/or other international donor institutions. We decided to focus projects funded by bilateral and other international donors because such donors are well established and have their own strategic direction which NGOs should be aligned with if they are to receive funding. Moreover, their influence which is channelled through grants and control over funding is likely to determine how NGOs involve beneficiaries. To ensure that our sample meets all the above requirements, we decided to use purposive sampling which allows us to use our judgement in determining who to involve as participants in this study. It is important to note that since we didn’t have enough information about each individual projects, we allowed our participants to select a project of their choice on which to collaborate for research purposes. We however had to ensure that the project shared met our research parameters.

3.5. Literature Search

We started by defining our area of interest, after establishing that we were interested in the area of project management in NGOs, we started searching for existing literature in this field. Reviewing the existing literature in a given field helps the researcher to identify gaps and subjects that need to be studied further (Sandberg & Alvesson, 2011, p.28). Conducting literature search helped us achieve this objective in the field of project management in NGOs. In our literature search, we mainly focused on journal articles published in Peer Reviewed Journals.

Furthermore, we used books and handbooks from project management professional bodies such as Project Management Institute (PMI) and Project Management for Non-Governmental Organisations (PM4NGOs). In addition, we used policy papers and reports from international development organizations like African Development Bank (AFDB), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and other main actors in NGO sectors. These articles were searched by using Google Scholar, Umeå University library’s database, Heriot-Watt online library and other credible databases using key terms such as Project Management, NGOs management, stakeholder management, beneficiary involvement, needs identification, development projects, third sector organizations and different combinations of the aforementioned key words. During the literature review, the secondary citations were avoided as much as possible. Identification of key authors with considerable contribution to the topic assisted in finding further relevant literature.
3.6. Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations made by researchers are among the success factors of any research in business and social science studies (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p.20). In research, ethics is interpreted as moral choices that affect decisions, standards and behaviours, towards those who are participating in the study. (Saunders et al., 2012, p.226). Regarding our ethical considerations, we followed the recommendations suggested by Ghauri & Grønhaug, (2010, p.20) who argued that researchers should seek voluntary participation, inform participants on the purpose of the research, preserve anonymity of participants, protect participants by not exposing them to stress, not using coercion to get the information and not using special equipment without their consent.

To comply with our ethical considerations, we designed a consent form that we sent to potential participants from NGOs we had selected. This form presented information on the purpose of the study, the interview process, the benefits of taking part in the study, the rights of participants and an undertaking to provide the participants with a copy of the research once completed. The guiding interview questions were shared with all participants beforehand to get them acquainted with themes we wanted to explore and allow them to reflect more on the subject of discussion and also on the voluntary decision to be part of this study.

3.7. Practical Methods
3.7.1. Interview Guide

Our interview guide was prepared based on the research question and the theoretical framework we had developed (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p.127). As we were interested in understanding the level of beneficiary involvement in each project, we used interview guides and most of the questions asked were structured around the project phases. Our aim was to allow our participants give more details on their experience in managing beneficiary involvement (Saunders et al., 2012, p.391).

The first two question of our interview were about the interviewee and the project they wanted to share with us. These two questions helped us to ensure that both the respondent and the project selected met the pre-set requirements for the research. The following seven questions were focused on how beneficiaries were involved at each phase of the project: initiation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and, close-out. The last two questions covered the topics of donors’ influence and challenge in involving beneficiaries. This interview guide helped us to collect empirical findings which we partly based to suggest ways of improving the process of beneficiary involvement.

3.7.2. Access

It is important for researchers to have a strategy on how access to information will be gained when collecting data (Bryman & Bell. 2015, p.277). To gain access to potential interviewees, we mainly relied on both our personal and professional networks. We believed that it would be easy to establish quick contacts through personal referral and recommendations.
Out of the 82 potential NGOs we had identified that met our requirements, we selected 15 NGOs mainly focusing on those we had heard about before. We then visited their official websites as well as LinkedIn network to identify potential interviewees. Through this process, we selected 20 participants and contacted them. Our initial contact was through e-mails of which we follow-up through phone calls or text messages to check if the e-mail has been delivered. During our first contact with each potential interviewee, we briefly explained the purpose of our research. We explained to them that we are interested in project management in NGOs and our focus was on beneficiary involvement and asked if they would be willing to participate.

From the 20 email request we sent, we received 13 replies; seven confirmed their willingness to participate while the remaining six said that although they would have loved to help us, they could not find time in their schedule as they were busy with end of year activities. To the seven who accepted to participate in this study, we sent the interview guide and made regular follow-ups via e-mail to ensure that we addressed any concerns arising. However, as most of our participants were engaged in end of year reviews, there were several postponements of interviews that had been confirmed and as a result we were unable to conduct two of the seven interviews we had confirmed.

3.7.3. Conducting the Interview

We started all our interviews by appreciating respondents for their time and efforts they committed to our research. We reminded them the purpose of the research, explained their rights in line with our ethical considerations (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p.20) and asked for permission to audio record our interview (Saunders et al., 2012, p.389). We also promised to preserve their anonymity and to give them a copy of the research once the study was concluded. After the introduction, we started to ask questions according to the interview guide and added follow-up questions depending on the flow of the interview.

In addition, we decided that one of us led the conversation while the other focused on taking notes. This was helpful as it allowed respondents to focus their attention to one person who was leading the interview and also allowed us to take notes of all key statements that were mentioned during the interview. Although we had planned to conduct all interviews through Skype video calls, one of respondent requested us to switch off the video option after introduction due to internet connectivity issues. However, this had no impact on the quality of the responses we received during the interview. The summary of all interviews is presented in the table below:
Table 1: Respondents profile and lengths of interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Date of interview</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R01</td>
<td>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation Manager</td>
<td>HIV Prevention among Youth</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>28th Nov 2016</td>
<td>00:49:17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R02</td>
<td>Community Engagement Manager</td>
<td>Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>30th Nov 2016</td>
<td>00:37:03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R03</td>
<td>Country Coordinator</td>
<td>Community Livelihood</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>4th Dec 2016</td>
<td>00:50:28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R04</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td>HIV Prevention</td>
<td>14 years</td>
<td>5th Dec 2016</td>
<td>00:53:43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R05</td>
<td>Resilience &amp; Livelihood Sector Lead</td>
<td>Community Nutrition</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>10th Dec 2016</td>
<td>00:45:15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.7.4. Transcribing the Interview

In a qualitative study, it is important to audio-record the interviews because it helps the interview to keep track of the whole conversation (Saunders et al., 2012, p.394). In our research, we also audio-recorded all interviews with permission of the participants. After interviewing each participant, we fully transcribed each audio-record to ensure that the data we collected has been captured. To avoid any errors, we reviewed each other’s transcriptions and listened to the audio-records several times.

3.8. Data Analysis

We used the thematic analysis strategy where data was analysed through themes identified through the literature and/or revealed from the data collected. In addition, we used both deductive and inductive approaches to analyse our data (Saunders et al., 2012 pp.489-490). Deductively, we started by identifying key themes from our conceptual framework. The themes we identified included: project phases - design and initiation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation as well as close-out and transition. We also identified donors’ influence and challenges in beneficiary involvement as key themes. After identifying these themes, we then categorized the findings in each case study under these themes.

After categorizing our findings under the above mentioned themes, we started to read and review the findings looking for ways in which beneficiaries were involved in each case. This reflected the inductive approach since we were not looking for predetermined themes. After this process, we checked if what we determined as beneficiary involvement at each phase matched the meaning of any involvement levels we had identified in the literature. If they matched, we categorised the result under the matching level. If it did not match any level of involvement from those we identified in the literature, we reviewed it again to determine if it merited consideration as a new level of beneficiary involvement.
3.9. Quality Criteria

In every study, researchers need to ascertain that the conclusions made based on the research findings will hold against all scrutiny (Saunders et al., 2012, p.191). The most discussed quality criteria used for the qualitative study include Validity, Transferability, confirmability and reliability (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.401; Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.278).

Validity criterion is about building proper operational measures to ensure that the results of the research are true (Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2010, p.63). To comply with this criterion, we used multiple sources of data and compared the information collected to check how reliable it was. This helped us to minimise the risk of making conclusions based on unrealistic information gathered from a single source of data.

Transferability criterion refers how the findings on a particular study would hold valid in similar context (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.402). As we mentioned before, the purpose of this thesis is not to collect findings that are statistically generalizable. However, we considered this criterion by adopting a multiple case study strategy. Consequently, the findings from each case could hold valid in a similar case and context.

Confirmability criterion is used to measure the objectivity of the researchers and ensure that their personal values have not influenced the research (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.403). Conducting this study in pairs and having regular debates at each stage of the research helped us to overcome question and eliminate biases that may result from our personal values.

Reliability criterion refers to whether the research process is constant and if the same research is conducted by a different researcher, it would produce the same results (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.278). To comply with this criterion, we made efforts to ensure that all steps involved in research process were clearly documented in detailed and transparent ways. We also ensured that these documentations were accessible throughout the process the research time.

As this research was conducted following an interpretivist viewpoint, we recognise that it carries elements of subjective views and opinions from the researchers as well as the respondents. The data we collected are based on the experience of our respondents which is subjected to personal biases. In addition, we analysed this data based on our knowledge, skills and experiences which are not void of elements of biases. However, being aware of these biases and their implication on our research, we took measures to minimise them. These measures included having constant debates and reviews between us to ensure that we agreed on the research process and understood the meaning of our data. We also held biweekly supervision sessions where we sought advice and guidance from our supervisor on whatever challenges that we faced.
Chapter 4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this section we present the summary of the interviews for the reader to have a clear picture of the contexts of the projects, the overall process of beneficiary involvement and challenges they face in involving the final users during the project cycle. Thus, we present the findings of each case separately so that the reader can follow the story of beneficiary involvement from the beginning to the end of the project.

4.1. Presentation- Case Study I

The first project we investigated was about HIV/AIDS prevention in Uganda. The target beneficiaries were youth aged between 10 and 24 years from two districts in the central region of the country. The project focused on economic empowerment and community capacity building. It was funded through Civil Society Fund (CSF), which was a partnership between the government and the AIDS development partners comprised of DFID, Irish Aid, USAID and DANIDA. We gathered more information about this project during our interview with respondent R01 who was part of the project team and also the Monitoring and Evaluation Manager of the organization that implemented this project.

We started by asking how the stakeholders came up with HIV/AIDS prevention project among the youth of 10-24 years. R01 responded that it was a follow up of the project they carried out before. When the organization saw a call for proposals in newspapers they wrote a proposal and were successful in getting the funds for this project. They relied on statistics and government report to identify the problem. The reason the two districts were selected was because of high rates of HIV/AIDS infections among the youth in those areas. R01 also mentioned that this particular selection was in addition due to the unemployment and poverty problems, where youth searched for other sources of earning money, like engaging in prostitution.

To the question whether the project team involved targeted groups in the design and planning phases of the project, R01 said that before starting the implementation they fully engaged beneficiaries during the Planning phase. They held several meetings with the representatives of the youth, district technical team and political teams to agree on activities they wanted to conduct, and to select a few peer facilitators and communities to work with. R01 emphasized their roles by saying “beneficiaries had a higher hand in everything we did. Because they are the ones who informed us on communities that needed more help and young people to be involved. They also identified people to be as the contact person”

Furthermore, R01 explained that the project team presented the training material which they normally use, to the local leader and youth representatives and reviewed them together. They were requested to translate these documents into the local language because most of the beneficiaries did not understand English. After this, they did a baseline survey, to understand the prevailing status and also received input from district authorities. Before the training of all beneficiaries, they started training the selected peer facilitators who in turn provided training at a community level.

Regarding the role of beneficiaries in monitoring and evaluation phases of the project, R01 noted that monitoring was easy since it involved many stakeholders like beneficiaries, community leaders, district leaders and project staff. They developed local advisory
committees based at district level and advisory groups based at sub-county level. Subsequently each group consisted of five people who were: community leader, opinion leader, youth representative, religious leader, and development officer. Whenever the project team went to the field, these people were the first they talked to; to learn about peer facilitators performance before seeing peer facilitators themselves. Meetings were conducted on a regular basis.

Another topic discussed was the role of the donors during the project life cycle. R01 explained that donors had three ‘arms’ that were involved in the project, they included: Financial Management Agency, Technical Management Agency and, Monitoring and Evaluation Agency. These three arms were not involved in the implementation rather they provided technical support and supervised the project to ensure that the project funds were being put to the right use.

When discussing the challenges, R01 said that many challenges related to teen pregnancy. One of the problems was when youth were directed to the health centers, and when they got there, they found that health centers had experienced stock-outs. Another issue the respondent raised was the challenge of not having; “a youth friendly corner at the health centers, especially relating to reproductive health services. Instead of helping the young people, who go there for services, there were cases when the nurses were rebuking the young people asking why they want to use the reproductive health services when they are young”.

Another challenge was the low turn-up of young girls during trainings. Their trainings were mainly attended by more male participants than female. However, during HIV/HIDS counseling and testing, it would mainly be the girls in attendance.

When we asked about what happened at the project close-out phase, the respondent told us that it was very important to prepare an exit strategy. The strategy focused on other goals of the project which were community capacity building and economic empowerment. R01 particularly stressed the importance of economic empowerment since many problems were caused by poverty. For that reason, the project team created what was called youth empowerment clubs where the youth learned different skills like crafts, carpentry and bakery so that they could work and earn money. They also continued to work together to ensure that they sustained what the project had achieved. R01 also mentioned that before the project closed, they gave training materials to the peer facilitators they had trained so that they could continue training the community even after the project had ended. They also advocated for support of these facilitators from district leadership and other partners.

R01 also highlighted the importance of creating ownership of the project among beneficiaries by saying that when someone comes to the community and tells them what to do without involving them, they will no doubt reject it. When we asked how this happened, R01 said; “rejection in this sense may not be telling you outright that we don’t want this project, but through some behaviors you may notice that they have rejected the project. For example, if you have given the peer facilitators bicycles to use for transport, when the bicycle breaks down they will come back and say that ‘your’ bicycle has broken down instead of saying that ‘my’ bicycle.” In addition, the respondent said that it is very important to work closely with the community, because it enables sustainability of the project.
4.2. Presentation- Case Study II

This project was about Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in the southern part of Rwanda and it was funded by USAID. During our interview with respondent R02 the community engagement manager, we got more details on how beneficiaries were involved in this project. We asked our respondent to tell us more about design phase and how beneficiaries were involved at this stage. R02 stated that as an organization, they use a top-down approach. At design level, they started with identification of the most pressing problem in the community and considered how they could assist in addressing this problem. For this project, the project team used government reports to identify specific needs and then developed a proposal which they submitted to donors for funding.

Once the funds were granted, the project team started planning. At this stage, a baseline survey was conducted to understand the prevailing status. However, R02 pointed out that the top-down approach used at design level had some drawbacks, mainly because the project proposal was developed before conducting a baseline survey so in some cases the results from the survey would greatly differ from what was in the design which then required redesigning of the whole project. R02 gave an example where the project could be designed based on the data showing that only girls were dropping out of the schools, but after the baseline survey, the data might show that there was an equally high rate of boys dropping out. Thus, R02 emphasized the importance of bottom up approach compared to top down approach, adding that it is very important to design the project by involving the community. In addition, R02 mentioned that baseline surveys are always conducted by firms contracted by donors which also limit the engagement between beneficiaries and the project team in the early stage of the project.

For reasons why in many projects beneficiaries are not involved at design stage R02 said that most of the big donors publish or make an advertisement saying that they are interested in funding a specific program. Then R02 continued saying that “that is how their business works. If the organization is interested in a specific area, you just come (up) with (a) fancy program because you want to impress the donor to give you money. So, it is not a matter of involving the communities at the first stage, but it is a matter of convincing the donors to give you the money.”

Furthermore, R02 continued explaining that “big donors impose what they want […] they are interested in a very specific thematic area, so at least you have to get along with what donors want.” Therefore, NGOs get stuck in between, because there is a community need and there is also donors’ requirement, and it is quite hard to manage both, because “sometimes you are addressing hygiene problems while people are starving and they have no food.”

At the implementation of this project, R02 explained that beneficiaries were involved so that they could embrace the hygiene practices. To engage communities, the organization created hygiene clubs, where people came together and to share ideas. There were also field officers who met these people on a weekly basis to help and facilitate the whole process. Besides, if there was another curriculum about hygiene or gender based violence, this could also be discussed. The organization’s target was to give the full ownership to the community for it to be able to lead of the entire process.
During the monitoring phase, R02 stated that the project team used result oriented monitoring. Every three months a team of experts would come in and help in revising the design of the program and also look at all indicators. The team also helped in mitigating challenges, and advised on the way forward. R02 mentioned that when the team was bidding for grants, it needed to be very ambitious in order to win which usually led them to set very ambitious expectations. Consequently, when it was later realized that the set targets were not achievable and a review of the design of the project was required, the changes could only be done with those experts acting on behalf of a donor. In addition, R02 said “we had this steering committee that involved government leaders. This was a council to sit every three months to inform of the progress and challenges of the program, and how the beneficiaries were doing.”

We then asked whether beneficiaries would still take the ownership of the project when they were not involved in the early phases. To this, R02 responded that there was a tendency towards community led ownership among NGOs; moreover, this component should be included in proposal to boost the chances of getting the fund. In addition, R02 said that they created community clubs to empower them and make them own the project. In those clubs, communities are trained to run all components of the project themselves, and the organization is only there to facilitate.

Finally, our last question was about challenges faced in involving beneficiaries, and R02, in supporting the idea of involving said that by involving beneficiaries the project team secures two important things: ownership and cost effectiveness. He also added, “These people have already ideas (sic); you can get ideas from them but it is not like this will always work out.”

The main constraint the respondent mentioned was time, that it took a lot time to involve the communities. However, R02 recognizes that involving beneficiaries from the very beginning will make the program more successful rather than planning the program while seated in the office.

4.3. Presentation- Case Study III

This is a community livelihood project implemented in the western part of Rwanda, it was funded by the Segal Family Foundation and other individual donors from United States of America. The project used a community led model to empower vulnerable communities in rural areas. The model was about engaging community members and project recipients from scratch in all activities of the project. The focus of this model is not on the project rather it is on addressing problems in one village. Respondent R03 who is also the country director took us through the project and the model mentioned above. R03 explained that in reality, this is a set of other small projects that aim to improve the living conditions of one specific village from health to economic empowerment.

We started by asking about the process of needs identification and R03 explained that the community needs identification process consisted of two stages, the organization level and community level. R03 highlighted that the organization would never go to the community with already identified needs and challenges. All the project team knew were the assumption that people in Africa were still suffering from poverty and hunger mainly in rural areas. Their task was to identify the most vulnerable and impoverished communities, because communities seldom come forward themselves. Initially, the team went to the appropriate authorities and
solicited reports, next they approached districts, who could give information regarding vulnerable sectors, and sectors in turn would recommend cells, who in turn recommended them to a particular village. When the organization reached the communities, the primary goal of the organization was to involve them in the development of their own life conditions. Accordingly, they assembled the community members to create partnership to make a positive impact to the life of the community.

Furthermore, the respondent explained that once the community was approached, the next stage of needs identification process started. The organization surmised that nobody knew the community needs better than the beneficiaries themselves. For that reason, the organization engaged with community members so that they could help to identify their needs. To do that, facilitators asked them to think about what they wanted to achieve and where they wanted to go and to set up goals. They defined that they wanted to improve their health, have an education, and earn better income. Facilitators then helped the communities to develop goals in a proper way and told them to think about what they could do to achieve those goals. For example, when facilitators asked them how they could improve their education, they said that is was by building a primary school. Thus, after deciding to build a school, the next step was to develop a project proposal to get funding for building the school.

Here the organization’s role was to empower the communities and equip them with necessary skills for project implementation providing them with appropriate trainings. The facilitation process took six months. After that the community was given the funds to accomplish the project. After implementing the project, the organization followed up to learn how everything was going and finally finished the project by developing an exit strategy.

R03 pointed out that the organization played only a support role. After the communities submitted their proposal, the organization reviewed and checked it. If there were some deficiencies in the proposal, the organization gave necessary recommendations did not directly tell the communities what to do. Facilitators gave them questions to prompt them to think about prevailing gaps. Our respondent explained such a situation in the following way “For example, in the plan of building a primary school they forgot about building toilets, so the organization went back and asked, after building the school what do you think about sanitation and hygiene? After that they said, ‘oh, we forgot to mention that we need toilets, we need water and other sanitary materials!’” Furthermore, R03 continued to say that the organization also helped them with technical support, like engineering consultations to check the construction of the building by hiring specialists from outside of the community. Eventually after working on the proposal, the community received the funds for the project.

Then the respondent talked about the implementation phase saying that with the help of facilitators, the community implements the project. R03 noted that it was very important for the community to implement the project themselves because it creates a sense of ownership of the project, when they feel that it is their own project. R03 also said that this sense of ownership increased the commitment, and community’s responsibility towards the project.

After the implementation phase, R03 said that the organization went through monitoring, evaluation, and reporting process. R03 reminded us that in planning the organization also set success indicators and metrics. These indicators were not restricted to building the school but also achieving desired attendance and performance in that school.
Moreover, R03 explained that it was necessary to think about what would happen after the project ended and the organization left. For that reason, the organization supported the community for the two years following the end of implementation phase. During that time the organization followed up by checking the community’s reports and in case of need for technical support or extra funding, the organization helped out, or suggested a contact for the necessary support. In addition, community members were given different types of trainings so that they could do most things on their own. Another option for the organization was to transfer the responsibilities to the government who in turn would support this community school.

Our next question was about the short planning period of six months, whether this period was not too short for planning, learning the required skills and writing a proposal. R03 explained that sometimes for the community, it was too long a period, because the community wanted to immediately start the project. But when the organization explained that the proposal must be strong enough to access the funding and the community saw that it was no easy task the community appreciated that probably even more time was needed.

Another issue was how donors perceived this new model, because big organizations have their own established approaches. R03 explained that as an organization, they have tried to approach some big bilateral and multilateral donors, unfortunately, they were not successful in getting the grants. The respondent said that big donors had some requirements one of which was to have ten years of experience of using the new model. However, the respondent said that some of the donors started to show interest in the model and most probably the USAID would be the first to accept the model. Still, R03 asserted that it was necessary to maintain communication channels and convince the donors that the model worked. R03 also highlighted that it was not only about securing funds, but about developing the communities, empowering them because when there was a commitment everything would work out.

Towards the end of our interview, R03 shared with us an impressive story from a colleague who went to South Sudan and saw a school that was not functioning because of some minor problems. When the community members were asked why they were not using the school, they responded that it was not their school, that it was Muzungu’s (European) school, *they built this school. “The community was not involved; the community did not understand that the school was important for them and that it is their school. On the contrary, they kept calling it a European school”*

Then again, our respondent emphasized the importance of defining the exact needs directly from the beneficiaries by saying “*We understand ourselves as experts, saying that we have masters in community development and whatever, we know a great model to use. But we still question ourselves, do we know their (community) challenges? Are we there to let them know what exactly they need? Do we know where they want to go? They themselves know where they want to go, challenges they have.*”

4.4. Presentation- Case Study IV

The fourth project was about HIV/AIDS prevention and behavior change among the youth between 10 and 30 years old. It focused on young people in school and out of school. It also targeted people whose behaviors could influence the youth. These included: teacher, community leaders, parents and caregivers. Furthermore, the project had a component of youth empowerment through career guidance, doing advocacy and networking on issues affecting the
youth in Uganda. The project covered five districts around Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. This project was funded by USAID under Children AIDS Fund.

More insights on how beneficiaries were involved in this project were given to us by respondent R04 who participated in the design and implementation of the project. We started by asking how the project team identified the need to initiate a project on HIV prevention in the selected districts. The respondent explained that the team based on the national statistics which showed that HIV prevalence and school drop-out rates were high in those five districts. We asked if the team involved the targeted beneficiaries when the project was being designed and the respondent told us that their involvement was very limited at the design phase. The respondent explained that it was a top down approach where the organization developed the proposal to submit to the donors for funding considering the fact that the donors had already highlighted the key objectives and interventions of the project. Therefore, the team relied on national statistics do develop the proposal rather than involving beneficiaries as explained in the following statement: “there was already funding and the high-level objectives determined, so we had to work backwards to fit in the predetermined model. This was more of a response to the donor’s call rather than being a community initiated project.”

In addition, the respondent said that it was challenging to involve beneficiaries at the design phase because for such projects it was very hard to point a finger at the exact beneficiaries because in most cases any member of the community could be a beneficiary. This is what R04 said: “[...] even at conceptual level it is hard defining who actually the beneficiary is, are they the direct beneficiaries or secondary beneficiaries? [...] so they are defined from the project as beneficiaries because they are recipients of the goods and services from the project.”

Regarding beneficiary involvement at planning phase, the respondent said that prior to implementation, the project team conducted a baseline survey in two districts where they would talk to beneficiaries to determine the prevailing state. The results from these two districts were inferred from the remaining three mainly because they did not have enough funds to conduct baseline surveys in all five districts. They also held a number of consultative meetings with the community leaders, and local government authorities in all the five districts. At this stage, they also started to mobilize the communities and informing them about the project.

Furthermore, R04 said that more involvement of beneficiaries started at the implementation stage, where they met with community members, introduced themselves and explained the purpose of the project to them. They asked communities to help them in selecting and recruiting members of the community who would be trained as peer facilitators. The emphasis was on ensuring that each person selected to be trained should be a member of a specific village within the district. The reason why peer facilitators from the community were used was that they were looking for people who understood their community and its cultural context. It was those whose stories and behavior were known in the community and who were likely to be socially accepted. These would also act as a bridge between the community and the project team.

However, the respondent told us that even though beneficiaries were involved during implementation phase, their involvement was still limited because at this stage they could hardly influence any decision on how the project was being implemented. This respondent stated this in the following sentence: “[...] to be frank, the beneficiaries were weak, in terms
of the power relationship they were the weaker party. Their involvement was more supply driven not demand driven."

Regarding monitoring and evaluation phase, R04 said that the project team used beneficiary participatory approach at monitoring and evaluation. To know whether the trainings took place or not, the team conducted spot checks. This was through direct meetings with beneficiaries who are the recipients of the message, instead of asking the facilitator who has given the reports about training. They would ask about the topic of the training and beneficiaries’ opinion about the trainings. This also helped to assess if there was any impact from the training in terms of change in knowledge, behaviors, and attitudes. The project team would also hold meetings with community leaders once a quarter to get their feedback, and asked about the success stories on change in the behavior within communities. Sometimes, feedback and reports from the community leaders were used to replace peer facilitators who were not performing well. Regarding whether the ordinary beneficiaries had the power to influence any changes in case of deviations to what was planned in the project, R04 said: “I don’t think that they had the power but also the mechanism for them to do that, which shows them what to do or how express their grievance.” Furthermore, the respondent explained that even getting feedback on project activities was not a dual traffic flow of information, where beneficiaries expressed their concerns without waiting for a member of the project team to ask. This could mainly be attributed to the big number of beneficiaries who at the same time were fragmented and lacked a unified voice.

Regarding the influence of the donors during the implementation of the project, R04 said that the donors were more interested in justifying the funding and as such they were interested in quantitative results rather than qualitative. Sometimes, emphasis on quantitative data undermined the qualitative aspects of the projects as people focused on how many people were being trained instead of focusing on ensuring that the trainings were effective and the message well understood. Because of financial dependency, the project team had to comply with donor’s requirements to ensure that it got funds for the following period: “It was more on how many we have reached this quarter and how many are we going to reach next quarter.”

On how beneficiaries were involved during the transition phase, R04 explained that the project team conducted an end of project evaluation to look at the impact of the project. The project team talked to beneficiaries and there were some success stories. The team had also managed to form beneficiary clubs especially in schools and these clubs helped to sustain what the project had done. However, there were a few challenges relating to sustainability mostly in those communities where the project had not been able to form these clubs. Furthermore, the respondent explained that another issue that affected the sustainability of the project was the culture of dependency. Peer facilitators received incentives or allowances during the project time, so when the project stopped and there was no more allowance, some of these facilitators stopped doing what they had committed to do, save for those who were passionate about creating a positive change in their communities who continued serving in their respective villages.

About the challenges relating to beneficiary involvement, R04 said that the biggest challenge is the dependency attitude created by donor funded projects mainly because of the facilitation concept which has killed the spirit of volunteerism. The respondent explained that in most cases the project team had to pay beneficiaries in form of transport refund or allowances for them to
attend meetings and trainings. This was also caused by the fact that different NGOs were competing for the same funding amongst themselves and since donors are interested in quantitative data, those that can demonstrated that they have more people are the ones to receive funding. In addition, R04 explained that beneficiaries also know that different NGOs were competing for them, so they used that aspect as leverage to ask for allowances. Another challenge was about uncoordinated interventions of NGOs, the respondent told us that there was “fatigue” among beneficiaries because of the large number of NGOs.

Moreover, lack of structure among beneficiaries was another challenge that was mentioned by the respondent. There was no structure to bring all beneficiaries together to talk about their challenges given the fact the project spread across 350,000 direct beneficiaries. Involving all of them without some kind of structure like associations or beneficiary forums created problems of its own.

4.5. Presentation- Case Study V

This was a food security project in Rwanda which was about facilitating vulnerable families, small holder farmers and off farm business individuals. The purpose of the project was to foster income growth by improving what the beneficiaries were doing and building capacity on practicing modern techniques used in farming, promoting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as well as supporting and encouraging the creation of income generating activities. Another objective of the project was integration of a nutrition component by equipping beneficiaries from various communities with necessary skills and knowledge on how to prepare a balanced diet meal, providing access to nutritious seeds and conducting campaigns on nutrition awareness in partnership with health centers and local authorities. The project was funded by USAID.

During our interview with respondent R05 who is the Resilience & Livelihood Sector Lead, we got more information on how beneficiaries were involved in this project. To the question regarding the identification of needs of beneficiaries, R05 answered that they were using secondary data to identify district or sectors that have more vulnerable and poor communities than others. R03 also explained that because of poverty indicators some areas have more NGOs than others in Rwanda. Thus, before going to any village, they first worked with Government to determine where they were going work.

We then asked how the project team did planning after it identified vulnerable communities, whether at organizational level or together with the community. R05 responded that the team normally used problem trees -analysis and other tools to identify problems. Before planning and implementation phase, the team conducted meetings with communities of one or two sectors within the selected district to identify issues. Then they worked with communities, local government and local authorities to plan and set targets together.

In our next question, we asked about beneficiaries’ contribution during the planning phase. From the response of R05, the organization first met with representatives of communities to learn more about them, their problems, what they did to solve those problem and what resources they had that for some reasons were not being used. The organization always encouraged communities to come up with ideas and think together on poverty alleviation. R05 highlighted that tools like problem tree analysis helped to identify the root of the main problem. For instance, community members said that they had malnutrition problems, but after using
Regarding the implementation phase, our respondent once again reminded us that they tried to utilize ideas generated by the communities. Depending on the type of the task, the project team chose appropriate members from the communities for project implementation. For example, if the subject was on how to prepare a balanced diet meal, the organization involved community health workers to do the activities. The organization provided them with necessary trainings and support on how to do the activities, as well as other incentives like transport and meal allowances. Whereas Community health workers were given some incentive to help them do the trainings, the respondent explained that the organization had a cost sharing approach where during training, the project covered the expenses of the trainer and the venue only, while other expenses relating to the trainings were paid by beneficiaries themselves. In addition, the Respondent gave other examples of beneficiary involvement during implementation phase especially on the eradication of malnutrition problem; the organization gave livestock like goats to help the community representatives get manure for acidic soil, so that they could cultivate vegetables and fruits besides obtaining milk from the livestock.

Regarding monitoring and evaluation phase, R05 said that the project team conducted one-year and two-year general evaluations respectively. The team also made field visits to see the how activities were implemented and what outcome those activities generated if any. The team also met with community leaders to assess the impact of the project after a given period. Since beneficiaries were involved in all previous stages, R05 affirmed that they were also involved in developing project transition plan on how to sustain the project after project team’s departure. R05 also said that normally in the last two years of the project there was no implementation, thus they worked on ensuring that what had been done was sustainable.

We also asked about donors’ influence to the project and R05 stated that donors were always interested in a specific area and if one wanted to secure funds, one was to submit a project proposal related to the specified area. In this project donors usually came to visit and assess the impact of the project comparing reports submitted and actual progress against the project proposal.

Then in our last question we wanted to know about challenges in involving beneficiaries. R05 asserted that one of the biggest challenges was lack of a strong sense of ownership among community members leading to poor commitment in performing project activities. R05 also added that the beneficiaries had, “poor mindset on self-resilience and sustainability.” The respondent explained that the poor mindset was mostly due to NGOs practices. After the infamous 1994 Genocide against Tutsi and moderate Hutu by Hutu extremists, NGOs intervened using a relief approach by giving food and other material stuff directly. Consequently, some “community members still have this mindset, which I would say is a dependency syndrome where they expect that with every NGO project they are going to receive free things.” R05 further explained that such an attitude is a hindrance especially that whereas the organization is helping families to create income generating activities, the families do not want to use their hands but expect free things.
R05 shared one of the examples of creating a sense of ownership using one of the cases where the project team gave tap water to the communities. Whenever there was a problem, no one would try to resolve it. As R05 said “they don’t have the passion of seeing that problem as theirs- that is one of the challenges we faced and that is why I called lack of ownership.” To solve this problem, they decided to introduce water management committees everywhere they gave tap water. These committees collected a minimal fee from each family that fetched water from the tap and when a component of the tap was broken, the committee used such collections to repair or buy a replacement of the broken part(s).
Chapter 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we present our discussion on the findings and our understanding of what these findings mean. The findings were analysed in line with the concepts and themes presented in the literature review chapter. These include project phases and levels of involvement. We also present what new concepts we identified in the findings which we had not covered in reviewed literature.

5.1. Analysis Case Study I

This was about an HIV/AIDS prevention project in Uganda. The targeted beneficiaries were youth aged between 10 to 24 years from two districts in the central region. The project has focused on economic empowerment and community capacity building.

Beneficiary Involvement at Initiation and Design phase

During the design phase of this project, there was no involvement of beneficiaries. The project team relied on national statistics to design the proposal which they submitted to donors for funding. One of the reasons why beneficiaries were not involved at this stage could be related to the fact that the organisation had not yet secured the funding, hence engaging beneficiaries at this stage would have created false hope which would result in disappointments in case the funding was not secured (Eskerod et al., 2015; p.50). However, designing a project without consulting the targeted beneficiaries to understand their needs may result in implementing a project that does not respond to needs of the beneficiaries.

Beneficiary Involvement at Planning phase

After securing the funding, the project team started planning. At this phase, beneficiaries were involved at three different levels. Firstly, the project team introduced the project to beneficiary communities through meeting with district leaders, radio talk-shows and visits to the communities. We identified this kind of involvement as Information Sharing. Secondly, we observed that a baseline survey was conducted together with consultative meetings with beneficiaries and local leaders to understand the current state. This helped them to understand the needs of the community as well as creating the initial rapport between the project team and beneficiaries which was useful in creating a sense of ownership. We identified this as Listening and Learning. However, we believe that Listening and learning would yield more results if it was performed at the design phase before initiating the project (Kreindler, 2009, p.119). Thirdly, we noted that both the project team and beneficiaries’ representative reviewed the training material together and with the request from beneficiaries, these materials were translated into the local language. In addition, beneficiaries themselves selected people who would work as peer-facilitators which demonstrates that the decisions at this stage were not only being taken by the project team but also beneficiaries. We therefore, categorised this involvement as Shared Decision-making. Moreover, Van Heck (2003, p.6) argued that involving beneficiaries in the decision making process creates the sense of ownership because they appreciate that their views and ideas are taken into consideration.
Beneficiary Involvement at Implementation phase

Regarding the implementation phase, we observed that before delivering the trainings, there was a process of selecting community members who would work alongside the project staff in delivering the trainings. In fact, the selected community members were the trainers in their respective villages whereas the project team played a support role. We categorized this involvement as Peer facilitation which is a new level of involvement that we identified through the empirical findings. We also noted that transfer of skills and knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention and providing counselling service to the beneficiaries started at this phase. This transfer of knowledge and skills aimed to impact the change of behaviour and attitude within the communities, not only on HIV/AIDS but also on other community challenges including poverty. We identified this kind of involvement as Empowerment. It is important to note that beneficiary empowerment started by training peer facilitators who were members of the beneficiary communities, who in turn trained their respective communities. The skills that peer facilitators acquired during this training are lifetime skills which they would apply in any similar project, thus their empowerment also encompassed the personal development aspect of beneficiaries (Hamukwala et al., 2008, p.215).

Beneficiary involvement at Monitoring and Evaluation phase

At Monitoring and Evaluation phase, we observed that there was an initiating of community lead monitoring and evaluation process. This was done by forming committees comprising of community members and beneficiary representatives both at village and district level to perform activities relating to monitoring and evaluation exercises. This involvement is considered to be Joint assessment. The project team worked together with these committees during this phase; discussions and deliberations were done before making any decision at this stage. We believe that this kind of involvement at monitoring and evaluation phase yields better results (Winters, 2010, p.228), because it involves beneficiaries in identifying gaps and solution to fill these gaps. Therefore, their sense of ownership increases as the project is adjusted to meet their needs.

Beneficiary involvement at Close-Out phase

Finally, at the close-out and transition phase, we observed that the project focused on training youth on skills that would help them address poverty as the root-cause of the problem to which the project was responding. The trainings shifted from HIV/AIDS prevention to teaching new skills like craft, baking and developing the talents of the youth which they would use to create income generating activities thus addressing the poverty problem, we also identified this involvement as Empowerment. In addition, youth empowerment clubs were created where beneficiaries would come together and discuss their challenges and find solution together. This created cohesion among beneficiaries and allowed them to have a common voice. We identified this new involvement as Group forming. Beneficiary clubs would also enable beneficiaries to hold accountable the project team on the expected deliverables. In addition, clubs are also beneficial to the project because they served as an efficient channel for communicating with beneficiaries and understanding their needs.

Furthermore, beneficiary clubs contribute to sustainability of the project output whereby members continue working together even when the project has ended (Jacobs & Wilford, 2010, p.801). Through these clubs, members can work together to identify new challenges and ways
of addressing them. However, we argue that Group forming would be more effective if it is performed at the implementation phase and used simultaneously with other strong levels of involvement like empowerment. This would help to minimise any tension and conflicts (Prasad et al., 2013, p.70) as the members would be sharing the same value and view at this point. We also believe that initiating this involvement at implementation phase would contribute to a high sense of ownership, cohesion and sustainability.

We have summarised the levels on involvement we identified in this project in the table below:

*Table 2: Project 1- level of beneficiary involvement at different phases*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of involvement</th>
<th>Initiation and Design</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluation</th>
<th>Close-out and transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening and learning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer facilitation (new)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision-making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group forming (new)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Influence of the Donors**

Regarding the influence of the donors in this project we noted that they provided technical support to the project team. They were interested in ensuring that the project went according to the plan. Although Rauh (2010, p.34) claims that donors set the agenda and the projects and influence how it is implemented, we didn’t see a similar pattern in this project. This could be attributed to the fact that this project was funded through a consortium of various donors. Thus it would be hard for one donor to put forward that donor’s agenda since it would require a consensus from all involved donors.

**Challenges in involving Beneficiaries**

Regarding the challenges in involving beneficiaries, there was a challenge of low turn-up of female beneficiaries during the trainings. In addition, we noted some case of beneficiaries who went to health facilities looking reproductive health services would be rebuked or judged by the health officer which would also affect the overall turn-up of beneficiaries. These challenges can be attributed to cultural context (Ika et al., 2012, p.106), where in some communities, girls are required to stay home and take care of the family business. Furthermore, some cultures judge and question the behaviors of unmarried people especially the youth who would go the health facility asking for reproductive health services. Therefore, it would be useful to analyze the cultural context in which the project was to implemented in during the design phase and identify strategies to deal with these challenges.
5.2. Analysis Case Study II

This project was about Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in the southern part of Rwanda and it was funded by USAID.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Initiation and Design phase**

Similar to the project we previously discussed, the design phase of this project was involved in developing a proposal for submitting to donors for funding. Through the finding, we noted that the organisation uses a top-down approach at the design phase (Tembo, 2003, p.529). Thus, there was no involvement of beneficiaries at this phase. This was a deliberate choice with emphasis put on meeting the requirements put forward by donors in the call for proposal. As we argued before, this presents a risk of designing a project that doesn’t address beneficiary needs which would result into disappointment or the need to adjust the project design. This aligns with argument made by Botes (2000, p.43) who noted often beneficiaries are involved in later stages of the project where no much changes can be made on the already designed project. Although the development of proposal was based on data from government reports and other statistical databases, most of these data was quantitative and presented in an aggregated form, therefore, there is possibility that they do not cover some elements of the community reality. Using a small sample of beneficiaries together with statistics and government reports would provide more insights on the community needs hence improving the quality of the design.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Planning phase**

In this project, beneficiary involvement starts at the planning phase. The firstly, we noted that local readers and beneficiaries were informed about the start of the project and the baseline survey which was conducted by the contractor hired by the donor. We identified this kind of involvement as Information Sharing. It is important to mention that this was a one-way flow of information no direct feedback or ideas from beneficiaries were sought at this point. Secondly, the project team started going to the beneficiary communities and talking to community health workers and other local leaders to identify people who would work with the project as leaders of the community clubs. We categorised this involvement as Collaboration. Although beneficiaries contributed in identifying other members who would lead their club, their involvement is still limited because the decision to approve those people was done by the organisation implementing the project. We argue that as the project was approaching the implementation phase, it would have been useful to start engaging beneficiaries in a proactive way by seeking their opinion and feedback (Monnikhof & Edelenbos, 2001, p.3), and creating a dual flow of information. This would enable to create the sense of ownership among beneficiaries during the early phase of the project. Furthermore, we believe that if the project members were the ones who conducted the baseline survey, it would have allowed them to establish a relationship with the beneficiaries which in turn would influence the type of involvement at subsequent phases.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Implementation phase**

The findings also showed two levels of involvement at the implementation phase. Firstly, this phase started with training opinion leaders who were selected to lead community clubs. The
trainings were on new hygiene curriculum and leadership and, management skills. These club leaders were the ones who conducted trainings in their communities using the same curriculum. This involvement was categorised as Empowerment. In addition, there was creation of community hygiene clubs. The purpose of these clubs was to ensure that community members embrace hygiene practices that they are being trained on. This involvement was identified as Group forming. These clubs would also continue function after the end of the project to sustain hygiene practices amongst members. Moreover, they served as a forum to bring beneficiaries them together to share their experiences and learning (IFAD, 2001, p.10). The idea of forming these clubs at the implementation stage was good considering the fact that at design and planning phase involvement of beneficiaries was still limited.

**Beneficiary involvement at Monitoring and Evaluation phase**

Regarding the involvement at Monitoring and Evaluation phase, beneficiaries didn’t participate in the activities of monitoring and evaluation as this was conducted by contractors. Although the reports on monitoring and evaluation were discussed by the steering committee that comprised the project team members and government leaders, the actual beneficiaries were not represented on this steering committee. We therefore categories the involvement used at this phase as Information Sharing. It would have been useful at this phase, to seek feedback from actual beneficiation on how the project is progressing and in case of deviation, identify and take corrective measures together.

**Beneficiary involvement at Close-Out phase**

At the close-out and transition phase, we noted that most of the activities performed at this phase aimed to equip club leaders and their members with skills that would help them to keep running the clubs when the project ends. We therefore, identified this as Empowerment. In addition, the organisation handed over to government who in turn support the clubs in terms of follow-ups to ensure sustainability. In our view, we believe that the idea of handing over to government could have overshadowed the role of beneficiaries in the project. It is possible that the project focused more on complying and getting feedback from government instead of focusing on beneficiaries whose involvement at all phase would lead to satisfaction and sustainability (O’ Dwyer & Unerman, 2010, p.467). The table below presents the summary of different levels of involvement we identified in this project.

**Table 3: Project II- level of beneficiary involvement at different phases**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of involvement</th>
<th>Initiation and Design</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluation</th>
<th>Close-out and Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group forming(new)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

40
**Influence of the Donors**

Regarding the influence of donors, we noticed that the donors had high influence from the beginning till the end of the project. They are the ones determined the area and objectives of the project and the implementing organization had to align itself to those objectives. In addition, all the project evaluations were conducted by contractors who were hired by the donors this means that in case of any deviation, the process of taking corrective measures would be initiated by the donor rather than the project team. This shows that the relationship between the organizations implementing the donors was more of a contractual relationship when the donor specifies what needs to be done and in some cases how it should be done. This confirms what Rauh (2010, p.34) and AbouAssi (2013, p.972) said where they claimed that donors are have more power than any other stakeholder which allows to influence how the project is designed and implemented.

**Challenges in involving Beneficiaries**

The challenge identified in this project related to the involvement of beneficiaries in design phase. As the project was designed as a response to the donor’s call for funding, the timeline in which this proposal was due was very short. Thus, involving beneficiaries would require more time and it would have been challenging. However, we believe that it would still be possible to consult leaders or a few members of the community to gain more insights on the community needs.

**5.3. Analysis Case Study III**

This project is community livelihood project implemented in the western part of Rwanda. It is a set of other small projects that aim to improve the living conditions of one specific village from health to economic empowerment

**Beneficiary Involvement at Initiation and Design phase**

Contrary to the previous two projects we had discussed so far, the organisation initiated this project after securing the funding. This provided the opportunity of involving beneficiaries in the early stages of the project.

At design phase, we identified three level of involvement. Firstly, the project team visited the beneficiary community and brought village members together to identify their needs. Targeted beneficiaries were given the opportunities to express their view on challenges they face and analysing them together. At this point members of the project team acted as facilitators of this discussion. We categorised this involvement as *Listening and Learning*. Secondly, beneficiaries and the organisation set and agreed on the expectations of each side. Agreeing on expectations together creates a system of accountability and transparency whereby each party knows its roles and responsibility and what should be expected from the other party. It also helps to avoid any disappointments that would result from unrealistic expectations. We considered this involvement be *Shared Decision-making*. Thirdly beneficiaries set the project goals and priorities they wanted to achieve, and developed a project proposal. The project team facilitated and guided the process to ensure that the goals are achievable and linked to the needs identified earlier. We therefore, identified this kind of involvement as *Empowerment*. 
Empowering beneficiaries at design phase is useful because it creates the sense of ownership from the beginning of the project. Rather than seeing the project as belonging to the NGO, beneficiaries embrace the project (Nanthagopan et al., 2016, p.1613) and work together with the organisation to ensure that it succeeds.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Planning phase**

During the planning phase, beneficiaries were facilitated in the process of planning how they were going to execute the project; they set the project indicators and matrix and timeline for each activity. We identified this involvement as *Empowerment* because it enabled the community members to develop the project plan themselves. Through this process, they acquired skills and knowledge that they would also use beyond this project.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Implementation phase**

At the implementation phase, community member led all the activities according to the plan they had developed. They also received technical support from the organisation when they lacked some skills on specific activities. We also identified this involvement as *Empowerment*, where community members were given the skills and opportunity to execute the project themselves, which increased the sense ownership. In addition, since they were the one who owned the project plan, in case where the execution no longer fitted their needs, they had the power to adjust it accordingly (Hamukwala et al., 2008, p.196).

**Beneficiary Involvement at Monitoring and Evaluation phase**

During monitoring and evaluation phase, members of the project team together with the community members review the progress of the project against indicators and timeline that they set during the planning phase. They discussed the findings and agreed together on the next steps. Although the indicators used to monitor and evaluate the project were set by community members, which would qualify this involvement at this phase as empowerment, we decided to put categorise it as *Joint Assessment* due to the fact that any decision taken here would be discussed with the project team before it is adopted. This helps to clarify on any expectations that may arise from any changes to be made since they are likely to have financial implications that would require support from the organisation (project team).

**Beneficiary Involvement at Close-Out phase**

Finally, at the close-out and transition phase, community members received trainings on advocacy, leadership and management to ensure that they continue to manage the project and its results by themselves. In addition, they received support in terms of supervision and follow-ups for two years after the implementation phase. We identified this involvement as *Empowerment* as involved transferring knowledge and skills to beneficiaries.

This project is an example of where beneficiaries were involved in all phases of the project from the beginning till the end. Table 4 below presents the summary of different levels of involvement we identified in this project.
Table 4: Project III- level of beneficiary involvement at different phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of involvement</th>
<th>Initiation and Design</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluation</th>
<th>Close-out and Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening and learning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision-making</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Influence of the Donors and challenges in involving Beneficiaries**

Donors had no influence of on the design and implementation of this project. This could be attributed to the fact that the funding was meant for a specific village and it was up to the village members to decide which kind of project they wanted to implement. This model of funding transfers the influence from donors to beneficiaries as primary stakeholders. There were also no specific challenges in involving beneficiaries in this project.

5.4. Analysis Case Study IV

This project was about HIV/AIDS prevention and behavior change among youth in Uganda. It also targeted those who can influence behaviors of the youth mainly parents, teachers and community leaders.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Initiation and Design phase**

At the design of this project, there was no involvement of beneficiaries, the project proposal was developed using government reports and national statistics to gather information about the target communities. This is attributed that fact that this project was designed to address an already identified problem and also was a response to the donors’ call for proposals. Although government reports and other statistics may provide information about the needs of a given community, it would still be useful to consult potential beneficiaries and learn more about their need. This would ensure that no mismatch between the project objectives and beneficiaries’ needs. We recognize that these kinds of proposals are time and budget constrained which limits beneficiary involvement. We are also not claiming that projects that are designed with limited level of beneficiary involvement cannot address the community problem. However, we are emphasizing on the need to consult the actual beneficiaries and directly assess their needs (Jacobs & Wilford, 2010, p.799) rather than relying on secondary sources.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Planning phase**

In the planning phase, the project team started to involve beneficiaries. They used consultative meetings with communities, and district authorities and conducted the baseline survey to determine the current state and adjust the plan wherever it is possible according to the any new needs that are identified through this process. We therefore, identified this level of involvement as Listening and Learning. In addition, beneficiaries were involved in process of identifying and selecting other members of the community who would act as facilitators. We categorized this process under Shared decision making. Although there was involvement of beneficiaries
at this phase, their involvement was still limited. All planning activities were performed by members of the project team themselves. Therefore, as Botes, (2000, p.43) noted, beneficiary involvement at this phase was limited, most of the decisions were influenced by the staff members instead of transferring this influence to the beneficiaries.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Implementation phase**

At this phase the beneficiary involvement level increased compared to the previous ones. During the implementation phase different levels of involvement were used. Firstly, members of the beneficiary communities were trained as trainers to go and conduct trainings within their respective communities. We identified this approach of using members of the beneficiary communities as *Peer Facilitation*. Peer facilitation presents the advantage that since the people conducting the training are member of the communities, they are culturally aware and will also be socially accepted, hence mitigating any kind of biases that may arise from beneficiaries.

Secondly, noted that at during this phase, beneficiaries were equipped with skills and knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention and behavioral change. We identified this involvement as *Empowerment*. Empowerment also involved training peer facilitators who in turn trained their respective communities.

Lastly, we noted that the project offered a token in form of transport and meal allowances to beneficiaries for them to come participate in the trainings. We categorized this involvement as *Incentive system*. It is a new level of involvement and also unique to this project due to the context in which it was executed. The findings show that due to uncoordinated and double interventions of NGOs, a dependency culture had been developed among beneficiaries who expect to receive free thing from NGOs. Beneficiaries expected to receive something tangible for them to participate in any project, thus project team had to find ways of stimulating their participation. We do not advocate for this level of involvement because it is not sustainable and in addition, it disempowers beneficiaries by strengthening dependency attitudes. However, we argue that in a context where such attitudes exist and where the chances of changing them in short term are limited such involvement could be used.

Incentive system could in also be a different form, for instance instead of giving allowance to beneficiaries, projects could outsource services and products from community members where possible. These could include services like labor in cases of construction projects.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Monitoring and Evaluation phase**

During monitoring and evaluation phase, we noted spot checks were used to assess the progress and impact of the project. Through these spot checks, the project staff would ask beneficiaries to assess the quality of the training and evaluate the facilitator as well. In addition, meeting with community leaders were held to seek feedback on the quality of the project. On some occasion, the recommendations from these meeting would be used to replace peer facilitators who are not performing very well. We identified this involvement as *Joint assessment*. Although beneficiaries were involved at this level (Winters, 2010, p.228), their ability to influence any decision was still limited. The implementation of any recommendations was still at the discretion of the project team.
Beneficiary Involvement at Close-Out

When the project was coming to an end, the focus was on ensuring that the results of the project are sustainable. Beneficiaries were grouped into different clubs both in schools as well as in communities. Through these clubs, beneficiaries could share information with each other, listen and learn from each other, make necessary decisions together, collaborate with each other, empower each other, and assess the result of their work together. We identified this involvement as Group forming. When clubs are used, they would help to build cohesion among beneficiaries, create a sense of ownership within the communities which in return contributes to the sustainability the project outputs. Table 5 below, summarizes different levels of involvement we identified in this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of involvement</th>
<th>Initiation and Design</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluation</th>
<th>Close-out and Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening and learning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incentive system (new)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer facilitation (new)</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
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<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shared decision-making</td>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group forming (new)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Influence of the Donors

Donors had high influence in this project. They influenced the design as well as the implementation of the project by setting the objectives and key milestones of the project and the report format. Since they controlled the funding, we noted that project team focused more on meeting requirements set by donors due to the fear of losing funding. Although accountability is important, focusing more on donors’ requirements may compromise how beneficiaries’ needs are being addressed.

Challenges in involving Beneficiaries

One of the challenges that effect beneficiary involvement was the issue of aid dependency. This was mainly due to the fact that NGOs compete for the same funding from donors. Therefore, those that can demonstrate that they are more effective would have higher chances of being funded. Since the effectiveness of NGOs in normally measure through the numbers of beneficiaries reached out, NGOs created ways of attracting participants mainly through offering handouts. Although this approach helps NGOs to attract more people, hence receiving more funding, in the long run it creates more the dependents where beneficiaries considering handouts as a rule to which all NGOs must adhere.

Another challenge we identified in this project was lack of coordination among beneficiaries. Lack of structure hinders how they are involved considering that the project reached-out to a big number of beneficiaries. Involving all beneficiaries at once would not be possible; therefore, using community leadership structure would help solve this. In addition, beneficiary
clubs would help to coordinate beneficiaries since it would be easy to reach-out to them and it would as well help them to have a unified voice.

5.5. Analysis Case Study V

The project under discussion is a food security project, it also involved the integration of nutrition programs whereby the beneficiaries were equipped with skills and knowledge on how to prepare a balanced diet and supporting vulnerable families to have access on nutritious seeds and conducting campaigns on nutrition awareness. It also aimed to facilitate vulnerable families by training them on practicing modern techniques used in farming, supporting and encouraging the creation of income generating activities.

Beneficiary Involvement at Initiation and Design phase

At the design phase, we noted that before designing the project, the organization used secondary data to identify community needs. In addition, they worked with local government authorities to identify the most vulnerable communities but also to confirm the secondary data. We identified this as Listening and Learning. Although actual beneficiaries were not involved at this, we believe that involving local government leaders helped to clarify on the community needs. However, the ideal approach should have been to consult the beneficiaries themselves and here from them.

Beneficiary Involvement at Planning phase

At planning phase, members of the project team go to selected villages and work together with community leaders to identity the problem. Though problem tree analysis, they identify the root cause of the problem. They work together to identify possible solutions plan how these solutions will be implemented. We identified this involvement as Collaboration because it allows members of the community to identify solutions to their problems working together with the project team (Monnikhof & Edelenbos, 2001, p.3), which creates the sense of ownership and transparency among beneficiaries

Beneficiary Involvement at Implementation phase

At the implementation phase, we noted different level of involvement. Firstly, the project worked with community health workers who are also members of the beneficiary communities as partners to deliver trainings on nutrition program. We identified this partnership as Collaboration. Partnering with community health works helped to ensure that beneficiaries embrace the project because they viewed them as part of the community. An external trainer may have been viewed as a stranger and this would create resistance to the project.

Secondly, beneficiaries were given skill and knowledge on preparation of a balanced diet through training conducted by community health workers. We identified this involvement as Empowerment. It is important to mention that empowerment at this stage started when community health workers are trained to go and train their respective village. In addition, there was economic empowerment where the vulnerable families were given small livestock like good to help them get manure for the acidic soil wish is also a cause root for malnutrition. This livestock would also generate some income in the long run.
Lastly, we noted that before starting the implementation, beneficiaries were informed that for any kind of training, the project would cover the expenses relating to the trainer and training venue, any other expenses would be covered by beneficiaries themselves. This is a new level of involvement we identified through the empirical findings and we called it *Cost sharing* since beneficiaries would contribute towards their learning.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Monitoring and Evaluation phase**

We noted that during monitoring and evaluation phase, project officers conducted field visits where they visited each beneficiary family to assess how they are doing. In addition, regular meeting with community leaders and representatives of beneficiaries conducted to reflect on project progress and impact. Any recommendations given during these meetings would be implemented to improve the quality of the project. We identified this involvement as *Joint assessment*. This involvement provided opportunity to provide feedback on what is happening and influence any decision that affects the project (Winters, 2010, p.228).

**Beneficiary Involvement at Close out phase**

During this phase, project staff transferred skills and knowledge to community members to ensure that they are able to manage and maintain what the project had delivered. Community members worked on developing transition plan based on their ideas with the facilitation of the project team. This plan clarifies the responsibility of each party when the project ends. In addition, follow-ups were made to each beneficiary especially those that received livestock to assess how they are doing and help them solve any problems that they may have. We categorized this involved as Empowerment. We believe that Empowering beneficiaries at the close out phase contributed to the sustainability of what the project had created.

Through the findings, we also noted that the project had provided tap water to one of the communities. Due to past experience where a similar tap project broke down and community would wait for the project to repair it. The project initiated a process under which families would contribute a small monthly fee which would be whenever the tap broke down instead of relying on the project. We identified this as *Cost sharing*. The monthly fees were collected and managed by the water management committee which is composed of selected members of the community.

Cost sharing is one of the best ways of involvement that creates great sense of ownership and contributes to sustainability. When community members have contributed to a given activity, they will create an accountability mechanism (Yalegama et al., 2016, p.655) where they need to follow-up on what is happening. This is because they are aware that if something goes wrong they will lose the resources they invested in that particular activity. Cost sharing should not always be in monetary term, it can also be different form, for instance when the project is building a school or a health facility, community members can contribute labor instead of being paid for by the project. The table below summarizes the levels of involvement we identified in this project.
Table 6: Project V- level of beneficiary involvement at different phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of involvement</th>
<th>Initiation and Design</th>
<th>Planning</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
<th>Monitoring and Evaluation</th>
<th>Close-out and Transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening and learning</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared decision-making</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Influence of the Donors**

In this project, donors influence was more at the design phase where they specified the area they were interested in funding and the key objectives of the project. In addition, their involvement was at monitoring and evaluation phase where they check to ensure that what is being done in the field matches what was stated in the proposal. Their influence was also on approving the any suggested changes to the project plan (AbouAssi & Trent, 2016, p.387). They are the ones who could give a go ahead to implement the changes. This shows that still donors have more influence compares to other stakeholders in NGO sector.

**Challenges in involving Beneficiaries**

In this project, we identified aid dependency as a challenge that affected how beneficiaries are involved. This dependency is a result of the relief approach which was used by NGOs in the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against Tutsi. Some community members still expect to receive free stuff like it used to be after genocide. This mindset would affect the how the project is implements as well as the sustainability of it outputs.

**5.6. Cross-case Analysis and Discussion**

**Beneficiary Involvement at Initiation and Design phase**

At the design and initiation phase, we noted that beneficiary involvement was very limited. In case study I, II and IV there was no direct beneficiary involvement and in case study V, we observed that Listening and learning was applied during this phase. The limited beneficiary involvement at design phase in the above phase could be attributed to the fact that these projects were initiated as responses to the call for proposals from donors. Calls for proposals are time bound and in most cases the timeframe in which the proposals should be submitted is limited. Furthermore, donors will specify the area of interest they want to fund and key areas that the project should cover. Therefore, this is a constraint for beneficiary consultations since it would require more time (Boon et al., 2013, p.51). In addition, at this phase, NGOs are in competition to get the funding, therefore, there is a possibility that the proposal may not be funded. This encourages NGOs not to engage beneficiaries at this stage to protect themselves against creating false hope within the community and any reputation damage that may result from disappointments.
In contrast to the above cases, we noted that three levels of involvement were used in case study II at design and initiation phase. They include Listening and learning, Shared decision-making and Empowerment. High level of involvement at design phase in this project could be attributed to the nature of the project. This project was more of community focused rather than focusing on a specific area of intervention. In addition, it was initiated when the organisation was sure that it is able to fund the proposal from the beneficiary community. These kinds of projects provide flexibility on the side of the organisation which allows them to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment process. The results of the needs assessment process enable the organisation to design a project that addresses the needs of the community. In addition, such projects provide opportunity to involve beneficiaries in early phases (Winters, 2010, p. 219) by empowering them with the necessary skills so that they can run the project themselves.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Planning phase**

During planning phase, we noted several levels of involvement. Firstly, Information sharing was used in case study I and II where the project teams informed targeted beneficiaries about the projects. Secondly, Listening and learning and Shared decision-making were applied in case study I and IV where the project teams conducted baseline surveys and consultative meetings with beneficiaries to learn about their needs. In addition, beneficiaries were involved to some extent in decision making process where they gave ideas on how those needs could be addressed. Thirdly, Collaboration was applied in case study II and V where the project team worked alongside beneficiary representatives and other community leaders in developing project plans. Finally, Empowerment was applied in case study III where the project team ensured that beneficiaries are given the skills to enable them develop the plan of the project themselves.

As we discussed before, the project in case study I and II presents an opportunity of involving beneficiaries more compared to the rest. Although beneficiaries were not involved at the design phase in case study I, II and II; the levels of involvement they applied at the planning show that NGOs recognize the importance of understanding the needs of beneficiaries to ensure that they are properly addressed during the project cycle.

**Beneficiary Involvement at Implementation phase**

At the implementation phase, we noted that Peer facilitation was used in case study I and IV. As we discussed in the analysis of these cases, this form of involvement may help to navigate some of the cultural challenges that the project team may not be aware of. Peer facilitators are members of the beneficiary communities, thus they are culturally aware and socially accepted within their respective communities. Furthermore, we believe that peer facilitation would be ideal in projects that are covering a big catchment area, which was applicable to case study I and IV. It would also help to maintain the relationship between the project and beneficiaries since it is likely to be challenging for project staff to maintain this relationship by themselves.

Group forming was applied in case study II where community members were brought together in hygiene clubs so that they could work together and embrace good hygiene practices. In
addition, *Collaboration* was used in case study V where project team partnered with community workers who are also members of beneficiary community to deliver trainings on nutrition programs. Moreover, we noted that empowerment was applied in all five cases we investigated, this highlights the fact that development projects are always geared towards improving the livelihood of their respective beneficiaries (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004, p.1432).

We also note *Incentive system* and *Cost sharing* were applied in case study IV and V respectively. Incentive system was used as a response to the context of dependency behaviors. As we mentioned before, incentive system may not be ideal under normal circumstances. Although cost sharing was only used in case study V, we believe that it would be applicable in any project. Beneficiaries should always be encouraged to contribute to the cost of the project either in monetary terms or in kind. This will ensure that they view themselves as partners in the project hence increasing their sense of ownership towards the project (Lawther, 2009, p.166).

**Beneficiary Involvement at Monitoring and Evaluation phase**

At this phase, we noted that *Joint assessment* was applied in case study I, III, IV and V whereas case study II applied *Information sharing*. The use of joint assessment in the majority of the case studies shows that beneficiaries were given an opportunity in assessing and evaluating how the project was being implemented and provide suggestions and ideas on what should be done in case their needs are not being properly addressed hence the need for corrective measures. However, in case study II, all activities relating to monitoring and evaluation were performed by contractors hired by the donors. The results of the monitoring and evaluation activities were not discussed with beneficiaries which creates a gap in the feedback mechanism. It would have been useful to provide a platform where beneficiaries would participate in the discussion relating to project progress and its impact.

**Beneficiary involvement at Close-out and transition phase**

At this phase, we observed that case study I and IV used *Group forming* as one of the involvement applied. The purpose of beneficiary clubs in the two cases above was to ensure that beneficiaries embrace and sustain what the projects had delivered. We also believe that beneficiary clubs could help beneficiaries to have a unified voice during the project life hence creating a system of downward accountability (AFDB, 2001, p.11). These clubs would also be ideal for projects that deal with a large number of beneficiaries and who don’t have a formal structure that brings them together. Furthermore, *Empowerment* was applied in case study II, III and V which was purposed to ensure that there’s proper transfer of skills from project teams to beneficiaries. The skills acquired at this phase are meant to help beneficiaries to look after what the project has delivered and ensure that it is sustainable. In relation to sustainability of project output, we noted that in case study V, they applied *Cost sharing* which ensured that any cost relating to the project output is borne by beneficiaries rather than being an expense of the project. In table 7 below, we present the summary of different levels of beneficiary involvement we identified in each case at each phase. We will also base on these levels to develop our revised framework for beneficiary involvement.
Table 7: Summary of levels of beneficiary involvement in all cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project phase</th>
<th>Case Study I</th>
<th>Case Study II</th>
<th>Case Study III</th>
<th>Case Study IV</th>
<th>Case Study V</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiation and Design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening and learning, Shared decision-making Empowerment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Information sharing, Listening and learning</td>
<td>Information sharing, Collaboration</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Listening and learning, Shared decision-making</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Peer facilitation, Empowerment</td>
<td>Group forming, Empowerment</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Incentive system, Peer facilitation, Empowerment</td>
<td>Collaboration, Empowerment, Cost sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
<td>Joint assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close-out and Transition</td>
<td>Group forming, Empowerment</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Group forming</td>
<td>Empowerment, Cost sharing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During this research, we noted that culture is also another factor that can influence how beneficiaries are involved. This was evident in case study I in cases where health staff would judge and/or rebuke young people who go to them looking for reproductive health services. In addition, low turn-out of female participants compared to the male participants which can be attributed to the fact that in most of the cases girls stay home to take care of the family errands. To address these, the project team should be willing to learn about the targeted communities and listening to them especially when they are planning ways to mitigate these challenges, (Golini & Landoni, 2014, p.125). In addition, involving other stakeholders contributes to having common understanding of the challenges and how to address them is important.

In addition, we noted that in case study II and IV, requirements set by donors and their influence affected how beneficiaries were involved. In particular, the emphasis on accountability and quantitative aspect of the project are likely to compromise how beneficiaries are involved (Reith, 2010, p.450). We are not against accountability but we are pointing out that there is need to be some kind of flexibility to ensure that the quality of project deliverables is not compromised which in turn would affect the beneficiaries. It is obvious that if donors are interested in the number of people reached out by a given training project, the organization will focus on getting more people to ensure that they get more funding for the subsequent period regardless of the quality of the training as it was claimed by Eskerod et al., (2015, p.44).

Although most of beneficiaries of development projects are members of vulnerable communities (Rusare, 2015, p.243, 249), it does not mean that they do not have ideas of how to overcome the challenges they are facing as it can be seen in case study III. Therefore, NGOs
should endeavor to involve them in all activities of project that aim to improve their livelihood. For the projects where involving beneficiaries at design phase is challenging due to different context such as case study I, II and IV, there should be some degree of flexibility in the developed proposals. This would allow adjusting the project design to accommodate any other needs that are identified after the project has been designed.

In case study IV and V, we observed that through practices of handout, NGOs have created a dependency culture amongst beneficiaries. This affects how beneficiaries are involved because they always expect to receive free stuff from NGOs. Although these practices may address an immediate need within a particular community, they are also likely to affect the sustainability of the project since they don’t create any sense of ownership. We argue that handouts should be used when it is the only option that could yield results. We have summarized all levels of beneficiary involvement we identified during this study in the table below:

Finally, as we have summarized it in table 7 above, we have identified ten progressive levels of beneficiary involvement during this research. They were identified through literature review as well as the analysis of our empirical findings. These levels are: Information sharing, Listening and learning, Incentive system, Peer facilitation, Joint assessment, Shared decision-making, Collaboration, Group forming, Empowerment, and Cost sharing. They are arranged from weak to high level of involvement. We believe that as the involvement moves from information sharing to cost sharing, it creates accountability, transparency and a great sense of ownership thus leading to sustainability of project output. However, as we mentioned before, the level to be used at each phase of the project may depend on the context in which the project is executed. Regardless of the context, beneficiaries should be involved in the project, and at minimum there should be information sharing during the project cycle.
Chapter 6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, we summarise the answers to our research questions. We present our revised frameworks for beneficiary involvement, discuss the theoretical and practical contributions of this study and recommend areas for further research.

6.1. General Conclusion

6.1.1. Understanding the Process of Managing Beneficiary Involvement

The purpose of this research was to improve the process of beneficiary involvement during the project cycle in NGOs. To achieve this, we started by reviewing the exiting literature about beneficiary involvement which helped us to have an initial understanding of this process. Through our literature review, we identified six different levels of beneficiary involvement, they included: Information sharing, Listening and learning, Shared decision-making, Collaboration, Joint assessment and Empowerment. Based on our initial understanding, we developed a theoretical framework for beneficiary involvement during the project cycle. Furthermore, we collected data from multiple cases through interviews to get new insights on how beneficiaries are involved in practice. Through analysis of the empirical findings, we were able to identify four new levels of beneficiary involvement. They include: Incentive system, Peer facilitation, Group forming and Cost sharing.

The ten levels of involvement we identified in this research are in a progressive order as follows: Information sharing, Listening and learning, Incentive system, Peer facilitation, Joint assessment, Shared decision-making, Collaboration, Group forming, Empowerment, and Cost sharing. This means that information sharing is less involving while cost sharing the most involving level amongst all level we identified.

Through this study, we discovered that the involvement of beneficiaries at design phase is limited compared to other phases. This is mainly attributed to the fact that the design phase is about developing project proposals to be submitted to donors for funding, therefore engaging beneficiaries before securing the funding might create false hopes. However, when the project is initiated after securing the funds, beneficiaries are involved at the design phase. Thus, approval of funding is an important decision gate for beneficiary involvement.

This study also shows that requirements set by donors as well as their influence affect the levels of beneficiary involvement. NGOs are always competing for funding from donors, and if they are to receive future funding, they need to comply with donors’ requirements even when it would mean compromising how the needs of beneficiaries are addressed. Furthermore, this study shows that cultural values affect how beneficiaries are involved, thus project managers should consider the cultural context in which the project is to be implemented to be able to identify any possible challenges that are likely to arise and develop strategy to mitigate them. We also understood that practices of handouts which are used by some NGOs create a dependency culture among beneficiaries. As a result, it affects their participation because they expect to receive everything for free.

Although there was limited involvement in the early phases of the project, all respondents admitted that involving beneficiaries from the initial stage of the project till the end increases
the sense of ownership and satisfaction among them. This would also contribute to the sustainability of the project results.

6.1.2. Improving the Process of Managing Beneficiary Involvement

To improve the process of beneficiary involvement, we have developed two frameworks which could be used to determine which level of involvement would be appropriate at each phase of the project. These frameworks were developed based on the understanding we generated through literature review and analysis of empirical findings. The first framework which is presented in Figure 3 below is appropriate for projects that are designed in response to donor’s calls for funding. It would also be applicable for projects that cover a wide catchment ideally more than one community or village depending on the number of potential beneficiaries. We have assigned these levels of involvement to different phases of the project based on the combination of the literature and empirical findings.

We believe that information sharing and listening and learning would be useful at the design phase when the NGOs need to understand and evaluate the needs of targeted beneficiaries. Shared decision-making and collaboration would yield more results at planning phase where beneficiaries would contribute in defining project goal, and indicators. Incentive system, peer facilitation, empowerment and cost sharing would be more useful at the implementation stage. However, as we mentioned in our discussion, incentive system should be used as the last option as it is likely to cause dependency behaviours among beneficiaries. In addition, we believe that joint assessment would be applicable at monitoring and evaluation phase when beneficiaries would be involved in assessing and evaluating the impact of the project and suggesting corrective measures where applicable. Lastly, as the project is coming to an end, group forming, empowerment and cost sharing would help to ensure that there is a smooth transition which would lead to sustainability.

![Figure 3: Revised Framework I](image)

Figure 3: Revised Framework I
The second framework is appropriate for projects that are community led and whose funding has been secured before they are initiated. These kinds of projects would present an opportunity of empowering beneficiaries with the required skills to manage the entire project themselves. Project managers can work together with beneficiaries in identifying and assessing their needs, finding solutions to the identified needs and implementing those solutions.

We have therefore identified five levels of involvement that would be applicable in these projects. They include: Listening and learning, Shared decision-making, Joint assessment, Empowerment and Cost sharing. These levels of involvement are linked to different project phases as shown in Figure 4.

At the design and initiation phase, we identified Listening and Learning and Empowerment as the applicable levels of involvement. Before designing the project, it would be appropriate to listen to the beneficiaries and learn about their needs. After identifying their needs, the next step would be to give them the required skills so that they can identify possible solutions to their challenges and how to meet the identified needs. At this stage, the project team should act as facilitators. At planning phase, shared decision-making and empowerment would be applicable. The emphasis should be on ensuring there is mutual agreement on the project goals and schedules. Beneficiaries should be empowered to perform all planning activities. And where there is a need for specialised skills, the project can provide support to ensure that this phase is performed successfully.

Furthermore, we identified Empowerment and Cost sharing as the levels of beneficiary involvement applicable at the implementation phase. Beneficiaries should be given the opportunity of taking full ownership of the activities performed at this phase. This could be done by equipping them with all required skills and encouraging them to contribute to the cost of those activities either in monetary terms or in kind. Contributing to the cost of the project would create an accountability system since they would be interested in protecting their stake in the project. At the monitoring and Evaluation phase, we suggested Joint assessment. This would involve beneficiaries working together with other stakeholders to assess and evaluate the progress of the project and in case of any gaps to be filled, identify the possible solutions together. Although, it is possible to let the beneficiaries perform the evaluation themselves, joint assessment provides an opportunity of having joint decision making process among all stakeholders especially when there is a need for adjusting the project budget.

Finally, we suggest Empowerment and Cost sharing at the close-out and transition phase. Empowerment at this phase would focus on ensuring that beneficiaries have acquired enough skills to look after the project output when the project comes to an end. As it is likely that to sustain what the project has delivered would involve some costs, beneficiaries should be encouraged to find ways in which they would raise funds that would help them to meet any probable costs.
6.2. Theoretical Implication

This research contributes to the work of Edelenbos (2000) and AFDB (2011) by identifying four new levels of beneficiary involvement which include: Incentive system, Peer facilitation, Group forming and Cost sharing.

Furthermore, the current paper supports the research of AbouAssi, (2014) and Reith (2010) by highlighting that because of resource dependency in NGO sector, donors who have higher influence compared to other stakeholders since they are the ones who control the funding.

This study also contributes to the work of AbouAssi & Trent (2016) and Hermano et al. (2013) by presenting empirical findings that NGOs face constant challenges in responding to donors’ requirements and at the same time meet pressing needs of vulnerable communities. In cases where these requirements were compromising the needs of the beneficiaries, this study shows that project managers decided to comply with donors’ interests in order to secure funding for their projects.

Our work also supports Botes (2000, p.42) who noted that beneficiary involvement in early stages of the project is limited. However, due to the fact that NGOs rely on donors to fund their project and since at design phase there is still uncertainty on whether the project will be funded NGOs chose to limit beneficiary involvement. In addition, this research also contributes to the work of Boon et al., (2013, p.52) by providing arguments for importance of involving
beneficiaries during the whole project life cycle. The findings of this study show that beneficiary involvement contributes to transparency, accountability and sustainability.

6.3. Practical Implications

The findings of this study may provide insights to project managers in the NGO sector on how to involve beneficiaries during the project cycle. The framework we developed could be a guiding tool for managers to decide which level of involvement they would prefer to use. However, as we mentioned, the level of involvement depends on the project context, therefore, personal judgement should be exercised. In addition, due to the nature of the qualitative nature and design of this research, the results of this study cannot be generalised.

Furthermore, the case studies we investigated are limited to socio-economic projects which aim to improve community livelihood. Therefore, caution should be exercised whenever the aforementioned framework is to be used in similar or different project context.

For the purpose of sustainability of the project output, managers should endeavour to involve beneficiaries from the beginning of the project as it helps to increase the sense of ownership.

6.4. Recommendation for Further Research

As our research focused on beneficiary involvement during the project cycle, further studies can be conducted to assess the impact of different levels of involvement identified in this research on the sustainability of the project output. In addition, conducting a similar study using a bigger sample and different sectors would generate more insights on beneficiary involvement.

Furthermore, a comparative study between community initiated projects and donor initiated projects would be useful to determine how the influence of different stakeholders affects the project results.
References


Appendix I: Interview Guide

1. Could you please share with us what your position involves?
2. Could tell us about one project you were involved in from the beginning till the end?
3. How did identify the problem/ assess the needs for the targeted beneficiaries?
4. When you were designing the project, did you engage any beneficiaries?
5. What role did the beneficiaries play during the planning activities?
6. How did you involve beneficiaries during the implementation phase?
7. How did you monitor and evaluate the project and how were beneficiaries involved in this process if they did?
8. When the project was coming to an end, how did you involve the beneficiaries during the transition period?
9. Were the donors involved during the implementation period? If yes, how?
10. Did you face any challenges when engaging/involving beneficiaries in the project activities?
Appendix II: Themes for Data Analysis

I. Project phases

- Design and Initiation
- Planning
- Implementation
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Close-out and transition

II. Levels of Involvement

- Information sharing
- Listening and learning
- Shared decision-making
- Incentive system (new)
- Collaboration
- Peer facilitation (new)
- Joint assessment
- Group forming (new)
- Empowerment
- Cost sharing (new)

III. Influence of Donors

IV. Challenges