

# Decision Making in Community Driven Development: Whose Opinions Count in What?

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**Abstract:** The aim of the study was to, among other objectives, establish if beneficiary communities make decisions in various parameters in the community driven development approach. The study design was a descriptive ex- post facto cross-sectional survey, which used a non-random sampling technique and both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The sample size was ninety (N-90) for individual interviews and five (N-47) for focus group interviews. The study established that decision making is largely mainstreamed in development processes in the community driven approach and that communities make decisions on some parameters of project components and activities. Additionally, decision-making processes are mainly “representational”. It can be concluded that beneficiary communities make decisions in some aspects and not others in the community driven development approach, as is the case with conventional and top - down approaches. Further, as established by the study, conspicuous lack of decision making by the youth and opinion leaders in development processes in this approach has implications of exclusion, an aspect that negates tenets of people-centred and driven development ideals, a gap which development practitioners need to address.

**Keywords:** Beneficiary, Community Driven, Development, Decision Making, Project, Stages.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on an assessment of decision making in the community driven development approach. The objective of the study was, among others, to determine if decision making is mainstreamed in the community driven approach, who gets involved in what activities and how beneficiary communities rate their decision making. It contains the background to the study/literature review, problem statement, study design, results and conclusions.

## 2. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Decision-making is one of the parameters through which community participation in development can be measured. When potential beneficiaries make key project decisions, participation becomes a self- initiated endeavor, with exercise of voice and choice [Mansuri & Rao, 2004]. Mulwa [2008] observes that people should of necessity participate in decisions that affect their lives, including those of development in their communities. Ong'ang'a [2009] further argues that community members must not be pushed or have issues imposed on them but instead, their views and decisions must be sought and taken into consideration.

Existing literature on participation in community development suggests that the extent and quality of participation is often limited, particularly with regard to decision-making [King et al., 2010]. Cernea [1985] recognizes that although there is increasing recognition of the importance of participation in decision-making by program beneficiaries, there has not been much involvement in decision-making by communities especially in the conventional, top-down and participatory development approaches. Cornwall [2008] further argues that in conventional development approaches, consultation is widely used as a means of legitimizing already-taken decisions, therefore providing a thin veneer of participation in development by communities. This therefore indicates that decisions as to which projects will be initiated, the needs, resources and the people who participate in community development projects are a major handicap in community development processes.

De Beer [2006:29] observes that "... decision making and planning are outside the ambit of ordinary people because participation is seen as interfering with effective provision of basic needs". This construes that structures deliberately stifle beneficiary community decision-making regarding their own development destinies. Cernea [1985] further argues that governments generate development programs and projects that are divorced from the interest and needs of the people themselves and people are therefore not involved in making decisions that determine their needs and priorities and if the proposed development initiatives will be able to cater for their real needs.

In their studies in South Africa and Bangladesh respectively, Thwala [2010] and Mohamad [2010] found that one of the major issues in rural communities was the fact that people in leadership make decisions on behalf of the communities. This means that all community members do not get an opportunity to participate in the processes. The above sources also observed that local people were consulted only after development projects were conceptualized, designed, and planned by project proponents and funding agencies. Masanyiwa and Kinyashi [2008] further established that communities generally consider development project decision making to be the responsibility of the village councils, ward development committees and not a responsibility for the larger community.

Okinda [2009] argues that although Kenya has had beneficiary community participation as a central development theme and objective, people have not been actively involved in decision making in planning and implementing projects under the various development strategies. In Kenya, community based development and devolved funds like Constituency Development Fund (CDF) still do not mainstream beneficiary community decision-making. Further, Okinda [ibid] observes that, community participation is influenced by political, economic, social and cultural factors that operate and shape who gets to sit at the decision making table and whose issues get addressed and priority attention. This denotes elite and political capture, and lack of participation of beneficiary communities.

In a study carried out by the National Anti-Corruption Campaign Steering Committee [NACCSC, 2008] in Kenya which investigated among other things community participation in the CDF management, it was found that slightly over 20% community members were involved in decision making in aspects of development like project identification and/or prioritization. The same study indicates that public participation in Constituency Development Fund projects' identification is lower than expected.

Mulwa [2008], [1994] makes observations that community development projects often collapse due to various factors, the most critical of which has proved to be low or non-participation of the key stakeholders and communities, particularly in decision making on needs identification, assessment and project appraisal. Community members are seldom consulted in the formulation of the plans for development interventions and that "blue print" plans are drawn – up and handed down for execution through government extension networks without consideration of their decisions. Mulwa [2008] further argues that through carefully planned manipulation loaded with slogans and rhetoric, people are degenerated into mere tools for implementation of development plans, and that development priorities are drawn by others, without the inputs and decisions of the beneficiary communities.

### 3. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Lack of reliable data on community participation in development projects poses a major constraint to rural development practitioners, policy-makers, planners, managers and funders (Maraga et al., 2010). To date, there are several documented studies of how beneficiary communities make decisions in development in Kenya, with evidence indicating existence of poor decision making in the traditional community development approaches. The lack of documented knowledge and data on beneficiary communities decision making on various parameters in development in the community driven approach despite the approach having been in existence and in practice for several years in Kenya, specifically in Central Kenya, Thika East District is what necessitated need for this study.

### 4. STUDY DESIGN

The geographical and administrative locale of the study was Gatunyaga Sub-Location, Gatunyaga Division, Thika East District, Kiambu County, Kenya. The study employed a descriptive, ex-post facto cross-sectional survey research design, being carried out after an intervention (a multi-sectoral community driven development project). It was descriptive since it described the status of community participation as per the time of the study. Non – probability (quota) sampling technique was used to select the sample. The sample size for the individual interviews was 90 (N=90) and 5 focus group interviews

(N=47) community interest groups (CIG) members. The breakdown of 90 was drawn from 9 sectoral groups with the quotas having been proportionately allocated (for purposes of representativeness). From the total 2304 CIG members, the calculation of quota proportionality was based on the size of each sector divided by the total of CIG members (from the 9 sectors) multiplied by 90. The 47 participants for the focus group interviews were randomly selected from the 9 sectors, with each interview having 8-10 participants proportionally drawn from the 9 sectors. The choice of 90 participants and 5 focus group interviews was discretionary.

Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) were used for data collection. The method used to collect quantitative data was individual interviews while qualitative data was collected using focus group interviews. The reason for the choice of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies was to enhance corroboration, diversification, verification and enrichment of the data collected through multiple methods. The tool used to collect quantitative data was a structured questionnaire, and an interview schedule with thematic topics was used to collect the qualitative information. Quantitative data was organised, processed and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (univariate) were computed to generate frequency outputs. For qualitative data, refined themes were categorised and codes used to create thematic impressions and patterns that formed the basis of analysis and interpretation.

## 5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Below is the presentation of the research findings and resultant discussions based on the study findings. For most variables, respondents were required to give a yes or no response to each option and yes response was taken to be the highest percentage.

### 5.1 Community consultation:

From the findings of the study, 100% of the respondents mentioned that beneficiary community is consulted before project commencement. This was corroborated by the focus group interviews where all the participants interviewed were in consensus that the beneficiary community gets consulted before commencement of the project during the participatory rural appraisal exercise. For development interventions to be supported and owned by community members, it is crucial that beneficiary communities be consulted before commencement of development interventions. The findings therefore indicate that the community driven development approach employs pre-project beneficiary community consultation, which resonates with the fact that community participation is a human and democratic right.

### 5.2 Who decides /proposes development projects to be undertaken:

When asked who decides development projects to be undertaken, the results were as follows: whole community at 91.1%, administrative leaders at 78.9 %, community opinion leaders at 72.2%, government /funder at 57.8, village development committee at 2.2 % while project beneficiary community only reported 0.0 % as shown in table 1. The participants in the focus group interviews indicated that the whole community gets involved in decision making on sub-projects, and not in projects identification. For communities to support and participate in decision-making, it is crucial that decision on what projects to be undertaken be made by communities. The study findings therefore are suggestive that there exists community participation in deciding the projects/sub projects to be undertaken in the community driven development approach.

**TABLE: 1. Who decides / proposes development projects to be undertaken**

Category	No	Yes	Total
	%	%	%
Whole community	8.9	91.1	100.0
Project beneficiary community only	100.0	0.0	100.0
Village development committee	97.8	2.2	100.0
Community opinion leaders	27.8	72.2	100.0
Administrative leaders	21.1	78.9	100.0
Government/Funder	42.2	57.8	100.0

### 5.3 How decisions are made on what projects to undertake:

The study sought to find out how decisions on what projects to undertake are made. Of the respondents interviewed, 65.6 % mentioned that decision-making is decentralized while 34.4 % indicated that it is centralized. Similar findings were generated by the focus group interviews' participants. Decision-making in development should be decentralized to the beneficiary community level. Decision making in development needs to be carried out at the lowest community units to encourage acceptance and participation of as many development constituents as possible. It can therefore be concluded that decision making in the community driven development approach is decentralized, which is crucial for community ownership of development process.

### 5.4 Who controls decision-making:

On who controls decision making, 98.9 % of the respondents mentioned community groups, followed by administrative leaders at 73.3%, local elites at 62.2 %, opinion leaders at 33.3%, development partners/donors at 31.1%, individuals at 12.2% while the village development committee was the lowest at 0.0 % as shown in figure 1. Responses from the focus group discussions indicated that the community, through community interest groups, makes decisions on the needs to be addressed by development sub-projects. Ideally, in the community driven approach, the beneficiary community organized into local institutions should control the decision making process since community groups are local people's collective organizations. The study findings imply a shift from the traditional approaches where it is mainly the funders and local elites who control development project decisions, meaning that the community driven development approach entrenches control of community decisions to community groups (local institutions).

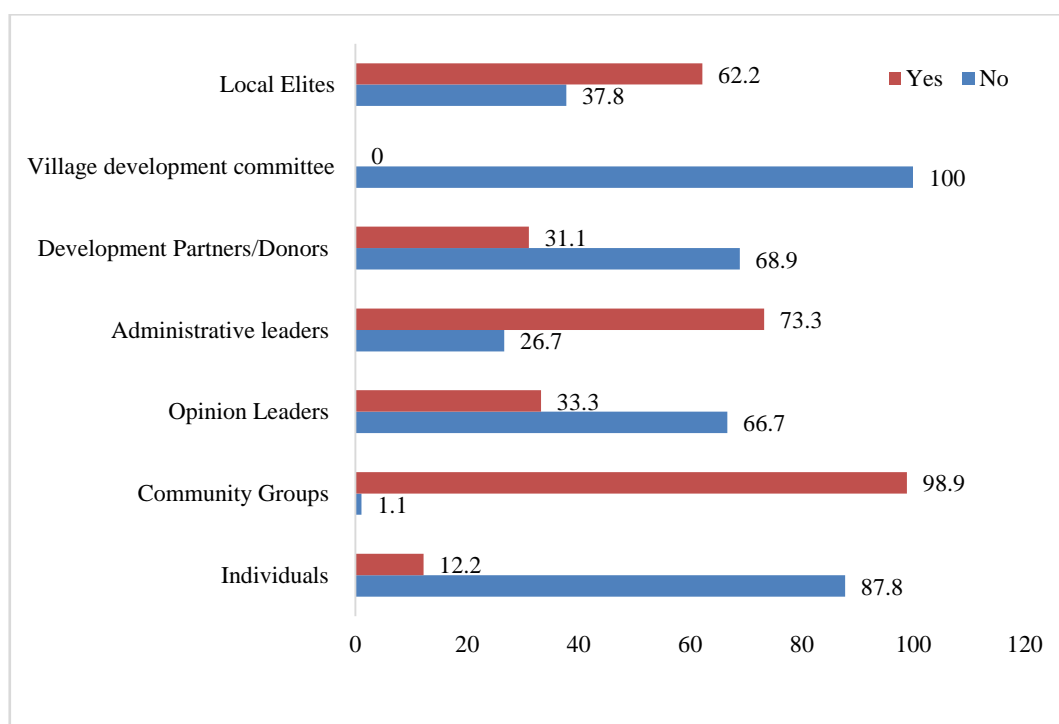


Fig: 1. Who controls decision-making?

### 5.5 Who decides what projects needs address:

When the respondents were asked who decided what needs to be addressed, majority of them mentioned community interest groups at 87.8%, followed by community groups at 86.7% while government/funder and project beneficiary community only were least mentioned at 2.2% respectively. Village development committee received no mention, standing at 0.0% as demonstrated by table 2. Responses from the focus group discussions revealed that community groups like women, self- help and community interest groups make most of the decisions. It is critical that development beneficiary communities decide the needs that projects should address. The study findings attest that in the community driven development approach, decisions on what needs to address and the projects /sub-projects to undertake are mainly made by either community interest groups, community groups or whole community.

**TABLE: 2. Who decides what projects needs address**

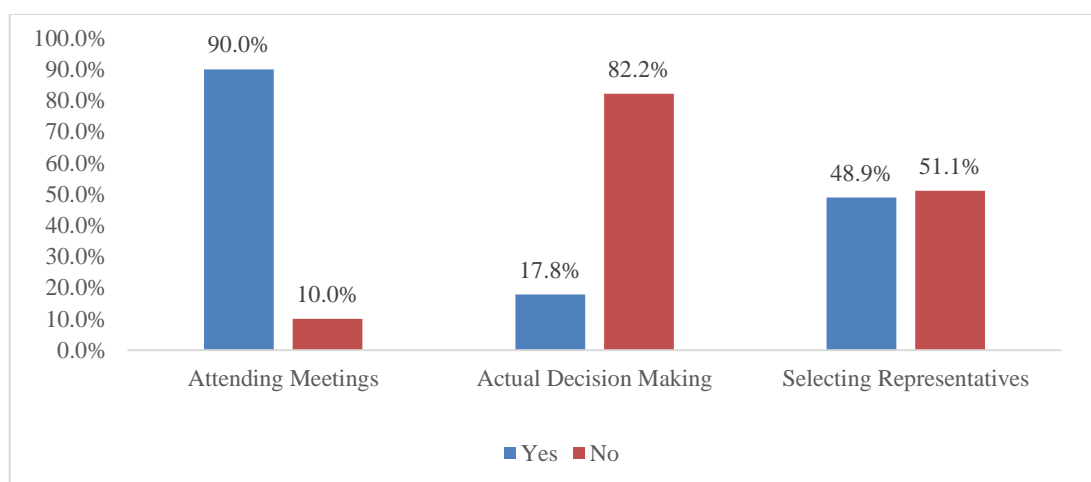
Category	No	Yes	Total
	%	%	%
Whole Community	21.1	78.9	100.0
Project Beneficiary community only	97.8	2.2	100.0
Community Interest Group(CIG)	12.2	87.8	100.0
Community groups	13.3	86.7	100.0
Village development committee	100.0	0.0	100.0
Government/funder only	97.8	2.2	100.0

### 5.6 How decisions are made on what needs to be addressed by projects:

On how decisions are made, 81.1% of the respondents indicated it was through consensus, followed by acclamation at 17.8% while the least was secret ballot at 1.1%. Decision-making through consensus building enhances acceptability of decisions made and cooperation in the implementation of the decisions. This means that the community driven development approach entrenches consensus building as an attribute towards community building.

### 5.7 How communities participate in decisions making:

The study sought to find out how communities participate in decision-making. 90.0 % of the respondents mentioned attending decision making meetings, 48.9% selecting representatives to decision making organs while 17.8 % mentioned through actual decision making, as figure 2 demonstrates. Focus group discussions revealed that most of community participation in decision making is through attending meetings, selecting representatives to the decision making organs, while most do not get involved in the actual decision making. Decision making in development should be actual and not based on proxies like attending meetings or nomination of community members to decision making fora. It can be deduced from the study that participation in decision-making processes in the community driven development could be described as “representational participation” through committees and community leaders and not the community making actual decisions, concurring with a study conducted in Tanzania by Masanyiwa and Kinyashi [2008].

**Fig. 2. How communities participate in decisions making**

### 5.8 Who makes decisions on project resource acquisition and/ or utilization:

On the question of who makes decisions about project resource acquisition/utilization, respondents mentioned community groups at 94.4%, community interest groups at 87.8%, development partners/donors and administrative leaders at 53.3% and 52.2 % respectively, while the least was village development committee at 1.1%, followed by individuals at 10.0 % respectively as figure 3 shows. The focus group interviews participants confirmed the above findings by indicating the beneficiary community through community groups gets involved in decision making on resource identification and acquisition.

'The community through community groups gets involved in decision making in resource identification during the PRA'.  
Community interest group member.

For development to be sustainable and people driven, beneficiary communities should be able to make decisions on acquisition and utilization of resources to match development needs. The study findings denote that although the beneficiary community makes decisions on resource acquisition and utilization, development partners/donors, and administrative leaders still have a hold on the decision making processes, as is the case with conventional development approaches. This negates the tenets of community decision making on resource acquisition and utilization that ought to be characteristic of community driven development approaches.

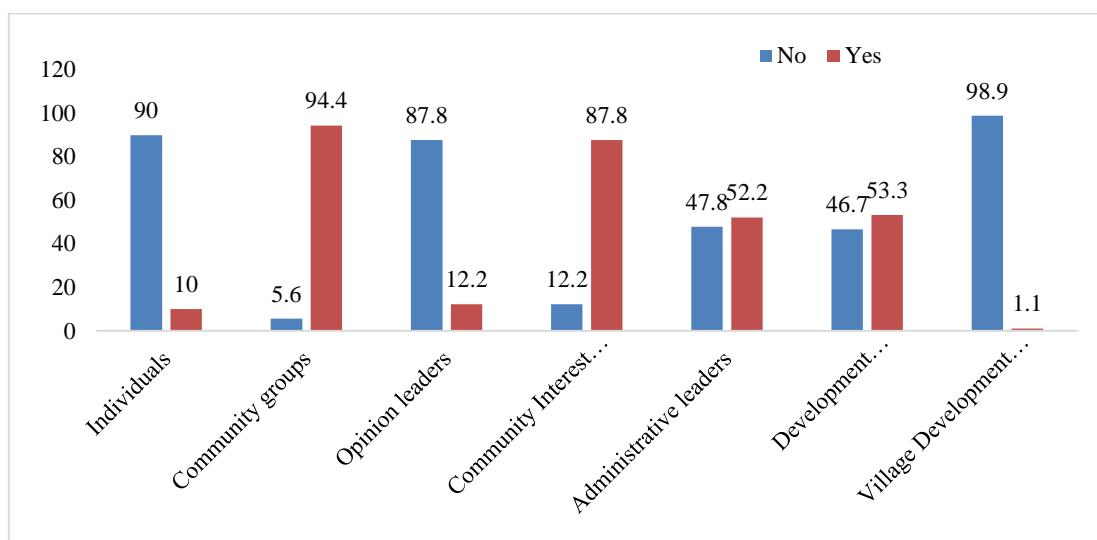


Fig: 3. Who makes decisions on project resource acquisition and/ or utilization?

### 5.9 If communities are given the option of choice of sub-project, (sector) to belong to:

From the study, all the respondents said the community is given the option of choice of projects/sub-projects to participate in the community driven development approach. For community participation in development to be voluntary, beneficiary communities ought to have an option of which activities they are interested in taking part.

### 5.10 The stages of the project in which communities are involved in making decisions:

Regarding the stages of the project the community gets involved in, majority of the respondents (96.7%) mentioned needs assessment and appraisal. This was followed by planning, implementation and project identification at 74.4%, 73.3% and 40.0 % respectively. Evaluation at 4.4 % and monitoring at 25.6% respectively were the least mentioned as indicated by table 3. For development projects to be sustainable, inclusive and people driven, the beneficiary community should make decisions in all the stages of the project cycle. The findings imply that in the community driven approach, beneficiary communities' decision making on various stages of the projects fluctuates. This negates the ideals of participatory and community driven development and may affect the quality of project actualization.

TABLE: 3. The stages of the project in which communities are involved in making decisions

Category	No	Yes	Total
	%	%	%
Project identification	60.0	40.0	100.0
Needs assessment and appraisal	3.3	96.7	100.0
Planning	25.6	74.4	100.0
Implementation	26.7	73.3	100.0
Monitoring	74.4	25.6	100.0
Evaluation	95.6	4.4	100.0

### 5.11 Description of the decision making process:

Regarding how they describe decision making in the community driven development approach, all the respondents (100%) of the individuals interviews mentioned transparent, followed by accountable and inclusive at 93.3% and 51.1 % respectively while exclusive was not mentioned, as figure 4 shows. This was confirmed by most of the focus group discussions, which revealed that decisions are made consultatively and that they are inclusive and democratic. How decisions are made regarding development priorities, resources and activities ought to be transparent, accountable and inclusive of all constituents of development. The study findings resonate with the fundamentals and assumptions of community driven development that describes beneficiary participation as a right that enhances inclusivity of most if not all segments of the community in decision making regarding projects.

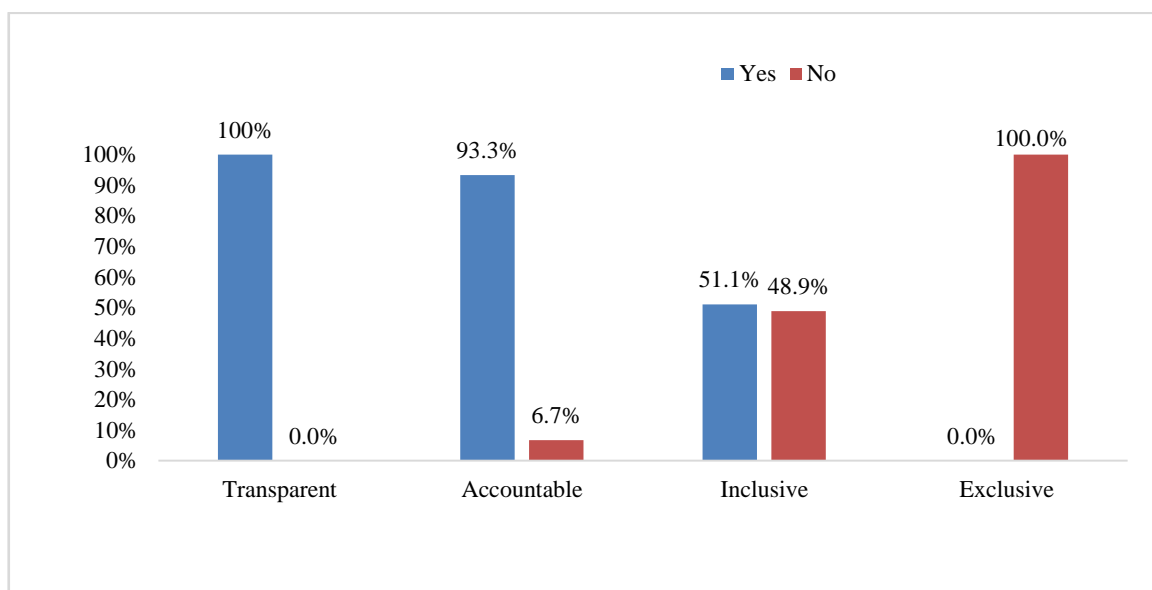


Fig: 4. Description of the decision making process

### 5.12 Community rating of their participation in decision making:

On the question of rating their and community participation in decision making, the respondents mentioned much as the highest at 85.6%, followed by moderate at 12.2 % while very much was the least mentioned at 2.2 %. On rating of community participation in the community driven development approach, a participant of the focus group interviews had this to say:

*'Community driven development approach is better since it gives us the opportunity to be involved in the project without selecting a few people. Community driven development approach has opened our eyes'.* Community Interest Group Member.

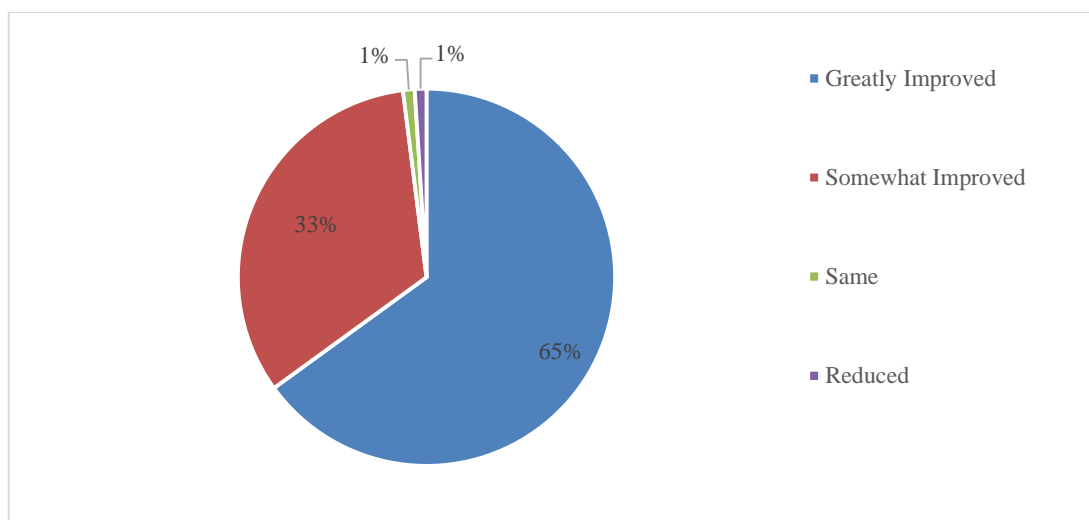
For decisions to be participatory and to be seen to represent the wishes of development constituents, it is crucial that the beneficiary communities rate the decision making process highly. The study findings suggest that community driven development approach is emphatic on beneficiary community decision-making.

### 5.13 Rating of communities' confidence to make decisions:

On rating communities confidence to make decisions in the community driven development approach compared to other development approaches, 65.0% indicated that this had greatly improved, 33.0% said it had somewhat improved and 1.0 % said it had either remained the same or reduced respectively as shown in figure N. The focus group interviews confirmed this by indicating that the community rates its decision making in the community driven development approach as much and that it had greatly improved compared to other approaches. On rating the confidence of the community to make decisions in the community driven development approach, participants in focus group discussions had this to say:

*'We feel that the community driven development approach has given the community opportunities to make decisions on development compared to when other NGO's come and we see them doing activities without consulting us'.* Community Interest Group Member

Beneficiary communities need to have confidence in their ability to make decisions regarding their development. The study findings correspond to principles of community and people driven development that considers the confidence of community members to make decisions on development processes as crucial



**Fig N. Rating of communities' confidence to make decisions**

## 6. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the study that community decision-making in development processes is paramount and it should be at the centre of people and community driven development approaches. Although decision-making is largely entrenched in development processes in the community driven development approaches, some elements are still missing, a gap which practitioners of this approach can strive to bridge. The findings of this study will provide insights to development practitioners, interventionists and policy makers in their endeavour to streamline and improve people-centred and community driven development approaches.

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