



# Critical success factors for community-driven development projects: A Sri Lankan community perspective

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## Abstract

Despite significant investments, community-driven development (CDD) projects have yielded mixed successes in different countries and localities, underscoring the need to improve the project model. Recognising the importance of critical success factors (CSFs) in this exercise from different stakeholders' perspectives and at a project-level 'micro' view, this study identifies the CSFs of the Gemidiriya CDD project of Sri Lanka from a community perspective. Questionnaires were administered to beneficiary community members and community project managers at villages to assess the importance of various project model features and linkages with overall project success. Factor analysis identified three critical success factors: enabling community environment, measurable project management outcomes by village organization and community project management engagement. Project managers should view CSFs from an impact-on-ground-orientation rather than a task-orientation. Furthermore, the beneficiaries who were also involved in the project execution may have a greater tendency to assign a high weight on the impact.

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## 1. Introduction

The unsatisfactory performance of international development (ID) projects has been a concern throughout development project history and development agencies have adopted various management approaches to improve project performance. At present, the development agencies use participatory approaches such as the community-driven development (CDD) approach. However, the mixed success of CDD projects across countries and regions emphasizes the need for improving the project model. Whereas, specific managerial approaches and tools are needed for

successfully managing international development (ID) projects (Golini and Landoni, 2014; Khang and Moe 2008), the public sector development projects/programs specifically designed to address economic and social needs of developing countries (Gunawan and Ahsan, 2010). Development agencies, especially since the 1990s, adopted participatory approaches in executing ID projects (Cornwall, 2006). Participatory approaches depart from traditional treatments of poverty in three ways (Chakrabarti and Dhar, 2013): Firstly, it persuades national agencies to decentralise rural development; secondly, it treats poverty eradication as a management problem; and thirdly, it treats the subjects (poor) as active rather than docile in the project management process. Therefore, in ID projects, community engagement in project management (PM) is essential and the clients are actively involved, whereas in typical projects, the client and end-users are not involved in the project management (PM) process.

Participatory approach of the World Bank, the community driven development (CDD) approach empowers communities to manage all aspects of the project including project selection,

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procurement, implementation, and monitoring by themselves at the village level (Dongier et al., 2001). In contrast, the World Bank's social fund programs or projects have previously been criticized for lack of capacity-building, especially the building of organizational skills at community level, and a lack of "ownership" of the projects by the beneficiary groups (Platteau and Gaspard, 2003, pg. 1687). CDD projects including international developments have unique features requiring a departure from standardized PM tools. A number of studies (Crawford and Bryce, 2003; Khang and Moe, 2008; Hermano et al. 2013) have pointed to the project goals of ID projects as being complex and intangible since they are concerned with poverty alleviation or social transformation; the complex web of stakeholders arising from social and political nature of these projects as another distinguishing feature identified by the same studies. Communities are only facilitated through providing technical and financial assistance. Experience has shown that when given clear explanations of the process, access to information and appropriate capacity and financial support, poor men and women can effectively organize to identify community priorities and address local problems by working in partnership with local governments and other supportive institutions (World Bank, n.d.). The World Bank (n.d.) recognizes that CDD approaches and actions are important elements of an effective poverty reduction and sustainable development strategy.

As opined by Ika et al. (2012, pg. 105) and widely acknowledged and supported by a number of studies (Diallo and Thuillier, 2004; Khang and Moe, 2008), very little has been written on international development project success, success criteria and criterion success factors. Furthermore, international development (ID) project research has been narrow with limited work on examining project and project management in general, project proliferation, the importance of projects in existing programs, and questionable outcomes (Crawford and Bryce, 2003; Gunawan and Ahsan, 2010; Ika and Saint-Macary, 2012).

However, on the success of this CDD approach, the sparse literature shows mixed results with both positive (Baird et al., 2013; Nkonya et al. 2012; Padawangi 2010) and negative (Ahmad and Abu Talib, 2015; Asmorowati, 2011; Avdeenko and Gilligan, 2014; Casey et al., 2012; Dasgupta and Beard, 2007; Labonne and Chase, 2011; Mukherji, 2013; Rao and Ibáñez, 2005) results, underscoring the need to improve the project model. In improving the model, identification of critical success factors (CSFs) could be very important because CSFs could help significantly to improve the project management success (Pinto and Slevin, 1988; Wateridge, 1995).

Drawing upon definitions provided by Denizer et al. (2013), project outcomes for the World Bank or ID projects can either be measured at the 'macro' or 'micro' levels with the 'macro' view being 'country' specific performance (i.e. quality of policies and institutions) and the 'micro' levels or views referring to the impact as measured at the local level. In this research, the main aim was to measure the project impact at the local level as the project objective was not to make an impact at the national level; therefore identification of CSF in this study is based on the community view on the Sri Lankan Gemidiriya project success. The World Bank funded Gemidiriya community development

and livelihood improvement project is the first (and so far only) CDD project in Sri Lanka.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Community-driven project characteristics and implementation

CDD projects are implemented in three broad sets of partnerships as the administrative systems allow: 1) Partnerships between community based organizations (CBOs) and elected local or municipal governments; 2) partnerships between CBOs and private support organizations (nongovernmental organizations or private firms); and 3) direct partnerships between CBOs and central government or a central fund (Dongier et al., 2001).

The World Bank conducts a *Systematic Country Diagnostic* (SCD) which uses data and analytic methods to support country clients and World Bank Group teams in identifying the most critical constraints to, and opportunities for, reducing poverty and building shared prosperity sustainably, while considering the voices of the poor and the views of the private sector and other stakeholders. Then the *Country Partnership Framework* (CPF) is prepared which lays out the development objectives that WBG interventions expect to help the country achieve and attendant program of indicative WBG interventions. The CPF objectives are derived from those country development goals that reflect the Bank Group's comparative advantage as well as alignment with the goals of ending extreme poverty and increasing shared prosperity. Next *Performance and Learning Reviews* are conducted to identify and capture lessons; determine midcourse corrections, and help build the WBG's knowledge base, including effective approaches for integrating inclusion and sustainability dimensions (including gender and environmental sustainability) into the SCD and CPF. Finally *Completion and Learning Reviews* are conducted to identify and capture end-of-cycle learning to contribute to the WBG's knowledge base (World Bank 2015c).

According to estimates of Mansuri and Rao (2013), the World Bank has spent US\$ 80 billion on CDD initiatives over the past 10 years. According to Wong (2012), in 2012 the World Bank supported approximately 400 CDD projects in 94 countries valued at almost \$30 billion. According to the World Bank (2015a), CDD projects are regarded as part of the wide range of World Bank project portfolio. The World Bank has a wide range of projects in several sectors such as agriculture, finishing, public administration, health, and education transport (see World Bank 2015a). The World Bank project portfolio in Sri Lanka has 167 projects of which Gemidiriya CDD project is one of them (World Bank 2015b), and it is the only CDD project. Except for the livelihood development projects, other projects are executed by the experts in the subject area or, in construction projects, by the contractors selected through a bidding process. Labonne and Chase (2011, pg. 349) observe that while the operations taking a CCD approach might vary by context and objective, they are typically characterised by the following two stages of 'preparation' and 'funding'. The following subsection provides some contextual background information about the project.

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