Article

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A Stakeholder Approach to Community Participation in a Rural Development Project

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Abstract

The present study investigates a rural community project (Nguni Cattle Project) that uses Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a tool for its operational focus. The main objective of the study is to identify how the stakeholders are reflecting the PRA goal of the project. The method used to categorize the stakeholders is reported. The participatory patterns of the stakeholders are then analyzed, with emphasis on the points of intersections where the stakeholders meet to make sure the beneficiaries are sufficiently informed about the project. The data used to discuss the stakeholder participatory method were collected through interviews, information gleaned from organizational documents, and observations of meetings. The analysis of the data revealed the promotion of mutual understanding through sustained collaborative relationships among the stakeholders. The study presents a perspective that is new to the literature and to rural development practice due to its focus on the type of stakeholder participation in rural development projects.

Keywords

stakeholder, participation, participatory, PRA, rural development

Introduction

The implementation of rural development projects is inherently complex, partly due to the need to satisfy multiple stakeholders. In light of this, the diversity of knowledge and values of the rural community have to be taken into consideration (Reed, 2008) and it is necessary to ensure that there is stakeholder participation in decision-making processes (Stringer, Reed, Dougill, Rokitzki, & Seely, 2007) and implementation. Stakeholder participation in decision making is a democratic right (see the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's, 1998, Aarhus Convention), hence it is not uncommon that it is an operational framework mainly adopted by community development facilitators.

Substantial evidence suggests that reciprocal relationship between stakeholders increases their participation in rural development projects because they provide a platform for new relationships to be developed in addition to the existing ones—and they learn to appreciate the legitimacy of each other's views (Forester, 1999; Leeuwis & Pyburn, 2002). This makes the collaboration of stakeholders necessary for sustainability and the implementation of decisions to be addressed effectively (Richards, Blackstock, & Carter, 2004). One of the arguments that has been used to justify stakeholders' participation is that it results in a strong sense of ownership over the process and outcomes achieved (Reed, 2008).

As rural development projects are the means by which government, development institutions, and non-government organizations (NGOs) deliver a range of services to alleviate rural poverty and raise awareness, it is important to look at the available best practices in stakeholder participation. A limited number of studies have examined the use of the stakeholder participatory model in rural development projects. Thus, this article discusses stakeholders' participation in decision making and implementation in a rural community development project by looking at the model put in place to achieve stakeholder participation. The article discusses the conceptualization of the model in terms of how the stakeholders participate in the project. The study examines the stakeholder participatory model and the implementation of a rural development project that has so far been judged a resounding success.

By investigating the model used to facilitate stakeholders' approaches in a rural community development project, this study provides a new perspective to the literature on rural community development by examining how the proper

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utilization of stakeholder participation will result in better management of such projects. This article contributes to literature in several respects, as existing research on stakeholder participation has mainly focused on management and environmental management, and very little has been reported on rural community development projects.

In this article, "participation" is defined as a process where individuals, groups, and organizations choose to take an active role in making decisions that affect them (Wilcox, 2003). The use of the term also reflects World Bank's definition, which describes it as "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them" (World Bank, 1996, p. 3). The focus here is on stakeholder participation. Stakeholders are defined as those who are affected by or can affect a decision (Freeman, 1984). Hence, we will be investigating the extent to which the stakeholders have participated in the planning and management of the project. In the next sections, we will describe the rural project, followed by a discussion of stakeholder participation to foreground its relevance in rural development projects. Following this is a discussion of the method used to categorize the stakeholders involved in the project. The "Stakeholders' Relationship in the Nguni Cattle Project" section discusses stakeholder participation and the application of relationship model to the project, and the last section is a discussion and conclusion.

The Nguni Cattle Project

The Nguni Cattle Project was initiated by the University of Fort Hare (UFH) in 1997 and it involves the introduction of Nguni herds into rural communities who have shown interest in the project and its operational principles. According to the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC), which finances the project in rural South Africa, the project involves the establishment of nucleus of Nguni herds in communal villages over a period of 5 years. Each recipient community receives 10 Nguni heifers and two Nguni bulls to make up a nucleus herd.

The project is built around the concept of *passing on the gift.* Communities are required to return 10 heifers and two bulls from the offspring of the Nguni herds after 5 years, which are then used to set up a similar herd in another rural community. The project has an operational framework that requires the beneficiary communities to get involved in all the different phases of the project planning and management through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA; see the IDC's website). In this project, the emphasis on PRA as an approach is fundamentally about participation, as it is generally believed by development experts that a process can only be regarded as fully participatory when participants are in direct control of decision making in terms of goal setting, planning, policy making, implementation, and evaluation (Robinson, 2002). Thus, stakeholders relevant to the project must be identified early in the project to establish its participatory framework. In addition, the IDC's involvement in the project is based on the understanding that the implementation will be stakeholder led to minimize costs.

The project's potential as a catalyst for rural development and food security was brought to the attention of the Provincial Department of Agriculture (PDoA) by the UFH. This impelled the PDoA and the UFH to seek funding from rural development agency known as the IDC. In South Africa, agriculture is regarded as one of the tools for rural development. Hence, the PDoA provides a free agricultural extension service and sends animal and veterinary officers to rural areas in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The project is managed by a board of trustees, which is mainly responsible for the affairs of the project. As its operational framework is PRA, the stakeholders that make up the board of trustees are representatives of the IDC, UFH, PDoA, and a representative of the beneficiaries. These stakeholders (board of trustee members) have a vested interest in the project, and hence they contribute personnel to see to their interests in line with the project's PRA operating principles.

Other functions of the board of trustees include an agreement with community leaders to ensure that within the given time, the participating communities do not renege in the agreement to return to the trust the required number of cattle, which are then passed on to another community. The trust is also responsible for appointing the project manager who is responsible for managing the nucleus herd in cooperation with other stakeholders. The duties of the project manager, as stated by Usadolo (2011), are

- assisting and advising communities on the management of Nguni,
- inspection and examination of the Nguni,
- assisting in maintenance of a stock book and register,
- regular reports to trustees meetings, and
- oversight over the marking and identification of the Nguni and their progeny (Usadolo, 2011).

As the management of the project is based on a PRA model, the project manager is expected to carry out the duties listed above with the input and participation of all the stakeholders, which include 210 beneficiaries in the 21 rural communities this article investigated. These 21 rural communities were served by the following representatives of the PDoA: 22 agricultural extension officers, 20 animal health technicians, four animal scientists, and two veterinary officers.

Most of the beneficiaries were subsistence farmers, while some reported having other means of livelihood, including being teachers, owners of community convenience stores, and taxi drivers. A few worked in government departments, such as the Department of Education and the Department of Roads and Public Works. All male respondents more than 65 years of age, and all female respondents more than 60 years of age, received social grants from the government.

These communities are led by chairpersons who are elected by members of their communities. Through the chairpersons, the PDoA representatives (the agricultural extension officers, animal health technicians, etc.) are able to access these communities to provide agricultural services. In terms of religion, some community members are Christians, while others are non-Christians but are not Muslims.

Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholder participation in organizational or project management is always considered from two main perspectives. First, from a normative perspective, stakeholder participation is regarded as an ethical issue (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Samuels, Greenfield, & Piper, 1996), as it takes into consideration the legitimate interests of the identified stakeholders, necessitating a stakeholder-oriented operational framework policy in the organization. The normative perspective provides an ethical and moral framework that reflects not only economic imperatives but also the human-centered values of the organization in its goals (Mainardes, Alves, & Raposo, 2011).

Second, and in contrast, is the instrumental perspective, which investigates how stakeholder participation can be used to achieve the performance objectives of an organization (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Jones, 1995). The instrumental perspective seeks to find out how stakeholders can be used as a tool in strategic decision making to achieve predetermined objectives (Jones & Wicks, 1999). For instance, Berman, Wicks, Kotha, and Jones (1999) state that a strategic management model requires an organization to address the concerns of their stakeholders, as doing so will boost the organization's financial performance. This perspective involves the personalization of the organization's relationships with its stakeholders, the particularization of each stakeholder's interests, and the raising of managerial awareness of organizational decisions, processes, and policies to achieve the organization's objectives (Starik, 1994).

In a participatory development project, stakeholders should be identified and brought in as partners "to explore more widely the *anticipated* development challenge as perceived by different stakeholders" (Hawkins, n.d., p. 5, emphasis added). This will provide a platform to articulate the relationship model required in the decision-making mechanism to achieve the stated goals (Freeman, Wicks, & Parman, 2004). Similarly, the identification of the stakeholders is done early in a project to understand key stakeholders' "positions and perceptions about the proposed change" (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009, p. 24). Above all, the involvement of stakeholders makes it possible to seek their views and identify how individual stakeholders can contribute to meeting the identified challenges.

As the Nguni Cattle Project's operational framework is PRA, the project should aim at making sure that stakeholders

- come together to identify common development challenges and a focus that will benefit or lead to the realization of mutually agreed objectives,
- achieve a common understanding of the development challenge,
- integrate the views of the different stakeholders,
- understand the broader context of the challenge,
- state the desired changes that need to occur, and
- assess the different options that will to achieve the desired changes (Hawkins, n.d.).

Past research has demonstrated the benefits of organizational stakeholder relationships in terms of organizational outcomes such as improved financial performance. For example, Waddock and Graves (1997) investigate whether stakeholder participation leads to improved organizational performance and whether organizations with sufficient resources can afford to be more responsive to stakeholders. They found that both these outcomes apply, indicating that the relationship between stakeholder relationships and financial performance is multifaceted. Hence, they suggest that the relationship between financial performance and stakeholder participation is mediated by factors such as the quality of an organization's management. If an organization has a rural development focus, it can improve the quality of its management by embracing joint decision making in the form of stakeholder participation. An empirical study of multiple-case analysis by Koontz (2005) evaluated the degree to which stakeholder participation affects the recommendations of community-based taskforces developing local farm preservation policy in the United States. Koontz found a significant effect in counties where the citizens and the elected officials were concerned about the issues involved, and where participants were connected with strong social networks that focused on the problems being addressed. Kotter and Heskett's (1992) case studies of a small number of successful organizations indicated that the managers of those organizations emphasized the interests of their stakeholders in their decision making.

A study investigating whether stakeholder participation improved the quality of local plans for the long-term management of ecological systems on the basis of theoretically based criteria found that the inclusion of specific stakeholders increased the quality of ecological management (Brody, 2003). An analysis of 36 cases of community fisheries management in Bangladesh with and without stakeholder participation during planning found evidence that stakeholder participation leads to a greater uptake of conservation measures and fewer conflicts among stakeholders (Sultana & Abeyasekera, 2007).

Despite the empirical evidence of the success of stakeholder participation in the studies cited above, stakeholder participation may not yield the intended objectives if it is not properly executed. For example, Nelson and Wright (1995) emphasize that in poor stakeholder participatory processes, stakeholders may easily conclude that their involvement has no impact when it becomes clear to them they cannot influence decisions that affect them (Duane, 1999; Handley, Griffiths, Hill, & Howe, 1998; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000) because the participatory process resembles a "talking shop" without concrete action (Vedwan et al., 2008).

Stakeholder participation is often evaluated on the basis of criteria derived from theory, and the analysis of cases in the absence of the stakeholders who were involved in the project right from the start (Chase, Decker, & Lauber, 2004). An example of this is a study by Chess and Purcell (1999), which investigated the degree to which "process" and "outcome" goals were achieved through a variety of participatory approaches (p. 2685). Their findings showed that the extent to which these goals were achieved did not differ between the different methods. Instead the success of projects was influenced by the ways project facilitators responded to the group dynamics, communication with stakeholders, the clarity of goals that were set, and the quality of planning.

Whereas the aforementioned empirical findings are illustrative of stakeholders' participation in different situations, in the present study, our focus is on the tools used to ensure that the PRA trajectory was followed.

Categorization of Stakeholders in the Nguni Cattle Project

To be able to categorize the stakeholders in the Nguni Cattle Project, contact was made through the UFH's staff member working with the IDC. This culminated in a referral to IDC's two representative officers stationed at the UFH. Through the IDC representatives, approval was granted to conduct the research. Consequently, we were permitted access to some important organizational documents and were able to interview staff and identified stakeholders.

As this article is about stakeholder participation in a rural development project, it is important to categorize stakeholders so as to understand "the power relations between them and their specific interest in the project" (Luyet, Schlaepfer, Parlange, & Buttler, 2012, p. 215). Categorization of the stakeholders also makes it possible to identify the boundaries and of each stakeholder according to their stake in the project (Reed, 2008). The categorization used in this article is consistent with Reed's (2008) suggestions:

1. Individuals and groups who are affected by or can affect particular parts of the system need to be identified.
2. There is a need to prioritize the individuals and groups involved in the decision-making process.

Reed (2008) also suggests that the "interest-influence matrices, where stakeholders are placed in a matrix on the basis of the extent to which they are interested in or can influence the issue under investigation" should influence the categorization of stakeholders (p. 2423). Our categorization also reflects groups or individuals "without whose support the organisation would cease to exist" (Bowie, 1988, p. 112), and it reflects Reed's (2008) suggestion as two types of stakeholders groups, namely, the primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders, were identified. Using the primary and secondary stakeholder distinctions enables us to consider the stakeholders' spheres of influence over the day-to-day running of the project as we consider this to be the requirement for the PRA focus of the project.

To be able to identify the stakeholders and categorize them based on the method mentioned above, we attended meetings of the boards of trustees to gain a sense of who the likely stakeholders of the project would be. We had meetings with representatives of all other stakeholders to find out their involvement in the project. What follows is the categorization of the stakeholders into primary and secondary stakeholders, emphasizing constant information links between the primary and secondary stakeholders to address any possible interruptions to the timely transfer of information.

Primary Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders are directly involved in the day-to-day affairs of the project (Pesqueux & Damak-Ayadi, 2005), which in the context of this study means involvement in the field implementation of the project. In other words, they are referred to as primary stakeholders due to their direct involvement in the project. They are

1. the IDC representatives (an animal health technician and a project manager),
2. agricultural extension officers,
3. animal health technicians,
4. animal scientists,
5. veterinary officers,
6. the beneficiaries, and
7. researchers.

Secondary Stakeholders

The secondary stakeholders are also referred to as institutional stakeholders as they are based in the same institutions as the primary stakeholders. The stakeholder partnerships formed at the secondary level are crucial because these stakeholders make decisions on behalf on their institutions about the project. Indeed, the stakeholders at this level are considered to operate from a management perspective. The decisions made at this level are relevant to the overall coordination of activities of the project because these stakeholders are responsible for managing the primary stakeholders. Communication at this level requires a back and forth process as depicted in Figure 1, where ideas are discussed, refined, and agreed upon in the form of an action plan or pathway to address the mutually identified challenges of the development project. As indicated in Figure 1, the secondary stakeholders are

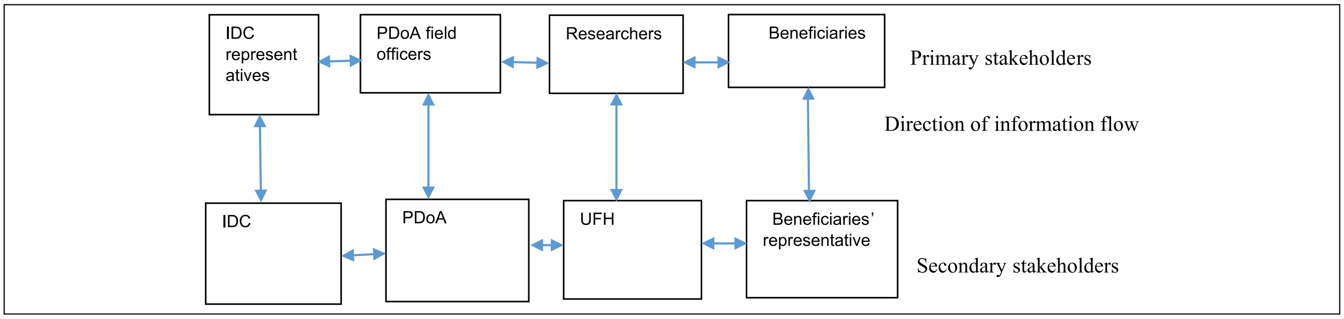

Figure 1. A stakeholders' model of the Nguni Cattle Project.
Note. IDC = Industrial Development Corporation; PDoA = Provincial Department of Agriculture; UFH = University of Fort Hare.

1. the IDC,
2. PDoA,
3. UFH, and
4. the beneficiaries' representative.

The secondary stakeholders contribute field officers with the technical expertise required to run the project. These field officers are referred to as primary stakeholders as described above. In Figure 1, the two-way horizontal arrows between the secondary stakeholders show continuous communication between them. For example, they have to inform each other of any concerns the primary stakeholders have about the implementation of the project. These field officers (the primary stakeholders) are very important in the implementation of the project, and hence they engage in an organized and continuous communication between themselves and the secondary stakeholders to enable them to get an understanding of how the project is implemented and how the identified challenges are being addressed. Figure 1 represents this as unbroken horizontal and upward interaction processes both at the primary stakeholder and secondary stakeholder levels.

The primary stakeholders perform the functions identified by their affiliated secondary stakeholders and report to them on the progress and challenges identified. The unbroken upward communication indicates the need for both parties to communicate about the project and it gives the institutional stakeholders a platform to monitor the project.

Figure 1 emphasizes that interactive communication at both levels of the stakeholders' engagement is indispensable for addressing the identified development challenges in relation to the overall PRA focus and objectives of the project. The following section on stakeholder engagement in the Nguni Cattle Project focuses mainly on the engagement required to drive the project's field operations.

Stakeholders' Relationship in the Nguni Cattle Project

Following the discussion of the PRA model and the communicative relationships between the primary and secondary stakeholders, this section discusses the relationships and participation of the identified stakeholders. The discussion presented here reflects our interview with the IDC representatives, the documents made available to us about the project, observation of board of trustees' meetings, and field practices of the primary stakeholders.

The IDC representatives comprise one project manager and an animal health technician who are both answerable to IDC as their employer. However, in the context of the Nguni Cattle Project, they are regarded as the IDC on the board of trustees and as employees of IDC when dealing with other stakeholders. They therefore double as primary and secondary stakeholders based on the categorization used in this study, as they have a major stake or voice in the Nguni Cattle Project. They represent the IDC in the board of trustee's meetings and are very active in the field as primary stakeholders. They have a significant role on the board of trustees and wield considerable influence as primary stakeholders as other primary stakeholders rely on them for information and on other resources to get the project going on a day-to-day basis.

To reflect the PRA objectives of the project, the IDC representatives meet with other secondary stakeholders such as agricultural extension officers, animal health technicians, animal scientists, and veterinary officers—who are employees of the PDoA—to aggregate information they have received from their respective institutional (secondary) stakeholders. They also use the opportunity to plan how to collectively and individually address issues in the project in line with the available information and the prevailing challenges they face. Once the challenges are identified, meetings are planned and held with the beneficiaries to put the identified challenges in focus and to find ways to solve them in the field. It is also expected that in his meetings with the beneficiaries, the beneficiaries' representative on the board of trustees will discuss the issues covered in the board of trustees meetings. The beneficiaries are the ultimate focus of the project, hence the PRA model guarantees them and their representative unfettered access to the board of trustees and all other beneficiaries, as indicated in Figure 2 below.

The meetings discussed above are strictly based on the PRA model in Figure 2, and we verified this as participant

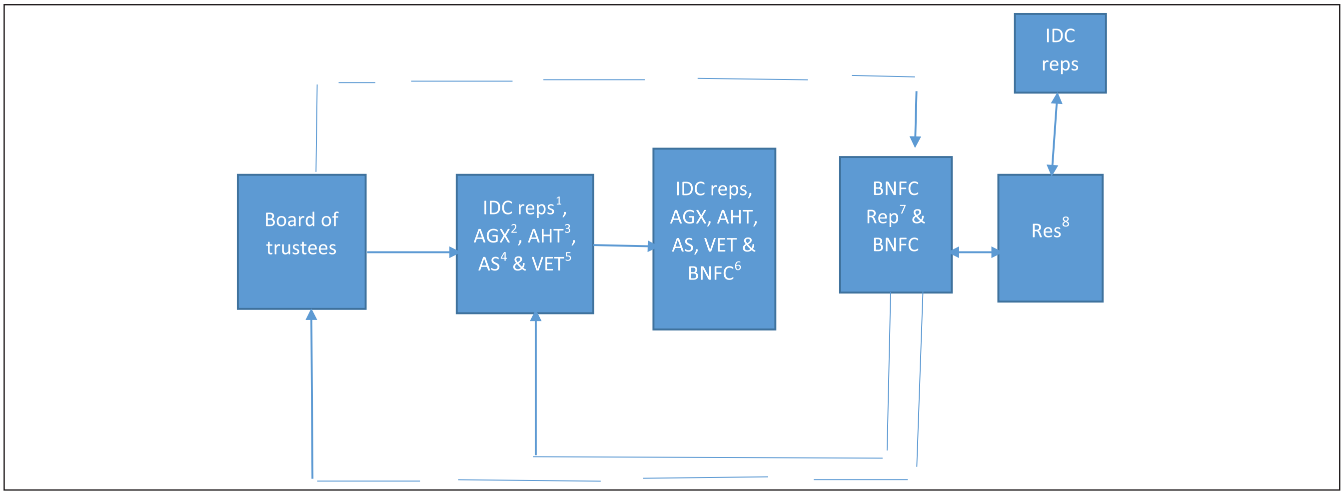

Figure 2. PRA model of stakeholder's participatory relationships.
Note. PRA = Participatory Rural Appraisal; IDC reps = IDC representative; AGX = agricultural extension officers; AHT = animal health technicians; AS = animal scientists; VET = veterinary officers; BNFC = beneficiaries; BNFC rep = beneficiaries' representatives; Res = researchers.

observers in field trips during which we observed the IDC and other primary stakeholders. The stakeholder participatory model is represented in Figure 2.

In addition to the stakeholder participatory relationships explained above, the IDC representatives mediate and supervise all other primary stakeholders to ensure their participation is in line with the objectives of the project. This is consistent with operational standards for participatory projects, which require that there should be a project coordinator or planner to see that the agreed participatory trajectory of a project is strictly adhered to (Papineau & Kiely, 1996). For example, we regularly saw that the IDC representatives were involved in some of the communities in the implementation of the project, such as monitoring the progress of the project, the dipping of calves, and giving advice to the beneficiaries and the agricultural extension officers.

As the model above has shown, several points of intersection between the primary stakeholders are provided to aggregate the information that can be made available to the beneficiaries. The researchers, who are employees of the UFH, have been categorized as primary stakeholder in the project, and have a relationship path that points to the beneficiaries and the IDC representatives. Their research focuses on the field experiences of the beneficiaries as well as other complex issues about the project. The researchers' findings are thought to be of immediate benefit to the beneficiaries, hence they have a two-way relationship with them at the primary stakeholder level—and also to the IDC representatives because of their position on the board of trustees. The participatory relationships give the beneficiaries unfettered access to all the stakeholders, including the board of trustees, because they are the focus of the overall development objectives of the project. Our initial observations showed that this communication between beneficiaries and the board is not actively encouraged by the board of trustees, and the beneficiaries have rarely used the channel, hence the line linking the board of trustees and the beneficiaries is represented with broken line in the model.

In sum, Figures 1 and 2 above illustrate the stakeholder relationship in the project. Our interviews with the beneficiaries revealed that the beneficiaries welcomed the stakeholder relationship model of the project. One of the beneficiaries' comments, which is in agreement with the general views of others, was that

> Everybody is treated equal, even though we the beneficiaries need to be told what to do going forward, we worked together with "top people" and were made to understand that the issues we raised were not only for us but also for the top people. Very good, our suggestions are taken and it is easy to see the top people when there are challenges. In fact, we are all the same and we all learn together!

The excerpt above captures the essence of stakeholder participation and the PRA focus of the project. It shows how questions of personality and power were dealt with and it shows the consequent positive social exchanges that enabled discussion and synergy of ideas between different groups of stakeholders. Although this beneficiary sees the other stakeholders as "top people," at the same time, he agrees that "we are all the same," suggesting a good communicative relationship between the beneficiaries and other stakeholders, made possible by a bottom-up approach that characterizes the participatory stakeholder relationship. Through learning and working together, the stakeholders are empowered in different ways. In this regard, Chambers (1994) states that

> Those who, through a PRA process express and share what they already know, also learn through that expression and sharing.

> Those who investigate and observe add to their knowledge. Those who analyse become yet more aware and reach new understandings. Those who plan and then implement what they have planned take command, and further learn through the experience of action. (p. 1444)

This is the general idea that underpins participatory relationships. Collaborative relationships are emphasized to promote mutual understanding in a group. The beneficiaries' representative expressed the same feeling in his comment, saying that encounters at the board of trustees level are open and cooperative. The openness at the board of trustees meetings, according to the beneficiaries' representative, has had an impact on the stakeholder participatory process and members now talk more candidly with a sense of cohesion, and with information circulating smoothly to the secondary stakeholders.

In one of the participating communities, the beneficiaries said that even though they had received less support from other stakeholders in the last few months, their previous encounters with other stakeholders in the previous 3.5 years had left them with a well-structured and coordinated project in which individuals in the group took responsibility for specific tasks. Long-term sustainability is one of the primary objectives of PRA and the community comments show the objective is being realized. The community has benefited from the cooperative nature of stakeholder relationships in the project and they are now able to carry on with the project into the future without other stakeholders. As noted by Freebairn and King (2003), community involvement in decision making and implementation allows the projects to continue after other actors such as the development experts, and in this case of this study, other stakeholders, have withdrawn from the process.

However, majority of the stakeholders such as the extension officers, animal health technicians, and the beneficiaries reported experiencing some specific problems during the implementation of some of the recommendations of the secondary stakeholders. They said that because they had insufficient experience, it took them quite some time to understand the PRA focus of the project. In this regard, one of the agricultural extension officers commented that

> At the beginning, it was difficult to understand how to engage the beneficiaries as I am used to leading and telling farmers what to do. It was difficult in terms of times and material to prepare and relate with the beneficiaries as equals. When considered from its long-term advantages, a participatory approach actually shifted many responsibilities from you because the farmers could approach you and stand on their own in the long term.

In the excerpt above, the beneficiaries were referred to as farmers by the agricultural extension officer. His comment acknowledges the essence of project sustainability after the main actors have withdrawn their active participation in the project. The comments recognize the drawbacks of a participatory approach in development projects. Scholars such as Julnes (2001) and Castello and Braun (2006) have noted that participatory approach is time consuming and takes multiple resources to implement. The agricultural extension officer's comment revealed why most stakeholders had problems with the PRA focus. This was because as experts, they were not used to fading into the background (Robinson, 2002) and allowing the beneficiaries to also lead. The agricultural extension officer felt disempowered because he was used to being seen as the expert who directed and gave information to the farmers (beneficiaries). For the purposes of the project, he had to operate by consensus, and initiate a constructive dialogue to build the necessary relationship with the beneficiaries to achieve the stated objectives of the project.

Further Discussion and Conclusion

This study has dealt with the PRA model and the concomitant stakeholder engagement. The PRA model discussed here proved to be a good theoretical model that has impacted the stakeholder relationships in the implementation process of the project. The PRA model is characteristic of a model that considers the interests of all the stakeholders to be central to the success of the project. It integrates the various interests and opinions of the stakeholders (Griffin, 1999) to understand issues that are relevant to the project (Duram & Brown, 1999) and to build trust in decision making (Beierle, 1998). As Figures 1 and 2 have shown, the model allows unfettered flow of information between the primary and secondary stakeholders. The beneficiaries are categorized as primary stakeholders because the project is for their well-being, and they are expected to run the project by themselves with support from the other primary stakeholders. The model shown in Figure 2 gives them unfettered access to all the stakeholders, though, as indicated above this may not be true in terms of their relationship with the board of trustees.

Also apparent in the PRA model is a complete lack of delineation of roles. Even though participatory projects call for joint decision making, this does not negate the need for each stakeholder (especially the secondary stakeholders) to be involved in the project at some point in the project. This is patently lacking in the PRA model discussed in this study and our observation of the primary stakeholders in the field also confirmed this.

We have also noted the important role of the beneficiaries' representative in both stakeholder categories. Based on the model, we feel the model is seriously flawed as one representative cannot adequately represent the beneficiaries in more 20 rural community projects, given the fact different communities have different interests. Our interview with the sole representative of the beneficiaries revealed that the geographical distance between the communities has made it impossible for him to relate with most of the communities in the project. In other words, the beneficiaries' representative is on the board of the trustees to create the impression of a stakeholder participatory relationship—a role best described as being a token representative of the beneficiaries. According to Arnstein (1969), despite the selection of these individuals to take part in decision making, responsibility for the decisions is ultimately in the hands of the development expert of planner.

One obvious limitation of this study is that we were unable to meet senior members of IDC, which is classified as one of the secondary stakeholders. The IDC as an organization holds the purse strings for the project. Hence, as stakeholder its views matter significantly. However, we noticed that as it is a rural development project financier, it is involved in quite a lot of activities and it was not possible to locate anyone who was knowledgeable about the project, other than their two representatives identified in this study.

The Nguni Cattle Project has been a resounding success story since it started in rural communities in South Africa. Its success attracted this study as we wanted to investigate whether it was meeting its PRA objectives and whether this was the reason for its achievements. Stressed in our discussion is the fact stakeholders' participation is the favored way of engaging diverse interests in rural development and these have to be done through a categorization process to identify the relevant stakeholders. In this article, we used a streamlined and instrumental definition of stakeholders as groups or individuals "without whose support the organisation would cease to exist" (Bowie, 1988, p. 112) to categorize the stakeholders using the primary and secondary distinctions in terms their involvement in the project.

The discussion of the stakeholders showed close relationships between the primary and secondary stakeholders were established in a bid to ensure that the beneficiaries are served and the project objectives of alleviating poverty in the communities are achieved.

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