

## Assessment of Higher Education Institutions' Social Responsibility Towards Transforming Lives of Deprived Local Communities: A Community Engagement Approach

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**Abstract:** Despite the Tanzanian Government's efforts in promoting its Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to address problems facing their surrounding communities, the strategy has insufficiently institutionalized to bring the expected results. This study is an endeavor to have an assessment of Community Engagement Program which was established as a strategy of stimulating the Community Development Training Institutes (CDTIs) and Community Development Technical Training (CDTTIs) to perform their Social Responsibilities. A cross-sectional research design was adopted to obtain a sample of 160 respondents. Data were collected using Questionnaires, Key Informants' Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) methods and analyzed by using SPSS and content analysis. The study revealed that, financial budget allocated to facilitate the program operations is insufficient. Subsequently the insufficient budget is negatively influencing the program implementers to find shortcuts in following the program operational procedures as a result some of the felt needs of the intended beneficiaries are precluded. Moreover, the program's undertakings are inadequately disclosed to attract support from other potential development partners. In order for the program to effectively accomplish the ideal objective of its establishment, it is recommended the government in collaboration with other stakeholders to mobilize and inject sufficient financial and other related resources.

### INTRODUCTION

The reputation and survival of any Higher Education Institution (HEI) in this world of competitive and perpetual transformation depend on how it responds to the needs of its respective society (Sanje and Senol, 2012; Moussa, 2022). That means the operations of a responsible HEI is expected to contribute the wellbeing of its surrounding community and the society as a whole (Kashyap, 2014). Basing on these presumptions, the world national governments have been orienting their HEIs to relate their three main tasks of research, teaching and consultation with socio-economic needs of the particular society (Kalinowska and Batorczak, 2017). Concurrently, the concept of Cooperate Social Responsibility (CSR) was developed with among other things to become a supervisory framework of overseeing that the institutions are responding to the needs of their respective surrounding communities (Szelałowska-Rudzka, 2019). CSR refers to the social and philanthropic responsibilities organizations morally perform to improve the lives of people and the amenities in their immediate areas of operation (Iguodala and Igbineweka, 2018). As an organ in a body, CSR is expected to promote relationships among all members and therefore the HEIs have to use this approach as a competitive tactics to link themselves with their social environment (Si & Van, 2020; Gulavani et al, 2016).

CSR of HEIs should not only be seen performed but it should be performed with perfect and appropriate strategies therefore, in order for the HEIs to effectively accomplish their CSR obligations, they should use suitable tactics depending on the needs, environment and living styles of the respective communities (Samer et al, 2018). Community Engagement is among the CSR strategies which has been commonly used and eventually it has brought a remarkable result in transforming the institutions' nearby communities (Mbirigenda, 2020). Community engagement is a process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographical proximity to address issues affecting their well-being (GoT, 2019b). According to Deigh et al, (2016) Community

engagement is an appropriate CSR strategy because it enhances relationships between civilians and professionals and more significantly it entails the community relation actions such as volunteerism and donations. Entirely in the world, countries have been promoting the use of community engagement approach so as to comply with the requirement of goal number three (3) of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The goal requires the countries to engage local communities in addressing their socio-economic problems so as to incorporate their felt needs and enhance sustainability of the particular programs (IISD, 2016). Poland and Indonesia are among the successful countries whose HEIs are using community engagement as an approach of CSR to deliver the community services basing on their preferences and improving their institutions' image ((Szelągowska-Rudzka, 2019; Rumambi et al, 2021).

In Africa, because of the African communal living styles HEIs are emphasized to perform their CSR by engaging local communities by considering and manifesting such indigenous participatory slogans like 'Harambee' and '**Msaragambo**' (Amoako et al., (2013). While 'Harambee' is participatory slogan commonly used by East African's local communities which is reflecting the strong ancient value of mutual assistance and joining efforts; '**Msaragambo**' is among the participatory slogan originated from Pare language of Northern Tanzania, to mean joining hands through working together (Wiston & Riyan 2008; GoT, 2019a).

In Tanzanian context, the government has established a Community Engagement program to the public Community Development Training Institutes (CDTIs) and Community Development Technical Training Institutes (CDTTIs) (GoT, 2019b). Apart from motivating the institutions to perform their CSR, the program was established to stimulate the institutions to market their activities and inducing the students in the real community setting environment (ibid, 2019b). As a response to these government initiatives, the respective institutions have been performing a number of interventions at their localities. For instance, Monduli CDTI has done remarkable work in this regard. It has implemented two credible interventions which are: - Mobilizing the private & public firms to support poor household to join improved Community Health Fund (iCHF); and to mobilize rural communities to join the national better housing campaign by improving their housing through the "**Msaragambo**" participatory approach (Madodi and Eliamini 2021; Madodi et al, 2022). In the same line, Rungemba CDTI, has been allocating its students to the institute's surrounding villages so as to induce them in the real community setting environment and practicing theories taught in classes meanwhile addressing problems facing the communities (GoT, 2019b).

Nevertheless, from the highlighted interventions led by Monduli and Rungemba CDTIs, there is limited information in public accessible sources which demonstrate other interventions performed through this program. Rumambi et al, (2021) suggest that, in order for the institutions to meet the accountability principle, they must report their social responsibility undertakings. This study was therefore conducted to assess performance of community engagement program as it established to the CDTIs and CDTTIs for the purpose of promoting them to perform their CSR obligations.

## METHODS

The study was conducted in surrounding communities of all eight (8) public CDTIs and CDTTIs of which are located almost in each geographical zone of the country; - South, North, West and East. Such that; - Rungemba, Ruaha and Uyole CDTIs are located in South Western zone of the country- Iringa and Mbeya respectively; Buhare CDTI and Misungwi CDTTI located in North Western zone of the country Mara and Mwanza respectively. Others are Monduli CDTI which is found in Arusha region - Northern zone, Mabughai CDTTI which is found in Tanga region- Eastern zone and Mlale CDTI found in Ruvuma region -Southern zone of the country. With this extensive coverage, community engagement undertakings have therefore been expected to benefit substantial community members all over the country.

The choice of these communities as a target population of the study, based the CSR principles which oblige the corporations to serve their nearby communities before they extend their services to

others. The study employed a sample size of 160 respondents. Random sampling procedures was used to obtain 20 respondents from each institute's surrounding community. The study was also employed a cross-sectional design was also. Moreover, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected from secondary sources including documentations from various sources and primary sources which are Questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Key Informants' Interview (KII). The key informants who are government officials were purposively involved through in-depth interview so as to get insight on the performance of the program in transforming lives of communities in their localities. The officials were 8 Village Executive Officers, 8 Village Chairpersons, 8 Ward Community Development Officers, 8 Ward Executive Officers, 8 District Community Development Officers (DCDOs) and all institutes' Heads of Community Engagement departments/Units. In order to solidify the findings, one (1) Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) was conducted in each ward among the wards where the study was conducted. After data collection, both qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed by using content analysis and descriptive statistics methods respectively. While the former enabled the researcher to quantify and analyses the presence, meanings and relationships the later summarized or described features from the collected information to produce frequencies and percentages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### ***Communities' Awareness on the Operations of Community Engagement Program***

According to WHC, (2015) The community to be aware on any development program aimed addressing problems facing them is important because awareness is a gateway for community members to gain knowledge of the particular program. This study was therefore assessed local communities' awareness on the program in discussion (See the result in table 1).

**Table 1.** Communities' Awareness on the Operations of the Program

Attribute	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Mechanisms used to create communities' awareness on the program's operations</b>		
Low	80	50
Moderate	35	21.9
High	45	28.1
<b>Mechanisms used to create communities' awareness on the program's operations</b>		
Notified through folk media like Kitongoji (street) leader	48	30
Notified through Village assembly	31	20.5
Announcements done at religious congregations	79	49.5

Source: Research findings, 2024

### *The link between communities' level of awareness and relevance of the mechanism used to create awareness on the operations of the program*

The information revealed in table 1 indicates that majority of respondents by 50% had low level of awareness on the program's operations and 49.5% were notified on the presence of the program through announcements during religious congregations. Content analysis may lead to the conclusion that there is correlation between the two aspects. This is determined by the fact that the number of those who were involved in the two aspects became almost equivalent. The finding concurs with that of Adams and Sherar, (2018) who found that engaging local residents in the intervention activities has been challenged by poor mechanisms used to inform the community and that is why the same small number of community members are often getting involved in all local initiatives and activities. Olaleye and Adebusuyi (2019) found that, effective local leadership should respond to community needs through relevant mechanisms in exchanging information because the information services serve as a binding thread among different groups of rural dwelling. Tanzanian local government Act of 1982,

emphasize that, the village community has to make their decisions and disseminate the information through village assembly (GoT, 1982). During the FGDs in Monduli Juu Ward one of the discussants narrated as follows:

**".... We expected to be informed about what you call "community engagement program in the village assemblies but our leaders are hesitating and fear to call official village meetings which would assemble many radical people who would probably enquire many other issues..."**

### ***Adherence of the Program's Operational Procedures as stipulated in the National Guideline of community engagement program***

According to (GOT, 2019b), the implementation of community engagement program should follow the analytical steps which are stipulated in the National Guideline of the particular Program. The steps are: - the community profiling (research), feedback to the community (triggering & visioning), resource mobilization and implementation. This study was therefore assessed whether the program implementers have been adhering to the stipulated procedures (see results in table 2).

**Table 2.** Relevance of Operational Procedures for implementation of the Program.

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Conducted community profiling before initiating of a particular intervention</b>		
Yes	50	31
No	110	69
<b>Community got feedback to the community as a result of a community profiling</b>		
YES	55	34
NO	105	66
<b>Mechanism used in identification of the project to be implemented</b>		
Top down (none participatory approach)	120	75
Bottom up (Participatory Approach)	40	25

Source: Research findings, 2024

Findings in table 2 depict that, while majority of respondents by 69 % indicated that there was no any community profiling conducted before initiating a particular intervention, 66 % respondents indicated that there was no any feedback for those community profiling which were conducted. On the other hand, majority of respondents by 75% indicated that the mechanisms used in identifying the needs of the communities were irrelevant as it was top down which is non-participatory approach. Generally, findings revealed in this sub section suggest that, the operational procedures for implementation of community engagement program were slightly regarded. The National guideline for community engagement program requires local communities to be involved in identification of various challenges they face and then the community deserves to be informed on those identified challenges (GoT, 2019b). The finding implies that due to these irrelevances, the program's intended result would hardly be achieved. The findings concur with that of Madodi and Eliamini, (2021), who found that if irrelevant procedures are used to execute a certain community development program, then a chance of the particular program to attain the intended results will tremendously be affected. Development efforts must aim at satisfying the needs of marginalized communities and this can only be achieved by enabling them to take part in the process of changing their lives (Otieno, 2014). Engaging local community can lead to the increases in social capital and building their capacity (Cyril et al, 2015; Deigh et al, 2016).

### ***The Role of Stakeholders in the Implementation of the Program***

While state governments have a supervisory role in ensuring the proper implementation of community development programs, local communities are the closest beneficiaries of the program.

This study was assessed the role played by both mentioned key stakeholders to the achievement of the program (see results in table 3).

**Table 3.** The Role of Stakeholders to guarantee the program implementation

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
The role of Local communities to respond and supporting the program		
YES	120	31
NO	40	69
<b>The government's role to ensure accomplishment of the program's overall objective</b>		
Allocate financial sufficient budget	55	34
Establish reliable policies & guidelines	105	66
<b>The effects of insufficient budget allocated for the program operations</b>		
Failure to publicize the program	80	50
Precluding the communities felt needs	80	50

Source: Research findings, 2024

The information revealed in table 3, depict that local communities have been positively responding to support the implementation of the program by 75%. This implies that the community has played its part as accordingly. Uddin, (2019) found that local communities' engagement in any development initiatives pertained to promote their wellbeing, will increase the chances of success to particular program and this will eventually lead to the sustainability of a particular projects/program. Berková et al, (2019) found that, the cooperation between HEIs and the labor market (community) is positively impacting the communities' social problems being addressed and the cooperation getting reputation. On the other hand, only 34% of respondents were agreeing that the government has been allocating sufficient fund to the program operations. This implies that majority of community members and other program actors have been not satisfied by the fund allocated in this area. The finding complies with that of Madodi and Eliamini, (2021) who found that, the government has been allocating insufficient budget to facilitate the implementation of community engagement program run by CDTIs and CDTTIs.

Furthermore, fifty to fifty percent of respondents were agreeing that some of the effects of allocating insufficient budget for the program operations are precluding the communities' felt needs and failure to publicize the programs' interventions. According to Suphian & Jani, (2020), Development Partners need to properly be informed the main social challenges facing the community then through participatory approach they support to address them using local available resources. The innovative findings of this study which is supported by several other literatures is that, the successful implementation of any community development program must entail all key stakeholders to play their parties as required. Otherwise, the success of the particular program is at risk. According to Philip (2019), the current CSR regulatory framework in Tanzania is weak to conform the modern CSR regulation occurring in our contemporary world. Philip (2019) continues to assert that the Tanzanian CSR practices still follow the tradition mode of practice whereby CSR activities are optional at the will of the firms.

#### **DISCLOSURE OF THE INTERVENTIONS EXECUTED THROUGH THE PROGRAM**

Signaling theory emphasizes that the corporations should do something to the society to show a signal that the corporation is not only supporting them but it also like them to feel that they are part of the corporation's success (Strle & Gurzawska, 2015). Thus, the present study revised various reports and documents of the program from the institutes' documentation sources to find out whether the institutes have done something on the community through the program. (See the revealed interventions performed by the respective institutes in Table 4).

**Table 4.** Some Credible Interventions Executed by CDTIs/ CDTTIs for the last 3 years.

The Institute	Intervention Category	Intervention's Brief Description	Achievement Per Target (IN %)	As
<b>Rungemba CDTI</b>	Creating awareness on the importance of balanced diet for people's health.	The intervention aimed to create awareness on nutritional education to 425 community members so as to improve the communities' nutrition.	142	
	Mobilizing communities to engage in avocado farming.	The intervention facilitated Kitelewasi, Itimbo and Rungemba villagers to plant 6120 seedlings of avocado so as to improve their level of income.	100	
<b>Misungwi CDTTI</b>	Mobilizing community members to improve their transportation infrastructure	The intervention facilitated the villagers of Mbela 'B' to renovate their village road which connect the village with other nearby villages so as to simplify transportation of people with their farm products	100	
	Mobilizing communities to effectively use local available resources.	Facilitate training to 20 local fundi(s) 14 women and 6 men on how to make water tanks reserves with the capacity of carrying at least 1200 litres so as to address the challenge of water shortage	100	
<b>Monduli CDTI</b>	Facilitating poor households to access equitable health services.	Mobilizing both poor household of Monduli Juu Ward and the private/public firms to complement each other contributing a premium of 30,000/- to join iCHF.	66	
	Mobilizing local communities to join the national better housing campaign.	Facilitating poor household of Monduli Juu Ward to improve their housing through participatory ' <i>Msaragambo</i> ' approach. This was done in order to improve the particular communities' housing.	50	
<b>Mlale CDTI</b>	Creating Community awareness on Gender based violence practices.	Creating awareness on Gender based violence to 722 (364 males and 388 Female) pupils of Masangu and Magagura primary Schools. The intervention aimed to enable young primary School Pupils be aware with the GBV practices.	100	
	Women's social and economic Empowerment	Facilitating 388 Women members of VICOBA groups of Masangu, Magagura and Lusonga villages on how to prepare Business plans. This was aimed at enabling them to successful operation of their entrepreneurial activities.	100	
<b>Uyole CDTI</b>	Promoting hygiene and sanitation among household members	Mobilize 32% households to improve their toilets or build a new one. This is a result of a baseline survey which revealed that find that only 68% of	52	



		households were owning improved toilets.	
<b>Ruaha CDTI</b>	Creating community awareness on the importance of breast feeding.	Facilitate training to 265 community members (38 males and 227 female) of Ruaha, Luhota, Kitwiru and Igumbilo Wards on the importance of breast feeding. The intervention aimed at enabling the communities to improve nutrition status of the children under five years at the particular communities.	100
<b>Buhare CDTI</b>	Improvement of primary education learning environment	Mobilized community members to participate in construction of two classrooms at Buhare A and B primary schools.	100
<b>Mabughai CDTTI</b>	Promoting communities' Socio-economic wellbeing	To conduct entrepreneurship training for Kinko, Ndobwa and Migambo villages through providing them with entrepreneurship skills. This was aimed at imparting skills on how to make soaps, breads and bee keeping to 60 female and male groups.	60

Source: Documentation from CDTIs and CDTTIs' community engagement units, 2024

The information revealed in table 4, discloses several interventions which were executed by the CDTIs and CDTTIs through the community engagement program. Generally, the study found that, the institutes have been prominently implementing several projects through this program although to some extent they are slightly meet the communities' priorities. Failure to meet their priorities is mostly attributed by the insufficient fund which results to the irrelevance of operational procedures identifying the communities felt needs as revealed in 3.2. Reed, (2008) found that in order to get the real felt needs or the priorities of the local community their diversity of knowledge and values have to be taken into account during the project need assessment process. Stringer et al, (2007) suggest that, it is essential to guarantee that local communities are engaged in all process of executing the particular project. Additionally, this study found that these interventions are inadequately publicized to publicly accessible sources such as the official websites of the respective institutes. This results to the program being not paying attention to potential development partners. This finding is concurring to that of Nejati et al, (2011) who found that HEIs have been adhering to their social responsibility as they are being engaged in supporting their surrounding communities but the challenge has always been, the institutes themselves are not broadcasting these interventions in their websites' contents. Rumambi et al, (2021) suggests that, the report of HEIs operations should become the media of accountability because it produces qualitative and quantitative information of institute's activities. According to Rumambi et al, (2021) any institution is needed to be accountable to the public by becoming transparent through communicating its activities to stakeholders.

## CONCLUSION

The present study aimed at assessing performance of community engagement program run by CDTIs and CDTTIs. The study reveals several issues which have been challenging the performance of the program by in achieving the ideal objective of its establishment. One of the major challenges is insufficient financial budget allocated to facilitate the program's operations. Because of the insufficient budget, some of socio-economic problems which are the priorities of the particular local communities were either precluded or inadequately addressed. Apart from this, the study found that there are a

number of interventions which have been executed under this program but are inadequately disclosed to pay attention of other stakeholders. Several program's interventions which are matching the willingness of the government to counter attack poverty and unemployment have been implemented through this program but unfortunately, they are insufficiently disclosed. This study suggests the government in collaboration with other stakeholders to allocate enough budget to facilitate smooth implementation of the program and facilitate publications of such credible works done by CDTIs and CDTTIs so as to attract investment and support from other potential stakeholders.

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