



## **Assessing the Level of Beneficiaries' Participation: A Case of Medicinal and Food Plants Extension Project**

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<b>RESEARCH ARTICLE INFORMATION</b>	<b>ABSTRACT</b>
<p><b>Received:</b> July 17, 2023 <b>Reviewed:</b> May 25, 2024 <b>Accepted:</b> June 05, 2024 <b>Published:</b> June 30, 2024</p> <p> Copyright © 2025 by the Author(s). This open-access article is distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.</p>	<p>The level of participation of the beneficiaries in the medicinal and food plants extension project was assessed using the typology of participation such as passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation, and empowered participation. All three barangays are within Cabagan, Isabela: Angancasilian, Catabayungan, and Cubag, consisting of 37 respondents comprising three barangay chairmen, three barangay health workers, and 31 project beneficiaries. Guided survey questionnaire which was translated in vernacular dialect (Ybanag), key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions (FGD) were employed during the conduct of the research. The participation of the project beneficiaries resulted in empowerment in the planning stage. However, there was less participation during the implementation phase due to the use of mediated communication. This modality affected the level of participation of the beneficiaries because of the lack of face-to-face interaction between implementers and beneficiaries. It also demonstrated empowered participation during the monitoring and evaluation phase. The salient result of this research would be useful in conceptualizing a participatory communication plan for the project by considering an "empowered participation" of the beneficiaries in all its phases to achieve empowerment and sustainability of the project.</p>

**Keywords:** *level of participation, participatory communication, Medicinal and Food Plants Extension Project, key informant interviews, empowered participation*

### Introduction

The active involvement of beneficiaries has become increasingly essential in development projects. Research has demonstrated that beneficiary participation not only improves the success of projects but also contributes to their long-term sustainability (Bande, Ika, & Ouedraoga, 2024). Nevertheless, the extent of beneficiary involvement differs among projects, with some utilizing a more participatory strategy than others (Ahmadu et al., 2012). Recent research has emphasized the significance of mutual information exchange, involving beneficiaries early and extensively, and striving to comprehend and support mental model development for successful participatory development (Dutta, 2023).

Participatory communication is an approach based on dialogue that enables the sharing of information, perceptions, and opinions among various stakeholders, thereby facilitating empowerment (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009). Similarly, Servaes (2002) stated that participation in decision-making is vital to sharing information, knowledge, trust, commitment, and the right attitude in any development project.

Yet, despite the growing consensus on the benefits of beneficiary participation, there is still a lack of empirical evidence on the specific levels of participation in extension projects (Aguiling, 2023).

Thus, participatory communication does not only focus on an exchange of information and experience but also the exploration and generation of new knowledge aimed at addressing situations that need to be improved. This is also associated with community-driven development; however, it could be used at any level of decision-making at local, national, and international regardless of the diversity of groups involved (Tufte & Mefalopulos, 2009).

### Typology of Participation

Mefalopulos (2008) discussed the participation paradigm, emphasizing that "meaningful participation cannot occur without communication." Therefore, this study extracted questions based on the definitions per level of participation. Passive participation involves stakeholders being informed about participation activities without providing much feedback or actively participating in discussions. Participation by consultation is when stakeholders provide feedback to questions posed by outside researchers. However, the decision-making power remains with the external professionals, and they are not obligated to incorporate the stakeholders' input. Functional participation involves stakeholders discussing and analyzing predetermined objectives for a project, and providing valuable input on how to achieve them through horizontal communication. Lastly, empowered participation occurs when stakeholders are willing and able to be part of the participation process, leading to joint decision-making. The role of outsiders is that of equal partners, while local stakeholders have a decisive say in decisions concerning their lives.

### Function of Extension in State Colleges and Universities

Universities like Isabela State University (ISU) are large repositories of knowledge, manpower, and physical resources. They cannot function and exist in isolation from the

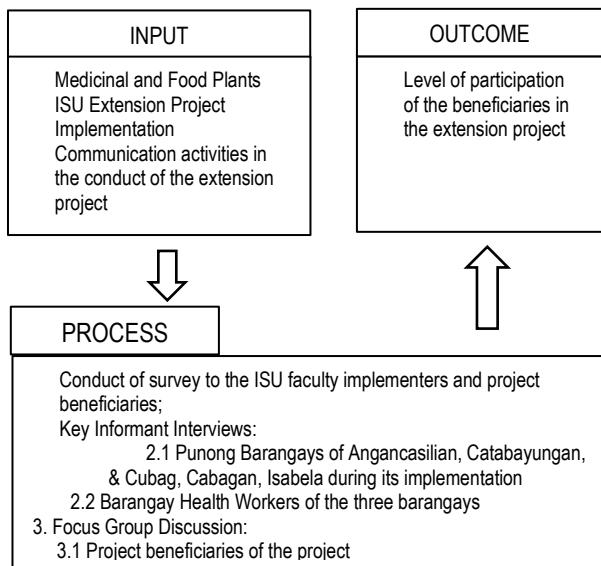
society and communities where they are located. They must cater to the overall and diverse learning needs of the segments of the neighboring people and communities (Islamia, 2016). Henceforth, the pivotal role played by State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) is vital in addressing local communities' development needs and promoting sustainable development through the transfer of knowledge and technology (Bicol University, 2022).

### ISU Extension Program

It is for this reason that ISU is fulfilling its role to transfer matured and relevant technologies and practices generated from research. These are in the forms of Extension Programs, Projects, or Activities (PPAs) which are conceptualized to support the local government units, barangay government units, associations, and individual members of the community (ISU Extension Services Manual of Operations, 2014).

Hence, this research evaluated the level of participation by the beneficiaries of the project conducted by the Department of Natural and Applied Sciences (DNAS) titled "Medicinal and Food Plant Nursery as Alternative Health Care and Livelihood Opportunity in Barangay Angancasilian, Catabayungan, and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela". This project used various communication tools such as leaflets, flyers, posters, radio, and face-to-face modalities in phases of the project to educate them on the usefulness of wild-type indigenous plants as a source of alternative medicines, ultimately helping them establish their barangay medicinal plant nursery to serve as immediate sources of alternative medicinal plants.

The diagram explained in the theoretical structure served as the researcher's foundation in attaining the study's objective. Its paradigm is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** *Paradigm of the Study*

The focus of this research was to develop a participatory communication plan for Isabela State University based on the experience of the Medicinal and Food Plants Project. Specifically, it aimed to determine the level of participation of intended

beneficiaries based on the typology of participation for more efficient implementation of future extension projects.

## Methods

### Population and Locale of the Study

The respondents of the study were identified through purposive sampling, specifically stakeholder sampling. The strategy used concerns the identification of major stakeholders who are involved in managing the programs and services. In this case, they were the barangay leaders and the project beneficiaries.

As presented in Table 1, there were three barangays where the project was implemented such as Angancasilian, Catabayungan, and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela. The respondents were the Community Chairmen (Punong Barangay), the overseer of the project, and the Barangay Health Workers (BHW) who served as barangay field coordinators and participants during the project implementation of the medicinal and food plants project. The researcher first handed permission to conduct a research on the medicinal and food plants project conducted by ISU and, likewise, sought their approval to reveal their identity as respondents of this study. The KII respondents were the informants who took part in the survey while, the project beneficiaries were part of the FGD and survey as well, as listed below.

**Table 1. Profile of KII Beneficiary-Respondents**

Interviewee	Years in the Service	Sex	Barangay
<i>Community Chairmen</i>			
Brgy. Chairman 1	10	Male	Angancasilian
Brgy. Chairman 2	11	Male	Catabayungan
Brgy. Chairman 3	12	Male	Cubag
<i>Barangay Health Workers</i>			
BHW 1	6	Female	Angancasilian
BHW 2	11	Female	Catabayungan
BHW 3	12	Female	Cubag

Meanwhile, 65% of the 56 barangay respondents (37 individuals), including Punong Barangays, BHWs, and other project beneficiaries, represented the barangay stakeholders in the research. Meanwhile, the beneficiary-respondents (except for Community Chairmen and Barangay Health Workers) were informed of their right to refuse participation and their consent to provide their data such as name and age in the survey forms provided, as presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Distribution of Beneficiary-Respondents**

Barangay	Number of Respondents
Angancasilian	14
Catabayungan	14
Cubag	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>

### Data Collection Instrument

To ensure efficient collection of data, the researcher used a survey questionnaire for the 37 project beneficiaries. The survey questionnaire was presented as follows: Part I – socio-demographic profile of the project beneficiaries; Part II – communication activities used in per phase of the project; Part III – the level of participation in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation phases; and Part IV – recommendations of the project beneficiaries which are presented in open-ended and close-ended questions. The design used in the study was a 4-point scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) for the interpretation of data. Statements that were used in the questionnaire were formulated and analyzed based on the typology of participation (passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation, and empowered participation) based on Mefalopulos (2008).

Secondly, key informant interview (KII) with the people in the community who have direct contributions and involvement in the project, particularly, the Punong Barangay and the Barangay Health Worker (BHW) was also conducted. On the other hand, FGD was composed of beneficiaries in every barangay to avoid comparing their responses. The purpose was to gather salient information to validate the responses gathered in the survey questionnaire.

### Data Gathering, Methods, and Sources

The researcher personally administered the survey questionnaire and conducted the KII and FGD among its identified respondents. Table 3 shows the sequence of the data-gathering procedure.

The secondary data, such as the approved proposal and terminal report, were also retrieved at the Department of Extension and Training Services (DETS) with permission from the Project Leader and the Director of the Extension. It served as the basis for enriching this research.

**Table 3. Sequence of Data Gathering Procedure**

Date	Venue	Research Activities	Respondents/Materials
February 9, 2019	Angancasilian, Catabayungan and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela	Coordinated the data gathering to the barangay chairmen	1 Barangay Chairman, 1 BHW, 14 Beneficiary-respondents
February 10, 2019 (Morning session)	Angancasilian, Cabagan, Isabela	Conducted guided survey questionnaire	1 Barangay Chairman, 1 BHW, 14 Beneficiary-respondents
February 10, 2019 (Afternoon session)	Angancasilian, Cabagan, Isabela	Conducted KII to Barangay Chairman and BHW followed by FGD. During the FGD other participants were hesitant to vocally share their insights but they answered the survey questionnaire administered to them.	1 Barangay Chairman, 1 BHW, 14 Beneficiary-respondents

February 11, 2019 (Morning session)	Catabayungan, Cabagan, Isabel	Conducted guided survey	1 Barangay Chairman, 1 BHW, 14 Beneficiary-respondents
February 11, 2019 (Afternoon session)	Catabayungan, Cabagan, Isabel	Conducted KII to Barangay Chairman and BHW followed by FGD. During the FGD other participants were hesitant to vocally share their insights but they answered the survey questionnaire administered to them. Conducted guided survey among BHW and other participants of the project. The researcher was not able to get the desired number of beneficiary-respondents. Others were busy at the farm at the time of the survey although the coordination was already made.	1 Barangay Chairman, 8 Beneficiary-respondents
February 12, 2019	Cubag, Cabagan, Isabel	Conducted guided survey interview and KII. The venue was not in the barangay because the Barangay Chairman was the ABC president and this was the only way the researcher could conduct the interview.	1 Barangay Chairman
February 15, 2019	Josefina Albano Gymnasium, Cabagan, Isabel		1 Barangay Chairman, 1 BHW, 14 Beneficiary-respondents

### Treatment of Data

The quantitative data was analyzed and computed using the weighted mean of each answer. For data interpretation, the computed values were 4-point Likert scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree) to provide a clear and simple dichotomy between opinions without needing a neutral midpoint (Nee & Yunus, 2020), while weighted mean and rank of statements on the level of participation in different phases of the project (planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation) of the respondents. After this, the results were analyzed to categorize the respondents' typology of participation such as passive participation, participation by consultation, functional participation, and empowered participation. Moreover, for the KII and FGD, the researcher developed open-ended questions to further explain and interpret the findings from the quantitative phase, and the answers were enumerated and analyzed using thematic approach. This is to allow new impressions and shape interpretation to conceptualize a participatory plan appropriate to the conduct of the extension project.

In addition, the mean, frequency counts, and percent values were used for the descriptive equivalent. The respondents' typology of participation in the implementation of the extension project in the barangay was measured using the following scales:

Scale	Descriptive Equivalent (DE)
3.35- 4.00	Strongly Agree (SA)
2.50 – 3.24	Agree (A)
1.75- 2.49	Disagree (D)
1.00 – 1.74	Strongly Disagree (SD)

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical measures were practically imposed in the conduct of this study. Before gathering data, respondents and key informants willingly approved and consented to participate in the study. There was no violation of their rights inflicted on the respondents. Objectives of the study were also explained and agreed by the respondents.

## Results and Discussion

### Level of Participation of Beneficiaries in the Planning Phase of the Project

Table 4 shows the statements formulated to determine the participation of the beneficiaries in the planning phase of the project. The statements are based on the typology of participation by Mefalopulos (2008) which states that participation may be passive, consultative, functional, and empowered.

**Table 4. Participation of Beneficiaries During the Planning Phase of the Extension Project**

Participation	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Rank
<b>Planning</b>			
<b>Passive Participation</b>			
S1. I was only informed to be one of the participants of the project.	1.92	D	5
S2. I was only informed that the project will be on medicinal and food plants but they did not consider my opinion about it.	2	D	4
<b>Participation by Consultation</b>			
S3. The implementers asked my opinion about the project but they did not include me in the decision-making.	3.57	SA	2
<b>Functional Participation</b>			
S4. There were discussions and analyses made between us and the implementers on what we wanted to achieve in the project.	3.05	A	3
<b>Empowered Participation</b>			
S5. I willingly and actively participated in the discussions of the project during the planning stage.	3.7	SA	1

Table 1 shows that the beneficiaries have empowered participation. While other beneficiaries disagree that they have only passive participation. This means to say that, beneficiaries participated in the different levels of the planning phase of the project. The Punong Barangays of the Angancasilian, Catabayungan, and Cubag, Cabagan, Isabela affirmed that they were involved in the planning phase of the project. Based on the studies conducted by Amina & Nguri (2022), the involvement of beneficiaries has a significant impact on project performance, ranging from 73.8% to 97.6%. This emphasizes the crucial role they play in ensuring that project objectives are met and sustained. Collectively, they shared that before the actual implementation of the project, ISU implementers gave a letter of consent followed by a dialogue with the barangay officials on how they were going to put up the barangay nursery. The Punong Barangay of Catabayungan and Cubag shared that the collaboration was supported by a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). Below are the statements of the punong barangays:

*Una, pumunta sila sa akin at nagbigay sila sa akin ng sulat na gusto nilang makipagtulungan sa amin. Tinanong nila ako kung may nursery kami, sabi ko hindi na active, kaya sabi ko kung gusto naming magtayo ulit basta kasama ang ISU para maturuan nga kami doon sa mga herbal na sinasabi nila sa amin. Tapos tinanggap ko, sakto noon na may pondo kami sa nursery at doon na nagsimula ang partnership naming ng ISU. (First, the ISU team gave me a letter about our possible collaboration. They asked me if we have a barangay nursery, I said it is not active anymore, but if ISU will assist us in the establishment, we are very willing to do partnership and we will handle our counterpart in terms of monetary and it started there). (Statement of Punong Barangay of Catabayungan)*

*Bago nagumpisa mam y project, nakibbidda labbi ira tu ikaya mi kanu y magkaroon tu barangay nursery. Kinagi gapa hoo mam ngay basta egga kamu kaduvvum mi. Y kinagi da mabba, y taga ISU kanu y mangiyawa tu memula basta egga y pammulam mi yari ta nagpaprovide kami mam tu gibaw, counterpart ng barangay, doon na po nagumpisa. (Before the project started, Ma'am, they talked to us if we want to establish our barangay nursery, I told them, "Yes, provided you will help us to put up one". They told us that, ISU will be assisting us and will give us planting materials as long we provide space where we could plant the medicinal plants, as counterpart of the barangay, it all started there). (Statement of the Punong Barangay of Angancasilian)*

*Minay ira di Ma'am Jane, Ma'am Karen, Sir Arsen bi tawe nakibbida anna inagalak ku bi yuri ira kagawad ku nagkaroon ng quorum. Nabbiridam mi tungkol lagu ta pamadday mi tu barangay nursery. Nagkaroon noon ng MOA between ISU and Cubag. Ang Counterpart ng Barangay ay space anna manpower. Open yari nursery ta Barangay nu sinni maya manga umay lamang manga. (The ISU faculty like Ma'am Jane, Ma'am Karen, and Sir Arsen visited us and asked for a dialogue, I called my Barangay Kagawads and there was quorum that time. They discussed about the collaboration of having a nursery in the barangay. We also signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the barangay and ISU. The counterpart of the barangay was space for the establishment of barangay nursery and manpower for maintenance. The nursery was open to all barangay residents, if anyone wants to get. (Statement of Punong Barangay of Cubag)*

Based on the statements of the barangay leaders, participation did occur at the grassroots level. As pointed out by Aga et al. (2017), the active engagement of project beneficiaries during the needs assessment and planning phases significantly enhances their behavioral intentions toward ensuring the project's sustainability. Another author, Mefalopulos (2008), supported this idea, stating that the failure of many development projects and programs can be attributed to their lack of involvement of local people in the decision-making process. Meanwhile, when people feel ownership over an object, they see it as an extension of themselves and take better care of it (Baer & Brown, 2012; Chung & Moon, 2011).

### **Level of Participation of Beneficiaries in the Implementation Phase of the Project**

Table 2 shows the statements formulated to determine the participation of the beneficiaries in the implementation phase of the project. To understand and improve participation levels in various contexts, it is important to analyze the different levels of participation (Dallimore, Hertenstein, & Platt, 2004).

**Table 5. Participation of Beneficiaries During the Implementation Phase of the Extension Project**

Participation	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Rank
<b>Implementation</b>			
<b>Passive Participation</b>			
S6. I listened to barangay nursery on medicinal and food plants aired through the radio just to finish the training course.	2.68	A	4
S7. I attended a training demonstration just to finish it.	2.84	A	3
<b>Participation by Consultation</b>			
S8. I listened to barangay nursery on medicinal and food plants aired through the radio and gave insights about the topic/s discussed.	3.22	A	1
S9. I attended lectures and demonstrations and gave insights about the topic/s discussed.	2.57	A	6
<b>Functional Participation</b>			
S10. We were encouraged by the resource speakers and implementers to ask questions and share our ideas on the topic discussed.	2.51	A	7
<b>Empowered Participation</b>			
S11. I willingly and actively participated in the discussions every session and was recognized by the resource person/s.	2.92	A	2

The data reveal that the beneficiary-respondents have participated by consultation, as it is ranked 1. This type of participation pertains to listening on the radio about the different topics on medicinal and food plants, aired over DWRA, the carrier station of the project located at CDCAS Building, ISU, Cabagan, Isabela. Effective implementation of agricultural education is crucial. There must be adequate provision of functional mass media facilities to meet the agricultural education needs of the stakeholders (Okonijo, 2003). Radio and television are widely recognized as effective

media for engaging the masses in discussions about technological knowledge (Das, 2021). On the contrary mass media communication (e.g. books, brochures, newspapers, radio) does not address acute individual problems of extension clients (Albreeht, 1989 as cited in Zwane, 2009). Nonetheless, based on the FGD conducted, the beneficiary-respondents were very much interested in the technology being promoted as stated by the following beneficiaries:

*Y Pinakamakasta tu kinnua da, yore mam asunto ta herbal uses ira, ta actual tu pangimula mi, nikagi da nu kunnasi pangiyosa na abbabbing ira maski dakal lalo na yore serpentina tu nuyawa da tu nimula mi, aru balo y pede na gamutang tu taki. (The good thing they did was, the medicine, how we are going to use it in our own home, they taught us how to use it in children and even in adults and the serpentina they gave us, we planted it, with this project. Now I know that there are many illnesed it can cure). (Beneficiary 1)*

*Aru mam natudduam mi mas ngana ta natural ira tu herbal ira tu mula. I Oregano, adde sangawe yari I usak ku nu magigag nga pati ana ku. (We learned many things, especially in the preparation of natural medicine, like oregano, I have been using it to cure my cough and even my children). (Beneficiary 2)*

*Adde sangawe mam egga lapa mula mi ira ta balay mi tu Oregano, Cerpentina. (Until now, Ma'am, we have existing planting materials like oregano and serpentina). (Beneficiary 3)*

*Nituddu da labbi nu kunnasi y fustu tu ammula anna anni yari ira I abono tu mepay tapenu makasta yari attalou na mula ira. Tapos sumunod ngana yari nu kunnasi y mappatuma tu herbal ira tu niyawa da gitta na serpentina, oregano, lemon grass tu adde sangawe ay kuak ku lapa ta balu mi (The ISU implementers first taught us how to plant the herbal medicines identified, after that they taught us the proper ratio of taking the medicinal plants like serpentina, oregano, and lemon grass which until now, I am doing it in our household). (Beneficiary 4)*

Still, it was revealed that beneficiary respondents have different levels of participation. This implies that the beneficiaries have a different awareness of the project. This coincides with the study of Gannapao (2020) which asserted that the more aware the beneficiaries are, the more they will participate in the program services. But then, the beneficiaries have their way of practicing what was being taught to them, especially if they found it useful to them, as revealed by the majority of beneficiaries during FGD. They even argued that they share one another as a community. Therefore, it is crucial for the beneficiaries to actively participate in the project by sharing their knowledge and experiences (Louwaars, 2002). This suggests that while community members are hesitant to participate in activities offered by outsiders, they have their own ways of incorporating these practices into their daily lives.

In addition, the researcher's observation during the FGD was that the participants were more vocal about sharing their experiences in the project with their neighborhood or seatmates.

## Level of Participation of Beneficiaries in the Monitoring and Evaluation Phase of the Project

Table 6 shows the statements formulated to determine the participation of the beneficiaries in the monitoring and evaluation phase of the project. According to Valentine et al. (2016), beneficiary involvement in monitoring and evaluating extension projects is essential for their success.

Six statements were identified in this research as possible participation by the beneficiaries during the monitoring and evaluation phase of the project. To do that, according to Valentine et al. (2016) and Dutta (2023), involving beneficiaries in the project's M&E, by allowing them to provide input, contributes to decision-making. Also, the evaluated project outcomes lead to better outcomes, thereby ensuring meeting of the community's actual needs and its sustainability.

**Table 6. Participation of Beneficiaries During the Monitoring and Evaluation Phase of the Extension Project**

Participation	Mean	Descriptive Equivalent	Rank
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation</b>			
<b>Passive Participation</b>			
S12. Implementers did not involve us in the monitoring and evaluation of the project.	2.89	A	4
S13. Project implementers only did the evaluation of the project.	2.86	A	5
<b>Participation by Consultation</b>			
S14. Implementers solicited feedback from us but did not consider it for improvement of the training sessions.	2.78	A	6
<b>Functional Participation</b>			
S15. Implementers gathered feedback to improve the lapses in the training for smooth implementation of the project.	3.14	A	2
<b>Empowered Participation</b>			
S16. Project implementers and participants worked hand-in-hand to resolve limitations observed in the implementation.	3.19	A	1
S17. Stakeholders and implementers willingly conducted the project evaluation and both agreed in the result of the project evaluation.	3	A	3

In like manner, according to Chipili (2009), monitoring is a continuous process that starts from the initiation through all the phases of the extension project. This is to keep track of the implementation. He also added that the implementers and participants should ask the following questions while the project is ongoing: Was the project implemented according to plan? Is the activity truly serving the people's needs? Is the community participation in the activity still good? What improvements can we make to make our performance better? Does it use local resources? And does it build skills for the future?

The results revealed that the beneficiaries have empowered participation in the project, although all of them only agreed on their participation in the typology of participation according to Mefalopulos (2008). The two basic reasons why the project only tended to achieve its objective were lack of participation and ineffective communication. On this research, it means that some beneficiaries need to be reinforced. This can be done by engaging the farmers to watch things, read, and find out how things work and how they can be better wondered (Torres, 2010). The design of the extension and communication setting is as important as the appropriate communication strategy itself. During the KII, the BHW revealed reasons why the project was not sustained as expected:

*Bilang parent leader ng 4Ps, sakang gapa nina da tu gitta na mangamful ta nursery. Kailangan iddam mi tu importansiya tapenu mapakinabangan ng taong barangay, yari y kurang tawe nu mittang. (As parent leader of 4Ps, I am in charge of taking care of the nursery. We have to put importance in taking care of the barangay nursery so that barangay constituents will benefit from it, that is one lacking here). (Beneficiary 1)*

*I tadday mam tu pakkurangang, yari balamang y disiplina na tolay, maski anni mam ikaya mu tu mangiyawa kasi y karwang tu tolay ay awang tu kooperasyon na maski anni ituddung tu kunte, siyempre mam kezziga mangamful tu tolay. (The lack of discipline is one thing I observed, even if you want to give something for their benefit if they do not have cooperation, it is hard). (Beneficiary 2)*

But this could be resolved according to Renfro (2004) if there is a strong and clear partnership between communities, stakeholders, and local municipalities. Furthermore, the participation of stakeholders in the design, operation, and maintenance of projects is now, more or less, accepted even in international circles. The benefits of participation include increased productivity, reduced conflicts, and increased involvement of the poor. This was corroborated by Vanessa and Gitahi (2023), Mukarurinda and Irechukwu (2023), Katerengabo et al. (2023) who stated that involving beneficiaries in all phases of the project enhances project performance, ownership, commitment, and post-project engagement, leading to long-term sustainability.

### **Conclusion and Future Works**

The empowered participation of individuals is a crucial element of achieving sustainability of an extension project. Encouraging beneficiary involvement in all project phases and providing opportunities to express their concerns can enhance overall participation levels.

The effective integration of participation and communication is essential. It is not just about engaging beneficiaries in the planning, implementation, and monitoring, and evaluation processes; it is also crucial to consistently use suitable communication tools and channels.

Furthermore, no attempts were made to critique or provide commentary on the projects' achievements, but an attempt was made to draw possible approaches on how to best implement an extension project such as medicinal and food plants in a participatory manner. The participation of the beneficiaries of the project resulted in empowerment during the planning, monitoring, and evaluation phases; however, there was less participation during the implementation phase due to the use of mediated

communication or the use of radio. This modality affected the level of participation of the beneficiary-respondents because of the lack of actual or face-to-face interaction among implementers and beneficiaries. Apart from interpersonal communication, it is recommended to utilize various other forms of communication activities. Vigilant monitoring is crucial for projects to successfully attain their objectives.

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