



Beyond the demonstration farm

A comparative case study about participation and adaptation within development aid

Kajsa Pettersson

Degree project/Independent project • 30 credits
Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Agriculture Programme - Rural Development
Uppsala 2026



Beyond the demonstration farm. A comparative case study about participation and adaptation within development aid

Bortom demonstrationsodlingen. En jämförande fallstudie om deltagande och anpassning inom utvecklingsprojekt.

Kajsa Pettersson

Supervisor:	Linda Engström, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU, Department of Urban and Rural Development
Examiner:	Gwendolyn Varley, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU, Department of Urban and Rural Development
Assistant examiner:	Malin Beckman, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU, Department of Urban and Rural Development
Credits:	30 credits
Level:	Second cycle, A2E
Course title:	Independent project in Rural Development, A2E - Agriculture
Course code:	EX1025
Programme/education:	Agriculture Programme - Rural Development
Course coordinating dept:	Department of Urban and Rural Development
Place of publication:	Uppsala
Year of publication:	2026
Cover picture:	Fields in steep slopes, Morogoro district. Photo: Kajsa Pettersson, 2026
Copyright:	All featured images are used with permission from the copyright owner.
Online publication:	https://stud.epsilon.slu.se
Keywords:	Development aid, participation, Tanzania, inclusion, agricultural development, adaptation

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development
Division of Rural Development

Abstract

The thesis studies how well Swedish-funded development aid programs are adapted to meet the needs and challenges of the local community in which they are active. Lack of adaptation to local conditions, needs, and challenges in development aid contributions can lead to a gap between what is needed and what is provided. By studying this gap and why it exists, we can move towards a fairer type of aid that addresses local needs and challenges, which will help create more long-term sustainability. The research is done by a comparative field study in Tanzania, where the Swedish-funded development aid project *Sustain Eco* has been active since 2022. The project has been implemented in two different regions, Rukwa and Morogoro, by two different implementing partners, SNV and AWF. Data have been collected through interviews with farmers in two selected villages, one in each region. The farmers have been asked if they know about the project, what they know about the project, and if they feel like the project is well-suited for their needs and challenges.

The results show that the implementing partners' level of local participation affects the extent to which they were able to adapt their project to local needs and challenges. The empirical material can be categorized into three main themes: the first being **when** in the process one is included. The results show that the local community was included when the project was already in the implementing phase, making it difficult to adapt to local conditions, needs and challenges. The second theme is about **who** gets included. Only a small group of people feel like they been included in the project and people who can read, write and work voluntarily are favoured. The third is about **in what way** the relationship between the implementing partners and the local community effect participation, revealing that some participants did not feel comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas. The thesis concludes that there are layers of power immersed in participatory practices that can't be simplified or forgotten. Otherwise, despite honest intentions, the work can instead reproduce already existing power relations and fail to benefit the one they set out to help.

Keywords: Development aid, participation, Tanzania, inclusion, agricultural development, adaptation

Table of contents

List of figures	6
Abbreviations	7
1. Introduction	8
1.1 Purpose and Research questions	9
1.2 Thesis outline	10
2. Background and previous research	11
2.1 How the study came to be	11
2.2 Swedish development aid in Tanzania	11
2.3 Sustain Eco	12
2.3.1 The actors	12
2.4 Government structure in Tanzania	14
2.5 The Rukwa and Morogoro regions	14
3. Methodology	16
3.1 Data collection	16
3.2 Limitations	17
3.2.1 Selection	17
3.2.2 Working with a translator	18
3.3 Data analysis	18
3.4 Reflexivity and ethics	19
3.4.1 Note on AI	19
4. Theoretical framework	20
4.1 Postcolonial theory	20
4.1.1 Trusteeship	21
4.2 Participatory development	21
4.2.1 Different types of participation	22
4.2.2 Power in participation	24
5. Empirical data	25
5.1 Empirical results Morogoro	25
5.1.1 Introduction to the selected village in Morogoro	25
5.1.2 The project's main activities in Morogoro	26
5.1.3 When	28
5.1.4 Who	28
5.1.5 In what way	31
5.2 Empirical results Rukwa	34
5.2.1 Introduction to the selected village in Rukwa	34
5.2.2 The project's main activities in Rukwa	34
5.2.3 When	35
5.3 Who	37
5.3.1 The excluded sub-village	38
5.3.2 In what way	38
6. Analysis and discussion	40
6.1 When	40
6.2 Who	42
6.2.1 Motivation to participate	42
6.2.2 Getting the information	43
6.2.3 Geographical boundaries	44
6.3 In what way	45
6.4 Differences and similarities between Rukwa and Morogoro	46
7. Conclusion	47

References	49
Popular science summary.....	52
Acknowledgments.....	53
Appendix 1 List of self-instructions	54

List of figures

Figure 1. Author's figure based on Arnstein's (1996) ladder of participation	23
Figure 2. Author's figure based on Pretty's (1995) typology pf participation	23

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
AWF	African Wildlife Foundation
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
Sida	The Swedish International Cooperation Agency
VEO	Village Executive Officer
WEO	Ward Executive Officer

1. Introduction

The objective of Swedish development cooperations is *"to create opportunities for people living in poverty and under oppression to improve their living conditions"* (Openaid 2020). However, research shows how developed aid cooperations often fails to reach the goals they set out to achieve (Lee 2007, Hajdu et al. 2012). One reason behind failed development aid is lack of adaptation to local conditions and challenges. For instance, Hajdu et al (2012) show that agricultural interventions in South Africa have failed to deliver the poverty reduction for smallholders they promised and explore the reasons why. By looking at two large-scale agricultural interventions in South Africa with a transdisciplinary approach, they conclude that a lack of responsiveness to local realities and social contexts led to a mismatch in what is needed and what is provided, causing the projects to fail. The interventions are met with resistance as they have not been formulated in a participatory way and do not fit the local context. Hajdu et al, explain how the power relations between project designers and smallholders make participation difficult. The local resistance is attributed by the implementers as local inability or laziness (Hajdu et al. 2012).

Participatory practises in development aid emerged from critics that claimed that normal development is characterised by Eurocentrism, positivism and top-downism (Mohan 2014). Progressive thinkers, development practitioners and activists voiced the need for greater public involvement in decision-making (Cornwall 2008). Similar to Hajdu et al (2012), Green (2008) highlights difficulties of participation by examining three large-scale participatory development processes carried out in Tanzania between 2003 and 2008. She explains how participatory practices have become mainstream and strategized across many different organizations and actors in development processes in Tanzania, but that their outcome does not justify the popularity of these costly and long processes. Green (2008) claims that despite efforts to engage citizens through participatory practices, it is far from evident that this has led to increased commitment and to the reduction of poverty (similar statements are made by Lange 2008 and Murray Li 2007).

Lang (2008) similarly explains how there is a widespread agreement amongst actors in development aid that power needs to be devolved to lower levels of government authority to improve democratisation and people's involvement. However, she states that despite donors' support to decentralisation, many donor-founded development interventions are implemented with weak or non-existent relations to local government structures. Further, she explains how there are two parallel trends in development work that both aim for the same thing, to deepen participation and local input. The first being strengthening local governance and the other being outsourcing development to actors such as NGOs. By analysing two Tanzanian development projects, she demonstrates how these two parallel structures come to hinder each other, she instead proposes a more integrated approach.

The previous research presented above shows that participatory practices or lack thereof affect the quality of donor-funded development aid and that the practice is far from simple. In focus of this study is a Sida-funded project called *Sustain Eco: Sustainability & Inclusion Strategy for Growth Corridors in Tanzania* (Openaid 2025b). The overall objective of the project is to “*foster ecosystem stewardship in government, business and local communities to equitably balance priorities for sustainability and growth*”. In the project's annual report, we can read how the activities should be inclusive and grounded in community needs (IUCN 2025). The project is implemented in two different areas in rural Tanzania, where this case study focuses on one selected village in one selected region in each area of implementation.

Participatory practices in Tanzania have previously been studied, but the case of Sustain Eco specifically has not. The reason this project was chosen for the study is that (i) the project is bound to a specific geographical area, which enhances the study's feasibility and (ii) it has an interesting comparison factor where it is implemented in two different regions with two different leading implementing partners. In comparing the two regions, we can try to understand what factors play a part in successfully adapting activities to local needs and challenges.

This is important to study as the problem of development projects commonly not meeting the goals they set out to achieve still exists, and it is therefore a question of solidarity towards the people affected. Donors and implementers need to know that what they do matters and do not go unnoticed as a way to further demand accountability. This brings us to the study's objective and research questions.

1.1 Purpose and Research questions

The objective of the study is to look at whether or how development aid projects are adapted to local conditions, needs, and challenges, in order to create fairer aid that actually benefits its intended beneficiaries. This is done by looking at how the Sustain Eco project is adapted to local people's needs and challenges regarding sustainable agricultural development and comparing this particular aspect in two selected villages in the two regions Rukwa and Morogoro in Tanzania. In comparing the two villages we can try to understand what factors play a part in successfully adjusting projects to local needs and challenges. During the fieldwork it became evident that the level and quality of local participation within the project effected the ability to adapt. This resulted in one overarching research question that is explored through three smaller case specific research questions, they are as followed.

1. Are development aid projects adapted to local conditions, needs and challenges?
 - a. How is the *Sustain Eco* project adapted to local people's needs and challenges?
 - i. How are the level and quality of local participation affecting the project's ability to adapt to local conditions, needs, and challenges?
 - ii. Does local adaptation differ in the two selected villages, if so how and why?

1.2 Thesis outline

The thesis begins with explaining why I came to study this topic and the specific case selected, followed by information about Swedish development aid in Tanzania. The background also covers information about the Sustain Eco project as well as information on the specific regions that have been studied. Chapter 3 "Methodology" explains how the field study has been conducted and how different methodology have been used to collect the data necessary to answer the presented research questions, as well as a reflection of reflexivity and selection. Next up is Chapter 4 "Theoretical framework" where the theoretical framework used to analyse the empirical material is presented. In Chapter 5 "Empirical data" the result from each selected village is presented to later be analysed in Chapter 6 "Analysis and discussion" where it's categorised in three main themes and reflected on using the presented theoretical framework. Finally, I make my final statements in chapter 7 "Conclusion".

2. Background and previous research

In this chapter I will present relevant background information including how I came to study this topic. I will present Swedish development aid history in Tanzania as well as give information on the Sustain Eco project, its actors and the geographical areas in which the project has been implemented.

2.1 How the study came to be

Local implementation and impact of top-down decision making have been key interests of mine during my studies of rural development. The aspect of power in development is to me important to study, especially in relation to post-colonial structures. Aid policy in relation to power and postcoloniality has been a big reason why I chose to study rural development in the first place. To deepen my knowledge, I did an internship at Sida (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) in the Africa department, the unit of West and Central Africa. I also wrote my bachelor's thesis about accountability within development aid. During my internship I encountered programme managers working with the bilateral strategy of Tanzania and the different contributions within the strategy.

2.2 Swedish development aid in Tanzania

Sweden has a long history of development aid in Tanzania and Tanganyika (In 1964, the newly decolonized Tanganyika and Zanzibar merged, thus creating Tanzania as we know it today) (EBA 2016). The cooperation dates back to the early 1960s, and between the years 1962 and 2013 Tanzania (and Tanganyika) was the largest recipient of Swedish bilateral aid, the aid amounted to approximately 7 billion USD, which equals 8.4 per cent of Sweden's total bilateral aid during that time. During this period, Sweden was Tanzania's third biggest donor of official development assistance (EBA 2016).

In 2025, the total aid from Sweden to Tanzania was 56.92 million SEK, distributed across 96 contributions of which 22.55 million SEK were distributed on 7 contributions focused on the agricultural sector (Openaid 2026a). However, in December 2025, the Swedish government announced that the bilateral aid to Tanzania, amongst other countries, will be phased out, and that all bilateral contributions shall be closed on the 31st of August 2026 at the latest (Sida 2025). What consequences this will bring is yet unknown, but I believe it is fair to assume it is close to impossible to close that many contributions in that amount of time in a responsible and sustainable way.

2.3 Sustain Eco

Sida is currently funding a project called Sustain Eco: Sustainability & Inclusion Strategy for Growth Corridors in Tanzania (Openaid 2025b). The overall objective of the project is to “foster ecosystem stewardship in government, business and local communities to equitably balance priorities for sustainability and growth” (Openaid 2025b).

IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources) is the leading organisation, with SNV (Netherlands development organisation) as the implementing partner in Rukwa and AWF (Africa Wildlife Foundation) as the implementing lead in Morogoro and Sida (the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency) as the only funding agency (Openaid, 2025b). The project has two development areas, where general environmental protection is the biggest (46.15 M SEK, 80.96%), and the other being agricultural development (10.05 M SEK, 19.04%) (Openaid 2025b). In this thesis, it is mainly the latter area that is being studied. The Sustain Eco project originated from a previous project called Sustain Africa, led by IUCN from 2014-2020. The goal was to catalyse climate-resilient development that would balance economic growth with ecosystem stewardship (IUCN 2025). IUCN then initiated a second phase of the Sustain Africa project, resulting in Sustain Eco and its sister program, Sustain Pro. Sustain Eco has an operational plan from 2022 to 2026 (IUCN 2025).

The Sustain Eco 2024 annual report stated that the project contributed to ecosystem stewardship and deepened landscape-level engagement by focusing on nature-based solutions, integrated landscape management and climate smart agricultural practices through demonstration plots and training. This is said to be done in a way that aligns local action with national policy and investment priorities (IUCN 2025). The project highlights three main themes: (i) strengthening coordination amongst governance structures to create a more inclusive and sustainable management of natural resources; (ii) Improving ecosystem health and generate inclusive business and livelihood opportunities by integrating landscape management and (iii) protect and restore ecosystems. The report explains how one important role of the project has been linking grassroots actions with science, policy and finance. They highlight the power of nature-based community led action in ecosystem restoration. The report explains how inclusivity is key in the project’s approach, and that it is important that restoration efforts are inclusive and grounded in community needs and aligned with national goals.

2.3.1 The actors

As indicated by the small share of budget devoted to agricultural activities, the project puts its main emphasis on nature conservation. This key focus on

conservation also becomes evident when reading about the three organisations and their objectives, which this section will show. It also becomes clear that they all put emphasis on inclusiveness and collaboration at community level. The term participation is vague and what it means will be further discussed in Chapter 4.2 “Participatory development” but in general participatory practices in development call for greater public involvement in decision-making, where inclusiveness is central and can be seen as a type of participatory practice. So, even statements that do not include the specific word participation can still advocate for participatory norms.

IUCN is a union of civil society organisations and of governments. It is the world’s largest environmental network and has been active for over 75 years (IUCN n.d.). They state that their mission is to “Influence, encourage and assist societies to conserve the integrity and diversity of nature and ensure that any use of natural resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable” (IUCN n.d.).

SNV is a global development partner with the vision “A world where across every society all people live with dignity and have equitable opportunities to thrive sustainably” (SNV n.d.). They state that to achieve this vision, transformation is needed in agri-food, energy, and water systems. They state that by being adaptable and tailor their approaches to different contexts, they can contribute to impact at scale, resulting in more equitable lives for all (SNV n.d.).

AWF is an international conservation organisation founded in 1961. On their website they state that “Our vision is of an Africa where sustainable development includes thriving wildlife and wild lands as a cultural and economic asset for Africa’s future generations” (AWF n.d.). They state that the foundation brings a “uniquely African vision that puts people at the center of conservation and delivers sustainable solutions at the intersection of conservation and development” (AWF n.d.)

Sida is the Swedish government agency for international development and cooperation. On their website we can read how they are “working to create better living conditions for people living in poverty and under oppression around the world” (Sida n.d.). The activities done by Sida are funded through Swedish tax revenue (Sida n.d.).

After reading the projects 2024 annual report and information about the actors on their websites we can see how they all highlight the importance of inclusivity and

traditional knowledge. AWF writes about how they value inclusivity and how they believe that inviting diversity into partnership is the only way to achieve their vision (AWF n.d.). Another example is when IUCN states that:

Working with many partners and supporters, IUCN implements a large and diverse portfolio of conservation projects worldwide. These projects combine the latest science with traditional knowledge of local communities to work to reverse habitat loss, restore ecosystems and improve people's well-being (IUCN n.d.).

On their website SNV explain how they are deeply rooted in the countries they work in and how they recognise that change must be locally led and how sensitivity to power dynamics and local context is crucial.

...we facilitate inclusive and collaborative processes at different levels – linking needs to opportunities, delivering outcomes and enabling conditions for impact. We work with a wider set of system actors, blending their and our own capacities, knowledge and innovations to craft approaches that catalyse change. We see this as an iterative process, in which we pursue multiple options, and throughout which we reflect, learn and adapt together with our partners (SNV n.d.)

This is relevant as we conclude that who, when and how people in the selected villages are included plays a big role in how well the project succeeds in meeting the local communities' needs and challenges.

2.4 Government structure in Tanzania

Tanzania is divided into regions, which in turn are divided into districts. The districts are then divided into divisions and wards (Shivji 2002). In a ward, there is a Ward Executive Officer (WEO) who is appointed by the district council. A ward is in turn made up by multiple villages. At the village level, there are two major organs of governance, village council (VC) and village assembly (VA). The village assembly elects the village council, which is led by an elected village chairman. The chairman is assisted by an appointed Village Executive Officer (VEO). In turn, the village can be divided into sub-villages where the sub-village residents elect a sub-village chairman (Shivji 2002). I have visited one village in each of the regions, Rukwa and Morogoro. I have chosen not to include the name of the village or ward to further anonymize my interviewees.

2.5 The Rukwa and Morogoro regions

The Sustain Eco project refers to the area in which they have been active as the Kilombero and Sumbawanga landscapes (IUCN 2025). These landscapes include four different regions. The Kilombero landscape includes the Kilosa and Morogoro regions and the Sumbawanga landscape includes the Rukwa and Katavi regions.

For my study I visited one selected village in Morogoro and Rukwa due to reasons explained in 3.2.1 “Selection”.

In the Sustain Eco annual report 2024 the Kilombero landscape is described as a major conservation area with multiple reserves as well as an area known for high agricultural productivity and biodiversity (IUCN 2025). The report also highlights that the area is home to the Kilombero Valley Floodplains, one of the largest wetlands in Africa comprised of many rivers and seasonally flooded marshes and swamps (Dinesen 2016). It becomes evident both in the report and during my time in the village that the village’s closeness to water sources is one big reason why the project is in this area. The project aims to improve downstream health, by implementing climate-smart agriculture and improved resource management upstream in the villages (IUCN 2025). Approximately 3.2 million people lived in Morogoro in 2022. The population is predominantly rural with 79.6 percent living in rural areas. Most people work with agriculture (70.8% of people age 15 and above) (The United Republic of Tanzania et al 2024a).

In the Sustain Eco annual report from 2024 the Sumbawanga landscape is describes as a biodiverse region spanning between lake Rukwa and Tanganyika (IUCN 2025). Similarly to Kilombero, the water sources in Sumbawanga are a major reason why the area was picked for the project. Approximately 1.5 million people lived in Rukwa in 2022 (The United Republic of Tanzania et al 2024b) and the population is predominantly rural with 79.6 percent living in rural areas. Most people work in the agricultural sector (74.6% of people age 15 and above) (The United Republic of Tanzania et al 2024b).

3. Methodology

To answer the research questions, we need to know what needs and challenges the local community in each village faces, as well as what activities the Sustain Eco project has provided, and the alignment between them. We also need to know if the local communities have been able to influence the focus of the project to better fit their needs and challenges. The thesis is a comparative case study where the effects of the Sustain Eco project in the selected villages are being researched through semi-structured interviews. A case study is suitable for the thesis as the aim is to try to understand the adaptation to local needs and challenges in a specific project within a defined geographic area (our case).

Case study is a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson & McCartan 2016, page 150)

In case studies the use of a theory is central for generalising the study and make it relevant beyond the specific case, this is what Yin (2018) calls analytic generalisation. It is important to differentiate between analytic generalisation and statistical generalisation. Yin (2008) explains how case studies cannot be statistically generalised as a case is not a sampling unit and is far too small.

Rather than thinking about your case(s) as a sample, you should think of your case study as the opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles (Yin 2018, page 79)

Furthermore, a case study is a strategy for doing research rather than a method (Robson & McCartan 2016). The method used in the thesis is semi-structured interviews.

3.1 Data collection

To collect this data I used qualitative interviewing, and more specifically, semi-structured interviewing. 46 interviews were conducted in total, 23 interviews in each village. The people being interviewed were mainly farmers but also village leaders. In qualitative interviewing, there is a large interest in the interviewees' own perspectives and points of view (Bryman 2012). As I needed the local participants' perceptions of their needs and challenges, and their experience working with the project, this method was well suited. It gave me room to adapt my question in different situations, as qualitative interviews tend to be flexible (Bryman 2012). I used an interview guide with open questions which gave the interviewees a lot of leeway in how to reply, aligning with Bryman's (2012) description of semi-structured interviews.

3.2 Limitations

My work is limited to one specific project (Sustain Eco) and two specific villages within this project (one in each area the project has been implemented). Many different factors limit a master thesis, two major ones being time and money. The thesis was written in a set time frame, and the field work was conducted under two months. A lot of time was needed for travel within the country and managing different bureaucratic processes to allow me to do the research. This played a role in the amount of time spent in the villages. In the following chapter, I will discuss other factors that limited the thesis such as selection of villages, interviewees and methods. I will also reflect on my own biases and effects of working with a translator.

3.2.1 Selection

When the specific case was chosen, I contacted the implementing partners to get more information about where specifically they had been active and in which areas they had focused on activities regarding agriculture. Both implementing partners had the opportunity to recommend villages to me based on agricultural focuses, accessibility during the rainy season, and available accommodation. Because the implementing partner recommended the villages to me, it is fair to assume that the selected villages are ones where the project has been more successful. However, it was necessary, as I did not have time to visit multiple villages and make my own assessment. It was important that both implementing partners got the same opportunity so that the comparison would still be fair.

When we first arrived in the Morogoro village, we got help from people that were well involved with the project and village leaders in finding people to interview. However, we quickly realised that in doing so we mostly got to meet with people who in one way or other had taken part in the project. To get a fairer representation, we instead opted to find interviewees with the help of friends we met in the village. We were conscious of our selection and informed our friends that we wanted to meet people from every sub-village, men and women, and from all different ages.

In the second village in Rukwa, it was a bit different, we started by meeting village leaders like in the first village. However, we opted to get help finding interviewees from the sub-village leaders. In Rukwa, the sub-village leaders were not as aligned with the project, and the selection they helped us with was much more randomised, as it was not limited to people involved with the project. We gave the same instructions as in Morogoro that we wanted diversity in age and gender and people from all sub-villages.

3.2.2 Working with a translator

In Tanzania, the official language is Swahili, so, I have been working with a translator during my field work. My translator has a lot of experience assisting researchers and students, translating from Swahili to English. He was recommended to me by my supervisor. Before starting the field-work, my translator and I had a meeting where we discussed what was of interest for the study and the meaning behind the terminology I used. I explained the topic and why I wanted to research it. We went through the interview guide, discussing each question and what was important to bring forth so that as little as possible would be lost in translation, as English is neither of our first languages. We also had a follow-up meeting after our first set of interviews, tweaking questions to better reflect what we meant and needed. Working with a translator was beneficial for my analysis as I had someone to discuss with who knew the material well. It was also beneficial as we could discuss and confirm that we understood the material the same way, which further legitimised the data. However, not knowing the language made understanding subtle implications and contexts more difficult.

The quotes from interviews presented in Chapter 5 “Empirical data” are transcribed from the recordings done in the field, which means that the translation of the quotes is the direct translation given to me in the field. These translations are done quickly, which makes it harder to guarantee a correct quotation.

3.3 Data analysis

Most of the interviews were recorded. The interviewees were informed about how the recordings would be used, that they would not be shared with anyone and deleted after the research was finished. The recordings allowed me to go back while analysing my material. To conduct my analysis, I used thematic coding as described by Robson & McCartan (2016). It starts with familiarising yourself with the data which leads into generating the initial codes, these codes can then be grouped together in themes, which then can create a thematic network and lastly making comparison between different aspects of the data, interpreting patterns and so on (Robson & McCartan 2016). Analysis should be involved in early stages of the research, from the start of data collection the researcher should note down and be on the lookout for themes (Robson & McCartan 2016). I did most of my thematic coding while in the field through field notes and discussion with my translator.

3.4 Reflexivity and ethics

Qualitative research is interpretative, which makes it important for the researcher to reflect on how past experiences shape interpretation and affects the results of the study (Creswell 2018). The way I came to study this topic and my previous experiences are already presented under Chapter 2.1 "How the study came to be" however, in this chapter I present other possible factors that shape my interpretation. One big one being that I have never been to Tanzania before, here my translator helped me a lot, not only with the language but also with cultural differences and interpretations.

When deciding on my thesis topic, I was hesitant at first to do this field study, not because I don't believe the topic to be important or interesting, but because I did not want to do more harm than good. What I mean by this is that my sole presence in the villages can stir up emotions and expectations. I walk around with my notebook and my tape recorder, asking questions, and naturally, people start to wonder or assume what my purpose is. I stumbled across an example of what can happen when people visit who are unknown to villagers; when the implementing partners first came to one of the villages, they spoke to the village leaders, but the villagers did not know who they were. The implementing partners started to investigate the areas in which they were interested (the lake and the forest), and because of this, the villagers assumed that their lake and forest had been sold to these people.

To avoid this problem as much as possible we started our work by introducing ourselves to village leaders. Moreover, I started each interview by explaining who I was, my reasons for being there, and why I wanted to talk to them. I repeated multiple times that I was not a part of the project nor the government. I showed pictures of my home, my university, and my family and I explained that I am just a student and that my work will not bring any direct change to the village, but that I will show my results to the implementing partners. I explained that participation was completely voluntary and what that meant. As inspiration on how to present myself to my interviewees, I have used Robson & McCartan's (2016) list of self-instructions (see Appendix 1).

3.4.1 Note on AI

Generative AI has not been used to produce any material in this thesis; however, AI tools have been used to check spelling and grammar in parts of the thesis.

4. Theoretical framework

The aim of the study has been to examine how development aid projects are adapted to meet local needs and challenges. As I presented in Chapter 1 “Introduction” a lack of adaptation to local needs and context is a problem in development aid. To help me analyse and find themes within my empirical results, I have used postcolonial theory and critical analysis of participatory approaches in development aid. Postcolonial theory is mostly used in this thesis to set the scene in which modern development aid is acting, and as a way to lead us into participatory development. However, it will also be applied to understand which kind of knowledge is valued by the implementing NGO and through the use of trusteeship as a way to analyse the relations between individuals in the local community and the implementing partners.

Participatory development and aspects of power in participation became relevant after I started analysing my empirical results, where my three themes of when, who, and in what way started to form. All three themes fall under the category of participation, and it is used to understand the implementing partners ability to adapt to local needs and challenges. In the project plan and the implementing partners' description they claim to be inclusive and participatory. However, as will be further discussed below, the concept of participatory development, like postcolonial theory, is very broad and can be vague. The following section is a short historical background on the two frameworks and how they are used and understood in this thesis.

4.1 Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory is difficult to define, one reason being that it is not clear if colonialism is relegated to the past (McEwan 2014). However, in broad terms, postcolonial theory sets out to explain and criticise the material and discursive impact of colonialism that still lingers today (McEwan 2008). Postcolonial theory criticises and highlights how the world view, dominant discourses and values are Eurocentric (McEwan 2014). Further McEwan (2014) explains how what is recognised as knowledge has been and still is, to a large extent, produced and controlled in the West. In relation to development, postcolonial theory highlights how what is seen as development is rooted in colonial discourse where the north is seen as advanced and progressive and the south as backward (McEwan 2014). An author with great influence in this field is Said (1997). Said (1997) explains how the west has created the images of “the other” and taken control over its representation, which further cements that values and the authority of knowledge and therefore also power is controlled in the west (Said 1997).

This power translates in the development sector where certain forms of knowledge are dominant, and others excluded. Postcolonial theory questions who are defining the development concern, how power relationships shape priorities and which voices are excluded as a result (McEwan 2014). They attempt to overcome inequality by opening spaces for the enactment of agency by non-Western peoples (McEwan 2014). This brings us to our next concept Trusteeship.

4.1.1 Trusteeship

Li (2007) defines trusteeship in development aid as “the intent which is expressed, by one source of agency, to develop the capacities of another” (Li 2007, page 4). Li (2007) explains how the aim of trusteeship is not to dominate others but instead to enhance and direct their capacity for action. In our case the implementing partners are the trustees in the recipient villages. And as Li (2007) states the position of trustee is defined by the claim to know what is best for someone else. Li (2007) uses trusteeship to show the relationship between trustees and the local community and how it shapes the way local communities act as it makes certain courses of action easier and others more difficult. I argue that the role of trusteeship also creates a dynamic where the local community no longer can participate on equal ground as the trustees have already declared they know what's best. It is not only the implementing partners shaping this relationship, but also a power dynamic set-in post-colonial values and unequal distribution of power.

4.2 Participatory development

Since the 1980s participatory practices have grown to be more conventional and generally accepted in development aid (Mohan 2014). Robert Chambers was influential in the field claiming that putting the last first is necessary for rural development (Chambers 1997).

Participation is a very mouldable concept that in broad terms basically can mean anything that involves people (Cornwall 2008). Cornwall claims that the vagueness about what participation means may have helped public involvement become more mainstream; however, she, claims that more clarity and specificity is needed if it is to realise its democratizing promise. Pretty (1995) explains how there is a long history of participation in agricultural development, and how many different types of organisations try to include people in some aspect of planning or implementing. Voicing the reason behind participatory practices is important for its potential (ab)uses and impacts (Mohan 2014). Mohan (2014) explains that from a democratic perspective simply being able to participate is a major achievement, but for people who are poor their lack of resources means that any participatory process must yield tangible benefits.

Although participation is generally deemed a good thing, many argue that a lack of responsiveness to power relations and insufficient consideration of the complexity of local structures limits the potential for empowerment through participation. Critics of participatory development are disappointed about the shallow nature of the participation that often is achieved. One reason is a far too optimistic view on civil society (Molenaers and Robrecht 2009). Cleaver (1999) explains that despite the high regard for participatory practices there is little evidence of long-term effectiveness in improving conditions of the poor. Using concepts as eurocentrism derived from postcolonial studies Mohan (2006) claims that participatory research methods tend to re-inscribe relations of authority between the outside facilitator and the grassroots.

4.2.1 Different types of participation

As Cornwall (2008) states, participation can vary a lot between different actors and situations. To try to show different types of participation and to highlight that participation by default is not necessarily always a good thing I will use Pretty's (1995) descriptions of different typology of participation and Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation. I have chosen to include both since they speak to different results within the empirical data.

Arnstein (1969) explains that few would argue against participation in development. However, she explains how there is a critical difference between participating and having real power or participating without power, the latter being an empty and frustrating process for those involved. To help highlight this dynamic Arnstein presents eight levels of participation where the higher up you go the more actual power is given to the citizens involved. The eight steps on the ladder are categorised in three degrees of participation: no participation, tokenism and citizen power (see figure 1).

8. Citizen Control	Citizen power
7. Delegated Power	
6. Partnership	
5. Consultation	Tokenism
4. Informing	
3. Placation	

2. Therapy	Non Participation
1. Manipulation	

Figure 1. Author's figure based on Arnstein's (1996) ladder of participation

Similarly, Pretty (1995) argues that the many ways development organisations such as NGOs interpret and use the term participation can be categorised in seven different types, ranging from manipulative and passive participation to self-mobilisation. Pretty (1995) explains how types one to four does often not lead to any positive lasting effect on people's lives. Pretty (1995) argues that the term participation should not be allowed without clarification on what type of participation

Typology	Characteristics of each type
1. Manipulative participation	Participation is simply a pretence, with "people's" representatives on official boards but who are unelected and have no power.
2. Passive participation	People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. It involves unilateral announcements by an administration or project management without any listening to people's responses. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
3. Participation by consultation	People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. External agents define problems and information gathering processes, and so control analysis. Such a consultative process does not concede any share in decision making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
4. Participation for material incentives	People participate by contributing resources, for example, labor, in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Farmers may provide the fields and labor, but are involved in neither experimentation nor the process of learning. It is very common to see this called participation, yet people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.
5. Functional participation	Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve project goals, especially reduced costs. People may participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives related to the project. Such involvement may be interactive and involve shared decision making, but tends to arise only after major decisions have already been made by external agents. At worst, local people may still only be coopted to serve external goals.
6. Interactive participation	People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Participation is seen as a right, not just the means to achieve project goals. The process involves interdisciplinary methodologies that seek multiple perspectives and make use of systemic and structured learning processes. As groups take control over local decisions and determine how available resources are used, so they have a stake in maintaining structures or practices.
7. Self-mobilization	People participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used. Self-mobilization can spread if governments and NGOs provide an enabling framework of support. Such self-initiated mobilization may or may not challenge existing distributions of wealth and power.

Figure 2. Author's figure based on Pretty's (1995) typology of participation

4.2.2 Power in participation

I use the term power throughout this thesis, in relation to postcolonial structures and in relation to participation. Some aspects of power in relation to knowledge and eurocentrism have already been discussed. There are power relations in many steps that need to be taken into consideration, such as between implementing partner and financiers, implementing partner and the local community, and power structures within the local community, all affecting the way people can participate. In my analysis we mostly see examples of power relations between the implementing partners and the local community but also power relations within the local community. Gaventa (2006) explains how the use of participation by powerful actors in development can hide power dynamics. The use of language such as shared ownership or partnership can give the impression of an equal playing field but hides inequalities of resources and power (Gaventa 2006).

5. Empirical data

In this chapter, I will present the results from the field study. I spent two weeks in each village, first in the Morogoro region, from the fifth of February to the twenty-first, and then in the Rukwa region from the twenty-sixth of February until the twelfth of March, visiting one selected village in each region. Due to the extensive number of interviews (twenty-three in each village), I am unable to present what each interviewee said, instead I will use storytelling to present key themes that were mentioned by many of the interviewees in each village. I have chosen to first present my findings from the selected village in Morogoro (where AWF is the implementing partner), followed by the results from the selected village in Rukwa (where SNV is the implementing partner). A more detailed explanation of why these specific villages were selected, and the impact of the implementing partners being present in the selection process can be found under Chapter 3.2.1 “Selection”.

The results from each village are presented using the same subheadings, which makes it easier to compare the results. The sub-headings are based on the main activities implemented by the project and the three key themes: **when**, **who**, and **in what way**. The themes are found in both villages, this is mentioned and highlighted throughout the results. However, analysis and empirical results are kept separate in this thesis, which means that the implications of the presented findings and how they can be explained using the theoretical framework will be discussed in Chapter 6 “Analysis”. The focus in this chapter is simply presenting the data that built the key themes. Some stories are kept under one theme, even if I find them relevant for several, the themes are not completely parallel, they intertwine and affect each other.

5.1 Empirical results Morogoro

5.1.1 Introduction to the selected village in Morogoro

The selected village in Morogoro is in the Kilosa district within a ward comprising three villages. The village is located high up in the mountains and is rather isolated, even from the other two villages in the ward. There are six sub-villages within the selected village. The six sub-villages are also far apart, scattered throughout the mountains. People in the village depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Common crops include beans, maize, bananas and sweet potatoes. Most of the land being cultivated is on steep slopes. There are streams of water running through the village, going down to the valley below. The valley is home to many farms, including large-scale agricultural investments.

The roads leading up to the village are in bad condition. Road work was being done on the main road from down the valley up to the sub-village I call main, however, roads reaching the other sub-villages are in bad condition and are not being improved. It is not possible to go by car, and they are not reachable during rain, even on a motorbike. We went to the village and all the different sub-villages using a motorbike, walking occasionally when it was too difficult to manoeuvre the motorbike with passengers, and had to cancel if it was raining. Our driver/drivers were very experienced riding in these conditions, living in the village and working as drivers as their main job, and even then, it was far from a smooth ride. When villagers were asked what the main struggles of the village were, the majority mentioned the roads.

5.1.2 The project's main activities in Morogoro

In this chapter, I will present our initial introduction to the village in Morogoro and the project's main activities to give the reader a better understanding of what has been implemented.

When we first came to the village, we met with the project's local representative. He was very enthusiastic and optimistic about the project. He showed us around the sub-village he lived in. I will refer to this sub-village as the main sub-village simply because it's where the institutions were located, such as the schools, the church, and the village office. We were introduced to village leaders, villagers responsible for demonstration farms, and engaged teachers. All were very well informed and engaged with the project. This gave the impression that everyone was very engaged and well-informed about the project, we later learned that this was not the case.

We were shown around and saw the school, the church, and the demonstration areas. We were told that the main objective of the project was environmental conservation, where one of the main goals was to minimise soil erosion. This was done by advocating farmers to farm using terraces, implementing more agroforestry by distributing seedlings to farmers, urging them to plant these in their farms, and introducing new sorts of income in the form of keeping fish, harvesting honey, and planting fruit trees in an attempt to make villagers less dependent on activities that cause a lot of soil erosion, such as bean farming in the steep slopes.

The local representative explained that one of the main activities has been farming education, using farming leaders. He told us that the farming leaders are local representatives chosen by the villagers that got education from AWF on sustainable farming. The idea was then for these farming leaders to spread their knowledge to the others in the village.

They decided that we will have these farmers who be leading others, four from each village, we have three villages in the ward, so in total we were twelve. After having this number off farming leaders, they took us to the general village meeting so that they could also accept us. And from there they (the farming leaders) got training, then they came back to continue with their job, and I was among those farming leaders (Local representative, interview, 10/2-26)

One thing the project advocated for was farming using terraces to stop soil erosion and to keep the water source that goes through the village clean. However, after speaking to residents in all six sub-villages, most people we talked to had not changed their farming activities because of the project. Some already used terrace farming, others told us that it was too expensive to implement. The reason why terrace farming is good was well known to many, knowledge they had even before the project. Many people did not know about this project activity at all, as we see examples of in the next Chapter 5.1.4 “Who”.

Another main activity that was presented to us on our first couple of days in the village was introducing fishponds as an alternative source of income. It was explained to us that the fishponds were something that some villagers were already doing before the project, but in a way that wasn't very sustainable since they did not keep water very well and needed to be refilled often. The project created two demonstration ponds, one by the church and one by the primary school. The goal was to show and educate people on how to make more sustainable fishponds. We met multiple people who were inspired by the project, and dug fishponds, but explained how their ponds were not like the ones made in the demonstration areas, due to them being too expensive to make. Others began to make their ponds, but had to pause due to a lack of finances.

I started this dam myself, but I ended there because I used the money I had to construct it then the money ended, I am waiting again to get money then I will finish it (Villager in Morogoro, interview, 7/2-26)

Another activity the local representative told us about was introducing beehives to institutions such as the primary schools. A special beekeeping group had also been created, and farmers were encouraged to keep beehives in their nearby forest. The machinery necessary to process the honey was kept in the main sub-village and was free for everyone to use. Out of the 23 interviewees, only two told us and or showed us that they had implemented beehives.

The third and most well-known activity was planting trees. Many people told us that this was the only thing they knew about the project. AWF came and distributed

seedlings to villagers and encouraged institutions to start nurseries to produce even more seedlings. Most people told us that they were mainly distributing fruit trees, though some also mentioned that they had received timber trees.

The last big activity that the well-informed group of people told us about was the revival of different village groups that previously existed but had not been active in a while. The two main ones being the environmental group and the village land use committee that took part in creating a land use plan. While meeting villagers many knew about the land use plan, as many had been asked to move their farms further away from the water sources. They had also seen signs put out by the project announcing what certain areas of land should be used for.

5.1.3 When

Most of the interviewees explained that the project was announced to them during the implementation phase and that there was no opportunity to influence it during the planning phase. For most people, the project was already decided on when they first heard about it (if they had heard about it), and they got informed rather than asked.

Some participants told us that this was problematic as it resulted in mistakes that easily could have been avoided. One of the teachers working with the project mentioned that many of the trees that were planted around the secondary school died due to it being too dry. The children, while in school, had to travel far to collect water for the trees. He explained that there could have been a better solution, and that it would have been beneficial to ask what type of trees would have been best suited for the local climate. He also explained that he did tell AWF about the problem regarding water and said that the school needed a well, which AWF agreed on, but never provided. Furthermore, the teacher explained that supplies such as gumboots and more waterpipes would have been necessary for the school and the kids to implement the project in a good way.

5.1.4 Who

Some of the project's activities were more well-known than others. We could clearly see a difference in how well-known the project's activities were to different people when we spoke to villagers outside of the very well-informed groups we met in the beginning. Village leaders were very optimistic about the project, stating that it was well-received and that people had been able to participate and receive information about the project as it was announced in the church, as well as at village meetings. However, both of these types of announcements were done in the main sub-village, and as explained by many interviewees, the roads are in a very bad

condition, and the sub-villages are scattered far away from each other. This made it difficult for some to participate. Roads are mentioned by the majority as one of the main challenges of the village.

When we visited farmers without any particular role within the project, we did not meet the same enthusiasm. Many of the interviewees did not know at first what project I was asking about, especially in sub-villages other than the main one. After a little bit of explanation, most but not all of the interviewees knew about the planting trees part of the project. To many, collecting and planting the distributed trees was the only way they had participated in the project. When asked if they knew why they were given trees, some explained that it was for environmental reasons. Some interviewees already knew about the environmental benefits of planting trees on their farms, and others told us they learned this from the project. However, most told us that the project had not made a great difference in their lives, some were hopeful that it might once the trees bear fruit.

After our initial introduction to the village and the project, we met with the owner of a small business that we happened to pass. This was our first interaction with someone who did not have a particular role within the project nor a leading position in the village, and as mentioned above, that played a huge part in how well-informed and included villagers were within the project. We were also not introduced by any leaders or project representatives, like we were with the well-informed people we met before. The business owner informed us that they were not involved in the project and simply saw people passing without knowing who they were or why they were there.

It's the same group of people who have been informing each other, like they are just passing us here, going there, and there, we don't know what's going on (Small business owner, interview, 10/2-26)

The business owner explained how she heard about the project from the church. However, she only knew about the fishponds part of the project and explained to us that they have fishponds at the church and by the primary school. When I asked if this was beneficial to her in any way, she told me that she was not sure if or how she would benefit. When I asked about what the biggest challenges are in the village, many interviewees, including the business owner, mentioned a lack of education on modern farming, as well as the roads. She explained how she knows that there are more modern ways of farming, but that the people in the village do not have access to them.

We are facing a lot of challenges during farming. We know that there are modern ways of farming, but we don't have access to that modern way of farming. We need to have an expert who will show us this is the way of farming in a modern way. But we don't have such kind of education, so we need to have such kind of education. (Small business owner, interview, 10/2-26)

This need seemed to match the project's initiative of educating farming leaders, as I mentioned earlier. However, she informed us that she had not seen any effort to educate farmers. Her friend joined the conversation, and they discussed the topic with each other. They told us that there was an announcement by the village chairman in 2024 saying that modern farming would be introduced, but that it never happened. They explained that it is common to get different activities announced that are later never implemented, they explained how this is very frustrating.

As we met with engaged teachers the day before, I was curious to know if the women noticed any activities in school, as both had children, one in secondary and the other in primary school. They told us that the children had mentioned that the school had made a fishpond and beehives. The children had not brought home any seedlings or mentioned planting trees. When asked if the children had engaged with the project in any way, the women told us that they had been used as labour in the construction of the pond.

They used them to dig the pond. They just used them as labour (Small business owner and friend, interview, 10/2-26)

It is interesting to see that an activity that was probably planned to work as participatory and inclusive can instead be received as exploitative. The ladies told us that if a project like Sustain Eco wants to improve agricultural practices in a way that includes the community, they would need to announce it to everyone. They explained that they feel that the project was only discussed within a small group and that it is always the same group of people who get this type of information.

So first they have to announce to everyone, call a meeting, and everyone need to know there is meeting, this meeting should be done on Sunday. Everyone will attend, so that they can know what is going on, otherwise these people have been doing their things on their own in the offices there, that's why we don't know what is going on. (Small business owner, interview, 10/2-26)

I came across another example of when the agenda of the project seemed to match with the needs and interests of the villagers but failed to reach the ones expressing the need when visiting one of the more faraway sub-villages. I met with a lady who was very interested in climate conservation. She reminded me of the lady with the

business, as she described the same needs, saying that the village needs agricultural education. She had heard about the project when in church. She told us that they had informed them about the importance of climate conservation and told them that they should farm using terraces. She took this to heart, and she and her husband began making terraces. A difficult task that takes a lot of time and effort. She also told us that she had to move her farm due to the restrictions on farming close to the water sources. When asked if she was feeling frustrated for having to move, she simply answered that she understood why she was moving, it was for a greater cause.

Many of the more included and well-informed interviewees, such as the local representative and village leaders, mentioned that one of the project's biggest challenges was getting villagers to participate.

They have been announcing, I have seen leaders try a lot to announce different meetings, but the turnout is not good, we always have few people attending the meetings. (Villager in Morogoro, interview, 16/02-26).

After visiting all sub-villages and realizing that many informants first don't know the project, I returned to the village leaders and in an interview with one of them, I asked why he thought this was. He responded that I must be mistaken and that everyone knows this project, and it must have been the way I pronounced it that resulted in the lack of knowledge.

5.1.5 In what way

Many Interviewees had ideas on how the project could improve, but many were reluctant to tell the implementing partners. The owner of the demonstration farm told us that out of the trees that the project distributed, the most sought after and wanted were the avocado trees. The reason for this was that the villagers believed the avocado trees would produce the most yield. However, she explained how there were not enough avocado trees. The lack of the most wanted tree resulted in people stealing avocado trees from others. She explained how some of hers were stolen.

They could give us more of avocado rather than other fruits. Because they are wanted most, that's why they are stealing avocado because they are hoping that avocado is doing good in the market. They have good price, and they are needed most rather than other crops. (Owner of demonstration farm in Morogoro, interview, 7/2-26)

When asked if she felt confident telling the organisation about this problem, she explained that one must be grateful for what one is receiving rather than telling the organisation that a different way would have been better, and that it would have been greedy to tell them they needed more avocado trees.

So it's like asking them (telling them that more avocado would be beneficial), begging them kindly, so whenever you asking something there is possibility of getting or not getting (Owner of demonstration farm in Morogoro, interview, 7/2-26)

Speaking to the project's responsible teacher at the primary school, he explained how he was given the responsibility of supervising the project when he first started at the school. One of his responsibilities became taking care of the school's demonstration fishpond. This included feeding the fish and making the fish food. However, there was not enough fish food provided by the project to see the first harvest of fish, at which point it could start making a profit. This resulted in the teacher having to invest himself to keep the fish alive. Putting a financial burden on him personally.

When they brought it (the fish project to the school) they just gave me enough fish food for one month only and so after that they asked me to continue on my own...I went to see my management (at the school), I asked them how we will sustain this project and they said that they don't have any funds.... then from there I had to use my own money from my own pocket to sustain it, that's a big challenge to me (Teacher in Morogoro, interview, 09/02-26)

I asked if he or anyone else had informed AWF about this problem, but he informed us that he was reluctant to tell them.

I felt shy to ask them (AWF), because these people they built the dam for us and also, they brought the fishes to us (Teacher in Morogoro, interview, 09/02-26).

Multiple interviewees who were well-informed and played an active role in the project explained that it had not brought much value to the people in the village. Many interviewees had ideas on how the project could bring more benefits to the village while still meeting the environmental needs.

One person explained that they could have provided more value to individuals by choosing to distribute a different type of tree. He suggested cashew trees, as cashew

would provide a higher yield for the farmers. He explained how the cashew trees would still bind the soil and prevent soil erosion, which was the main purpose for the distribution of trees anyway. He believed that by making this change, people would care more for the trees they were handed, as they truly are valuable to them. When we spoke to farmers who went to collect trees from the village center, they did not speak very highly of them. They said that they did collect them because they were urged to, they understood that it is good to bind the soil to stop erosion, and that the trees might bear fruit, but overall, most did not think the project had provided much benefit to them. However, the interviewee was reluctant to tell AWF about his idea.

The owner of the demonstration farm explained how she was very grateful. She tells us that she felt honoured to get chosen, as it means that people trust her. However, she explained that the project had not been beneficial to her personally as of yet. She hoped that it might when the trees start to bear fruit. But as of now, when asked if the project had matched her needs and challenges, she told us how the project had not been beneficial to her and explained ideas she has on how the project could have helped her in a more efficient way. However, she did not have the opportunity to tailor the project to her needs and challenges, instead she told us how one must be grateful for what one has received,

As I said before, the way I came to be part of this project is because they just brought these seedlings to me as a widow. So, it's the leaders who decided that also the widows can get these seedlings. So, I just been a part of this because the leaders seen like I also supposed to get these seedlings, but I did not have that chance to ask them or to question them like I need this. You know as we human beings whenever you get something you have to be thankful for what you have been given. But I had to accept what they brought to me that time instead of questioning and asking, I had to be thankful for what they just brought to me that time. (Owner of demonstration farm in Morogoro, interview, 7/2-26).

To summarize, people have ideas that would contribute to meeting the project's goals, diversifying income and making farmers less dependent on bean farming, which is causing a lot of soil erosion, as well as creating real change for their economic situation, which would create more local ownership. However, the villagers feel reluctant to share these ideas because they don't want to seem ungrateful.

5.2 Empirical results Rukwa

5.2.1 Introduction to the selected village in Rukwa

In the Rukwa region, the selected village comprises four sub-villages located in the Sumbawanga District. Three of the sub-villages are very close together, for an outsider, it was difficult to say where one begins and another ends, except for the fourth sub-village, which is very far away from the others. The village was recommended by the implementing partner due to the reasons mentioned under Chapter 3.2.1 “Selection”. The village is near a large lake, which is the reason it was picked for the Sustain Eco project, as one of the project's objectives is natural conservation of water areas (the same as in Morogoro).

The people in the village are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. Common crops are beans, maize, and groundnuts. Rukwa is not characterized by large-scale agriculture in the same way as Morogoro. The village is located next to a major road, and we could reach it from our accommodation by bajaji, a small three-wheeled motorcycle taxi often called a tuk-tuk in other parts of the world. It is a common means of transport in Tanzania used for both passenger transport and goods. To the different sub-villages, we could easily walk, as they were right next to each other. To the last sub-village, we had to go by motorbike. The road to this sub-village was in a very bad condition. In this village, there is not one sub-village that feels like the centre or the main, like there was in Morogoro. Instead, the big difference is between the three sub-villages that are close together and the distant one.

5.2.2 The project's main activities in Rukwa

One of our biggest challenges while in the selected village in Rukwa was understanding what type of activities had been done by the project, due to being told different information by different people. Even within smaller, more uniform groups, such as village leaders, the information about the project's activities differed. This is different from the selected village in Morogoro, where we also received different information from different people, but where there were two somewhat uniform groups. When we first came to the village, we met with the WEO. He introduced himself and the project in plain terms. He also organized a group interview with all the wards' Veo's the next morning. This was then followed by an interview with the village farm extension officer. We met with the village chairman, all the sub-village chairmen, and farmers from all four sub-villages, which included people who played an active role within the project, such as being part of different committees, but also people who had never heard about the project before.

People in positions of power who knew about the project well, presented it to us in quite general terms, making it difficult to understand what specific activities had been done. They explained that the project focused on environmental conservation. One activity that was mentioned by all the people in power positions I interviewed was planting trees around the lake. This activity was also quite well known by farmers in three of the sub-villages, as many villagers had been participating in digging holes for these trees. We were told that the people participating in planting trees were given an allowance. Another activity many mentioned, the Veo's, for example, was protecting one of the forests that were located on a nearby hill close to the lake. It is now not allowed to cut down trees in this forest. To protect it, beehives had been put up to scare people so that they would not enter. Multiple people, a few farmers as well as people in positions of power, told us that there have been beacons put up by the farming areas close to the lake to prevent people from farming too close to the water. A patrolling group of villagers had also been created. This group patrols the area around the lake, making sure that no one breaks the new rules and fines the ones that does.

The area in which the information differed the most was regarding the agricultural aspects of the project. When asked, some people in a position of power said that there might be agricultural aspects, but that they don't know them well, others said that there will be agricultural activities, but that these have not started yet, one told us about multiple agricultural activities that have been conducted, and many told us that they had never heard about an agricultural aspect of this project.

The one person in a position of power who had a lot of knowledge about the agricultural aspect of the project, claimed that the reason many don't know about these activities might be that it's nothing new. He claimed that farming activities happen every day, so maybe people don't notice them compared to the tree planting part of the project, which was something people haven't done before, and therefore it received more attention. Another reason he mentioned was that people, including people in positions of power, lost interest in these activities when they were not receiving money anymore. He told us how SNV had been paying the people coming to seminars and training, but then later the payment stopped, and so did the interest. The one person in a position of power who knew about the agricultural aspect of the project told us that a farming group had been created that together takes care of a demonstration plot, where the goal is to gain knowledge about more nutritious crops and modern ways of farming.

5.2.3 When

Despite the mixed information about the agricultural focus of the project, there was one thing all interviewees agreed on, the fact that the project was already planned before ever reaching the village.

It was already planned. We had only the chance to ask them questions. When we were asking these questions, they told us this project will be participatory, it will involve the villagers themselves, the leaders, even the district councils will be involved (group of the wards Veo's, interview, 27/2-26)

The project was introduced to the village rather than being planned together, similarly to what we heard in Morogoro. The Veo's of the ward told me during our group interview that SNV told them how the project would be participatory, but that the participation was only possible in the implementation phase and not the planning phase. A sub-village leader explained how the village had not been included in any other way than working.

It is participatory in the level of implementation, not in the planning phase (group of the wards Veo's, interview, 27/2-26)

It was just participating by working... We have just been instructed, they brought trees, and we have to go and plant them. They were not educating us, they were just instructing (sub-village leader, Rukwa, interview, 02/03-26)

One man in a position of power explained how this is problematic, as it caused challenges that he claimed could have been easily avoided if knowledgeable people from the village were included in the planning phase. He explained and showed us how a lot of the trees that had been planted around the lake had died and explained that it is because they were not suitable for the soil. He explained how he could have told them this before if they had just asked before starting. We can see similarities with the village in Morogoro, where trees that were planted by the secondary school were dying due to drought.

Many informants told us that when the project was introduced at the village meeting, there was an opportunity to ask questions. I asked if there was an opportunity to bring up suggestions and wishes as well, and the majority told me there was no such opportunity. However, there were some exceptions. One older man told us how he was selected to give advice as an elder, as they wanted his input, and so he was invited to a special meeting.

To summarise the local community were first involved during the implementation phase of the project, which led to mistakes being made that could have been avoided if people with knowledge about the local climate were involved earlier. Which leads us to our next chapter exploring who were selected to participate and why.

5.3 Who

When people of Rukwa were asked (leaders as well) about what benefits the project brought to the village, the majority mentioned that the main/only benefit they got was being paid to do activities, like planting trees. The agenda itself is not generally viewed as beneficial. After payment, the interest in participating disappeared for many.

They (SNV) just brought the project, and I can say that the only benefit we got was getting paid to do the work (planting trees) (sub-village leader, Rukwa, interview, 02/03-26)

When I asked village leaders about who got selected to be a part of the project, for example, by joining the farming group, they told us people were selected because they were motivated, could read and write, and could work voluntarily. Even with these criteria in mind, the results show how the main motivation still was money, and people within the farming group told us how the motivation cooled down when the payments stopped. The payment also created frustration as we were told that many of the participants had not received some of their payments yet, as the method of payment was not suitable for everyone. One village leader working closely with the project explained how he was getting blamed for the missed payments, which caused him a lot of distress and frustration. We can see similarities to the teacher who got the responsibility over the fishponds in Morogoro. The leader told SNV and is hoping for improvement, but was very anxious about the farming groups' meetings, as he knew he would be blamed.

Despite the selection being based on who the leaders thought would be motivated to do the work voluntarily, the main motivation has been money. However, there are exceptions to this as well. One of the villagers we met that was part of the patrolling group, told us that there were no more payments. Still, he told us that he spends almost 12 hours every week patrolling the area around the lake. He explained that he has been selected and that it is now his obligation. Many others from the patrolling group have quit.

5.3.1 The excluded sub-village

When visiting the last sub-village (the one further away), it became evident that it had not been included in the project. The only one in the sub-village who had heard about it before was the sub-village leader. When asked what he knew about the project, he answered in very general terms, saying he knew it was for the benefit of the village. When asked if he knew any specific activities that had been done, he said that he only knew about planting trees. He told us that he could not explain much more as he is far away, and that the activities are done by the sub-villages close to the village office, and that he only got the information when he attended a village meeting. He explains that this sub-village has not been a part of the project and that SNV has not come to visit them.

The sub-village chairman was saying all of this in a very resigned way, as if this is the way it is and there is not much to be done about it. However, after further discussion, I could also notice frustration. The frustration became more evident when speaking to farmers in the village. Other village leaders agreed that this sub-village often gets excluded. They say it is because they are far and the connection is bad, so it's hard to reach them. However, the villagers of this sub-village told us that because they have phones, it should not be hard to give them the information. None of the three other representatives from the far away sub-village knew about the project, and all felt frustrated about this.

They never give us any information, whenever there is a project most of them end there (in the more central sub-villages) (Villager in the excluded sub-village, interview 07/03-26)

Interviewees in the sub-village informed us that they would like to participate, but that they don't get the opportunity due to a lack of information. All the interviewees were asked about what needs and challenges they viewed as the most pressing, the main answer from people in this sub-village were schools and roads. The children have to travel far to the schools, and the roads are in bad condition, which leads to kids skipping school or dropping out early. Other challenges include security within agricultural investments, where farmers have been sold fake seeds from distributors, something interviewees believed a project like Sustain Eco could help with.

5.3.2 In what way

When asked if the project had met the needs and challenges of the village, the majority answered no. They say, as mentioned above, that the benefit they got was being paid for taking part in different activities, such as planting trees. The different needs and challenges mentioned by the interviewees differ a lot, but a few recurring ones include roads, schools, fake seeds, and the agricultural market.

A few different explanations were given as to why people did not raise suggestions or ideas to the implementing partner. The most common answer is that there was no such opportunity. One person told us that there was nothing to complain about and therefore no need to raise opinions. Another explained how there are glorified pictures of this type of projects and that many don't get enough information to be able to form opinions about it.

Two different farmers told us that they were afraid that the project might leave if it got criticized. Telling us that these types of projects are of great value to the community and that they need to take care of them carefully. We can see a connection to Morogoro, where people did not want to bring forth their ideas as they were afraid to be viewed as ungrateful. Others, such as the leader who was frustrated about the non-sustainable trees, told us that they tried to give suggestions but failed due to the project already being planned.

6. Analysis and discussion

Within the empirical material, I have found three main themes: the first being **when** in the process the local community is included by the implementing partners. Both villages experienced that the implementing partners planned the project before ever reaching the village. This led to mistakes that could have been avoided if the implementing partners had included the local community earlier. The second theme is about **who** is included. As I show in the empirical results, there are two distinct groups in the selected village in Morogoro, the included and the excluded. This theme also highlights who the implementing partners selected to participate in both villages, and the relationship between the included and the excluded groups. The third and last theme is **in what way** the local community were able to participate. This theme explores the relationship between the implementing partners and the local community, revealing a power dynamic in which the local community doesn't feel comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas. All themes are closely related to the concept of participation. **When** can the local community participate, **who** gets to participate, and **in what way**.

6.1 When

As clearly shown in the empirical results most of the interviewees told us that the project was already planned before the information about it reached them, and if they participated, they mainly did so in working on the implementation of activities such as planting trees. If we use Pretty's typology of participation this would be categorised as **functional participation**, meaning that the local community participates by helping to achieve goals that already were set by external agents, as a way to make the project more efficient and cost-effective (Pretty 1995). Cornwall (2008) explains that this is the most frequently found type of participation in development.

The late participation is shown in both villages. Molenaers and Renard (2009) explains that participation becomes more difficult in earlier stages of the policy cycle, such as planning and that most strategic agenda-settings takes place behind closed doors at the government and donor levels. This is said about participatory practices between government and civil society organisations (which a lot of participatory development literature focuses on) whilst my results are based on the relationship between NGO, local leaders and community members. However, the same tendencies can be found. The business owner from Morogoro explained that decisions are made in the village office, and that it's always the same group of people making these decisions and that the general community is not included or informed. As stated by Cornwall (2008) the term participation is vague, and it is often unclear what the implementing partners mean by it. Cornwall (2008) explains that different kinds of participation imply different amount of effort. Sharing

information for example is easier, while involving everyone in planning would be much more difficult if not impossible. This may be one reason why the project has not included the local community earlier.

Please note that in me stating this I am not saying that the project ever claimed to include everyone in every decision (although, as indicated, they did claim to ensure that restoration efforts would be inclusive and grounded in community needs (IUCN 2025)). Nor do I claim that they should. I am simply noting how this late involvement effects the project's ability to adapt to local needs and challenges, and ultimately the project's ability to reach its objectives. As presented in the empirical results multiple interviewees claim that problems occurred due to the implementing partners failing to include knowledgeable community members in time, resulting in trees dying because they are not suitable for the area in which they were planted. This happened in both villages, and in both villages, we meet with interviewees that say that if they gotten the opportunity, they could have recommended more suitable options. The late involvement also led to participants not being equipped with suitable material and equipment to do tasks they were asked to do. In the Morogoro village, school kids were asked to plant trees on the school grounds. The responsible teacher said that they would have needed equipment such as gumboots to do so safely and efficiently but that these were not provided.

There were interviewees in both villages that told us how the implementing partners had asked them to give input. However, this was still after the projects main objectives had been decided. Which raises the question of how influential this input really became. Once again turning to typology within participation, asking for input without real change can be categorized as consultation according to Arnstein's ladder of participation (Arnstein 1969). Consultation is a form of tokenism that gives the illusion of participation and is used to legitimise already taken decisions, to give the process moral authority (Cornwall 2008). Cornwall (2008) explain that the outcomes of this type of inclusion are often selectively read and used by those with power to decide on further action. In summary, local community members were invited to participate when the big decisions and the large agenda had already been set, which can be seen as a way to morally legitimise the implementing partners plan rather than actually better meet the needs and challenges of the local community.

One reason the local community was involved late in the process might be that the project partners already assumed that they knew what was needed without explicitly asking. Li (2007) explains that the position of trustee is defined by the claim to know what's best for someone, which this can be seen as an example of. We do meet interviewees of the kind that were well engaged with the project (such as the local representative in Morogoro) that told us that the ideas that they gave were

listened to. However, this is not mirrored when speaking to the broader public in either of the villages, which leads us to our next topic of **who** is included.

6.2 Who

6.2.1 Motivation to participate

When interviewing Veo's of the ward in Rukwa they told us that the people who could read and write were selected to participate in the project. This is not unique: Cornwall (2008) explains how participatory practise in development often heavily relies on linguistic representation of knowledge. However, most knowledge is not linguistic, it is generated in practise (Cornwall 2008). By only including villagers that can read and write the project is excluding the ones that does not fall under the implementing partners norm of what is considered knowledge.

Village leaders also explain that when they as village leaders were asked to select people to participate, they selected people who they thought would have the motivation and ability to work voluntarily. Despite this selection the main motivation among those who were selected in Rukwa, was still money and when the participants no longer got paid the interest in participating stopped. When interviewees in Rukwa (including leaders) were asked what benefits the project brought they say that the benefit they got was being paid to do activities like planting trees. The agenda itself is not generally viewed as beneficial. Alternatively, in Morogoro it may be beneficial but not feasible, for instance to construct a fishpond can be too expensive. Cleaver (1999) explains that in participatory development the will for individuals to participate is expected to occur due to participants realising that participation is for their own benefit.

Evidently in Rukwa people felt that participating was for their own good as long as they got paid. This could be interpreted as that the project activities and what participators could gain from attending was not enough on its own. One reason for people not engaging when not being paid could be because it was not suited to participants needs and challenges. A term that becomes relevant here is "tangible benefits" (Mohan 2014, page 135). Mohan (2014) explains that from a democratic perspective simply being able to participate (which far from everyone gets to do) is a major achievement, but for people who are poor their lack of resources means that any participatory process must yield tangible benefits. The benefits of participating must outweigh the opportunity cost. The cost of participation is different for different individuals and therefore what is needed to create tangible benefits will differ between individuals, which effects their ability or willingness to participate.

Similarly, Cleaver (1999) explains how individuals in participatory development is usually defined in terms of the functional nature of the project and how little recognition is made of the variable costs and benefits of participation to different people. For some, the cost of taking part do not outweigh the benefits of doing so; these costs are rarely considered (Cornwall 2008). Excluding the ones with the least leeway, aligning with Molenaers and Renard (2009) that the poorest are the most difficult to organize. Just finding out if something would be beneficial enough to participate in is a luxury, as it is only available to those with the leeway to come to an information meeting and make the decision. Out of those getting the information, only including people who could be motivated to work voluntarily could also mean excluding groups where the bar to create tangible benefits are higher and thereby excluding the poorer segments of a community, in the same way as one can argue that including only people who can read and write could be excluding poorer segments as well .

One reason that the implementing partners might assume participation is simply based on the idea that people by default have a pure motivation of participating, rather than the understanding the importance of creating tangible benefits could be an overly romanticised view of the local community (Molenaers and Renard 2009).

Social responsibility and interests in community development as a whole are also sources of motivation to participate (Cleaver 1999). We do see examples of this in both villages. One example in Morogoro is the lady responsible for the demonstration farm and in Rukwa, one example is the man in the patrolling group. The man in the patrolling group is not getting paid and does not report that he is gaining any personal benefit from taking part but is still patrolling the ground around the lake and forest up to 12 hours a week, even after many others that were selected to patrol quit. He told us that he was selected and is now obligated. Cleaver (1999) explains that many policy approaches can make efforts to link participation with social responsibility making not participating irresponsible. I am not making a claim that this necessarily is the reason in the case of the patrolling man, but it does show how our choices are not entirely our own, and it is hard to know what one does for obligation or guilt and what is done because one wants to.

People do speak a lot about the honour of getting selected and the duties that come with it and don't really see an opportunity to turn it down. We see examples of this in Morogoro as well were the lady responsible for the demonstration farm explain that one must be grateful and is honoured to be selected. This will be further elaborated on under Chapter 6.3 "in what way".

6.2.2 Getting the information

In the Morogoro village there is one group of people who are very well informed and included in the project (for example the farming experts). Many in this group

told us that one of the biggest challenges within a project like Sustain Eco is getting people to participate, explaining that people are uninterested and unmotivated, saying that their lack of participation is self-exclusion, due to personal characteristics. Cornwall (2008) however explains that there may be many reasons one is not participating which has little to do with personal characteristics, such as the time meetings and activities are scheduled, where the meetings and activities take place, self-confidence, and lack of trust in that participation actually will lead to something good. Similarly to what was presented above in creating tangible benefits.

However, with all of this said one can only self-exclude if they know about the activities to begin with. My empirical data show many examples of people who indeed wanted to participate and were motivated and interested and believed that the activities like farming education, for example, would create tangible benefits for them, but had not received the information. For example, the lady who made her own farming terraces, proving great determination and will, showing characteristics that are the opposite of what the well-informed group is accusing.

Another example is the business-owner, proving that people outside of the well-informed group are interested in what is being presented but are not aware how one is able to participate. In Pretty's (1995) steps of participation we can read that information is seen a lesser form of participation, however Cornwall (2008) explains how keeping a flow of information going is important and should not be seen as less. So, who participates is not only influenced by the degree of perceived tangible benefits, which in turn can be driven by cash payments or the degree to which the project activities speak to local needs, but also about who gets access to project information.

6.2.3 Geographical boundaries

One of the clearest results on the lack of information and the lack of the opportunity to participate is found in the sub-village further away in Rukwa. No one in this sub-village had heard about the project (except for the sub-village leader, who knew it very briefly). Cornwall (2008) explains that although participation processes are intended to deepen inclusion and are mostly seen as good it can have the opposite effect, deepening exclusion of particular groups, if these groups are not explicitly included. The people in the sub-village were frustrated and explained how they always get excluded, a feeling that deepened when we came and informed them that there was yet another project they were not a part of.

We also see examples of geographical boundaries in Morogoro, where all project activities and meetings were held in the main sub-village. And due to roads being bad and the sub-village being far, many could not participate.

6.3 In what way

When we first think of **in what way** one can participate, we might think of in which activities or in which decisions one is invited to take part in. However, these are matters I already discussed under **when**. What I mean by **in what way** is more related to the relationships and power dynamics between local leaders, villagers and the implementing partners and how this relationship affects in what way people participate. I argue that the way you can participate is shaped by the role you have been assigned both by others and yourself, which became evident in the empirical results. Here, postcolonial theory becomes relevant to understand these roles, consciously assigned or not.

The owner of the demonstration farm in Morogoro explains that if she had told AWF about observations she made about weaknesses in the project's activities, she would be begging or asking them rather than sharing ideas of improvement. To me, this does not seem like a partnership or collaboration, instead the owner of the demonstration farm explains how she must be grateful to the project. We see more examples of when participants don't want to share information in fear of sounding ungrateful, or in Rukwa's case in fear of the project leaving.

Li (2007), as explained in Chapter 4.1.1 "Trusteeship", defines trusteeship as "the intent which is expressed, by one source of agency, to develop the capacities of another" (Li 2007, page 4). In our case, the implementing partners are the trustees in their respective villages. Making it difficult for people in the village to take part in an equal way, as the trustees already declared they know what's best (maybe not out loud). The villagers are describing their part of the relationship as in a dependency position or debt of gratitude to the implementing partner, which makes it difficult to participate on equal terms. Regardless of if this was the implementing partner's intention or not, important information on how the project could improve is lost due to this power dynamic.

There were also interviewees who told us that they did not come with suggestions simply because they had none to give. This may be true, but it can also be an example of not believing that they had something to bring, maybe because the role they have been assigned is seen as less knowledgeable. Cornwall (2008) explains that this could be the case of self-exclusion due to people not feeling like they have something to contribute and a fear that their ideas and knowledge are not going to

be taken seriously. Another reason for self-exclusion, as explained by Cornwall (2008), is that people don't think it will make a difference anyway. The business owner, for example, explained how it is common to be promised change without action. This type of unkept promises can lead to mistrust, and it no longer feeling meaningful to participate even if given the chance.

6.4 Differences and similarities between Rukwa and Morogoro

Similarities and differences between the two villages have been mentioned throughout the analysis and discussion, in this section a few of these are highlighted. To quickly summarise, the three themes: **when**, **who**, and **in what way**, in relation to participation, are relevant in both villages. Showing that both implementing partners struggled to create local participation in a meaningful way. Both villages were selected due to their closeness to water sources which the implementing partners are set out to help restore.

One major difference is that the villagers in Rukwa got paid to participate in the project activities, which was not the case in Morogoro. The payment has worked as a form of motivation in Rukwa, and one could argue that this could have helped with the struggles the more involved group mentioned in Morogoro, where the less involved group did not show up. However, the less involved group in Morogoro showed that lack of motivation was never the reason they didn't show up; it was a lack of information. Many explained that they would have shown up if they had just gotten the information.

Lack of information seems to be relevant in both villages. In Rukwa, mostly related to the one excluded sub-village. This is interesting as Pretty (1995) claims that information is an easier type of participation to achieve, but still, this problem is relevant in both villages.

7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I will summarise the main results found in the empirical material and how these relate to my research questions, using the three themes: when, who and in what way. I will reflect on to what extent the thesis reaches its purpose and what insights it has brought me.

The study supports existing literature stating that the definition of participation is vague and that development aid actors tend to use simpler types of participation such as inviting local people to participate in the implementing phase rather than the planning phase (Cornwall 2008, Molenaers and Renard 2025), or ask for local people's input when the agenda of the project is already set. Inviting people to participate when the agenda has already been set can be seen as a way to morally legitimise the implementing partner's plan rather than actually better meet the needs and challenges of the local community, a form of tokenism (Arnstein 1969). In the Sustain Eco case, the project's late invitation to local participation led to mistakes being made that could have been avoided if the local communities had been invited to participate earlier. These are the results from both villages.

It became evident that the villages were selected because of their water sources which the project was set out to protect. The main goal of the project is natural conservation, and the change in agricultural practices is to help environmental conservation by, among other things, lessening soil erosion. Benefits for the villagers are then found within this made agenda, which made it difficult to adapt it to local people's needs and challenges as the frame was already set. This is an easier form of participation as less people need to be included in decision making (Cornwall 2008, Molenaers and Renard 2025), but where the actual distribution of power to local people is compromised.

The problem of late participation and of actual power distribution is the case in both villages, but motivation to participate and who is selected and able to participate differ slightly. In the Morogoro village, the agricultural activity that is providing education does meet some of the needs and challenges of the villagers, however, it often has not reached the ones asking for it. While in Rukwa, the main motivation for participating by the ones selected to do so was getting paid to partake in certain activities, which tells us that the project activities on their own did not yield tangible benefits (Mohan 2014) for the local community. The project has not matched the needs and challenges of their everyday life and has not created much benefit for them on an individual level or at the community level.

Adaptation to local needs and challenges is made even more difficult as many interviewees don't feel comfortable sharing thoughts on how the project could better adapt to the implementing partner, as they are afraid of sounding ungrateful or greedy. This shows the importance of working on the relationship between implementing partners and villagers if we want a meaningful collaboration, and challenge post-colonial power structures. In both villages, we see that only a certain group of people are included, in Rukwa, people who can read and write are selected to participate, and in Morogoro we do meet one small and very engaged group that, to a large extent, consists of village leaders.

To summarise, an already made agenda and late participation, together with only a certain type of local individuals participating and an unbalanced power dynamic between the implementing partners and the local community, all make local adaptation difficult, as this type of participation more so legitimises already decided plans rather than actually distributing power to the local level.

No one is against participation, and the fact that development aid needs to be adapted to local needs and challenges is not a controversial one. Development aid actors use words such as participatory and inclusive to describe their work and goals, however, I have found, as many others before me, that there are layers of power immersed in participatory practices that can't be simplified or forgotten. Otherwise, despite honest intentions, the work can instead reproduce already existing power relations and fail to benefit the one they set out to help. This implies that higher demands are needed in development aid on how participatory practices are used. The way the development sectors has previously responded to critical researchers has been too shallow. It is a question of solidarity towards the recipients, and development actors need to take accountability.

With all of this said, I still believe that the goal needs to be a greater power shift to local levels, but that respect for what is possible at certain levels needs to be accounted for. Local communities are not acting in a void, they are dependent and acting within structures around them, and this complexity is not to be overlooked. Lastly, I want to express that more research needs to be done on the consequences that will follow the Swedish government's decision to phase out bilateral aid in a very short amount of time, not only to Tanzania, as this also needs to be taken accountability for.

References

- Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*. 35(4), 216–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225>
- AWF (n.d.). *Strategic vision: 2020-2030*. <https://www.awf.org/about/strategic-vision> (2026-06-06)
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. 4 edition, Oxford University Press.
- Cleaver, F. (1999). Paradoxes of participation: questioning participatory approaches to development. *Journal of International Development* J. 11, 597-612.
- Chambers, R. (1997). *Whose Reality counts? Putting the last first*. ITDG Publishing.
- Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking ‘Participation’: models, meanings and practices. *Community Development Journal*. 43(3), 269-283. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsn010>
- Creswell, J.W. & Creswell, J.D. (2018). *Research design : qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. 5 edition, SAGE.
- Dinesen, L. (2016). Kilombero Valley Floodplain (Tanzania) In: Finlayson, C.M., Milton, G.R., Prentice, R.C. & Davidson, N.C. (eds.) *The Wetland Book: II. Distribution, Description, and Conservation*. Springer.1-8. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6173-5_224-1
- EBA (2016). *Swedish Development Cooperation with Tanzania - has it helped the poor?* (2016:10). Expertgruppen för bistandsanalys (EBA). https://eba.se/app/uploads/2016/10/2016_10_Tanzania_webb_Tillganp.pdf (2026-05-14)
- Gaventa, J. (2006). Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis. *IDS Bulletin*, 37(6), 23-33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00320.x>
- Green, M. (2010). Making Development Agents: Participation as Boundary Object in International Development. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 46(7), 1240–1263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2010.487099>
- Hajdu, F., Jacobson, K., Salomonsson, L. & Friman, E. (2012). “‘But tractors can’t fly’”: A transdisciplinary analysis of neoliberal agricultural development interventions in South Africa.’, *International Journal of Transdisciplinary Research*. 6(1), 24-51.
- IUCN (n.d.). *About IUCN*. <https://iucn.org/about-iucn>. (2026-10-06)
- IUCN (2025). *SUSTAIN Ecosystem stewardship to balance sustainability and growth in Tanzania: 2024 Annual Report*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland. <https://waterandnature.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/SUSTAIN-Eco-2024-SHORTVERSION-V03.pdf> (2026-05-06)
- Lang, S. (2008). The Depoliticisation of Development and the Democratisation of Politics in Tanzania: Parallel Structures as Obstacles to Delivering Services to the

- Poor. *Journal of Development Studies*. 44(8), 1122-1144
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220380802242396>
- Li, T. M. (2007). *The will to improve: Governmentality, development, and the practice of politics*. Duke University Press.
- McEwan, C. (2014). Postcolonialism. In: Desai, V. & Potter, R.B. (eds) *The companion to development studies*. Third edition, Routledge. 137-141.
- Mohan, G. (2006). Beyond participation: strategies for deeper empowerment. In: Cooke, Bill and Kothari, Uma. (eds) *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books. 153–167.
- Mohan, G. (2014). Participatory development. In: Desai, V. & Potter, R.B. (eds) *The companion to development studies*. Third edition, Routledge. 131-136.
- Molenaers, N. & Renard, R. (2009). The Trouble with Participation: Assessing the New Aid Paradigm. In: Kremer, M & Went, R. (eds) *Doing Good or Doing Better: Development Policies in a Globalising World*. First edition, Routledge. 255-278.
<https://doi.org/10.5117/9789089641076>
- Openaid (2020). *Different kinds of aid*. <https://openaid.se/different-kinds-of-aid> (2026-06-22).
- Openaid (2026a). *Sectors*.
<https://openaid.se/en/thematics/sectors?sectorCategories=311&years=2025&order=desc&includeThematicAreaTransactions=true> (2026-06-06)
- Openaid (2026b). *Sustain Eco: Sustainability & Inclusion Strategy for Growth Corridors in Tanzania*. <https://openaid.se/utforska-data/SE-0-SE-6-15216> (2026-06-06)
- Pretty, J. (1995). Participatory Learning for Sustainable Agriculture. *World Development*. 23(8), 1247-1263.
- Robson, C. & McCartan, K. (2016). *Real world research: a resource for users of social research methods in applied settings*. Fourth Edition. Wiley.
- Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage.
- Shivji, I. From Liberation to Liberalization. Intellectual discourses at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik*, 18(3), 281–294.
- Sida (n.d.). *About Sida*. <https://www.sida.se/en%2Fabout-sida> (2026-06-06)
- Sida (2025). *Regeringen beslutar om utfasning av landstrategier och stängning av ambassador*. <https://sida.se/om-sida/nyheter/regeringen-beslutar-om-utfasning-av-landstrategier-och-stangning-av-ambassader> (2026-06-06)
- SNV (n.d.). *Who we are*. <https://www.snv.org/about-us>. (2026-06-06)
- The United Republic of Tanzania, Ministry of Finance, National Bureau of Statistics & President's Office – Finance and Planning, Office of the Chief Government Statistician, Zanzibar (2024a). *The 2022 Population and Housing Census: Morogoro Region Basic Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile Report*. Dodoma: National Bureau of Statistics.
<https://sensa.nbs.go.tz/publication/Morogoro.pdf>

- The United Republic of Tanzania, Ministry of Finance, Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics & President's Office - Finance and Planning, Office of the Chief Government Statistician, Zanzibar (2024b). *The 2022 Population and Housing Census: Rukwa Region Basic Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile Report*. Dodoma: National Bureau of Statistics.
https://www.nbs.go.tz/uploads/statistics/documents/en-1738323693-15.%20Rukwa%20Region%20Socio-Economic_Profile.pdf
- Yin, R. (2018). *Case study research and applications: design and methods*. Sixth Edition. SAGE.

Popular science summary

The thesis studies how well development aid projects meet the needs and challenges of the people they are intended to benefit. This is explored through interviews in rural Tanzania, where a Swedish-founded development aid project has been active in two different areas. The results show that the level of local participation affected the project's ability to meet the needs and challenges of the local communities in the areas where the project was implemented. The project had not met the needs and challenges of the local community. Three main themes are found as to why the project failed. The first reason was that the local community was involved too late in the process. Another reason is that only a certain type of people was invited to participate. The third reason was that the local community did not feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas.

Acknowledgments

I will forever be grateful for this opportunity and for the helpful people who made it possible. First, I would like to thank all the people in my two selected villages. Thank you for taking the time and welcoming me into your homes with curiosity and honesty. Next, I want to thank my dear friend and translator Charles Kona. Thank you for being the best traveling company, helping me navigate not only language but also norms and bureaucracy, with your kind heart and positive attitude, and for becoming a true friend. This thesis would not have been possible without you. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Linda Engström for your guidance and advice, with your calm energy and great engagement. And lastly, thank you to my friends and family, especially Edvin, who have taken the time to listen to my ideas and read my many drafts. Thank you for your patience and for always believing in me.

Appendix 1 List of self-instructions

As inspiration on how to present myself to my interviewees' have used the following list from Robson & McCartan (2016):

Introducing yourself: a list of self-instructions

Explain purpose and nature of the study to the respondent, telling how or through whom they came to be selected.

Give assurance that respondent will remain anonymous in any written reports growing out of the study, and that their responses will be treated in strictest confidence.

Indicate that they may find some of the questions far-fetched, silly or difficult to answer, the reason being that questions that are appropriate for one person are not always appropriate for another. Since there are no right or wrong answers, they are not to worry about these and do as best they can with them. We are only interested in their opinions and personal experiences.

They are to feel perfectly free to interrupt, ask clarification of the interviewer, criticize a line of questioning, etc.

Interviewer will tell respondent something about herself – her background, training, and interest in the area of inquiry.

Interviewer is to ask permission to tape-record the interview, explaining why she wishes to do this.

(Robson & McCartan 2016:294)

Publishing and archiving

Approved students' theses at SLU can be published online. As a student you own the copyright to your work and in such cases, you need to approve the publication. In connection with your approval of publication, SLU will process your personal data (name) to make the work searchable on the internet. You can revoke your consent at any time by contacting the library.

Even if you choose not to publish the work or if you revoke your approval, the thesis will be archived digitally according to archive legislation.

You will find links to SLU's publication agreement and SLU's processing of personal data and your rights on this page:

- <https://libanswers.slu.se/en/faq/228318>

☒ YES, I, Kajsa Pettersson, have read and agree to the agreement for publication and the personal data processing that takes place in connection with this

☐ NO, I/we do not give my/our permission to publish the full text of this work. However, the work will be uploaded for archiving and the metadata and summary will be visible and searchable.