SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The concept of community participation in development in Nigeria is gaining popularity. The main assumption is that community effort can help to improve the quality of life of the people and also provide opportunity for socio-economic activities. Participation has become part and parcel of development. However, the challenge is how participation should be vigorously pursued to achieve developmental gains such as improving the living condition of the poor. Community involvement in development can be considered from at least two viewpoints, namely: the decision-making process that would involve community participation; and the benefits of development such as employment and business opportunities. It was against this backdrop that rural communities mobilize themselves and community resources aim at improving their well-being. This paper therefore sees community participation very important for attaining sustainable development. The paper begins with an introductory highlight, the concept of community of participation, development and the approaches to community participation were briefly discussed. How community participation is seen and viewed, whether as contribution or as empowerment was also forwarded and conclusion and recommendation given.

KEYWORDS: Community participation; Development; Empowerment; Community

INTRODUCTION

The concept of people's participation is not a new phenomenon as far as rural development is concerned; it has been talked and written about since the 1950s or even before (Guijt and Shah, 1998; Nelson and Wright, 1995). Many authors and development agencies argue that genuine people's participation can increase the efficiency, effectiveness, self-reliance, coverage and sustainability of development projects and programmes (Kumar, 2002; Oakley, 1991). There is a wide spectrum of views on the concept of participation and the ways of achieving it. Ngujiri (1998) summits that, "despite the increase in the number of NGOs, participatory methodologies, and after many years of poverty alleviation, poverty continues to be rife and communities continue to languish in it". There is now a growing recognition that if participation in one form or another is an objective of development projects and programmes, it must be evaluated (DFID, 1995; FAO, 1997; Karl, 2000). Karl (2000) has

identified three main aspects of participation in rural development projects and programmes that need to be evaluated namely; the extent and quality of participation, costs and benefits of participation to the different stakeholders, and the impact of participation on outcomes, performance and sustainability. DFID (1995) suggests that, in evaluating participation, it is important to consider the quantitative, qualitative and time dimensions of participation. This is because participation is a qualitative process that cannot be measured using only quantifiable indicators. While quantification in relation to project outputs may be sufficient, the qualitative dimensions of participation should also be evaluated because a project success depends on empowering participants to take on greater responsibility and control.

Despite the aims of participatory rural development through the involvement of people in development that affects them directly; quite often, the reality of participation differs from the rhetoric, on many counts (Chambers, 1997; Nelson and Wright, 1995). Pretty (1995), notes that the dilemma for many development agencies is that they both need and fear people's participation. They need people's agreements and support, but they also fear that this wider involvement is less controllable, less precise and so likely to slow down planning and implementation process. Shepherd (1998) argues that, participation is usually asserted, not demonstrated, as few development organisations have time to examine the indicators or follow the process of how participation happens, and what its effects are on participants and in the wider society. Community participation is one of the key ingredients of an empowered community. Participation is the heart that pumps the community's life blood. It entails citizens taking part in community's business. In Nigeria, a number of studies have been carried out on people's participation in community development in homogenous communities, however, the view of social diversities and its effect on the practice of community development in heterogeneous Nigerian communities has not been adequately addressed. This necessitates a search for a framework by which anticipation can be made on what happen when people from different social background come together to make a decision.

It is however important to note that community participation can provide different benefits, for beneficiaries of a project, the communities, organization and to the professionals. While the citizens may perceive it in terms of their overall empowerment, the professionals may look only at the advantages it offers to their project success. On the other hand, the success of community development programmes has been found to be extensive influences by people's ownership and participation.

However, prevailing social factors such as education, income, membership of social organization and diversity of language spoken, influence the thinking and the attitude of the people towards effective participation. Due to differing social backgrounds, people naturally react differently to community development programmes. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines sustainable community development programmes in socially diverse Nigerian communities.

Concept of Development

The word development is fraught with ideological, political, and historical connotations that can greatly change its meaning depending on the perspective being discussed (Haug, 1997). Three definitions of development are most helpful and suitable in relation to this paper. The first definition is put forward by Korten (1990) has it as development is a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilise and manage

resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.   Korten's definition emphasizes the process of development and its primary focus on personal and institutional capacity. It also touches on justice, equity, quality of life, and participation.

The second definition is from Robinson, Hoare, and Levy's (1993) work. They add the dimension of empowerment to Korten's idea of development (Robinson, 1993).Empowerment is a social action process that promotes participation of people, organisations, and communities towards the goals of increased individual and community control, political efficacy, improved quality of life, and social justice.

For, Zachariah and Sooryamoorthy (1994), they emphasize that development must promote economic growth, but not at any cost. The encouragement of economic growth must take account of and be restrained by three other equally important objectives: Protection of the environment and consideration of the ecological impact of industrialisation and commercialization; fair and equitable distribution as well as redistribution of goods and services to enable poorer people to get a fairer share of society's wealth and to participate fully in the economy; and creation of opportunities for everyone to increasingly participate in the political, artistic and other activities of society.

Zachariah and Sooryamoorthy's criteria for development recognize the environmental and ecological facets of communities going through the process of development. The environment is considered an integral part of development, since any impacts on a person's environment also influence the state of well- being or welfare. Environment and development are thus linked so intricately that separate approaches to either environmental or developmental problems are piecemeal at best (Bartelmus, 1986).

The Concept of Community Participation

Participation is a rich concept that varies with its application and definition. The way participation is defined also depends on the context in which it occurs. For some, it is a matter of principle; for others, practice; for still others, an end in itself (World Bank, 1995). Indeed, there is merit in all these interpretations as Rahnema (1992) notes.

Often the term participation is modified with adjectives, resulting in terms such as community participation, citizen participation, people's participation, public participation, and popular participation. The Oxford English Dictionary defines participation as "to have a share in" or "to take part in," thereby emphasizing the rights of individuals and the choices that they make in order to participate. Arnstein (1969) states that the idea of citizen participation is a little like eating spinach, that is, no one is against it in principle because it is good for you. But there has been little analysis of the content of citizen participation, its definition, and its relationship to social imperatives such as social structure, social interaction, and the social context where it takes place.

Brager, Specht, and Torczyner (1987) defined participation as a means to educate citizens and to increase their competence. It is a vehicle for influencing decisions that affect the lives of citizens and an avenue for transferring political power. However, it can also be a method

to co- opt dissent, a mechanism for ensuring the receptivity, sensitivity, and even accountability of social services to the consumers. Armitage, (1988) defined citizen participation as a process by which citizens act in response to public concerns, voice their opinions about decisions that affect them, and take responsibility for changes to their community.

Pran Manga and Wendy Muckle (Chappel, 1997) suggest that citizen participation may also be a response to the traditional sense of powerlessness felt by the general public when it comes to influencing government decisions: "people often feel that health and social services are beyond their control because the decisions are made outside their community by unknown bureaucrats and technocrats" . Westergaard (1986) defined participation as "collective efforts to increase and exercise control over resources and institutions on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from control". This definition points toward a mechanism for ensuring community participation. The World Bank's Learning Group on Participatory Development (1995) defines participation as "a process through which stakeholder's influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them".

A descriptive definition of participation programs would imply the involvement of a significant number of persons in situations or actions that enhance their well- being, for example, their income, security, or self- esteem (Chowdhury, 1996).

Methods of Community Participation

The United Nations Research Institute on Social Development (UNRISD) Approach asserted that the most important and original aspect of UNRISD is the focus on people power and organization of disadvantaged groups, hitherto bypassed in development. The significant factor in this approach was not that it concentrated on the poorest of the poor but that it emphasized questions of power and organization and also viewed the allies and adversaries of the hitherto excluded as included in the scope of investigation (Chowdhury, 1996)

Self-Reliance and Self Help

During the development decade of the 1960s, self- reliance and self- help projects became the order of the day (Chowdhury, 1996). Chowdhury (1996) also notes that this trend is further developed by the social worker. The main components of this developmental process are participation in taking initiatives to identify unmet needs, and self- reliance—breaking away from dependencies that suppress the creativity of the poor. This approach is nearest to the type of people's participation practice in Nigeria. It is more a psychological than an economic or physical process.

Identification of Suitable Stakeholders

The public involvement of stakeholders in development projects is widely recognized as a fundamental element of the process. Timely, well- planned, and well- implemented public involvement programs have contributed to the successful design, implementation, operation, and management of proposals (UNEP, 1996). For instance, the range of stakeholders involved in an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) project typically includes: The people, individuals, or groups in the local community, the proponent and other project beneficiaries, Government

agencies, Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and others, such as donors, the private sectors, academics, and so forth

Needs Identification and Goal Determination

Participation of the masses in development activities implies enhanced capacity to perceive their own needs. Through participation, local people identify their needs as well as the relevant goals of a program. By participating in decision making and implementation activities, local people help project officials identify needs, strategies to meet those needs, and the necessary resources required to implement the various strategies (Yadama, 1995). For example, community participation will be discouraged if environmental issues are given priority in agendas without addressing issues such as poverty, homelessness, health, and other basic necessities perceived to be more important by the rural communities.

Information Dissemination

This is the flow of information from the proponent of the development project to the public. The proponent should provide sufficient relevant information about the project such as the benefits of the project to the beneficiaries, the costs of implementation, the potential for financing, implementation, and possible risk factors. The proponent must allow sufficient time for individuals to read and discuss information provided, and listen to the views held by individuals as well as to issues and problems. The Lack of transparency often fosters mistrust and misunderstanding between project authorities and local communities (UNEP, 1996).

Consultation

Consultation involves inviting people's views on the proposed actions and engaging them in a dialogue. It is a two- way flow of information between the proponent and the public. Consultation provides opportunities for the public to express their views on the project proposal initiated by the project proponent. Rigorous planning and implementation of projects should be undertaken only after considerable discussion and consultation. Consultation includes education, information sharing, and negotiation, with the goal being a better decision making process through organizations consulting the general public (Becker, 1997). This process allows neglected people to hear and have a voice in future undertakings.

Genuine Interests

Participation depends on people's legitimate interests in the project or development activities. Therefore, participation needs to be considered as an active process, meaning that the person or group in question takes initiatives and asserts an independent role (Chowdhury, 1996).

Involvement of Public in Decision Making

Public involvement should entail the encouragement of a maximum number of people in the participation of development projects. Such involvement should give the participants full inclusion in designing, organizing, and implementing activities and workshops in order to create consensus, ownership, and action in support of environmental change in specific areas. It should include people and groups rather than exclude any individuals. Public involvement is a process

involving the public in the decision making of an organization (Becker, 1997). Participation actually brings the public into the decision- making process.

White (1989) stressed community involvement in management of marine protected areas. According to the author, public involvement can take place at several stages in the establishment and management of marine protected areas. These stages are: (1) the recognition of a need; (2) discussions with interested parties and integration with the community; (3) baseline studies and monitoring; (4) education; (5) core group building and formalization of reserves; and (6) enforcement.

Accountability

The requirement of accountability applies to all parties involved in a project, such as project management, external organizers, and traditional leaders, as well as any emergent leadership from the ranks of the poor and the disadvantaged (Adnan, Barrett, Alam, and Brustinow, 1992). The authors also note that agencies involve in a project management and implementations are procedurally and periodically answerable to the people in the project area, as well as the citizens of the country in general. All people should be aware of their roles in a project and the planning of activities of the project. Accountability of concerned community members must be ensured, particularly after the decision is taken.

Frequent Interaction

Often there is interaction at the beginning of the project but no dialogue or any other form of interaction occurs during the project. This ultimately creates a big gap between the proponents of the development projects and the communities. Consequently, the local people abandon a project based on such an idea. Therefore, it is suggested that there should be ongoing communication throughout the project period.

Ownership and Control

Participation plays a major role in people's management of their own affairs. Ownership and control of resources have a profound impact on participation in development projects (Mathbor, 1990). Ferrer (1988) emphasized four areas to be worked toward in a participatory coastal resource management program, which includes greater economic and social equality, better access to services for all, greater participation in decision making, and deeper involvement in the organizing process resulting from the empowerment of people.

Sharing of Benefits

It is evident that without sharing the benefits of a project, participation is a frustrating process for the poorer people. Zachariah and Sooryamoorthy (1994) note that there should be a fair and equitable distribution of benefits, as well as redistribution of goods and services, to enable poorer people to get a fairer share of society's wealth and to participate fully in the development process. The Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP, 1984), a regional rural development organization in South Asia, mentions that participation entails three distinct processes, firstly, the involvement of the people in decision

making; secondly, eliciting of their contribution to development programs; and thirdly, their participation in sharing the benefits from the development process.

Partnership

Partnership in development processes allows concern stakeholders to work, talk, and solve problems with individuals who are often perceived as the masters. Wilson and Whitmore, 1997 identified a set of principles for collaboration in a variety of situations. These include nonintrusive collaboration, mutual trust and respect, a common analysis of what the problem is a commitment to solidarity, equality in the relationship, an explicit focus on process, and the importance of language.

Community Participation as Contribution and as Empowerment

Drawing on Oakley (1991) and Dale (2004), perspectives on participation in development work, may also be captured by juxtaposing two notions, participation as contribution and as empowerment. Participation as contribution may be enlisted primarily in the implementation of programmes and projects or in the operation and maintenance of created facilities. The contribution may be entirely voluntary, induced to various extents or even enforced. It may be provided in the form of ideas, judgments, money, materials, or unpaid or lowly paid labour (Dale, 2004). Indeed, this notion may also be seen as 'participation as means' to get things done.

According to Bretty (2003), participation is an empowering process in which "people, in partnership with each other and those able to assist them, identify problems and needs, mobilize resources, and assume responsibility to plan, manage, control and assess the individual and collective actions that they themselves decide upon". As a process of empowerment, participation is concerned with "development of skills and abilities to enable the rural people to manage better, have a say in or negotiate with existing development systems" (Oakley, 1991).

As Eade and Rowlands (2003) argue, powerlessness is a central element of poverty, and any focus on poverty, inequality, injustice, or exclusion involves analysis of and/or challenging/changing power and power relations. Participation as empowerment can therefore help to amplify unacknowledged voices by enabling the rural people to decide upon and take the actions which they believe are essential to their development (Oakley, 1991; Slocum et al., 1995). According to some FAO (1997) studies, small informal groups consisting of members from similar socio-economic backgrounds are better vehicles for participation in decision making and collective learning than heterogeneous, large scale and more formal organizations.

Recommendations

In order for community participation in developmental activities to succeed in rural areas aim at contributing to long term sustainable socio-economic development, local community integration is required to assist in ameliorating social, economic and environmental problems that seriously confront communities, which have a negative impact. In this regard, the success of community participation in development should not be measured merely in terms of increased numbers of people that participated, but should also be evaluated according to how the participation will benefits local communities at a grassroots level. In this regard, government

policy and grassroots programmes should be strengthened and should involve the input of local communities (the beneficiaries).

To encourage effective and efficient community participation that will enhance community development in both rural and urban areas, government should create the enabling environment for all rural communities.

Policy and institutional mechanisms should be established to encourage local participation in the design, implementation and management of community developmental projects and local use of resources. At least, local communities should be empowered to determine what forms of development they want and how they can develop their respective communities, and how development costs and benefits should be shared among different stakeholders. In order to achieve these, there should bottom-up approach to development.

There should be campaigns, mass communication or media, jingles etc in enlightening Nigerians on active community participation and its benefits. My suggestion also goes to the various NGOs whose mandate is to spur development in the country to come out with development programmes and policies to enhance the effort of the government in reducing developmental challenges in rural and urban communities.

Social factors like poverty, ignorance, unemployment, inequality, illiteracy should be confronted by government. These factors hinder the people not to participate in community development. Economic empowerment creates good atmosphere for community participation which in turn encourage community development.

Community-based organisations in development that will see residents in rural communities actively participating in the decision making process on activities that are related to community participation and development should be established. Community based organisations should use an interactive participation approach where people, including local communities, will participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local institutions. Local community should regard participation here as a right, not merely as a means to achieve project goals. Community should also recognise that through this process local groups take control over local decisions and determine how local resources should be used, so that they have a stake in maintaining structures and practices.

In order for community-based development organisations to materialise in rural areas, local communities should develop a pool of resources, including financial support, human capital, and ownership of development projects. Local people should be actively involved in each and every stage of development planning in order to ensure that all their projects are well integrated to serve community interest.

Rural people should be engaged and should be involved in development programmes in their villages or community right from the start. This process will present a significant step towards ensuring more adequate participation in development. However, considering the fact that there is a lack of skills within local communities to make decisions independently, Government at all level should develop a strategy that will see more local skills strengthened. This means that for some time local people will only participate through consultation until necessary skills are produced within the local communities so that interactive participation, which was suggested above can be fully implemented.

Conclusion

Based on the preceding illustrations of community participation, it is clear that non participation of citizens in community activities undermines community development. It is, therefore, necessary that communities organize themselves into civic bodies that can represent

their interests at local government level. In short, the birth of democratic Nigeria does not mean the realization of a more equitable socio-economic prosperity. This specifically means communities should not cease to organize themselves for development programmes commensurate with their enshrined constitutional rights, such as the right to life and overall human dignity (Williams, 1999; 2000).

It has become clear that only concerted effort by community members can solve development challenges in local communities, it is therefore significant to note that community participation has influenced on community development.

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