

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: CATALYST FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

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Abstract

Participatory rural development seeks to improve the social, economic, political and capacities of the rural people. This discussion revealed that ineffectiveness of rural development initiatives in Nigeria is associated with the lack of people's participation in the identification of problems, designing and execution of the projects and programmes there from. Fifty-Four years after Nigeria's independence, most rural areas demonstrate characteristics that indicate lack of prosperity. The paper found out that the previous attempts at national development ended up dividing Nigeria into two distinct socio-economic dichotomies- the urban and the rural. The urban-biased approach to development gave rise to decades of rural neglect because government programmes for rural development never succeeded. The paper attempted to examine the factors of socio-cultural and political nature, which must be taken into account while considering the use of community participation methods in the planning, and implementation of projects. It further x-rayed the various approaches to rural development by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each. It also discusses in detail the types of community participation and rationale for the people's participation in the matters that affect the quality of their life. The definition/delineation of the rural areas as this would help in the proper channelization and concentration of resources meant for the rural areas as well as the concerted incorporation of formal associations serving each community in local level development programmes are advocated. The paper concluded that by improving participation of community members in the development process, then development projects will succeed in rural communities and poverty will subsequently be alleviated.

Keywords: Participation, Community Participation, Rural Development, Popular Participation, Sustainable Development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Fifty-Four years after Nigeria's independence, most rural areas demonstrate characteristics that indicate lack of prosperity. The previous attempts at national development ended up dividing Nigeria into two distinct socio-economic dichotomies- the urban and the rural. The urban-biased approach to development gave rise to decades of rural neglect because government programmes for rural development never succeeded.

The issue of rural development which has taken different policy measures at different times in different countries of the world, is assuming a position of eminence in the global socio-economic discourse. An issue, which, hitherto, was considered complex for the rural people, who were earlier regarded as incapable of partaking in the art of diagnosing the rural problems and designing of the solutions, must participate fully in the matters that concern them (Adedeji, 1990: Draper III. 1990)

Anyanwu, (1992). Difference or lack of cooperation of communities with projects owing to inappropriate communication techniques or consultations have been known to lead to colossal wastes of scarce human and material resources.

The rural sector is central to Nigeria's development. The sector has close to 80 percent of the country's population who are engaged mainly in primary production activities. Nearly half of the country's labour force is employed there and they generate one-third of its GDP which accounts for about five percent of its total exports. According to Imoh, Isaac & Nwachukwu (2009), the main reason for programme failure was the non-inclusion of programme or project benefiting communities in the entire programme planning and execution.

The peculiar socio-cultural setting in Nigeria cities and rural communities especially calls for an appropriateness of participation by the beneficiaries. Paternalistic approaches to community development projects in fact do bring about situations where people's needs are satisfied without allowing them any freedom or responsibility (Anzorena. 1980: Elegalam, 1980: Skinner. 1983). As a national policy, community participation is, as it is being currently conceptualized, a new approach to rural development and implies total involvement of the people in the matters that concern them.

It is against the background that this discussion attempts to examine community participation in rural development and the emphasis is on the forms and reasons for the people's participation in the rural development programmes.

However, in more recent time development agencies have come to realize the importance of such participation in various forms involving communication, consultation, implementation and evaluation of projects.

2.0 DEFINITIONS OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION, PARTICIPATION, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

When seen broadly in reference to the entire political and economic process of a nation or country, popular participation can be designated by another term called 'Democracy'. For the purpose of this contribution, we may call it 'Rural Development for the people and by the people' Ghai (1990) says that the participation is the process of empowerment of the deprived and excluded and has three main elements namely; sharing of power and scarce resources, deliberate effort by social groups to control their own destinies and improve their conditions, and opening up opportunity from below. The approach is the most current in the literature and planning (Adedeji, 1990: Anyanwu, 1992: Draper III, 1993).

The concept of people's / community participation can then be referred to as the active involvement of the rural people in the decision and matters that concern their well being. It includes active participation in their needs identification, solution planning and implementation. The type of new involvement require identification with the movement, which grows only out of involvement in thinking, planning, deciding, acting and evaluation focused on socio-economic development. It is indeed a mental process as well as a physical one.

For sustainable Development, it connotes the capacity to improve the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of the supporting eco-system (Agugu, 2008). Sustainability is the continuation of benefit flows to rural people without the programmes or organizations that stimulated those benefits in the first place (Oni, 2005). Development involves changes, the most of which is in the attitudes and actions of those people who become participants, individually or in groups in the process itself.

A distinction therefore has to be made between the participation of some local individuals and the participation of the organized community as such. The word "Community" denotes as social entity organized in some fusion however loose and informal and with some sense of identity, not just the inhabitants of a locality.

3.0 CONCEPT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Rural Development is part of general development that embraces a large segment of those in great need in the rural sector. Hunter (1964) was among the earliest to use the expression *Rural Development* which he considered as the "starting point of development" characterized by subsistence. World Bank in Ekpo and Olaniyi (1995) defined rural development as a process through which rural poverty is alleviated by sustained increases in the productivity and incomes of low-income rural dwellers and households. This definition is defective as it dwelt majorly on the economic growth, which is just an aspect of development. Taking into cognizance, the economic growth and social upliftment as aspects of development, Ijere (1990) regarded rural development, as the process of increasing the per capita income and the quality of-life of the rural dweller to enable him become prime mover of his own destiny. Obinne in Ogidefa (2010) perceived rural development to involve creating and widening opportunities for (rural) individuals to realize full potential through education and share in decision and action which affect their lives. He also viewed it as efforts to increase rural output and create employment opportunities and root out fundamental (or extreme) cases of poverty, diseases and ignorance.

Therefore, combining all the essential elements of development, Rural Development can be described as the integrated approach to food production as well as physical, social and institutional infrastructural provisions with an ultimate goal of bringing about both quantitative and qualitative changes which result in improved living standard of the rural population. It therefore, infers that agricultural production (development) is a component of rural development as more than two-third of Nigeria's 150 million citizens are farmers. They live in an estimated 97,000 rural communities. Their lives are characterized by misery, poverty, morbidity and under-development (Ekpo & Olaniyi, 1995). Hence, it has been widely recognized that the rural areas and people are characterized by the following: general poverty trap, low income and investment ratchet, underutilized and/or unutilized natural resources, rapidly increasing population, underemployment and/or disguised employment, low productivity, especially of labour, low and traditional technology, limited enterprise or entrepreneurship, high level of illiteracy, ignorance, disease and malnutrition, near absence of social and physical infrastructures (like all-season roads, potable water, electricity, good schools, health centres, etc.), and political powerlessness, gullibility and level of general vulnerability (Lele & Adu-Nyako, 1991: 1 - 29).

Rural development has scope that is broad and elastic, and it depends on the interaction of many forces such as the objectives of the programme, the availability of resources for planning and implementation, etc. In developing countries, such as Nigeria, rural development projects will include agricultural set-up projects, rural water supply projects, rural electrification projects, rural feeder-road and maintenance projects, rural health and disease control projects, rural education and Adult education campaign, rural telecommunication system, and rural industrialization. Based on the scope of rural development (as the improvement of the total welfare of the rural low-income people), the following objectives of rural development evolved:

- to have greater commitment of the resources to the rural areas in terms of budgeting allocation and actual expenditure.
- to ensure popular participation of the rural people in the identification of priorities, planning of programmes as well as their implementation.
- to lay greater emphasis on the use of total resources and promotion of local skills.
- to expand and improve on rural infrastructure such as roads, markets stalls, electricity, water and storage facilities.
- to maintain political and social stability
- to create rural employment opportunities
- to increase commodity out-put and production and subsequently increase food and food supply as well as rural farm incomes

From the objectives of the rural development in Nigeria, Ijere (1990) postulated that the underlying principles of rural development are as follows:

- ❖ The leaders and policy-makers should be committed to the philosophy of rural development for the improvement of the rural sector.
- ❖ There should be total community involvement in rural development. To ensure this, rural development organizers should delegate powers to local leaders at all levels of the population who should account for the exercise of that power. Also, a more suitable community participation approach using the people's institutions and leaders is imperative.
- ❖ Incentives and motivation should be built into the rural development system. These could be in form of citations, honourable mentions, honorary titles and prizes, competition between villages, towns and local government areas, organizing rural development day to select the best farmers, cleanest communities, accident-free communities, etc.
- ❖ All aspects of the peoples life should be affected by the rural development schemes to allow for even development.
- ❖ A core of local leadership should be built-up to sustain the rural development effort. There should be a standing development planning committee in every community from which such persons can be mobilized.
- ❖ There should be development of appropriate skills (human capital development) as well as implementation capacity to sustain new technologies and improvement of social welfare.

❖ Rural development programmes should utilize the cultural values and practices of the people. It makes the scheme understandable and meaningful. Indigenous institutions such as age grades; youth organizations, clubs and town unions should be used in reaching the people and in mobilizing latent energies (pp. 66 - 67).

3.1 Rural Development Approaches

The overall aim of rural development efforts is geared towards the improvement of the lives of the rural population. However, several approaches aimed at arresting the ugly under-development situation in rural areas have been put forward. According to Ijere (1990: 52 - 54), they include the following:

i. Growth Pole Centre Model: This model is also known as "Growth Point Model". The model involves the development of a few strategic towns, communities and industries likely to activate other sectors. The model focuses attention on the development of few towns leading to the neglect of the rural areas.

ii. The "Big Push" Policy: This approach is similar to the growth pole centre model except that it is more concentrated. It takes a few sub-sectors and expends most of the resources on them in the hope that in the long run, their multiplier effect will salvage the whole economy. The flaw in this model is that "in the long run" is not a specific period.

iii. The Selective Approach: This model/approach involves the selection of certain sectors for development based on economic, political, social or religious grounds, which may not necessarily be related or interconnected.

iv. The Protectionist Approach: In this approach, the government carries out the development process on behalf of the people believing that it knows everything and that the people are not yet ripe to participate, in the management of their own affairs.

v. The Top-down Approach: It is also called the Top-bottom approach. It is a strategy based on passing down to the poor certain policies and directives from the governing bureaucracy. This type of rural development approach requires force to maintain and sustain it.

vi. The Decentralized Territorial Approach: This approach centres on the dispersal of benefits to the rural area. It has minimum linkage with the city but with settlements of various sizes to act as service and market centres. The defect in this approach is the undue fear of towns being exploitative and parasitic, and the consideration that size alone could determine the performance of a settlement.

vii. The "Laissez-faire" Policy: In this model, the authorities use the role of thumb, past experience, hindsight and the free market mechanism to manage the economy, with the hope that the invisible hand of God would ensure optimum happiness for everybody.

viii. The Key Settlement Strategy: This model is closely related to growth pole centre model except that its focus is on settlement. It assumes a focal point for a given rural area, and the concentration of all rural development resources in such a settlement. This in turn will serve other regions through its network of roads and communication. This model requires a long time to mature, and therefore it is more expensive.

ix. The Adaptive Approach: It is a combination of selective approach and Laissez-faire policy and any other approach. It gives the people the opportunity to decide on their own lives, sometimes, under the guidance of the government.

x. The "Bottom-Up" Approach: It is also called Bottom-top approach or Rurism strategy. This approach implies that development starts with the people. It is a new political development strategy. Rurism is a coherent national and social-value system in which human and material resources are mobilized and allocated from the lower echelon of the economic and social strata to the top. It is free from any foreign ideology and infection. It promotes self-reliance, self-consciousness into balanced development of human and materials resources. It is the idea approach. However, it is costly and rather slow.

Before we ruminate over the rationale for people's participation in the development efforts of their areas, many different types of activity as pursued under the designation of community participation shall be discussed below:

4.0 THE FORMS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

i) Consultation

This is the basic means of giving the community some voice by involving it in decision making. The main rationale here is to ensure that the project or programme introduced by the outside agency is adapted to meet the needs of community members and to avoid difficulties. This may involve consultation with community representatives or leaders only on one hand and consultation with all sections of the community on the other.

ii) Financial Contribution by the Community

Cash collection made by and within the community generally prior to or at the time of implementation of a project, usually as a contribution to capital construction. Excluded as not really constituting community participation are cases which amount to a payment by individual families for service even when it is an advance payment.

iii) Self-Help Projects by Groups of Beneficiaries

In these projects, a specific group of local inhabitants contribute their labour (and perhaps other inputs) to its implementation while there is also the assistance of an external agency. Those who contribute will recompense by reduced fees for the services they receive, while non-members pay more

iv) Self-Help Projects involving the whole Community

Projects in which every family in the community is expected to make a contribution (usually in labour), while there is also an input from an external agency. Food-for work projects may perhaps be included here, though the element of community participation may be considered slightly if it consists only of labour which is paid in cash or kind.

v) Community Specialized Workers

The training and appointment of one or a few community members to perform specialized tasks (e.g. as community health worker, or operation of a community water supply system). The training and technical supervision are carried out by an external agency, but some form of community authority is usually also exercised over the specialized workers.

vi) Mass Action

Collective work in the absence of a major input from an external agency. Often such actions as stated by White (1981) are directed at environmental improvements (e.g. to drain waste water or clear rubbish during monthly sanitation exercises)

vii) Collective Commitment of Behaviour Change

Cases where a community makes a collective decision to change customs or personal habits, and collective social pressure is exercised for the realization of such changes. Examples range from penning of domestic animals to construction and use of latrines or to the reduction of excessive expenditure in connection with weddings, funerals, etc. While changes of behaviour may of course occur in other ways, community participation is involved when explicit decision is collectively taken.

viii) Endogenous Development

Cases in which there is no autonomous generation within the community of ideas and movements for the improvements of living conditions - as opposed to stimulation by outside agents. The community may, however have recourse to external agencies to help with implementation or indeed press for such help. On the other hand where this is simply pressure for services to be provided, it hardly qualifies for the term community participation: though in a wider sense this is an example of political participation.

ix) Autonomous Community Projects

The ambiguous "self-reliance" is often understood in this sense projects where any external resources are paid for by the community with funds raised internally including the hiring of any outside expertise or professional staff. Such projects are therefore under community control.

5.0 RATIONALE FOR THE PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION

While there could be several reasons for involving a community in projects that will be of benefit to them, the following can be advanced for community participation.

- **More will be accomplished**

The view that more will be accomplished if the energies of the people are harnessed now lies at the heart of much development thinking following disillusionment with older assumptions that development would flow from capital investment in "modern" economic and social institutions like the IMF and World Bank. A number of countries have launched programmes to raise the productivity of the poorest or least productive with in emphasis on public participation. An example is the "Better Life for Rural Women Programme". "Family Support Programme" of the past military regimes.

Reliance on people's energies as the motive force for development may be said to have originated from traditional societies and been earned furthest in countries with socialist socio-economic system. In Nigeria and West Africa for instance, provision exists for some rural areas to provide materials such as cement and expert help for village communities which undertake the building of classrooms or the digging of wells (Skinner, 1984). It would seem that a very strong commitment at the national political level is necessary for a policy of government stimulated community action to achieve any large-scale success.

- **Services can be Provided at Lower Cost**

If services can be provided at lower cost of each community, they can be provided to more communities. However, the reference to the comparative cheapness of a participatory approach is usually made from the perspective of government, and implies that the resources are saved by a government agency which uses community contributions to help complete projects and are released for completing more projects or for other government purposes in general.

Cost reduction need not only be a question of not paying for labour, however, but for adopting organizational and technical solutions which are cheaper and may-also be more appropriate to the local environment. Village health workers like local nurses, for instance, may actually be more effective than doctors in the village, if they are well trained for the circumstances in which they will work, they understand the environment and are typically more motivated to work within it.

- **Participation has an Intrinsic Value for Participants**

Apart from the more instrumental advantages of community participation as a means to achieve other ends, it is often argued that people simply should be able to participate actively in the processes, which affect them, having a voice in the decisions that are taken, and a part in their implementation. Apart from the intrinsic satisfaction that this may bring and the avoidance of feelings of alienation and powerlessness, one may also mention the possibility that an increase in cooperative interaction will lead to a more united community.

- **Participation Leads to Sense of Responsibility for Project**

It is thought that when people have taken an active part in the planning and / or implementation for a project, they will collectively consider the completed project as their own, have pride in it and a sense of responsibility for it and therefore use it, do so responsibility and avoid damaging it and do their best to maintain it. This argument is based on the familiarity, which each community member will have gained with the project, but in greater part on the idea of emotional investment he will have made in it.

- **Participation Guarantees that a Felt-Need is Involved**

This argument for participation duties from the others in that the advantage is not seen as being a consequence of the participatory effort but in a better selection of projects site. Communities demonstrate their need for the project and their willingness to support and use it once completed by making the collective effort to organize and participate in construction or by making a financial contribution.

In general, it might be considered that it a community agrees to make a contribution to project in collaboration with an external agency, and if the agency is satisfied that all sections of the community support this community decision that is sufficient to establish that a felt need is involved.

- **Participation Ensures Things are done the Right Way**

If the users take an active part in the planning and design of the system they will use, then these systems will presumably be better adopted to their needs than if the technical solutions are decided by outsiders without consultation. There is however one potential.

Problem here when given the opportunity to choose between different technical solutions. There is tendency for people to choose the solution which is more "modern". Sophisticated or expensive for reasons connected with prestige. This is particularly true if the users will not bear very much of the additional cost of a more expensive solution. Or if the cheaper one requires more work which they will have to do without payment.

It is therefore clear that consultation on technical options must be approached carefully. Villagers can not be asked to plan something they do not know about. Nor of course take over the technical design which is the legitimate responsibility of the design professional. But they can have a useful part to play in the discussions where there is a choice to be made between alternative solutions either in terms of major decisions over type of system to be adopted. Or more minor questions of the design of user facilities and useful suggestions for improvements may emerge from discussions. Openness is also required over the costs of different solutions and bear them.

- **Use of Indigenous Knowledge and Expertise**

It is now generally accepted that ingenious practices are usually well adapted to the circumstances in which they developed. One of the arguments for participation by Yap (1983) is that it enables progressive change to take place while making use of this knowledge and adapting it to new circumstances. Rather than discarding it and devaluing its possessors.

In many cases an introduced technology will be indisputably better in all aspects but sometimes indigenous techniques have advantages even when they appear less efficient or more costly: they use local labour and raw materials rather than imports: maintenance and repair will be easier for local craftsmen and there will be less demand for scarce skilled manpower or spare parts or the indigenous technique serves some additional purpose neglected in a superficial comparison. • Freedom from Dependence on Professionals

Professional skills are scarce and professionals in most developing countries enjoy a standard of living incomparably higher than that of the mass of the population. This makes the use and services of professionals very expensive on projects especially where there can be appropriate and adequate cheaper alternatives.

6.0 SUGGESTED POLICY OPTIONS

This write-up must not fail to address certain issues, which it feels only the government, be it federal. State or local can proffer solutions in order to actualize the noble ideals of rural development. Thus, the following suggestions are made:

(a) In the first instance, the government should try as much as possible to define and delineate the rural areas. This is very fundamental, as it will help in the proper channelization and concentration of resources meant for the rural areas. Without proper definition of what is the rural area, the government or its agency may derail. There is tendency for the agency to be working on semi-urban areas. However, the definition of rural area will depoliticize the activities of the agency and make it more objective and realistic.

(b) The Federal Government should be doing better if it creates an A independent and permanent agency for rural development in the country. The agencies which will be like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Niger Delta Ministry will be charged studying. Planning with the people and executing with them all rural development programmes and / or projects. Unlike the (NDDC) to which the Federal Government and the oil Companies contribute. The rural development agency will be funded by the Federal Government. All the multi-national corporations in Nigeria and supra-national organizations that show concern for rural conditions.

(c) The agency. State and Local Government participations should be in a way that consciously encourages and promotes local initiatives and enthusiasm for community development. Through this arrangement the varying needs of .the communities will be favourably considered and at the same time make them integrative

within the national planning framework.

(d) The need for a democratic approach to rural development should be based on the premise that since people are the target of any development activity, their needs and values must be reconciled with the objectives of any development in order to secure their cooperation and effective direction and utilization of resources in local level development, a redundant "inadequately staffed and under-financed agency is not required. Rather a rural services division of each executive ministry should be charged with carrying out development work in their specific specialties at the local level.

(e) To realize the much desired community development's aim of "helping people help themselves" and to capture and maintain the local people's interest and commitment to government rural development programmes. Change agents have to recognize and utilize local elites as well as available voluntary formal associations serving each community.

(f) Lack of economic power was found to be the biggest obstacle to participation. It is recommended that opportunities should be created for rural people to be involved in profitable economic activities that would enhance their livelihood. To achieve the above therefore, rural people should be encouraged through soft loans and training on the use of such loans to enhance their economic endeavours.

(g) Rural youths should be mobilized through economic empowerment programmes in order to position them for participation in development project. This could be done by government through creation of employment opportunities such as regular supply of electricity in the rural areas. Quantity education, both formal and informal should be emphasized most especially in rural communities to create better awareness and profitable time management strategy.

7.0 CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that many resources have been spent by the governments. Supra-national bodies and various rural communities on the attempts to develop the rural areas. Yet the rural condition is worsening and rural - urban migration is taking unprecedented dimension.

However, the rural areas remain undeveloped because while the governments and supra-national bodies narrow approach hinged on the law of comparative cost advantage failed to address the rural people's felt needs, the people's self-help lack the needed skill and resources to transcend their rural needs. It is revealed that by improving participation of community members in the development process, then development projects will succeed in rural communities and poverty will subsequently be alleviated.

Therefore, it is argued that the best approach is the one that will involve the rural people and the government from the early stage of problem identification to solution designing, project execution, evaluation and management. It is a hybrid approach born out of merging the government approach and the rural people's self-help approach. It is the only method, which can mobilize all the resources (government and the people), achieve the stated objectives, satisfy the rural areas and ensure national growth and development.

While the techniques and discussions are not exhaustive, they give an idea of the relative merits of different methods. Similarly, it should be added that none of the methods is usually adequate if used alone and combinations of methods are sometimes necessary.

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