# Community Development as a Road Map for Promotion of Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

The sustainable development of rural communities in the third world countries have received varying levels of attention among parties interested in development discourse. As a result, various opinions have been expressed on the issue. But, the problem is, how can sustainable development be achieved in the country in order to ensure sustainable livelihoods for the poor whose living depend largely on natural resource-based livelihoods. This paper identifies the role community development can play towards promotion of sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper notes that ignorance and dependency are two main obstacles to change in the underdeveloped countries particularly in their rural areas. These factors tend to undermine even efforts doggedly carried out towards achieving social and economic development. The removal of these obstacles paves way for the sustainable development. In view of this, the paper identifies three specific community development activities which can be geared towards achieving this objective. In addition, some factors for consideration in programming were also suggested.

## Introduction

Environmental degradation is one of the current challenges facing development. The impact is worse in the developing countries as a result of poverty, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. It is telling on agricultural production and conditions of living of the people of region. Most poor are exploiting marginal soils in order to provide for themselves and their families the barest minimum sustenance resulting in lower productivity. The entire natural resource-base of most countries is at risk due to the use of unsustainable methods of exploitation.

Governments and international organizations in developing countries have made interventions of various levels to tackle this problem. In Nigeria, the government is involved in the movement towards the preservation of the environment through various programmes covering areas such as environmental impact assessment, poverty reduction, preservation of forest resources and so on. Non-Governmental Agencies (NGOs) are also committed to the crusade to promote sustainable development in the country.

In view of this, this paper is designed to identify the role of community development in the promotion of sustainable development in Nigeria.

## 1.      Conceptual View of Community Development.

Community development is a process of social change introduced by the British colonial administration to promote awareness and acquisition of skills in order to improve the condition of life in the communities (Anyanwu 1992). It is an attack against ignorance, which inhibits participation in development; it is also an attack against dependency, in view of the fact that it behooves the community to develop themselves and not to wait for outsiders.

Community development has been defined by the Cambridge summer conference 1948 as,

> a movement to promote better living for the whole community, with the active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community, but if the initiative is not forth coming spontaneously, by the use of techniques for arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its active and enthusiastic response to the movement.

## 2.      Educational Concomitants of Community Development.

The community development process when viewed as forming part of adult education is concerned with action learning (Nwangwu 2001).  It is a process in which the practice of adult education is matched with action. This differentiates it from other forms of adult education. The action may involve provision of portable water, health

care and sanitation, power supply or Construction of roads, etc. This means that the learning environment may not be that of sitting in a class and listening to an instructor. In spite of this knowledge, skills and attitudes are acquired through the experience the participants undergo which may lead to adjustments in the way they live, in interactions and in their analytic ability. (Nwangwu op. cit).

Community development is a continuous process that engulfs every community because there is no community which does not seek to introduce changes for the betterment of their members and environment. It shows how members of the community try to grapple with the complexities of their lives and environment by themselves, it helps people to think for themselves, to identify their problems by themselves, to initiate action and seek for resources by themselves, to execute projects by themselves and to bring about lasting solutions to their community problems by themselves. (Anyanwu 1992)

To Anyanwu, this educational process helps people to understand their community and its social situation, enables them to weigh objectively the forces for change, help them to accept or reject such forces, and to equip themselves with the specific skills for doing specific jobs.

This educational process may be formal, structured according to school-type of learning, non-formal in an organized setting different from school and informal, implying unintended learning (Barikor 1981).   The learning environment vary and consists of their occupation sites, local gatherings, club meetings, discussion sessions, conferences, workshops, etc. The techniques used in learning include talks, discussion, problem solving, discovery etc. Community development workers help to stimulate interests in the people, organize discussions, establish synergies etc.

## 3.      Impediments to sustainable development.

For the development of any community or nation to be sustained, several obstacles must be removed. This when achieved, will pave way for sustainable development.

The importance of sustainable development is that it seeks to make the present generation better, and ensures the future generations should not be worse off. Ezima (2005) presents sustainable development as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations.

In the community two main obstacles will be confronted in the process of promoting sustainable development. These are ignorance and dependency. Ignorance simply put, is a state of lack of knowledge. There is a general belief that ignorance is a disease. A high level of ignorance will have a negative effect on people's ability to identify personal and community felt needs. Most unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, particularly in rural communities is as a result of ignorance. The greater segment of the rural population, for lack of access to information may not be aware of the danger posed by unsustainable resource exploitation, much less possessing the know-how to mitigate the effects. Negative activities such as wasteful bush burning, indiscriminate felling of trees, street collection of sand, are prevalent in rural areas. Given the level of illiteracy in rural areas (70%), these practices are likely to persist.

ependence on the other hand is another impediment that needs to be tackled to open the door for sustainable development. As a result of historically rooted fatalism, extended family system, ignorance and lack of self confidence, dependence attitudes tend to be more pronounced among rural people (Onyeozu 2007). Dependence makes people lazy, idle, impotent etc, only to expect already made solutions to problems they can handle themselves. Dependence negates experience, exposure and hard work, which are values that have to do with sustainable development. With the dual problem of ignorance and dependece, sustainable development is frustrated. This call for Community development is a means to removing these obstacles, there by achieving sustainable development.

## 4.      Community Development as a means of tackling Ignorance and Dependency.

Using Community Development to tackle Ignorance and Dependency involves the following strategies:

        Fundamental Education

        Training in group processes

        Participation in decision making

         Skills development

### 4.1 Fundamental Education

Fundamental Education is an all-embracing, practical education which seeks to lay foundation for sustainable improvements in the lives of members of a community and their environment.

According to UNESCO  in Nwangwu (2001)

> Fundamental education is a long-term world-scale attack upon ignorance. It is many-sided undertaking ranging from primary education, to working with adult illiterates.  It includes education for better health and agriculture, for economic improvement, for artistic and cultural development, for citizenship and for international understanding.

The commission on fundamental education (1946) cited in Nwangwu (2001) conceived fundamental education as follows:

> Fundamental education is that kind of minimum and general education which help children and adults who do not have the advantage of formal education, to understand the problem of their environment and their rights and duties as citizens and individuals and to participate more effectively in the economic and social progress of their community.

Fundamental education is thus, an attempt to provide for the members of a community, opportunities to acquire the minimum knowledge which are the essential requirements to attain an adequate standard of living. As a result, it focuses attention on literacy, work, agriculture, health, domestic science including hygiene and small scale business. It is also concerned with family planning, environmental and computer literacy.

The aim should be to create a knowledge base for the community's development. The creation of a knowledge base system is a great asset to any society as this not only facilities the development of the society but also creates a sustainable system for development to continue to thrive (Omotola and Patrick 2010).

*4.2 Training in group process*

Communities and groups offer their members opportunity to understand group dynamics, especially through their self help activities by involving their members directly in attempt to satisfy their personal and community needs. The experience of participation in mobilization and group actions is a factor which helps to foster in ordinary people a sense of power, dignity and self-reliance. It encourages the development of attitude of collaboration, co-operation and volunteerism. These factors have a great deal to do with developing individual potential and enhancing community capacity.

The specific lessons participants can draw from such training in group lessons include:

a.      They learn that success and failure may have their turn, but as long last, the end justifies the means.

b.      They discover the virtues of perseverance.

c.      They become conversant with alternative methods as well as the facts and merits of these methods in solving community problems.

d.      They learn to cooperate, to appreciate others and even sympathize with them in the course of selling solutions to issues of joint concern.

e.      They learn that they are capable of achieving success on their own.

f.      They learn to take responsibilities for their lives.

g.      They learn that they too have inside them the power to create and they desire to succeed.

h.      They learn that they can influence the lives of others around them.

i.      They learn to respect others, constituted authority and self.

j.      They acquire the ability to communicate.

k.      They learn to follow prescribed procedures, etc (Onyeozu 2007)

*4.3 Participation in decision making*

Decision making is a very crucial aspect of development process. It is equally an end and a means to an end. It involves the discovery and selection of satisfactory alternatives. Participation in decision-making is a distinct process in the programming of a project. It implies the ownership of the development process. Sustainability depends on the level of ownership that the people think they have over the project. It is a learning process that involves sharing of information and practice of reflective thinking.

Involvement in this process enables community member to develop the ability to participate more actively in their group and community activities. Participation in decision making at local level gives them

recognition and the morale to participate at higher levels e.g. local government, state and national. This is very important since it is the will, thinking and action of the people that should drive and direct the process of development.

*4.4 Skills Development*

Skill acquisition programmes can be designed to promote sustainable development. This may focus on life skills or income generating skills. Income generating skills involve skills that can be used to earn income, e.g. carpentry, welding, tailoring, etc. Life skills are needed by an individual to operate effectively in society in a meaningful way.

## 5.      Recommendations for successful programming.

The challenge for practitioner is to ensure effective programming and gainful participation achievable in the following ways;

a.   Leaders must be committed to the achievement of set      objectives. This requires that they be trained.
b.   Ensure that the more vulnerable groups such as women and youths are involved. Employ a mix of participatory approaches to ensure that powerful groups among them do not dominate others.
c.   The success of the programme will also depend on the provision of basic necessities for the poor.
d.   Focus on the goal, which is self-reliance.

## 6.      CONCLUSION

Community development plays important role in national development. One of such roles as this paper indentified is the promotion of sustainable developing. Therefore, the adoption of community development as a national development strategy is welcomed, particularly in less developed countries.

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