

The Imperativeness of Felt-Needs in Community Development

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Abstract

This paper examines the imperativeness of felt-needs in community development. It highlighted on the concepts of felt-needs, community, development and community development. It illustrates the role which felt-needs can play in actualizing community development efforts. The paper made some recommendations and concludes that community development efforts can be achieved when it is people-oriented and they see it as their felt-needs.

Keywords: Imperativeness, Felt-need, Community, Development and Community development.

1. Introduction

The meaning of any concept is very complex. This is true of felt-needs and community development. Terms are defined to make their discussion and meaning more intelligible and elaborate. Aristotle, the great philosopher, once proposed that for any discussion to be intelligible, it must begin with definition of terms. To focus on this discussion properly, there is need, not only to define felt-needs, and community development, but also to look at the general aspect of what it does in community development.

Felt-Needs: This is a combination of two different words 'felt' and 'needs'. In describing what the component word means, attempt was made in defining each of them.

Felt: Hornby (2004) defines 'felt' to mean the past tense and past participle of feel. It simply means the desire, feeling and aspiration about something.

Need: Hornby (2004) perceives need to mean to acquire something/somebody because they are essential, or very important, not just because you would like to have them.

Felt-needs, can therefore be perceived to mean that emotional feeling, for need for change to better in people. This ultimately makes them team together and form a driving force in that change process, which they see as essential to them. This emotion envelops their attitudes, their values, their hopes, their aspirations and their fears. An attempt to induce change to them which ignores involvement of this emotional commitment might result in cohesion or manipulation. This concept in community development focuses on the identification by the people of their needs, or their desire or lack, which will in turn lead to the improvement of the welfare of the community. According to Onyeozu (2007:23) "felt-needs means something sincerely desired, something craved for. It means want, longing or aspiration. It also means a strong object of inner wish or an object of heart-felt prayer or something aimed at".

2. Community Development: Community development is an amalgam of two different words; namely community and development. It becomes imperative to have the meaning of each of the component words to make this discourse more meaningful.

2.1 Community: Community as a concept has many meanings to different people. It is also being used in many different ways. Oni and Ohiani (1987), and Onyeozu (2007) perceive community as a territorially bounded social system within which people live in harmony, love and intimacy, sharing common social, economic and cultural characteristics.

Onyenemezu (2008) views community to mean a social system where there is common life among people, having a geographical limit, sharing common socio-economic and cultural characteristics and having a feeling of oneness and sense of belonging which enables them to pursue common goal.

2.2 Development: The concept of development has varied meanings to different people. It is multi-faceted. Some see it as growth, others see it as increase in quality of life. For the purpose of this paper however, a brief definition of the term development, in the words of Palam (1971) in Onyeozu (2007:10) is perhaps appropriate as "a continuous process of positive change in the quality and span of life of a person or group of persons".

3. Community Development: According to Onyeozu (2007:16) the term "community development was introduced in 1948 at the Cambridge Summer Conference on African Administration. It has since then been recognized world-wide as an effective method that could be consciously applied for promotion of change in developing countries (Routledge 1978).

Following this recognition, several attempts have been made by different writers and authors to give an acceptable definition to the concept. For the purpose of this paper however, a brief definition of the term “community development” by United Nations in Esenior (1992:5) is appropriate as:

a process by which the efforts of people themselves are united with those of government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate those communities into the life of the nation and to enable them contribute fully to national progress.

Looking at the above definition, one may say that community development follows John Dewey’s problem solving technique by identifying the people’s needs and problems and finding solutions to them.

4. Felt-Needs in Community Development

“Felt-needs” is a basic concept in community development. It is one of the key concepts of community development. Felt-needs are changes deemed necessary by people to correct the deficiencies they perceive in their community. Onyeozu (2007:10) states that “felt needs is a force that stimulates intrinsic motivation which in turn serves as a driving force that induces participation in community development efforts”.

The use of felt-needs in community development practice involves the process of identifying needs, prioritizing them, and building programmes based on their priorities. Felt-needs is based on the methodology of needs assessment as a technique to gather data used for programme definition and design. The desire for people to engage in any community development project is more if anchored on their felt-needs especially the basic ones. They will team up to support and participate actively in one spirit, to achieve the targeted project. Armstrong and Davies (1975) observe that felt-needs is the corner-stone whereby community work derives its whole legitimacy.

Community development, whether defined as a movement, a process or a method, generally has its ultimate central concern to develop man as a useful and acceptable member of the community. Therefore, felt-needs of people should be the basis for community development action. The idea of felt-needs of people in community development arises from lack of something or the desire to have something which is crucial in the opinion of members of the community. The fact remains that felt-needs is a catalyst that motivates human action. It motivates community members to participate actively in community development activities. Doyl (1978) describes felt-needs as the need for change which will be the driving force in the process of change. The strong feeling about felt-needs can produce a strong emotion enveloping the people’s attitudes, their values, their hopes, their aspirations and fears. Such strong emotional feeling and commitment will result to spontaneous participation by community members.

According to United Nations Publication Article 176 as stated in Onyeozu (2007:17)

If the full benefits....are to be realized, two conditions are necessary. First the felt-needs of the people should be taken into consideration. The first duty of those responsible for community development is to identify the felt-needs of the people. They should also assist people in making better judgement for themselves on what their needs are and how to satisfy them. Finally, they should be able to identify needs not yet perceived and make people conscious of them and aware of the importance of satisfying them.

Felt-needs in community development occurs as a result of people’s awareness of the fact that they possess the capability to confront and dislodge their limitations and solve their problems through their own individual or collective efforts. It is a strong desire for advancement that is, moving from a worse situation to a better situation in the socio-economic, political, cultural and environmental milieu. It emphasizes inherent abilities in the people for solving individual and community problems. Felt-needs is stronger and more invigorating than any external assistance because it is the fountain of all genuine development in the individual. Moa Tse Tung (1972) of China in Onyeozu (2007:6) recognized the importance of felt-needs when he stated that “all work done for the masses must start from their felt-needs and not from the desire of any individual however well intentioned”.

5. Forms of Felt-Needs

There are basically two forms of felt-needs in community development, namely, intrinsic felt-needs and extrinsic felt-needs.

5.1 Intrinsic Felt-needs: Intrinsic felt-needs simply means the inborn desire to achieve a target. Intrinsic felt-needs is sometimes considered as the first step in community development. It is only intrinsic felt-needs that brings about positive motivation and participation in community development. All community development efforts must stem from intrinsic felt-needs of people.

5.2 Extrinsic Felt-needs: This is just the opposite of intrinsic felt-needs. This simply means induced need about something. This needs does not come from members of the community, rather, it comes from an outsider who induces the need either formally or informally to members of the community. For instance, an external body gives the idea of building a town hall to members of a community and they accept the idea.

6. Examples of Felt-Needs Projects at the Grassroot Level

This aspect of the paper presents some felt-needs projects carried out by some communities for the improvement of their living standard at the grassroot level.

In 2005, the people of Iboro community in Ifu Local Government Area in Ogun State successfully constructed a local bridge which was one of their felt-needs. This was supervised by Mr. Ademolu Funshion as the community development group chairman and Mr. Abroro Tom, as the community development officer. This particular felt-need came to them as an urgent and pressing one. The people realized the fact that the bridge after completion will not only make them have free access to their neighbouring communities but also will make them spend less amount of money in transporting food items. This bridge construction was pioneered by motor byke riders popular called "Okada". They vowed not to relent over the project until it was completed. This project succeeded because it was their intrinsic felt-need. Every citizen was actively involved because all of them will make use of the bridge to their neighbouring communities. This, no doubt, increased the socio-economic status of the people and reduced their poverty level.

Also, Kisi community in Irepo Local Government Area of Oyo State identified their felt-need for a central market. This was pioneered by Kisi Progressive Association through its various organs viz chiefs, elders, sole administrator of the Local Government Area and some others. They successfully planned and completed a modern market which today, is being used by the community and beyond. This also has increased their socio-economic status and helped in reducing their poverty level.

Similarly, Imhabekhai (2009) reveals how Irhirhi community of Oredo Local Government Area in Edo State, has many completed and on-going felt-needs projects such as primary school, market, electricity and water bore hole projects. These were also executed through the various organs like the chiefs, youths, women, elders etc in the community.

Also Gabriel (2003) informs us that Sapele community town hall in Delta State was completed by the indigenes when it became their felt-need. He also states that women organizations embarked on various felt-needs projects in the community like markets, town halls, school buildings, maternity homes etc.

Anyanwu (1982) reveals that the people of Akagu community in the former Eastern Region of Nigeria through self-help efforts successfully completed various grassroot projects which were their felt-needs. Such projects like road construction, mass literacy, dispensary maternity home and school building to improve their welfare and standard of living.

7. Conclusion

This paper emphasized imperativeness of felt-needs, which is a basic concept in community development. The concepts felt-needs, community and community development were discussed. The paper believes that felt-needs is an integral aspect of community development because it contributes meaningfully to the success of community development efforts. It makes community members to see projects/programmes as 'ours' rather than 'theirs'.

For effective implementation and promotion of felt-needs in communiSty development, the following recommendations are made:

Communities should be allowed to decide their felt-needs by themselves. This would ensure and promote active participation in developmental projects and ensure sustenance of the project after completion.

Appropriate fora should be created to enable community development leaders to intimately interact with community members in identification of their felt-needs. This will also promote active participation by members and ensure sustenance of the project.

Government should encourage felt-needs projects by providing financial assistance to communities on projects that are their felt needs.

Enlightenment programmes should be organized at the grassroot levels to conscientize citizens on the need to embark on projects that they see as their felt-need.

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