

Grassroots Perception and Participation in Community Development Programs in Etche Local Government Area

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ABSTRACT

The Study examined Grassroots Perception and Participation in Community Development Programs in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population for the study comprised 600 executive members of the community administration institutions – Town Union, Women Association, Youth Association, CDC and the Traditional Rulers Council in the thirty communities that make up the LGA spread in five clans. A multi-stage sample procedure was adopted, involving the random sampling technique which was used in selecting 2 communities from each of the 5 clans in the LGA. The second stage involved a purposive sampling of the Chairmen, Secretaries, Public Relation Officers and Treasurers of the community administration institutions – Town Union, Women Association, Youth Association, CDC and the Traditional Rulers Council. This was used to realize a sample size of 200.

Questionnaire and Focus Group Discussion were adopted as instruments for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.87. Three research questions were posed. They were analyzed with frequencies and weighted means. The study revealed that the grassroots have a negative perception of what constitutes CD and the objectives of its programs. It also revealed that grassroots participation in CD activities has been very low. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended amongst others the need to engage qualified adult educators and community development workers in our rural communities so as to demands of creating the desired awareness to change the peoples' perception of development and CD. Community members should be carried along at all levels of CD projects and programs – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and these programs should be co-coordinated by competent CD officers.

INTRODUCTION

Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia (2009) views development as an act of improving by expanding or enlarging or refining; a process in which something passes by degrees to a different stage (especially a more advanced or mature stage). This can be defined as a continuous and liberating process, which involves a total but gradual change of people and society. Adams in Onyeozu (2007) defines development as improvement and progress, or simply as advancement. Adreski in Onyeozu (2007) sees development as westernization or modernization. Palms in Onyeozu (2007) defines development as a continuous process of positive change in the quality and span of life of a person or group of persons.

There are six cultural dimensions of a community that undergoes change. Development means social change in all six cultural dimensions: technological, economic, political, interactive, ideological and world view.

Development is a co-operative effort of many. Institutions like the World Bank among many other charitable groups around the world also provide money and projects to improve the lives of poor people. These groups and governments established a list of goals that the whole world today is striving to reach-the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Development, by its nature, will always be ongoing, even when these basic goals are met. People will always try to improve the quality of their lives. Development efforts should be sustainable. This means meeting today's needs without creating problems for future generations.

True development must mean the development of man-the unfolding and realization of his creative potential, enabling him to improve his material conditions and living, through the use of resources available to him. It is a process by which man's personality is enhanced; and it is that enhanced personality-creative, organized and disciplined – which is the moving force behind the socio-economic transformation of society. It is clear that development does not start with goods and things; it starts with people – their orientation, organization and discipline. When the accent on development is on things, all human resources remain latent, untapped potential and a society can be poor amidst the most opulent material resources. On the contrary, when a society is properly oriented, organized and disciplined, it can be prosperous on the scantiest basis of natural wealth (Scnitton & Luttrell, 2007).

Development according to Amirize (1999) proceeds from the inside and then manifests on the outside in the standard and quality of what people say, do and think. Any development in an individual or a community which does not reflect in the ennoblement of the quality of speech, action, behavior and thinking of the people both individually and collectively, is a development that is not rooted inside and can therefore be regarded as mere sham and pretence. Little and apparently insignificant things that people say or do often betray their inward development. .

To this end, Onyeozu (2007) is of the view that development should be perceived as a multi-dimensional process which involves the re-organization and re-orientation of the entire social, economic and cultural systems. Added to improvements in incomes and outputs, it involves radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as in popular attitudes and sometimes, even customs and beliefs. Development is all encompassing every aspect of society.

Wikipedia 2011 notes that society develops by consciousness and social consciousness develops by organization. The process that is subconscious in the society emerges as conscious knowledge in pioneering individuals. Development is a process, not a programme. Its power issues more from its subtle aspects than from material objects.

Not all social change constitutes development. It consists of four well-marked stages -- survival, growth, development and evolution, each of which contains the other three within it. The quantitative expansion of existing activities generates growth or horizontal expansion. Development implies a qualitative change in the way the society carries out its activities, such as through more progressive attitudes and behavior by the population, the adoption of more effective social organizations or more advanced technology which may have been developed elsewhere.

Community development is a structured intervention that gives communities greater control over the conditions that affect their lives (Bartle, 2009). This does not solve all the problems faced by a local community, but it does build up confidence to tackle such problems as effectively as any local action. Community development is a skilled process and part of its approach is the belief that communities cannot be helped unless they themselves agree to this process. Community development is crucially concerned with the issues of powerlessness and disadvantage: as such it should involve all members of society, and offers a practice that is part of a process of social change.

The Community development process is collective, but the experience of the process enhances the integrity, skills, knowledge and experience, as well as equality of power, for each individual who is involved. Community Development is about developing the power, skills, knowledge and experience of people as individuals and in groups, thus enabling them to undertake initiatives of their own to combat social, economic, political and environmental problems, and enabling them to fully participate in a truly democratic process.

Onyeozu (2007) argues that one of the cardinal tasks of modern Community Development is the challenge to root out the causes and effects of the vicious cycle of poverty, ignorance, disease and illiteracy in our rural Communities, and also to stamp out the evils of corruption, violence, ostentatious living, drug abuse, lawlessness and greed in the urban areas. However, Alozie (2011) noted that popular participation is an essential ingredient of CD, without which the efforts will not be sustainable.

Onyeozu (2007) points that the element of participation is a sine-qua-non in Community Development, in that any group activity which does not include an aspect of human participation by members of the group in its program cannot be regarded legitimately as Community Development.

The World Bank's Learning Group on Participatory Development defines participation as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them (World Bank, 1996).

Participation has been defined as the organised effort to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in a given social situation on the part of groups or movements hitherto excluded from such control (Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger 1996). There has been a growing emphasis on empowerment of people, a concept that has been widely promoted by NGOs (Marsden and Oakley 1994, Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger 1996). The concept of participation as empowerment has many nuances. Some development agencies see it basically as access to and control over resources, or as a way of releasing human energies and enlarging talents and potential (FAO 1997, Uphoff 1992).

Popular participation can be interpreted along three broad lines (Oakley 1991):

- Participation as contribution, i.e. voluntary or other forms of input by rural people to predetermined programmes and projects.
- Participation as organization, either externally conceived or emerging as a result of the process of participation.
- Participation as empowerment, enabling people to develop skills and abilities to become more self-reliant, and to make decisions and take actions essential to their development.

Participation in development projects and programmes is widely seen as both a means and an end. While many development agencies give equal weight to both, some emphasize one or the other aspect of participation (Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger 1996).

As a means, participation is a process in which people and communities cooperate and collaborate in development projects and programmes (IDB, Clayton et al 1998). Participation is also viewed as a means to help ensure sustainable development (Rudqvist and Woodford-Berger 1996, Uphoff 1992).

As an end, participation is seen as the empowerment of individuals and communities in terms of acquiring skills, knowledge and experience, leading to greater self-reliance (Clayton et al 1998). Participation is an instrument to break poor people's exclusion and lack of access to and control over resources needed to sustain and improve their lives. It is intended to empower them to take more control over their lives (Clayton et al 1998).

Participation means taking part in an activity. Participation in decision making process here refers to the right of the people to make some input with regard to projects being sited in their communities. People participate in local development everyday through their family life, livelihood activities and community responsibility. The degree of control that men and women have over these activities varies. The same holds true for Community Development initiatives or involves outsiders.

THE PROBLEM

There has been a consensus of opinion by scholars that popular participation is essential for the success and sustainability of CD efforts. The above stresses the need for beneficiaries of CD intervention efforts to actively participate in all stages of the program – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It has also been argued that grassroots perception of development and CD programs could affect their participation in CD programs. This contention is borne out of the conclusion that participation will be more effective when from the outset the people have a clear perception of what constitutes development, CD and its aims and objectives.. However, when the people are predominantly ignorant or still harbour some misconceptions as to what constitutes development and CD, popular participation would hardly be achieved.

Thus, peoples' perception could be the major difference between successful CD programs and failed CD efforts. Against this backdrop the researcher saw the need to investigate the perception of the people on what constitutes development and CD, their perception of the objectives of these programs and if grass root participation in CD programs has been very effective.

Therefore, the need to ascertain the level of peoples' awareness of what development and CD involves as a first step towards eliminating the misconceptions to guarantee a more successful CD programs is the problem of the study.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What do the grass root people perceive as development and CD?
2. What is the grass root people's perception of the objectives of CD programs and projects?
3. Do the grass root people participate effectively in CD programs and projects?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised the 600 executives members of Community Development Committees (CDCs) women associations, youth associations and traditional rulers council in all the thirty communities in Etche Local Government Area (ELGA) of Rivers State spread in the five clans of Igbo Agwuruasa, Mba, Ozuzu, Okehi and Ulakwo Umuselem.

A multi- stage sample procedure was adopted. The first stage involved a stratified sampling of two communities from each of the five clans in the local government area as follows: Okomoko, Umuechem – Igbo Clan; Umuaturu, Akpoku – Mba Clan; Ihie, Orwu- Ozuzu Clan; Akwukabi, Umuola – Okehi Clan and Afara, Odagwa – Ulakwo/ Umuselem.

The second stage involved the purposive sampling of the Chairmen, Secretaries, Public Relation Officers, Treasurers of the community administration institutions – Town Union, Women Association, Youth Association, CDC and the Traditional Rulers Council. This was used to determine the sample size of 200.

A questionnaire titled: Grass roots Perception of CD Program Assessment Questionnaire (GPCDAQ) was used for data collection. The reliability coefficient is 0.87.

The data collected were analyzed using simple percentages and weighted mean.

RESULTS

Table 1: Grass roots Perception of Development and Community Development (CD)

S/NO	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	X	REMARK
1.	Good roads constitute CD.	84 (336)	68 (204)	36 (72)	11 (11)	623	3.12	ACCEPTED
2.	Provision of maternities and is development.	92 (368)	73 (219)	29 (58)	6 (6)	651	3.26	ACCEPTED
3.	Availability of electricity is development	5 (20)	42 (126)	71 (142)	82 (82)	370	3.21	ACCEPTED
4.	Out of school education is part of CD.	90 (360)	68 (204)	36 (72)	6 (6)	642	1.85	REJECTED
5.	HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign and Roll Back Malaria Seminar are CD programs.	7 (28)	34 (102)	75 (150)	82 (82)	364	1.82	REJECTED

Table 1 shows that the respondents accepted development to involve the construction of good roads, provision of maternities, and availability of electricity. Each of these items has a mean that is greater than the criterion mean – 2.50. (3.12, 3.26, and 3.21 respectively); while the options suggesting out of school education and HIV/AIDS Awareness Campaign and Roll Back Malaria seminar were rejected by the respondents. Each of them has a mean that is less than 2.50. (1.85 and 1.82 respectively)

Table 2: Grass roots Perception of the aims and Objectives of CD projects and Programs

S/NO	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	X	REMARK
6.	CD programs are set up to compensate party supporters with contracts.	68 (272)	59 (177)	47 (94)	26 (26)	569	2.85	ACCEPTED
7.	Politicians embark on these projects principally to garner popularity for future elections.	72 (288)	63 (189)	49 (98)	16 (16)	591	2.95	ACCEPTED
8.	CD projects and programs only serve to improve peoples' standard of living.	15 (60)	42 (126)	64 (128)	79 (79)	393	1.96	REJECTED
9	Community people own government projects sited in their communities.	15 (60)	52 (152)	60 (120)	73 (73)	409	2.04	REJECTED

Table 2 shows the options that CD programs are set up to compensate party supporters with contracts and Politicians embark on these projects principally to garner popularity for future elections are accepted by the respondents. The items have means -2.85 and 2.95 respectively that are greater than the criterion mean; while the options were rejected by the respondents. Their means -1.96 and 2.04 respectively – is less than the criterion mean-2.50.

Table 3: Peoples' Participation in CD Projects and Programs

S/NO.	ITEM	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	X	REMARK
10.	Members of the community are always part of a needs assessment process to determine projects to be embarked upon in the community	6 (36)	33 (99)	76 (152)	85 (85)	372	1.86	REJECTED
11.	Members of the community always participate in the planning of CD projects	5 (20)	42 (126)	71 (142)	82 (82)	370	1.85	REJECTED
12.	Community members always participate implementation of CD projects	11 (44)	36 (108)	68 (136)	84 (84)	372	1.86	REJECTED
13.	Community members take part in monitoring and evaluation of CD projects.	15 (60)	48 (164)	64 (128)	73 (73)	425	2.13	REJECTED

Table 3 shows that the options indicating that members of the community are always part of a needs assessment process to determine projects to be embarked upon in the community, members of the community always participate in the planning of CD projects, community members always participate implementation of CD

projects and that community members take part in monitoring and evaluation of CD projects were rejected by the respondents. Each of their means – 1.86, 1.85, 1.86 and 2.13 respectively is less than 2.50 – the criterion.

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION (FGD).

From Group discussions were organized in five (5), one from each clan. In each of these communities ten persons who included the executive members of the community administration institutions were purposively sample and used for the FGDs.

The researcher tried to steer up reaction from the discussants on pertinent issues concerning their perception of development and the extent to which the people in CD activities and programs. In the course of the discussion, the discussants identified mostly in fracture and tangible projects such as roads, electricity, health centers schools as development not many of them agreed that HIV/AIDS Awareness campaign or out of school education such as: apprenticeship scheme, actually constitute development .To many of them, government has the sole responsibility of providing development while the people remain passive recipients of the development initiatives. The discussants also believed that projects are sited by government as a form of patronage to party faithful, One tried to support the argument by stressing that the school building in their area was awarded by a close relation of a popular politician who hails from the area and noted that he decides who gets what in terms of these contracts. This appears to be the trend as the discussants observed that each area has a political king who controls contracts and other forms of government, patronage in that area. A discussant sited the example of an empowerment grant being undertaken by the state government, He stressed that the main motive behind these actions was politic to compensate party faithful and garner support for election.

The discussants also revealed that the communities do not feel a sense of ownership of the government projects located in their areas. Many observed that the community was not involved during the award of contract and were not involved during the execution of the contract and wondered the project could turn out to be their own. They felt it was not also their responsibility to protect the projects from vandalization.

This led to the discussion on the extent of their participation in CD projects. The discussants noted that their participation in CD projects has been very low. The blamed the situation on the fact that the community people were not consulted, neither have they been effectively mobilized to participate in these activities. Many of the discussants, surprisingly, did not see the need for communities to engage in self help efforts to provide amenities such as roads, electricity, health centres etc. They felt it was the responsibility of the government. The discussants also revealed that the community people have never been involved in any stage of the CD process – needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. On monitoring and evaluation, one of the discussants wondered why they should monitor and evaluate what is ab initio not theirs.

DISCUSSIONS

Results of the study showed that the respondents were mainly executive members of the community administration institutions. These people are usually regarded as opinion leaders in their various communities and as such should be in the best position to understand and express the true feelings and sentiments of the people in the issues within the scope of this study.

The findings revealed that the respondents do not have the proper perception of development and community development. They consider development as solely tangible items starting with goods and things: good roads, electricity, health centers etc. They do not consider the non tangible items such as capacity building, awareness creation and as development. In the light of this finding, the view of Onyeozu (2007) becomes very relevant. True development must mean the development of man; the unfolding and realization of his creative potential, enabling him to improve his material conditions and living, through the use of resources available to him. It is a process by which personality is enhanced; and it is that enhanced personality, creative, organized and disciplined – which is the driving force behind the socio-economic transformation of society.

It is clear that development does not start with goods and things; it starts with people- their orientation, organization and discipline. When the accent on development is on things, all human resources remain latent, untapped potential and a society can be poor amidst the most opulent material resources.

The findings also showed that the respondents also have a negative perception of what constitutes the aims and objectives for embarking on CD projects. They accuse government and politicians of using the projects for self gains and image laundering to garner popularity for future elections. The people do not feel a sense of ownership

of these development projects sited in their areas and as such do not feel responsible for their protection against abuse, misuse and vandalization.

The reasons for the above may not be far fetched, since as the study revealed, the people were not mobilized to participate in the project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This could be responsible for non sustainability of many projects in the communities.

It is for this reason that World Bank (1996) stressed the need for participatory development – which they defined as a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them. Participation is an instrument to break poor peoples’ exclusion and lack of access to and control over resources needed to sustain and improve their lives. It is intended to empower them to take control over their lives. (Clayton et al, 1998).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings above the researcher made the following recommendations:

1. There is the need to engage qualified adult educators and community development workers in our rural communities so as to demands of creating the desired awareness to change the peoples’ perception of development and CD.
2. Oil companies should include creation of awareness in communities on issues that bother on their socio-economic development as part of their social responsibility to host communities.
3. There is the need for changes and reforms in terms of community management structures to widen the scope of participation in the affairs of the communities.
4. Community members should be carried along at all levels of CD projects and programs – planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation; and these programs should be co-coordinated by competent CD officers.
5. NGOs should include community education and capacity building in their plans for local communities.
6. The capacity of Community leadership should be strengthened to enable then cope with the challenges of leadership in a highly influenced by advancements in information technology.

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