

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Rural communities in Nigeria are plagued by attendant underdevelopment characterized by abject poverty and lack or inadequate social amenities such as health facilities, good roads, portable water, schools, shelter etc. However, successive governments in Nigeria mapped-out several programmes in order to bring about rural development but to no avail owing primarily to lack of involvement of the people concerned in such programmes. It is against this background that this paper examines the role of community development in promoting sustainable rural development in Nigeria. Community development entails the provision of infrastructural facilities to the people. It is a programme that covers areas of development such as agriculture, social welfare, youth programme, education, health, etc. and emphasizes on the involvement of the community members in development process which is why it is referred to as a programme of the people by the people and for the people. The paper recommends, among others, that Community Development workers should be adequate and be given relevant training to augment their professional skills.

KEYWORDS: Community, Development, Sustainable development, Rural community

Introduction

The majority of Nigerians are rural dwellers. Though inadequacies of statistics make knowledge of actual rural - urban population distribution inexact, unadjusted projections still shows that Nigerians predominantly live in rural areas. Rural areas in Nigeria are unquestionably characterized by debilitating material poverty and alarming decadence of infrastructure, arising from a long period of sad neglect by policy makers. The central place of infrastructure in development efforts need not be overemphasized. Indeed, rural infrastructures constitute the substance

of rural welfare and progress (Ikeji, 2013). However, the admiration of every society is development. Unfortunately, the status of development in our rural communities is nothing to write home about after 54 years of independence which is enough to attract development in any society clamoring for it especially with the continuous advancement in science and technology. The necessary social facilities are lacking which is the hallmark of development. Lending credence to the above, Ikechukwu and Chukwuemeka (2013) observed that the rural sector of Nigeria has not witnessed significant level of development in the past 52 years of the nation's independence. This is evidenced in the apparent lack of basic infrastructural facilities and abysmal poor quality of life in the rural areas. Rural areas are characterized by abject poverty and alarming decay in infrastructure due to neglect by successive governments in Nigeria. Most Nigerian rural areas are characterized by poor road network, poor electricity supplies, high incidence of diseases, defective market structure, low nutritional levels, high incidence of illiteracy etc. This is particularly true when Ezimah (2009) said that ...there is inadequate or poor modern amenities, high illiteracy rate resulting in various social ills such as high mortality rate, poor sanitation, poor housing, poor nutrition and diseases, etc. If the above portrays the state of affairs in our rural communities and if truly we are to bring about the desired development in rural communities, then there is need to advocate strong Community Development. This is because Community Development has the potential to bring about sustainable development in our rural communities. The vital role of community development as a virile instrument of socio-economic change and transformation of society cannot be under-estimated. Community development provides the necessary tools for transforming a stagnant or dormant community to a very active one. It is on the basis of the above that the paper examines the role that Community Development can play in ensuring sustainable rural development.

Conceptual Clarification

To create a better understanding of the paper, it is important to clarify the following major concepts:

Development: Development is a household concept throughout the world. Different people look at it in different ways. To some people, it means change while some see it as an advancement, improvement, progress, modernization or westernization. According to Porters (1975), in Ikechukwu and Chukwuemeka (2013), development entails transformation, advancement to a better and desire state. Similarly, Okoli and Onah (2002) assert that development involves progression, movement and advancement towards something better. They emphasized further that the movement should be on both the material and non-material aspects of life. Julius Nyerere (1978) cited by Omoruyi (2001) maintains

that development is summed up in man's capacity to expand his own consciousness, and therefore, his power over himself, his environment and society. To him, man is the central pivot around which development revolves. Hence, he concludes that development is for man, by man and of man. This means that man is not only the recipient of development efforts but also initiate the efforts to develop himself. Looking at the above, we can safely say that the most important thing in any development process is the desire for a better condition of living. Therefore, development is something that every society craves to have.

Community Development: Community Development involves the provision of basic amenities to the people. Sha'aba (2004) defines community development as the process of promoting the voluntary participation of people in improving their own economic, physical and social conditions. It is aimed at the entire community. The improvement of conditions is expected to lead to the raising of standards of living of the generality of the community members. As much as possible there is tremendous reliance on people's initiative and their human and material resources. Another definition that enjoys widest acceptance according to Osuji, Adewumi and Braimoh (1988) in Ezimah (2009), is that offered by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), which defines community development as "the process by which the efforts of the people themselves are united with those of governmental authorities to improve the economic, cultural and social conditions in the communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to progress."

Rural Development: This refers to the restructuring of the economy in order to satisfy the material needs and aspirations of the rural masses, and to promote individual and collective incentives to participate in the process of development. Rural Development also involves bringing about improvement in a host of multi-sectored activities like agriculture, rural industrial promotion, provision or creation of infrastructure, the establishment of structures that will allow for mass participation. Rural Development is aimed at bringing about improvement in the living standard of the rural masses with a view to encouraging and stimulating the people to participate in the transformation of the rural area. Objectives of rural development include: improved income distribution, full and productive employment, increased productivity, improved food for self-sufficiency, and the provision of basic needs and amenities (Omoruyi, 2001).

Sustainable Rural Development: This refers to long-term human and material sustenance. It is the continued existence of programmes long after their establishment. Sustainability is central to all rural development effort. Without it, investments in the rural development effort are short lived and of no effect.

A programme's results are called sustainable if they are utilized by the direct recipients after the completion of the programme without further external assistance. To plan for sustainable results, programme designers must pay close attention to the content of three Programme Formulation Framework (PFF) sections: major elements, host government commitment and inputs.

Major Elements: are the outputs and the activities logically organized and sufficient to produce capabilities that can be sustained by the direct recipients? For example, are few days training enough for trainees to actually perform better in their jobs?

Host government commitment: is the government or other national institutions clearly committed to build and sustain capabilities in terms of its policies, plan and resources, now and in the future?

Inputs: are the required national resources in terms of personnel, equipment, facilities and budget actually being provided to develop capabilities?

Sustainability is not created by planning alone, however, deliberate programme management and monitoring of the conditions that will bring about sustainability is essential during programme implementation. When applied to rural development, 'sustainability' is not limited only to continued existence of programmes long after their existence; it also means that sustainable rural development can be defined both as a process and as a policy goal (Ocheni and Nwankwo, 2012).

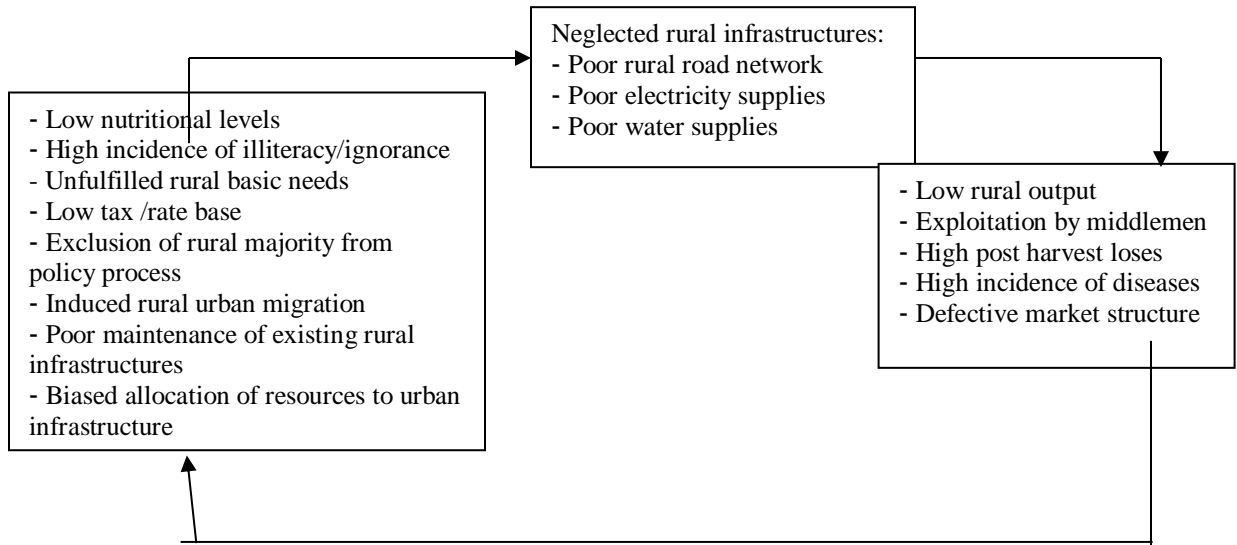
State of Rural Development in Nigeria

The world "rural" means different thing to different people. In Nigeria, the Federal Office of Statistics in the year 2012 classify rural as a community with less than 20,000 people. According to Afolayan (1995) in Ocheni and Nwankwo (2012), rural areas are easily identified by other various criteria, apart from population. Such criteria are:

1. Level of infrastructural development i.e. road networks, educational institutions, water supply, electricity, health facilities, communication etc. the rural area lacks most if not all of these infrastructures and where they are available, the quality as well as quantity is usually below desirable standard;
 2. Occupational differentiation: most rural dwellers earn their living by engaging in subsistence agricultural production;
 3. Housing: housing in rural areas are generally below the standard an average person will be proud of;
 4. Arising from the combination of the above factors is a characteristic abject poverty when related to the economic buoyancy of urban centres.
- It is not a gainsaying the fact that conditions of our rural communities is nothing to write home about. Considering the rate at which the urban

communities develop. All the necessary facilities that can attract development are not there. The poor conditions of rural areas have been summarized in the chart below:

Fig. 1: A vicious circle linking poor rural infrastructure to rural underdevelopment



However, if the above portrays the situation of things in our rural areas, it is obvious that things are not going on well as they are suppose to and if we are yearning for sustainable rural development, then there is need to strongly advocate for Community Development because of its potentials of bringing about sustainable rural development in Nigeria.

The role of Community Development in Ensuring Sustainable Rural Development

The important role of community development as a veritable tool for sustainable development cannot be over-emphasized. The role of community development, in this sense, can be looked at from the point of view of its scope and objectives. For the purpose of this paper, the writers adopt the discussions on scope and objectives of community development by Omoruyi (2001, 24-29) thus:

One crucial thing that emanates from the definition of community development is the fact that it can operate in different fields. These fields include agriculture, health, education and economic fields. This portrays community development as multi-purpose and inter-sectoral in nature. In rural areas, for

example, the components of community development include agriculture, irrigation, rural industries, education (including literacy), health, housing, social welfare, youth programme, employment, cooperative and training of village leaders...

In its scope therefore, community development stresses the idea of community service and community effort. It is a popular movement which seeks to stimulate the people's desire to know, to think and to act. It has to motivate and assist people to live healthier, happier, more satisfying and more interesting lives. Hence, it is often seen as a crusade against ignorance, poverty, disease, harmful and outmoded customs, and social apathy, personal boredom among the people irrespective of age, sex, their health and welfare, understanding the machinery of government, cultural and social awareness, and development of their economic and commercial organization. In other words, it helps the people to achieve true citizenship.

Specifically, the scope of community development includes:

1. Health
2. Rural Regeneration
3. Education
4. Urban-Renewal
5. Extension service

Health

In the area of health, community development caters for public health campaign, environmental sanitation and healthy family living, the use of preventive and curative medicine.

Rural Regeneration

One problem which community development seeks to address is rural neglect in term of development. The neglect of the rural areas can be traced to intensive urbanization. This had led to the emigration to the capitals of urban areas (human and material resources) which would have been useful in the development of the rural area. Rural regeneration is an activity centered around the taking of initiatives by the people themselves with a view to develop their community or bring about better living for the people. This also means helping the people to sustain those factors that have always kept the rural communities afloat. Rural cooperatives and vigilante group among others.

Education

Community development also has education as one of its components. Community development can be in form of campaign against illiteracy, in which case extra mural classes can be conducted for dropouts. Functional literacy, mass literacy, job training facilities and programme can be mounted for the people.

Education in community development therefore, provides services to illiterate adult, but does more than that. It provides the function of informing, enlightening and educating the people. It is frequently geared towards developing the local leadership which is badly needed for community development to take place.

Urban Renewal

Community development programme had resulted in the transformation of many rural areas. Community development in this direction is oriented towards the amelioration of the dislocations accompanying urbanization. Community development in this area can take the form of the provision of community centres, formation of community associations like civil defense groups, development of neighborhood units, community college or the construction of tangible projects such as town hall, roads etc.

Extension services

Extension services in community development take the form of public enlightenment about various subjects such as pest control, the use of fertilizer and land use decree, village layout, transitional programme etc.

Objectives of Community Development

Community development process aims at bringing about improvements in the lives of people through changes in the condition of their community. It is a complex or composite process through which the people are educated. This means that the people must be stimulated to a point at which they become desirous of better things, and sustain the urge to attain such better things. In the process, the people must be free to achieve their own betterment. This is the process of community development on which the objectives lie.

One major objective of community development is the education and motivation of the people for self-reliance or self-help. This is done by raising the awareness or moral of the people to the extent that they become desirous and willing to bring about better standard of living for themselves through or depending on their own efforts and industry. It therefore, involves an attitudinal orientation which will make the people know that they need to, and can improve on their present standard of living. In this process people learn to appreciate that community development means self-development by the community as a whole (Anyanwu, 1992, in Omoruyi, 2001).

Another objective of community development is the development of responsible leadership. In other words, community development provides a forum for leadership training. It would be recalled that the lack of effective, efficient and reliable leader is one of the factors hindering meaningful development of our

communities. A well explained programme of community development can produce leaders (men and women) who have adequate grasp of the objective that community development seek to achieve and have also acquired the necessary skills, knowledge and character for handling such task.

The third major objective of community development is to inculcate in the people or members of a community a sense of citizenship and a spirit of civic consciousness. The people must learn that they can only achieve the goals of development through their own efforts supplemented by external or governmental assistance. The people ought to learn that every community development programme is their own, design for their own benefit and so demand their active participation. It is only such involvement that enables the people to take their own share and make themselves felt in the conduct or execution of their own affairs.

The next objective is to introduce and strengthen democracy at the grass root level through the creation of institutions designed to serve as instrument of local participation. This is very important because Community Development make use of existing local organizations and institutions within the community. Community Development has to rely on local leadership to stimulate the interest of the people.

Fifth objective is to initiate in the people a self-generative, self-sustaining and enduring process of growth. In the course of Community Development the people learn that they must not wait for ready-made solutions to their problems, worked out by outsiders without any link with the community. The community has to be able, through constant practice, find out its own problems and initiate action aimed at solving or finding solutions to the problems relying, as much as possible, on the efforts of the people. The people must learn to take their own destiny in their own hands. Hence the emphasis in Community Development on the importance of people themselves to participate, at all stages in programme designed to enhance their welfare.

In addition, Community Development also seeks to help the people establish and maintain cooperative and harmonious relationship in their community. Community Development operate by stimulating and motivating people to action aimed at bringing about desirable change for better living among members of a community. The success of the community depends on the willing cooperative efforts of the people. The process creates in the people the desire to achieve success. It brings the people together and promotes healthy communication and interaction among the people. Harmonious relationship begins to evolve from the willingness of the people to cooperate in a participatory process, and new ideas are easily diffused into the people.

Finally, Community Development is also aimed at bringing about gradual and self-choosing changes in the life of the community. It enables people to identify what is good for them through the assessment of their needs. The people therefore,

must be able to choose their own programme based on their felt-need and decide at a pace favourable on how to achieve the goals of the programme. In other words, the people should be able to set their own goals, and decide also the way and manner they feel such goals can best be achieved.

A critical look at the scope and objectives above shows that Community Development is characterized by the fact that it is a developmental effort that is geared towards the need of the community members regardless of their status, sex or religious affiliation. There is no area of need that is not beneficial to members of the community one way or the other. Community Development is also characterized by its effort in solving one problem or the other for the people such as in the areas of education, health, agriculture, social welfare etc. In addition, it is premised on the principle of self-help or what is known as self-reliance and it is result-oriented.

On the whole, all the aspects of development covered by community development which are targeted toward the community members can ensure sustainable development considering the fact that the people actually participate in the process.

Conclusion

The paper has looked at the issues of rural underdevelopment in Nigeria and advocated for Community Development towards improving rural development. The paper argued that community development has potential to promote sustainable development in our rural communities owing to the fact that it encompasses virtually all the aspects of development such as education, health, social welfare, extension service, agriculture etc. In conclusion, the adoption of the recommended measures is expected to lead significantly to the enhancement of rural development process in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following are some of the recommendations proffered for ensuring sustainable development in our rural communities through community development in Nigeria:

1. Since community development is resource oriented (human and material), government should ensure adequate funding of the programme. This will go a long way in ensuring effectiveness of the programme.
2. There should be adequate manpower. Community Development workers should be adequate and should be given relevant training to augment their professional skills.
3. Rural populace should be adequately sensitized in the form of enlightenment campaign through various media such as village heads, religious leaders, radio, television, local newspapers, bill boards, fliers etc.

where the need for community development in their localities would be extolled.

4. There should be a follow-up visit in form of monitoring of projects and programmes in the affected communities so that the programme or project will be sustained. This follow-up visit should be in collaboration with people of the community.
5. Rural development should be given utmost priority in the budget to fast-track development in rural communities instead of concentrating development in the urban communities.

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