

Assessment of Citizens' Participation in Poverty Reduction Programmes in Ebonyi State

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges of citizens' participation in poverty reduction programmes in Ebonyi State. The objectives of the study include: to find out the strategies adopted by government and its agencies in poverty reduction programmes in the rural communities, to find out if such strategies have encouraged the participation of the citizens and identify factors militating against the participation of the citizens in poverty reduction programmes using Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme. The paper highlights the relevance and practical issues relating to citizens' participation in poverty reduction programmes. The work argued that participation of the citizens whose poverty levels are being reduced is critical and denying them the opportunity to participate and contribute to the process of alleviating their poverty level will hardly achieve the desired result. The research methodology adopted is the contents analysis of the existing literature on the related subject while secondary source of data were used. The paper was predicated on the Participatory theory as its framework of analysis. The findings reveal that the participatory strategy of poverty reduction programmes in the state was not properly applied while the programme was over politicised which led to very low level participation of the citizens.

The paper therefore, recommended strict compliance to participatory strategies of poverty reduction programmes in the state while poverty reduction implementation agencies should be made to be independent through legislation to avoid unnecessary political interference in its activities.

Key words: Assessment: Citizens' Participation: Poverty Reduction: Programmes.

Introduction

The issue of poverty reduction has been of great concern to various governments all over the world. This has attracted the attention of Non-governmental organizations, scholars, development experts, International development organizations among others. The general agreement is that poverty is a global issue that impacts negatively on the general wellbeing of people involved whether in developed or developing countries. A study of relevant literature in

both Management and Social Sciences show that poverty in developing countries including Nigeria is absolute.

Various reports showed that Nigeria is so poor today that over seventy percent of its population lack finance to take care of their immediate needs, lack food, shelter, access to health care services, education while child and maternal mortality rates have continued to grow, children of school age drop out of school for odd jobs, while the people don't have access to socio-economic and infrastructural facilities, and has been classified by World Bank Report (2015) as one of the 20th poorest countries in the world.

This precarious condition of continuous deterioration of the people's living standard has prompted various governments in Nigeria to initiate and implement various programmes aimed at reducing poverty. Ugo and Ukpere (2009) reiterate that successive government efforts at reducing poverty dates back to pre-Independence era through to the period of Independence but that non were majorly focused towards the poor, stating that most of these programmes never achieved the aims for which they were established. Some of these programmes include; Farm Settlement, established in 1960 to set up modern community farms to facilitate supervised credits to farmers, provide employment and stem rural-urban migration, Agricultural Development Programme (ADP); established in 1975 with the joint effort of the World Bank, Federal and State governments to increase agricultural and food crop production and income of rural farmers, Operation Feed the Nation (OFN); established in 1976 to mobilize the citizens toward self-sufficiency and self-reliant in food, Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme; established to assist peasant farmers source capital for food production, River Basin and Rural Development Authority; established in 1976 to transform both the surface and underground water resources, Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure; aimed at improving the qualities of lives and standard of living in the rural areas, Family support programme of 1997 and Better Life. Others include; Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) which was streamlined in partnership with World Bank assistance to give birth to National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). The Federal government equally established the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS) aimed at empowering the citizens to be self-reliant and promote employment, reduce poverty and stem rural-urban migration in the country, as it is expected that the programme should be established at the States and Local Government levels.

Irrespective of all these laudable programmes, Nigerian Human poverty index still remained at about 0.416, living on less than one Dollar per day (Amobi, 2008). Presently, the release by the United Nations Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (2015), shows that about 45% of Nigerians still live below the national poverty line (28% in the urban areas and more than 70% in the rural communities), while Ebonyi state has about 56% of her population below the national poverty level and the poorest among the south eastern states. A closer look at the results of these programmes leaves one to believe that the picture is getting worse by the day. Some commentators therefore believe that the citizens are not involved in formulation and implementation of these programmes, giving rise to poor results.

In consideration of the above and in search of more effective poverty reduction strategy that would actually assuage the poverty level of the citizens through participatory approach, the federal government reviewed all existing poverty reduction programmes in the country in order to harmonize and ameliorate them through various panels and committees that included;

- a. Presidential Panel on the Rationalization and Harmonization of Poverty Reduction Agencies headed by Alhaji Ahmed Joda
- b. Presidential Technical Committee on the review of all Poverty Reduction Programmes headed by Professor AngoAbdulahi
- c. Committee on Youth Policy, Concept of the Youth Empowerment Scheme and the Blueprint for Poverty Eradication Programme headed by Professor A.B. Aborishade (Shepherd 2007).

These Panels came up with their findings and recommendations which necessitated the formation of the National Poverty Eradication Programme in 2001, with the target to wipe out poverty from Nigeria (Onokerhoraye, 2007). Still desirous of programme that would involve community based approach and full participation of the citizens, Nigeria revisited the established 1996 community Action Programme for Poverty Reduction and in search of assistance to enable the government establish and implement this programme, Nigeria had to partner with two International Banks; the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The target was to have a programme that would focus on direct poverty reduction and support community-based activities through full participation of the citizens where they would initiate and implement projects of their choice according to their needs. This led to the emergence of Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme (CPRP) in Nigeria in 2001 meant to give the citizens the opportunity to initiate and

participate fully in the implementation of programmes of poverty reduction in their various communities. How this strategy has been applied in poverty reduction programmes in Ebonyi State is the focus of this study.

Literature Review

This focused on the theoretical review of the extant and relevant literature that covered the research areas, focusing on our study objectives.

Concept of Poverty

The disagreement on the precise definition of poverty has continued to engage the attention of scholars all over the world. This stems from the multifaceted nature of poverty and the relativity of the concept of poverty which prevents unanimity among scholars as regards its definition. This is evidenced by the intensive and extensive consultations and debates among scholars in determining a conceptual definition of poverty. Consequently, scholars and development economists admit that the concept of poverty is complex and multidimensional and as such a mere definition may not give a clear picture of its complexity. Ugo and Ukpere (2009), confirmed this when they stated that no definition of poverty can be said to be adequate due to its complexity. They averred that there are various factors that shape the interpretation of poverty to different people in different places and at different circumstances, maintaining that what one sees as poverty can be an affluent to another person. Despite this difficulty in poverty definition, it is agreed that poverty has one peculiar instrument which is involuntary deprivation; hence poverty is seen as involuntary deprivation which a person as an individual, household, community or nation faces. At individual level, deprivation could manifest when one is unable to have access to basic needs of life such as food, housing, education and health care services, and at the household level, poverty manifest when a man is unable to take care of his immediate family members such as sending children to school and paying their school fees, take house hold members to hospital when need arises and access the health care services, as well as taking care of family members' nutritional needs, while at the community or national level, deprivation can be seen when community or nation is unable to create access to social-economic and infrastructural services and create jobs and income generating opportunities to the people. Since income is the means of creating access to other needs, income becomes an important issue when

poverty is discussed. Lack or insufficient income to be able to create access to meet basic needs is the basis of poverty.

Nnamani (2003) sees poverty in different perspective, as he sees poverty as not just having sufficient income to take care of basic needs of life, but the account of how people were denied the opportunity to have access to the means of production to better their lot. This indicates that people are in poverty as a result of their denial of access to means of production such as land, education, healthcare services, electricity which would have enhanced their standard of living. The denial of access to means of production has continued to throw people to hunger. This is supported by World Bank (1996) assertion that the alarming rate of poverty was basically due to the denial of people the access to means of production which have thrown the poor into helpless situation. Poverty is as well seen as a situation where people are subjected to hardship and lack resources that would have assisted them seek means of assuaging their condition. Poverty can as well be seen from social perspective which portends people who cannot measure up to certain standard in the society as being poor. Here, people are judged by the type of school they send their family members, the type of food they eat as well as their dressing and the type of accommodation they have. This creates economic and social distance. Gasu (2011) sees this situation as a situation where a population or a section of the population is not just unable to meet its essential needs of foods, clothing and shelter but inability to maintain what the society see as minimum standard of living. Dennis (2011) added credence to the issue of social distance when he states that it is the marginalization of the poor that has created the situation of helplessness as the poor see themselves as people that are condemned to be pathologically on the road to damnation.

Another aspect of poverty came up when it was argued that it was the poor himself that will be in a position to describe poverty in line with his situation. This assertion has given a different approach to the concept of poverty. The assertion is that it is the person that wears the shoe that knows where it pitches him, hence the core of this view of poverty is that poverty has to be defined by the poor themselves or by the communities that poor people live in. Oladikpo (1999) agreed that poverty may look quite different when seen through the eyes of a poor man or a woman. This is seen in the differences in the various definitions, as poverty is weighed in relative term. As a result of this, Social and Management Scholars discern the need to widen the

definition of poverty when they famed that poverty can be seen in the areas of history, intellect and ideology, hence, Shepherd (2007) sees poverty as multifaceted.

The concept of poverty is therefore multidimensional, encompassing both monetary and non-monetary aspects. This shows that poverty cannot be defined focusing on one aspect of this concept as doing that would mean not showing good understanding of its complexity.

Citizens' Participation in Poverty Reduction Programmes in Nigeria

Citizens' participation in poverty reduction programme which is about the involvement of the citizens in the planning and implementation of poverty reduction programmes that they are expected to benefit from, has been the major desire of many administrations in the country. However, the application of the strategies of involving the people have been the major obstacles these programmes faced, as the citizens were denied participation as programmes were formed at the top and brought for implementation at the grassroots on top-bottom approach. This top-bottom approach had led to the failure of most poverty reduction programmes in the country as revealed by Maiangwa (2009), stating such programmes to include; Directorate for Food, Roods and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Peoples Bank of Nigeria, Family Economic Advancement Programme, National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), among others, stressing that the failure of poverty reduction programmes of government over the years to yield the desired objectives was because the citizens who were the expected beneficiaries of these programmes were never involved in the programme implementation.

Since citizens' participation in poverty reduction programme is all about the involvement of the citizens in transformation programmes of the government to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need as noted by Yusuf(1999), which will form the basis for entrepreneurship development and employment generation in the rural areas and therefore enhance the improvement of the living conditions of the citizens, it becomes imperative that the people should be integrated into the planning and implementation of programmes that they are expected to benefit from, since they are in better position to tell the government what they need and the way the need them. Finding robust solution to this trend, both the government agencies as well as foreign donors and founders, including non-governmental organisations who took part in most of the transformation programmes in the country have come to realise that the

transformation vision, programmes and strategies pursued though with good intentions, ended up being inappropriate and even irrelevant to the people. This scenario led to the emergence of Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme in the country which Ebonyi State is a beneficiary, where projects are designed and implemented by the citizens themselves with the government playing a supportive role in terms of finance and supervision as enshrined in its programme the six guiding principles as follows:

1. Project must be demand driven
2. Have community participation
3. Have decentralized decision making
4. Be implemented directly by communities
5. Empower local communities through skill enhancement
6. Have a minimum of hierarchy

When citizens are involved in programmes that concern them, they will be willing to put in their best leading to the realisation of the set objectives.

Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme (CPRP)

The quest for direct poverty reduction programme that would guarantee the full participation of the citizens prompted the federal government in agreement with the state governments and donor agencies to come up with Community Based Poverty Reduction Programmes in Nigeria in 2001. The adoption of the programme was to accelerate the process of poverty reduction in the rural communities where over seventy percent of the Nigerian population live (Soludo, 2006). The programme was meant to provide basic socio-economic facilities to the rural communities where these facilities are non-existence to improve their living standard. Since the little money the rural dwellers make are spent to have access to medical facilities and other essential commodities, it becomes imperative for government to find more effective means of providing these infrastructural and social amenities to these rural community dwellers through their full participation as it can enhance the full participation of the beneficiaries right from the identification stage to implementation and management of their development needs that would assuage their poverty situation by improving their living standard, hence the new concept of community based poverty reduction programmes as it is considered to be a model that can guarantee the participation of the intending rural community beneficiaries.

The programme started in six Nigerian states in September 2001 as a pilot programme. These states include; Abia, Cross-River, Ekiti, Kebbi, Kogi and Yobe States. In 2004, six other states keyed into the programme in the second phase of the programme, they include; Ebonyi, Edo, Gombe, Kwara, Osun and Yobe (EB-CPRP, 2009) and was designed to among other things:

- a. Upgrade the provision of infrastructure in the areas of health, education, electricity, and water sectors.
- b. Build multipurpose infrastructure in the rural communities including feeder roads and bridges.
- c. Improve access to the supply of social-economic services
- d. Improve the management and services of natural resources
- e. Enhance safety nets support.

The Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme that was participatory in strategy operated in Ebonyi State between 2004 and 2009 and was replaced by the present Community and Social Development Programme and yet, the United Nations Multidimensional Poverty Index (2015) still places Ebonyi state as the poorest state in the south east.

Table 1: Sectorial Distribution of Micro Projects by Ebonyi State Community Based Poverty Reduction Programme (EB-CPRP)

S/No.	Sector	Number approved since inception	Number completed since inception	%
1	Health	12	12	9.7
2	Education	40	40	32.3
3	Water supply	15	15	12
4	Feeder road and culverts	17	17	13.7
5	Sanitation	1	1	0.8
6	Rural electrification	9	9	7.3
7	Market infrastructure	5	5	4.0

8	Civic / skill acquisition	24	24	19.4
9	Others (specify) Agro processing	1	1	0.8
	Total	124	124	100

Source: Final Implementation Report of Ebonyi State CPRP Technical Committee Report of March, 2009.

TABLE 2: Distribution of Sub-Projects and Approved Funds to Local Government Areas

S/N	L.G.A	Senatorial Zone	Number Funded Since Inception	Funds Disbursed Since Inception (N)	%
01	Abakaliki	Ebonyi North	11	42,622,560	8.5
02	Ebonyi	Ebonyi North	07	25,323,238	5.0
03	Izzi	Ebonyi North	14	57,106,225	11.4
04	Ohaukwu	Ebonyi North	24	99,949,495	19.4
05	Ezza	Ebonyi Central	10	41,024,889	8.1
06	Ezza South	Ebonyi Central	07	29,138,560	5.8
07	Ikwo	Ebonyi Central	09	41,661,123	8.3
08	Ishielu	Ebonyi Central	10	41,021,669	8.2
09	Afikpo South	Ebonyi South	13	52,174,128	10.4
10	Afikpo North	Ebonyi South	04	15,410,158	0.3
11	Ivo	Ebonyi South	07	28,866,675	5.7

12	Ohaozara	Ebonyi South	03	11,700,000	2.3
13	Onich	Ebonyi South `	05	16,925,202	3.4
Total			124	502,923,922	100

Source: Final Implementation Report of Ebonyi State CPRP Technical Committee Report of March, 2009.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on participatory theory. John Dewey (1954) postulated this theory in an attempt to explain participation in government policies. Others were; Henry Kariel and Peter Bachrah, The proponents of this theory believed that citizens' participation in government policies rested on social consensus with regard to human development. Bachrah (1967) noted that Participation is vital to the process of policy selection since consensus could form a proper base for social judgement and the act of participation by itself is essential for self-development. This therefore, means that there should be a large means of social control of economic development, preferably by agreement in which the policy makers would meet the citizens to plan, formulate and implement public policies. The proponents of this theory argued that the government should go beyond provision of social services and socialise the forces of participation now at hand, so that the liberty of individuals will be supported by the very structure of economic organisation, acknowledging that our institutions and democratic forces tend to favour in substance, a few privileged, hopefully that is the sheer defeatism to assume in advance that the government institutions are incapable of furthering development.

Findings

a. Non-compliance to the participatory strategy of the poverty reduction programme

The creation of institutional frame work needed to facilitate the participation of citizens in poverty reduction programmes has been left in the hands of untrained personnel who never cared to adhere strictly to the participatory strategies outlined by the programme as guiding principles, while the major sponsors of the programme such as World Bank was not involved in the implementation. Equally, the civil society organisations and the private sectors that supposed to monitor the implementation were all shot out of the activities of the agency responsible for the

programme and this led to non-compliance with the guiding principles set by the initiators of the programme.

b. Over politicisation of poverty reduction programme in the state

Citizens' participation in poverty reduction in Ebonyi State has suffered over-bearing political interest in policy formulation and implementation. In the setting up of these agencies, the politics of who coordinates or decides projects and sites issues have always led to the abandonment of some lofty projects coupled with political divides where those communities and individuals who do not belong to the political parties in power were discriminated against in benefiting from these projects. When this is the case, the citizens were frightened away from participating.

c. Uncoordinated Institutional Structure:

Lack of coordinated institutional structure involving the government agencies, the donor agencies, the private, civil society and other stakeholders in the pursuit of poverty reduction programmes has hindered the realisation of the policy of citizens' participation in poverty reduction in Nigeria. The government agencies alone see the citizens as mere consumers of government services, and as such, do not regard them as very important in the cause of poverty reduction. The local Government councils and the benefitting communities were meant to contribute some percentage of the cost of projects, but this participatory and ownership mechanism was neglected by the implementers of the programme as individual could pay the counterpart fund meant for the community, and after the release of money for the project, the paid money is refunded to the person thereby executing the projects with lesser budget prompting the use of inferior material in project execution while the Local Government that would have liaised with the benefitting communities to maintain such projects were not equally involved, thereby shutting out the citizens from full participation in the programme

Conclusion

Nigeria since Independence had initiated programmes designed to reduce poverty through developmental and economic approaches, however, these programmes had excluded the participation of the people whose poverty situations were being assuaged. However, the recent poverty reduction strategies of the government in poverty reduction adopted citizens' participation through bottom top approach where the citizens are allowed to decide their need and equally be part of the implementation. These were all aimed at making the citizens self-

reliant through agriculture, small scale industries, provision of socio-economic infrastructure and acquisition of skills in various fields that would create employments, reduce poverty and curb rural-urban migration and crime.

However, though these policies are lofty that if carefully implemented would result to a lot of socio-economic benefit not only to the citizens but to the total sustainable transformation of Nigeria, but a closer look at the findings of this study lives one to believe that the more these policies evolve, the less result we achieve. This shows actually that poverty reduction programme designs were not strictly adhered to during the execution of these programme, especially attempting to reduce citizens' poverty level without involving them fully in the initiation and implementation of such programmes. This shows a serious disconnect between the government and the citizens as such projects turn to a wasteful venture. Therefore, to achieve its desired objectives, this study came up with some recommendations.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made to enhance citizens' participation in rural transformation.

1. The civil society and the private stakeholders, especially the citizens to whom these programmes are meant to benefit should be fully involved in the formation stage and during the implementations. This will equally serve as watch dog as this combination would enhance transparency and accountability in the processes. The citizens themselves would have good knowledge of the programme and be able to participate fully. When this is done the tendency for wastage and corruption would have been eliminated.
2. The institutions responsible for formulation and implementation of government poverty reduction programmes should be restructured to accommodate the representatives of the Donor agencies, the civil societies, and the citizens. Their involvements in formulation and implementation of these programmes would enhance proper application of the mapped out strategies for effectiveness.
3. Government should set up an Independent monitoring agency to monitor and evaluate the activities of poverty reduction bodies, with relevant laws to avoid unnecessary political influence, different from the over-sight functions of the National and States

Assemblies. This will serve as one of the methods the citizens can be encouraged to participate

4. Adequate information should be constantly made available to the general public about poverty reduction programmes in clear language for proper understanding. This could be achieved through bottom-top approach, where the citizens' needs are sorted through round table discussions and come to consensus on their needs.

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