

Community Development: A Veritable Tool for Achieving National Development in Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

No doubt, no any government world over can be able to provide all necessary needs of life to its communities. The aims and objectives of this paper is to stress the importance of encouraging communities to embark on Community Development projects in other words, self-help projects. Government (Federal, state and Local) seriously mount enlightenment campaign through their various organs to enlighten its communities to embark upon self-help projects in order to enhance or to complement government efforts in providing social amenities to their communities.

In this paper, efforts and attempts were made to identify the criteria for selecting community projects and some underlying problems affecting the success of community projects were discussed. Consequently, the efforts of women in community development programmes were also intensified.

The writer was also able to analyze the role of community development in the National Planning Policy and suggest the way forward in achieving this strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever there is increasing concern about revamping economic development of the country. The idea of National Guidelines on Community Development emerged when Director of Community Development Departments in the country met at Lagos to review community development programmes and activities as well as the recently general implementation strategies.

After an exhaustive deliberation on the issues raised, the Directors observed that in spite of the increasing temporary of self-help community development projects nationwide, not much appears to be known about community development as a government agency responsible for stimulating and co-ordinating the activities. The result has been the apparent low priority attached to community development in terms of recognition and acceptance as a veritable instrument for achieving National Development.

In addition to the above statements, community development attempts to integrate educational activities and programmes into the social lifestyle of the rural communities. The key to rural development in a society is the human element and not the material aid. Essential for the effective performance of anyone involved in adult education and community development in this country should be the basic understanding of the people among whom the work is to be undertaken and of the

environmental and other factors that influence the attitudes and behaviour of the people to be involved.

If our efforts in adult education and community development is to succeed, we must familiarize ourselves with the area in which we intend to operate so that we can ascertain the factors that will facilitate our efforts and foster development, and those that will stand as obstacles in our path.

According to Dunham (1971) community development is not concerned with any aspect of life such as agriculture, business, health or education, it is concerned with total community life and needs.

The relationship between adult education and community development therefore, justifies the assumption that perhaps similar psychological models in terms of techniques and methods could be employed in the education of adults and in the attempt to promote the development of the rural communities through self-help programmes.

UNESCO (1963) defined Adult Education as follows: A person is literate when he has acquired the essential knowledge and skills which enable him to engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community, and whose attainment in reading, writing and arithmetic, make it possible for him to continue to use those skills towards his own and the community's development and for active participation in the life of his country. Judging adult education from these perspectives, the purpose is to equip the individual with desirable skills that will enable him function effectively in any given society. Functionality is the watchword of adult education.

In his contribution to the UNESCO definition, Anyanwu (1981), described adult education as the development of personalities, aptitudes, and encouragement of social, moral and intellectual responsibility in relation to local, nation and world citizenship. Adult education is advocating for personality development so that an individual would become a desirable and acceptable citizen.

The term community development itself conveys various meanings to different people or even to the same people depending on the community's circumstance and issues under investigation. The generally accepted definition of community development is the one adopted by the United Nations. The United Nations defines community development "as the process by which efforts of the people themselves are united with those of the government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities, to integrate these communities into the life of the nation and to enable them to contribute fully to national progress.

Based on the above definition, the main objectives of community development are the establishment of organized systems of social service in order to make people self-reliant and able to participate fully in the development of the nation and

ensuring that the communities are fully integrated into the life of the nation through embarking in community development programmes.

In the same vein, Arthur Hillman, (1975) comprehensively defined community development as: A method of helping local communities to become aware of their needs, to assess their resources more realistically, to organize themselves and their resources in such a way as to satisfy some of their needs and in so doing, acquire the attitudes, experiences and cooperative skills for repeating this process again and again on their own initiative.

By this definition, community development is a process in the sense that it is a dynamic sequences which when set in motion, supplies its own motive power so that people in the community through their efforts are enabled to move steadily towards the goal of self-improvement.

PROCESS AND PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Central to our definition of Community Development was the identification of certain key features. First and foremost among them is self-help, followed by initiative from the people themselves and lastly, a stimulation process to break down apathy and show the people that what they want can be provided if they are prepared to take up to the challenge. Thus, the community development process begins.

STEPS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

There are basically three steps in the community development process as indicated below:

- Identification of needs for development.
- Planning for specific projects or services to meet the needs.
- Sources of Resources.

For a smooth start, the identification of peoples needs is primary in the community development process. The fact finding should incorporate the social, economic and cultural background and beliefs of that society because these determine their type of needs. In trying to help people identify their needs, one must live close to them. This will instill the degree of confidence in them because the change agent or development worker is part of them and it should always be ensured that the initiative should come from them in order to be committed because it is part of their daily lives and beliefs.

After assisting people to identify their needs, the next thing is to communicate this to the entire population in a language they will best understand or by forming a committee with this responsibility.

The second step after the identification of people needs is the planning for specific projects or services to meet the identified needs. This begins with a cleared objective of each project and services proposed which gives a sense of direction.

Setting of target in terms of quantity and quality of projects and services followed closely. Target in a plan helps to establish the answer to the question "How many and how much". It is the plan target that helps to measure the success and or failure of the plan in the final analysis.

The next stage after setting of target is to allocate financial resources to the projects. The allocation should be spread over a number of years, say two, three or four, depending upon the type of project. The assistance of a professional planner or an economist may be required. The fourth stage in the planning process is to establish or project the financial and material assistance the community is expecting from governmental and non-governmental organization. The community must not rely solely on such assistance for the execution of its projects. It may be necessary to substitute labour for finance when assistance from outside is not forthcoming or when there is shortfall in the expected funds from the people themselves.

The fifth stage is to determine the recurrent expenditure of the projects take may not be taken over by government. This is important so that projects or services that are provided by the people themselves are not abandoned or left un-catered for after some years.

The sixth stage is to allow various groups in the community such as youths, traditional rulers and influential people to go through the draft of the plan before it is finally approved by the development committee.

The last step after the planning process is sources of resources. The two most important determinants of success or failure of a plan are availability of human and financial resources and prudent management and utilization of these resources. Human resources here means the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour force required to implement a plan.

The labour force are made up of the community itself, the local, state and federal government agencies, business organizations, religious groups and philanthropic organization, age grades, youth movements, women groups and social clubs respectively.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING COMMUNITY PROJECTS

In a developing country such as Nigeria, it is common to find increasing number of unfinished and abandoned development projects scattered in almost every village or hamlet. These projects range from unfinished family houses to churches/mosques, bridges and even small-scale industries among others.

There is no doubt that the unfinished projects represent wasted efforts, time and money. They also reveal the need for proper planning and co-ordination and above all, the effective involvement of the people (popular participation) in the implementation of development programmes. A developing country, with limited financial resources for reconstructing its economy and preparing its citizens for a

changing world of work, cannot afford to dump its scarce resources into developing projects which cannot be carried to successful conclusions.

However, selection of projects is very crucial to community development practice. Before any project is selected for implementation, there should be a thorough survey of the project (situational analysis). This is done in order to avoid unnecessary waste of time, money and efforts. Selection and prioritizing of projects should be based on the felt needs of the people and availability of resources for executing it. The following aspects of the projects should be considered:

- i. Viability of the project;
- ii. Method of constructions;
- iii. Estimated cost of the project;
- iv. Availability of labour required;
- v. Cash at hand for the project;
- vi. Cash already expended on the project;
- vii. Estimated amount needed to complete the project;
- viii. Amount of assistance required.

If the above criteria are carefully followed between the change agents/development workers and the rural people in the quest for developing their communities, the issue of abandonment of project would be curtailed.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

Relevant to this paper are the questions: what are the types of projects embarked upon by these communities? Will the project create permanent employment for the residents of the target area? In short, how has the project been of help to the individuals in the community?

Above all, the success of any adult education or community development programme should be assessed by how far such programmes have achieved community stabilization and attainment of self-sufficiency by the target community or individuals. Other factors to be considered in such an evaluation include:

1. Increase in vocational skill.
2. Reduction in school-leavers' migration to the urban areas.
3. Increase in literacy rate.
4. Reduced bias against agriculture.
5. Mobilization of all available manpower resources in the community.
6. Increased coordinating and cooperation between the social agencies that provide social services for the community.
7. Improved economic position.
8. Some measurable physical and psychological changes in the community's environment and people that will stand the test of time.

SOURCES OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES (FUNDING)

The importance of finance to the process of community development programmes cannot be over-emphasized. Without exaggeration, finance can be said to be the live-wire of any community development efforts whether in terms of construction of physical projects or teaching of new ideas and techniques of carrying out certain work. Money is required or needed for materials, tools and equipment for heavy machinery and for payment of token fee to professional advisers and hired labour to carry out projects. Above all, money is required to maintain existing structures and to keep certain service going. Money is also required to carry out research into ways of life of different communities for purposes of comparison and emulation. Money is needed to send people for training, seminars and workshops where new ideas are learnt and brought back to the community.

Where does this money come from? The existing policy on community development stipulates that the federal, state and local governments shall provide adequate financial assistance to community development on self-help projects. This aspect of the policy is consistent with the definition of community development which implies that self-help projects are to be jointly funded by both the community and government authorities. To ensure effective implementation of the policy, the federal, state and local governments should substantially increase their budgetary allocation for community development projects. Summarily, any community embarking upon community development programme, owe it a duty to contribute their own quota financially to the execution of the programme. Financial contribution of the people can take one of many forms such as:

- development levy on flat rate for male and female adults;
- development levy in accordance with level of individual's income;
- voluntary contribution to individual wish or capability;
- the community may also launch an appeal fund.

Apart from government assistance, the business sector may take over the execution of a project or projects started by the community or it may take over the maintenance and continuous running of certain services provided by the community.

Religious and philanthropic organizations may also provide certain services single-handedly and hand them over to the community. Examples of such services include educational and health institutions, postal services and social welfare centres.

WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The importance of women to social and economic development of any society cannot be over-emphasized. To this regard, Abama, Anzaku, Kanchok and Mangwat (1993) argue that the resourceful and fruitful efforts of women to support and sustain their families and communities socially and economically even in the pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria was eminent. Women in those days were involved in economic enterprises like vegetable farming for family. Consumption and public sale, sale of produce, cooked food, petty business and other unquantifiable economic activities which kept the various societies going.

Through individual and group efforts, women have tried to introduce the understanding of changes taking place in the society at large and how to cope with the challenges brought about by such changes. In many parts of the world, including Nigeria, there has been a burning desire among women for more education for themselves and their daughters.

All over the world today, women have formed themselves into groups with different names and objectives. The main goal of these groups is to meet the social needs of members and other women who might be less fortunate in the society. In Nigeria, the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) is a federation of hundreds of women societies throughout the country. Its aim is to assist women in both urban and rural areas on their important role as home-makers and nation-builders.

Today in Nigeria and other developing countries, women societies are directly involved in almost all the stages of community development process beginning from identification of felt needs (need assessment) down to the execution and evaluation of projects. As stable members of the community, women help a great deal in assessing the impact of a programme after it must have been completed. This, they do out of keen observation of changes that have taken place in the community. In this way they are able to suggest amendments to a plan already embarked upon.

Women have also assisted in mobilizing themselves for physical participation in development plan and implementation embarked upon by the local communities. For example, in many communities in Nigeria where communities have constructed bridges, churches, mosques, roads, dams, town halls and built both primary and post-primary schools by themselves without government involvement, the women have actively involved in supplying sand, water for the construction of these projects. Furthermore, they (women) constantly provide food and refreshments for members of the community who provide labour for the construction of projects.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE NATIONAL PLANNING

Community Development has been widely accepted as a veritable instrument for achieving National Development since it ensures active involvement and participation of people in the planning and implementation of projects aimed at improving their own standard of living. There is therefore a strong link between community development and national planning. Indeed, many countries in Africa and Asia as well as in the America, have adopted community development as a strategy for bringing about social and economic changes in their economics. Since every government is expected to bring development to its people, and since it has never been practicable for any government to single-handedly satisfy the needs and requirements of the people, then it is cheaper and more sustaining for government to embrace community development strategy as a matter of deliberate policy.

Today, Nigeria is facing very critical human settlements problems such as rapid population growth, environmental poverty, declining quality of life, non-existing and relying infrastructural facilities, flooding, desert encroachment, rural-urban migration and almost complete absence of social amenities especially in the rural areas. Indications are also that the challenges are likely to be more complex in the near future, unless there is an organized major movement to remedy the existing situation.

From our experience so far, as well as the experience of other countries, direct delivery of services by government cannot by itself alone satisfactorily address the complex problems. Therefore, community development strategy which is participatory and cooperative approach must be realistically adopted and emphasized.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Despite the wide acceptance of community development from time immemorial as the back-bone of socio-economic growth in many communities and towns in Nigeria, it has not taken a prominent position in the national policy on national development in Nigeria.

Below are some of the obstacles militating against the success of community development:

- a. **Instability of Rural Communities:** Local communities in Nigeria are characterized by instability and rapidly growing migration to the urban areas by young school leavers. Community development and adult education should aim at mobilizing such raw man-power resources for diverse productive and essential projects that would both create gainful employment for school-leavers and result in the creation production assets and infrastructural facilities. As social scientists would agree – unless a community is made stable by the incoming projects, any efforts to develop it will always remain illusive.
- b. **Leadership Problems:** The proponents as well as the leaders of community development or self help projects are usually the sons and daughters of the village. Mature and able-minded leadership in development programmes is one of the ideal steps of bringing about the problems of his people, and has the desire to help solve these problems by positively influencing his people with a desired change proposal. Leaders are to serve as motivating mediators between their communities and government agencies. Any changes being imposed on the people by their leaders may suffer some set backs.
- c. **Lack of Trust:** Our communities lack trust in the government projects. Such lack of trust may be a function of generalized fear of governmental intentions and past unfulfilled promises. Besides the lack of trust in government, the communities may also generalized their distrust to their own local leaders and officers due to:- past failure experiences arising from previous community projects for which money was collected from the

villagers and land allocated, but the project was either not started or was not completed. Local politics also contributed to lack of trust in the area of demography (sitting of projects) and may sometimes result from violation of traditional division of power and authority in the community.

- d. **Bias against Women:** To the average Nigerians, when one talk of community development, one is understood to be talking about men's area of decision-making and involvement and the women's area of doing whatever the men want from them. The general failure on the part of men to realize that women have something to contribute to the development of Nigeria other than being somebody's wife is a miscalculated attempt and a bad impression that need redress.
- e. **Related Inadequacies:** An adult educator or a community development agent often sees himself as a bearer of good news. When the target individual or community fails to cooperate with his attempts to educate them or to develop their community, the agent tends to ascribe their non-cooperation to apathy. Individuals and communities survival had always been guided by the principles of self-help. The lack of cooperation which the agent gets from the community or if individuals may be a function of failure on his part to perceive his attempts may be a function of failure on his part to perceive his attempts as the community perceives him. From the view point of the recipients of the attempted change, the agent is seen as an intervener. The agent must understand and employ in his attempts those human factor strategies that tend to inhibit such suspicion, arouse cooperation as well as the psychological know-how that will stimulate maximum cultural change in the individual vis-à-vis the community.
- f. **Mismanagement of funds of resources:** Another serious obstacle to community development programmes in Nigeria is the mismanagement of funds/resources meant for projects. Sometimes funds are being diverted or embezzle by few individuals to the detriment of overall development of the community. For example, a community has contributed to build a maternity home, or a community clinic only to realize that all their contributions in terms of money and efforts were not to be accounted for. However, shortage of fund also leads to abandonment of projects.
- g. **Poor Maintenance Culture:** The maintenance of completed project is problematic. Owing to poor implementation of the project concerned, many rural projects are either not completed at all or after completion, they cannot be maintained.
- h. **Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation:** Monitoring and evaluation are integral elements of community development practice. Lack of proper supervision of projects by experts may result to its early breakdown or existence. Supervision should be undertaken systematically and regularly with a view to identifying the problem and challenges to community development on the ground of making recommendations and proposing modification on existing policy. As specified in the social development policy documents, the federal government shall concentrate on the activities of the states, while the state government and local councils shall take responsibilities for those of the development areas (communities) respectively.

CONCLUSION/SUGGESTIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

In many communities in Africa, poverty, ignorance and disease and closely inter-related in a vicious cycle. A selective approach by tackling an individual problem in isolation cannot be wholly effective unless through collective effort. One of the most successful strategies for reducing resistance against the introduction of adult education or community development is to involve the group concerned in diagnosing the difficulty and designing the procedure.

The key words the development worker must always remember are participation and involvement. People enjoy and affirm the changes they make for themselves; they resist demands imposed on them by others. In other words, information relating to the need for adult education and community development, the plans and consequences for such must be shared by all the relevant people in the community. They must be made to feel, through group discussion and decision-making that the idea they are acting on is their own.

For equity and fairness to exist in community development programmes, women should be fully involved in the participation process. Participation is an important aspect of involvement in the development process where crucial issues on needs assessment, project formulation and evaluation are taken. Hence, all forms of barriers for their participation in the social, economic, and political activities in their communities must be lifted.

Publicity of Community Development programmes and projects at the federal, state and local government levels should be intensified. Accordingly, the following publicity strategies should be geared up:

- a. Television projection of documentary films on "Community Actions";
- b. Development and use of Audio Visual Aids and materials;
- c. Publication of reports on community development projects in both vernacular and English languages;
- d. Publication of community development information and instructional materials;
- e. Publication of research findings on new techniques/innovations;
- f. Establishment of the project support communication units in the state departments;
- g. Instituting award nights for outstanding community development practitioners and philanthropists.

The federal and state government should increase and release the budgetary allocation to the Directorate of Community Development in all states of the federation to support self-help programmes in the rural areas.

The works service units should provide technical assistance to rural communities engaged in self-help development projects. Development agents should be given the opportunities to attend seminars, conferences and workshops to equip them

with new knowledge and techniques which will facilitate their progress in every day's endeavours.

If our effort in adult education and community development is to succeed, we must familiarize ourselves with the area in which we intend to operate so that we can ascertain the factors that will facilitate our efforts and foster development and those that will stand as obstacles in our paths.

The relationship between adult education and community development is a symbolic one in the process of development. Variables like understanding the forces that act on the individual, the influence of groups, provision of knowledge and opportunity for practice, and effective use of reinforcement were mentioned as essential in initiating changes that will stand the test of time in the people.

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