

**COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines the nature of community participation in rural development at the grassroots in Nigeria which is essentially the role of rural dwellers in the up-liftment of their living conditions. Local government being the third tier of government is examined within the context of its constitutional roles and resources at its disposal to facilitate the much desired task of grassroots participation in rural development. The study employs the use of Content Analysis as a methodology and Participatory Theory is used as a theoretical framework of the study. The data for the study was generated from secondary sources. The paper reveals that top bottom approach, political deprivation, lack of enlightenment and awareness campaign and lack of proper educational empowerment constitutes the major challenges of community participation in rural development. It was concluded that the goals of the participation in rural development are not with that of government development plans. The paper recommended that, the local government should improve in the enlightenment and awareness campaign which can serve as a way of motivating communities to participate in rural development.*

**KEY WORDS: Community, Participation, Rural, development, Empowerment, and Mobilisation.**

**INTRODUCTION**

Rural development is one of the concepts of development administration that focuses attention on how to develop rural communities through the participation of private individuals, organisations and public sector. Rural development involves 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. Its aim is to improve the living standard of the rural masses with a view to participate in the transformation of the rural area. The major aspect of Nigeria's political development since 1960 has been the creation of new states and local government areas. The statements government often makes when carrying out such exercises is that, it is intended to foster grassroots development and provide a wider spectrum for people's participation in public policy formulation and implementation (Bakare, 2002).

Perhaps, this form the basis and motivational factor among Nigerians who over the years have severally yearned and demanded for new local government areas or even a state. This desire is seen as a positive strategy aimed at confronting the crisis of rural development and grassroots participation. Yet with the creation of several states and local government areas, the incidences of rural alienation and neglects leading to mass poverty, hunger and disease have continued unabated (Anyanwu 1992).

It is to be observed at this juncture that all development efforts in Nigeria since independence have been located and rooted within the context of a capitalist economy. Furthermore, our conception of development like in all other African countries remains at the level of ideology breeding on Western World propaganda which is carried out with the intensity through the various agencies of the United Nation Organisation (Baberga, 2006). The west thus propagates the notion of westernisation, industrialisation or capitalist economic growth as the basis for development. It has also been observed that, the nature, character and structure of dependent capitalist ideology of development constitute the basis for instability, social injustice and inequality of the present Nigerian social order. Hence, suggestions have been made for a new social order whose doctrine would include: self reliance in economic production, political development, social justice and equity in the distribution, exchange and participation.

The need to generate development from the grassroots by involving the rural dwellers is informed by the fact that, it is the spot where the majority of the population live. The most serious attempt was however made by President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) in 1986 when the Directorate of Food, Roads and Infrastructure (DFFRI) was created. The decree charged it to commit itself into identifying, involving and supporting viable local community organisations in the effective mobilisation of the rural populations for sustained rural development activities, bearing in mind the need for promoting greater community participation and economic self-reliance of the rural community.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Community participation in rural development was stifled by the Top-Bottom Approach which for many years had been the ideological basis for designing rural development programmes in Nigeria and most developing countries.

Despite the fact that rural areas serve as a ground by which almost all the resources used in national development were obtained; rural areas were still backward and static in terms of development with even their participation in decision making.

Rural dwellers are not encouraged to participate in the process of decision making because the level of awareness is very low.

However, since the attainment of Nigerian independence in 1960, various governments both military and civilian have initiated several rural and community based development programmes designed to enhance the living standard of the people who are living at the grassroots level. Consequently, some communities still live without portable drinking water, electricity, good access roads, hospitals and information centres among others.

It is against this backdrop that this paper intends to examine in critical terms the impacts of community participation in rural development at the grassroots with a view to recommending solutions on how to enhance the living standard of the rural populace.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- (i) To examine the extent to which community participation serves as a strategy of rural development in Nigeria.
- (ii) To identify the structural and technical constraints that serve as impediment to community participation in Nigeria.
- (iii) To examine how top-bottom approach to development together with lack of enlightenment and awareness campaign impede community participation in Nigeria.
- (iv) To find out the impact of community participation in rural development in Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

- (i) To what extent has the community participation served as a strategy of rural development in Nigeria?
- (ii) What are the structural and technical constraints that impede community participation in Nigeria?
- (iii) How has the top-bottom approach to development together with lack of enlightenment and awareness campaign impedes community participation in Nigeria?
- (iv) What is the impact of community participation in rural development in Nigeria?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Rural Development**

Rural development has been described in different ways by different scholars depending on the discipline or line of thought of the person concerned. This is because rural development is a multi-disciplinary concept and the definition of each author depends on the area where the author focuses attention. The central theme in all the definitions is “improvement of the living conditions of rural people”.

Aslam (1981), defines rural development as “a process aimed at developing the rural poor, their economy and institutions from a state of stagnation or low productivity equilibrium into dynamic process leading to the higher level of living and better quality of life”.

Schumacker (1983), conceives rural development as “developing the skills of the masses to make them self-reliant through the instruction which supply appropriate and relevant knowledge on the methods of self-help”.

On the other hand Bakare (2002), defines rural development as the process whereby concerted efforts are made in order to facilitate significant increase in rural resource productivity with the overall objectives of enhancing rural income, increasing employment opportunities and upgrading rural communities.

It can be seen that the above definitions came from the trained specialists who tend to lay emphasis on the development of human resources, while the definition taken from the World Bank publication focuses attention on the development of the environment rather than human being. According to the (1998) World Bank Publication on the Role of Community Participation in Developing Planning and Project Management, rural development is a “strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people-the rural poor. It involves extending the benefits of development to the poorest among those who seek a livelihood in the rural areas.

Rural development is 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. Its aim is to improve the living standard of the rural masses with a view to participate in the transformation of rural area.

### **Community Participation in Rural Development**

The concept of community participation is concerned with the process of ensuring that the intended beneficiaries of development projects and programmes are themselves involved in the planning and execution of those projects and programmes. This is considered important as it empowers the recipients of development projects to influence and manage their own development, thereby removing any culture of dependency (Castle, 2010). An effective participation for grassroots development would only be realised where the grassroots have the freedom to make their own decisions and set their own development priorities, draw their own plans; implement and ensure a fair share of the fruits of their work. Participatory grassroots development is an alternative approach for equitable rural development.

Participation of the grassroots is seen as a process whereby the marginalised groups in a community take the initiatives to shape their own future and better their lives by taking full responsibility for their needs (Aslam, 1981). It is a collective venture through which the grassroots discover their identity in the wider society. The process is marked by the development of new knowledge and skills by their people including their appropriation through adaptation and control of technology and extension services so that it serves them in response to their development priorities and in the context of their life experiences.

## **Factors that influence Community Participation in Rural Development in Nigeria**

### **i. Empowerment**

The term empowerment has different meanings in socio-cultural and political contexts, and does not translate easily into all languages. An exploration of local terms associated with empowerment around the world always leads to lively discussion. These terms includes self strength, control, self power, self reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with one's values, capable of fighting for one's rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening, and capability to mention only few (Mabogunje, 1980).

Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in negotiation with influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives. In its broad sense, empowerment is the expansion of freedom of choice and action. It means increasing one's authority and control over the resources and decisions that affects one's life. As people exercise real choice, they gain increased control over their lives. Poor people's choices are extremely limited, both by their lack of assets and by their powerlessness to negotiate better terms for themselves with range of institutions, both formal and informal. The concept of empowerment in the context of participation of people in rural development at the grassroots centred around four major elements; access to information, inclusion and participation, accountability and local organizational capacity.

One of the view of participation sees it as the empowerment of the "deprived and the excluded (Bakare, 2002)". This suggests that the great mass of the people in the rural areas – small farmers, tenants, sharecroppers, the landless etc. have been widely associated with various forms of oppression under social structures through which dominant social groups are able to dictate conditions of life of the dominated and to appropriate material assets (Bakare, 2002).

It must be observed that the process of grassroots participation is rooted in the concept of grassroots representative democracy. The democratic imperative suggest that public matters be attended by elected representatives of (responsive and accountable to) the mass of the people. The democratic imperative equally suggests that people organize themselves into Community Based Organizations (CBOs) which are expected to enhance Bottom-Up Development and the overall national economic development in the following ways:

- a. The pooling of resources to achieve collective strength and countervailing power at the grassroots level,
- b. Enhancement of manual and technical skills, planning and managerial expertise at the community level – (local capacity),
- c. Increasing stakeholder's ownership of policies and projects by contributing to their willingness to share costs and maintain assets created,
- d. Articulating the development needs of the grassroots to higher authorities.
- e. Ensure that the principle of sustainable human development awareness is imbibed in the community,
- f. Fostering democratic values by promoting the ideals of democracy and participation at the grassroots – thereby serving as training foundation for national leaders,
- g. Enhancing the much desired collaboration between the local communities, government at the various levels, and international aid agencies like the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank and other donor organizations in the promotion of a development that is people oriented and sustainable.

The democratic imperative imbedded in participation in rural development at the grassroots further connotes the allocation of liberty and freedom to rural dwellers to make authoritative assessments of public policy which directly or indirectly affects their well being and socio-economic advancement. In this direction it is expected that their assessments (comments, criticisms, petitions e.t.c) are taken into by the government so as to be able to affect the design, content, shape and dimension of public policy in the areas of conception, formulation and execution. The government gets the opinions of the rural dwellers through people, press, extension workers, research workers etc. Suffice it to state at this point that, participation in rural

development at the grassroots is enhanced by a balance communication/information system in the society (Bakare, 1997).

### **ii. Mobilisation**

Mobilisation is a process where by a group of people have transcended their differences to meet on equal terms in order to facilitate a participatory decision making process. In other words, it can be viewed as a process which begins a dialogue among members of the community to determine who, what and how issues are decided, and also to provide an avenue for everyone to participate in decisions that affects their lives.

Norman (1974) agreed that a “successful performance of extended rural development requires organization, participation at the local level in conjunction with the resources, services and the policies of the central government.

Rural mobilization is a capacity-building process through which community individuals, groups, or organizations plan, carryout and evaluate activities on a participatory and sustained basis to improve on the quality of life of the communities either on their own initiatives or stimulated by others. The media play an important role in grassroots mobilization. This includes; educating the community, giving necessary information, providing for mobilizes and calling out the people of the community for action. For the media to be used effectively in mobilization, it must possess the ability to make the necessary contact for giving the relevant information. That is why Braimoh (1988) describes communication as an “essential tool for the establishment and maintenance of good social working relationship. Grassroots mobilization depends heavily on communication. Its effectiveness permits members to ask for the opinion of the others at anytime. However, participation is equated with mobilization of people. In this case, the grassroots which forms the majority of the total population can become conscious of the resources at their disposal, and are motivated and energized to collectively utilize such resources to improve their respective lot. This view sounds like preparing the rural population to collaborate with government development plans. Hence, it suggests the case in which the higher authorities conceive and design social and economic development projects and mobilize the communities at the level of execution of such projects.

### **iii. Self-Help Program**

There is no doubt that no government, however richly endowed can supply all the needs of its people. This is even more in developing country like Nigeria where there is almost a revolution of expectations. Most people look upon the government to do one thing or the other for them, despite the fact that the resources available to meet these expectations are continually dwindling. Besides, there are wide gaps between our people’s expectations and actual accomplishments on the part of the government. This has led to a number of adverse effects, such as alienation, frustration, withdrawal of support, legitimacy and lack of interest on activities of the government.

Against this background, there is therefore a need to change our strategy of development. Instead of looking up to the central government or even industrialized nations for technological transfer and experts of the transformation of our rural areas, the Nigerian populace, particularly the millions of people who live in rural areas should be mobilized in order to transform their areas. One of the ways to achieve this is through the self-help programmes in rural development.

Self-help can also be seen as a strategy that induces progress in rural societies, all of which do not involve action by government. It could be related to an individual who alone has the resources to implement a project or projects to satisfy the basic needs of a community. It could also apply to coordinated efforts within a community to select and execute local, economic and social programmes addressed to the development of a community. This implies the improvement of the people through their own efforts largely for their own benefit.

Castle (2010), conceived self-help as a situation whereby man himself becomes both the object and subject of his own improvement and not merely as an instrument in a process imposed from above or within. In rural development, the element of self-help is adopted to secure the active participation and co-operation of the people in programmes designed to improve their standard of living and promote their development, which means that every organization in the community, namely; clubs, age grades, towns union, women groups, headmasters, religious leaders, traditional rulers and in fact all opinion leaders must be involved in initiating

and implementation of self-help programmes and to invite the government and non-governmental agencies when necessary.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Participatory Theory**

The theory was developed by Charles Tilly and Doug Mc Adam in (1970). The participatory theory seeks to engage local populations in the decision making process and development projects. Participatory theory has taken a variety of forms since it emerged in the 1970s, when it was introduced as an important part of the 'Basic Need Approach' to development. Most manifestations of participatory development seek to give the poor a part in initiatives designed for their benefit in the hopes that development projects will be more sustainable and successful if local populations are engaged in the development process. Participatory theory has become an increasingly accepted method of development practice and is employed by a variety of organisation. It is often presented as an alternative to mainstream 'top-down' development. The definition of participatory Theory is premised along two different dimensions. There is the Social Movement Perspective and the Institutional Perspective.

The Social Movement Perspective defines participatory theory as the mobilisation of people to eliminate unjust hierarchies of knowledge, power and economic distribution. The Institutional Perspective defines the theory of participation as the reach and inclusion of inputs by relevant groups in the design and implementation of inputs and opinions of relevant groups and stakeholders in a community (Norman, 1972).

### **Basic Resource Theory**

The theory was propounded by Peter Ray (2000), the basic resource theory emphasises the role of basic natural or environmental resources in the development of any locality or region. The theory stipulates that economic growth depends on the presence, quality and magnitude of basic natural resources within a particular area or economic regions. It argues that the development of these resources attracts capital investment to these areas and increases income and employment (Essong, 1975).

There is no doubt that natural resources have a role to play in the development of any locality especially in the initial stages of economic development. In such areas, economic development consists, at least at least in the initial stages of efforts to exploit the readily available natural resources. Thus, within a given country, region or areas with basic resources tend to have a higher income and grow faster than those with meagre resources. In Nigeria for instance, the cocoa, groundnut, and cotton growing areas and the palm belt and mineral rich areas of the country experienced, until recently much faster growth than the other areas not so endowed. Edo and Rivers state of Nigeria are experiencing rapid economic growth based on the production of a highly valuable resources-petroleum. This partly explains the disparities in the development of the rural areas of the country.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the mere availability of basic natural resources in an area is a sufficient guarantee of rapid development. The second limitation of the theory is that it does not sufficiently emphasis the operation of diminishing returns.

Based on the above theories reviewed, the study adopted the participatory theory as the theoretical framework of analysis. The theory is more suitable in addressing the issue at hand, because it shows how the participation of the community would help in addressing the felt needs of the communities.

## **THE IMPEDIMENTS OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

Participation in rural development at the grassroots in Nigeria is faced with a number of problems among which include:

- a. Top Bottom Approach: today in Nigeria, developments policies are taken on the basis of Top-Bottom Approach which does not give room for participation to take place from the bottom. The top bottom approach to rural development employed by government functionaries whip up enthusiasm among the people, as there is absence of total community participation.

- b. Political Deprivation: for over the years Nigerians are calling for some changes in the way and manner the election are being conducted at the local level. Election is not always free and fair, therefore the people's votes are not counted and the right people are not chosen either at the Councillorship, Chairmanship or State House of Assembly Levels. As a result of this, some community members are deprived from their political right and this will serve as a serious setback to participation in rural development which in turn leads to political apathy.
- c. Lack of Enlightenment and Awareness Campaign: government is supposed to use the mass media (radio, television, newspapers, etc) to facilitate the enlightenment of rural dwellers on the benefits of participation in rural development.
- d. Lack of Proper Educational Empowerment: there is a serious wide gap between the educational systems of the urban places with that of the rural areas. People who are living at the local and community level do not have access to qualitative education in majority of the local governments of Nigeria.
- e. Lack of Cohesive Identity: failures have occurred in rural development as people regard the social and cultural aspect of development as subordinate to the economic development. Any innovation that does not guarantee the cohesiveness of the group and respect their history and beliefs has little or no hope of survival.
- f. Lack of Proper Economic Empowerment: people tend to treat rural development projects as charity or welfare packages. Only few people are interested in the costing, evaluating and ensuring that targets are met. The poor people in the rural areas do not have a voice in economic activities, therefore participation is not encouraged.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employs Content Analysis as a methodology since we are dealing with existing literature on community participation in rural development. The literatures reviewed include textbooks, journal articles and documents from community based associations in some areas of the country. The population of the study comprises the 36 states of the federation. Cluster sampling technique was used to divide the country into six (6) geopolitical zones: North East; North West; North Central; South East; South West and South South. Simple random sampling technique was also adopted to select one state from each of the geopolitical zone of the country to serve as a sample of the study. These are Gombe, Kano, Enugu, Osun, Bayelsa and Benue State.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The paper find out that today in Nigeria, developments policies are taken on the basis of Top-Bottom Approach which does not give room for participation to take place from the bottom. The top bottom approach to rural development employed by government functionaries whip up enthusiasm among the people, as there is absence of total community participation. Due to the approach adopted people evoke unwilling response as they are regarded as being incapable of standing on their feet. The community dwellers are of the opinion that qualitative education should be provided at the rural areas because there is no way for a community to develop and even think of development without access to quality education. This means that educational empowerment can enhance their capacity to participate and influence development policies at the local level. Another finding of the study is that some community members feel that local government should motivate communities to participate in rural development through enlightenment and awareness campaign. They are also of the opinion that there is a wide communication gap between the government developments plans and the real need of the people. Therefore, lack of enlightenment and awareness campaign prevents effective participation thereby reducing development to the privilege few that are close to the government. Finally, political deprivation leads to lack of good leadership which constitute the major factor of hindrance for effective participation in rural development because the local government executive and legislative bodies are not elected by the people but appointed by the government in power. The people views and opinions do not therefore count in the development process. Lastly, there are some changes in some part of the country

where some states like Gombe, Kano, Kaduna and Enugu among others, joint project do exist between the community and the government through the State Agency for Social and Community Development. It is an agency whereby if the community members identified problem affecting them, they mobilise human (labour) and material resources (money and raw material) and inform the agency for government intervention and support.

## **CONCLUSION**

In all ramifications, development is for the people and therefore must design to meet their needs. This means that all rural development efforts must be derived from the felt needs and aspirations of the rural people from within not from outside the communities. Government should show the necessary leadership by matching words with actions through evolving workable rural development approaches, proper coordination, funding and technical assistance.

## **Recommendations**

- a. Political Empowerment of the Rural People: Politics should go beyond paternalistic decentralization of power to lower community. The traditional relationship and the stereotypic mutual attitudes of urban and rural dwellers must be restructured. The silent majority who are subject to deceptions and exploitations by the city demagogues should be given opportunity to express their political awareness. Efforts should be made to keep them abreast on government activities through the establishment of radio-listening and television viewing centres.
- b. Bottom-Up Approach: Community participation is concerned with the process of ensuring that the intended beneficiaries of development projects and programmes are themselves involved in the planning and execution of those projects and programmes. This is considered important as it empowers the recipients of development projects to influence and manage their own development, thereby removing any culture of dependency.
- c. Enlightenment and awareness Campaign: Government should constantly engage in enlightenment and awareness campaign because it is only when government embark on this that the community dwellers should be able to understand the efficacy of their involvement in government activities. In this process Mass Media and Town Criers plays a pivotal role in educating the people on the need to participate in their development process.
- d. Political Empowerment: community dwellers are also expected to be empowered politically, the election process should be credible to their satisfaction and free and fair election should be guaranteed. If this is done, their votes are count and the right people will be chosen at various political offices and this will serve as a means of eliminating the political apathy.
- e. Educational Empowerment: Education should be given to the people who are living at the community level. This is because educational empowerment will enhance the capacity of people to participate and influence development policies at the local level.
- f. The local government should find way of encouraging its people to engage in rural self-help programme so that they can give their own contribution in terms of idea and material support for development.
- g. Government has to regularly call for town hall meetings and training of community leaders on how to go on the enlightenment and awareness campaign.
- h. People should be encouraged to initiate self- help community projects whereby the decisions, planning and implementation and the maintenance should be the responsibility of the community.
- i. The community dwellers should be allowed to identify their felt needs and come up with their programmes and projects of their priority attention and not imposed from above as currently being experienced in various communities. It is only when the community dwellers identify their needs and priorities that such projects sited within such communities would be utilised and protected.



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