

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN OREDO LOCAL GOVERNMENT COULCIL OF EDO STATE: ASSESSING CITIZENS' AWARENESS AND LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

This study was aimed at finding out the level of awareness of the citizens or community members, of the importance of participating in community development processes, and also to assess the level of involvement of the citizens in the decision making and developmental processes of activities that concerns them. In order to achieve the purposes intended, two research questions were raised. A review of some related literature on participation in community development project execution in particular and community development in general was carried out, and the instrument used for data collection was a two section structured questionnaire, for which a reliability coefficient of 0.59 was obtained using Pearson's correlation formula. A total of 315 respondents comprising adults, resident in 9 different communities within Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State were randomly sampled for the study. However analysis of results was based on responses from 283 respondents constituting the correctly completed and returned questionnaire. The collected data were analysed using frequency counts, and simple percentages. Result from the study showed that a very large percentage of the citizens are still very ignorant of the importance of their roles in community development processes; none involvement of community members in deciding what their felt-needs are and in identifying the projects that could be executed to meet those felt-needs is a major setback to community development processes. Also community development association executives are largely ignorant of their roles in community development processes and that the level of participation in community development processes of the "ordinary" community members who form the bulk of the citizens is abysmally low or even non-existent. The paper made recommendations which include the need for the empowerment of community members to initiate and control their own improvement, even when external assistance is available.

Introduction

Citizen participation is a very critical aspect of the developmental process of any community. Botes and van-Resensburg (2000) posited that "participatory development is very essential to the community development process". This perhaps is because community development itself is meant to bring about improved living standard for community members, and not necessarily the initiators or executors of the community development project from outside the benefitting community. Consequently, it is only logical that the people, for whom the project is designed, be involved in the decision making process, beginning from the initial stage of needs assessment to the implementation and execution stages. More so, citizens' participation in the developmental process that concerns them ensures speedy development and brings about a sense of importance and ownership, which ultimately translates to commitment and also helps in capacity building.

The World Bank in 1996 proposed some reasons for community participation, amongst which are that: community members have the true knowledge of what their felt needs are, and that they equally have self-awareness as to the solution that would or would not work; participation brings about a sense of importance and 'ownership' which translate into more commitment to the execution of community development programmes and projects. It also helps to build members' capacity, which in turn, increases available human resources, and it also bridges the gap between professionals and community members, with each group, learning from the other.

The reasons so enumerated, are indicative of the fact that when a people for whom a project is meant are side-lined, in terms of not being given room to participate in the decision making process, such project is likely to fail. Akpomuvie (2010) also submitted that "community participation in rural project development is an important element and a sure way to the speedy development of the rural areas in Nigeria". Indeed, citizen participation brings about collective effort, which is usually greater than the sum total of individual efforts. This could very well explain the significance the Nigerian Government has attached to the concept of participation, as submitted by Babajide (1998), who referred to the Nigerian National Policy on the Environment to have implicitly invoke the strong necessity for people-centred solutions to sustainable development, and, therefore, mandates their active involvement for the success of the development process. From the submission, it is clearly evident that participation of the citizens in developmental activities is a mandate as enshrined in Nigeria's National Policy on the Environment. However, in spite of the laudability of such mandate or authorizations (i.e. policy statements), it is only proper implementation that can bring out their benefits and be of help in ensuring sustainability in terms of the development of the environment. Such categorical policy statement made about participation signifies a good grasp of the concept, at least by the policy makers. Besides, empirical evidences have proved that community participation greatly influence the success or failure of community development project execution (Ademiluyi & Odugbesan, 2008; Asnarulkhadi & Fariborz, 2009). In other words, when community participation is adopted as the main strategy for community development, sustainable development is assured, with a resultant high level of visible and verifiable development witnessed. Nevertheless, it is observed that this has not been the case in most communities within Edo State, in spite of the many community development initiatives embarked upon over the years. In fact, there is hardly any convincing evidence of successfully executed and sustained community development projects in Oredo Local Government Area.

Purpose of the Study

There is no gainsaying that when community participation is adopted as the main strategy for community development, sustainable development is assured. However, the facts on ground remains that many community development initiatives embarked upon over the years, are hardly ever completed or in a state of disuse, if ever completed. Since participation has severally been noted to evoke enthusiasm and instigate a sense of ownership thereby facilitating implementation/completion, appreciation/utilization and sustainability of executed projects, this study purposed to ascertain the level of Oredo community members' awareness of the importance of participation in community development processes, and to determine the extent of their involvement in the decision making/developmental processes of activities that concerns them.

Research Questions

Given the discuss on the immense benefit of community members' participation in community development processes, and that there are hardly any convincing evidence of successfully executed and sustained community development projects in Oredo Local Government Area, the paper therefore wonders whether or not the community members are knowledgeable (i.e. aware) about the importance of their individual and collective participation in the development of their communities and in the attainment of their general wellbeing. This is because awareness is fundamental to building perception, and in this case, perception is key to developing the required interest to participate, and working hard at participating in community development processes, which in turn develops people's capabilities to improve their own lives; undermine the related vices of ignorance, indolence and class-conflict, and that direct participation of

local people in local affairs is an essential means for public education, without which democracy and individual liberty cannot function (Nelson and Wright, 1995; Timothy, 2000; Tosun & Timothy, 2003). The questions therefore are; are the citizens really aware of the importance of participating in community development processes? To what extent are the citizens involved in the decision making and developmental processes of activities that concerns them?

In the circumstance of the aforementioned importance of citizen participation in community development processes especially as it concerns them - environmentally, socio-politically, economically or otherwise, this paper sought to resolve the queries raised, in order to ascertain the reason(s) behind the success or failure of most projects embarked upon by the Government, in the area. At this point, it is important to first elucidate the meaning and relevance of community development, as well as the principles of community or citizens' participation, before delving into the methodology of the study.

Community Development: Meaning and Relevance

A proper grasp of community development as a concept can be concretized by elucidating the meaning of the two separate terms. A community can be defined in terms of all the people or group of people living within a specific geographical area such as a village, neighbourhood, town or city. In this sense, the community is seen firstly as a social unit, and secondly as a geographical or ecological unit. This implies that the people or group of people that are members of such units are closely organized and closely knitted with a strong bond of communality, which spells out a feeling of togetherness among the people. On the other hand, development in the context of this study can be defined as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system to enhance the living condition or standard of members of that social system (Omoruyi, 2008). It is as well a change from a prior bad or poor condition to a better one.

The concept of community development is not recent. In fact, Wise (1998) cited a number of scholars (Batten, 1957; Cary, 1979; Cawley, 1989; and Sanders, 1970), to have argued that professional community development practice is a post World War II ideology. Wise particularly referenced Cary (1979) to have traced the earliest foundation of community development to a set of principles viz. felt need, democracy or extensive citizen involvement, agreement, and local decision-making. The Wikipedia Encyclopaedia (2010) also records that, in the 1970s and 1980s, the United Nation (UN) Agencies and the World Bank issued policy statements promoting community development as vital parts of "Integrated Rural Development" strategy. It is obvious that the UN and the World Bank as it were, could not have so promoted community development without adequately testing its theories and organised practice. Community development in a broad term could simply be defined as any action taken by any group or community primarily for its benefit and uplifting. In this regard, Omoruyi (2008) opined that community development is basically concerned with seeking the best means of improving the socio- economic and cultural conditions of communities, and a process by which people plan and act together for the satisfaction of their felt-needs.

Irrespective of the aforementioned on community development, one thing is common, and that is "improvement" for the ultimate satisfaction of felt-needs. Consequently, the concept of community development centres on bringing about improvement or betterment in a situation, in a place or for a people. In addition, Community development includes all strategies, interventions or coordinated activities at the community level aimed at bringing about social and economic development (Akpomuvie, 2010). Furthermore, Wise (1998) noted Sanders (1970) to have argued that community development should be viewed as a process that move by stages from one condition to the next, where the emphasis is on what happens to people as they advance; as a method of working toward the attainment of a goal, i.e. the emphasis is on an endpoint or product; as a program, in which if procedures are carried out, activities will be accomplished, i.e. the emphasis is on activities; and finally, as a movement - a course to which people become committed, i.e. the emphasis is on inciting people to action.

Though many scholars have defined community development at various times, the summary of the many definitions is that, community development is the process by which the efforts of citizens are united among themselves and possibly with those of "outsiders" as the case may be, to form a synergy that would help, to improve or better the socio-economic, infrastructural, cultural and political conditions as well as the state of health of the community; to integrate the communities into to the life of the nation so as to

enable them contribute fully to national progress; and to afford the citizens the opportunity of discussing and defining their needs and through collective efforts of members satisfy the identified needs. In essence, seeing community development as a process that ultimately unites and synergise the efforts of citizens and possibly those of "outsiders" to among other things, afford the citizens the opportunity of discussing/defining their needs and proffering solutions that will help satisfy the identified needs, is to submit to the fact that citizen participation is key to community development process.

Principles of Citizen Participation

Given the foregoing discussion, citizen participation in essence is the involvement of members of a community in the decision making process about issues that affect their lives and socio-economic well-being. In other words, it is about the involvement of people in the developmental process, so much so that they are able to suggest ways of finding lasting solutions to their perceived problems and felt-needs. However, Francisco (1995) in Mejos (2007) argued that; effective participation cannot be initiated by luring people with incentives. Mejos corroborated this fact when he argued that participation is a result of a person's conscious striving for fulfilment and the realization that he cannot do it alone but must seek it together with others. Effective participation is therefore, the bedrock of communality, without which the very essence of community and communal togetherness cannot be attained. It is the result of an appreciation by every man that he cannot achieve self-actualization and fulfilment in isolation from others. It is the consequent force that drives every individual within a community to deliberately pursue the *good of all* - a pursuit which in the real sense brings about a greater attainment of the good and betterment of the individual in particular, and that of the community in general. From the aforementioned, it is evident that sustainable development is certain to be fostered through the unity-of-will, in any community where ignorance, indolence and class-dichotomy is undermined. To say that there would hardly be a manifestation of unity-of-will in a community without self-awareness among the individual community members and realisation of the importance of their roles towards the overall good of the community is stating the obvious. In fact, Nelson and Wright (1995) submitted that participation is a practice that develops people's capabilities to improve their own lives. This implies that effective participation among community members can only be expressed and maintained after individual self-awareness and self-realization of members, and the continuous fostering of the development of their capabilities.

Notwithstanding the way the concept of citizen participation, is conceived or described, it has a set of principles which, if adopted in community development, can ensure both effective participation and also sustainable development. Phillips and Passewitz (1977), asserted that citizens will voluntarily be involved in community development activities when they: see positive benefits to be gained; have an appropriate organizational structure available to them for expressing their interests; see some aspects of their way of life threatened; feel obligated to be supportive of the activity; have better knowledge of an issue or situation; and feel comfortable in the group. These submissions allude to the fact that when citizens understand the benefits that can be derived, in terms of socio-economic and political gains for their overall betterment, they will want to be involved in the development of their communities and also in "organizing or identifying appropriate groups receptive to citizen input; helping citizens find positive ways to respond to threatening situations; stressing obligations each of us have toward community improvement; providing citizens with better knowledge on issues and opportunities; helping participants feel comfortable within the development group" (Phillips and Passewitz, 1977). When these principles are followed step by step with a view to ensuring that members of a community participate in their own betterment, the citizens will, irrespective of who is initiating the development project, voluntarily participate and this will not only bring about improved standard of living but also ensure sustainable community development.

Citizens' participation in their own betterment brings beneficial results to the whole community. Hence, the advantages of citizen participation in community development can not be over emphasized. While it may be argued that citizen participation cannot possibly "do" all that is claimed, it is however undeniable that citizen participation cannot be dismissed from community development, and that there must be *something* to it. Grasping this understanding, with the ability to identify the types of participation and the context in which they must operate to ensure desirable outcomes is paramount to sustainable

community development. In this regard, Wilcox (1994) proposed ten guides to effective participation. Some components of one of the guides include – information which is described as merely telling people what is planned; consultation, i.e. offering some options, listening to feedback, but not allowing new ideas; and deciding together through the encouragement of additional options and ideas, and provision of opportunities for joint decision making.

However, it is apparent from a critical analysis of the arguments, that a more elucidating and effective approach would be by informing community members about plan of actions for development and to educate them about the benefits that they would enjoy as individuals and collectively as a community; in addition to consulting with them as to their felt needs, choice of developmental projects, available options, plan of actions while most importantly listening to feed-back so as to feel the pulse of the people.

Methodology

Research Design

The descriptive survey research design method was used in carrying out this study.

Population of the Study

The population of this study included of all adult residents of Oredo Local Government Council, including those of the 9 different communities where executed projects selected for the study are located, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Communities/Project Location and Executed Projects

Communities/Project location	Executed Projects
Adesuwa Police Barrack (Etete Community)	Mini Water Scheme
Agbado (Agbado Community)	Electrification
Edo College (Uhundumwun Community)	Mini Water Scheme
Ekae (Ekae Community)	Primary School Block
Idia College I (Iyaro Community)	Mini Water Scheme
Idia College II (Iyaro Community)	Skills Acquisition Centre
Oben (Oben Community)	Electrification
Utagban (Utagban Community)	Primary Healthcare Centre
New Benin (New Benin Community)	Mini Water Scheme, Primary Healthcare Centre and Public Toilet

Source: A Compendium of Projects under Edo State Community-Based Poverty Reduction Agency (CPRP) - January 2007 – June 2009

Instrumentation

The research instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire, designed by the researchers.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was validated by one expert from Adult and Non-Formal Education Department and two measurement and evaluation experts from Departments of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies, both of the University of Benin. The reliability was determined through a two weeks interval test-retest method, with a resultant reliability coefficient of 0.59. The reliability test was carried out within the same 9 communities stated above, but using a population outside the actual sample size of the study.

Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for this study was 315 adult persons selected from the target population of the study. The number of male or females that formed the sample size was not indicated because sex was not relevant to the study. The simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 35 adult persons from each of the above stated 9 communities.

Administration of Instrument

The research instrument was personally administered by the researchers over a period of two weeks, because in some instances the contents of the instrument had to be read and interpreted to the respondents so as to elicit the correct responses.

Method of Data Analyses

The collected data were analysed using frequency counts and simple percentages.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: Are the citizens really aware of the importance of participating in community development processes?

Table 2 Responses to statements on level of citizens' awareness

Item	Questions	Responses	Frequency of Response	% out of total Respondent
1	Community members are aware that their participation or involvement in community development is very important to the community development process.	Yes No UD	116 167 -	41 59 -
2	Community awareness initiative is very necessary in community development project identification, planning and execution.	Yes No UD	257 26 -	90.8 9.2 -
3	Participation is a practice that develops people's capabilities to improve their own lives and that of their community.	Yes No UD	147 13 123	51.9 4.6 43.5
4	The pursuit of the need for community members to be actively involved in community project design and execution cannot be over emphasized.	Yes No UD	263 20 -	92.9 7.1 -

Table 2 is a presentation of results of the responses to statements of items 1 through 4, intended to elicit level of community members' awareness. The citizens' level of awareness of the importance of participation in community development processes is crucial to their willingness to actually participate in the processes because awareness is fundamental to building perception, and in this case, perception is key to developing the required interest to participate, and working hard at participating in community development processes. Given the responses to the said statements, it was observed that even though some of the respondents are aware of the importance of community members' participation in the community development process, a larger percentage (precisely 59%) is still very ignorant of the importance of their role in the process. Secondly, the percentage distribution shows that whereas 90.8% of the respondents agreed with the statement elicited by item 2, none was undecided while the others disagreed with the statement. In the third instance, whereas 51.9% agreed that participation is a practice that develops community members' capabilities to improve their own lives and that of their community. A consideration of the remaining 48.1% comprising those who disagreed with, and were undecided about the statement in reference, is indicative of a 'very' high level of ignorance of the importance of community participation on community development processes, among community members. However, the result of those in agreement with the said statement buttresses other research findings which submitted that participation - is a practice that, develops people's capabilities to improve their own lives; is capable of undermining the related vices of ignorance, indolence and class-conflict, and that direct participation of local people in local affairs is an essential means for public education, without which democracy and individual liberty cannot function (Nelson & Wright, 1995; Timothy, 2000; Tosun & Timothy, 2003). Lastly, concerning the statement of item 4, 92.9% of community members agreed that it is of utmost importance to ensure that community members are actively involved in the community development process.

The submission from the analyses of the responses to items 1 – 4 as discussed in the preceding paragraph is that though a percentage of the respondents are aware of the importance of community members' participation in the community development process, a larger percentage is still very ignorant of the importance of the role of community members' participation in the process both with respect to what they as individuals stand to benefit in particular, and what their community would benefit in general. The results are also indicative of the fact that community awareness initiatives are critical to member's participation in community development programmes.

Research Question 2: To what extent are the citizens involved in the decision making and developmental processes of activities that concerns them?

Table 3: Responses to statements to ascertain the level of community members' involvement in community development processes

Item	Questions	Responses	Frequency of Response	% out of total Respondent
5	We the community members participate in identifying project to be executed in our community.	Yes	46	16.3
		No	233	82.3
		UD	4	1.4
6	Community development projects in my community are identified solely by community development agencies or association executives without the involvement of other community members.	Yes	135	47.7
		No	56	19.8
		UD	92	32.5
7	Only a few elites in my community decides projects to be executed.	Yes	138	48.7
		No	61	21.6
		UD	84	29.7
8	We the community members have no idea who decides project to be executed in our community.	Yes	99	35
		No	184	65
		UD	-	-

Table 3 is a presentation of results of responses intended to resolve the above research question. With regards to this question, the response to the statement of item 5 shows that a significant percentage (82.3% precisely) of the community members confirmed that they do not participate in identifying projects to be executed in their communities. Secondly, in respect to item 6, the percentage of community members, who were definite in their affirmation that community development projects are identified solely by the executives of community development associations/agencies, is higher than those who were undecided, and precisely 2.4 times greater than the percentage of those who were opposed to the statement. Whereas the undecided category made up of 32% community members may probably not be sure of who decides what project is executed in their communities, it is quite indisputable that they are not in the least involved in the project identification process, though they are members of the community. Thirdly, in response to the statement of item 7, the percentage distribution of responses to this statement almost tallied with the percentage distribution of responses to the statement of item 6. In this case, 48.7% of community members agreed solely with the statement as against 47.7% in the preceding case. Also, 21.6% disagreed as against 19.8% for item 6, and 29.7% were undecided in their response to the statement as against 32.5% in the case of undecided response to item 6.

In this case also, the percentage of community members, who were definite in their affirmation that only a few elites in the respective communities decides on community development projects to be executed in the communities, is greater than those who were undecided, and precisely 2.3 times the percentage of those who countered the statement. It is also unarguable that the undecided group are not at all involved in deciding what community development project to be executed in the communities. It is quite evident from this percentage distribution that whereas 35% of community members are affirmative that they have no idea who decides project to be executed in their communities, 65% of them disagreed

with the statement, while none was undecided. This connotes a pointer that majority of the community members seem to be consistent in indicating that they know those who decide what projects are executed in their communities, while apparently stating that they (the community members) are not part of those who decide what projects to be executed. In other words, the level of participation in community development processes of the "ordinary" community members who form the bulk of the citizens is abysmally low or even non-existent. In fact in virtually all communities, decision making of community development initiatives is an exclusive reserve of supposed community leaders, without recourse to the interest of those perceived to be ordinary community members, but who constitute the majority (Dukeshire & Thurlow, 2002; Skidmore, Bound & Lownsborough, 2006; Olukotun, 2008; Ozor & Nwankwo, 2008).

Conclusion

Consequent upon the analysis of collected data and discussion of the results, the following conclusions were drawn;

Some community residents are aware of the importance of community members' participation in the execution of community development projects. However, a larger percentage is still very ignorant of the importance of their roles in the process, both with respect to what they as individuals stand to benefit in particular, and what the community stands to benefit in general.

Non-involvement of community members in deciding what their felt-needs are and in identifying the projects that would be executed to meet those felt-needs is a major factor that militates against community participation in the arrangement and execution of community development projects in the area.

Community development association executives are largely ignorant of their roles specifically in encouraging and coordinating community residents towards participation in community development processes.

The level of "ordinary" community members' participation in community development processes is abysmally low or even non-existent.

Recommendations

In view of the conclusions drawn from the analysis of data for this study, the following recommendation was made;

- Community members should be empowered to initiate and control their own improvement, even when external assistance is available,
- Seminars, workshops and awareness campaigns should be organised from time to time, to sensitize both community development association executives and other community members on their roles in the community development processes,
- Community members should be truly allowed to collectively decide what their felt-need are, and be encouraged to be involved in the decision concerning the choice of project to be executed to meet those needs, rather than having only a few persons - some community elites/community development association executives decide what projects are executed in the communities.

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