

SELF-HELP AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Community development projects are basic requirements by any settlement for its effective and proper functioning for the vital overall development. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of self-help as an instrument for sustainable community development. Various community based projects were found to have been executed by both the private organisations and the government but with little impact to the community. To resolve the problems of effective community facility provision in the study area, it is recommended among other things that physical planning must be embraced since it involves the creation of functionally efficient and aesthetically friendly environment for living, working, circulation and recreation. Nigeria Government should make available institutions that extend credit facilities at very low interest rate for projects development and above all, Government should encourage and assist the people through awareness creation etc, to enhance communities infrastructural development and community participation in order to have sense of belonging.

Keywords: *Self-help, Community development*

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the developing countries which engage in community development through Self-Help. The origin of Self-Help is as old as man itself. The quest for better life has led man seeking for ways to satisfy his needs in the society. Community development was left to be shouldered by the government alone, but most communities are seeking ways to improve their livelihood knowing that government cannot provide for all their needs. One of the most significant attributes of pre-colonial Africa societies was their regular resort to collective

community effort as a means of meeting common challenges. For many centuries, it was through this indigenous arrangement that communities built fortifications for their collective security, built roads and bridges to facilitate transportation and cleared forest to make way for farms (Obodoechi, 2010).

Long before the colonial administrators came with their development plans, many Nigerian societies had perfected mechanisms by which their people could identify common needs, mobilise the human and material resources for meeting

such needs and execute collectively adopted programmes of action. These arrangements, among other things, helped to install in young members of the community, the spirit of self-help and reliance frequently reinforcing the idea that members of each community were the primary architects of their own destiny. The evolution of the practice of self-help activities has the following periodic dimensions; the pre-colonial, the colonial up to 1939, the period from 1940 to the Nigerian Civil War, the civil war years and the post-civil war years to the present democratic settings (Obodoechi, 2009).

Brief history of Community Development in Nigeria

Before the onset of colonial administration, communities across Nigeria had employed communal efforts as the mechanism for mobilizing community resources to provide physical improvement and functional facilities in the social, political and economic aspects of their lives. Communal labour was employed in constructing homesteads, clearing farm lands, roads or path way, construction of bridges and for the provision of other social infrastructural facilities required by the people. Some of the relevant institutions were the age-grades and the village councils. Though some of these institutions have persisted, the difference between self-help activities undertaken in the past and those prosecuted today are not hard to find. Differences exist in the scope of the operations, equipment utilized and the extent of government involvement. Furthermore, equipment used was hoes,

cutlasses, diggers and shovels were generally utilized. The construction of walls did not follow any standard measurements in that the people used their imagination to plan, construct and implement such projects. At this stage, there was little or no government involvement as the planning and execution of these self-help projects. Where the government was involved at all, was for the purpose of taking over completed projects for operation or maintenance. Where neither the state government nor the local government councils were interested in such project, the missionaries took over (Akpomuvie, 2010).

During the colonial period, community development efforts took a compulsive and coercive turn. The contradictions in the new development effort, therefore, did not fire the corporate imagination of the people and this was given expression by the tax debacle of 1929, popularly known as the Aba women riot. It questioned the whole essence of the tax laws as established then, the imposition of the Roads and River Ordinance and the apparent shirking of development responsibility by a government that had already extorted taxes for this purpose. Apart from the establishment of governmental exploitative infrastructural apparatus, no serious self-help programmes eliciting popular participation was encouraged (Akpomuvie, 2010).

Development is not just a matter of getting more money into the hands of the poor, but ensuring that increased production, and its resulting increased income, leads to an improved standard of living (Isiugo-Abanihe, Isamah and Adesina, 2002).

Every meaningful, concrete and lasting development begins and ends in the focus on human resources. Human resources refer to all economic resources that are wholly and directly supplied by human being, for instance, the suppliers of labour services and entrepreneurial function. The size of the human resources depends largely on the population size while the quality is a product of educational, health services and environmental factors (conducive environment that promotes an investment friendly platform) (Akpomuvie, 2010).

Nonetheless at very local levels, the family, interfamily and village settings, the pre-colonial trappings of mutual assistance through self-help persisted for the construction of homesteads, clearing farmlands, clearing water points and for providing other socially felt needs. Church organisations were also able to cooperate with members for the building of schools. By the late 1940's however, an element of modern community concept in rural development was introduced in the form of mass mobilization for self-help activities (Akpomuvie, 2010).

At the local level, the earlier Native Authority Councils were replaced by the County Council. Suffice it to say that this development led to the establishment of Community Development Division at the local level and thus became an important organ of government, charged with the responsibility of channeling and coordinating the efforts of the people towards promoting social and economic developments. The Development and Welfare Fund provided for the colonies by the British Government was thus able to

permeate to the grassroots level through this third tier of government. The beginning of the war in 1967, the observations of Sir James Robertson, aptly typified the state of development needs and awareness and the immense role the government expected self-help activities to play to complement their efforts (Akpomuvie, 2010).

After the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), the need for massive reconstruction work further aroused in the people a revival of the spirit of self-help which is deeply rooted in their rich traditions. Most communities realized that the only way for immediate reconstruction of the war ravaged facilities was through self-help. This period also marked the evolution of a multiplicity of social clubs with aims consonant with social insurance and self-help. Further efforts by government to motivate development at the grassroots led to the enactment of the 1976 Local Government Reform to create new growth centres for further spatial spread of development. In addition, Local Government Service Commission was created at the state level and confer with wider powers and functions by the 1979 constitution and the enactment of the special Development Fund Law, aimed at generating more funds for community development at the local level. Thus, deliberate government support became necessary to increase the spate of development activities by the various communities (Akpomuvie, 2010).

The period between 1973 and 2007 marked a watershed in rural development efforts in Nigeria. The period witnessed deliberate government efforts at

mobilizing the people for rural development. A number of task forces and bodies were set up to oversee, organize and to direct partnership with the people on self-help activities. They include: Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Rural Electrification Schemes; Credit Schemes to small holders through various specialized institutions such as People's Bank, Agricultural and Cooperative Development Bank, Community Banks, Small and Medium Enterprise Credit Schemes, the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), Universal Primary Education Schemes and Low Cost Housing Schemes, Health Scheme as the Primary Health Care Programme, National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Better Life for Rural Women Programme as well as the Family Support Programme (FSP). More recent programmes include the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) as well as the Small and Medium Industries Equity Investment Schemes (SMIEIS). The various state governments had also articulated blueprints on rural development, adopting the Integrated Rural Development Strategy as their strategic option to carry development to the masses of the people (Akpomuvie, 2010).

Self Help and Sustainable Community Development

The term self-reliance or self-help is a conception of development in which a given community is self-mobilised in order to transform their physical, technological, political, administrative, economic and social environments, for

their general well-being. It is a development strategy which relies mainly on peoples' ability to bring about self-generating and self-sustaining socio-economic and political system which is problem searching, problem leaving and problem solving (Giovannoni & Fabietti, 2014).

As a conceptual tool, self-reliance or self-help has both ideological and instrumental dimensions and as an ideology, it entails development of a perspective of "we" consciousness in a people that their destiny and survival lays in their determined and sustained efforts rather than on the efforts and directions of other people who have transformed their environment for their own well-being.

When self-help is internalized as an ideology, it leads to the recovery of people's self-respect, self-confidence, self-worth and self-actualization. As an instrument for accountability, self-help is used to shake off inertia in people to accelerate the pace of all aspects of national development (Giovannoni & Fabietti, 2014).

Concepts of Self Help

The overwhelming enthusiasm and active interest and participation among members of various communities for self-help projects and development have risen tremendously in the past few years in Nigerian rural areas. The process of rural and community self-help projects involves grass root participation which means that the process of initiating is not by a single group or individual, rather, the local people consult themselves and get involved in the identification of local

needs. The conception and formulation of any project aimed at self-reliance will also involve a network of non-governmental agencies, individuals, local unions and associations, elite indigenes among many others (Oladeinde, 2013).

Self-help could also be defined as the theory that individuals provide for their even support and improvement in society or the act of providing for or improving oneself (illustrated Oxford Dictionary). This can be achieved through discussion in family meetings and public conferences. The fact in this statement is that there is no single person either by his position or influence in the society or community that can impose any decision or has the sole right to make decision for the community on what project to embark upon. It has been noted that communities tend to achieve greater success in implementing their chosen self-help projects if they receive assistance from the government in the form of money and other technical inputs.

The Role of Self Help in Community Development

In the human history, men have sought to increase their ability to conquer the environment with a view to improving their standard of living. Development entails qualitative and quantitative increase in the capacity, skills, creativity and general material well-being of individuals.

Nwanegbo and Odigbo (2013) assert that community development could be seen as the process of empowering people to maximize their potentials and the ability to exploit nature to meet daily human needs.

It can also be seen as a process by which quality of human lives and capacity to surmount daily needs are considerably improved.

According to Ali (2006), self- help plays significant roles in rural development as follows:

(i) Economic development of the rural areas through development of road network, schools, health centers, recreation clubs etc.

(ii) Creation of employment through their various projects for a rapidly increasing labour force and enhances the welfare of those employed as well as that of their dependence.

(iii) Facilitating peaceful co-existence among the people, thereby promoting unity and security for the generality of their people.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at examining the impact of self-help as an instrument for sustainable community development in Nigeria.

The following objectives were pursued in order to achieve the aim of the study:

to promote unity, understanding and co-operation amongst the rural dwellers,

to ensure advancement in developmental process, creation of employment and security,

to contribute in terms of moral, financial and the physical development of the society and empowering the community members, especially, the youths through acquisition of skills.

Sustainability of Self-Help for Sustainable Community Development

Self-help is seen on ground like: community health centers, schools, roads, skill centres, bore hole, well, grinding house, culvert, market etc. The process of identifying needs was through meetings, consultations and constant dialogue among community members, ward heads and the leaders. Resource in terms of personnel are available, sources of funds are donations and contributions by members of the community. The effectiveness of the projects is felt by the citizens in terms of usage (Giovannoni & Fabietti, 2014).

However, sustainability here recognizes the role of community participation as a process of sustainable development. This conforms to the project sustainability framework by Khan (2006) and the emphasis that the fulcrum of the project sustainability framework is the community or group dimension as it is through the active participation of community or group members in self-help projects that sustainability dimensions can be effective. Abandoned projects on ground are mostly imposed projects by government or outsiders who did not put the community interest first. Akpomuvie (2010) noted that in self-help strategy, intrinsic value is accorded to participation as people's participation tends to reduce when some development projects are imposed on them by outsiders who may be ignorant of the real needs of the communities.

Thus, community participation has been recognized to be paramount in bringing about effective development as their involvement gives a sense of belonging,

thereby, bringing about sustainable development. If the involvement of the community members continues to exist, then there is a good sustainability prospect for projects executed (Giovannoni & Fabietti, 2014).

Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Sustainability and sustainable developments are contestable concepts, like democracy, truth and justice (Jacobs, 1991). They cannot be defined in the same way that physical scientists might define the standard metre. Indeed, discussion and debate about the concepts of sustainability and sustainable development provide a focus for contact between contending positions (Myerson & Rydin, 1996) and so become essential parts of the practical process of working towards sustainability.

Nevertheless, some kind of description of the concepts is necessary to establish the broad domain of discussion. For instance, many proponents of sustainability and sustainable developments might not wish these concepts to be applied to the economic success of a company which manufactures weapons of mass destruction, or 'sustainable future' to the maintenance of the future market for stocks and shares.

Sustainability and sustainable future is treated here as the goals or end points of a process called 'sustainable development'. A sustainable society is considered to be a society that has reached sustainability through this process.

Sustainable development, on the other hand, emphasises the long-term aspect of the concept of sustainability and

introduces the ethical principle of achieving equity between the present and future generations. The context in which the definition is embedded indicates that 'needs' include a sound environment, a just society and a healthy economy. Sustainable development is not intended to mean sustaining practices, industries and organisations that are harmful to these three requirements.

While providing a valuable perspective on sustainable development, the Brundtland Report's definition is limited in several ways. As part of a political document (in the sense of involving power structures in international relations), the definition appears to equate 'needs' with 'wants' and to assume that economic growth is necessarily part of development. Because it does not clearly distinguish between different types of economic structure, it appears to support growth in the use of materials and energy, a form of economic growth that damages the natural environment. The definition does not mention the natural environment explicitly, focusing only upon human needs or wants. However, the report as a whole makes it clear that these 'needs' include the conservation of the natural environment.

Community Participation in Sustainable Development

According to Ekong (2003) as cited in Ofuoku (2011) defined community participation as taking part in community meetings and decision making for the planning and implementation of programmes, and making financial contributions towards communities programmes.

Participation in rural development efforts in Nigeria has almost come full circle, from the pre-colonial period when rural dwellers have identified their problems themselves, proposed solutions to them and solved them. In the post-colonial and contemporary era rural problems are identified for the rural dwellers and the solutions are prepared and executed by own-rural bureaucrats.

According to Tango (2009), every community has a traditional structure to ensure the participation of inhabitants in projects and programmes that have positive effects on the life of the majority. Most projects identified, planned, executed and managed by the community themselves outlive those imposed by a benefactor with little or no community participation. Furthermore, many development programmes include participatory measures in project design. An example of successful community participation is in community projects in India which were selected based on community priorities and implemented with significant local contributions of labour, materials and sometimes cash. This effort strengthened the members of group, empowered the members and ensured the maintenance and repair of projects (Tango, 2009).

The success of community development programme depends on the degree to which a population can be motivated. This again depends on how much their interest, their felt needs are taken into account, and to what extent they are involved in the planning and decision-making process. Unless the rural people are given an opportunity to participate in the

development interventions designed to improve their livelihoods, they will continue to miss the benefits of any intervention (Tango, 2009).

Types of Participation

There are four major types of participation which are follows:

Community engagement with a focus on community development or community building

Community participation in consultation and decision-making

Community engagement that helps organisations, businesses etc. to improve their service delivery or to achieve their goals

Community engagement as part of social change movements or as part of the work of voluntary community organisations

Sustainability and Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development (SD) has become a ubiquitous development paradigm—the catchphrase for international aid agencies, the jargon of development planners, the theme of conferences and academic papers, as well as the slogan of development and environmental activists (Ukaga, Maser, & Reichenbach, 2011). The concept seems to have attracted the broad-based attention that other development concepts lack(ed), and appears poised to remain the pervasive development paradigm for a long time (Scopelliti et al., 2018; Shepherd et al., 2016). However, notwithstanding its pervasiveness and popularity, murmurs of disenchantment about the concept are rife as people continue to ask questions about

its meaning or definition and what it entails as well as implies for development theory and practice, without clear answers forthcoming (Montaldo, 2013; Shahzalal & Hassan, 2019). SD, therefore, stands the risk of becoming a cliché like appropriate technology - a fashionable and rhetoric phrase - to which everyone pays homage but nobody seems to define with precision and exactitude (Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2018).

In the attempt to move beyond the sustainability rhetoric and pursue a more meaningful agenda for sustainable development, a clear definition of this concept and explanation of its key dimensions are needed (Gray, 2010; Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2018). This need, according to Gray (2010), as cited in Giovannoni and Fabietti (2014), has been advocated by both academics and practitioners in order to promote sustainable development. While it cannot be disputed that literature on SD abounds, issues regarding the concept's definition, history, pillars, principles and the implications of these for human development, remain unclear to many people. Thus, the profusion of literature notwithstanding, further clarification of the unclear issues about SD is imperative since decision-makers need not only better data and information on the linkages among the principles and pillars of SD, but also enhanced understanding of such linkages and their implication for action in the interest of human development (Abubakar, 2017; Hylton, 2019).

Succinctly put, a concise and coherent discourse on SD is needed to further illuminate the pathway and trajectory to

sustainable development in order to encourage citizenship rather than spectatorship. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to contribute to the intelligibility and articulacy of the discourse on SD by providing more concise information on its meaning, evolution, associated key concepts, dimension, the relationships among the dimensions, the principles, and their implications for global, national and individual actions in the quest for SD. This is significant as it would provide researchers, policymakers and academics, as well as development practitioners and students more information about the paradigm for policy-making, decision-making and further research.

CONCLUSION

This research asserts that self-help is a feasible tool used by different communities to propagate sustainable development. Self-help could also be in partnership with development agents or public spirited individuals or groups who provide succor to alleviate scourges in communities thereby improving or transforming the conditions and lives of the people. Therefore, self-help strategy is an indispensable element in building sustainable community development. Community Development must be people oriented or centered right from the period of conception or initiation to implementation, usage, repair, maintenance and preservation/protection. Self-help strategy is democratic in approach and indeed touches the core needs of the communities, thereby engendering collective welfare and social advancement of the people. It also

enhances capacity building of the people, thereby ensuring sustainable development. To this effect, self-help strategy is the road map for the smooth operation of sustainable community development which improves the standard of living of the people and ensures social prosperity and harmony.

Recommendation

- (i) All development projects or programmes embarked by development agencies for communities should be adequately blended with consultation and participatory element of self-help strategy to ensure its sustainability.
- (ii) Policies to encourage self-help in pursuit of sustainable community development should be embarked on. These include mandatory training of host communities on the uses, benefits, minor technical requirements for repair, maintenance, service of infrastructure deployed in villages/communities for efficiency and effective maxima utilization. Bottom-top policy approach is also suggested as the best way to address the felt or real needs of the communities instead of the supposedly "thought need" that is government initiative and directive in nature, thus it usually does not bring lasting solution to the needs of the people acclaimed to be serviced.
- (iii) Adequate reorientation and campaigns should be carried out to sensitize and enlighten both government officials and the people on the nexus and benefits of self-help as essential tool

- for sustainable community development.
- (iv) There should be collective efforts by the government and the communities to ensure the creation of enabling environment and adequate provisions of the basic self-help strategic tools to guarantee sustainable community development.
 - (v) Governments of all countries should promote “smart growth” through proper land use and alignment of their economies with nature regeneration capacity. All countries should adopt appropriate production and consumption practices that fully align with the planet’s ecological processes. This could be done through taxation and subsidy policies which accentuate the acceptable and eliminate unacceptable outcomes.
 - (vi) Population growth should be checked through population policies backed by legal frameworks. Unless special action is taken, population growth coupled with increased resource consumption beyond what the earth can accommodate, will lead to the decline in or the collapse of the environment, economy and society. All countries need to have population policies that seek to check unbridled population growth. In this connection, the UN should have a global policy on population growth and ensure that member countries comply with the policy.
 - (vii) There is the need for all countries to formulate and implement social policies that foster tolerance, social cohesion and justice as cornerstones of social interactions. This can be done by enshrining universal human rights within a framework of citizenship, inclusion, equity and effective political governance.
 - (viii) There should be constant education on SD by the UN and the governments of all countries as well as civil society organisations to all people resident everywhere. The sensitization programmes should be directed at ensuring that every country’s residents understand the concept and principles of sustainable development and engage in responsible environmental, economic and social behaviour.
 - (ix) Sustainable development requires the generation and application of creative ideas and innovative design and techniques. For this reason, the UN should partner with governments, private sector, development agencies and civil society organisations (CSOs) to provide strong institutional and financial support for universities and other research institutions for research into education, agriculture, physical development planning and land use, information and communication technology and health systems. All these should be backed by appropriate legal frameworks and strict enforcement of regulations to ensure that all the stakeholders comply with the SD agenda.
 - (x) In prosecuting the SD agenda, UN should acknowledge and consider different national capacities and levels of development and respect national policies and priorities. The UN should also ensure that all countries emphasis

universality with country-specific approach to the global goals, and encourage the developed countries to support the developing ones in the implementation of the global agenda.

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